THE IMPACT OF MEDIA ON TEEN SEXUAL HEALTH

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty in Communication and Leadership Studies
School of Professional Studies
Gonzaga University

Under the Supervision of Dr. John Caputo
Under the Mentorship of Dr. Carolyn Cunningham

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies

By
Michaela Ciesynski
May 2013
We the undersigned, certify that we read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree Master of Arts.

Thesis or Project Director

Faculty Mentor

Faculty Reader

Gonzaga University
MA Program in Communication and Leadership Studies
Abstract

This thesis presents an analysis of research gathered in order to explore the impact of the media on teenage views of sexual health. The chosen research highlights the prevalence of sex in today’s television and how these portrayals can influence teens’ views on “normal” sexual behavior. The research shows that teens receive valuable information on social cues, or normalized behavior, from media outlets like popular television shows. Its impact on societal concepts in teenagers can create different view points on what it means to not only engage in sexual behavior, but what sexual behavior is expected. With this ability to influence the way teenagers view certain behaviors, media generates another important question: can this influence be both a positive one and a negative one? Given the mass media penetration, can examples of teen pregnancy in the media be used as a learning tool in media literacy? Therefore, with these questions in mind, a 21-question survey was conducted using 18 to 19 year old college students in the Pacific Northwest. This survey aimed to answer the question of how teen sexuality is portrayed in modern media and how it develops young adult perceptions on normal behaviors. Additionally, it questioned whether or not media representations of sex were realistic. Ultimately, the survey also demonstrated a level of media literacy among survey respondents that may or may not be present in the general teenager population.

Keywords: sexual health, media influence, social dynamics, media literacy, survey research
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Importance of the Study

Statement of the Problem

Definition of Terms Used

Organization of Remaining Chapters

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Philosophical and Ethical Assumptions

Rhetoric

Golden Mean

Theoretical Basis

The Literature

Predictions of Teen Pregnancy Statistics in TV Views

Television Media as an Environmental Factor

Television Media as a Social Factor

Television Media & Education

Rationale

Research Questions

CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope of the Study

Methodology of the Study

Anonymity

Survey Measures

Participants

Data Analysis

Validity and Reliability

Ethical Considerations
CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY

Introduction 33

Data Analysis 34

Results of the Study 36
  RQ1: With the celebrity factor being attributed to stars of shows such as Teen Mom, are sexual health concerns being glamourized or normalized? 36
  RQ2: Are there consequences involved with equating televised reality to real life? 37
  RQ3: Do teens note the sexual hyper-reality created by popular television programs? 38

Section I: Television Viewership 40

Section II: Personal Experience 41

Section III: Pregnancy 42

Section IV: Media Observation Part I & II 43

Discussion 47

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS 50

Limitations of the Study 50

Further Study of Recommendations 52

Conclusions 54

REFERENCES 58

APPENDIX I 62

APPENDIX II 66

APPENDIX III 67
Chapter 1: Introduction

Media power comes with the ability to impact the way people perceive themselves and the world around them. In modern society, continuous exposure to media images help create human conceptions or expectations. Ultimately, societal conceptions about normal or ideal relationships, looks, etc. can be crafted based on continuous exposure to media images (Griffin, 2009). With media influence viewers are exposed to various behaviors that they begin to store in their minds.

Albert Bandura’s social learning theory incorporates the dominance of media in relation to its impact on societal behaviors. Overall, Bandura’s social learning theory emphasizes the environmental impact television images have on both the internal (mental) and environmental (behavioral) processes of viewers. Although watching television shows that cast real teen mothers, teen girls may not go out and get pregnant just to be on the show, but if they do end up getting pregnant at sixteen, they may believe it easy to get on the show and become a celebrity. Similarly, Hall’s (as cited in During, 1999) theory of encoding/decoding describes the creation of messages through the viewing of social signs and symbols. In a society with such a media presence, the media becomes a social entity in which messages are created, verified and interpreted.

Therefore, with the influx of sexual content on television, teenagers are exposed to sexuality in varying situations. Two popular reality television programs present an example of how sexual content can be demonstrated on television: MTV’s Teen Mom and 16 and Pregnant. These two “real-life” depictions of teen pregnancy claim to illustrate the hardships faced by teen parents but have come under fire for turning a hard issue into a publicity stunt. An article in ABC’s Nightline claims that the young girls featured on
MTV shows such as *16 and Pregnant* are becoming celebrities for getting pregnant as teenagers, which causes some concern over whether or not teen pregnancy is seen as a negative in today’s society (Chang, 2008). With this type of Hollywood celebrity being attributed to teen pregnancy, are the sexual health concerns being glamorized?

**The Problem**

**Importance of the Study**

With the U.S. as one of the leading countries for teen pregnancy, it is important to understand the impact of media on adolescent perceptions of sexual health. Using both Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory and Hall’s (During, 1999) theory of encoding/decoding, teen views on sexual media content can be explored on both the conceptual and behavioral levels. Both communication theories state that media aids in the construction of societal concepts. The ability to explore how teenagers interpret television messages may shed light on new education techniques about teen sexual health in order to combat the actual teen pregnancy rate and demonstrate the impact of shows like *Teen Mom* on the mental perceptions of 18-19 year olds.

**Statement of the Problem**

Currently, most Americans have access to countless channels at the click of a button. Television stations can provide people with a wide range of outlets, from entertainment to education. Yet, it also shows us another important societal concept: sex. With the influx of sexual content on television, people, especially teenagers, are shown sexuality in varying situations. Previous studies have examined how the prevalence of sexual media messages influences young viewers. However, less research has been done on how teens interpret these messages and how it helps shape their view of norm sexual
behaviors. Thus, this study will analyze how 18-19 year olds perceive common sexual television content.

This study will also examine television media representations of teen pregnancy. It is important to note that this study does not aim to investigate the teen pregnancy rate in the United States. Additionally, this study does not intend to investigate the connection between media messages and high-risk sexual behaviors. Instead, this study looks at teen perception of media messages in terms of the creation of sexual norms, accurate sexual portrayals and the reality of teen pregnancy as presented on television.

**Definition of Terms Used**

This study uses terms specific to television media and teen sexual health as follows:

**Media Literacy:** Level of education or awareness regarding the meaning of media messages. Ability to interpret and analyze media messages.

**Norm:** Typical or normal social behaviors as perpetuated by society.

**Sexual Health:** Awareness of appropriate sexual behaviors, practices or situations. Understanding of risk factors involved in sexual activity. Practicing safe sex.

**Television Sexuality:** Sexual scenarios, actions or references as aired in television episodes.

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter presents the importance of this study and the need for additional research on the influence of media on teen sexual health perceptions. Chapter two examines the theoretical and philosophical foundation of the study in addition to an analysis of the existing research on the topic of
media impact on teenage sexual behaviors and perceptions. Chapter three explains the scope and methodology of the survey study. The following chapter, Chapter 4, analyzes the survey data collected in regard to the research questions presented by this thesis. The final section of this thesis, Chapter 5, describes the limitation of the study and recommends areas for future research on this topic. The appendices to this thesis provide the survey questions asked as well as the open-ended responses to the survey questions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review examines areas of research in regards to the topic of teen sexual health perceptions as influenced by televised media. The first relevant research comes in the form of theoretical communication practices such as Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory and During’s (1999) explanation of Stuart Hall’s theory of encoding/decoding. Secondly, this section explores past research and work conducted on adolescent media perceptions as well as televised behavioral models.

Philosophical and Ethical Assumptions

This thesis takes a philosophical assumption that today’s media is increasingly penetrating societal conceptions of normalized behaviors. Due to this mass media saturation, viewers are increasingly exposed to media messages. Specifically, teenagers are becoming increasingly adjusted to viewing sexual content across various scenarios on television. As previously discussed, media impacts the way people see the world around them and therefore, influences their behaviors and social interpretations. Given the influx of sexual television content, teenagers may relate these observations to normal sexual behaviors. While depictions of teens having multiple sexual partners on shows such as 90210 may not influence a specific teenager to act accordingly, it could promote an ideal that highlights promiscuousness as the norm. With this in mind, the ethical question then becomes reflective of questions raised by Westernized philosophers such as Aristotle. Aristotle’s rhetoric and golden mean reflect the necessity for media literacy during an age of technological advancement and dependence.
Rhetoric

Modern media has become a key aspect in the lives of many Americans. It is not uncommon to see someone texting on their smart phones or watching a video, streaming a movie on their laptop or playing a game app on their tablet. The technological era encompasses mass media penetration as a societal norm. Marsh (2006) notes a change in rhetoric throughout the digital age, in which mass media has become “multimedia and multisensory” (p. 343). Using the above as an example, technology has developed to meet the multifunctioning needs of the user. Therefore, media exposure and accessibility are increasing and Marsh (2006) explains that literacy in a media saturated age is changing. Aristotle (as cited in Griffin, 2009) describes rhetoric as the way a speaker means to persuade their audience (p. 349). As previously mentioned, Durham et al. (2006) explain that in the production stage, television programs are developed as marketed products to the target audience. Thus, given Aristotle’s rhetoric concerns in the technological age, rhetorical ethical concerns transfer onto mass media as the persuasive speaker. Marsh’s (2006) analysis of convergent media is based on the concept of the “oral spell” (p. 339). Simply defined the “oral spell” is the ability of a speaker to produce a spell over an audience where they believe in the absolute certainty of the words, regardless of experience to the contrary. Mass media, according to Marsh (2006), takes on the properties of oral storytelling, and it is then necessary to refine media literary. Due to the mass penetration of media culture, it becomes necessary to educate the general public to interpret the messages they receive on a daily basis. Aristotle’s rhetorical ethics highlight the need for educational background on today’s media messages.
**Golden Mean**

Griffin (2009) explains that Aristotle’s golden mean highlights moderation (p. 349). Aristotle attributed moderation to wisdom because “…virtue develops habits that seek to walk an intermediate path” (Griffin, 2009, p. 349). Similar to rhetoric, Aristotle’s golden mean is wary of persuasive reasoning. The golden mean aims to find the middle ground. In terms of media messages, the ethical dilemma is in finding the moderation between hyper-reality and banning sexual content in television programs marketed to teenagers. Aristotle’s golden mean is not about pleasing one specific party, but finding a way to acknowledge possible ethical dilemmas in a way that answers all the questions without taking it to the extreme. Ultimately, this thesis utilizes Aristotle’s golden mean to examine the current media state on sexualized television content targeted to teenagers. Basically, a balance of entertainment value and media literacy should be represented in mass media in order to better inform the normalized social concepts observed by the teen audience.

