Original Paper

Commodification, Sexuality and Choice Among School Children in A Ghanaian Community: The Consequences for Teaching, Learning and Life Chances

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Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenon of early sexual practices among young schoolchildren in Ghana through the lens of the ability of young people in two peri-urban communities to make better or productive moral and ethical judgements that enable the sustenance of opportunities for education, learning and life chances. Using a questionnaire, interviews, conversations and observations, it reckons the schoolchildren's reasoning and consciousness in determining their attitudes towards choices concerning early sexual practices and in their indulgence or otherwise. It argues that schoolchildren's attitudes and behaviour are shaped by social philosophies including empiricism, solipsism, economism and commodification in a complete departure from the ways of knowing that obtained in society a generation ago. The consequences of such a radical change from the traditionalism of a generation ago is the development of a nihilistic attitude guiding their moral and ethical choices which are nevertheless detrimental to their own development into personhood and the development of their future opportunities through education, learning and life chances.

Keywords

empiricism, early sexual practices, moral and ethical judgements, exchange, belonging, and desire and pleasure

1. Introduction

While residing in a community and carrying out some volunteer work in informal teaching and mentoring assistance in a number of Private and Public schools and their catchment area, my co-author stumbled upon a phenomenon that she thought was quite noticeable and that affected pupils' seriousness about schooling, attendance, interactions and attitudes, and ultimately, school dropout rates. We discussed it often and at length over a period of four years and eventually decided that a study of the pupils in the schools through a questionnaire and possible personal interviews and conversations could help to understand some of their values, attitudes and choices in relation to their education and life chances. This study articulates our research findings and conclusions according to our aims and objectives.

1.1 Background to the Study

It is no longer news that the kind of sexual inhibitions that existed a generation or two ago among teenagers are fast losing their importance today, and sexual involvement even at a low age of below fifteen (15) years is becoming the order of the day among contemporary Ghanaian youths and school children. An online story of two Secondary school girls fighting naked over a boy in a school dormitory (Ghanaweb, 2022) and others about Secondary school students experimenting three-some and four-some sexual experiments (Dokosi, 2018) illustrates the nonchalant and taken-for-granted attitude towards sexual mores, judgements and ethical choices by youth even in the school setting. A generation or two ago, owing to the primary governance by specific cultural and religious norms regulating sexual behaviour in society, the world seemed different from how we see it around us today and a generation from now, we believe, the world will also not be what we see today. But what is the driving force of this change? The world has changed considerably, but these changes which are paradoxically both negative and positive, did not happen overnight; they happened over the course of many years, and several factors and forces are responsible for these changes, but chief amongst them, we suggest, is the changing way of knowing towards empiricism. Empiricism as a philosophical movement states that whatever cannot be related with using the senses does not exist. (Ghilan, 2012; Borghini, 2020)

1.1.1 Technological Development and Advancement

Empiricism permeated Ghanaian society mainly through technology, economism and commodification. As the global society continues to evolve with different heights of technological advancement and achievements, many in Ghanaian middle class society and urban dwellers have found easier ways to do almost everything through technology. For example, you do not have to carry out hand-washing of clothing if you do not feel any compulsion to do so because the washing machine is available and if affordable, can be obtained. Similarly, the hand-washing of dishes is becoming obsolete unless for some reason such as the inability to afford, you want to do them without using a dish washing machine. You do not have to walk miles to fetch water from the river because water runs through pipes in abundance in many urban communities and middle class homes. In effect, life has been so simplified that it has insidiously permeated social ethics and morals which seem to have lost their grip and are fast correspondingly loosening themselves especially among the teenagers. As a consequence, in our society

today, the old order of things has fallen apart and has been reshuffled. Children have lost their innocence and have taken over the roles of parents, assuming control of their own lives. One of the results has become the phenomenon of a high degree of unabashed sexual practices among the young people. Whereas one may associate the technological advancement and its influences principally upon young people from middle class homes and urban centres, owing to commerce and other numerous channels, especially mobile phone technology, however, the same developments have inevitably penetrated rural communities too. Consequently, the values, attitudes and behaviour under study are prevalent in both urban and rural communities.

The phones, computers and other digital technologies which are used to connect to various social media platforms are a result of technological development and advancement. This has made almost every information about sex easily available and accessible to the young people.

Online shopping which is another offspring of technological development has also made it easier for young people to shop for such things as contraceptives, lubricants, sex toys and other enhancers without having to go to any sex shop personally. This means that they can order these things in the comfort and privacy of their homes without anyone to whom they may be accountable finding out.

The various forms of contraceptives used by young people in preventing pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases are also a result of technological developments. Consequently, young people can involve in sexual activities without the fear of getting pregnant.

1.1.2 Youth and Sexuality: Early Introduction to Sexual Practices

Results from the 2008 Ghana Demographic and health survey show that over three quarters of females and sixty percent of males in Ghana had their first sexual encounters before the age of 20 (Ghana statistical service, 2010). The 2011 Edulink survey conducted in Ga Mashie shows comparable results. In addition, over 40% of girls and about 20% of boys between the ages 15-19 in Ga Mashie reported ever having sexual intercourse, similar to national rates; and this data suggests that a large proportion of Ghanaians have sex before the age of 20 and more females than males start having sex during adolescence." (Biney, 2013).

Teenage pregnancies remain a big challenge in Ghana and data from the annual Ghana Health Service (GHS) statistics on this phenomenon raises concerns over health, well-being, education and social welfare. This study focuses on the concern about the education, educability and life chances of the young and on how they are affected by this phenomenon of early introduction to sexual practices. Nevertheless, the main question extends farther into how what we learn about the factors and causes of the rapid changes of sexual and moral behaviour among the young people from the traditional norms can enable us to fashion content, learning and pedagogy for effective teaching and learning among the young people of today towards better moral and ethical choices, self-actualization and life chances.

The Ghana Health Service data shows that in 2020, approximately 301 girls were impregnated every day in Ghana while 13 teenage pregnancies were recorded every one hour. According to the Ghana Health Service, a total of 109,888 teenage pregnancies were recorded with the lowest threshold age of girls put

in the family way being ten-year olds. Per the data, girls between the ages 10 and 14 years account for 2,865 pregnancies recorded in 2020 while another 107,023 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 were impregnated within the same year (Ghana Health Service, 2020).

Thus, a high proportion of Ghanaian adolescents are sexually active before the age of adulthood.

Various studies have concluded that:

- "4 in 10 Ghanaian females and 2 in 10 males aged 15-19 have ever had sex."
- "By the age of 20, 83% of women and 56% of men have had sex. The median age at first intercourse is 17.4 for women and 19.5 for men."
- "Among those who have had sex, 4 in 10 women and 6 in 10 men aged 12-24 have had more than one sexual partner."
- Sexual coercion is a common occurrence: 1 in 4 sexually experienced young women say that they have ever been forced against their will to have sexual intercourse (8% of sexually experienced young men report the same). 12% of women and 2% of men were forced into their first sexual experience. (Research in brief, 2004)

The phenomenon of early sexual practices among minors in our society poses a variety of threats to the society in which we live as much as it affects the actors of the practices. For instance, what then are the life chances of these clusters of teenagers who have to take responsibility for other children before they themselves have been fully educated and capable of being employed in viable productive establishments? This study focuses on the concern about the education, educability and life chances of the young and how their productivity are affected by this phenomenon of early introduction into sexual practices.

1.1.3 Research Idea and Aim

As the prevalence of early sexual practices among teenagers in contemporary Ghanaian society is a challenge because its many effects pose several threats to teenagers' education and life chances, this study is aimed at establishing, to a large extent, the factors and causes of the prevalence of early sexual practices among teenagers in contemporary Ghanaian society and to determine how it affects an important dimension of their being; namely, their education, educability and life chances, and to a large extent, to what extent their ability at better and productive moral judgements and choices can be enhanced and upgraded. Eventually, it focuses on to what extent schoolchildren's values, attitudes and actions can be re-directed towards more viable productive options for their benefit through the creation of content or knowledge, and teaching and learning methods for making better choices and building confident and robust self-identities and self-hoods that do not depend upon early sexual practices to prove their worth and achievements.

