

# Key Behavioral Effects of the Mass Media



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By

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To Michael and Patrick



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# CHAPTER ONE

## EROTICA

*The key question in research on pornography is whether there is a link between exposure to pornography with sexually violent themes and either sexual violence or greater tolerance by societies of sexual violence (Gray, 1982, p. 389)*

The United States has been described as having *cultural schizophrenia* regarding sexual depictions (Gillmor, et al., 1998, p. 634). Parents speak out about the harmful effects of pornography on children, yet the public condones erotica in public opinion polls and in their use of sexually explicit videos and explicit cable programming. Legislators and the courts try to limit it, yet can't agree on how to define it. In 1977, a New York jury acquitted a distributor of films depicting bestiality because the films were too disgusting to appeal to normal sexual interests (Gillmor, et al., 1998, p. 634). Yet the list of books banned because they were considered obscene at one time and place or another includes most of the great works of literature and much of the non-great. *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, was banned from the Library of Concord because of a letter from Louisa May Alcott. *If Mr. Clemens cannot think of something better to tell our pure minded lads and lassies, he had best stop writing for them*, she wrote.

## LEGAL BACKGROUND

The basis for obscenity law in the United States was derived from the *Hicklin Rule* adopted in England in 1868. The test was:

*whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influence and into whose hands a publication of this sort should fall.*

The definition raised concerns present today that sexually explicit materials are harmful, especially to children. It also allowed the possibility of putting *content*, rather than a person, on trial and put the focus on *thoughts*

rather than *behaviors*.

Justice Brennan wrote the majority opinion in the first U. S. Supreme Court definition of obscenity in 1957. There, the test of obscenity was *whether to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to prurient interest* (**Roth v. U. S.**). Yet Brennan dissented when the definition was revised to the current standard in 1973 (**Miller v. Calif.**). He argued that attempts at definition had led to nothing but confusion. In an earlier case (**Jacobellis v. State of Ohio**, 1964), Justice Stewart had declared that while he couldn't define it, *I know it when I see it*.

One of the first court cases on pornography in the U. S. concerned *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, better known as *Fanny Hill*. John Cleland wrote the book in 1748 on a bet he could write the  *dirtiest* book in the English language without using a single dirty word. It was found to be obscene in a Massachusetts case in 1821 and came before the courts again 145 years later. Then the Court argued, among other elements, a work must be *utterly without redeeming social value* to be considered obscene. Fifteen years later in *Miller* the Court revised the standard again. Today sexually explicit materials are used in therapy for rapists as well as for couples who have sexual dysfunctions.

The current U. S. standard (**Miller v. California**, 1973) provided the test of *obscenity* as whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work:

*taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest, whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct, specifically defined by the applicable state law, and whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.*

The majority opinion, written by Chief Justice Berger, went on to provide potential examples, such as:

*Patently offensive representation or descriptions of ultimate sexual acts, normal or perverted, actual or stimulated, and patently offensive representation or descriptions of masturbation, excretory functions, and lewd exhibitions of the genitals.*

The definition of obscenity, or pornography, is the same for all media. If a work is found to be obscene, it cannot be legally disseminated. Additional issues came up for the broadcast industry and, most recently the Internet, because of the large number of users who are children. **FCC v. Pacifica Foundation** (1978) ruled that indecent words, as in George Carlin's list of *seven dirty words*, cannot be broadcast when children are in the audience, later

ruled to be from 6 a. m. to 10 p. m. (*Action for Children's Television v. FCC*, 1995). The issue of harm to children then shifted from television to cable and the Internet. Cable is essentially protected from restrictions on indecency because it is not a scarce resource like broadcasting and allows more viewer choice and discretion.

Congress became involved in the high amount of sexually explicit content available on the Internet, potentially to children, when they passed the *Communications Decency Act* as part of the *Telecommunications Act of 1996*. The Act made it a criminal offense with fines up to \$250,000 and up to two years in jail for anyone who made available to children any material disseminated electronically that was *obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, or indecent (or) that depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards, sexual or excretory activities or organs* (Gillmor, et al., 1998, p. 613). The *Communications Indecency Act* was overturned in *Reno v American Civil Liberties Union* (1997). Fundamental to these efforts to regulate pornography and indecent material is the assumption that it has a negative impact on society through its effect on the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of users.

