

The Impact of Television on Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors among Teenagers

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Abstract

Sexual content on television has been shown to have significant impacts on sexual attitudes and behaviours of people, especially among teenagers. Consequently, numerous studies have been conducted over the last decade to examine the connection among these areas, among other goals. Also, it is an attempt to analyze the connection between sexual attitudes and behaviours of teens and sexual content on television, as well as the dissatisfaction created, as a result of the high levels of these contents. 80 students were included in this study, conveniently selected from three schools in the city of Klina. The hypothesis is that portrayals of sex on television lead adolescents to sexual relationships. In addition, high levels of sexual content push teens to dissatisfaction with their sexual experiences. From the obtained results, it is concluded that, although TV provides considerable levels of sexual content, it does not encourage teenagers to early sexual intercourse, but if TV shows such content in high levels, then teenagers can be disappointed with their experience and have health as well as social problems.

Keywords

TV, Teenagers, Sexual Attitudes, Behavior, Experience, Self-Satisfaction, Parents, Education

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a stage of life during which the individual receives skills and knowledge of adult responsibilities. Emotional experience and physical changes take high importance towards establishing new relationships with the world and oneself (Kaza, 2006).

G. Stanley Hall called it a period of riots, torments and tensions and in the meantime a period of great sexual, emotional, physical and cognitive opportunities (Rečka, 2006). Teenagers often get contradictory messages about sex from TV, but parents and educators try to be cautious (Brown, 2006). The main period of

sexual development and exploration occurs during adolescence. During this period, teenagers begin to consider which sexual behaviors are satisfying, moral and appropriate for their age groups (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999).

Socio-cognitive theory suggests a direct correlation between television and the attitudes and behaviours of teenagers, which is largely because the content seen on television is then used as a guide to sexual activities (Nixon, 2000).

Attitudes toward television and public attitudes toward sex on television have become more tolerant and less censored during recent years, so here are no underlined critics on multiple sexual contents that TV offers. Surveys also show confusion regarding to this wondering why this is like it appears to be-trying to find the cause on TV, magazines, technological development, or commercial pressure, or because of the Clinton-Lewinsky case (Bragg, 2002).

During the ages 8 - 18, teens spend about eight hours per day online and 3 - 4 hours watching television (Ward & Friedman, 2006). As studies show that the television they watch is enriched with sexual content which highly holds the teenagers' attention (Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, Kunkel, Hunter, & Miu, 2004).

The main focus of this study is: to examine whether or not sex portrayals on TV stimulate teenagers to sexual relations. Television fosters the development of sexual behavior among teenagers during a time when they are unable to fully understand or when their thoughts are abstract or unclear, regarding sexual content (Kunkel, Cope-Farrar, & Biely, 2001).

Chapin (2000) emphasizes that it is an undeniable fact that TV is one of the socializing sources which compared with the school and parents may be primary in this aspect. However, TV content might affect teenagers attitude, beliefs and behaviors (Collins, Elliott, & Rat, 2003). Watching TV with sexual content might create illusions and unrealistic expectations for teenagers that sex was basic in daily life, prompting teenagers to perform such activity but not teaching them how to protect themselves during sexual intercourse or to have safe sex which later was reflected with different consequences (Kunkel, Cope-Farrar, Biely, Farionola, & Donnerstein, 1999). Likewise, television gives a one dimensional view of sexual intercourse which is always spontaneous, romantic and risk free (Rice & Dolgin, 2005).

Sex on TV usually appears through acts of kissing, hugging, sex, love, and aggression that are related to the use of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol, as a precursor (Huston, Wartella, & Donnerstine, 1998). Then, the actors performing sexual intercourse usually are not married to each other or one of them is married or in a relationship. This impacts the attitudes of teens by setting an example of what is normal (Arnett, 2002).

The Social Learning Theory predicts that teenagers who watch sex scenes without experiencing negative consequences are more likely to approve the portrayed behavior (Harris, 1994). Modeling is an important process in the development of sexual roles; a lesson of social theories learning and presented models on television are extremely stereotyped (Haxhiymeri & Gjermeni, 1997).

Parents are the ones who may be able to reduce the effects of sexual contents, while watching TV with their teenage children and discussing about the attitudes and beliefs regarding sex (Dacey & Kenny, 1997).