1.1.4 Significance of the Study

The phenomenon of early sexual practices among teenagers is one that we find occurring all around us in ways that it did not occur before the twenty-first century. The problem, however, is that it is a never-discussed-topic in a large percentage of homes. But the fact that the study topic is a taboo in most homes does not eliminate the fact that these things are happening underground and even most times, in broad

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daylight as evinced in the case of a Senior High School student who filmed herself having a threesome and at another time, a foursome (Dokosi, 2018). The sad part of it is that it is not that society is oblivious of this fact; society is very much aware that they exist and are a menace to the society and its moral and ethical unity as they used to know it, but it has turned both a blind eye and a deaf ear to the phenomena although society continues to experience the effects of this behavioural change among the teenagers. This, perhaps, is because individuals feel powerless against a trend that they neither feel confident that they adequately understand nor feel able to roll back no matter how much they may attempt it as it floods homes, schools, institutions and communities. This then means that conscious activities must be generated to awaken society from its mute state and raise its consciousness to clarify and determine the effects of the phenomenon and the causes of their own inabilities to find a credible solution to a phenomenon that is possibly negating the life chances of the youth in society. As Philip Larkin states in *High Windows*, society is *going down a long slide* and at the end of the slide is awaiting "High Windows". The culture of silence needs to be broken, but how can it be done? Like the modernist poets who took to writing poems as their way of rescuing some of the most valuable values under collapse and reaching the people, we have chosen this research study as a way of articulating and investigating the outlines and factors of the problem in order to share and suggest possible ways of both understanding and creating the avenues for controlling the domination of the phenomenon on the youth in society and their life chances. We envisage that through the generation of content, and establishing teaching and learning channels and methods that address the factors and causes of the phenomenon, we may be able to suggest how to aid better or productive moral and ethical judgements and choices for the young people in particular. This also follows earlier work on the valorisation and behaviour patterns of college students in examination contexts and situations which concluded as follows:

"On the other hand, it is obvious that students have omitted any references to ethics and morality which have hitherto governed the references to examination malpractices in their choices of behaviour in the discussion about failure and examinations, but have oriented themselves exclusively to the language and discourse of commodification and the market. To be able to reintroduce any elements of ethics and morality on which the prior discourses and discussions about examination malpractice and other references are made into the discourse of students, a conscious effort will be needed to be made towards re-establishing the linkage between examinations, failure and success in the educational domain. From this exploratory study, the suggestion is that the linkage between the ethical and moral frames that governed the norms of discourse related to examination malpractice have been eroded or broken by subscription to the logic of the market." (Adjoe, 2019, pp. 42-43).

How then do commodification and the logic of the market influence the moral and ethical judgements and ultimate choices and/or the inability to make productive choices by the youth? How can they be helped to develop the ability to make better or more productive moral and ethical choices and valorisations that tend towards creating better educational opportunities and life chances for them? The research would hence also enable teachers and those who work with youths and schoolchildren to be able

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to determine entry points for planning teaching and learning and the purposes and pillars upon which they can focus their efforts at the education for better and productive moral and ethical choices and valorisations among youths and schoolchildren.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objective of the study is to find a way of articulating and investigating the outlines and factors of the problem of early sexual practices among schoolchildren. The study hopes that it can find a way to contribute to understanding and creating the avenues for controlling the domination of the phenomenon of early sexual practices on the youth in society and stem its negative effects on their life chances. We envisage that through the generation of content, and establishing teaching and learning channels and methods that address the factors and causes of the phenomenon, we may be able to suggest how to aid better or productive moral and ethical judgements and choices for the young people in particular. In essence, how do we find a focus for teachers and educators and youth workers, and how do we find an appropriate content to focus upon in the education of the youth towards better and more productive moral and ethical judgements and choices?

1.3 Research Questions

- How then do commodification and the logic of the market influence the moral and ethical judgements and ultimate choices and/or the inability to make productive choices by the youth?

- How can they be helped to develop the ability to make better or more productive moral and ethical choices and valorisations that tend towards creating better educational opportunities and life chances for them?

- What kind of contents and approaches can enable teachers and those who work with youths and schoolchildren to be able to determine entry points for planning teaching and learning?

- And what kinds of purposes and pillars can teachers and workers with youth focus their efforts at the education for better and productive moral and ethical choices and valorisations among youths and schoolchildren?

2. Research Methods and Instruments

The study limited itself to two peri-urban communities in proximity to each other chosen purposively in order to study the phenomenon noticed in schools in these communities, as well as for the convenience in respect of their accessibility to the researchers. As part of our data collection modes, we adopted questionnaires to collect data randomly from teenagers in the catchment area of two schools. It followed an earlier exploration of the phenomenon in which conversations and interviews were held with five children, adopting an ethnographic style, in a different community in which the co-author undertook voluntary work. The small study convinced us to investigate the phenomenon on a larger scale by using a questionnaire for description only while expanding our interviews and conversations with children. Although we tried to distribute an equal number of questionnaire among males and females, we had to be content to limit ourselves to the number that were willing to participate. The catchment areas were

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chosen due to accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. We also undertook conversations with as many schoolchildren and youths as were willing to talk about themselves in relation to the research study. Thereafter, the data was analysed and interpreted within the framework of the rise and influence of modernism and empiricism on society, what it promotes, and their influence in determining the ability or otherwise at better or more productive moral choices and behaviour of teenagers specifically in Ghanaian society as mirrored in youth behaviour in the research setting.

2.1 Research Ethics

In order to meet ethical research standards, we interviewed schoolchildren at home or away from home by explaining to them the purpose of the research in order to receive their consent. Opportunistic interviews and conversations were also used to ascertain personal experiences from pupils and to confirm reports of practices among fellow school children. We did not resort to interviewing or conversing with pupils at school premises because we wanted to diminish the influence of peers on their responses as much as possible by meeting them in their own natural environments where they felt themselves and comfortable. Data has been analysed using descriptive methods. However, the findings have been articulated and further interpreted through the philosophical and literary lenses of the impact of modernism and empiricism and the principles they advocated for society, and through the framework of consciousness, attitude and behaviour (Adjoe, 2019). In consonance with Gyimesi's (2019) understanding, "literature offers a platform for philosophical experimentations which can yield insights that would otherwise be very difficult, if not impossible to obtain". And so we have not been afraid to employ literary insights in modernism as a lens for analysis of data when necessary. This enabled us to discuss and relate the findings to the influence of technology, materiality, choice, freedom, individuality, selfhood and identity, which are all derivatives of the influence of empiricism and modernism. The approach has therefore helped to discuss the causes, effects and ways of approaching the prevention of the modes of choices and determining values that create the tendencies towards moral distortions among our teenagers and leading to the loss or distortions of educational opportunities, educational readiness, productivity and life chances.

2.2 Limitations

In Ghanaian society, sex topics are not very easy to deal with. As a matter of fact, the mention of the word 'sex' screams 'promiscuity!' in the ears of the majority of the people who hear it. Hence, in Ghanaian society, this is a challenging study in terms of the possibilities described below:

i. Dishonesty: For a number of reasons, it is difficult to find people who will easily open up about their private lives, especially if that private life includes sex. The fear was that respondents may not give honest responses to the questions on the questionnaire. For example, during our interviews and conversations, about 75% of pupils honestly told us that there was no guarantee that they could tell us 'everything'.

ii. Personal expression: Aware that the topic under study is a 'taboo' topic, it was difficult to express the self by using words as comfortably as would have been desired. Getting apt words that should prevent

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possible misinterpretation and misunderstanding became a challenging task that had to be negotiated carefully.

2.3 Literature Review: The Mode of Knowing in Ghanaian Society before the Twenty-First Century

The mode of knowing in Ghanaian society before the twenty-first century had weighed heavily in favour of cultural tradition, religious authority and state authority. Owing to the primary governance by specific cultural and religious norms regulating sexual behaviour in society, youth behaviour was predictable because of what was expected. It made it easy to determine morality—that is, the difference between right and wrong, and the choices one had to make to be a person of character in the society, a productive person, a moral personality, and the moral goals and decisions necessary to build one's life and future, and that of community and society as a whole. It also made it easier to draw up curricula in teaching behaviour, attitudes and moral norms and choices. One knew what to contribute to society and how to do so because of the established and approved ways of achievement. Parents, families, communities, institutions and authorities knew what to expect from children, subordinates, superiors and friends and relations and others. It was thus easy also to know and fashion out how to educate the young: what to teach the young and what to instruct them to be and what and how to achieve success and attain their goals in life, and how to secure their futures. However, by this time, the world has changed drastically and has introduced an overwhelming amount of uncertainty and fragmentation in the lives of society, communities, institutions, families, individuals, and in particular, the lives of the young. There seems to be a sense of great loss among adults as to what it is all about and how to deal with the sense of loss of grip on events and phenomena which hitherto were within grasp and control. One of the most consequential impacts is in education where the sense of knowing what to teach and how to educate the young is fraught with uncertainty especially as the sense of morality and values of children in school point to a complete departure from the old moral choices under cultural tradition, religious authority and state authority. The sense of choice of contemporary young people appear for many adults to be guided by other values and capacities generally attributed impersonally to the dominance of technology. Nonetheless, even if it is assumed that the changes in values and morality are due to the dominance of technology, by what means does technology accomplish its capacity to change the values and morality of individuals and of the young people? And what kind of values, moral and ethical endowments does it substitute?

Drawing upon Wittgenstein (1959) and Palmer (2017), we think this question can only be answered by examining the mode of knowing of the individual and of the society. The issue of the mode of knowing relates to the means by which we arrive at the truth—the means by which we arrive at accepting our knowledge as valid and something that can be relied upon. Such warrant can be conscious or unconscious (Palmer, 2017). As the old modes of authority lose their power to represent the truth for the young and for a critical mass of the population, the tide towards technology and its appeal for providing ready answers has grown exponentially.

