

Protecting Your Family From Media's Sexual Terrorism

The recent shooting massacres in Colorado and Wisconsin have again focused attention on the hundreds of thousands of studies on the links between **violence in the media** to acts of violence in society. The results have overwhelmingly showed that violence in media does influence people's attitudes and behavior, even more so if it's children and adolescents exposed to heavy violence in media.

Even so, this posits another question: Can the same thing be said for **sexuality in movies**?

Sexuality outside of marriage is not only common in America, but is celebrated and encouraged among society's youth. This has caused increases in pornography, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and high divorce rates that are actively hurting families. Is this a result of media indoctrination? Does the sexuality in movies really have that much to do with the increase in sexual behavior in adolescents?

Some studies in the past have strongly suggested that, yes, sexuality in the media does shape hearts, minds and behaviors. Dartmouth College recently conducted a large survey to examine the influence of MSE movie sexual exposure (MSE) on youths before the age of 16 and how it affects them in adulthood. The college started by researching the amount of sexuality that popular movies contain. The study revealed that 84 percent of movies released between 1950 and 2006 had some form of sexual content.

"A content analysis revealed that 70 percent of the sexual acts depicted in movies released from 1983 to 2003 occurred between newly acquainted partners, 98 percent included no reference to contraception and 89 percent resulted in no

consequences," the study said (Gunasekera, Chapman, & Campbell, 2005).

The study continued, "Adolescents who watch popular movies, therefore, are exposed to a great deal of sex, most of which is portrayed in an unrealistic and/or risk-promoting manner."

Armed with this information, the Dartmouth researchers surveyed more than 6,000 adolescents from 2007 to 2012. The research team asked youth between the ages of 10 and 14 which movies from a random list of 50 they had seen. Approximately five to seven years later, the same individuals were asked at what age they became sexually active and how many partners they had. After calculating the amount of sexual content in the top 684 movies, they had some results.

The survey results, as predicted, showed that higher MSE before the age of 16 resulted in a "higher number of lifetime sexual partners and more casual sex" (e.g., Brown et al., 2006). Evidence also suggests that sexual behavior among adolescents is influenced more by movies over other forms of media (television, music videos, etc.). The study also revealed that males with MSE are more susceptible than females to risky sexual behavior. Many participants even admitted to copying love scenes depicted in movies in real life, *The Telegraph* reported.

All of this stems from a Hollywood view of love and sex that is both unrealistic and unbiblical. The risky sexual behavior in movies is mostly shown without consequences, but in reality, sexual irresponsibility leads to STDs and unwanted pregnancies. Most adolescents don't consider the real consequences because they only see what movies tell them.

So what do researchers suggest as a solution? In their conclusion, they said, "Our results suggest that restricting adolescents' MSE would delay their sexual debut and also reduce their engagement in risky sexual behaviors later in

life. This strategy could attenuate the direct influence of media on adolescents' sexual behavior by limiting the acquisition of risky sexual scripts and/or reducing their likelihood activation" (Wright, 2011).

The study's conclusion continues:

"One promising approach would involve incorporating media literacy training into sexual education. A recent intervention showed that a peer-led sexual-media-literacy curriculum increased ninth-grade students' self-efficacy in resisting peer pressure with regard to sexual behavior, reduced their perception of normative prevalence of sexual activity during adolescence, and improved their attitudes toward abstinence" (Pinkleton, Austin, Cohen, Chen, & Fitzgerald, 2008).

These two steps are what Movieguide has been promoting for years.

The first step is teaching media literacy and media wisdom to children. Having media literacy and media wisdom means that we analyze, interpret, build discernment, and create. Analysis is understanding and comprehending the medium of filmmaking and storytelling. If we understand how Hollywood communicates its message, it will help us interpret what that message is.

Interpreting is many times the hardest part because it requires that we understand the definitions of a biblical worldview versus a non-biblical or humanist worldview, and then discover what is the movie or television program's attitude toward those worldviews. Finally, media wisdom requires teaching children how to discern good from evil. If children aren't taught from a young age how to discern between good and evil by their parents and other role models, they will likely learn and repeat the lies from the media and the world around them.

The second step is to teach children to create. Being made in God's image, we are called to create things that reflect all

glory to God. Now, not everyone is called to be a filmmaker or a writer, but everyone uses his or her creative imagination to some degree. Creativity helps children analyze and interpret the media because it helps them understand communication through art. These tools will not only help children discern the media but also discern the world around them.

The third and final step to protecting your family from the influence of the media is avoiding movies that have explicit violent or sexual content. We see enough sin and immorality in the world, so there's absolutely no need for it to be brought into the family living room. Movies should be wholesome and uplifting, but many times they are filled with sexuality, violence, offensive language, and anti-Christian values.