

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MASS MEDIA EXPOSURE AND ATTITUDE  
TOWARD SELECTED SEXUAL ACTIVITIES AND INTENTION  
TO ENGAGE IN THESE ACTIVITIES

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by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that significant changes in the sexual attitudes and practices of adolescents have taken place during the last decade.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, Stark<sup>2</sup> reports that during the 1970's the number of sexually active American teen-ager has increased by two-thirds. In 1986, when Stark made the study almost half of the boys and a third of the girls in the 15-17 age-bracket were sexually active. The report further revealed that one out of ten teen-age girls under the age of 15 became pregnant every year. Part of the reason for this high rate of pregnancy is obvious: American teen-agers are becoming sexually active at younger ages today than the Americans of yesteryears.

Changes in the sexual attitude and behavior of adolescents are not confined in the United States alone, but extend to other countries as well. In the Philippines, these changes have been manifested in an increasing favorable attitude toward sex and early involvement of the

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<sup>1</sup> John Conger (ed.), Contemporary Issues in Adolescent Development (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975), p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Stark, "Young, Innocent and Pregnant," Psychology Today, 20 (10): 28-29, October, 1986.

young with the opposite sex resulting an increased rate of teen-age marriages, unwanted pregnancy and abortion. In a national survey made by Raymundo,<sup>3</sup> it was reported that one out of five urban respondents and one out of two adolescents in Manila found premarital sex acceptable if the couple are in love, or intend to marry. Soriano<sup>4</sup> also reported that 45 percent of students aging 15-25 enrolled in nine schools in Metro Manila admitted to having sexual intercourse. He further disclosed that more than 85 percent of his respondents knew of friends who had experienced sexual intercourse. In a national study reviewed by Mataragnon<sup>5</sup> it was also revealed that urban adolescents and youths go steady for the first time at age 16, when most of them are still in high school. The majority of the respondents see their boyfriends often, from daily to once a week. Forms of intimacies during their dates include kissing, necking, and sexual intercourse. Raymundo and Ruiz<sup>6</sup> also reported that the Visayas Region has relatively favorable attitude towards

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<sup>3</sup> Corazon M. Raymundo. "Preliminary Findings from Survey of Young Adult Fertility", Philippine Journal of Child-Youth Development, 6(1):3-13, July, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Marcelo Soriano, "Peer Counseling: The Young Helping The Young," Initiative in Population, 4(4):24, December, 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Rita Mataragnon, "Sex and Filipino Adolescent: A Review", Philippine Studies 30 (Manila: 1982), pp. 311-323.

<sup>6</sup> Corazon Raymundo and Cecilia Ruiz, "Adolescent Fertility in the Regions," Philippine Population Journal, 1(4):12-40, December, 1985.

premarital and precocious sex. Furthermore, they reported that based on the Philippine Fertility survey, 9 percent of all live births in the Philippines occur to women below 20 years old and that the same age group accounts for 18 percent of all illegitimate births in the country.

There is no doubt that times have changed and that adolescents today have different sexual attitudes and practices from those of yesteryears. These changes could be attributed to various factors such as poor communication about sex at home, peer influence and exposure to mass media. In many homes, parents seem to treat sex as some sort of mysterious taboo and, therefore, could not be discussed openly with children. In this kind of home, sex is usually considered dirty and vulgar. Because of this lack of communication about sex in the homes, adolescents tend to turn to their equally inexperienced and (mis-or-un) informed peers for sex information and education. Many sexual activities of adolescents are initiated by a desire to become part of the group. Because of peer influence, many youngsters begin to engage in sexual activities before they are ready for it.<sup>7</sup>

Mass media has also been blamed for the changing trends in adolescent sexual behavior. There are some empirical

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Clay Lindgren & Others, Psychology: An Introduction to Behavioral Science (New York: Harper & Row Publisher, 1961), p. 68.

basis to support the contention that adolescents' interest in sex and to practice sex are stimulated and encouraged by their exposure to sex-oriented mass media. Findings of the study conducted by the Education Ministry's Child and Youth Research Center (CYRC) showed that pornographic literature, movies, television and friends were the principal sources of sexual information among the majority of the respondents.<sup>8</sup> Results of the Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) survey for Metro Manila revealed that majority of the high school respondents have read or looked at sexy books or magazines. Moreover, 34 percent of them have reportedly seen sex performance in an X-rated or openly sexual movie. Pornography and romantic stories were reportedly popular among majority of the male respondents and about 45 percent of the females.<sup>9</sup>

Several studies have shown that mass media exposure is related to behavior. A study made by Donnerstein<sup>10</sup> revealed that exposure to pornography tends to increase male aggression toward females. Another study conducted by Holady and Stoddard among teen-age inmates of the Chicago jail showed

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<sup>8</sup> Gerry Anigan, "Sex in the Filipino Adolescent" Initiatives in Population, 5(1):4, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Mataragnon, op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Donnerstein, "Aggressive Erotica and Violence Against Women," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 39(2):269-277, 1980.

that many of the inmates followed the specific plans for crimes as shown in movies in attempting their own robberies and illegal acts. In other words, the movies provided them with models of their crimes.<sup>11</sup> Studies conducted in the Philippines also have shown a direct relationship between mass media exposure and attitude; and between mass media exposure and dating practices of adolescents. Castillo's study done in 1973 showed that the greater the mass media exposure of college students in Manila, the more permissive their attitudes and practices toward dating tend to be.<sup>12</sup> Africa also found that mass media exposure of first and second year college students in Manila is directly related to their attitude toward going steady and early marriage.<sup>13</sup>

Some empirical findings, however, tend to disagree with the above findings on the influence of mass media on attitude and behavior. Some communication researches revealed that mass media is not very likely to change

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<sup>11</sup> P. W. Holady and G. D. Stoddard, Getting Ideas from the Movies (New York: McMillan, 1983), cited by Harold Hill, "The Impact of Movies and TV on Adolescent," Counseling the Adolescent, ed. Alexander Schneiders (California: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 208-214.

<sup>12</sup> Ma. Isabel Castillo, "Mass Media Exposure and Sexual Attitudes and Behavior of College Students in Greater Manila Area," Philippine Journal of Communication Studies, 2:75, June, 1972.

<sup>13</sup> Socorro Africa, "Exposure to Print Media and Attitude of the First and Second Year College Students of Greater Manila Area Toward Early Marriage," Philippine Journal of Communication Studies, 5:101, September, 1971.

existing attitude and behavior of a person. That mass media's typical effect in attitude and behavior is merely reinforcing is best expressed in a statement by Klapper:

"The mass media audience does not present itself to the different forms of media in a state of psychological nudity; they are instead clothed and protected by their existing predispositions and preferences. If their exposure to mass media has changed the attitude and influenced their behavior, it is because the audience is already predisposed to change."<sup>14</sup>

The inconsistencies and disagreements in findings and observations have motivated the researcher to undertake this investigation. In addition to this, local and national researches on the relation of mass media exposure to sexual attitude and behavior are still rare in regions outside Metro Manila area, and therefore, the need for investigations in the provinces are further justified.

#### Statement of the Problem

This study has two general objectives. First, to describe the extent of exposure to sex-related media; and to ascertain their attitudes toward and intention to engage in sexual activities in their premarital state.

Second, to determine whether mass media exposure is related to adolescents' attitudes toward and intention to engage in sexual activities in their premarital state.

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Klapper, The Effect of Mass Media Communication (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960), p. 302.