However, the language of technology is couched in empiricism. Empiricism as a philosophical movement which states that whatever cannot be related with using the senses does not exist (Gilhan, 2012). Empiricism, propagated mainly through modernist discourses, permeated Ghanaian society to a large extent through technology, economism and commodification. As Paddy (2009) notes in a summary of the life of Friedrich Nietzsche who thought that 'man should not be weighed down by idealized pasts or borrowed systems of thought', modernism propagated the belief that 'morality was in fact an expression of power, merely the force of group beliefs, and not an innate set of truths'. Against what Nietzsche regarded as 'the repressive systems of politics, religion and law (which impose suffering on the individual and demand ascetic habits of denied living)', 'life, freedom, passion, and an individually derived morality' should rather be embraced (Paddy, 2009, pp. 132-133). The reshuffling of morality and values in Ghanaian society today in which the old order of things have fallen apart and have been reshuffled reflect Nietzsche's nihilistic modernism. Children have lost their innocence and have taken over the roles of adults. One of the results has become the phenomenon of a high degree of unabashed sexual practices among the young people. In the words of Palmer (2017), 'expressive individualism' is replacing community and tradition, generated by the discourse of modernism. It is a kind of individualism not 'softened by the sense of community.' But this might not completely be the case either, because the concern and confusion of people and their feeling of sense of loss indicates that there still exists the mixture of individualism and community, for as Gyimesi (2017) observes, "When applied to real life scenarios and the practical nature of day-to-day reality, the principle of absolute randomness is untenable without descending into chaos". Similarly, according to Wittgenstein's (Wittgenstein, 1958; Eagleton, 2022) 'there is no private language'. Eagleton (2022), citing Wittgenstein states: "We are not isolated beings sealed within our own incommunicable experience. On the contrary, the way in which I come to know you is pretty much the way in which I come to know myself. How can I know that what I am feeling is jealousy unless I have been reared within a language which contains the concept? And language is nobody's private property."

In the Ghanaian context in which the study takes its root, the median age at which women and men initiated sexual contact was between the ages of 18.4 to 20 years over a generation ago. However, in the present age young people initiate sex at as young as 10 years in some societies although earlier ages of onset have been reported (Boislard & Poulin, 2011; Lawoyin & Kanthula, 2010). Early sexual activity results in a long period of premarital sexual activity during which changing partners is relatively common, thus leading to the development of higher risk of sexually transmitted infections and diseases. People who begin to have intercourse at younger ages are more likely to engage in sexual intercourse with casual partners and to have multiple and concurrent partnerships (Uchudi, Magadi, & Mostazir, 2010). Other outcomes noticed among adolescents who engage in early sexual debut are involvement in several types of social vices such as stealing, fighting, use of controlled substances, school absenteeism and increased number of friends (Sawyer et al., 2012). The age at sexual debut is increasing in the younger females—

as much as 27% who by the age of between 15-19 years have initiated sexual coitus. Males however are showing a decreasing age at sexual debut (GSS et al., 2009, Fatusi & Blum, 2008).

The traditional views of morality in Ghanaian society had a close resemblance to the Augustinian concept of moral reasoning and choice described by Moseley (1988) which proposed that human beings are answerable to a God because they reside within a moral order established and linked to duty and virtue on whatever moral choice they decide to make. This gave the traditional world view and its people a unitary view of life. They accepted that there was a higher power above for whom they all exist and to whom they were all answerable. They then lived their lives following the laid down rules of morality. They understood that there was a core that held everything together and they were all connected to that core; therefore, breaking away would certainly disrupt the order in the society. They understood that they were answerable to higher powers and lived in reverence and fear of those powers. And although opinions differed, there was one source—God, and one goal—paradise, or varied ancestral names for the other-world, which held society together.

However, in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the unitary point of view of life and the reference points for moral choice began to dissolve. The diversity of opinions based upon a different world view- the Copernican world view spawning diverse philosophies and views of the world, humanity, and of the human being, made deep inroads and have dominated thinking and attitudes in Ghanaian society. Based upon the different world views and different philosophies, people are living their lives following those philosophies, including modernism and postmodernism. People speak, understand and interpret things from their own philosophical points of view which they term 'secular', which is, in fact, relativism. The God figure that held everything together has almost been pushed out and no longer matters much and is being replaced with social philosophies rooted in relativism. The single structure has been broken and the consequences are that the core to which they should all be connected, and which created common grounds and understanding has been removed, creating anxiety, uncertainty and anomie. The stabilising stasis needed to establish 'truth' among the different philosophical points of view and the difficulty in understanding and reconciling them is now claimed to be located instead in the pursuit of theories promoting hard facts and evidence or scienticism in the society. A typical example of this pursuit is captured through empiricism.

2.3.1 Empiricism and Ghanaian Society

Empiricism states that the origin of all knowledge is sense experience. It therefore emphasizes the role of experience and evidence, especially sensory perception, in the formation of ideas and argues that the only knowledge humans can have is a posteriori (based on experience). Empiricism contrasts with rationalism which holds that the mind may apprehend some truths directly without requiring the medium of the senses (Martin, 2009).

What this means is that empiricism emphasizes the fact that the authenticity of a thing is proven through the ability to relate to it with at least one of the five senses; hence, it must have the propensity to be seen or touched or physically manifested (Ghilan, 2012).

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Empiricism has gained dominance in society obviously because it emphasizes that anything that cannot be seen, touched, smelled, tasted or heard does not exist, hence God is a bogus belief and right thinking humans need not waste their precious time and energy believing in what does not exist. Can God be seen or heard or smelled or tasted or touched? Then how can his existence be validated?

The *Stanford Centre for the study of language and Information* (2017), divides empiricism into three varieties, each taking a posture that backs up its claim that only hard facts exist and are true.

i.   **Explanatory Empiricism:** This type of empiricism denies the validity of inferences from observable phenomena to causes that cannot themselves be observed. (Meyer, 1992, p. 136)

ii.   **Genetic Empiricism:** A second form of empiricism summed up by the Latin slogan "nihil est intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu" (nothing is in the intellect which is not first in the senses). Drawing from Lowe (1995, p. 189)**,** this type of empiricism makes claims about the origin of our ideas. It takes two forms. The first of these is what we may call 'tabula rasa' (blank slate) empiricism, which denies the existence of innate ideas or principles of reasoning holding that both our factual knowledge and the concepts we employ in describing the world are drawn from experience. The locus classicus for an empiricism of this kind is the work of John Locke, who famously suggested that the mind is originally "white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas" (Locke Essay 2.1.2).

iii.   **Justificaton Empiricism:** A third form of empiricism is what we may call Justification Empiricism. In its strongest form, an empiricism of this kind is indifferent as to the origin of our ideas and can tolerate inferences to unobservable entities. It merely insists that wherever our ideas come from and whatever they claim, they cannot be regarded as justified until they have been successfully tested against experience. Within the twentieth-century philosophy, this position is associated with a sharp distinction between the "context of discovery" and the "context of justification" (Reichenbach, 1938, pp. 6-7)

Two types of empiricism seem to dominate contemporary Ghanaian society—the genetic empiricism and especially justification empiricism—and are obvious in educational contexts and pronouncements, political contexts and pronouncements, and media communications that emphasise 'hard facts' and 'evidence'. In all these contexts, there is an emphasis on quantitative methods of research, and 'evidence' and a near disregard for qualitative studies, the humanities, and an emphasis laid on the observable and practical disciplines leading to skill sets bringing 'practical results' especially in terms of monetary or economic rewards.

Consequently, the orientation towards Scienticism has set people, especially the young people, free because it has discarded the idea of being answerable to any higher power that as they have come to realise, was only postulated to, as it were, 'control' them and deny them pleasure while allegiance is paid to 'experience' as the ultimate proof of choice. Youth have consequently subscribed to immediate

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experience as the regular and the norm. Thus, while morality and ethics ask, 'Do you think it is the right time for you to engage in sexual activities? Should you not focus on your studies or be developing your life or self, and your future?' Scienticism replies 'So when is the right time, and who decides when the right time is?'

Such posture has inspired young people to think that all that is required of them is to be able to 'think outside the box' and, in respect of sexuality, to resort to the various forms of contraception that have been produced and propagated through media advertisements and birth control campaigns 'proven to free them from any dangers' such that they can engage in all they want without the fear of catching a disease or getting pregnant as promised by the advertisements they read, hear and see. Morality and ethics (which had restricted them all of the while), takes the stance that sexual practices are reserved for a particular group of people of some particular status and at a particular time; but this has become an archaic assertion for most young people and adults.

2.3.2 Literary Modernism and Technology

Literary modernism emerged as a response to the impact of scienticism and technology. As humans began to 'think outside of the box' and replace the gods with themselves, making themselves the measure of everything, effects were produced upon human life. Human life became fragmented as emphasis was placed on individualism—that is, individual choice and isolation above social needs and concerns. The cold hard facts inevitably had their effects on the nature of society and the individual to the extent that it did not matter what your neighbour thought or felt, for as long as it was right by the individual and felt good, it was the individual's choice based on the hard facts and evidence and so was alright. Everything then, including human interactions, depended on either the human being or the machines which have no emotions and which were therefore incapable of showing love or discretion. Things that could not be proven with evidence or hard facts did not matter anymore.