**Theoretical Basis**

Albert Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory developed in order to unify behavioral theories in explanations of human behavior (p. vi). According to Bandura (1977), human behavior is learned and enhanced through reactions and perceptions to individual experiences (p. vi). More specifically, Bandura (1977) cites the human reciprocal interactions in which individuals are neither powerless to outside forces nor are they in total control of their self-development (p. vii). This reciprocal relationship is continuous, and codependent; i.e. human beings have a reciprocal interaction with their environment just as the environment has a reciprocal interaction with human beings.
(Bandura, 1977). He describes human behavior as, “…continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants” (p. vii). Given the reciprocal relationship, behaviors are determined by socially learned behaviors. Basically, learned behaviors, according to Bandura (1977), are based on observation of such behaviors. Learning such behaviors is not necessarily derived from the most flamboyant or outrageous behavioral demonstrations. Instead, Bandura (1977) explains that social learning occurs casually through every day observations (p. 39). Therefore, social learning theory attempts to explain socially learned behaviors through observations of individually perceived behaviors as well as internal connections applied to such forces by the observer.

Given the current mass media penetration of society, television media has become increasingly common in American households. In fact, The Neilson Company (2012) in its 2011 *U.S. Digital Consumer Report* stated that 35.9 million home with television access contain four or more television sets (p. 4). Thus, with continuous technological advancement, televised media is not only becoming more accessible but more normalized. Bandura (1977) cites visual media such as television as influential on the social learning of adults as well as children. He explains that media has the power to transmit vast behavioral messages to the masses simultaneously (Bandura, 1977, p. 40). The power of media is not limited to spreading mass messages. Bandura (1977) states that due to humans’ exposure to a small select environment, “…their perceptions of social reality are heavily influenced by vicarious experiences- what they see, hear, and read in the mass media” (p. 40). Basically, people shape their societal norms and conceptions around how they perceive the world, which is based off of their observations
of real life events and media made events. This concept of media creating a sense of
hyper-reality will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The second theoretical concept of this thesis focuses on the meaning ascribed to
media messages. Like Bandura’s (1977) emphasis on societal norms being embedded in
viewer’s interpretations, During (1999) explains how cultural theorist Stuart Hall
explores the processes in which messages are encoded into culturally specific
signs/symbols. During (1999) describes Hall’s encoding/decoding model as a structure of
“production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction” moments (p.507).
Television media represents this process through the program production, in which a
story or message is created. These messages are created based on social references from
other relevant sources and audience perception (During, 1999). Based on societal
constructs encoded to the given message, the audience participates in various levels of
communication exchange where, based on their own perceptual experiences, they
interpret what they view. Hall also specifies how certain mass media messages can
become “normalized”, which describes a situation where codes contain a sense of
ormalcy or commonality among a given culture (During, 1999, p. 511).

With Bandura’s (1977) assertion of projection of media perpetuated hyper-reality
and the levels of television viewership, it is reasonable to assume that Hall’s (During,
1999) theory of “normalized” coding may be related to the mass media culture. Hall
(During, 1999) argues that some media messages have become so ingrained in a given
culture that they appear “near universal” (p. 511). However, Hall also references the
creation of social coding, for which there is no “natural” representation (p. 513). This
mapping of social codes reflects a “dominant cultural order” (p. 513). While Hall chooses
the term “dominant” this term actually refers to the preferred norm rather than a cultural reality. While Hall (During, 1999) argues that encoding/decoding theory has a strong influence in behaviorism, this theory also represents a sense of media literacy in being able to not only absorb media messages but to process these messages into social meaning. Without a proper societal framework, codes such as television visuals, would not have such a universal or naturalized nature. Yet, while some level of awareness is required in order to accurately attribute these meanings to social frames, how aware are people of the impact of such media messages? Shields (1993) argues that, due to a lack of media literacy education, awareness regarding advertising messages and the like have become lax. Shields (1993) specifically references alcohol abuse and underage drinking in advertising. He states that as teens pay attention to alcohol advertising but having no media literacy knowledge, they are more likely to view drinking as “cool and macho” (Shields, 1993). In order to promote increasing awareness, Shields (1993) notes the saturation of media culture and promotes greater education to limit the negative effects on the viewer population. Like Shields (1993), Hall’s (During, 1999) encoding/decoding theory cements the importance of a framework for understanding the various social messages absorbed by every day media. Therefore, Hall’s (During, 1999) theory represents a case for media literacy similar to Shields (1993), in that it is through a process of interpretation that media messages gain their meaning and therefore their impact on an audience. Without an understanding of this interpretation process, it is difficult to note the importance of the sign itself or the possible impact on internal or external processes. Overall, the frame of Hall’s encoding/decoding theory will be used in
later portions of this thesis to interpret and analyze the communication messages embedded in common sexualized television media content.

The Literature

**Predictions of Teen Pregnancy Statistics in TV Views**

According to a longitudinal study of youth published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* (Berry, Chandra, Collins, Elliot, Kanouse, Martino & Miu, 2008), there is a solid link between teens watching sexual content on television and occurrences of teen pregnancy. Berry et al. (2008) claim that this study is the first to explore the correlation between teen pregnancy statistics and exposure to sexual content on television. This study states that while previous studies have explored the link between viewing sexual content and early sexual behavior of adolescents, there is a lack of research conducted on the correlation between sexual images on television and teen pregnancy rates (Berry et al., 2008).

The basis for this study concerned teen pregnancy rates in the United States. While this rate has steadily decreased since the 1990s, the Center for Disease Control (2012) explains that teen pregnancy in the U.S. is still noticeably higher than in other westernized countries. Since 2009, teen pregnancy rates within the 15-19 year old age range declined by nine percent, a new low for the U.S. (CDC, 2012). In addition, in the National Survey of Family Growth (Martinez, Copen, & Abma, 2011), results of a study showed that sexual activity in females aged 15-19 declined from 51% in 1988 to 43% in 2006-2010 (p.5). The survey also represented the perceived consequences of sexual activity. For example, Hispanic and Black female teenagers cited fear of pregnancy as the second highest reason for abstaining from sex while White female teenagers cite it as the
third highest reason (Martinez, G., et al., 2011). Yet, with the decrease in sexual behavior, the question still remains as to why in the U.S. is the teen birthrate still higher than in most other developed countries?

With these statistics as background, Berry, et al.’s (2008) study attempted to discover the link between exposure to sexual content and teen pregnancy rates. The data for this study was collected over a three-year period and monitored the results of teenagers, both male and female, ages 12-17 and 15-20 (Berry et al., 2008). Other studies have shown that, “Individual (eg, lack of school attachment), social (eg, peer norms regarding sexual behavior), and environmental (eg, availability of contraception) influences converge in predicting teen pregnancy” (Berry et al, 2008, p. 1047). With these factors proven to influence teen pregnancy rates, media could fit into two of the above-listed categories: social and environmental. A study conducted by Bleakley, Gottfried, Hennessy, Jordan & Vaala (2011) on genre specific teen sexual content showed that there was not a correlation between exposure to sexual content and sexual activity the following year. However, the study did note the possibility that “not all sexual content in the media is ‘created equal’” (Bleakley et al., 2011, p. 75). For example, the study found that sexual content in dramas had a higher overall rate and risk factor (Bleakley et al., 2011, p. 75). While the results of this study did not conclusively predict sexual content exposure to increased sexual activity, it did survey the impact of sexual content on sexual perceptions. Bleakley et al. (2011) state that analysis of sexual content by genre displayed teen reactions to sex in regards to normative pressure (p. 87). Ultimately, Bleakley et al. (2011) found that teens felt more positively regarding sex after watching sexual comedy content while they felt more negatively about sex post drama
genre sexuality (p. 87). The discoveries in Bleakley et al.’s study emphasize Berry et al. (2008) and Bandura’s (1977) concept of determinable factors.

The following section will explore the arguments of media, more specifically television media, as an environmental and a social factor.

