Adolescent Male Attitudes Towards Viewing Stereotypical Television and Explicit Internet Websites: Understanding the Connection

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ABSTRACT

From an educational standpoint, Adolescent males viewing habits of stereotypical television and sexually explicit internet material can be better understood if direct research focuses on these two mediums. Understanding how the media can shape adolescent’s attitudes is important from a social perspective. With media becoming more important in an individual’s day lives, understanding its direct effects is paramount. In the proposed experiment, teenage males will participate in a survey on their viewing habits of stereotypical television and exposure to sexually explicit internet material. After the completion of the survey, the participants will elaborate on their answers in the survey during an open forum. Getting to a better understanding of how television and sexually explicit internet websites directly affect adolescent male’s attitudes toward sex and sexual relationships will help determine strategies to help male adolescent better understand how media can influence their views and beliefs.
INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are surrounded by media daily; this media comes in various forms from television to the internet. For this study focus was placed only on the two mediums of television and the internet and how they ultimately affect adolescent’s attitudes toward sexual and sexual relationships. With technology increasing at a faster pace than ever before young people are getting personal devices in their hands at younger ages. The age when teenagers first view a sexually explicit photo or video is shockingly young. This study seeks to contribute to the research on what kind of impact this kind of media is having on male adolescents.

For the research proposal, the question examined is: What effect do the media sources of television and the internet have on male adolescent’s attitudes concerning sex and sexual relationships. This paper will discuss important variables and other relevant material that exists relating to the proposed research question.

There has been a variety of relevant studies related to this topic. The first relevant study introduced by Ward and Friedman (2006) focused on the direct association between television viewing and adolescents’ attitudes toward sex. The second relevant study proposed by Peter and Valkenburg (2010), considered the processes underlying the effects of adolescents’ use of sexually explicit internet material. All the research found on this topic showed from a cultural standpoint how media plays a significant role in the sexual socialization of adolescents (Ward and Friedman 2006). The research articles compiled for my proposal focus on adolescents in the more general sense; however, each article explains that their studies included both adolescent males and females. For example, Braun-Courville and Rojas (2008) used a sample that consisted of 85% female. However, for this research endeavor, only the male adolescent data will be used and analyzed. Another important variable is the age range of the population. In the research
articles found for the literature review, youth aged 12-18 were the primary participants. Still, some research considers adolescents to be a little older or younger than the age range.

One relevant article found that supports the research question put attention purely on sexually explicit online material and the correlational between adolescent’s recreational attitudes toward sex (Peter and Valkenburg 2006). The focus on not just any internet material but sexual explicit online material gave this article a more narrowed down approach to research.

The second most relevant research article dealt with only the television-viewing habits of adolescents. The results of this study were interesting because they found that an increase of “romantic” television program viewing caused adolescents to have more gendered attitudes towards dating and sex (Rivadeneyra and Lebo 2008).

As the research process continues to evolve, there will be a need for more articles that expand on the relationship between primarily male adolescents and their attitudes and behaviors towards sex and sexual relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As technology and media become an integral part of everyday life studying how it effects people will be of high important. Research like this has been happening on teenagers since the 1960s (Braun-Courville and Rojas, 2009). In this review, the focus is placed on the two mediums of television and sexually explicit internet websites because these are two technologies that are heavily used by teenagers. For research purposes, this literature review will look at content that will help support the research question of what effects high viewing of gender stereotyped television and high exposure to sexually explicit websites has on male adolescent’s attitudes toward sex and sexual relationships.

Sexual Scripts in Television
A plethora of sexual scripts exists in the media especially in television targeted at teens. Sexual scripts exist as a model for many teenagers. As Hurst et al. (2008) explains, sexual scripts act as a model of how adolescents believe they are supposed to act; especially, at times when they find themselves in sexual situations. Both men and women hold stereotypical roles according to certain sexual scripts in television. For example, in many television shows men present themselves as the stronger sex; both physically and mentally (Hurst, et al. 2008). On the other hand, as Damme (2010) notes, female characters are more often portray themselves as weak and more concerned with material things than men, such as their physical appearance. Also, a stark difference between males and females are portrayals in teen television programs often relates to their gender. Female characters are objects especially regarding their sexuality (Damme 2010). Television does not just often display stereotypical sexual scripts, this medium also has a larger role in the lives of adolescents.