A secondary issue in this research is the question of whether or not high levels of sexual content lead teens to dissatisfaction with their personal, sexual experiences.

Researchers claim that sexually active teens wish they had waited longer to have sexual intercourse, and many of them have faced different consequences such as becoming a parent at a young age or undergoing sexual infections where their future got endangered and difficult. This clarifies that they were having sexual affairs without being prepared for the consequences. Supporting evidence includes data reported by public health officials, involving unplanned pregnancy and STD's among teens (Bragg, 2002).

Sustainability and sexual intensity, which appear in television content, are disappointing teens with their own personal experience, creating illusions that they should have sustainability and intensity too, which at the same time, for them, is an unrealistic expectation (KFF, 2000).

When teens reach "sexual socialization", they change beliefs on sexual content of television due to formal reasoning refine and, in the mean, time are able to interpret the reality of their experience, regarding TV and vice versa (Rice, 2005).

There is a general belief that television distorts the reality of sexual intercourse by introducing sex as an inspiring, casual activity without dealing with the consequences and at the same time provocative or stimulatory for the audience (Ward, 2006).

Study object of the thesis: The objects of this study are changes that occur in attitudes and behaviors, as a result of television influence on teenagers (5 - 17 years old) in the city of Kline.

The purpose of this study: To analyze the eventual connections between television and sexual attitudes and behaviors among teenagers (15 - 17 years old) in the city of Kline.

Specifically:

1. The amount of impact television has on sexual attitudes and behaviors;
2. Detection of positive or negative attitudes and behaviors on teens;
3. Recognition of the self-satisfaction level with sexual experience among teens.

Hypotheses

There are two hypotheses in this research. One of them is primary and the other one is known as secondary. The main or the primary hypothesis of this study is: sex portrayals on TV push teenagers into sexual intercourse. Whereas the other hypothesis is: the high level of sexual content leads teens to sexual experience dissatisfaction.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The total number of participants in this research is 80.

This number was selected from IX, X and XI grades of three schools located in the city of Kline (one primary and two secondary schools). The selection was conveniently made and the classroom that has had current disposal was assigned after relevant director approval for implementation. And was supported by the relevant caretakers of the respective class, where were included students who were present in the classroom. Participants are from both genders, where 47 of them are female and 33 of them are male, ages 15, 16 and 17 years old. Participants were informed at the beginning about the issue that was being examined and that their notes will remain anonymous. This is done due to ethical matters in order to preserve the participants' privacy.

2.2. The Appliance/Tools

The instrument used in this research is a questionnaire.

The questionnaire is a procedure of receiving and elaboration the data of a psychological tracking issue, which extends to a social community member or to a particular social group. The questionnaire contains 15 questions, which are made to ask subjects about personal data and point of views about the attitude and types of behavior regarding the socio-psychological issue which was being examined (Nushi, 1999).

The questionnaire that has been used in this research contains 15 questions, which provide information about the impact of the television on sexual attitude and behavior. I have personally taken care for the compilation of the questionnaire.

The answers given by the subjects are ranked from 1 to 4 points. The answers look like this:

1. Strongly agree;
2. Agree;
3. Neutral;
4. Don't Agree.

2.3. Experimental Design

Analyses derived in this research are: Coefficient alpha, percentages and hi square, in base of which we will see if our assumptions or hypothesis are supported.

Data processing was done by SPSS programme.

2.4. Procedure

After the participants were selected, the purpose of the research was explained to them, which is namely the impact of television on changing of attitudes and sexual behaviour.

Subjects, at the beginning, were informed that the questionnaire would be anonymous and it was required

sincerity of their answers. They approximately had 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was clear and therefore, subjects did not have any questions, regarding the submitted questions.

3. Results

In this research, there were 80 participants of which 33 of them were male and 47 female. Their ages ranged about 15 - 17 years old (Tables 1-7).

Table 1. Sex.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	33	41.3	41.3	41.3
	Female	47	58.8	58.8	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Age.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15	21	26.3	26.3	26.3
	16	31	38.8	38.8	65.0
	17	28	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Confidentiality analysis-alpha coefficient.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.561	.557	15

Table 4. T-TEST-group statistics.

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	S.E. Mean
Attitude Male	33	27.00	5.72	1.00
Female	47	26.28	4.89	.71

	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-Tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Lower Difference
Attitude Equal Variances Assumed	.45	.51	.61	78.00	.55	.72	1.23	-1.72
Equal Variances Not Assumed			.59	61.93	.56	.72	1.23	-1.73

Table 5. CHISQ summary.

