

Media and Sexual Development

Name
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At one time, sexual development and discussion was a talk to be had with people of mature age who were ready to have sex. Nowadays, as people seem to *mature* younger and younger, the talk needs to be had earlier and earlier, regardless of whether or not parents are ready, let alone children. With the advent of technology and media permeating our daily existence, the intended guidance of sexual development doesn't even have a timeline. Media exposure to risqué content, sexual narratives and undertones, television ratings that have no censorship, creates a society that is impacted along the lines of sexual development and behavior. Monkey see, money do. What we are exposed to on television and online create the personas we present to others in the world, regardless of age. The unfortunate outcome of it all, however, is that sexual development occurs at such a rapid pace since there is no stopping the media presentation. Therefore, through constant bombardment of sexualized topics on television and online, sexual development is shaped with a sexualized attitude of nearly everything, changing reserved behavior of Americans into free-spirited sexual beings who can own their sexuality, but at what cost.

MTV plays a large role in shaping the sexual development of today's youth. For example, with programming that spans music to movies, reality shows fall in between, especially noticeable are *16 and Pregnant*, *Teen Mom* and *Jersey Shore*, all of which have heavily sexualized themes. *16 and Pregnant* tells the stories of girls who are underaged who come into motherhood before they graduate high school, plagued with stories of absent fathers, impoverished family situations, the inability to care for a baby while finishing high school. This is due to unprotected sex at such a young age (Barker et al. 1440). The question can be raised as to what convinced the girls on the show to find their sexual identities so early, and for many, it can be linked back to media exposure since they are of age for this entire fad of television shows.

16 and Pregnant does, however, provide public service announcements at commercial breaks about looking into sex education and prevention measures, which is a step in the right direction, however, the question is raised as to whether or not these should be options for people who are barely teenagers? The question becomes what age is too young to start having sex, and when media throws it in people's faces with potential consequences that are glamorized on television shows, no age becomes off limits.

Teen Mom is the second incarnation of *16 and Pregnant* which follows the stories of the young girls who took on motherhood, some with problems and some with achievements. This creates unrealistic expectations for those who decide to have sex at an early age, who feel they could sustain a college course load or become entrepreneurs while raising a baby. The girls on this show have been paid by MTV to have their lives recorded. The girls on this show who can start a clothing line while still being seventeen and caring for an infant have help that is not seen, constant adults around, salaries, no other responsibilities. Thus, this contributes to a lackadaisical attitude of Americans, especially youth, when it comes to sex, because if they can do it and have a television show, why can't they? This leads to complications where people grow up too fast or miss important milestones they should have as young adults. Although teen pregnancies have been on the decline since the 1990s (Reichert 2019), the idea of babies having babies is still very present in society.

Teen pregnancy is only one consequence of a sexual development that begins too early. Risque behaviors also stem from a developed sexual identity and activities that occur by way of the media through shows like *Jersey Shore*. As the reality show of male and female strangers living in a house in Seaside Heights, New Jersey, originally the conflict was about their portrayal of Italian Americans in the United States. Rapidly, however, this concern blossomed into one

that portrayed youth culture as irresponsible, uncouth party animals who trade sex and alcohol like it's their business. For example, lingo like "DTF" came into the picture from *Jersey Shore* which was a casual phrase the guys would ask random girls in the club to determine if they were good to have sex. Before *Jersey Shore*, clearly people would go to clubs for random hook-ups, but now, it became part of youth culture. Whether or not people would say "Are you DTF?" for fun, or if they used it now as a method to pursue sexual behaviors would shape the way of sexual development, making it more acceptable to have random sex as long as that catchphrase was present. In addition, the amount of alcohol consumed by the cast during a lot of these situations would lead to nights of anonymous sex in the "smush room," STIs, cheating, complicated relationships in the house. Many problems emerged yet they were swept under the rug in favor of repetitive episodes of partying and drinking that would lead to sex. Furthermore, this was propelled by the scantily clad outfits worn by the female cast members, proud of their "boob jobs" or outfits that just barely hid their privates (Reichert 2019). Thus, these males and females barely over the age of twenty found themselves as role models for many young adults who applauded their abilities to get hookups and have fun. What was learned from the show was that the more crazy they could get, the more fun and sex they could have. There was no consideration for consequence which contributed to years of prolonged sexual exploration as a priority.

Thus, with all of the television programming that fails to censor nudity or innuendos, it is no wonder why people are becoming sexually active at younger and younger ages. Exposure to this type of material plants the seed of curiosity in their minds, even if it doesn't make them explore the activities right away. Thus, with the lack of prevention to the exposure on television, there is an even trickier challenge to limit exposure online. Social media enables people to say

whatever they want whenever they want. Posting of pictures, sentiment, dirty lyrics, even pornography is rampant across sites like Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube. The fact that you can find pornography on YouTube suggests that America has either given up in censoring inappropriate material because there is just too much *or* we have become so desensitized to it that it doesn't matter. In years past, pornography could be purchased at adult stores with a stern age policy (Reichert 2019). Now, it can be downloaded onto a phone, taken on a bus, and watched over one's shoulder by a child. Even if America or parents try to limit their child's exposure to sex, there will always be one more corner to turn around from which it hits them in the face (Barker et al. 1440). Media is everywhere, and especially social media, through which anyone, anywhere, and at anytime can search for and learn about sex to either curb their behavior or encourage it. This suggests that the openness of information online could provide a good foundation for sexual health awareness and consequences of sexual development too early, however, it must be propelled by action, something which the current state of America does not seem to encourage. Thus, American behavior has been so shaped by early-onset sexualization that it compromises the ability to deter children from developing that persona at an early age themselves.

Ultimately, sex is everywhere. It is on television which translates into in-person conversations, which people post about and then others read. There is a never ending cycle of discussion about the topic, whether through action or gossip, but there is limited discussion about how to reverse the damage. Do we want thirteen-year-olds having babies? Do we want clubs filled with drunk people just trying to hook up? Unfortunately, this will happen in many circumstances, but should these be the standards for behavior that Americans strive to achieve? It is hard to not be in the majority, and if a show or post becomes popular or viral, it makes sense to

honor it, to be part of the culture. Yet this culture is very *adult*, and we must be able to censor it for those who are not ready to sexually develop.

Works Cited

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