Television’s Role

Understanding more of what type of television exists for teenagers allows a connection between what role viewing high amounts of this medium can have on the life of a male adolescent. In their research, Rivadeneyra and Lebo (2008) states that adolescents spend a significant amount of time during their day dedicated to media, almost half of that time is devoted to television. With adolescents spending much of their media time watching television they open themselves to exposure to gender stereotypes especially related to sex. This research further shows that adolescents receive much of their dating and understanding of sex from their favorite television shows. At times, this means adolescents are receiving stereotypical information which can cause a problem, especially because many teens are inexperienced in the areas of dating and sex (Rivadeneyra and Lebo 2008). In their study, Brown and
Bobkowski (2011) found direct evidence between adolescents viewing habits of romantic television programs and how they modeled their dating relationships. Television was not the only medium researched. Attention was also placed on the medium of the internet, specifically adolescent’s exposure to sexually explicit websites.

Exposure of Sexual Explicit Websites (SEIM)

Aside from television, another form of media that has a direct effect on adolescents is the internet. Today it is rare to find an adolescent without a cell phone or a personal laptop; allowing for easy access to almost any website on the Internet. With this easy access, many adolescents use the Internet to learn about sex and sexuality by, at times, visiting sexually explicit websites (SEIM’s) (Peter and Valkenburg 2006). Other research found on the same topic, explained how often adolescents use the internet. As Weber et al. (2012) show in their data, the use of pornographic content has become an almost daily occurrence for some adolescents. Much of the research on the topic, has focused on the direct effects sexually explicit websites has on adolescent’s attitudes and behaviors, however, this next study took their research even deeper and found out about not just the effects of use but the process behind those effects. “In this study, we focus on the perceived realism of SEIM as a variable that potentially underlies the effects of SEIM on adolescents” (Peter and Valkenburg 2010, 376). Seen from these sources the viewing of sexually explicit websites can be seen to have some impact on male adolescents attitudes toward sex and sexual relationships.

Male Adolescents Attitudes Toward Sex and Sexual Relationships

Television plays just as much of a role in shaping male adolescent attitudes on sex and sexual relationships as sexually explicit internet material does. As ter Bogt et al. (2010) show, exposure to television such as soap operas, talk shows, and dramas during the adolescent years
lead to a more positive view of casual sex. In a similar research study, Ward and Freeman (2006) note that besides influencing attitudes about casual sex, adolescent attitudes about stereotypical gender roles can also be affected by television.

**EVALUATION**

Most research centered on male adolescent’s exposure to sexually explicit websites and stereotypical television use similar measurements in their studies. For example, Braun-Courville and Rojas (2009) used a cross-sectional survey to understand exposure to sexually explicit websites. The survey consisted of a questionnaire format that obtained general information such as age but also asked questions regarding the use of sexually explicit websites and attitudes toward sex (Courville and Rojas 2009). Researchers found that males were more affected by viewing sexually explicit websites because they viewed them more frequently than females. Also, the more adolescents viewed SEWs there was a higher rate of permissive attitudes toward sex in general (Courville and Rojas 2009, 159). In another study, researchers examined television in a similar context as sexually explicit websites. This study used the “Television Exposure Scale to understand television viewing amounts” (Rivadeneyra and Lebo 2008,295). This study also consisted of a questionnaire asking questions about dating scripts and attitudes. Relating to their first hypothesis, researchers from this study found that high viewing amount of stereotypical television endorsed more traditional gender attitudes. However, these same researchers were inclusive to find data that supported their second hypothesis that predicted that more television viewing would cause the adolescent to hold traditional attitudes towards dating and sex (Rivadeneyra and Lebo 2008, 301). My study will use aspects from the two studies above. First, a questionnaire will be used to address television viewing, sexually explicit website use, and attitudes toward sex and sexual relationships. Overall, my research will aim to understand the
direct effects high viewing of stereotypical television and high exposure to sexually explicit websites has on male adolescent’s attitudes toward sex and sexual relationships.