2.3.3 Literary Modernism

Literary modernism's concerns were with the accelerating pace of society toward 'destruction' and meaninglessness. As many of society's certainties were being undermined, modernist writers attempted to come to terms with where humanity would stand after its cornerstones had been removed or pulverized. What they did was to sift through the shards of the past looking for what was valuable and what could inspire construction of a new society as the contemporary world appeared to be becoming a directionless place without centre or certainty. They thought that the past certainties, no matter how oppressive they had been and constructed on specious values, were at least some kind of foundation for the world. (Barnhisel, 2003)

The movement believed that the moral rules and standards society needed to give it certainty and confidence already existed and yet were submerged in the rubble of the new dominant technological and scientific trends which produced efficiency and yet a coldness and calculation and indifference towards humanity. All they needed to do was to dig out those submerged standards, reawaken them in the hearts of people and make them remember who and how they used to be. The modernists were not against

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science and technology, for after all, the mass—producing machine had a stake in the increasing literacy among the people. Neither were they against the creation of things using technology but against the way these were used. Humanity which began to think itself as 'god' because of technology with which he could create things created guns and bombs and armoured tanks and all other ammunitions which ended up being used to destroy humanity itself. The same things he created were the same things that were used to destroy him. The modernists did not accept that man (at any point or day) should be a God unto himself because humanity does not exist of himself alone like an atom or as an island.

For the literary modernists, scienticism and technology also created individualism and isolation in society as its way of knowing was based on atomism. Atomism created individualism and isolation resulting in solipsism. Dylan Thomas (Roberts, 1988) described an aspect of the manifestation and effects of the philosophy of individualism in his poem *After the Funeral*. Written in honour of the poet's most beloved aunt, Ann Jones (the poet's favourite aunt with whom he spent most of his vacations). The persona (Ann Jones) was a devout Christian woman whose heart was metaphorically likened to a fountain so great that it could drown the sun. She spent most of her days helping people and taking care of the old brown chapel. However, no one noticed her or cared about her. She always gave love yet received none, but at the event of her death, people came in to mourn her death and even built a monument for her. This show of love and concern after the death of Aunt Ann Jones would have been most useful when she was yet alive and could still feel them. But because of the concept of individualism, people minded their businesses and cared less about others. If Aunt Ann were an individualist, she would not have even cared about the sweeping and cleaning of the church which she did throughout her days. She did not feel loved or appreciated while she was alive and doing all of these services to humanity, yet, she continued regardless. But when she transited, these congregants came in their numbers, doing the right thing at the wrong time. The atomism created through scienticism and technology result in the philosophy of solipsism leading to individualism. Solipsism is the idea of self as the term implies; solus (alone) ipse (self) (of Latin etymology). Three types of solipsism can be identified:

   i.   **Epistemological Solipsism:** Epistemology, simply put, is the study of the theory of knowledge. Hence, epistemological solipsism is the idea that we cannot know anything outside of our own mind. Solipsists argue that the only true knowledge is what we know about our own internal thinking. Everything else is uncertain and untrustworthy.

   ii.   **Ethical Solipsism:** Ethics is the philosophy of the study of principles relating to right and wrong conduct. That being said, ethical solipsism is the idea that the self is the only thing which matters morally. The moral choice in any situation is to do whatever you think is best for yourself, without regard for anyone else.

   iii. **Metaphysical Solipsism:** In metaphysics or the philosophy of reality, solipsism is the idea that only the self exists. According to the solipsist, I am the only thing in the universe and everything I see outside myself is an illusion.

The product of solipsism is the emergence of the idea of individualism which emphasizes the separateness, independence and uniqueness of different people, and producing individual selves fitting Dylan Thomas' modelling in *After the Funeral*. Ethical solipsism and metaphysical solipsism seem to hold sway over the moral and ethical judgements and choices of young people, and becoming a dominant feature of society and outlook.

Interacting with a developing nihilism, it is inevitable that a sense of meaninglessness, uncertainty and anomie should characterise moral and ethical choices generally. It calls for need to develop the abilities and capabilities for better ethical and moral judgements and articulation in building the self, identity, personhood and the clarity in the kind of freedoms that enable beneficial choice-making especially under challenging times and situations.

Nihilism is the rejection of all religious and moral principles as the only means of obtaining social progress. Their rejection of conventional morality is based upon its supposed arbitrariness, its conformity and its exertion of control over human feelings. In other words, the rules of conduct are a restrictive and limiting force over the human spirit. The young people believe that for an individual to feel whole, he or she needs to be free of all the encumbering baggage of many years of hypocrisy.

To ascertain the extent to which the young people in Ghanaian society subscribe to the influences of empiricism, modernism, individualism, solipsism and nihilism in the making of moral and ethical choices, we asked the following questions through questionnaires. The results are below as follows:

3. Results from Questionnaire Distributed

This study was conducted based on results from the distribution of a total number of one hundred and eight (108) questionnaires to teenagers attending basic schools in two peri-urban communities. The questionnaire was limited to finding out the prevalence of early sexual practices among basic school students (teenagers) which is an indicator of the ability to make better or productive moral and ethical judgements and choices towards educational opportunities, staying in school, learning and better life chances.
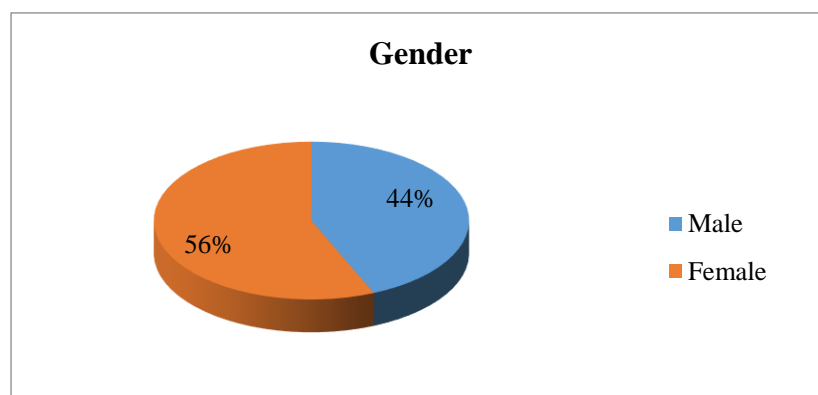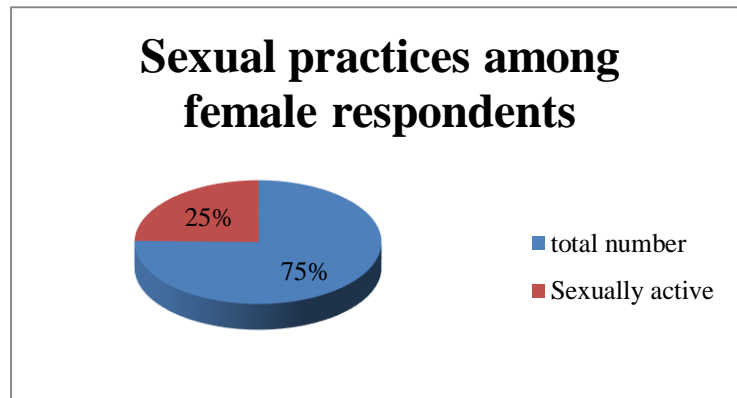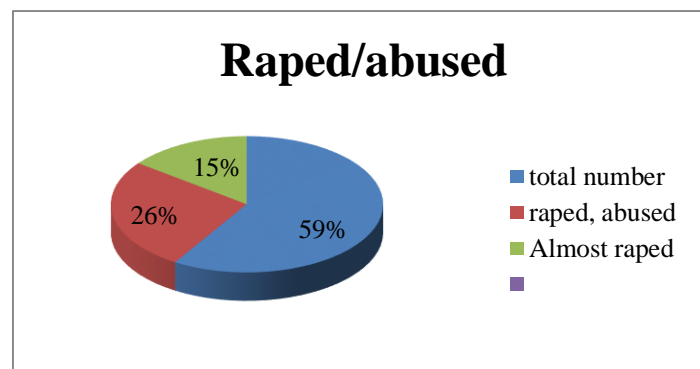

Figure 1. All respondents

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Interpretation: The above pie chart is a representation of the two respondent genders with the female gender being the dominant. There was a total number of forty-seven (47) male and sixty-one (61) female respondents. In all, there were a total number of one hundred and eight (108) respondents.
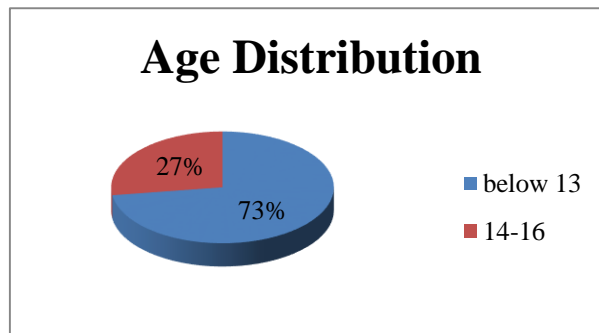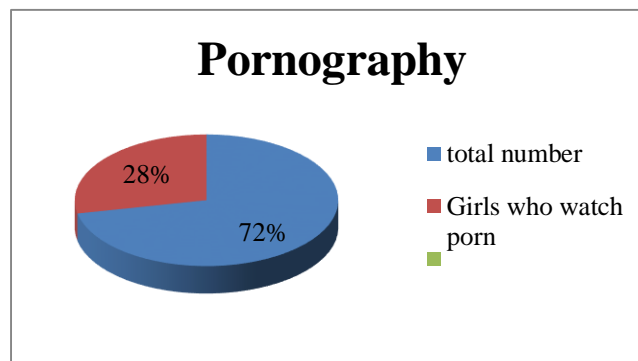

Figure 2. Female Respondents

Interpretation: the above chart is a representation of the total number of female respondents. There were a total number of sixty-one (61) female respondents and twenty of them are sexually active.

