

## **PART II**

# **Sexualizing Products**



## Chapter 8

# Sexual Content of Television Commercials Watched by Early Adolescents

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When Justin Timberlake ripped Janet Jackson's bodice, exposing her breast during the MTV-produced Super Bowl half-time show in 2004, parents, educators, and network executives entered into a heated debate about appropriate content for national network television. Comments typically ranged from outrage to a simple shrug; the concern generally centered on younger viewers who were unwittingly exposed to the daring stunt. The incident also focused attention on the program's advertising as being crass, oversexualized, and inappropriate for young audiences (Smith & Simon, 2004). Fallout from this media "event" highlights how little we know about the content of television that children consume—and that we know even less about the content of embedded commercials in those programs. This chapter attempts to close that gap by focusing on one specific age group—early adolescents—and the sexual content of the commercials that run during their most-watched shows.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Sex in the Media

Sexual images in the media have long been a concern of mass media researchers. Much of the early research concentrated on the content analysis of sex on prime-time television in an attempt to paint an accurate picture of the type and amount of sexual content portrayed during the most heavily watched time slot.

Spanning the second half of the 1970s, these analyses established that sex was primarily portrayed through reference and innuendo (Franzblau,

Sprafkin, & Rubinstein, 1977), and that the incidence of such references generally increased from year to year (Greenberg, Graef, Fernandez-Collado, Korzenny, & Atkin, 1980; Sapolsky, 1982; Silverman, Sprafkin, & Rubinstein, 1979). Throughout the 1980s, analyses indicated that the incidence of sexual content in television programming rose consistently. For the first time, actors seemingly engaging in sexual intercourse, formerly portrayed exclusively through reference, were depicted directly (Lowry & Shidler, 1993; Sapolsky & Tabarlet, 1991). Even though television's portrayal of sexual content increased, its portrayal of the risks and possible negative consequences of sexual activity remained infrequent (Lowry & Shidler, 1993).

The 1990s witnessed an explosion of televised sexual content not only in prime-time broadcast television but also across time periods and cable channels. Over time, television depicted or strongly implied sexual intercourse with increasing frequency (Kunkel & Cope, 1999; Kunkel et al., 1999). By 2000, a Kaiser Family Foundation study found that the incidence of sexual content on television had risen to two out of every three shows and that these shows averaged more than four scenes with sexual content per hour; in addition, in all shows depicting sexual behavior, only one in 10 made reference to the risks and responsibilities of sexual activity (Kunkel, Cope-Farrar, Biely, Farinola, & Donnerstein, 2001; see also Farrar et al., 2003).

### Sex in Advertising

Since the late 1960s, the use of sex in advertising—a controversial practice much discussed among practitioners, scholars, activists, and the public—has also been investigated. Seminal studies analyzed the effects of nudity in print advertisements: who among viewers responded to the sexual appeal and how the appeal affected brand recall and viewer attitudes toward the brand (Alexander & Judd, 1978; Steadman, 1969). In comparative analyses of sexual portrayals in magazine advertisements in 1964 and 1984, scholars found that while the percentage of sexual appeals did not increase, the types of sexual portrayals did, with the sexual appeal becoming more overt (Soley & Kurzbard, 1986). In addition, women were portrayed in a sexually suggestive manner more in 1984 than in 1964, a reflection the authors attributed to “[c]hanges in society's sexual attitudes and behaviors” (Soley & Reid, 1988, p. 966).

In a comparison of magazine advertisements in 1983 and 1993, scholars found a significant increase in the proportion of sexual appeals, with both genders portrayed more explicitly, although women were three times as likely as men to be portrayed as such (Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen, & Zavoina, 1999). While the preponderance of sex appeal

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studies has centered on magazine advertisements, attention has turned more recently to the use of sex appeals in television commercials. For example, Lin (1998) found that while the sexual appeal accounted for a small fraction of television commercial appeals, three fourths of sexual appeals in the sample presented women as sex objects.