**Television Media as an Environmental Factor**

Television has become a staple in many American households. According to an article in *Science Daily* (Daniel, Gauvin, Kestens, Lambert, & O’Loughlin, 2008), 60 percent of teenagers spend an average of 20 hours a week watching television or using the computer. However, a smaller group of teens may spend up to 40 hours a week in front of the television and computer (Daniel et al., 2008). The research more specifically shows that male teens report higher weekly television and computer levels than female teens (Daniel et al., 2008). While this study explores the higher risk for obesity in high levels of “screen-time”, extended exposure to media influence via television and computer saturation is also a factor that should be considered. With easy access to television programs, media can become an environmental factor. Daniel et al.’s (2008) analysis of screen-time also referenced the socio-economic factors correlated to teen television hours. The results showed that in more disadvantaged neighborhoods, teens reported higher television hours (Daniel, et al., 2008).

Berry et al.’s (2008) study concluded that teens in the higher exposure rate of sexualized television content were, “…twice as likely to experience a pregnancy in the subsequent 3 years…” (p. 1047). Basically, by increasing the exposure to sexual content on television, the possibility of teen pregnancy increases. Therefore, it can be concluded
that upping the overall television viewing hours also increases the possibility of exposure to sexual content. Since television exposure can be measured on a socio-economic level and due to the level of possible exposure (i.e. weekly screen-time), television media can be described as an environmental factor.

**Television Media as a Social Factor**

In Berry et al.’s (2008) study, social factors are described as “…peer norms regarding sexual behavior…” (p. 1047). While these peers can be seen as physical human beings, television, and the content it presents, can also be considered a type of peer. Berry et al. (2008) states,

The notion that television may play the role of a “sexual super peer,” influencing the sexual decision-making of youths, is supported by a study that established a prospective link between exposure to television sexual content and earlier initiation of sex. (p. 1048)

To explain this relationship, Jordan, Strausburger and Wilson (2009) state that sometimes teenagers attempt to mirror the actors and actresses they see on television as they seek to find their own sense of personality or individuality (p. 232). In addition, exposure to more sexualized television content can also change teens’ perceptions of sex. They can start to view the sex they see on television, sexual content without repercussions or more experienced sexual partners, as reality (Jordan et al., 2009, p. 232). For example, if a teen closely relates to a television character, they may begin to view themselves as being sexually inadequate in their own experiences (Jordan et al., 2009, p. 233). Another example provided by Jordan et al. (2009) is the sexual content displayed on soap operas.
Many of the sexual encounters highlight the idea that “sex just happens” (Jordan, et al., 2009, p. 233). It emphasizes the lack of consequences that are associated with being caught up in a passionate moment, or a lack on contraception, or forethought.

Additionally, Van Damme (2010) states that representations of sexual behavior in television transfers into the outside culture due to assigned meaning. Like Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory, Van Damme (2010) explains a hyper-reality due to representations of stereotypical sexual behavior as presented on television. Van Damme (2010) equates socially learned behaviors to perpetuated stereotypes in teen television. For example, while Van Damme (2010) argues that there is more sexual talk rather than action in teen shows, many highlight cliché sexual actions such as the boys acting like “real men” and trying to sleep with as many girls as possible (p. 82). Van Damme (2010) also indicates how female sexuality is stereotyped in teen shows as women being the object of sexual desire, while men are able to freely act on their desires without the negative reputational consequences (p. 82). Mirroring these stereotypes as role models can impact a teen’s gender interaction as well as identity (Van Damme, 2010, p.82). With these examples, teenagers may begin to associate the peers they view on television as being social examples for their real lives.

**Television Media & Education**

Despite the previously explained negative concepts teenagers may derive from sexual content on television, many educators are attempting to use portrayals of teen pregnancy as an education tool. According to an article in the *New York Times*, many teachers are using shows like *Teen Mom* and *16 and Pregnant* to teach teenagers about birth control and the consequences of being a teen parent (Hoffman, 2011). These shows
have received criticism for glamorizing teen pregnancy and creating celebrities out of
teen moms (Hoffman, 2011). However, some teachers are finding the situations portrayed
on these television shows as being good examples of the responsibilities of parenthood.
Even the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy has distributed
3,000 DVDs (Hoffman, 2011). Outside the classroom, organizations such as the CDC and
Planned Parenthood are also using media examples to spark teenage sexual health
education. For example, in a Minnesota Planned Parenthood press release, they state,

*MTV’s 16 and Pregnant* has done an excellent job creating awareness of the many
difficulties teen mothers and their families face. But at what point do we stop
watching and start acting? The key to overcoming these obstacles is awareness
and education. (Planned Parenthood, 2011)

Also, Planned Parenthood (2011), in this press release, responds to news that *16 and
Pregnant* star Jordan Ward is pregnant with her second child at the age of 18 because she
could not remember to take her birth control. Minnesota’s Planned Parenthood responds
with,

Since Jordan Ward had a difficult time remembering to take her birth control pill,
perhaps another form of birth control would have been better. Alternative choices
like the Shot, Sponge, Patch, Diaphragm, IUD, Cervical Cap and countless others
are available. Experts at Planned Parenthood’s Health Centers are available to
educate you on the pros and cons of each method. And many of these birth control
forms are free or low-cost so you can choose which method is best for you.
(Planned Parenthood, 2011)
Creating awareness and education to alternative birth control methods is just one way that organizations are reaching out to today’s teenagers. Overall, Hoffman (2011) represents how many educators are turning to prevalent media; *Teen Mom*’s second season finale reached 4.7 million viewers, in order to spread a healthy message about sexual health.

However, are educators the ones leading discussion that creates awareness or is it the show itself? A survey conducted by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Unplanned Pregnancy (2012) asked respondents to weigh in on whether shows like *Teen Mom* glamourized teen pregnancy. Eighty-two percent of respondents felt that *Teen Mom* helps teenagers to better understand the hardships of parenthood while 15 percent thought it glamourized teen pregnancy (The National Campaign, 2012). Does this statistic reflect the possibility of educational value in modern television portrayals of teen pregnancy or is it a dramatic representation meant to shock the teenage population into safe sex? While this study does not aim to analyze the educational possibilities in shows like Teen Mom, it does attempt to gauge teen perceptions of such shows in relation to sexual health education outlets.

**Rationale**

As Berry, et al. (2008) would suggest, television media directly impacts teen perceptions. Whether this impact is positive or negative ultimately depends on the situation of the individual teenager and how they interpret the media messages they are receiving. Regardless of the level of sexual exposure, the mere fact that media have the ability to change teen self-image deserves some recognition by media regulation (Berry et al., 2008). Therefore, improving media literacy or creating discussion regarding the images of teen pregnancy portrayed on television is vital in understanding adolescent
reproductive health and exploring its link to teen pregnancy rates.

**Research Questions**

Thus, the following research questions are cultivated: With the celebrity factor being attributed to stars of shows such as Teen Mom, are sexual health concerns being glamourized or normalized? While this thesis is not an analysis of the current teen pregnancy rate in the U.S., it does observe the outcomes of viewing sexuality in various situations as perceived by teenagers. Are there consequences involved with equating televised reality to real life? Do teens note the sexual hyper-reality created by popular television programs? Basically, given the social cues and “norm” behaviors that are learned through fictional television portrayals, this thesis provides an analysis of what young adults take away from sexualized media content and how this applies to their own real world views on sexual health.
Scope of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the relationship between media representations of teen sexuality and perceptions of sexual health in teenagers. More specifically, this study analyses the representation of teen pregnancy in teen marketed television programs. There are three objectives included in this research study:

1. Determine the impact of media portrayals of teen sex on teenage understanding of this issue,
2. Determine the impact of media representation of teen sex on teen understanding of sexual health issues, and
3. Determine how teens interpret sexual media messages.

This research is characterized in Communication Research Strategies and Sources (Haridakis, Piele, Rubin, & Rubin, 2010) as people-or behavior-oriented research (p. 218). The focus is on assessing people’s behavior through surveys, observations and self-reports of behavior or attitudes (Haridakis, et al., 2010, p. 218). Therefore, this study incorporates research analysis as a supplement to prior conducted survey research. While prior studies emphasize the high pregnancy rate within the U.S., a correlation between teen pregnancy and viewing sexual content on television is out of the range of this study. In restricting the scope to teen understanding of sexual health, this study aims to explore all possible perceptions retained after viewing common media portrayals of sex. So, while this study does not aim to answer the questions about teen pregnancy rates in the U.S., it is important to note that prior research and studies cited in this thesis may rely
upon statistical information, such as rate of sexual activity, pregnancy, etc.

In addition, since this study involved human subjects and sensitive questions (i.e. sexual history and behavior), sampling procedures met the minimal risk participant standards as dictated by the Institutional Review Board at Gonzaga University (“IRB”). Given the sensitive topic of the research, the scope of this study was limited to teenagers 18-19 years old and out of high school. College students were chosen as the participant population for this study due to experience level. They were chosen based on the level of knowledge they would have regarding the concept of sexualized media messages as well as the applicable personal experiences. It was believed that college students would be more media literate as well as more sexually aware of societal standards. Therefore, they would be able to provide greater insight into the research topic over a population of high school teens.

