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## Sexual Content in Movies May Predict Teen Sexual Behavior

By Amber Moore



Twilight Movies

A recent study has found that exposure to sexual content in movies increases the chances of children adopting risky behavior later in life.

"Adolescents who are exposed to more sexual content in movies start having sex at younger ages, have more sexual partners, and are less likely to use condoms with casual sexual partners," said Ross O'Hara, currently a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Missouri, one of the authors of the study, in a statement.

For the study, researchers analyzed sexual content in nearly 684 blockbuster movies between 1998 and 2004. They found that even movies with G and PG ratings had high levels of sexual content (such as heavy kissing) and that most recent movies do not portray safe-sex methods.

In the second part of the study, they asked 1,228 participants, between the ages of 12 and 14, to report which movie they had seen from a list of 50 randomly selected recent movies. The researchers then conducted a follow-up survey of these participants after 6 years. Participants were asked about their sexual behavior like when they had their first intercourse, use of a contraceptive method, number of sexual partners, etc.

Research has shown that there is a causal effect of sexual content in media on sexual behaviors of adolescents. Other studies have shown that **teen-centered films** almost always have sexual content in them. Experts say that exposing children to content that is more consistent with actual sexuality can help them think critically about their sexual behavior.

"Much research has shown that adolescents' sexual attitudes and behaviors are influenced by media. But the role of movies has been somewhat neglected, despite other findings that movies are more influential than TV or music," O'Hara said.

### Sensation seeking attitudes

Researchers say that sensation seeking attitude, a type of personality trait, may explain why young boys and girls undertake risky activities. Biological changes plus a desire to experience novel things pre-disposes many children to this kind of behavior.

"These movies appear to fundamentally influence their personality through changes in sensation-seeking, which has far-reaching implications for all of their risk-taking behaviors," O'Hara said.

### Media as the main source for sexual information

Researchers say that sensation seeking personality may not be the only reason behind teens' risky sexual behavior. To many American children, 57 percent, media is the only source available to get sex-related information and sometimes about how to deal with a complex emotional problem. Thus teens, at times, can't differentiate between reality and fiction, according to the Association for Psychological Science.

The study will be published in a forthcoming edition of *Psychological Science*.