In addition to the sexual appeal, the depiction of gender roles has been a major research interest related to the study of sex in advertising. A prevailing assumption is that constant exposure to stereotyped gender roles in the mass media fosters and reinforces gender-typed views and behaviors. In a pioneering analysis of television commercials, McArthur and Resko (1975) found that men appeared more frequently than women and that women were portrayed as lacking expertise and independent identities. Follow-up studies revealed that while women were portrayed as frequently in television commercials as men by the mid-1980s (Bretl & Cantor, 1988), voiceovers were dominantly male (Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Knill, Pesch, Pursey, Gilpin, & Perloff, 1981; Lovdal, 1989), and women were mainly portrayed in the conventional roles of mother and housewife (Knill et al., 1981; Lovdal, 1989). These studies also reveal that a significant proportion of women are portrayed as sex objects. For example, a study of gender roles in magazine ads found symbolic and institutionalized sexism (Cortese, 1999), while an analysis of portrayals of women in ads in 15 years of *Ms.* magazine found that, even though *Ms.* policy precludes the publication of ads harmful or insulting to women, advertising in the magazine increasingly portrayed women as sex objects (Ferguson, Kreshel, & Tinkham, 1990).

### **The Role of the Media in the Lives of Children and Teens**

Furthermore, in recent years, scholars have begun to systematically examine the role of the media—including advertising—in the lives of children and teens. Many researchers have been concerned in particular with the media's portrayal of sexual behavior and its effect on beliefs and attitudes. As early as 1963, Bandura and Walters suggested that children and adolescents, due to a lack of other information sources, turn to the mass media to learn about sexual behavior. As Bandura's (1977) conception of social learning theory suggests, adolescents are neither the passive dupes of the media nor complete free agents in choosing how the media will and will not influence their behaviors, attitudes, and actions. Rather, adolescent behavior is the result of "a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants" (Bandura, 1977, p. vii). Subsequent research has confirmed that the media serve as the primary sex educators in American culture (Courtright & Baran, 1980). As Brown and Keller (2000)

asserted, "The mass media—television, music, magazines, movies and the Internet—are important sex educators. Yet, the media seldom have been concerned with the outcome of their ubiquitous sexual lessons" (p. 255).

The prevailing theme in most studies of children and teens is that the sexual images in the media tend to be harmful to impressionable minds. Knowing that teens watch an average of 6 hours of television a day (Klein et al., 1993) causes concern when researchers also know there is a significant relationship between the proportion of sexual matter an adolescent views on television and the level of his or her sexual experience (Brown & Newcomer, 1991). A recent survey of teens by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2002) revealed that nearly three out of four (72%) teens believe sex on TV influences the sexual behavior of their peers, while only one in four (22%) believes it influences their own behavior. When television programming presented mixed messages about sexual behavior, children received confused messages, and even when programs did not explicitly concern sex but included sexual references, children still received sexual messages (Kaiser Family Foundation & Children Now, 1996). In a study of college-age women, Ward (2002) found that regular television viewing predicted subjects' sexual attitudes and assumptions. Other studies have suggested that the media's presentation of the thin body ideal may negatively affect teens' self- and body-esteem (Botta, 1999; Irving, 1990).

A central concern among effects researchers is the media's relative reluctance to portray the negative consequences of risky sexual behavior. Many recent content analyses of prime-time television programming have shown that these programs rarely discuss or portray controversial issues such as sexually transmitted diseases, the use of condoms, AIDS, homosexuality, and unintended pregnancy (Cope-Farrar & Kunkel, 2002; Kunkel, Cope, & Colvin, 1996; Truglio, 1998). Other concerns focus on the context in which sexual attitudes or behavior is depicted. Pardun (2002) found that while little overt sexual behavior occurred in the movies most watched by teens, most romance was depicted without context between couples who either did not know each other well or were not in committed relationships. Indeed, the media's portrayal of sexual behaviors and attitudes can serve as scripts for young people as they learn about themselves as sexual beings (Brown, White, & Nikopoulou, 1993; Cope-Farrar & Kunkel, 2002; Ward, 1995). Therefore, as the American Academy of Pediatrics and others have repeatedly suggested, advocacy for responsible media portrayals of sexual content and the introduction of media literacy programs in schools would do much to empower children and adolescents to make healthy sexual choices (Brown & Keller, 2000; Committee on Communications, 1995; Committee on Public Education, 2001a, 2001b; Hogan, 2000).