**Methodology of the Study**

The data for this study was collected via a survey of teens, both male and female, ages 18-19. Possible participants were gathered from local Pacific Northwest university classes. Social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter were also used to offer ease of accessibility. After receiving participant consent, the teenagers were asked to respond to a brief, 10-question online survey. Given the nature of the research topic, the survey objective was meant to study a broad spectrum of people and gather an in-depth response without conducting face-to-face interviews.

According to a study conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (Jones & Madden, 2002), college students cite the Internet as being not only a major tool
in their educational practices, but their communication practices as well. Using the Internet to conduct survey research regarding this topic can maintain participant confidentiality, described below, as well as promote a sense of openness that may not be achieved through other means of research. Jones, et al. (2002) explains, “…Almost half (46%) of college students agree that email enables them to express ideas to a professor that they would not have expressed in class…” (p. 4). Given the sensitive topic of this research, it is important to promote a sense of openness where the participants feel comfortable sharing their perceptions on media sexuality. Using the Internet as a survey tool will hopefully accomplish similar feelings of expression that were noted in the Jones, et al. (2002) study. Ultimately, using the Internet to conduct the survey will benefit the research through both promoting a greater sense of comfort in that participants feel that their anonymity will be maintained and, since Internet usage has become commonplace to college students, allow for easy survey completion/promotion.

In addition, this study employed survey research as a means to gauge teen response to sensitive television material. Upon entering the survey page, participants were presented with a brief description of the aim of the study as well as its voluntary nature. Participants were informed that at they could skip a question or leave the survey without fear of consequence at any point.

**Anonymity**

Anonymity was achieved in the survey research by using an online, outside survey page (i.e. eSurveyspro.com) that does not require the name or any contact information for submission. Participants were also encouraged to respond to the survey in a private location, as so the sensitive nature of the questions will not be observed by
outside parties. Participation was strictly voluntary and participants had the option to leave the page at any point in the process without consequence.

**Survey Measures**

The survey measures three main areas: pregnancy/personal experience (3)$^1$, television viewership (4) and media observations (3). Survey questions were also loosely based off similar questions presented in the Kaiser Family Foundations’ SexSmarts survey (2002). This survey questions teens ages 15-17 years old about sexual health issues such as speaking with a partner about STDs and parental involvement in a teen’s sexual health education (KFF, 2002). While this survey does not seriously delve into media impact on teen pregnancy, it does provide an example of teen sexual health statistics. Therefore, in creating a survey instrument, the SexSmarts survey (KFF, 2002) demonstrated effective survey questions for brief, topic-focused questions on teen sexual health and experiences.

This survey was conducted electronically using a template provided by the eSurveyspro.com website. It was broken down into four pages, an introduction page followed by the three main topic pages. Each page contained a main title, reflecting the nature of the questions, as well as a brief explanation of participant’s task. Page one of this survey contained a brief explanation of the survey purpose and content. Page two measured personal experience in a series of four questions, two single response questions and two Likert-type scale questions to measure a respondent’s level agreement/disagreement. Page three measured television viewership using four Likert-

---

$^1$ These numbers reflect the number of questions on the survey regarding the given topic.
type scale questions. The final page, page four, studied media observations. In this section of the survey, participants were asked to view two video clips through the video hosting site YouTube. Links were provided to the videos along with a brief description of each. Upon viewing the clips, the survey asked three follow-up questions: two multiple choice questions regarding perceptions of sexual normality in the provided clips and one comment section where participants responded to an open-ended question regarding their thoughts on typical teen television sexual relationships.

Videos clips were chosen based on availability, such as video accessibility, and program content. The two videos were from two current television programs that are marketed to a teenage audience on primetime channels. The first show, *Gossip Girl*, was chosen because of the sexual show theme and the fact that it is aired via the CW network. According to a Fox News article (2009), the Parent Television Counsel, a parental advocacy group, attempted to ban an episode of the network’s popular show *Gossip Girl* because the show planned to depict a threesome sexual encounter on screen. The group’s director of communication and public education, Melissa Henson, explained that,

> Images of teenagers in sexual scenarios are nothing new. But the idea of a threesome is a fairly new phenomenon that has previously only been associated with adult films. The network is giving it a sense of normalcy and depicting it as nothing unusual and suggesting there are no particular consequences for this type of behavior. (Fox News, 2009)

The group also opposed the sexual nature of the network’s promotion advertisements, especially given the perceived target audience of teenager girls. The second clip also presents a sexual situation but was chosen based on the more “family” network it is aired
The video clip is from the popular ABC Family show *Pretty Little Liars*.

**Participants**

As previously mentioned, the survey population was composed of 18 to 19 year old college students from four local universities: University of Washington (Seattle, WA), Washington State University (Pullman, WA), Gonzaga University (Spokane, WA) and University of Portland (Portland, OR). Non-college students were not purposefully included in this survey population.

Upon entering the survey page, participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and that they had the option to skip a question or leave the forum at any point during the survey process. Participants were also given instructions based on the question topics as well as warned in advance about the video portion of the survey. Since this survey used an outside video-hosting site, YouTube, participants were given the option to watch the video in a separate window. Prior to visiting the video links, participants read a brief warning regarding the sexual content presented in each television clip. Upon completion of this survey, participants were thanked for their completion of the survey and reassured that their anonymity would be maintained.

**Data Analysis**

Data from both the survey and research analysis were analyzed to answer two main research questions: Are there consequences involved with equating televised reality to real life? Do teens note the sexual hyper-reality created by popular television programs? Basically, given the social cues and “norm” behaviors that are learned through fictional television portrayals, this thesis provides an analysis of what young adults take
away from sexualized media content and how this applies to their own real world views on sexual health. The majority of survey questions were conducted using multiple choice or Likert-type scale questions. Therefore, analysis of those responses was represented through numerical percentages. This way, the data was easily presentable and interpretable for comparison to past research studies for and for use in future studies.

The media observations section of the survey did not rely on close-ended scale questions. Instead, this section was loosely based on the Take It Seriously: Abstinence and the Media (TISAM) media literacy program developed by the Teen Futures Media Network and as referenced in an article published in Health Communication (Chen, Cohen, Fitzgerald, Pinkleton, & Weintraub, 2008). According to Chen, et al. (2008), TISAM created five lesson plans in order to adhere to the federal mandate for abstinence focused sexual education (p. 467). While this study does not focus on abstinence education, the TISAM lessons are tailored to sexually explicit media literacy. Regardless of participant sexual choices, such as being sexually active or abstinent, this study simply aims to observe and note teen reactions to media exposure.

TISAM’s five lesson plans are as follows:

1. Using Sex to Sell: Ways in which advertisers utilize sex in order to market products to the younger generation.


3. Want to Be A Statistic?: Using teen marketed television programs to open discussion to sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

4. It’s Your Choice: In TISAM’s lesson, this is where students are encouraged to
take a pledge of abstinence. However, for the purpose of this survey, this is the section where discussion of media’s representation of sex impacts teen opinions on pressure to either become sexually active or abstain.

5. Make a Media Message: Participants reflect on what they have learned through the creation of their own media messages. (Chen, et al., 2008).

With these lesson plans as a guideline, research participants were shown two television clips that presented sexual situations and teen pregnancy. Following the media clips, participants were then asked to respond to what they have just seen and were guided by three open-ended questions similar to those presented by TISAM’s lesson plans.

The analysis for this section differed from the other seven survey questions because the data could not be grouped numerically. This data was collected in order to probe the perceptions instilled upon norm teen sexual practices through television role modeling. These responses were analyzed in terms of common themes and question responses. Was there a common understanding that television sexuality differed from real life sexuality? Did teens seem shocked by these sexual situations? Questions such as these were used as a filter to analyze the comment style questions presented in the media observations section of this study.

Chapter four provides a more in depth analysis of the survey results as they apply to the previously mentioned research questions.

**Validity and Reliability**

As with all research, both the method and analysis need to be valid and reliable. Haridakis, et al. (2010) explains that the validity refers to a studying measuring what it
means to measure (p. 203). Basically, maintaining validity requires a researcher to conduct a study using tools that will represent data valid to the study itself (Haridakis, et al., 2010). Reliability in a study reflects consistency and repeatable the methods of research are (Haridakis, et al., 2010, p. 203). Using methods that can be easily duplicated is important in maintaining research reliability. According to Haridakis, et al. (2010), researchers commonly rely on methods that have a solid reliable track record (p. 203). For this survey research, test-retest reliability, using a measure twice with similar results, was used in sending the survey to three different colleges, with three different sets of respondents (Haridakis, et al., 2010, p. 203). Using reliable and valid methods in conducting and analyzing communication research adds not only credibility to a study but consistency as well.

**Ethical Considerations**

According to Haridakis, et al. (2010), research ethics is defined as “what is right and wrong in the conduct of research” (p. 204). Research is a process of choices. These choices need to reflect both the interests of the research goals, such as research questions to meet, as well as the interests of the participants. Overall, Haridakis, et al. (2010) explained that researchers are required to be respectful and fair in their communication research endeavors. Specifically for this study, a prominent ethical concern centered on the use of human subjects and the nature of the research topics. Since sex is a sensitive subject for many people, especially teenagers, it is important to keep the participants informed at every stage of research. Therefore, using a questionnaire/survey provides the informed consent of research participants (Haridakis, et al., 2010, p. 204). Discussions of sex can make people uncomfortable. Yet, this survey did not aim to create discomfort.
Instead, it studied participant perceptions and observations rather than their sexual preferences or personal information. Therefore, this survey adhered to Haridakis, et al.’s (2010) basic rule: Do no harm (p. 204).