METHODS

Variables

This study seeks to find a relationship between gender stereotypical television and sexually explicit internet websites (independent variables) and what effect high exposure of these two mediums have on adolescent male’s attitudes toward sex and sexual relationships (dependent variable). Assessment of these variables will be done through a survey and discussion forum. A select group of students from the all-boys boarding school of Grand River Academy will be surveyed about their gender stereotypical television viewing habits and their exposure to sexually explicit websites. These variables and the essential details from the survey and open discussion will help determine if there is a connection between high viewing of gender stereotypical television and substantial exposure to sexually explicit websites and adolescent male’s attitudes towards sex and sexual relationships.

Hypothesis 1: I hypothesize that male adolescents who watch a high amount of gender stereotypical television programs and are consistently exposed to sexually explicit internet websites will have more relaxed attitudes towards sex and sexual relationships in their own life.

Hypothesis 2: I hypothesize that adolescent males between the age of 16-18 who view a high amount of gender stereotypical television and are consistently exposed to sexually explicit internet websites will have moderately relaxed attitudes towards sex and sexual relationships.

Hypothesis 3: I also predict that adolescent males between the age of 13-15 who view a high amount of gender stereotypical television and are consistently exposed to sexually explicit internet websites will have highly relaxed attitudes towards sex and sexual relationships.
Population and Sampling

Research into the possible negative correlation between high viewing habits of gender stereotypical television programs and sexually explicit internet websites on adolescent males’ attitudes toward sex and sexual relationships. Due to the scope and age range of individuals at Grand River Academy, I will use the method of stratified random sampling. Students from similar class sizes from each grade level will be a part of the sample. I will use this method because I want to make sure to have some representation of the varying age groups of adolescent males from age 13-18. For this study, 50 students were chosen to participate. These chosen adolescents should serve as a representative sample of high school aged students. Grand River Academy follows a similar daily structure as other private schools and public high schools. However, the demographics of the students differ than most public high schools in the cultural diversity that exists. Also, Grand River Academy has a large number of international students enrolled related to the school’s overall yearly enrollment rates. Like other private schools, most of the students enrolled at Grand River Academy have a higher than average family income. Even with these important factors, I do not believe they will affect the validity of the study. However, if I were to do another study, I may do the same study except adding a sample from a public school. I would be interested if there would be any substantial variation in results.

DESIGN

Before being administered the survey, the participants signed an informed consent document. Also, the students were given details on the general content of the survey. The survey consists of three parts. The first part will deal with the students viewing habits of traditional gender stereotypical television programs. The second part will focus on student’s exposure to sexually explicit internet websites. Lastly, the third part will consist of questions relating to their
attitudes based on their viewing habits and exposure to the independent variables. After the students take the survey, there will be a more in-depth discussion about concerning the student’s answers. During this time, students will be able to elaborate more on their answers since the survey aimed to address viewing habits, exposure, and attitudes.

The survey design is modeled after a similar study that I found during my research. This research article studied the correlation between adolescents watching sexually explicit music videos and their attitudes about sex (Zhang et al. 2008). This study helped me develop the first part of my survey related to adolescents viewing gender stereotyped television programs.

This survey will start with more general questions in each section to allow the students to feel comfortable and at ease with the content. For example, at the start of the survey, there will be a question about the participant’s age and grade level. The goal of the design of the survey is to get the information needed, but at the same time not become too detailed, so the students did not feel uncomfortable with any survey content. With the addition of a discussion after the survey results are analyzed would allow for an open forum if students were willing to discuss their answers in more detail. However, the forum element is not added to pressure any students to discuss their answers in any more detail than they feel comfortable with.