However, the literature exploring the effects of sexual media on children and teens is rather incomplete and inconclusive. Few studies, for example,

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have examined in detail the sexual images that are portrayed. Kunkel and Cope studied the sexual content of family-hour programming over three decades (in 1976, 1986, and 1996), but did not study in depth the context in which sexual content was depicted (1999). Further, the preponderance of studies has focused on sexual content in television programming (Cope-Farrar & Kunkel, 2002; Kunkel et al., 1996; Truglio, 1998; Ward, 1995), while relatively few have focused on television advertising or other media.

Although a number of studies use ethnically diverse and gender inclusive samples of the U.S. teen population when studying effects (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002; Kaiser Family Foundation & Children Now, 1996; Ward, 2002), few have examined the differential effects between genders or among ethnic groups. In addition, few scholars have used media lists that were derived from the population itself. More common is to use published lists, such as Nielsen data or magazine lists of top-grossing films, to determine the television programs (Cope-Farrar & Kunkel, 2002; Ward, 1995) and movies (Greenberg et al., 1993) teens most attend. While media critics have castigated the advertising industry for the negative effects of much advertising content—including sexual content—on children and teens (Committee on Communications, 1995), relatively few studies have actually examined the advertising that appears within the programs that these early adolescents (12-to-14-year-olds) watch. The following questions were advanced as an initial effort to inform this area of research:

- RQ1: What types of sexual imagery are found in television commercials embedded in television programs that early adolescents indicate they watch regularly?
- RQ2: What are the differences in exposure to sexual content according to race or gender?

### METHOD

The present analysis is part of the Teen Media Study, a much larger project funded by the National Institute for Child Health and Development. Teen Media, a 5-year longitudinal examination of the impact of media on adolescents' sexual health, gathered and analyzed data from adolescents about their media usage and health, and content analyzed sexual content in adolescents' frequently viewed television programs, movies, CDs, magazines, newspapers, and Internet sites. Analyses indicate that adolescents' sexual media diets are significantly associated with their sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

In the first phase of the study, 3,250 seventh and eighth graders (65% of the sample surveyed) were asked several questions about their media use, including the television programs they watched on a regular basis (L'Engle,

**TABLE 8.1**  
**Type and Proportion of Sexual Content in Commercials**  
**Aired During Programs Most Watched by Early**  
**Adolescents**

<i>Type of sexual content</i>	<i>Percentage of total sexual content in commercial</i>
Sexual emphasis on body	61.8
Light romantic touch	17.6
Dating and relationships	11.5
Sexual innuendo (verbal)	5.1
Marriage	3.6
Passionate kissing	2.3
Reference to sexual intercourse	1.2
Public health messages (sex-related)	0.6
Crushes or flirting	0.3

Pardun, & Brown, 2004). Respondents chose from a list of 140 television programs, which was created by combining Nielsen lists, focus-group results, and a program list derived from pilot testing with the seventh and eighth graders not in the major study. The teens were also given an opportunity to report any additional programs not on the list that they viewed regularly. For this current study, each television program that was mentioned by at least 10% of each subgroup (boys, girls, Blacks, and Whites) was included in the sample. This sampling method yielded 71 programs. Our test sample comprised one episode of each program aired in the fall of 2001 that was collected as closely as possible to the time the teens completed the questionnaires. These 71 episodes collectively contained a total of 1,783 commercials, each of which was analyzed for sexual content (see Table 8.1).

Sexual content was categorized in several ways. We began with a protocol first developed by Kunkel et al. (1999), which focuses on risks and responsibilities of sexual messages. We expanded the protocol to include sexual issues that would have particular interest to early adolescents (12-to-14-year-olds). For example, we allowed for "lighter" sexual encounters (such as light kissing and flirtations). In addition, we specifically searched for positive sexual health messages that would be pertinent to teens such as pregnancy prevention, negative consequences of unplanned sex, and healthy relationships between committed partners.

The unit of analysis was a camera cut, which could be as short as 1 or 2 seconds. Nearly one fourth of the televised sexual content (both commercials and content) was double coded to calculate Scott's *pi* for intercoder reliability. The sexual content was coded at two levels: manifest and latent. Manifest content consisted of overt sexual characteristics such as "crushes

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or flirting," "light kissing," "reference to sexual intercourse," and "dating," as well as long-term relationships (for example, a commercial depicting a married couple and anniversary diamond rings). In addition, the manifest categories accounted for emphasis on the body in a sexual way, which included nudity or partial nudity and revealing clothing. A separate category for sexual innuendo was created that allowed for innuendo (e.g., "size really does matter") common in advertising content.

