

The Impact of Sex and Violence on Television

Katherine Parker

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Television shows and movies serve as an escape from reality; they distract from the real world, which is why they can become so addictive and binge-worthy. However, this tendency to binge-watch has started to become detrimental due to the explicit themes often present throughout storylines. Popular shows today – *Euphoria*, *Outer Banks*, and *Squid Game*, to name a few – are prime examples of sexual imagery and violence showcased in programming. These portrayals are reshaping real-world relationships by prescribing a sense of what is considered the new normal, not only for adults but for children as well.

When I was a child, I remember sitting on the couch with my brothers watching Disney Channel. Shows like *Special Agent Oso* or *Octonauts* taught simple life lessons and kept kids entertained. At the time, Disney was a place for children to be children. Now, I often find myself rewatching Disney programs, only to notice how much they have shifted to appeal to older audiences. Both television and streaming shows increasingly expose children to themes of romance, love, sex, and even violence—subjects once reserved for older teens and young adults.

Disney, as mentioned earlier, is a prime example of this shift. One current show on Disney Junior, supposedly geared toward toddlers, is *Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug and Cat Noir*. Originally broadcast in France, the show follows two teenagers with magical powers who secretly battle villains. A central theme throughout the series is the romance between Marinette

and Adrian, the heroes of the story. I often find myself engaged in this particular storyline: Adrian has a crush on Ladybug, while Marinette has a crush on Adrian. Because they are not allowed to reveal their identities, they never realize they are in love with each other. Beyond that, we also see obsessive behaviors—Marinette keeps dozens of photos of Adrian, and Adrian does the same with photos of Ladybug. The show depicts the two kissing and flirting multiple times. Rated TV-Y7, it is deemed suitable for children seven and older, yet the strongest theme is the romantic dynamic between the heroes. Children at this age should be learning real-life lessons, but these messages are often overshadowed by the focus on romance.

Outside of children's shows, programs with nudity and violence have reached new peaks in popularity. In recent years, shows like *Euphoria* and *Squid Game* have dominated cultural conversations precisely because of their violent and sexual content.

Euphoria, a show about high schoolers battling addiction, crime, and toxic relationships, recently released its second season, which intensified its already mature themes. In one episode, the main character, Rue, struggles with heroin and opioid addiction. In another, a violent fight breaks out after Cassie betrays her best friend Maddie by sleeping with her boyfriend. The series includes numerous sex scenes and instances of full nudity, which can be deeply uncomfortable for viewers, explaining its TV-MA rating.

Squid Game, another Netflix sensation, exploded in popularity at the end of 2021. Originally aired in Korean and later dubbed into multiple languages, the show follows debt-ridden individuals forced to choose between immediate death or competing in childhood games for the chance at financial freedom. While the premise is captivating, the show's depiction of graphic violence, sexual themes, and disturbing imagery earned it a TV-MA rating.

This excessive exposure to violent and sexually explicit shows creates unrealistic representations of relationships and human interaction. Love should be something cherished, not taken for granted or equated with toxicity. Since the 1970s, with shows like *Charlie's Angels* (described by *Time* magazine as “family-style porn”), television has increasingly normalized sexual content. Later series, including *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girl*, cemented sex as a dominant theme. According to media scholar Tonoah P. Merritt of Governors State University, viewers exposed to unstable romantic relationships on TV may begin to relate to these characters or even accept such dysfunction as normal. When sexual violence or toxic behavior is portrayed as passion, audiences can internalize these dynamics as models for real-life relationships.

In conclusion, television is becoming more sexual and violent with each passing decade. From Netflix dramas to children's programming, explicit themes are reaching wider audiences, including those who are too young to process them. While these trends may benefit streaming platforms and networks by boosting ratings and cultural relevance, they risk distorting viewers' understanding of relationships and social behavior. Ultimately, what entertains on screen may be detrimental to how people perceive reality off screen.

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