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Sex * p31	80	100.0%	0	0.0%	80	100.0%

Table 6. Sex on CHisq.

p31			
Sex		1.00	Total
	.00	16.00	33.00
Male	17.00	48.48%	100.00%
	51.52%	1.00	Total
Sex	p31		
	.00	1.00	Total
	30.91%	64.00%	41.25%
	21.25%	20.00%	41.25%
Female	38.00	9.00	47.00
	80.85%	19.15%	100.00%
	69.09%	36.00%	58.75%
	47.50%	11.25%	58.75%
Total	55.00	25.00	80.00
	68.75%	31.25%	100.00%
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	68.75%	31.25%	100.00%

Table 7. Chi-square tests.

Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-Tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.77	1	.01
Likelihood Ratio	7.75	1	.01
Continuity Correction	6.46	1	.01
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.67	1	.01
N of Valid Cases	80		

Specifically, those of age 15 were 21 subjects, of which 9 were female and 12 male. There were 31 subjects who were 16 years old, consisting of 19 females and 12 males. There were 28 subjects who were 17 years old, including 19 females and 9 males.

Alfa results is .561 and based on established criteria by Professor Lee Joseph Conbrach, alpha with result of .561 is considered not reliable because this criterion, according to him, is a poor alpha and with an unacceptable reliability (Conbrach, 1951).

Male attitudes were reported $X = 27.00$ and DS 5.72, while female reported $X = 26.28$ and 4.89 DS and T-test

(78) .61 and $P = 5.6$, therefore have no significant differences regarding attitudes and gender and, as a result, this hypothesis shows that sexual portrayals on TV that foster teens towards sexual intercourse has no support

Regarding attitude males reported $X = 48.00\%$, whereas females $X = 19.05\%$ and CHIS (X^2) = 7.77 and $p = .01$ so here we have significant differences regarding the views and, as a result, we can say that the secondary hypotheses that high level of sexual content that pushes teens to dissatisfaction with their sexual experiences, finds support.

In the question: do you think modern television programs present acceptable levels of sexual contents? 2.5% of participants stated (totally agree), 50.0% (agree), 12.5% (neutral) and 5.0% (don't agree).

In the question can teens have access to sexual content on the internet more easily, compared to television? 53.8% of participants said (totally agree), 26.3% (agree), 7.5% (neutral), and 12.5% (don't agree).

In the question: do you watch television shows with sexual content, 16.3% of respondents declared (totally agree), 15.0% (agree) and 22% (Neutral), and 46.3% (don't agree).

In the question: are males more affected by television sexual content compared than females? 27.5% of participants replied (totally agree), 40.0% (agree), 25.0% (neutral) and 7.5% (don't agree).

In the question: do you think that teens are influenced by television sexual content? 23.8% of participants answered (totally agree), 38.8% (agree), 27.5% (neutral) while 10.0% stated (don't agree).

In the question: is television sexual content the cause of an increasing number of pregnancy in teenagers and other related diseases, 35.5% of participants stated (totally agree), as 35.0% (agree), while only 10% stated (neutral), 20.0% (don't agree).

In the question: do sexual content on television affect your sexual behaviour? 20.0% of participants replied (totally agree), 10.0% (agree), 15.0% (neutral), while 55.0% stated (don't agree).

In the question: should parents be more vigilant about what their children watch on television? 70.0% of participants answered (totally agree), 23.8% (agree), 3.8% were (neutral) and only 2.5% (don't agree).

In a question: do teens face social problems due to television influence on them? 27.5% of participants replied (totally agree), 41.3% (agree), 18.8% (neutral) and 12.5% (don't agree).

In the question: do you think teens seek sexual content on television? 25.0% stated (totally agree), 33.8% (agree), 25.0% (neutral) and 16.3% (don't agree).

In the question: should there be a specific time after which the TV program is allowed to talk about sex? 46.3% of participants answered (totally agree) 22.5% (agree), 15.0% were (neutral) and 16.3% (don't agree).

In the question: do you think that teens will have a positive attitude towards sexual behaviour if their parents were more open with children about sexual education? 40.0% of participants answered (totally agree), 33.8% (agree), 12.5% (neutral) and 13.8% (don't agree).