Given the nature of the questions, it is therefore important for the researcher to protect the confidentiality of participants. However, Haridakis, et al. (2010) emphasizes the difference between confidentiality and anonymity (p. 205). Confidentiality means that a researcher will not disclose the names or personal information to participants (Haridakis, et al., 2010, p. 205). It is used when a researcher needs to protect the privacy of participants but may need to contact them for follow-up research. Anonymity, however, is participation in a research project without the researchers knowledge of their identity (Haridakis, et al., 2010, p. 205). For example, if participants did not put their names on an online survey response, this would be maintaining anonymity. For the purposes of this study, anonymity will be achieved and maintained. At no point during the online survey are participants asked to reveal any personal identification.
Chapter 4: The Study

Introduction

The study examined survey responses collected from teenagers ages 18-19 years old regarding media and teen sexual health. Its purpose was not to review the high pregnancy rate in the United States. Instead, it aimed to measure perceptions on media depictions, both reality television and fictionally based television, on sexuality as marketed to teenagers. Therefore, the survey questions narrowly focused on feelings or perceptions of media sexual representation.

Results of this survey measured 22 total responses, both complete responses and partial responses. Participation in the survey as well as in each question was completely voluntary and eight respondents chose to skip questions in the survey process. The findings of this study presented a background on the type of respondent through two sexual experience questions. None of the survey participants have ever been pregnant or fathered a child and 76.47 percent of them consider themselves to be sexually active. This survey attempted to answer the following research questions: Are there consequences involved with equating televised reality to real life? Do teens note the sexual hyper-reality created by popular television programs? Ultimately, given the social cues and “norm” behaviors that are learned through fictional television portrayals, the study aimed to gage what young adults take away from sexualized media content and how this applies to their own real world views on sexual health.

Surprisingly, respondents displayed a level of media literacy, seemingly aware of the dramatic angle of sexual television scenarios. Although certain concerning factors, such as safe sex, were decidedly missing from the video clips shown in this survey,
respondents referenced circumstances that occur outside the television reality. Basically, while they may deem certain television instances of sex as realistic or believable, they cite outside experiences that are not represented. For example, one participant explained there might not be a conversation about safe sex before the actual act because currently many girls are on birth control (Appendix II). Overall, the findings of this study represented a sense of media awareness against the creation of normalized sexual behaviors from television portrayals. Additionally, participants weighed in on their perceptions of current media representation of teen pregnancy. Participants in this study generally did not look to television for their sexual health education and did not view reality shows such as Teen Mom as being representative of true teenage parenthood.

Data Analysis

The online survey titled, “Media & Teen Sexual Health”, was conducted in March and April of 2013. The survey was divided into three sections, or pages, and was conducted via Esurvey.com, a free survey website. Section I focuses on television viewership and consisted of six close-ended questions. Questions from this section were meant to measure the level of television viewership among the target audience. Section II dealt with personal experience. Participants were asked to respond to three questions, pertaining to their sexual experiences (i.e. have they ever been pregnant/fathered a child, etc.). Participants were also asked to rank their agreement on whether or not they felt their sexual experiences were the norm for people their age using a Likert-type scale.

Section III specifically asked questions relating to pregnancy. This section contained six questions\(^2\), five structured on a Likert-type scale response and one being a

\(^2\) Question 11 in Section III was inadvertently repeated as question five in Section I.
multiple choice yes, no or undecided response. The questions in this section aimed to
survey how teens view media portrayals of teen pregnancy. It also surveyed whether or
not participants had been pregnant or fathered a child. The fourth and final section of this
dealt with media observations. This section made up the bulk of the survey and was
broken into two subsequent parts: general media observation questions and questions in
response to two sexual scenario video clips from primetime television. Part I of Section
IV contained three general questions surveying participant response to current television
media portrayal of sexual scenarios. Participants were asked to respond to these questions
by choosing their level of agreement on a Likert-type scale (i.e. strongly disagree to
strongly agree). Part II of Section IV provided respondents with the same three questions
to respond to after reviewing both video clips. Due to the sensitive nature of the videos,
respondents were asked to open the links in a separate window and to be aware of their
surroundings when watching. However, the content came from previously televised
shows and therefore, was appropriate for the age range surveyed. Two questions were
structured in the scale format while the third asked for a detailed free-range response to
guiding open-ended questions.

This survey studied 22 individuals, garnering 14 complete responses and eight
incomplete responses. Due to anonymous nature of the survey, the gender of the survey
population is not known. This study aimed to garner responses from both male and
female teenagers ages 18 to 19 years old. However, since no distinguishing information
was asked on this survey, it is not possible to know if every respondent is within the
desired population. For background on the sexual activity of survey population, two

3 Question 13 of Section IV Part I was inadvertently repeated in as question four in
Section I.
questions regarding the level of sexual experience of the respondents were asked. As
taken from question seven of the survey, 76.47% of respondents consider themselves
sexually active. In addition, 100% of survey respondents claimed in question eight to
have never fathered a child or been pregnant.

Results of the Study

Thus, the following research questions are cultivated: Given the mass media
penetration, can examples of teen pregnancy in the media be used as a learning tool?
With the celebrity factor being attributed to stars of shows such as Teen Mom are sexual
health concerns being glamourized or normalized? While this thesis is not an analysis of
the current teen pregnancy rate in the U.S., it does observe the outcomes of viewing
sexuality in various situations as perceived by teenagers. Are there consequences
involved with equating televised reality to real life? Do teens note the sexual hyper-
reality created by popular television programs? Basically, given the social cues and
“norm” behaviors that are learned through fictional television portrayals, this thesis
provides an analysis of what young adults take away from sexualized media content and
how this applies to their own real world views on sexual health.

RQ1: With the celebrity factor being attributed to stars of shows such as
Teen Mom, are sexual health concerns being glamourized or normalized?

The majority of respondents indicated that they agreed that recent media
depictions of teen pregnancy glamourizes it and ignores the struggles that real teen
mothers face on a daily basis (Appendix I).
RQ2: Are there consequences involved with equating televised reality to real life?

While no specific survey question specifically asked about the connection between relating a television reality to the outside world, questions regarding the difference between television portrayals and societal reality were asked in four out of the five survey sections. As previously discussed, in response to these questions respondents displayed a surprising level of media literacy. 75 percent of respondents stated that television programming does not accurately represent common and realistic sexual experiences or the consequences sex can result in. Likewise, 85 percent felt they understood the difficulties attributed to having a baby during their teen years, even though 82.35 percent of survey respondents felt shows such as MTV’s *Teen Mom* and *16 and Pregnant* do not depict the actual hardships of teen pregnancy. Although the teen respondents in this survey portrayed an awareness of the distinction between the sexual scenarios represented in popular television programs, many touched on the dangers of television failing to address outside factors when depicting sexual content. One survey participant explained that,

> the message taken away from the clip is that the couple clearly loves each other, but it also encourages young girls to partake in risky sexual behavior by not showing use of protection (Appendix II).

Another respondent echoed that,

> I feel this portrayal encourages girls to seek this ideal of the 'perfect sexual experience' and causes them to desire this 'norm' presented by the media which
leads teens to think that their first sexual experience will be as perfect as this one, when if reality that is not true (Appendix II).

Overall, respondents demonstrated an understanding of the fictional and marketable nature of television programming. One respondent specifically stated that, “Television shows depict relationships between two people in such a way to catch the attention of the viewer instead of showing real life experiences” (Appendix II). Ultimately, the teens in this study demonstrated an overall awareness of the contradictions between normal sexual scenarios and those televised. So, when questioned whether or not the sexual scenes they see on television influence how they feel about sex and sexuality in their real life, 56.25 percent claimed that it didn’t influence their beliefs. However, they did cite that there are others who may not be as aware of this distinction, and suffer the consequences of taking sexualized television portrayals at face value.

**RQ3: Do teens note the sexual hyper-reality created by popular television programs?**

As previously explained, survey participants in this study demonstrated an awareness of media literacy. In response to question 14, 81.25 percent of respondents do not believe that current television programs represent common and realistic sexual situations and the possible consequences of sex. After viewing both video clips, respondents were asked to rate whether they felt the clip portrayed a normal sexual scenario. The first clip was chosen due to the emotional aspect of sexual intercourse represented by two characters. The majority, 50 percent, agreed that this scene was believable and realistic. In response to the open-ended question response, six out of ten respondents claimed that the video clip was believable. Many claimed that it depicted the
emotional side of sex. Seven out of ten of the respondents to the open-ended question also reference the lack of discussion regarding sexual protection. Yet, the scene is still seen as being believable by the majority of survey participants. The second clip, however, was seen as being less believable. This clip was chosen to demonstrate a more graphic sexual scenario and for the dramatic nature of the character interaction. In regards to this particular clip, ten out of ten respondents felt that it was unrealistic. One participant stated, “Again, the dialogue before this clip is worlds away from realistic, but I genuinely believe there are people dumb enough to recreate the situation” (Appendix III). Due to the nature of the sexual relationship between the two characters in this clip, many respondents felt that this clip created an unhealthy sexual dynamic. One participant explained,

This clip is not believable. The two people are obviously angry with one another and it shows that sex is a healthy outlet for anger. The clip allows girls to believe that its okay to hate someone you have sex with, and that having sex is better than resolving the underlying problems (Appendix III).