Figure 3. Female Respondents Raped/Abused

Interpretation: the above chart is a representation of number of female respondents who have been raped/abused or nearly. Out of the total number of the sexually active female respondents, nine (9) have been raped and five (5) have nearly been raped.

Figure 4. Female Respondents and First Sexual Experience

Interpretation: the above chart is a representation of the age distribution of the female respondents. Sixteen (16) respondents had their first sexual experience before the age of 13 while six had theirs between the ages of fourteen (14) and sixteen (16).

**Figure 5. Female Respondents Who Watch Pornography**

Interpretation: the above chart represents the total number of girls who watch pornographic materials. Out of the total number of sixty-one female respondents, twenty-four watch pornographic materials.
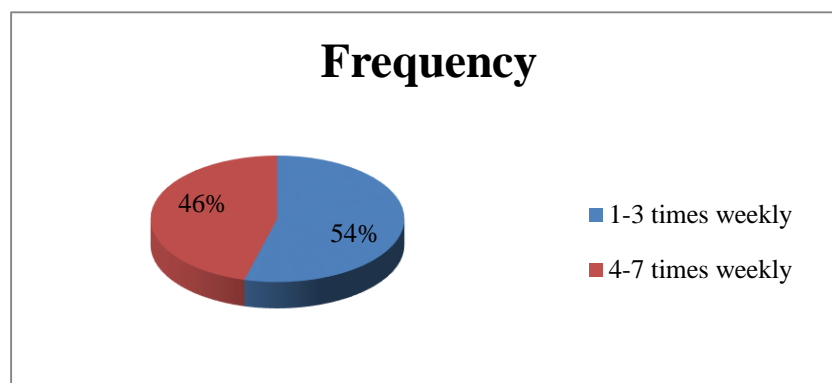
**Figure 6. Female Respondents: Frequency of Viewing Pornography**

Interpretation: the chart above represents the frequency at which female respondents view pornographic materials. Thirteen respondents out of the twenty-four watch pornographic materials between 1-3 times weekly while 11 watch between four to seven times weekly.
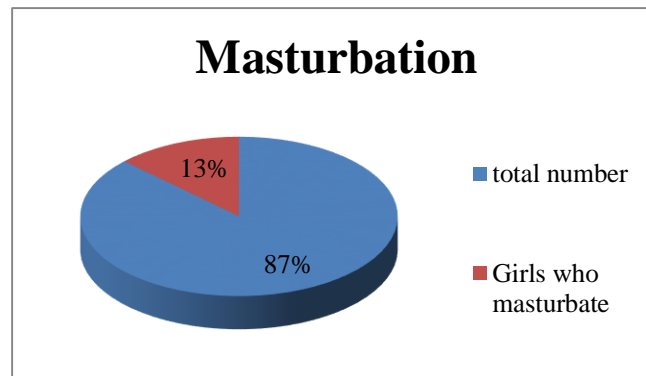

Figure 7. Female Respondents Practising Masturbation

Interpretation: the above chart represents the number of female respondents who masturbates. Out of a total number of sixty-one female respondents, nine (9) girls masturbate.
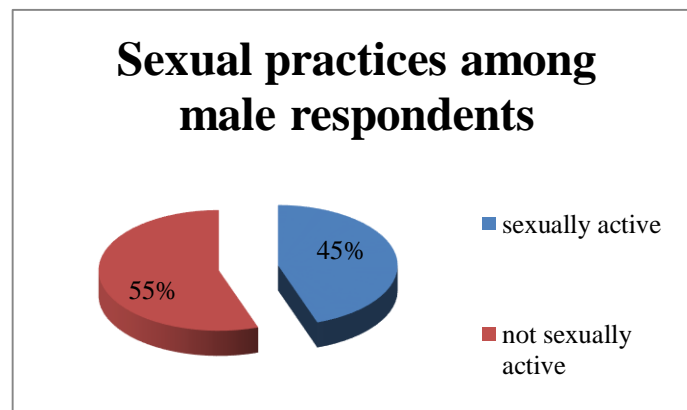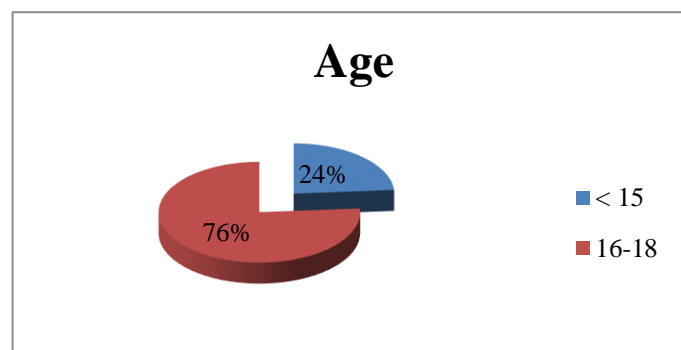

Figure 8. Male Respondents

Interpretation: this chart represents the number of male respondents who are sexually active. There was a total number of forty-seven (47) respondents and twenty-one (21) are sexually active.

Raped/Abused

**70%** **30%**

■ total number
■ Raped/abused
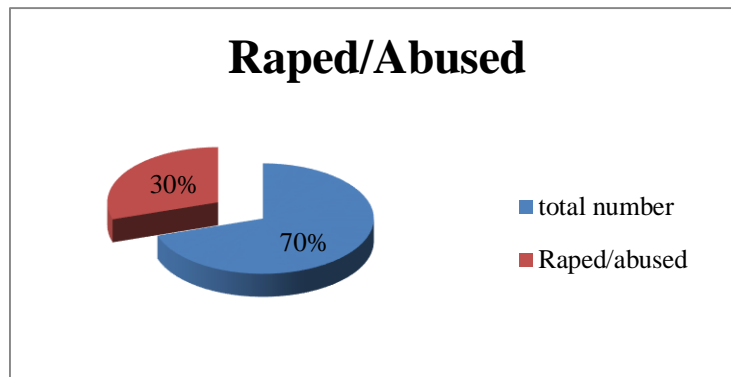
Figure 9. Male Respondents Sexually Abused/Raped

Interpretation: This chart represents the number of male respondents who have been sexually abused/raped. Nine (9) male respondents out of a total number of twenty-nine sexually active male (29) have been raped before.

Age

24% **76%**

■ < 15
■ 16-18

Figure 10. Male Respondents Who Are Sexually Active

Interpretation: the chart above shows that of the boys who are sexually active, five (5) had their first sex below 15 years of age and sixteen (16) between sixteen to eighteen (16-18) years.

Pornography

72% **28%**

■ Boys who watch porn

■ boys who do not watch porn
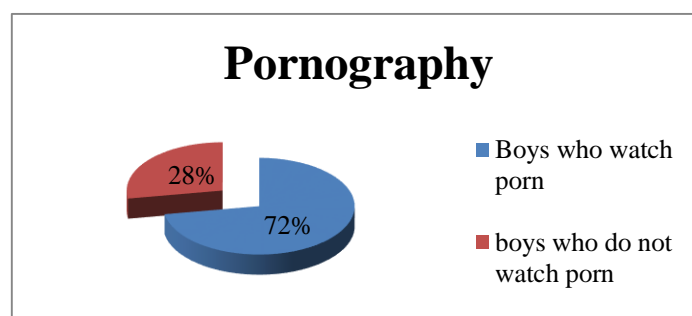
Figure 11. Male Respondents Who Watch Pornography

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Interpretation: as represented with the chart above, thirty four (34) out of a total of forty-seven (47) boys watch pornographic materials.
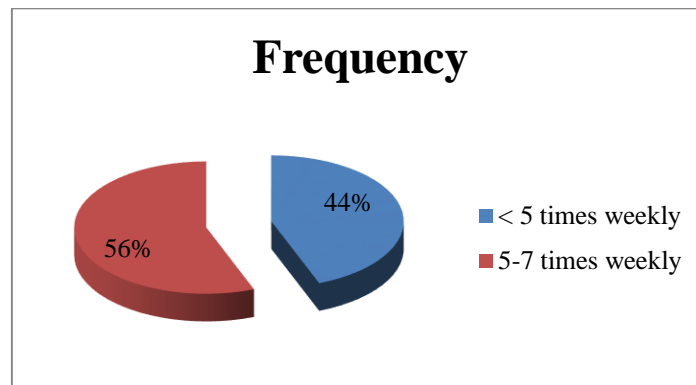
Figure 12. Frequency

Interpretation: of the total of thirty-four (34) boys who watch pornographic materials, fifteen boys watch them between one to four (1-4) times every week; the remainder (19) watch them between five to seven (5-7) times every week.
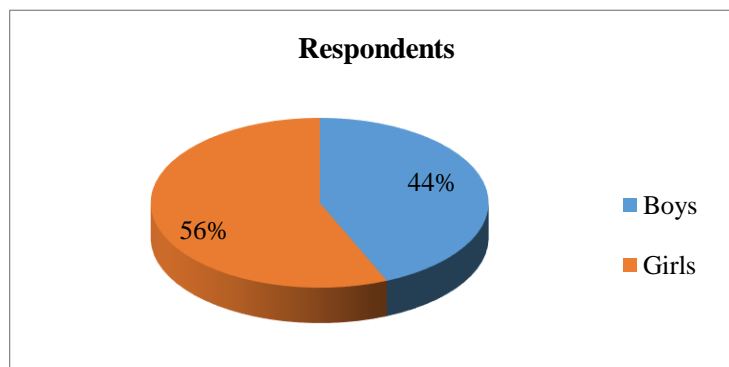
Figure 13. Collective Data

Interpretation: A total number of one hundred and eight (108) teenagers were used in this research. There were forty-seven (47) males and sixty-one (61) females, represented in the chart above.