In the question: is sexual content on television educating teens about safer sex methods, such as condom use? 28.8% of participants answered (totally agree), 41.3% (agree), 12.5% (neutral) and 17.5% (don't agree).

In the question: do you think that sexual abuse has increased among teens because of sexual content shown on television? 26.3% of participants replied (totally agree), 41.3% (agree), 21.3% (neutral), 11.3% (don't agree).

In the question: do you think sexual content on television affects sexual behaviour among teens? 30.0% of participants stated (totally agree), 36.3% (agree), 25.0% (neutral) and 8.8% (don't agree).

4. Discussion

From this research, it is observed that, although television offers an acceptable level of sexual content, and teens think that these contents affect their teen lives, still there are no significant differences regarding their attitude and gender, so the abovementioned hypothesis that television with its sexual portrayals pushes teens towards sexual intercourse hasn't found adequate support. Television is not the only source where these contents are easily transmitted, so there are other indicators that can be easily accessed.

Other data in this study show that high levels of sexual content on television cause later consequences, regarding the experience, as well as health and social terms. Thus, as for the behaviour, we find significant differences, regarding gender and visibility of these contents where males lead with forty-six percent of watching the sexual shows, while females are about nineteen percent, but when they were asked whether the other teens watch such contents, both declare a positively high percentage. Also, the fact that television offers educational examples about sexual intercourse finds support.

Parents may be able to reduce the effects of sexual content by being more vigilant about what their children

watch on TV, by discussing their attitudes and their beliefs about sex (Treise & Gotthoffer, 2002).

Results from this study have similarity to several other international researches, such as the research by Jane Brown, professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of North Carolina in the US. In 2006, Brown investigated the case about the impact of TV on students' attitude and assumptions about sexual intercourse, concluding that television offered sexual content but it didn't push teens to experience emergent sexual growth. Arguing that this occurs naturally or is something that is biologically meant to happen, TV can improve or educate but not push teens. The non significant differences regarding the gender argue with the fact that sex is part of life, a physiological need, something very desired by both genders, and something natural in the century we're living (Brown, 2006).

TV formal analysis about sexual content shows that most sexual intercourse occurs between two characters who are not married to each other, and safe sex, contraception or STDs are barely mentioned (Arnett, 2002).

Another research that was done in the US in 2001-02 where teens were surveyed by telephone was concluded that most of the teenagers with sexual experience had declared that they have had health or even social problems and felt disappointed about the sustainability and intensity, noting that their expectations had been greater. So there are similarities in this aspect with our research but differs in regard to the incitement of sex, where teens involved in this research state positively about this (Ward, 2006).

Even the research done in 2004 by Rebacca Collins—science professor at the University of California at Los Angeles, US regarding this issue came to the conclusion that teens saw television more as a sexual education factor than stimulant, whereas the characters who performed sexual intercourse in the movies also performed in various video tapes. In many cases, teenagers not only develop negative thoughts, and identify or name them with different names known for bad behaviour, but also show that teens get disappointed with them or their partner's sex expectations and this may lead them to personal and health problems hinting that lately the sexual life or sexual adaption is contributing for a safe affair (Nixon, 2000).

Sexual messages are unchangeable where sexual behaviour is usually performed by two adults who are not married to each other (Walsh-Childers, Gotthoffer, & Lepre, 2002). Possible consequences of sexual intercourse are rarely addressed (Sapolsky & Taberlet, 1991).

The television as a meditative institution is one of much social critical power that plays an important role in forming the patterns of sexual behavior (Tberlet, 1991).

5. Limitations and Recommendations

Of course, this study might have its limits, which in one way or another may somehow diminish its value. Results are obtained only from the questionnaire because of the inability to make a research that might create a situation which would "provoke" subjects in order to see their behaviour. As a definition, we can mention the fact that the sample was selected only from schools located in the city of Klina and not from the villages around. Consequently, results may not be valid for teens living in villages around the city because of the impact that social context has on its own teenagers. Also the questionnaire is not reliable according to Cronabch alpha and is one of the limitations of this study.

Recommendations

More studies should be made by expert on this issue, mainly studies which would have institutional support and which will be published with their recommendations.

A greater participation of psychologists in schools would help improve the current situation and the possibility of avoiding the consequences of sexual content on television.

Television should display camouflaged sex.

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