Latent content represented a deeper description of the coding choice selected from the manifest category. For example, if "dating" was chosen, then second-level coding would be a choice between "pleasurable consensual relationship between married couple," "pleasurable consensual relationship between unmarried couple," or "divorce or deteriorating relationship." Manifest content categories resulted in a Scott's *pi* of .85, and latent content achieved a reliability of .84. Because the unit of analysis (a camera cut) was so brief, only one dominant theme for manifest and latent content was coded for each unit.

## RESULTS

*Research question 1:* In the 1,783 commercials examined in this study, a total of 1,796 sexual incidences were identified and analyzed. Each examined episode of the adolescents' favorite television programs was found to have at least one commercial with sexual content. Nearly two thirds of the sexual content in the commercials (61.8%) sexually emphasized the body. The second most common category (17.6%) represented light romantic touches. There were only eight incidences of passionate kissing in the entire sample, and only one incident involving sexual intercourse. Even sexual innuendo, which is often part of the negative critique of "sex in advertising," represented only 5.1% of advertised sexual content.

As previously discussed, much of the advertising literature criticizes the objectification of women in advertising. Therefore, it would be logical to predict that the majority of commercials featuring an emphasis on the body would be focused on women. While this study does reveal that sexualized body instances were mostly of women (58%), it should be noted that 37.5% of the content focused on men, and 12.6% focused on both genders equally. This, of course, may not mean that women are less objectified than in the past, but that male models are now experiencing objectification. Further research would be needed to explore this nuance.

Because many scholars consider the media as a social learning tool for adolescents, we were particularly interested to note how couples were portrayed in the commercials. There were 536 incidences of couples shown in the commercials. Out of those, only 11.9% of the interactions between the couples showed the couple as married; conversely, 88.1% of the incidences

were unmarried couples. In addition, when the incident depicted a couple (married or unmarried), it was coded as to whether either partner expressed love to each other verbally. Versions of "I love you" were expressed only 9 times out of the total 546 events. Further, in only one of these instances was the couple depicted as married.

Again following social learning theory, we paid close attention to any form of public health message portrayed in the commercials. Even though we had several categories for public health messages (including information about sexual maturity, condom use, preventing pregnancy, negative consequences of unprotected sex, and regret), all were collapsed into just one category labeled "public health" messages because such messages were so infrequent. In fact, of the 1,796 incidences of sexual messages, only nine occurrences of a public health message of any kind were recorded.

*Research question 2:* Elsewhere we discuss the racial and gender differences in television programming choices (Brown & Pardun, 2004). In that study, we organized the 140 sampled television shows by gender and race categories. We found that, for the most part, Blacks and Whites and girls and boys reside in different television worlds. For example, only four shows were watched by more than one third of *each* group (*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, *The Simpsons*, *Boy Meets World*, and *Malcolm in the Middle*). More common were shows such as *The Hughleys*, watched by 78% of the Black teens and only 11% of the White teens.

To a lesser extent, the sexual content in commercials is considerably varied. When looking at sexual content in the commercials in the top 10 shows as described in Brown and Pardun (2004), there was no significant difference among commercials viewed by Blacks, Whites, males, or females. In some ways, this finding is not surprising, given advertisers' need to reach mass audiences across several different programs as well as the networks' typical rigorous examination of commercial content for regulation pitfalls, such as deception and indecency. However, it is worth noting the interesting patterns that emerged in specific programs. For example, when the 71 television programs most watched by these early adolescents are categorized according to network and cable stations, analysis shows greater variation of sexual content in the commercials. Table 8.2 provides a breakdown of network and cable station by the average number of seconds of sexual content in commercials from the sampled programs.

Among the "Big Four" networks, NBC had, on average, more seconds (64 seconds per show) of sexual content in its commercials than the other major networks. The WB, a network that has positioned itself with programming for younger audiences, had an average of 75 seconds of sexual commercial content per show (see Table 8.2).

