Key findings from the Teen Media study  
(Re: Media and Sexual Behavior)

Strengths of the Teen Media study

- The Teen Media study looked at four kids of media: TV, movies, magazines and music, rather than focusing only on TV as the few other similar studies have done.
- The diverse sample of adolescents included Black and White males and females.
- The sample is representative of the public school population from which it was drawn.
- Very high retention rates of teens across the two waves of the study
- The Sexual Media Diet measure is a highly specified independent variable measuring exposure to sexual content across four media, combining individual reports of media use with objective content analysis of those media.

Early Adolescents' Sexual Media Diet

- Eleven percent of the media early adolescents use (TV, movies, magazines, and music) contains sexual content.
- Forty percent of early adolescents' music contains sexual content. In specific genres, 57% of R&B music (e.g., *Destiny's Child, Janet Jackson*), 48% of Rap lyrics (e.g., *Snoop Dog, Ludacris*), and 19% of Heavy Metal music (e.g, *Incubus* and *Metallica*) was identified as sexual.
- There is little evidence of the 3 C's: Commitment, Contraception, and Consequences in early adolescents' media diets. Less than one-half of one percent of the content in the media young teens use contains positive sexual health content.
- The rare positive content portrayed is often ambiguous and inaccurate, reinforces traditional gender stereotypes that males seek sex and females are responsible for protection against pregnancy, and presents puberty as funny and contraception as embarrassing or humiliating.
- Black teens are exposed to more sexual media content than White teens.

Adolescents’ race and gender affects their media selections

- Analyses of early adolescents’ media selections find little evidence of a “common culture” of media use across race and gender.
- Movies viewed in the theater and at home and a few of the most popular rap musicians provide evidence for a common teen media culture because they are viewed or listened to by large proportions of males and females and Blacks and Whites.
- Young adolescents' TV shows, magazine selections, and many of their music choices are differ dramatically by race and gender.
- White boys have the most idiosyncratic media consumption habits as compared to Black and White girls and Black boys.
Media influences on sexual behavior

Cross-sectional Findings

- Early adolescents who are exposed to more sexual content in the media, and who perceive greater support from the media for teen sexual behavior, report greater intentions to engage in sexual intercourse and more sexual activity. These influences remain significant even after controls for demographics and other contextual influences.
- Media influences explain 13% of the variation in early adolescents’ sexual intentions, and 8-10% of the variance in light and heavy sexual behavior, after demographic controls. Parent influences explain 18%, school influences explain 11%, and peer influences explain 20% of the variance in sexual intentions. Parent influences explain 4-9%, school influences explain 2%, and peer influences explain 7-17% of the variance in light and heavy sexual behavior.
- Increased “hands-on” parenting, perceiving that parents disapprove of teen sexual behavior, and less perceived peer sexual behavior were also associated with teens’ lower intentions and less sexual behavior.
- The amount of sexual media content that adolescents are exposed to is more important than the specific type of content. For example, exposure to dating content, to nudity, or to sexual intercourse were similarly related to adolescents’ sexual intentions and behaviors.

Longitudinal Findings

- Exposure to sexual media content during early adolescence accelerates White adolescents’ sexual activity, doubling their risk of engaging in early sexual intercourse.
- White adolescents in the top quintile of Sexual Media Diet when 12 to 14 years old were 2.2 times more likely to have had sexual intercourse when 14 to 16 years old than those who were in the lowest SMD quintile, even after a number of other relevant factors, including baseline sexual behavior, were introduced.
- Although increased exposure to sexual content in the media was significantly predictive of Black adolescents’ sexual behavior initially, once other relevant factors were controlled for this relationship was not statistically significant.
- For White and Black teens, increased “hands-on” parenting and less permissive peer norms were predictive of delayed sexual intercourse.
- Among abstinent teens, increased exposure to sexual media content including sexually explicit media, and increased perception of media support for teen sexual behavior, leads to increased cognitive susceptibility to initiating sexual intercourse, and ultimately, early sexual intercourse.

Mass media may be a sexual super-peer for adolescents

- The media may serve as “sex educator” for U.S. teens because other sources for sexual information are often reticent.
- Sexual content in the media is ubiquitous and easily accessible.
- The media provide models of attractive older adolescents engaging in risky sexual behavior.
- Early maturing girls report greater exposure to sexual content in the media, and perceive more sexual permission from the media.
References


