

NETFLIX

BIG MOUTH



The Big Problem with Big Mouth



Because Our Children
Are Watching

September 2021

INTRODUCTION

Over the past dozen years, the Parents Television and Media Council (PTC) has observed and documented a trend in television programming whereby children, or child-aged characters, are increasingly involved in scenes that are sexually explicit and/or profane.

The trend began with child characters routinely being present in scenes where adults were using profane dialogue on primetime broadcast network television. In [Habitat for Profanity](#) [2010], we found that use of the “f-word” during the so-called “family hour” on primetime broadcast television increased more than ten-fold from 2005 to 2010. Use of the “s-word” nearly tripled during that same time; anatomical and sexual references doubled.

The trend continued to where child characters were not only present in such scenes, but were frequently the ones delivering the profane dialogue. In [Trash Talking Teens](#) [2016] we found 109 instances of profanity and 55 instances of sexual dialogue coming from minor-aged characters on the four major broadcast television networks during the 205-hour study period.

And it wasn’t just profanity; child characters became increasingly involved in sexually explicit dialogue. In [Lewd by Example](#) [2018] we found that (81.5%) of all primetime broadcast network “family comedies” contained instances of adults using explicit sexual dialogue in front of children.

At the same time, the sexual exploitation of teen characters was treated as humorous, even on primetime broadcast television. In [TV’s Newest Target: Teen Sexual Exploitation](#) [2013], we found that while adult female characters were more likely to be involved in sexualizing scenes, the

likelihood that a scene would include *sexual exploitation* was higher with younger women and teens; and such scenarios were more likely to be portrayed as humorous.

The sexual exploitation of children expanded to animated programming, and in particular, the Fox Television primetime cartoon *Family Guy*. In our report entitled **At Whose Expense Are We Laughing** [2015], we found that within the 21 episodes of *Family Guy*’s 2014-2015 broadcast season, there were 23 scenes containing some form of sexual violence. Nineteen of those scenes were jokes and humorous depictions regarding sexually violating children.

Sadly, the aforementioned media research findings seem almost quaint in comparison to today’s sexualization of children, and indeed even the *sexual exploitation* of children, which we’ve found in the Netflix cartoon entitled *Big Mouth*. This current report analyzes the volume and degree of sexually explicit, sexually-exploitative and profane content on the most recent season (Season 4) of *Big Mouth*.

Just over a year ago, Netflix ignited a firestorm when publicity photos for *Cuties* – an imported drama for which Netflix had acquired exclusive streaming rights in the US – started to circulate online. The cover art depicted a group of pre-pubescent girls wearing revealing dance costumes, and striking provocative, sexualized poses. Netflix’s attempt at damage control was to use a different cover image, and to insist that the original artwork wasn’t reflective of what the film was actually all about -- a charming “coming of age” story.

When the first reviews started trickling in, it became all too clear that the original art showed us *exactly* what the film was all about; and that’s when Netflix tried to

reposition it as a “cautionary tale” about what can happen to girls growing up in an overly sexualized culture. (A culture that has become more sexualized because of films like *Cuties*.)

Had this been an isolated episode for Netflix, the controversy might have passed more quickly than it did – and Netflix’s feeble explanations excusing and justifying this exploitative movie might have had some credibility.

But it wasn’t an isolated episode. It was consistent with a pattern of behavior on Netflix programming.

In 2018, Netflix started streaming *Desire*, a film which depicts a little girl of 9 playing “horse” by straddling a pillow and bringing herself to orgasm.

The Netflix series *Sex Education* focuses on the sex lives of high school children and depicts high-school aged characters – teens – engaged in graphic sex scenes with dialog so explicit that one might expect to find it in XXX films.

These programs represent a troubling new trend fomented by the surge in streaming video: Child characters being put in extremely explicit sexual situations.

But before any of this, Netflix had *Big Mouth*.

Big Mouth is a TV-MA-rated series about middle schoolers. It depicts the genitals of 12 and 13-year-old children. It depicts 12 and 13-year-old children masturbating. It depicts 12 and 13-year-old children in sexual situations, engaging in sexual dialogue the likes of which the PTC has never documented on any television program or television distribution platform.

After watching 10 episodes of *Big Mouth* Season 4 and logging the instances of

explicit content, we would have thought unfathomable a Hollywood studio producing content suggesting a child be held down and having a penis forced into his mouth; we would have thought it unfathomable that a child would offer to fellate his own father; we would have thought it unfathomable that a character would suggest having sex with his own excrement and then eat it.

It should shock the conscience to see children sexually exploited for the sake of entertainment and financial profit, as they are on *Big Mouth*. Seeing children used in this way for the entertainment of adults violates our sensibilities, especially when, across the nation and around the world, sexual assault is spiking, and women and children are being held in sexual bondage. We would have thought that Hollywood, following on the heels of its reckoning with the #MeToo movement, would eschew the production and distribution of programming that centers on sexual exploitation.

Sadly, we would have thought wrong. There is a Big Problem with *Big Mouth*.

METHODOLOGY

All 10 episodes of the most recent season (Season 4) of the animated Netflix series *Big Mouth* were examined by trained and experienced PTC Staff. The total program run-time was 270 minutes (4½ hours). Every instance – whether expressed verbally or depicted visually – of profanity, sexual content, anatomical references, violent content and substance use/abuse, was tallied. Relevant dialogue was transcribed, and explicit visual depictions were captured and/or described, in order to maintain the context of the program content. conglomerates move to recapture their licensed properties to make them available exclusively on their own streaming services, pushing families to adopt multiple streaming subscriptions to access their favorite content.