Given the Janet and Justin Super Bowl scenario described at the beginning of this chapter, it should come as no surprise that MTV—with 111

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**TABLE 8.2**  
**Sexual Content in Seconds Per Television Program Watched by Early Adolescents (By Network or Cable Station)**

<i>Station</i>	<i>Number of programs</i>	<i>Average seconds of sexual content in commercials per program</i>	<i>Average seconds of commercials per program</i>	<i>Percentage of sexual content per program</i>
NBC	5	64	902	7.09%
CBS	4	32	758	4.22%
ABC	9	42	808	5.19%
FOX	10	29	451	6.43%
UPN	8	48	622	7.71%
WB	12	75	689	10.88%
BET	1	69	1417	4.87%
Nickelodeon	4	14	217	6.45%
MTV	4	111	746	14.87%
Comedy Central	1	108	430	25.11%
Cartoon Network	5	18	462	3.89%
Disney	1	20	431	4.64%
ESPN	1	41	1221	3.35%
FOX Family	1	29	2371	1.22%
TBS Superstation	1	7	394	1.77%
PAX	1	24	874	2.74%
The Learning Channel	1	33	830	3.97%
Syndication	2	51	960	5.31%

seconds—was ranked highest in average number of seconds of sexual content in commercials per program. What might come as a surprise to parents of 12-year-olds, however, is that shows on MTV (e.g., *Total Request Live*) are watched regularly by this age group, and the program and its embedded commercials contain a relatively heavy dose of sexual content.

Tables 8.3 and 8.4 highlight the differences between the amount of sexual content in the commercials and the programming of the top 10 television programs watched by Black, White, male, and female early adolescents across race and gender (Brown & Pardun, 2004). Although the sexual content in both the commercials and programs watched by girls is relatively low (with the exception of the program *Cribs*), in half the programs there was more sexual content proportionally in the commercials than in the programs. With boys, 7 out of 10 programs had more sexual images in the commercials, and with Whites, it was 8 out of 10. Black early adolescents have a different experience, however, with 8 out of 10 programs containing more sexually oriented content than the embedded commercials.

**TABLE 8.3**  
**Percentage of Sexual Content in Commercials and Programs of Top 10**  
**Programs Watched by Black and White Early Adolescents**

<i>Program</i>	<i>Percentage of Blacks who watch regularly (N = 1,338)</i>	<i>Percentage of sexual content in commercials</i>	<i>Percentage of sexual content in program</i>
Parkers	85.0	.02	.15
Martin	81.4	.02	.10
Hughleys	78.8	.04	.04
Moesha	78.8	.01	.07
106 and Park	78.4	.05	.27
Wayan Brothers	71.6	.02	.03
Parenthood	70.6	.37	.22
One on One	70.3	.07	.12
Steve Harvey Show	69.0	.08	.05
Living Single	67.0	.01	.01
	<i>Percentage of Whites who watch regularly (N = 1,604)</i>		
Simpsons	51.5	.09	.01
Boy Meet World	50.2	.06	.04
Whose Line Is It Anyway?	48.5	.07	.03
Friends	47.8	.11	.09
Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?	43.2	.05	.00
Seventh Heaven	40.2	.06	.11
Sabrina the Teenage Witch	39.9	.04	.03
Malcolm in the Middle	37.8	.04	.01
Survivor	36.7	.04	.12
Lizzy McGuire	35.5	.05	.01

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our first research question explores the types of sexual imagery found in television commercials embedded in television programs most watched by early adolescents. As discussed earlier, past studies of magazine advertisements have documented the increasing prevalence of sex appeals and the sexual objectification of women from the 1960s and 1970s to the present. This magazine research has led to the general assumption in media effects work that much contemporary advertising is drenched with sexuality. Our study, however, corroborates Lin's (1998) pioneering study of sexual content in television commercials: Overall, television commercials contain a relatively light dose of sexual content. In our study of commercials most watched by early adolescents, sexual intercourse is almost never depicted or implied, passionate kissing is rare, and sexual innuendo is infrequent.