## Definitions

In spite of the legal ramifications of the terms, *obscenity, pornography, erotica and sexually explicit* are often used interchangeably in the research literature. All the terms refer to *explicit and graphic depictions of sexual activity, the central purpose of which is to sexually arouse the receiver*. This includes pictures or other illustrations of naked young men and women, couples engaged in various sexual activities, such as intercourse, oral sex, etc., and explicit verbal or literary descriptions of sexual activity.

*Obscenity* in the ordinary language also includes scatological (excrement) and profanity (religious) references as well as certain insults (*bitch and bastard*). Legally, these references are termed *indecency*. The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States does not protect obscenity, as legally defined. In addition, broadcast law prohibits *indecent speech* when children are likely to be in the audience. There have also been attempts by Congress to pass laws prohibiting such material on the Internet. *Erotica*, derived from the Greek word *Eros* (love) is used to describe sexually explicit content without degradation or violence. While the term *pornography* is often used interchangeably with all the above terms, it is generally used to describe *hard-core* erotica and is sometimes reserved for violent sexually explicit material (Sparks, 2002, p. 92).

The *Meese Commission* (see below) identified five classes of *pornography*:

1. *Sexually violent materials* portraying rape and other instances of physical harm to persons in a sexual context;
2. *Nonviolent materials* depicting degradation, domination, subordination, or humiliation constitute the largest class of commercially available materials. These generally portray women as masochistic, subservient, and over-responsive to the male *interest*;
3. *Nonviolent and non-degrading materials* typically depict a couple having vaginal or oral intercourse with no indication of violence or coercion;
4. *Nudity* shows the naked human body with no obvious sexual behavior or intent;
5. *Child pornography* involves minors and, though illegal to produce in the United States, still circulates widely through foreign magazines and personal distribution (*Final Report*, 1986).

**Strasburger & Wilson** (2002, pp. 184-186) also provided five categories of sexually explicit content:

1. *Erotica* is R- or X-rated material with sexual content but no violence;
2. *X-rated material degrading to women*. Women are portrayed as eager recipients of the male sex drive;
3. *Violent pornography*. X-rated content in which women are portrayed as enjoying an assault or rape;
4. *Non-X-rated sexual aggression against women*. Programming in which women are depicted as deriving pleasure from an assault or rape;
5. *Sexualized violence against women*. R-rated films, often called *Slasher* films, which do not include rape but display graphic violence toward women in a sexual context. They contain suspenseful scenes in which an antagonist attacks one or more victims.

Generally, no antisocial harmful effect associated with *erotica* has been found, although this might not be the case for children. That might also not be the case with *date rape*.

Consenting adults have been found to engage in more sexual behavior after exposure. Adolescents who engage in sexual behavior do have more exposure to such content, including sexual content in advertising, television programming and talk shows, and music videos. Most studies find no antisocial effects associated with *X-rated material degrading to women*, although some research does. Overestimates of sexual practices and a more callous attitude toward women, especially due to the depiction of rape, can

result. *Violent pornography* has the most deleterious effect on those exposed. Exposure to such material leads to more callous attitudes toward women and increased aggression toward women. Exposure to violence by itself also has these effects, however. There is also evidence that such material stimulates rapists. Viewers of *non-X-rated sexual aggression against women* also increase callous attitudes toward women and rape victims. R-rated films containing *sexual violence against women* are less sexually explicit but tend to contain more violence. Teenagers are more likely to be exposed to such content. Research finds that exposure to such films tends to desensitize viewers toward committing violence.

## THE NATIONAL COMMISSION REPORTS

### *The National Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* (1970)

In spite of considerable evidence that film and television contained considerable amounts of sexual content, few empirical studies were conducted after the *Payne Fund Studies*, to determine the effects of that content. This changed with the creation of the *National Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* by President Lyndon Johnson in 1967. Also known as the *Lockhart Commission*, after its chairman, William B. Lockhart, the purpose of the Commission was to analyze (1) pornography laws, (2) the distribution of sexually explicit materials, (3) the effects of consuming such materials, and (4) to recommend appropriate legislative action. The Commission funded over 80 research studies. Little negative impact from exposure to pornography was indicated in the research and research summaries included in the final report, although it should be noted that most of the content studied at that time was sexually explicit but not violent.