A way to aid the students in answering questions truthfully was to add a level of anonymity. Students were not asked to provide their names. I felt the participant’s names were not needed in the study and that this would help to ensure more accurate results if the surveys were kept anonymous.

When it comes to the subject of validity the survey developed for the study achieves internal validity with a panel discussion with the participants after the survey was administered. The panel discussion of the survey results can reveal any statistical imbalance and help the
internal validity of the study. The participants for the study were randomly selected and the study can be replicated. Even though the students are not given their names the participants may not be truly honest because they are aware they are taking part in a study. This will make the panel discussion even more effective because it can ensure the validity of the survey answers. This could be the only challenge to the study’s external validity. However, since the study can be replicated future researchers can more effectively establish external validity.

ANALYSIS

Data will be used to determine the results of the study and test the proposed hypothesis. The data will be analyzed using chi-squares and a Pearson Correlation test. These models will serve the study to determine the effect that gender stereotypical television shows and SEIM have on adolescent male’s attitudes on sex and sexual relationships.

Chi-square model of analysis will be used to determine the strength of the connection between the effect that consuming gender stereotypical television programs and SEIM and male adolescent attitudes toward sex and sexual attitudes. With the possible difficulty of identifying the connection between media consumption and attitudes, for this studies purposes, it will accept a more lenient p-value (p<0.1) because of the difficulty of truly defining how much affect media has on adolescents.

A Pearson Correlation test will be used to compare and understand how the media consumption of male adolescents from the age range of 13-18 effect their attitudes toward sex and sexual relationships. If the Correlation test results in a difference of .05 or less between the age groups than if can be assumed there is a relationship between SEIM and stereotypical TV shows and adolescent male attitudes toward sex. The goal of this test is to compare if ongoing
exposure to these types of media (gender stereotypical television programs and SEIM) will have a positive effect on this groups view of casual sex and gender roles.

**ETHICS**

My study will follow the guidelines of ethics principles established in the Belmont Report with focus and attention placed on other guidelines related to the use of human subject in research.

Respect for persons: Informed consent will be taken from all participants of age to give consent. If participants are of the age that requires consent from a legal guardian, then this extra step will be taken to acquire this consent. Students will have a choice if they want to participate in the research study. There will be no repercussions against a student if they choose not to participate in the research study. If a student agrees to participate, they will not be asked to supply their name or any other information that could be used to identify them. The student will only give their grade level and age for research purposes. Only the researcher will have direct access to participant’s information. Any demographic information obtained for the study will only be used to educate the researcher. All measures taken will help to ensure that participants are at limited risks throughout the research process.

Beneficence: Students will be allowed access to review any of their information from the study. Students will have the right to review any notes taken throughout the research process from the first survey issued to the information gathered from the group discussions. Allowing participants to view their results will help to educate and inform participates of how their media consumption habits impact their beliefs and attitudes about sex and sexual relationships. Throughout the research process, the ethical principle of beneficence will be upheld to minimize
participant harm and maximize possible benefits. Students who participate in the study will be treated to a dinner off of Grand River Academy’s campus.

Justice: Lastly, the ethical principle of justice will be upheld throughout the study. Participants involved in the study will be treated regardless of their answers on the survey or participation in the discussion after the study.

**CONCLUSION**

Limitations and Future Study

The first notable limitation could be the range of participants. Students from a boarding school would be the chosen participants for the study. Each class from the school would have a small sample size of participants. This strategy to gather a sample could make for an available sample size; however, it may be hard to draw definitive conclusions with such a small, narrow sample. The study might draw more conclusions with samples taken from another school besides a boarding school. The study could benefit in regarding diversity by adding a sample of students from a public-school setting. Overall, a more diversified sample could result in a better understanding of how stereotypical television and sexually explicit internet content possibly affects male adolescents.

