



from the desk of

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Us Against them, Part 3

The Sexualization of the Media

⁸ *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.* (Philippians 4:8 (NIV))

Last week I wrote on the violent nature of many of our TV programs, and that certainly is an issue. However, I believe an even bigger issue is the sexualizing of the content of our media today, especially in what is being shown as "normal."

We've come a long way from the 1952 *I Love Lucy* episode "*Lucy Is Enceinte*" - using the French word for pregnant in the title as the word "pregnant" was seen as too vulgar for use. This was at a time when you'd see a married couple's bedroom portrayed with two twin beds with a nightstand between them - and never with them in the beds.

If we were to quickly state the Biblical standard for sexual conduct, it would be within the bounds of marriage for a man and a women (more on how that is deviated from next week).

Flash forward to today - the following is from a study by the Rand Corporation:

*The average American teenager watches three hours of television a day. Typical teen fare contains heavy doses of sexual content, ranging from touching, kissing, jokes, and innuendo to conversations about sexual activity and portrayals of intercourse. Sex is often presented as a casual activity without risk or consequences.**

The effect of this on the teens is as follows:

The results showed that heavy exposure to sexual content on television related strongly to teens' initiation of intercourse or their progression to more advanced

sexual activities (such as “making out” or oral sex) apart from intercourse in the following year. Youths who viewed the greatest amounts of sexual content were two times more likely than those who viewed the smallest amount to initiate sexual intercourse during the following year or to progress to more-advanced levels of other sexual activity. In effect, youths who watched the most sexual content “acted older”: a 12-year-old at the highest levels of exposure behaved like a 14- or 15-year-old at the lowest levels.

They suggest further that how we deal with this comes back to your involvement as a parent. The article continues:

*A different set of factors was found to decrease the likelihood of first intercourse. Many of these factors centered on parent characteristics, including having parents who monitored teens’ activities, having parents who were more educated or who were clearly disapproving of teens’ having sexual relations, and living with both parents. Other factors that reduced the likelihood of having sex included being more religious and feeling less depressed or anxious than other youths. Most of these characteristics were also related to how much sex teens saw on television; however, viewing sexual content on TV was related to advances in sexual behavior even after these other factors were taken into account.**

They finally conclude:

*Reducing teens’ exposure to portrayals of sex on television poses challenges, however. An alternative approach that has worked with violent content may also work with sexual content: having parents view programs with their children and discuss their own beliefs regarding the behavior depicted. Doing so can reinforce the benefits of accurate risk information and positive messages and may help to limit the negative effects of sexual portrayals that do not contain risk information.**

The Rand site seemed to find solace in depictions of sexual conduct that at least did show possible consequences. I’m not sure that there are enough scenarios of consequences of sex to outbalance the times when sex outside of marriage is shown as quite normal and expected.

In short our children and youth are being fed a steady diet of media fare that normalizes sex between teens as inevitable, that couples as a matter of course live together before marriage, and are often in and out of these relationships multiple times. What is not shown are the rates of STD’s among sexually active youth, the failure rate of condoms to prevent pregnancy (30% of the time) or STD transmission (50% of the time for certain STD’s). What is not shown is that couples who live together before marriage actually have a higher incidence of divorce than those who don’t.

As suggested even by these secular studies, you are a parent are the key element into shaping attitudes toward sex. The primary way our children

and youth will get the real message of what God intended for sex to be is through you as the parents and we as the church.

And you think this portrayal of what is “normal” is bad - wait until next week when we talk about same sex relationships - even now being promoted by Disney!

Need further ideas with specific needs? I'm only an email away!
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DCE Randy

*http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9068.html