The majority report of the Commission concluded that

*exposure to erotica does sexually arouse most males and females but does not substantially change established premarital, marital, or extramarital behavior among either sexually experienced or sexually inexperienced individuals.*

In addition, there was

*no evidence that exposure to or use of explicit sexual materials play a significant role in the causation of social or individual harms such as crime, delinquency, sexual or nonsexual deviancy or severe emotional disturbance* (1971, p. 58).

In conclusion, the Commission recommended:

- (1) *Repeal of federal, state, and local legislation prohibiting sale, exhibition, or distribution of sexual materials to consenting adults* (p. 51);
- (2) *State adoption of legislation prohibiting commercial distribution or display of certain sexual material to young persons* (p. 52); and
- (3) *State and local adoption of legislation prohibiting public display, and unsolicited mailing of sexually explicit materials* (p. 36).

The implication of the **Miller** criterion, that obscenity is *an offense to public morality or taste*, is *socially worthless* and therefore not protected speech, was *not* recognized by the Commission in spite of widespread moralist arguments. The moralist belief is that sexually explicit content can lead to an excessive interest in sex which can distract people from other important societal roles, undermine marriage and family, lead to illegal acts, and cause moral decay (cf. **Linz & Malamuth**, 1993).

The recommendation for repeal of obscenity legislation was based on the lack of evidence indicating harmful or adverse effects on the user of pornography. The Commission supported statutes protecting children, however, since there was not sufficient empirical evidence of lack of effects to support their repeal. The Commission recognized strong ethical concerns regarding research on children in this area. Oregon became the first state to rule that pornography laws, other than those regarding children, were unconstitutional (**Oregon v. Henry**, 1987). The Commission also recommended a massive sex education program in the schools. Twenty years passed, however, before such a program began to be implemented nationally, usually beginning in the sixth grade.

When the report was issued, President Nixon declared that *so long as I am in the White House there'll be no relaxation of the national effort to control and eliminate smut from our national life* (**Eysenck & Nias**, 1978, p. 94). Two Commissions in Great Britain issued their reports a few years later (**Longford**, 1972; **Williams**, 1979), followed by the *Frasier Commission* in Canada (*Report of the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution*, 1985). Each of these commissions concluded that there was no conclusive support for the harmful effects of pornography.

### ***The Meese Commission*** (1986)

In 1985, U. S. Attorney General Edwin Meese charged the *Attorney General's Commission on Pornography* to

*determine the nature, extent, and impact on society of pornography in the United States, and to make specific recommendations concerning more effective ways in which the spread of pornography could be contained, consistent with constitutional guarantees.*



In the intervening 15 years since the *National Commission*, the media content had changed. The *Payne Fund* research, published in 1933, had found that 75% of the themes in movies had a sexual or violent theme. Sex and violence depictions had been linked in content in the 1970's and 80's, with a dramatic increase in the explicitness of the sexual behaviors and the graphic detail of the violence depicted. Together they potentially constituted extremely arousing stimuli. Cable and satellite television and VCRs have made such content more readily available.

The *Meese Commission* funded no new research on the topic, but gathered *anecdotal* evidence from across the country and reviewed current research on the topic. They concluded *that the available evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that substantial exposure to sexually violent materials bears a causal relationship to antisocial acts of sexual violence, and for some subgroups, possibly the unlawful acts of sexual violence* (**Final Report**, 1986, p. 40).

Disagreements with the *Report* did occur, however. **Linz, et al.** (1987) argued that their own research had been misinterpreted by the *Meese Commission* and that the recommendation to strengthen pornography laws regarding film ignored other media with sexually violent themes. **Linz and Donnerstein** (1992) pointed out that serial killer Ted Bundy, quoted by the *Meese Commission*, later blamed violent movies and television, not pornography, for his crimes. The *Report* itself cited evidence from an FBI spokesperson that violent detective magazines, not pornography, were usually found in the possession of violent criminals. Most importantly, the *Commission* went beyond the evidence in its treatment of correlational data as sufficient evidence for causality.