Sexual pravalence

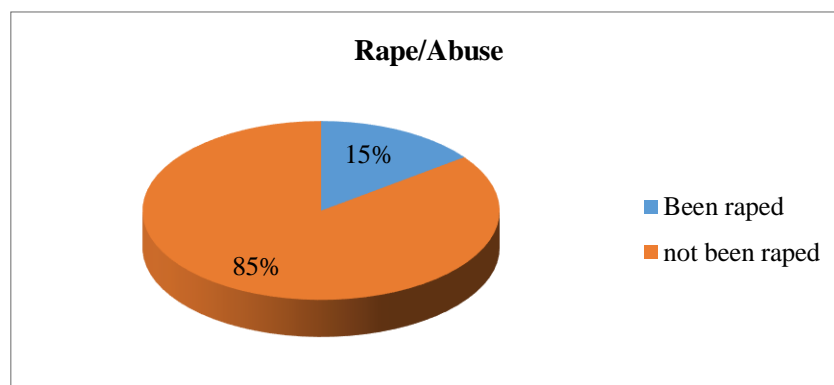- sexually active
- Not sexually active

38%
62%
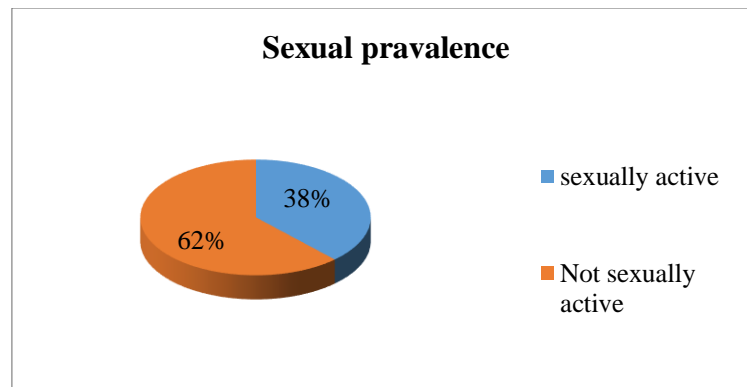
Figure 14. Male and Female Respondents Who Are Sexually Active

Interpretation: the above chart represents the total percentage of respondents (male and female) who are sexually active. Out of a total of one hundred and eight (108) respondents, forty-one (41) are sexually active.

Rape/Abuse

- Been raped
- not been raped

15%
85%

Figure 15. Rape/Abuse

Interpretation: the above chart represents the total number of respondents who have been raped/abused. Out of the total number of respondents, sixteen (16) have been victims of rape.

Age distribution of sexually active respondents

- < 13
- > 13 - 16
- > 16 - 18

7%
25%
68%
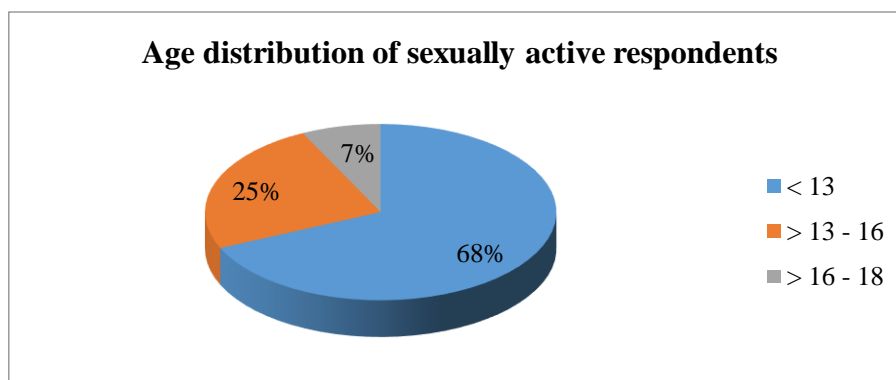
Figure 16. Male and Female: Onset of Sexual Experience

Interpretation: the chart above represents the age distribution of all sexually active respondents. Twenty-eight (28) respondents had their first sex before they turned thirteen (13), ten (10) between fourteen and fifteen (14&15) and three (3) between sixteen and eighteen (16-18)

Pornography

28% 72%

■ Respondents who watch porn

■ respondents who do not watch porn

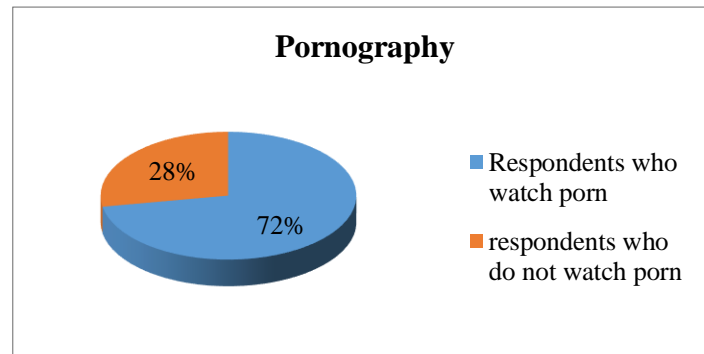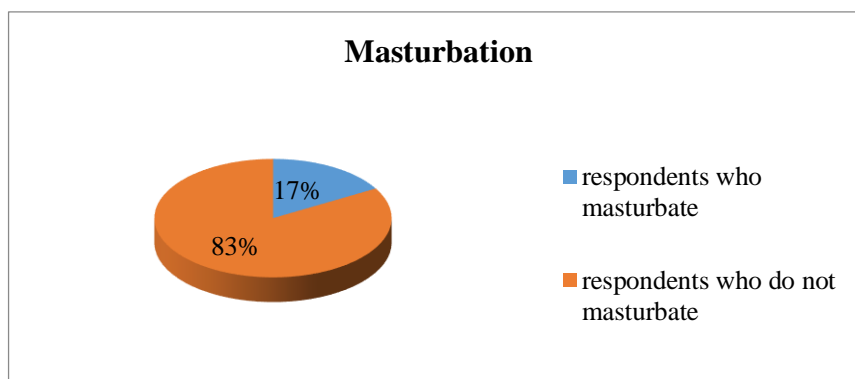**Figure 17. Male and Female Respondents Who Watch Pornography**

Interpretation: the chart above represents the percentage of respondents who watch pornographic materials. Seventy-eight (78) out of the one hundred and eight (108) respondents watch pornographic materials.

Masturbation

17% 83%

■ respondents who masturbate

■ respondents who do not masturbate

Figure 18. Male and Female Respondents Who Practice Masturbation

Interpretation: as represented by the chart above, eighteen (18) respondents out of the one hundred and eight (108) masturbate.

3.1 Analysis of the Result

This study was conducted on a total of one hundred and eight (108) teenagers ranging between thirteen (13) and eighteen (18) years old. There were a total of sixty-one (61) female and forty-seven (47) male respondents. Forty-one out of them are sexually active, most of which are below 15 years old. Fifteen (15) out of the forty-one (41) teenagers have been raped before, some of which had their first sexual experience as rape. Seventy-eight (78) of them watch pornography on a regular basis and eighteen (18) masturbate.

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This brings us back to the question of how the sexual practices of Primary schoolchildren were formed and how they impact upon their educational opportunities and life chances. Children, barely fifteen years old are seen here to be engaged in one form of sexual practice or the other. Even some of those who are not sexually active are not oblivious of sexual activities as they either masturbate or watch pornographic materials or both. One of the respondents (male) who is less than fifteen years old has had three sexual partners. Over seventy (70) out of the one hundred and eight respondents are sexually active and or watch pornographic materials.

It is noteworthy to point out that through this research and extensive conversations with teenagers, we have been able to find out that girls get involved in sexual activities earlier in years than boys. Through conversations with some of the girls, we have determined that this comes as a result of being enticed with material things, forced against their will or done in solidarity with friends; and sometimes, on account of more than one of the above reasons.

In a conversation with a boy of about eight years old, he said that he had had sex with more number of girls than he could count. This shows how much Children are no longer children, i.e., innocent as known a generation ago. Now, almost every child you meet on the streets has knowledge of what sexual intercourse is and what it entails.

Sometimes, however, their sexual practices are not a result of their own choice. All of the respondents who have been raped before are now sexually active and so we can deduce that to a large extent it boils down to the fact that one cannot keep what has already been lost; a feeling that they have no dignity left to protect or preserve, relating to personhood and identity.

It is evident that the prevalence of sexual practices among teenagers is neither a myth nor far-fetched. Very young children now practise sexual activities freely and at will and to them, it is normal.

4. Discussion: Other Contributory Factors to the Prevalence of Early Sexual Practices among Teenagers in the Contemporary Society.

