

Adolescent health brief

Music Videos, Pro Wrestling, and Acceptance of Date Rape among Middle School Males and Females: An Exploratory Analysis

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Abstract

Exposure to televised music videos and pro wrestling were associated with rape acceptance (lower levels of agreeing with the statement “forcing a partner to have sex is never OK”) among males, but not females, in a sample of 904 middle school students (controlling for overall television exposure, parenting style, and demographics). © 2007 Society for Adolescent Medicine. All rights reserved.

The relationship between violent television viewing and antisocial behaviors is well established [1]. Although few media studies have focused on exposure and outcomes directly related to sexual violence, the existing evidence of a connection is worrisome [2]. Experimental studies of exposure to sexually violent or demeaning movie scenes report similar results among males: desensitization to media violence, increased acceptance of aggression against women and rape myths, and blaming of victims [3–5]. Such studies, however, have focused on older subjects (e.g., college students) and R- or X-rated films rather than other kinds of programming. No studies have examined the association between sexually violent mainstream television and sexual violence attitudes among young adolescents.

Both music videos and pro wrestling shows are popular with youth, combine violent and sexual content, and glorify individuals who behave violently [2,6,7]. More frequent viewing of music videos and pro wrestling has been associated with sexual activity and fighting [2,8]. However, it is not known if these exposures are related to coercive sexual activities or opinions about sexual violence. This analysis examines whether exposure to music videos and pro wres-

ting is associated with adolescents endorsing the idea that forcing a dating partner to have sex is acceptable.

Methods

Sample

Analyses are based on data from 462 female and 442 male students in seventh and eighth grade (ages 12–15 years) who completed the Teen Media Project health survey. Respondents were recruited from three Southeastern U.S. public school districts that included urban, suburban and rural populations. The Teen Media Project has been described in detail elsewhere [9]. Protocols were approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board.

Measures

Rape acceptance. Students were asked whether they agreed strongly, agreed, disagreed, or disagreed strongly with the statement: “forcing a dating partner to have sex is never OK.” Rape acceptance was the extent to which students did not agree with the statement.

Media exposure. Students reported the number of days in the past week they watched music videos and the number of days in the past week they watched pro wrestling. They also reported average overall weekly television watching. Because measures of hours spent watching television or any

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Table 1
Media exposures, parenting styles, and demographics of study sample females and males

	Females (n = 462)	Males (n = 442)
Agreement with statement “forcing a dating partner to have sex is never OK”		
Strongly agree	84.6%	64.9%
Agree	6.3%	20.8%
Disagree	2.2%	4.5%
Disagree strongly	6.9%	9.7%
Media use		
Music video watching in past week, Mean	4.7 days (SD 2.7)	4.0 days (SD 2.9)
Pro wrestling watching in past week, Mean	1.2 days (SD 2.2)	1.7 days (SD 2.5)
Average television watching per week, Mean	4.7 days (SD .9)	4.7 days (SD .9)
Parenting style		
Hands-off parenting	19.5%	26.9%
Half-hearted parenting	44.6%	46.2%
Hands-on parenting	35.9%	26.9%
Demographics		
Age, Mean	13.6 years (SD .7)	13.8 years (SD .7)
Black Race	51.1%	50.0%
Free School Lunch	32.0%	29.6%

SD = standard deviation.

genre on television are suspect, given difficulty in estimating precise viewing time, the less specific measure of days exposed was used. This measure allows relative comparisons within the sample. Because exposure may vary from day to day and between weekdays and weekends, we asked about days spent with each exposure over a seven-day period.

Parenting. We used a three-category parenting style variable based on responses to a series of questions about parental monitoring, rules, and expectations for their child’s behavior, including media use (“hands-off,” “half-hearted” and “hands-on” parenting). Questions included, “On weekends, do you have to be home by a particular time at night?” and “How often do your parents or guardians try to monitor what you watch on TV?”

Demographics. Students reported their age in years and race (Black or White); receipt of free or reduced price school lunch (yes or no) served as a measure of socioeconomic status.

