



THE MUPPETS STUDY

**An examination of iconic children's characters
delivering adult-themed content**



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The Parents Television Council’s Research Department conducted a scene-by-scene analysis of the first four episodes of *The Muppets*, a half-hour series that debuted on September 22, 2015. The focus of PTC’s examination was on adult-themed content and messaging.

The Muppets have always maintained a subtle sense of humor intended to appeal to older viewers. Today, as part of the Disney brand, their outreach to an older audience has taken on new meaning. In a recent *New York Times* article (September 7, 2015) Executive Producer Bob Kushell acknowledged that despite attempts to reach an older audience, "Rightfully or wrongfully, *The Muppets* became more of a kids' product over the years." Speaking of the 2015 version of *The Muppets*, Kushell continues, "Everyone in this version of the Muppets wants to push them further in a way they've never been before."

While the producers of the Muppets program may want to “push” the content in an adult-themed direction, the reality is that children across America reasonably – and understandably – believe that the program is still for them. After airing only four episodes, despite Disney’s attempt to redefine these beloved iconic characters, Nielsen data reveals that every week over one million children are watching. This study seeks to examine the adult-themed images and references those children are experiencing.

Major Findings

- In just four episodes, there were a total of 33 instances of adult-themed content. That is equivalent to one instance of adult-themed content airing every 3 minutes and 38 seconds.
- Most of the adult-themed content within the show consisted of sexual innuendos or alcohol and drug references/depictions.
- Forty-six percent of all the adult-themed content was sexual (45.5%).

Table 1: References and/or Depictions of Sex, Alcohol, and Drugs by Episode

	Episode 1 9/22/15	Episode 2 9/29/15	Episode 3 10/6/15	Episode 4 10/13/15	Total	
Alcohol Reference/Depiction	1	1	5	6	13 (39.4%)	Drugs/Alcohol: N = 18 (54.5%) Ref./depictions
Drug Reference/Depiction	0	3	1	1	5 (15.2%)	
Sexual Innuendo	4	5	0	1	10 (30.3%)	Sex: N = 15 (45.5%) Ref./depictions
Sexual Reference	1	0	2	0	3 (9.1%)	
Anatomical Reference	2	0	0	0	2 (6.1%)	
Total	8 (24.2%)	9 (27.3%)	8 (24.2%)	8 (24.2%)	33 ref/depict	

Violence was not included in the analysis. However, the few instances of violence were mild. Also there were a few instances of mild language (e.g. “suck” and “hell”). These were not counted. Therefore relative to “language” only sexual language was included in the study.

- Fifty-five percent of all the adult-themed content consisted of alcohol or drug references and depictions (54.5%).
- The following Muppet characters delivered sexual, alcohol, or drug-related content: Miss Piggy, Kermit, Fozzie, Scooter, the band, Yolanda, Animal, Rizzo, Sam, Zoot, Dr. Bunsen Honeydew, Bobo, Waldorf, Floyd, Uncle Deadly, Pepe, Sweetums, and Swedish Chef.
- Over 70% of all alcohol and drug references/depictions aired in the two most recent episodes (episodes #3 and #4) (72.2%).
- The number of instances doesn't tell the full story of how much adult-themed content a child watching *The Muppets* would consume. Screen time (the amount of time allotted for a scene, actor, subject matter, or show) is also important to consider. One bar scene in the fourth episode of *The Muppets* was counted as one instance. However, the scene was long enough to consume almost one-quarter of the show's screen time. During this scene, the Muppets were drinking and shown becoming drunk from beer, wine, and hard liquor.
- Eighty percent of all the sexual content aired in the first two episodes (80%) was in the form of sexual innuendos (e.g. "too many women, too many towns"); sexual references (e.g. "sex it to me sake boy"); and anatomical references (e.g. "I'm getting this thing hiked over Hiatus").
- Almost half of all sexual content in the study was delivered by the two most famous, iconic children's characters: Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy (46.7%).

Table 2: Sexual References and Depictions by Character

Muppet Characters	Sexual Ref./Depiction
Kermit	4
Miss Piggy	3
Sam	2
Zoot	1
Yolanda	1
Animal	1
Rizzo	1
Non-Muppet Characters	Sexual Ref./Depiction
Christina Applegate	1
Ed Helms	1
TOTAL	15

A Few Examples of What Children Are Hearing and Seeing

(Bolded character names indicate the segment of dialogue/depiction that was counted)

Dialogue

- (Anatomical Ref.) **Miss Piggy:** I've had this hiked (flips her hair), these hiked (gesturing toward her breast), I'm getting this thing hiked over hiatus (gesturing toward her buttock).

- (Sexual Innuendo) Miss Piggy: So sorry I'm a little late, but for some reason it's just so hard to get out of bed these days.
Swedish Chef: Der pigin di groopin di groobin.
Miss Piggy: Oh Chef! You have a naughty mind. But accurate!