Likewise, another respondent stated that,

This [clip] may create for good drama in a show but it is in no way realistic. However it causes teens to think that its okay to have randomly have sex with anyone, even someone you despise, and causes teens to forget about the emotions involved (Appendix III).

Ultimately, survey respondents noted the dramatic motives behind entertainment television. While they may not be as susceptible to the hyper-reality created by
sexualized television, other non-media literate teenagers are less likely to be conscious of the discrepancies between televised fantasy and sexual reality.

Section I: Television Viewership

![Figure 1. Weekly television viewership of respondents.](image)

Results from Section I gaged the television viewership practices as well as the perceptions of what they were viewing. None of the respondents reported viewing 40 hours or more television a week; instead the research indicates that the majority of respondents, 75 percent, watch less than 20 hours of television a week (Figure 1). This statistic reflects Daniel, et al.’s (2008) findings that 60 percent of teenagers spent an average of 20 hours a week using the computer or watching television. The results also demonstrate while the majority of viewers, 81.25 percent, have viewed television content containing a theme of teen pregnancy, only 31.25 percent of them look to media outlets such as television programs for sexual education. Additionally, respondents were split between agreement and indecision on whether networks whose target audience are teenagers contained sexually explicit content. Of the 15 answers to this question, 33.33 percent strongly agreed with this statement, 46.67 percent agreed and 20 percent were
undecided. More specifically, MTV’s programs depicting “real-life” teen mothers, such as \textit{Teen Mom}, were seen as unrealistic as 31.25 percent strongly disagreeing with the statement that these shows accurately depicted the hardships of teen motherhood and 43.75 percent disagreeing with the statement. The following question garnered similar yet more conclusive results with 62.50 percent of respondents disagreeing with the statement that typically viewed television programs portray accurate and realistic sexual situations.

\textbf{Section II: Personal Experience}

Section II of the survey provided statistical background information on the sexual activity of the target audience. It attempted to address sensitive materials that focused on sexuality in the teen years without being too invasive. Section II was completed by about 77 percent of the 17 total respondents. The same number of people answered and skipped all three questions. This section of the survey reaped the highest response rate. The majority of participants claimed to be sexually active while the remaining 23.53 percent did not categorize themselves as such. It is important to note the lack of definition surrounding the term “sexually active”. Boudreault, Klein, Proctor and Turczyn’s (2002) ten-year study \textit{Healthy People 2010 Operational Definition} defines sexually active females as, “ …females who have had intercourse in the 3 months prior to interview” (p. 2). However, the glossary page of CancerCare Manitoba’s website (2013) defines sexually active as “both sexual intercourse and intimate genital contact”. Given the ambiguity of the term, the respondents’ response does not necessarily reflect the number of teenagers currently engaging in vaginal intercourse.

All 17 respondents answered in the negative regarding whether they had ever been pregnant or fathered a child. Furthermore, the majority of those surveyed felt that
their sexual experiences reflected the norm of others their age. Only 17.64 percent disagreed/strongly disagreed with this statement (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Answer to perceptions personal sexual experiences in relation to the “norm”.

Section III: Pregnancy

The three questions in Section III focused on teen pregnancy in as portrayed in current television media. This section does not explore personal pregnancy experiences due to the sensitivity of the subject. More specifically, MTV shows such as Teen Mom and 16 and Pregnant aim to depict the daily ‘reality ‘faced by many teen parents. However, other scripted television shows such as Glee and The Secret Life of the American Teenager have used teen pregnancy as a plot line. With teen pregnancy a common televised media staple, it is unsurprising that, as previously stated in Section I, 81.25 percent of survey participants have viewed a show with teen pregnancy as a theme.
On question ten, which asks if the respondent understand the possible consequences of having a child during their teenage years, 82.35 percent responded yes and 5.88 percent said no, with the remaining 11.76 percent responded that they don’t know/no response. The final question within this section asks for a response to the following statement, “I feel that recent media depictions of teen pregnancy glamourizes it and ignores the struggles that real teen mothers face on a daily basis.” Answers to this question were spread across the five Likert-type scale options. The majority, with 47.06 percent, agreed with the statement. While only 5.88 percent strongly agreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Glamorization of representation of teen pregnancy.](image)

Section IV: Media Observation Part I & II

In the final section of the survey, respondents were asked to answer three general questions regarding the impact of media representations of sex before viewing two video clips and responding to three questions per clip. Question 14 asks participants to rate their
response regarding whether or not television programs present realistic and accurate sexual scenarios, including the possible consequences of sex, to viewers. 81.25 percent disagreed. Nevertheless, when asked whether 25 percent claimed that the actions of television characters acting a specific way about sex/sexual situations impacted the way they felt about sex in real life, making it even with the opposing side, who disagreed with this statement. However, the majority of responses, 31.25 percent, strongly disagreed with this statement, with an additional 18.75 percent marking their answer as undecided.

Part II of Section IV starts with asking survey participants to a sex scene from ABC Family’s Pretty Little Liars. This clip was chosen due to the sexual scenario represented and because of the ABC Family’s desired target teen audience. This clip showed the first time sexual experience between one main character and her monogamous boyfriend. It was chosen to highlight a more emotional sexual scenario and as a foil to the second video clip presented in this section.

Following the clip, respondents were asked two close-ended questions. The first question asked whether respondents felt this clip represented a normal sexual interaction. In response, 50 percent of the 14 respondents agreed. 42.86 percent disagreed, leaving the remaining percentage undecided. Question 17, the second question of this section, asked whether participants felt the clip accurately portrayed the circumstances leading up to sex (i.e. need for protection, emotional involvement, etc.). Only 7.14 percent agreed. The remaining participants were split as follows: 21.43 percent strongly disagree, 50 percent disagree and 21.43 percent undecided. Finally, the last question of this section asked for an open-ended detail response. The final question asks survey participants to write a few sentences about their reaction to the clip focusing on whether it is relatable, believable or
realistic. It also asks what messages they take away from viewing this clip. Ten
participants wrote a few brief sentences in response to this question. The majority of
respondents claimed this first clip to be believable. One respondent described the scene
by stating, “The scene is believable, but it completely ignores the steps leading up to sex
that should happen. The message taken away from the clip is that the couple clearly loves
each other, but it also encourages young girls to partake in risky sexual behavior by not
showing use of protection” (Appendix II). Therefore, while the Pretty Little Liars clip
represented an emotional connection prior to a sexual scenario, it failed to emphasize the
precautionary steps prior to the act itself.

Clip two is a sex scene from the CW’s recently retired show Gossip Girl. This
clip depicts a racier sex scene, which the show is known for, within the love-hate
relationship of two main characters that have a rocky on and off relationship. During this
clip the characters are clearly not dating and their feelings are leaning towards hatred
rather than love. Again this clip was chosen based on the CW’s target teen audience as
well as previous media controversy over Gossip Girl’s sexual nature.

This particular couple and clip were highlighted in contrast to the previous video
clip. The nature of the relationship is outside the typical significant other relationship and
the sexual scenario is less focused on romance and more on lust. Participants were asked
the same previously asked questions. However, due to the significant difference in the
two clips, the answers varied greatly. For example, 85.71 percent of respondents did not
see the Gossip Girl clip as a typical sexual interaction. Moreover, no participants felt that
the scene accurately addressed the circumstances prior to intercourse. 64.29 percent
strongly disagreed while 21.43 percent disagreed and 14.29 percent were undecided about this statement (Figure 4).

In response to the final question of this survey, participants were asked to respond to the same open-ended question from the previous portion of this section. Like the previous clip, ten participants out of the 22 surveyed, responded to this section. Unlike in the previous section, the majority of respondents did not find this clip believable. One respondent stated,

This clip is not believable. The two people are obviously angry with one another and it shows that sex is a healthy outlet for anger. The clip allows girls to believe that it’s okay to hate someone you have sex with, and that having sex is better than resolving the underlying problems (Appendix III).

Another survey respondent echoed this statement by explaining that this particular clip causes teens to dismiss the emotional side of sex in favor of random sex with someone
anyone, even someone they hate (Appendix III). Overall, this clip demonstrated the riskier and more reckless side of sex in the fictional scripted television portrayal of teen-marketed sexuality while the *Pretty Little Liars* video excerpt represented the softer, more emotional sexual scenario. Neither clip was relatable to all the survey respondents nor did it properly emphasize the pre-sex steps necessary in these types of situations.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study confirmed Daniel, et al.’s (2008) findings that the majority of the teenage population spent 20 hours a week viewing television programming. Subsequently, the survey assessed the prevalence of teen pregnancy in current mass media. While shows like *Teen Mom* attempt to display the hardships and struggles faced by teen parents, the majority of participants felt these types of shows miss the mark. While the surveyed teens do not feel that these shows demonstrate real life teen pregnancy scenarios the majority of these teens stated that they still understood the possible consequences of having a baby during their teen years. So, while some teens may feel that current television media might not be a valuable, realistic learning tool on the topic of teen sex, teenagers in this study do not seem to be relying on television media for sexual education. While television may not be the sole or even dominant form of media literacy to teenagers, it is still a prevalent influence in their lives.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory bases the human experience on a series of interactions and perceptions of the surrounding world. Bandura (1977) explains how human beings in a given culture employ verification processes and thought in order to ascribe meaning to particular situations and relationships (p. 180). In a media saturated culture, modeling behaviors after visual
stimulus such as the actions of characters on a popular television program is a verification process in and of itself. Since the concept of social learning theory is the continuous interaction between people and their environment, television for the purposes of this study can be considered an environmental factor.

