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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between exposure to media variables and emerging adult's attitudes toward women and sex. Previous research indicated that exposure to media variables can influence the thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes of those exposed.

The current study examined how age at exposure to media variables impacted attitudes about sex and attitudes toward women.

BACKGROUND

Television has gained incredible popularity for its educational and entertainment qualities.

- From 1970 to 1999, the amount of households that owned a television went from 35% to 88%.
- Children spend almost 3 hours a day watching television.
- 95% of children age 7 and older watch television without parents in the room.

The fact that the youth population engages in large amounts of media usage, coupled with the fact that they are largely unsupervised while doing so necessitates the examination of the content and subsequent possible effects of this media.

The theoretical basis of the current study draws from Bandura's Social Cognitive theory. According to Social Cognitive theory, people learn behavior by observing the behavior of others. Modeling of observed behaviors can occur from media sources, such as television, as well as in-person sources, such as friends. From Bandura's iconic studies with children and the Bobo doll, it is known that children are just as likely to model a behavior they witness on television as they see in person (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963). It is the purpose of the current study to build upon these findings and examine new variables.

Table 1. Regression Coefficients

Predictors	Attitudes toward Women
Gender	-.31*
Exposure under age 5	-.06
Exposure between 6-10	.00
Exposure between 11-13	.03
Exposure between 14-16	.26*
Exposure after age 17	-.18*
R^2	.14
F	18.82*

METHODS

Participants

The current study sampled 694 college students, 65% ($n = 454$) of whom were female. The majority of participants were White ($n = 491, 70.2%$) and between the ages of 18-21 ($n = 501, 72.2%$).

Measures

- **Demographic:** Three questions assessed participant's age, gender, and racial background.
- **Sexual Attitudes:** Twenty five questions assessed attitudes toward human sexual expression (Hudson, 1997). Sample questions included "Pre-marital sex may be a sign of a decaying social order" and "I think that the only proper way to have sex is through intercourse." This scale has a proven reliability of .90 and a validity of .60.
- **Attitudes Toward Women:** Fifteen questions assessed attitudes toward women (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Sample questions included "Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man" and "Sons in the family should be given more encouragement to go to college than daughters." Alpha reliability for the scale was .79 in the current study.
- **Media Exposure:** Participants reported their age at first viewing (< 5 years to > 17 years) and frequency of viewing (*never to frequently*) of 41 children's and adolescents' movies and television shows. Exposure to stereotypical portrayals of women and sexual content in visual media were based on measures of content analysis using the frequency method. Inter-rater reliability for the current study was excellent, significant, $r(82) = .84, p < .001$. Based on participants' responses regarding their age at first exposure, total exposure variables were created based on age group. Items were then transformed into z scores to standardize the total exposure variables prior to analyses. The standardized total exposure variables were used in analyses.

RESULTS

Sexual Attitudes and Views toward Women

- Two one-way ANOVA's were conducted using gender as the independent variable and attitudes toward women and sexual attitudes as the dependent variables.
- Results were significant for attitudes toward women, $F(2, 691) = 31.94, p < .01$ but not but not sexual attitudes, $F(2, 691) = 1.74, p > .05$.

Predicting Attitudes Toward Women

- Linear regression analysis was conducted to determine how gender and age of exposure to gender stereotypes combined to help predict participants' attitudes toward women.
- The regression model was significant, $F(6, 687) = 18.82, p = .00, R^2 = .14$.
- Results of regression analyses can be found in Table 1.

Predicting Sexual Attitudes

- Linear regression analysis was conducted to determine how gender and age of exposure to sexual content combined to help predict participants' attitudes toward sex.
- The regression model was significant, $F(6, 687) = 5.28, p = .00, R^2 = .04$.
- Results from the regression analysis can be found in Table 2.



Table 2. Regression Coefficients

Predictors	Attitudes toward Women
Gender	.01
Exposure under age 5	-.03
Exposure between 6-10	-.05
Exposure between 11-13	-.03
Exposure between 14-16	.25*
Exposure after age 17	-.08**
R^2	.04
F	5.28*

DISCUSSION

Results indicated that men held more profemist views than women. However, no gendered differences were found for sexual attitudes.

A suggested cause to this result might be:

- Women are more negatively impacted by stereotypical media and hold more negative self-concepts
- Sexual media exposures, however, impacts genders similarly

Results from the regression predicting Attitudes Toward Women indicated that age of exposure to stereotypical messages of women was significant.

- Exposure between the ages of 14 and 16 resulted in more profeminist attitudes
- Exposure after the age of 17 was associated with less feminist attitudes.

The results from the regression predicting Sexual Attitudes indicated that age of exposure to sexual content in media were significant.

- Exposure between the ages of 14 and 16 resulted in more conservative sexual attitudes
- Exposure after the age of 17 was associated with more permissive sexual attitudes.

A suggested cause to this result might be:

- At this age, adolescents are looking for guidance of how men and women should think and behave.

Future research:

- Research examining why exposure to media variables during a specific age group are more influential will provide better understanding of the ways adolescents are influenced.