FINDINGS

- Examples of sexualizing or sexually exploitative content involving children include:
 - A minor offers to perform oral sex on his own father;
 - A minor exposes his scrotum;
 - Minors are shown in a shower with erect penises;
 - A minor urinates on another minor in a shower;
 - A male minor character penetrates a female minor character with his fingers;
- Although most of the explicit content on this show is verbal, that is not exclusively the case. Episodes contained visual depictions of sexual behavior, including depictions of the 12 and 13-year-old characters masturbating, and animated depictions of the genitals of the 12 and 13-year-old characters.
- Across 10 episodes, there were 17 instances of animated nudity, most of it featuring the genitals of minor-aged characters.
- *Big Mouth* featured almost 4 instances of sex, violence, and profane, indecent, or obscene language per minute of programming: 1081 instances across 4.5 hours.
- Far and away, “F**k” (284) and “S**t” (124) were the most used profanities.
- *Big Mouth* used language – especially slang terms for male and female anatomy – that the PTC has never seen or heard on any television program its 26-year history.

D**n	7
H**l	7
P**s	10
T*t(s)/T***e(s)	13
B***h	20
P**y	17
C**t	2
T**t	2
C**(oris)	5
C**e	4

T***t	2
P***k	8
C**k	7
D**k	50
B**l(s)/N*t(s)/S***t(e)(um)	28
A*s/A****e	50
S**t	124
F**k	284
Other Anatomical References	99

- In addition to the above, across ten episodes, there were 190 sexual references or instances of sexual innuendo.
- Episodes also featured “exotic” sexual behaviors that would be far outside the experience of an average 13-year-old.
- A character states that he will have sex with excrement and then eat it.

CONCLUSIONS

Most adults can look back on their experience as 12- and 13-year olds and recall the myriad transformational changes that took place in their lives. Adults with children or grandchildren who recently came through that age bracket are especially familiar with the challenges and complexities of the physical and emotional growth that occurs. Those experiences – both the positive and the negative – may in fact be ripe as a source for entertainment.

Programs like *The Wonder Years* and *Lizzie McGuire* were commercially successful; and both were uplifting, lighthearted, family-friendly programs that centered on the lives of children going through that very same awkward period. And while program content centering on 12-13 year olds need not always be appropriate for young children, the program content on *Big Mouth* is alarming.

Depicting the full-frontal nudity of little boys – some with erections, no less – can only be intended to shock, titillate and pander to the viewer. Such material falls squarely within most definitions of pornography. And inasmuch as it features children, we believe this qualifies as **child pornography**.

For whom is *Big Mouth* produced? Is it for children, ostensibly serving as a humorous attempt to help them navigate puberty? With a content rating of TV-MA, suggesting the program is for mature audiences only, the answer is clearly no. Furthermore, Netflix markets the program as an irreverent comedy, and not in any way as educational or scholastic in nature.

Is *Big Mouth* intended for adults, serving as a humorous source of entertainment reflecting on that awkward period in a child's life? Perhaps. But could not the story be told without sexualizing, even sexually exploiting, young children? The volume and degree of program content where children are engaged in such sexually explicit behavior is deeply troubling.

The ultimate impact of a program like *Big Mouth* is either to desensitize children and adolescents and make them more comfortable with sexually graphic material; or to present children as sexually willing, precocious, and adventuresome to adult viewers. Neither scenario should be considered acceptable. Neither has a place in our society.

This program is especially concerning when reported cases of child sex abuse broke all previous records. The National Center on Missing and Exploited Children reports more than 21.7 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation made to NCMEC's CyberTipline – the highest number of reports ever received in one year. And the BBC has just [reported](#) that reports of sex abuse in the UK *between children* has doubled in a two-year period, increasing from 8,000 incidents in 2017 to 15,000-16,000 in 2019.

There is no way of knowing whether or to what extent that abuse might have been fueled by media the abusers were consuming while in lockdown; but according to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, "From both laboratory research and the narratives of men and women, it is not controversial to argue that pornography can: (1) be an important factor in shaping a male-dominant view of sexuality; (2) be used to initiate victims and break down their resistance to unwanted sexual activity; (3) contribute to a user's difficulty in separating sexual fantasy and reality; and (4) provide a training manual for abusers."

With the publication of this report, **the Parents Television and Media Council formally calls on Netflix** to cease its practice of sexually exploiting children for entertainment and profit, and to remove Big Mouth from its distribution platform.

We call on local, state and federal law enforcement to determine whether child pornography laws have been broken; and if they were, to levy criminal charges against those who produced and distributed the program.

We call on parents to be aware of the dangerous program content that lives on the popular streaming media platforms, and to help guide their children to healthier entertainment options.

CONTENT EXAMPLES

To view content examples, go to www.ParentsTV.org/BigMouthContent



The Parents Television and Media Council® (www.parentstv.org®) is a non-partisan education organization advocating responsible entertainment.

P.O. Box 4210, Burbank, CA 91503-4210
Phone: (213) 403-1300 | Toll-Free: (800) 882-6868 | Fax: (213) 403-1301