According to Bandura (1977), self-awareness and environmental cues are constructed from societal symbols as well as experimental processes (p. 180). While the cognitive process of direct experience does enforce social learning, Bandura (1977) also highlights that vicarious experiences are an additional method of social learning.

Considering television as an environmental factor, the characters in popular television series can be viewed as peers. Through the viewing of character drama and plot points, teens may model their own actions or assign meaning to specific occurrences based on the actions and reactions of these television peers. In Barry et al.’s (2008) idea of a “sexual super peer” television may be creating the norm for what many teens view as normal sexuality and experiences. Bandura (1977) describes vicarious verification as a way for an individual to check his or her own feelings and actions against an outside representation (p.181).

Using television as a reference point may enforce a false ideal of support Jordan, et al.’s (2009) soap opera sexual mentality. While Jordan et al. (2008) highlights how soap operas support the notion that “sex just happens”, results of this study show that participants are aware of the drama and fictional elements of these television programs. One respondent, after viewing the second video clip, explained that this situation is “not believable, not realistic. It’s a show” (Attachment 2). Both video clips included in this study neglected to present evidence of the steps leading up to sex. The situations
presented did not discuss the act itself, the need for protection or what it would mean for the relationship between the consenting parties. When asked whether or not they felt these clips demonstrated the circumstances leading up to sex that needed to be addressed, 85.72 percent of respondents strongly disagreed/disagreed.

Generally, participants displayed a level of media literacy, in the sense that they were aware of the difference between realistic sexual experiences and those created for entertainment purposes. Yet, one participant did point out that they know a few people who would believe these types of scenarios and attempt to recreate them. This highlights the possible education gap in media literacy. This study aimed to survey teenagers in a college environment. Therefore, they may have a deeper media education than an 18-year-old high school student. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the level of awareness the study participants displayed when reviewing the television clips.

It is important to note the drawbacks of this study. For the purposes of protecting anonymity of the survey participants due to the sensitive nature of the survey questions, no distinguishing or qualifying questions were asked. Therefore, no questions were asked regarding the age, gender or profession of participants. While college students were targeted for survey participation, due to the use of social media to distribute and increase the survey response rate, it was not a distinguishing factor. Instead, participants were asked to take the survey and then distribute it to any of their peers/friends within the desired age bracket. So, the survey population of this study may not be consistent with the desired survey population. Okay but in Chapter 5 I am going to ask you to go back to lit again and particularly the philosophical implications you used in Chapter 2.
Chapter 5: Summaries and Conclusions

Limitations of the Study

Like all studies, this method has limitations both within its conception and implementation. Although the original intention was to distribute the survey to college students and then use social media to further promote the survey to this desired audience, the survey was actually distributed primarily through social media connections. Therefore, it is important to note that the intended audience may not be the only demographic being surveyed. Due to the sensitive content, this survey was anonymous. Without the use of qualifying questions to gage the age, sex or other personal information, it is not possible to know the demographic of those surveyed. Originally, the survey aimed to study only college students within four universities in Washington and Oregon. However, due to lack of survey responses, the survey was distributed to contacts outside of the college environment. While this survey was distributed to the purposive audience of college students, these students were asked to distribute the survey link to their peers or friend in the 18-19 year old age range. College participation was not monitored. Furthermore, while the study aimed to survey college students, this is a small population of teenagers ages 18-19 in the Pacific Northwest. Nevertheless, this was part of the original survey design in order to narrow the focus of the study.

A principal aspect of this study was the aim to target college students for their response. College students were chosen as the small target population for study not only to narrow the survey results but also for their knowledge of media literacy.
Ultimately the survey garnered a total of 22 responses. Since participation in each question was strictly voluntary and respondents had the option to skip any question, only 14 of the 22 survey responses were complete. In addition, this study was limited due the presentation vessel used. Using an online-based survey attempted to increase the number of survey responses, limit concerns over embarrassment due to the survey content and increase accessibility to the survey content. Conclusions from the Jones et al. (2002) study showed that many college students rely upon the Internet for both educational and communication purposes. In creating this study, the survey focused on using a forum that would easily be accessible and allow for anonymous responses. However, relying upon an Internet-based survey does have limitations. Using EsurveyPros.com as the survey home limits responses to those who have Internet and computer access.

While this survey design intended to measure teen perceptions on sexual television content, it did not tackle any additional factors that may influence teen views on sexual content. These things might include previous sexual experience, media literacy education or exposure to real life instances of teen pregnancy. Participants were asked for their perceptions about whether or not sexual television portrayals accurately represent realistic occurrences, but not why they feel one way or another. Further study may be needed to examine the social, environmental or psychological factors that influence these responses.

In conclusion, this survey did not aim to answer the research questions through intensive background information in regards to the personal sexual experiences of the demographic surveyed. The results of this survey are meant to gage audience perception and awareness of sexual television content. These results should not be used to generalize
opinions of 18 to 19 year olds in the Pacific Northwest area. Due to a limited response rate, the survey results do reflect the audience’s level of media awareness and reaction to sexual content as portrayed on television and in the outside world. Generalizations such as the reasoning for the level of media literacy of respondents or exposure to sexuality in participant routines (i.e. daily lives) were outside the scope of this study.

Further Study of Recommendations

In response to question 15, “Seeing characters in popular television shows acting a certain way about sex influences how I feel about sex and sexuality in real life”, 56.25 percent of respondents strongly disagreed/disagreed. While this is the majority of respondents, 25 percent still agreed that viewing popular television characters act a particular way in regards to sex influenced their views on the subject. While this research did conclude that the majority of participants recognized the difference between presented sexual occurrences and real life sexual scenarios, further research may shed light on how influential television media is on subconscious comparisons or peer pressure.

Specifically, further research is recommended on analyzing the connection between media representations of sex and Bandura’s (1977) vicarious verification. Although Bandura explains how media depictions can be used as a vehicle for behavioral verification. Basically, teens could watch a television program where the characters act a certain way and then use this representation to affirm/dismiss their own actions or beliefs. Although this study demonstrated a that respondent’s held a basic level of media literacy, it did not ask participants to describe scenarios in which they would use sexual television depictions to either affirm or deny their own actions. Further research may seek to
explore the circumstance in which Bandura’s (1977) vicarious verification perpetuates or negates teen sexual behavior and choices.

Another area of research that may be explored developed out of a single open-ended question response. One participant claimed that, “Honestly, I watch too much HBO and Showtime for this clip to affect me.” With shows such as those shown on HBO containing graphic sexual scenarios, are viewers being desensitized to the less graphic sex scenes shown on primetime television? In an article in the Los Angeles Times, Flint (2013) describes a graphic portrayal of rough sex in HBO’s series *Girls*. The scene depicts rough sex between a new couple and ends with “...a shot of his bodily fluid on her chest” (Flint, 2013). When asked about the graphic nature of this scene an HBO spokesperson stated that, “*Girls’ has a raw honesty that viewers appreciate” (Flint, 2013). While HBO’s *Girls* centers on girls in their 20s, a younger demographic is also being reached. In reference to this younger crowd, Flint (2013) states,

> To younger viewers, who have been exposed to graphic sexual images via the Internet for years, any concern over the scene might be seen as much ado about nothing. On social media, the scene was talked about -- but not as much as a scene in which Dunham's character Hannah injures her ear with a Q-tip. The reaction may be an indication of "an increasingly desensitized audience," said Ben Carlson, co-creator and president of Fizziology, a firm that analyzes social media to gauge audience sentiment.

As the participant of this study claimed, the less graphic and more staged sexual productions seen in television programs shown on channels like the CW or ABC family are not as shocking as some of the other programs out there. If HBO programming is
going to be more appealing to a younger generation, it may be important to examine how viewing strong, more realistic sexual scenarios influences teen views on their own sexual experiences. Additional research may also shed light on how teenagers compare staged ‘realistic’ sex scenes to those more stylized instances of sex as seen in shows like those used for this survey.

**Conclusions**

Both Bandura (1977) and Hall (as cited in During, 1999) have created theories concerning the presence and influence of media on society. Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory believes human behavior is created and perpetuated through interaction both on an individual and environmental level. In the multimedia age, learned behaviors can be created through exposure to media depictions of society. Evidence from this survey supports Bandura’s (1977) beliefs regarding observational learning in a media heavy environment. However, the results of this study seem to demonstrate that, due to an awareness of the unrealistic nature of many television programs, teenagers in this study are aware of the “norm” depicted is unrealistic. In response to the two video clips teenagers sensed that there were portions of normal sexual behaviors missing. For example, the discussion of protection is something untouched by both video clips. However, the respondents did not seem to believe that unprotected sex was the norm being represented.