The second noticeable limitation is that my study fails to take into context other outside variables. The focus of the study is on two key variables, but the study does not try to understand the personalities and familial background of the study participants. While the study is worthwhile in what it can find out about the role stereotypical media can play in forming adolescent’s attitudes, other variables will not show up that could have impacted them as well. Adding more attention to other outside variables such as parental influence and peer influence could offset these weaknesses. However, with the input of external variables, careful attention would need to be kept focused on the two key variables. Too many variables could cause misdirection in
research, but with this type of research, it is possible that the inclusion of other variables could add to the research.

**Significance**

Even though some limitations exist within this study, the main strength lies in its contribution to discovering how the media affects adolescent males. Through the research in the Literature Review, some studies have engaged in this subject. However, my study takes two of the largest media platforms (TV and Internet) and combines them into one study. Also, many of the studies used for my research proposal dealt with both male and female. My study narrows the group of participants to just male adolescents. Using just male adolescents in the study would create a clearer picture of the effect this type of media has on this gender and age group. As media continues to gain importance in the lives of teenagers, it is essential to understand how media affects them. This study will help get to the core of understanding male adolescents attitude about sex and how media consumption can impact those ideas. Attempting to understand the impact media consumption has on male adolescents will be a significant role of research moving forward.
References


Peter, Jochen, and Patti M. Valkenburg. 2010. “Processes Underlying the Effects of Adolescents’ Use of Sexually Explicit Internet Material: The Role of Perceived Realism.”


3. Appendix A1

Gender Stereotypical Shows watched Per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Ranges</th>
<th>Number of Gender Stereotypical Shows Watched</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix A2

SEIM Accessed Per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Ranges</th>
<th>Number of Times SEIM Accessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B Survey

SURVEY
Effects of Certain Media on Adolescent Males Attitudes Toward Sex

Part 1: Television Viewing Habits

1. How old are you?
   a. 13 years old
   b. 14 years old
   c. 15 years old
   d. 16 years old
   e. 17 years old
   f. 18 years old

2. How many hours per week do you watch television (on a TV, table, laptop or smartphone)?
   a. 0-5
   b. 5-10
   c. 10-15
   d. 15-20
   e. 20+

3. Do you have access to a television without parental supervision? YES or NO
   If you answered NO to question 2, please skip to Question 4.

   If you answered YES to Question 2, please answer Question 3.

4. How often do you watch TV alone?
a. Never
b. Not very often
c. Often
d. Very Often
e. Always

5. Rank the following types of TV based on your preference.
   a. Action ___
   b. Comedy ___
   c. Drama ___
   d. Reality ___
   e. Sports ___
   f. News/Politics ___
   g. Other ___

6. How often do sexual situations come up in the programs that you watch?
   a. Never
   b. Not very often
   c. Often
   d. Very Often
   e. Always

7. Doing seeing these portrayals of sex affect you in your own personal life?
   a. Yes
   b. No

If you answered yes please answer question 7.
If you answered no please skip to question 8.

8. Please explain your answer to question 6.

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Part 2: Sexually Explicit Website Viewing Habits

9. How many hours per week do you view sexually explicit material on the internet?
   a. 1-3
   b. 3-5
   c. 5+
10. What devices do you have access to that have internet access? (Mark all that apply)
   a. Computer
   b. Smart phone
   c. IPad/Tablet
   d. Console Gaming System
   e. Smart TV

11. Do you view sexually explicit material alone or with friends?
    a. Alone
    b. With Friends
    c. Both

12. Have you ever felt pressure to view any sexually explicit material?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Part 3: Attitudes toward sex

13. How would you describe your relationships with female peers?
    a. I have a lot of females I consider as friends
    b. I have a steady girlfriend
    c. I have many girlfriends
    d. I try to hook up with as many girls as possible

14. Who or what you would say has the most influential over how you view sex and sexual relationships?
    a. Family
    b. Peers
    c. Media

15. Do you feel pressure to conform to certain sexual standards that you see in the media?
    a. Yes
    b. No