From the conversations with teenagers in our study and taking into account the literature review to this study and the outcomes of the questionnaire, the following can be articulated about the phenomenon of sexual morality and choice among young people in Primary school. The main contributory factors that can be articulated about why very young people (teenagers) engage in sexual activities include curiosity, social fitness or belongingness, poor parenting, indecent media content, financial constraints, alchohol and drugs, peer pressure, social media activities, sexual abuse and rape, unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and ignorance. We focus on them as follows:

1)   A Sense of belonging

The desire to have friends and belong to a social group means that children want to be seen as 'normal'. In our society today, as the usual normal things are becoming abnormal and abnormal things are becoming normal, sex at very early ages is one of these "normal" and those who are not involved in it are seen and tagged as 'Small girls/boys'. These ones hardly are able to make any 'cool' friends as they

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are seen as unfit to belong to certain groups. They sometimes have to pretend to be sexually active even if they are not, so as to not be tagged "Virgin Marys", etc. Also, these teenagers, when they meet to talk, happen to talk very freely about whom they have had sex with and how it was and felt (especially the male teens). Consequently, the ones without any sexual experience to share have no contribution whatsoever to make and soon begin to feel left out and unfit. Such a young person will want to have contributions to make the next time there is a discussion in that line of topic; after all, if all or most of their friends are doing it, it cannot be that bad.

2)   Peer Pressure/Influences

Peer pressure and influences is a great contributory factor to sexual practices among young people. Many of the things we find young people doing are basically done because they find their friends doing it. As I have mentioned earlier, they want to have something to contribute when their friends talk about boyfriends/girlfriends, sex, etc. More so, their friends are doing it, why can they not? In several discussions with teenagers, their reply to questions of why they did or not do certain things is usually that this friend or that friend does it. Their peers are also often able to talk them into doing things than anybody else would, basically because those peers do not shy away from saying things they do. For an example, a girl/boy can admit to their peers that they have a boyfriend/girlfriend and that they are sexually active. They can show their peers what contraceptive they use and recommend the same. In all, taboo topics which can hardly be discussed at home with parents or siblings can be discussed among peers and they get ideas from and share among themselves. Even for a teen that isn't or has no desire to be sexually active, the continual participation in such discussion makes it appealing.

In one of the communities on which this research is based, we carried out a conversation with a young girl who was commonly identified as very sexually promiscuous of about 13 or 14 years of age and in the Junior High School. She belongs to a group of 4 or five members all of the same age. This girl intimated that she had had many ex-sexual partners and about 7 other boys she was actively sleeping with at the time of our conversation. It was a practice that the group was known for. They eventually all got pregnant a few months to their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE).

3)   Poor Parenting

This issue of poor parenting stems from several roots. In one of the communities in which this study is based, we have seen situations where children slept out for a number of days and came back home to the welcoming arms of parents/guardians without as much as a caution about abnormal behaviour. Parents are afraid to caution their children as they doubt what the new standards are, hence what is normal and what is no longer normal. Hence, in order to avoid having teenage pregnancies on hand, there have been situations where mothers take their teenage daughters (as soon as they begin to menstruate) for implants or for other family planning methods in order to prevent them from getting pregnant, thereby giving them the *green card* to the world of sexual exploration.

4)   Financial Constraints

In a conversation with a teenage girl of 14 in one of the study communities, she said that she does not stay with her parents. She stays with her aunt for whom she sold things every evening after school. The aunt does not give her money to take along with her to school so she has to sell coconuts along with her aunt's wares. She needs at least Ghc3 to get to school every morning; Ghc2 for transportation to and fro school and Ghc1 for studies fee. When she is lucky enough to make a profit of more than Ghc3, she is able to buy herself snacks and if not, she does not eat until the end of school hours. She continued that there was a man who was asking her out. According to her description of the man, he should be in his forties. He told her that he would take care of her financial needs if only she agreed to let him sleep with her. Now, if this girl's financial situation continued to fluctuate, she will surely be tempted to accept this man's proposal.

In another discussion with a male teen within the same community as the girl above, he said that he needed some money for a particular need and decided to ask his friend, a girl. She told him that unless he had sex with her, she would not give him the money. Because he needed the money urgently, he had to have sex with her.

These above are just the few cases and conversations but there are many others who are caught up in similar critical decision-making situations to make critical choices. But sometimes, it is poor parents who commit some children at very early ages into the arms of desirous adult males for material benefits. These children have to become the sacrificial lambs in order to put food on their parents' table. Apart from this, because some children come from such homes where their parents cannot afford to provide their basic needs, they are compelled to sleep with the boys who would take care of them financially. The end result of these is usually the girl getting pregnant and moving into the boy's house as an underaged "bride".

5)   Sexual abuse and rape

In years of counselling young people, many of them tell stories of how they have been abused/raped at very young age and how it affected them henceforth. A female student (11 years) told in a conversation about how she was constantly abused by her cousin since she was 4 years until she turned 7 years and was moved out of that house. With her cousin, it wasn't a forceful rape experience; he would touch her pleasantly and get her ready for whatever he would do to and with her. Consequently, she and her friends formed a sex group where they had sex in groups. They would come together in a room and do whatever they pleased among themselves. When she turned 9 years, her mother's friend (a woman), also abused her. That was how she was introduced into lesbianism.

In another case, a boy who was interviewed related how when he was very young he was sexually abused by many of the ladies in his neighbourhood. He said that in those days, adult neighbours usually called him in the guise of making him run errands for them but they would lock him in a room and tickle his penis. When he was 9 years old, he had become very sexually active. He had sex with the aunties in his neighbourhood and also with his peers. The consequence of this is that now that he is grown, he has to keep numerous sexual partners in order to satisfy his sexual needs as one woman does not satisfy him.

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All of our respondents who have been raped are sexually active. Mostly, the ones who get raped mention how they begin to feel that they have no more dignity left to protect and so then begin to give themselves to whoever desires them. Other ones, having been introduced to sex cannot stop themselves from further engaging in it and they grow up having an insatiable desire for sex.

6) Alcohol

During social and or traditional festivals, many things happen which can result in sexual activities among young people. First of this is the availability of alcoholic drinks. Because alcoholic drinks are usually available in abundance during such festivals and are being profusely advertised, young people tend to drink and get drunk and consequently lose control of themselves in the process, making them vulnerable to certain acts in which they would not partake in a sober state.

7) Indecent Media Content

Contemporary Media contents tend to be full of explicit and lurid sexual stuff, promoted also by celebrities such as talk-show hosts, actors and actresses, musicians and other artistes. Hardly can you watch any music video now and not find naked or almost naked ladies in various suggestive positions, dancing and displaying all sorts of sexual moves. One of our interviewees among those who admitted to masturbation said that when he watches those kinds of music videos, he begins to have sexual feelings and then begins to masturbate.

8) Social media activities

The impact of social media in our lives in this age and time cannot be overemphasized. Social media has unified the world and its people. With it, we can connect with even people we do not know from all over the world. However, beside the positive, social media has had some negative impacts on the young people. They are able to connect with every kind of people from every sort of culture which has had both negative and positive effects on them, in this case, negative. Sometimes, they create social media accounts with fake names and ages and join age-inappropriate dating or pornographic sites. Sometimes, they get deceived by men or women who come on social media with that sole intent. Unfortunately, they are often successful in getting their preys. Reports of very many cases of sexual abuse/rape resulting from the visit to unknown/unfamiliar persons abound. Apart from the above, children are now able to create social media groups where they can exchange as much indecent contents (such as nude pictures of themselves and or others or pornographic materials) as desired. There are even hook up groups/apps now in the likes of HUD, Grindr, Feeld, 3somer, Tinder, amongst many others. Here people can match themselves with mates and hook up for sex.

9) Ignorance

Even with all of the advancements and development in various spheres of life, there is still a high dose of ignorance among our teenagers as regards to what love is and what love is not, also as regards to making right choices. According to the questionnaires we distributed, some of the respondents think that love and sex are the same thing. For this reason, a boy is able to blackmail a girl saying that he loves her and if she loves him too, then she must let him sleep with her. This ignorance regards what they should

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or should not do, what is good for them and what is not; they seem to rely solely on their bodies to tell them their response to sexual approaches from the opposite sex and in whether or not they are able to curb their own sexual appetite because it is all that they have without any moral and ethical guides which are not based on empiricism.