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**TABLE 8.4**  
**Percentage of Sexual Content in Commercials and Programs of Top 10**  
**Programs Watched by Early Adolescent Boys and Girls**

<i>Program</i>	<i>Percentage of boys who watch regularly (N = 1,485)</i>	<i>Percentage of sexual content in commercials</i>	<i>Percentage of sexual content in program</i>
Simpsons	62.9	.09	.01
Who Wants to be a Millionaire?	44.4	.05	.00
Rocket Power	44.3	.06	.04
Jackass	43.6	.26	.07
South Park	42.5	.25	.08
DragonBallZ	42.3	.03	.01
Malcolm in the Middle	41.7	.04	.01
Cribs	41.3	.11	.33
Celebrity Deathmatch	40.9	.07	.08
WWF Smackdown	40.7	.10	.20
	<i>Percentage of girls who watch regularly (N = 1,776)</i>		
Sabrina the Teenage Witch	59.6	.04	.03
Boy Meets World	57.3	.06	.04
Seventh Heaven	54.1	.06	.11
Moesha	52.5	.01	.07
Who Wants to be a Millionaire?	51.3	.05	.00
Clueless	50.1	.12	.02
Cribs	47.5	.11	.33
Parkers	47.5	.02	.15
Lizzy McGuire	47.2	.05	.01
Braceface	46.5	.06	.06

Although our study found 1,796 sexual incidences in the 1,783 examined commercials—what at first glance might seem to be a one-to-one correspondence—it must be remembered that our unit of analysis was the camera cut, not the commercial. Thus, when a single commercial did contain sexual content, it typically contained a small number of sexual incidences. And, these sexual incidences—mostly consisting of sexual emphasis on the body and light romantic touches—tended to be relatively minor in nature. Of course, social learning theory suggests that young adolescents' body images may be informed by messages they receive from commercials about the body and its sexuality. Given the alarming prevalence of eating disorders in American youth, further research in this area is needed. Also, most of the messages about relationships in the examined commercials involved unmarried couples. Because many young adolescents are beginning to explore the role of romantic relationships in their

own lives, social learning theory suggests that research is needed to explore the messages about romantic relationships contained in these commercials and their potential effect on young adolescents' relational scripts.

Our second research question examined the differences in exposure of young adolescents to sexual content according to race and gender. Although there is relatively little variation in the total amount of sexual content in television commercials consumed by these groups, there is greater variation in the proportion of commercial sexual content to programming sexual content. Media effects research has traditionally assumed that television programming contains more sexual content than commercials, but our research shows evidence that this assumption may be invalid. Although girls' programming contains more sexual content than the embedded commercials, boys' programming contains less sexual content than the commercials. It may be that girls' programming is responding to the popular perception that adolescent girls are more interested in learning about romantic relationships than are adolescent boys. Girls' most-watched programming thus explores relationships more—and contains more sexual content—than boys' programming does. The starkest variation occurs between White and Black adolescents' media diets: For Whites, the majority of programs contained less sexual content than the embedded commercials, and for Blacks, the majority of programs contained more sexual content than the commercials. Overall, then, Black adolescents consume more sexual messages in their television diets than their White peers do. Why the disparity, and what Black youth are learning about sexual relationships from these messages, are questions future research needs to explore more fully.

While media scholars, parents, and politicians often talk about whether adolescent exposure to television is problematic, the discussions rarely focus on advertising. Assumptions range from "all ads are evil" to "no one pays attention to advertising anyway." But, clearly, adolescents' daily media diets include a large dose of commercials. Some of this commercial content is clearly inappropriate for early adolescents.

Parents, if they choose, can use the controversial (and certainly not flawless) rating system that is available to decide whether a certain program is appropriate for their children to watch. But, the rating system does not pertain to the embedded commercials in those programs. While this study shows a relatively light overall dose of sexual content in commercials that run in programs that early adolescents watch regularly, in some programs, there is more sexual content in the commercials than the programs. Although the content may be considered "mild," these adolescents are receiving sexual messages that many in the adult community would question is appropriate. Adolescents are seeing unmarried couples in intimate situations; on the rare occasion when they might see a married couple, it

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is likely to be in a context like a recent Yoplait yogurt commercial. In the spot, the wife acts like a French maid in a “come on” to her husband. This ad may be rather sophisticated for a 12-year-old to assess.

Additionally, popular shows among this age group, like *Jackass* and *South Park*, have strong discrepancies between the sexual content of the commercials and the sexual content of the television program. Even a show such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, which has no sexual content and is given the mildest television rating possible (“appropriate for all ages”), contained sexual content in the embedded commercials.

Finally, as adults, we are living in a highly fragmented media world. We should remember that early adolescents’ media worlds are just as complicated. Additionally, as media choices become ever more complex, commercials may become the only media connection between these fragmented audiences. It is important, therefore, that we better understand the content that may be providing the glue that connects these diverse groups.

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