## THEORETICAL MODELS

Several models have been proposed over the years to account for the use and effects of sexually explicit material. Some of these models are specific to the genre, but most are inclusive of the effects of the mass media in general. Often they are not in disagreement, but provide slightly different reasons to account for uses and effects of mass media messages. **Malamuth and Billings** (1986) discuss two opposing models in depth: *The Sexual Interest Model* and *The Feminist Model*.

### The Sexual Interest Model

This model essentially argues that sexually explicit media content is a modern version of sexual expression contained throughout history and paintings, sculpture, and other forms of art to describe the *human condition* and

*all its variations* and to satisfy the sexual interest of receivers (**Gordon**, 1980). Effects are confined to fantasy (**Gagnon**, 1977) or to individual sex education (**Gillan**, 1978; **Wilson**, 1978). The model argues that attempts to restrict such content from consenting adults is unconstitutional censorship.

The model argues that sexually explicit material can serve as a *safety valve* such that exposure would satisfy sexual urges that might lead some individuals to commit a sex crime, similar to the *catharsis hypothesis* offered by some researchers in the violence area (**Feshbach**, 1955). While there is evidence that the use of sexually explicit material can enhance relationships, and even serve as a therapeutic tool for couples with sexual problems, the greater evidence is that sexually explicit material is more likely to desensitize individuals and to lead to a greater toleration of rape. There is also limited evidence that it has played a negative role in the adolescent socialization of at least some rapists.

### The Feminist Model

A number of writers have argued that erotica reflects and creates male domination of women (**Dworkin**, 1981; 1885; **Dworkin & MacKinnon**, 1985; **Morgan**, 1980; **Russell**, 1980; **Steinem**, 1980). A man's worth is measured by his power. A woman's worth is measured by her sexuality and she is regarded as a *playmate or pet*. According to **Malamuth and Billings** (1986, p. 88), in this view:

*Women are typically depicted as objects to be used to serve the pleasure of men; they are degraded, dehumanized, and frequently shown as both willing and unwilling victims of abusive and violent acts.*

The position reached its legal apex when Catherine MacKinnon, a law professor at the University of Michigan, argued that pornography is the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women and therefore not protected by the First Amendment (**MacKinnon**, 1987). Minneapolis and Indianapolis passed ordinances incorporating *MacKinnon's Law* but they were either vetoed or ruled unconstitutional by the courts. Moreover, not all feminists agreed with the position. **Tong** (1987), for example, pointed out that *paternalism* cannot be tolerated in the workplace or the bedroom. Feminists counter that sexually violent depictions can lead to a social acceptance of discrimination and violence against women. Empirical evidence supports such a view. In a summary of research, **Zillmann, et al.** (1994) concluded that exposure to pornography *facilitates the formation and reinforcement of inappropriate or undesirable perceptions of women in both sexual and nonsexual contexts* (p. 219). Changes in perception include less caring for

and trust in an intimate partner, less satisfaction in sexual relations, and a more superficial attitude toward rape.

### The Social Learning Model

*Social Learning Theory* (**Bandura**, 1977) suggests that individuals can learn either prosocial or antisocial attitudes and behaviors depending on the nature of the message. The reinforcement pattern in the message and the nature of the identification with the characters would affect the results. Media depictions can inhibit or disinhibit particular attitudes and behaviors among viewers by providing a model experiencing positive or negative consequences. This includes sexually stimulating material as well (**Check & Malamuth**, 1983; 1985).

When males are shown erotic films with consenting adults they are more likely to engage in such behavior themselves. When they are shown violent erotica that depicts women becoming sexually aroused from violence, they may *learn* that women enjoy such behavior. Continued exposure to violent erotica may lessen inhibitions against committing violence against women. The social learning model suggests that erotica by itself would not increase aggression since no violent depictions are present in the message. Violent sexual depictions, however, could lead to more negative attitudes toward women, an increase in rape myths, and more negative behaviors (**Donnerstein**, 1984). Because women are often treated as sexual objects in erotica, males, especially adolescent males, exposed to such material can learn to have attitudes toward women as sexual objects.

Individuals do use erotica as a source of information about sexual behavior, although it's not clear if it is learning of techniques or social attitudes that are most affected (**Duncan**, 1990; **Duncan & Donnelly**, 1991; **Duncan & Nicholson**, 1991). Sexually explicit films have been used in therapy to help women achieve orgasm and in therapy with sex offenders (**Wishnoff**, 1978; **Quinsey & Marshall**, 1983).

