



SEXUAL INTEGRITY INITIATIVE

A resource of CPYU and Project Six19



WHAT THE MEDIA'S TEACHING OUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX AND ITS IMPACT

| By Jason Soucinek

The average American teen now spends nearly every waking moment on a smart phone, computer or watching TV. This seismic shift in how kids spend their time is having a profound effect on the way they make friends, the way they date, and their introduction to the world of sex.

MEDIA AND SEX

- From 2005 to 2010, young people have increased the amount of time they spend consuming media by an hour and seventeen minutes daily, from 6:21 to 7:38—almost the amount of time most adults spend at work each day, except that young people use media seven days a week instead of five. Moreover, given the amount of time they spend using more than one medium simultaneously, today's youth pack a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of media content into those daily 7 1/2 hours—an increase of almost 2 1/4 hours of media exposure per day over the past five years. This report was released before we saw the rise of such social media giants like Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and even Facebook.¹
- On television (TV), which remains the predominant medium in terms of viewing time for all young people, more than 75% of prime-time programs contain sexual content, yet only 14% of sexual incidents mention any risks or responsibilities of sexual activity.^{2,3}
- Talk about sex on TV can occur as often as 8 to 10 times per hour.⁴ Between 1997 and 2001 alone, the amount of sexual content on TV nearly doubled.⁵
- In a study of 13- and 14-year-olds, heavy exposure to sexually oriented television increased acceptance of nonmarital sex.⁶
- In a Kaiser Family Foundation study, 76 percent of teens said that one reason young people have sex is because TV shows and movies make it seem normal for teens.⁷
- In another Kaiser Family Foundation study, most children aged 11 to 13 and some children aged 8 to 10 understood the sexual content, even the jokes and innuendoes about sex on TV.⁸



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- Music continues to be a major source of sexual suggestiveness. In one study, **40% of lyric lines contained sexual material, and only 6% contained healthy sexual messages.**⁹ An analysis of the 279 most popular songs in 2005 revealed that 37% contained sexual references and that degrading sexual references were common.¹⁰
- Teen magazines are popular with preadolescent and adolescent girls and devote an average of 2.5 pages per issue to sexual topics.¹¹ Coverage of sex as a health issue in magazines is more common than on TV, but the overarching focus seems to be on deciding when to lose one's virginity.^{12,13}
- **81 percent of Internet-using teenagers in America reported that they are active on social-networking sites,** more than ever before. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and new dating apps like Tinder, Grindr, and Blindr have increasingly become key players in social interactions, both online and IRL (in real life).¹⁴
- In a Dutch survey, social media use was a stable, common activity for boys and girls, but more common among girls. For girls, the more they used social media, the more body

surveillance they experienced and the less satisfaction they had with their sexual encounters. Girls who rapidly increased their social media use experienced even more body surveillance and lower self-esteem. **For both sexes in general, social media use predicted poor body and sexual self-perceptions as well as risky sex-related online behaviors.**¹⁵

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³Kunkel D, Eyal K, Donnerstein E, Farrar KM, Biely E, Rideout V. Sexual socialization messages on entertainment television: comparing content trends 1997–2002. *Media Psychol.* 2007;9(3):595–622

⁴Kunkel D, Cope KM, Colvin C. Sexual Messages on Family Hour Television: Content and Context. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation; 1996

⁵Kunkel D, Eyal K, Donnerstein E, Farrar KM, Biely E, Rideout V. Sexual socialization messages on entertainment television: comparing content trends 1997–2002. *Media Psychol.* 2007;9(3):595–622

⁶S. Liliana Escobar-Chaves, DrPH, Susan R. Tortolero, PhD, Christine M. Markham, PhD, Barbara J. Low, DrPH, Patricia Eitel, PhD and Patricia Thickstun, PhD (2005). "Impact of the Media on Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors". *Pediatrics* 116 (1): 303–326

⁷Kaiser Family Foundation. Teens and Sex: The Role of Popular TV [Fact Sheet]. Menlo Park, CA: The Foundation, 2001

⁸Kaiser Family Foundation. Measuring the Effect of Sexual Content in the Media. Menlo Park, CA: The Foundation, 1998

⁹Primack BA, Gold MA, Schwarz EB, Dalton MA. Degrading and non-degrading sex in popular music: a content analysis. *Public Health Rep.* 2008;123(5):593–600

¹⁰ibid

¹¹Walsh-Childers K, Gotthoffer A, Lepre CR. From "just the facts" to "downright salacious:" teens' and women's magazines' coverage of sex and sexual health. In: Brown JD, Steele JR, Walsh-Childers K, eds. *Sexual Teens, Sexual Media*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum; 2002:153–171

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¹³Walsh-Childers K. A Content Analysis: Sexual Health Coverage in Women's, Men's, Teen and Other Specialty Magazines: A Current-Year and Ten-Year Retrospective. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation; 1997

¹⁴<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2013/09/social-media-internet-porn-teenage-girls>

¹⁵Dosrnwaard, Suzan M. MS, Bickham, David S. Ph. D., Rich, Michael, MD, MPH, Vanwesenbeeck, Ine PhD. Sex Related Online Behaviors and Adolescents' Bodies and Sexual Self Perceptions. *Pediatrics*. Office Journal of The American Academy of Pediatrics. Vol. 134 No. 6 December 1, 2014: 1103–1110



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For additional information or resources to help kids navigate their sexuality, visit the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding and Project Six19's Sexual Integrity Initiative website at SexualIntegrityInitiative.com.

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