4.1 Conclusion: The Effects of Early Sexual Practices among Teenagers

It does not matter what the reason was which may have made a teenager go into sexual practices at those very early ages, what one must bear in mind is that this act just like most of our life's decisions come with their own effects. The effects which come from the acts of early sexual practices can be very devastating and mostly inescapable. We will discuss some of these below.

a. Unplanned pregnancy:

One of the foremost effects of sex is pregnancies. In this case, such pregnancies are unplanned because the teenagers do not engage in sexual activities for procreation but for fun and exploration so due to the fact that children now engage in sexual activities very early in age and have a little or no knowledge about sex and what it entails, it is inevitable to have themselves exposed to getting pregnant; and because these pregnancies are unplanned, it becomes a burden to them. 3o% of all births registered in the Ghana in 2014, were by adolescents... (Yussif et al., 2017)

b. Unsafe Abortions

When pregnancies occur in teenagers, the first resort is usually abortion. This most usually stems from the fact that they are very young and not ready to be mothers and fathers, neither are they ready to face their parents with such news or even face societal stigmatization, hence, the decision to get an abortion. Unsafe abortion is the second largest cause of maternal mortality. Interestingly, pregnant women aged 19-20 years were less likely to have an abortion as compared to younger women within the ages of 13-19 years. One possible explanation for this finding is that adolescents are under strict parental (or guardian) control. They fear the rejection of parents which will lead to unsafe abortion (Adjei *et al.*, 2015). Another explanation demonstrated by the Ghana Maternity Health Survey could be lack of money and herewith, the fear to be unable to cater for the newborn baby (Ghana Statistic Service, 2011)

Apart from the risks of death from unsafe abortions is the introduction of ill health in the unsuspecting teenagers. There are very few lucky ones who after going through the processes of these unsafe abortions remain in good health after. The majority however are not that lucky. In some cases, they end up with such health issues as damaged uterus, Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), barrenness, damage to the liver and other vital organs, etc.

c. Societal/ family stigmatisation

In many communities, adolescent pregnancies, especially the unmarried teen pregnancies are unwanted and unplanned (Afrose, 2015). Although society does not talk much about sex, it also does not condone such acts and so when a girl child, especially a young one, gets pregnant without being married, that girl is often stigmatised, called names and shamed both by parents and society. She is seen and used as a bad example to other girls and so association with them is frowned upon. And even when she becomes a

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mother, things don't get any easier. Teen mothers are stigmatized by stereotypes that they are unmotivated, irresponsible and incompetent parents (SmithBattle, 2013).

Society, as mentioned earlier, frowns upon teenage pregnancies, and so does the church. So in order to avoid the shame and disgrace which come to the family as a result of their daughters getting pregnant (especially when such parents hold key positions in the church or the community), some parents marry off their girls who get pregnant. Mostly, these marriages are usually not founded on love but on necessity and compulsion and therefore mostly do not last; they mostly end on a very sad note. Several negative effects can stem from this kind of marriage including domestic violence.

Marriages of the sort are usually full of frustrations. Dreams get indefinitely deferred and the boys especially blame the girls for their fates. Because what they felt which led to sex and then to pregnancy was most probably not love (because at that age, they can hardly differentiate between love and infatuation), it soon fades away and is replaced with regrets and then this regret breeds frustration, and frustration leads to bitterness. Soon, each begin to find ways to vent their bitterness and most often than not, the boys begin to hit the women. Most of these teen mothers suffer domestic violence and on their part, begin to vent their frustration on their babies. They see the babies as the cause of their predicament, forgetting the fact that they were the ones who engaged in such acts which got them pregnant.

The teenage mother actually got pregnant because she could not make good choices or did not know any better. How then is it possible for such a person to raise a child? Children who still need to be taken care of become mothers and begin to take care of children, a job they are mostly not successful at and as pointed out above, they usually get bitter and vent their bitterness on their children.

Besides, after getting pregnant, the girls have their education delayed as they have to stay around to nurse their babies. Whether they were married off or left in their parents' homes to have their babies, their education has to be delayed in one way or the other. Those few who are lucky, get to go back to school to continue their schooling but not before staying in the house for some time, either to nurse their babies or wait for the appropriate time of the academic year when admissions are allowed. By the time they go back to school (if they ever do), their classmates are already ahead of them. And these, as stated above are the lucky ones. The unlucky ones end up getting abandoned or married off by their parents/guardians and never complete their education.

d. Liabilities

Most of the pregnant teens, whether they are married off or not, become liabilities as their babies become an extra cost on the family. For those who are married off, the boy and his family have to cater for the girl and her child. Sometimes, the boy has to drop out of school and get a job in order to get enough money to take care of the burden which has been incurred. And for those who are not married off, it is more or less like the case of those who are married off. Every family member who cares will then have to work a little extra-hard to squeeze up together to take care of the newly added member of their family.

e. The Social Cost: Street children/streetism

The children who are born in such circumstances mostly lack most basic needs, especially, education. Mostly, the parents don't even get the time to really correct and discipline them as they would have, had they been born in a more comfortable situation. These children end up becoming street children constituting a nuisance in the society. When other children are in school, they hang around the neighbourhood disturbing the peace and quiet of the neighbourhood. They become thieves and vagabonds involved in one crime or the other.

f. Abuse of Contraceptive and emergency pills

In a bid to not get pregnant, many young girls abuse contraceptives, especially the emergency pills. Many of them take the emergency pills as many times as they have sex, but the emergency pills are not to be regularly used; they are only to be taken in cases of emergencies.

g. Contraction of sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Conversations which we have had with teenagers proved that many teenagers are living with various STDs which they have contracted through unprotected sex. The children at this age are mostly concerned about pregnancy as the only effect of sex so they try to protect themselves against that, neglecting the contraction of STDs which can have very devastating effects. Mostly, the ones who take or undergo one sort of contraception or the other (condoms excluded), no longer care enough to protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases. This is another very sad consequence of early sexual practices among teenagers because some of these STDs can ruin their lives in the long run.

So, from the data collected above we can see that sexual activities/experience is not bread and butter. There are very many inescapable effects of this.

4.2 Recommendations: Building a Self-image and Identity through Choice-making in the Face of Empiricism, Economism's Exchange and Relativism

The usual response to such findings as we have made is to propose relativist and reductionist solutions evoking tolerance, openness, abandoning of traditionalism and moralistic approaches and religious judgements, adjustments to the real and modern or postmodernist world, including teaching children about sex from an early age with the certainty that when they know everything about sex from a young age, they will either no longer be attracted to it or will know how to handle it better without its negative effects. To this effect, the adherents of such relativist and reductionist positions propose absolutist certainties about sex education and sensitisation such as breaking the culture of silence in the home, parental tolerance, regulation of media content, integration of sex talks in the school curriculum, and the integration of sex talks during religious gatherings, and others of the kind. This pushes all the responsibility and onus onto the community without enabling the teenagers to participate in creating selfhood and individual responsibility.

We take a different trajectory with the view that relativism and reductionism cannot solve the problem of moral and ethical judgements, valorisation and choice, character formation, identity formation, and the development of selfhood that enables individual knowledge, self-confidence and the ability and

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capacitation at making relevant decisions and choices that enrich individuality and at the same time build the community-consciousness that enables the right balance for being and becoming.

From the research experience so far, we recognise that young people do what suits them according to how they interpret what will be of benefit to them immediately. In other words, morality is still subjective and situational in a solipsistic fashion.

Under such circumstances and scenario as obtains with early sexual practices glimpsed from the two peri-urban communities studied, we have come to the realisation and conclusion that much of what is happening among young people can be summarised under three main categories regarding their choices, attitudes and behaviour. Whatever is done, is done for exchange (money), to belong (peers), and for experimentation (desire and pleasure) no matter in what form or by what means their actions manifest. Firstly, schoolchildren shape their attitudes according to modes of economic exchange in the manner a teenager pays back a girl through the measure of exchange she required:

In one of our discussions with a male teen, he said that he needed some money for a particular need and decided to ask his friend, a girl. She told him that unless he had sex with her, she would not give him the money. Because he needed the money urgently, he had to have sex with her.

In a similar manner, inadequate financial support from parents and relatives towards meeting their needs and wants in school compels them to enter into amorous relationships, which eventually result in the initiation of sexual intercourse.

Secondly, the desire to belong compels teenagers to practice things that they perceive are practised by the group and that would make them accepted by their group members as 'cool'. They abhor exclusion and prefer inclusion. For this reason, they would not want to be called names such as 'small boys' or 'small girls' or 'Virgin Marys', which are terms of derogation and exclusion due to abstinence from early sexual practice. Thus, many of the things we find young people doing are basically done because they find their friends doing it. As they want to have something to contribute when their friends talk about boyfriends/girlfriends, sex, etc., a girl/boy can admit to their peers that they have a boyfriend/girlfriend and that they are sexually active. They can show their peers what contraceptive they use and recommend same. Even for a teen that isn't or has no desire to be sexually active, the continual participation in such discussion makes it appealing.

Thirdly, the desire to experiment for the sake of pleasure and casual enjoyment entices young people to engage in sexual practices as early as they can find the setting and means for pursuing it. Recent media reports of teenagers engaged in three-somes and four-somes in classrooms as well as other types of sexual practices and the profound influence of the internet and social media apps and usage among teenagers smack of pure experimentation and pleasure-seeking behaviour. Such examples do not engender only pleasure but reference, in a profound fashion, the social context, attitudes, motivation - including age, personality, capabilities, previous knowledge—and learning opportunities and outcomes.

Consequently, we suggest that the issues go beyond the relativistic and reductionist perspectives to a need for the development of a moral compass and the ability to create stasis and balance for the self and

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for consciousness in the individual or self. While relativist perspectives drain all issues of moral and ethical principles and of content and reduce them to mere banalities, a fuller perspective recognises that the development of a selfhood, identity, and a healthy sense of community through the sense of better and productive moral choices and ethical judgements built from consciousness can generate a more creative route to empowering the individual young person to make choices about themselves and their lives depending upon rational consciousness, valorisation and judgements relating to the morality and ethics that govern their lives and productivity, including the whole process of living, being and becoming.

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