Statistical analyses

Ordinal logistic regressions of acceptance of date rape on exposure to music videos and pro wrestling on television were

performed, controlling for overall weekly television exposure, parenting style, and demographics. Interaction terms between predictors were tested.

Results

Although most students rejected date rape as acceptable, an alarming number did not strongly agree that forcing a dating partner to have sex is never OK (Table 1). The interaction term between race and gender was significant ($p = .039$), supporting stratification by gender. All other tests of heterogeneity were insignificant ($p > .05$). Black race predicted acceptance of rape among females, but not males. Among both genders, parenting style was significant, with “hands-off” parenting associated most strongly with acceptance of rape compared with “hands-on” parenting (Table 2). Age and receiving a free school lunch were not significant and were dropped from final models.

Neither music videos nor pro wrestling was significantly associated with acceptance of rape for females. Among males, however, both were significant predictors (Table 2). The odds of a greater level of rape acceptance for a male

Table 2
Odds ratios (OR) of accepting date rape for females and males based on ordinal logistic regression models

	Females (n = 462) OR (95% CI)	Males (n = 442) OR (95% CI)
Music video watching (Days/week)	1.06 (.93, 1.21)	1.10 (1.01, 1.19)*
Pro wrestling watching (Days/week)	1.02 (.91, 1.13)	1.10 (1.01, 1.20)*
Average television watching (Days/week)	.86 (.62, 1.19)	.94 (.75, 1.18)
Hands-off parenting (Reference hands-on)	3.05 (1.49, 6.26)*	2.14 (1.21, 3.81)*
Half-hearted parenting (Reference hands-on)	1.54 (.80, 3.00)	2.22 (1.32, 3.74)*
Black race (Reference white)	2.74 (1.46, 5.14)*	1.06 (.67, 1.68)

* p -Value < .05.

who watches music videos or wrestling a day per week was a factor of 1.10 (10%) higher than the odds for a male watching no days. A male watching music videos on four days and pro wrestling on 1.7 days per week (mean exposures for males) would have an odds ratio of 1.70 (95% confidence interval 1.01–2.75), or 70% higher odds of endorsing a greater level of rape acceptance, compared with a male who watched none.

Discussion

Our results demonstrate, for the first time for young adolescents, that exposure to commonly viewed television content combining sex and violence may negatively influence the development of sexual norms that reject rape. Previous studies of media exposure and rape attitudes have focused on college students. This is unfortunate; the many developmental differences between middle school and college students do not allow generalizing from one group to the other. We found that watching music videos and pro wrestling is associated with increased acceptance of date rape among males in seventh and eighth grade, but not among females. Black females were more likely than white females to accept date rape, but a race difference was not evident for males. The meaning of this difference is unclear, but merits additional study.

It is important to recognize the bidirectional nature of media use when interpreting our results. An adolescent's sense of self may influence media selection and interpretation. For example, the association between media content and rape acceptance among males but not females is consistent with research indicating that adolescent females are more critical of televised pro wrestling [10]. The circular process of media selection, interpretation, and incorporation, and the role of individual characteristics such as personality, make drawing conclusions about causality in non-experimental media studies difficult.

This analysis used a single-item measure of rape acceptance and should be considered a preliminary step to spur further research in this understudied area of mainstream media effects on youth rape attitudes. Future research may benefit from prospective longitudinal designs that include precise measures of duration and type of exposure to sexual violence. Additional research is needed to examine rape perpetration outcomes and to incorporate more elaborate

scales of complex cultural constructs such as sexism and rape myths to illuminate the mechanisms at work.

Attitudes about rape may have repercussions beyond whether a person becomes sexually coercive, such as implications for the healing process of survivors and for the criminal justice system that relies on jurors' perceptions. To reduce date rape acceptance, we recommend steps that will encourage and enable parents to take a "hands-on" approach to monitoring their children's media use, such as improvements in the current television rating system and further development of media literacy and sex education programs that help parents engage their children in discussions about media and sexual violence.

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