Similarly, Hall’s (During, 1999) theory of encoding/decoding supports how teens are now becoming more comfortable with televised sexual representations. Through social coding, sex scenes, like the scene depicted in the ABC Family *Pretty Little Liars* video clip shown for the survey, can be ingrained into media culture as being “near
Continuous exposure to these types of sexual scenarios on television has desensitized viewers. Regardless of the lack of discussion on sexual consequences (pregnancy, STDs, etc.) 50 percent of survey respondents felt this was a normal sexual interaction. While participants did not feel that this clip accurately discussed the circumstance leading up to sex, they still felt this was realistic and believable. Therefore, this type of emotional sexual connection is seen as the dominant media message. Like Hall (During, 1999) explains, this dominant message reflects the norm rather than the cultural reality. The cultural reality those surveyed expressed was one in which sexual precautions were discussed, and yet, they still positively responded to the normalness of the video clip behavior.

Furthermore, philosophical and ethical assumptions influence people personally and socially in the way they interact with their surroundings and those within it. As Marsh (2006) explains, technology has become interwoven with daily society. Marsh (2006) states that current society has entered a new multimedia age. In relation to Aristotle’s rhetoric, March (2006) emphasized the importance of broaching a new process of media literacy. Given the continuous development and saturation of media in society, media awareness should be available as a type of education. Aristotle’s rhetoric similarly calls for an awareness of the motives behind the manipulation. Teens in this survey demonstrated an awareness of the sexual messages as crafted for television viewership. An awareness of what they were viewing and the reasons they were viewing it seemed to indicate that the respondents of this survey were not as susceptible to blind media manipulation. While they may be influenced by what they see, they were aware that the point of television is to project a fantasy for their entertainment. Yet, one respondent
made it clear that their level of media literacy is not commonplace. They explained that they know some people who would see the media representation as the norm. These people may misunderstand the purpose behind television content; it is a product to be marketed. Therefore, Aristotle’s rhetoric is enforced through the call for education. Media literacy explores the nature of media motives as well as explores how specific behaviors may be enforced through viewership. While not all teens may see how the media inspires their behavior, it still does. Media is becoming the norm behavior and the majority of teens in this study have watched sex on television. So, in a technological age, television could be viewed as a gifted speaking, working to market something to the public. Without proper awareness, the public is unable to understand either the medium or the message properly.

Overall, teen sexual health is increasingly being highlighted in media. The ease of accessibility created by the media era allows for constant contact with sexuality. With this influx of sexual content, what are teens thinking? The results of this study indicate that teen survey respondents in the Pacific Northwest are aware of the sexual content they are viewing and take it at face value. The sex may be unrealistic, but they know that. Presentations may leave out the dire consequences of unprotected sex, but they know there are in fact consequences. However, these teens have made it clear that there are those who may misinterpret media messages as fact. So, in order to properly educate teens on the content they are viewing, media literacy is a necessary educational tool. Given this speed of media change and the various influences on teenage interpretation, this study did not come to a solid conclusion regarding whether or not teen pregnancy is
linked to media sexual saturation. However, this research does reflect various teen interpretations on modern television presentations of sex.
References


Appendix I

Media & Teen Sexual Health Introduction

This survey is part of an overall communication thesis, and is being administered in order to explore the impact of media portrayals of teen pregnancy on teen (ages 18-19 years old) perception of sexual health. In addition, this survey attempts to better understand the impact of sexual situations as presented in teen marketed media on ideals of "norm" behavior.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary and anonymous. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the entirety of this response and no information from this survey will identify you as a participant. You are also free to skip any of the 21 questions if you do not wish to answer and stop taking this survey at any time.

Television Viewership

Using the scales provided below each question, please rate your level of agreement. Simple check the number that most clearly represents your opinion.

1. About how many hours of television do you watch a week?
   a. Less than 20 hours
   b. About 20 hours or more
   c. 40 hours or more

2. Have you ever watched a television program that featured teen pregnancy as a theme (i.e. Teen Mom, 16 and Pregnant, etc.)
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t Know/No Response

3. The majority of my education on teen pregnancy comes from media outlets like television programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Most teen marketed television programs (i.e. shows on the CW Network, MTV, etc.) contain sexually explicit content in the majority of the episodes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. The hardships of teen pregnancy are accurately portrayed in shows like Teen Mom and 16 and Pregnant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. I feel that most television shows I watch accurately represent common and realistic sexual situations and the possible consequences sex can result in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personal Experience

7. Would you consider yourself sexually active?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t Know/No Response

8. Have you ever been pregnant/fathered a child?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t Know/No Response

9. I feel that my sexual experiences are the norm for people my age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pregnancy

10. I understand the possible consequences of having a baby during my teen years.

   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t Know/No Response

11. The hardships of teen pregnancy are accurately portrayed in shows like Teen Mom and 16 and Pregnant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. I feel that recent media depictions of teen pregnancy glamourizes it and ignores the struggles that real teen mothers face on a daily basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Media Observations

13. Most teen marketed television programs (i.e. shows on the CW Network, MTV, etc.) contain sexually explicit content in the majority of the episodes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. I feel that most television shows I watch accurately represent common and realistic sexual situations and the possible consequences sex can result in.
15. Seeing characters in popular television shows acting a certain way about sex influences how I feel about sex and sexuality in real life.

16. I feel that this scene depicts a normal sexual interaction
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t Know/No Response

17. I feel this clip accurately portrays the circumstances leading up to sex (i.e. need for protection, risk of STDs, emotional involvement in sex, etc.).

18. In the space provided below, please write a few sentences about your reaction to this clip. Is it relatable or believable? Is it realistic? What messages do you take away from viewing this clip?

   Sex scene from CW’s Gossip Girl
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7khI3Ofqwk4

19. I feel that this scene depicts a normal sexual interaction.

20. I feel this clip accurately portrays the circumstances leading up to sex (i.e. need for protection, risk of STDs, emotional involvement in sex, etc.).
21. In the space provided below, please write a few sentences about your reaction to this clip. Is it relatable or believable? Is it realistic? What messages do you take away from viewing this clip?
Appendix II

Survey participant response to Section IV, Part II video clip question 18

1. The clip is relatable and believable. The only thing missing is that often times people will decide to use a condom if it is a newer sexual partner. I take away that sex is normal for many people from this clip.

2. I feel like this clip is believable but it's definitely not realistic, and does not show them taking any of the precautions such as using protection. From this clip, I feel like it shows younger girls that you can just jump into bed with a guy on a whim whenever you feel like it and it won't have any consequences.

3. I feel like they did a good job depicting the emotional side of sex, but didn't touch on the risk factors.

4. Honestly, I watch too much HBO and Showtime for this clip to affect me. I think it is realistic I have met people that dumb.

5. It's believable, not relatable for me because I am not and never have been sexually active. I am uncomfortable with the student-teacher relationship.

6. I think the music is what makes it seem the most not realistic. The circumstances leading up to sex are not shown, but they could be shown earlier in the episode/show's plot.

7. I found it relatable and believable, but it definitely overlooked the necessary steps that need to be taken leading up to sex.

8. I think a lot of couples have unprotected sex. However, many girls are on birth control these days. Since this scene doesn't show the actual moment of intercourse, we don't know if they are protection or not and I feel in this situation many people would be caught up in the moment and grab a condom before actual intercourse occurred. We know Aria and Ezra are in an exclusive relationship and thus are not making a bad decision. They want to give themselves to each other and I honestly don't think this is a bad portrayal of how and when intercourse should occur.

9. It's what every girl wants a relationship to be like and what they want having sex to be like but in reality most people don't have an experience similar to this. Television shows depict relationships between two people in such a way to catch the attention of the viewer instead of showing real life experiences. I feel this portrayal encourages girls to seek this ideal of the 'perfect sexual experience' and causes them to desire this 'norm' presented by the media which leads teens to think that their first sexual experience will be as perfect as this one, when if reality that is not true. The scene is believable, but it completely ignores the steps leading up to sex that should happen. The message taken away from the clip is that the couple clearly loves each other, but it also encourages young girls to partake in risky sexual behavior by not showing use of protection.
Appendix III

Survey participant response to Section IV, Part II video clip question 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 1. Sex Scene from CW's Gossip Girl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. In the space provided below, please write a few sentences about your reaction to this clip. Is it relatable or believable? Is it realistic? What messages do you take away from viewing this clip?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  This is not believable. No one acts that dramatically before hooking up usually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  I feel the same way about the last clip, but I feel like the Gossip Girl clip is even more unrelatable and unrealistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Again, the dialogue before this clip is worlds away from realistic, but I genuinely believe there are people dumb enough to recreate the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Not relatable, believable, or realistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  I think that this scene glamorizes sex more than the other clip. It was also much more graphic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  This clip is not a believable representation of sex. I would not cross reference this clip for an expectation about sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  This is not realistic or normal. They obviously have sexual tension but they are not together or in love and have probably been having sex with other people as well. Though they may actually love each other, you can't have hate without love after all, they should not just be randomly having sex with each other. However I have never been in a position where I have had an ex I've had sex with so I cannot truly relate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  This scene completely disregards the emotional involvement in sex. It is simply to people that opening hate each other but for some reason still have this overwhelming sexual tension between them. This may create for good drama in a show but it is in no way realistic. However it causes teens to think that its okay to have randomly have sex with anyone, even someone you despise, and causes teens to forget about the emotions involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  This clip is not believable. The two people are obviously angry with one another and it shows that sex is a healthy outlet for anger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 not believable, not realistic. It's a show.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>