- (Alcohol Ref.) **Christina Applegate:** Yeah, well, you know, at least I didn't show that sake commercial you did in Japan.

- (Alcohol & Sexual Ref.) **Christina Applegate:** Remember the tagline was, "Sake to me sexy boys."

- (Alcohol & Sexual Ref.) **Miss Piggy:** And just so you know, the tagline was, "Sex it to me sake boys."

- (Sexual Ref.) **Kermit:** You know, when Piggy and I were a couple I found her unpredictable, spontaneous and quirky, you know, it was kind of sexy, but if you take dating out of the equation she's just a lunatic.

- (Sexual Innuendo) Yolanda asks the band to sign a birthday card. Yolanda stops Zoot and says, "Hey! Be nice! No dirty drawings!" To which **Zoot** replies, "Oh, maybe I can make it into a saxophone."

- (Sexual Innuendo) **Kermit:** When we were dating we had one of those free pass lists, you know. It was just for fun. Well, I mean, unless Leah Thompson and I got stuck in an elevator together.

- (Sexual Innuendo) **Ed Helms:** Hey, you sexy side of sausage!

- (Sexual Innuendo) **Kermit:** Denise? Uh, well, we, uh, started dating a couple months ago. Uh, she runs marketing for the network and we were at a cross-promotional synergy meeting and we ended up, uh, cross-promoting. Yeah.

- (Sexual Innuendo) Dan from Imagine Dragons asks Animal to go on the road with them, but Floyd says, "Life on the roads no good for Animal." **Animal** agrees by saying, "Yeah, too many women, too many towns."
- (Drug Ref.) **Waldorf:** Hey Stadler, make sure they take you to county medical, they're pretty loosey-goosey with the meds over there.
- (Alcohol Ref.) **Dr. Bunsen Honeydew:** Excellent, because this evening my P.H.D. stands for 'pretty hard drinking.'
- (Drug Ref.) Scooter: Well, uh, have you checked with the band? I bet they'd be happy to buy your cookies.
Bobo: Hey, hey, hey, yeah, yeah, yeah, those guys are always happy.
Scooter: Yeah, legally now!
- (Drug Ref.) Fozzie: Have you ever been shot with a tranquilizer dart, Kermit?
Kermit: Well, no but I did lick my 3rd cousin once and the walls started melting. So, I feel you bro!
- (Alcohol Ref.) **Dr. Bunsen Honeydew:** Will the crew still be gathering for drinks after the show?
- (Alcohol Ref.) **Animal:** Animal go get drinks.

Depiction *(The content below was present within 1 scene and is an example of the significance of screen time).*

(The following depictions are from 1 bar scene that lasted 4 min. 36 sec. In other words, the Muppets were in 1 bar scene either drunk or drinking beer, wine and hard liquor for almost one-quarter of the episode).

(Below are moments that capture what occurred during the bar scene. The content descriptions below should not be viewed as a complete representation of the amount of content in this one scene).

- Pepe's eyes are drooped and he is visibly drunk. Uncle Deadly is holding a glass of white wine.
- Ed Helms is visibly drunk when he is singing karaoke. Ed Helms brings Janice a glass of red wine and has a mixed drink in his hand for himself. Dr. Bunsen Honeydew is holding a glass of white wine while they all sing along to Ed Helm's rendition of "Don't stop Believing." Swedish Chef is shown holding a beer bottle.

- The Muppets and Ed Helms begin singing karaoke at the bar while the other Muppets watch from their table full of beer, wine, and mixed drinks.
- Dr. Bunsen Honeydew drinks a martini. Miss Piggy is holding a martini glass. Uncle Deadly is holding a glass of white wine. Floyd is holding a mug of beer.

The scene below lasted over 3 minutes:

- Kermit walks into the office and Yolanda is laying on her desk because she is hung-over. The rest of the crew arrive later and they are also hung-over.

The **Parents Television Council**[®] (www.parentstv.org[®]) is a non-partisan education organization advocating responsible entertainment. It was founded in 1995 to ensure that children are not constantly assaulted by sex, violence and profanity on television and in other media. This national grassroots organization has more than 1.4 million members, and works with television producers, broadcasters, networks and sponsors in an effort to stem the flow of harmful and negative messages targeted to children. The PTC[™] also works with elected and appointed government officials to enforce broadcast decency standards. Most importantly, the PTC produces critical research and publications documenting the dramatic increase in sex, violence and profanity in entertainment. This information is provided free of charge so parents can make informed viewing choices for their own families. **Visit the new PTC Watchdog Blog at <http://www.parentstv.org/blog/>. Follow the PTC on Twitter: @ThePTC.**