### The Excitation–Transfer Model

**Zillmann & Bryant** (1984) argued that erotica increases arousal that can be directed to aggressive behavior if the individual has been provoked or angered in some way. They developed the model of *excitation-and-valence* that makes four predictions regarding erotica and subsequent aggression (**Bryant & Thompson**, 2002, p. 203):

1. *Pleasant and non-arousing erotica reduces aggressiveness because it counteracts the provoked person's feelings of anger;*

2. *Displeasing and non-arousing erotica increases aggressiveness because it adds to the provoked person's feeling of annoyance;*
3. *Displeasing and non-arousing erotica increases aggressiveness because the enhanced feelings of annoyance are retained by the person and transferred to situations afterward; and*
4. *Pleasant and arousing erotica create a situation in which calmness rather than excitement is transferred, therefore canceling out negative effects such as aggressiveness.*

Thus, if a person has not been angered and is exposed to nonviolent erotica, the person is not likely to become aggressive. Likewise, if a person has been angered but is exposed to nonviolent erotica that is viewed as pleasing and arousing, that can displace the feelings of anger and the person is less likely to become aggressive. However, if the person is angered and then is exposed to nonviolent erotica that is displeasing, the person is likely to become more aggressive. Likewise if a person is angered and is exposed to violent erotica, the person is likely to become even more aggressive.

### **The Aggression Model**

Aggression theory argues that it is not erotica per se but the combination of sex and violence that leads to antisocial attitudes and behaviors toward women (Donnerstein, 1980; Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981; Donnerstein, et al., 1987; Linz, et al., 1984; Zillmann, 1984; Malamuth & Briere, 1986). *Nonviolent erotica* involves mutual consent, with domination by neither person (Linz, 1989). *Violent sexual depictions* do not include consent, although rape depictions often involve initial resistance but eventual eager participation that further serves to reinforce negative attitudes toward women and potentially overt behaviors. Research finds that exposure to violent erotica has a negative impact on the attitudes and behaviors of viewers. Research by Zillmann & Bryant (1988ab) found that this could also be true for subjects exposed to nonviolent erotica as well.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

As of 1995, there have been over **1,300 research studies** on the topic of sexually explicit media content and subsequent effects on user arousal, attitudes, and behavior (Allen, et al., 1995a, p. 265). Content analyses have found that sexually explicit content is widely available in the media. Exposure has been found to increase *arousal* as measured by self-ratings and physiological measures such as penile tumescence (Bancroft & Mathews, 1971; Eccles, et al., 1988), vaginal plethysmographs (Sintchak & Geer,

1975) and thermography (**Abramson, et al.**, 1981). Research on attitudes finds that exposure can lead to more negative attitudes toward women, especially when erotica is combined with violent material. Some reviews of the literature find a relationship between the use of erotica and harmful effects (**Linz**, 1989). Others, however, indicate no relationship (**Brannigan**, 1987; **Christensen**, 1987). Both sides often rely on the same body of empirical literature (**Linz, et al.**, 1987). As a result, this research has been criticized for its inconsistency and, at times, its methodology. Content analyses, surveys and experimental research have been conducted in the area.

Content analyses determine the extent to which various media contain sexually explicit depictions. The percentage and characteristics of the depictions are determined by medium with particular attention paid to violence. Depictions are generally coded into one of three categories: (a) nudity, (b) nonviolent sexual activity (petting, fondling of genitals, oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse), and (c) violent sexual behavior (sexual behavior with intent to harm) (**Allen, et al.**, 1995a, p. 267). They meta-analyzed 33 experiments and found that exposure to pornography increased nonsexual aggression.

Surveys ask respondents to estimate their frequency of exposure to sexually explicit material. Additional questions might be asked regarding respondent attitudes toward that content, attitudes toward women, or rape, or rape victims, or respondent behavior to see if exposure is related. Survey research is subject to the difficulties of recall of sensitive issues.

Experiments expose adult volunteers, usually college students, to various types of explicit material. Dependent variables such as attitudes and behaviors are measured shortly after exposure. Problems of internal and external validity are compounded by the subject matter. Self-selection concerns are especially relevant. Those not interested in erotica or who find it abhorrent might not volunteer for the research. Experimental research is especially subject to the artificiality of the lab in this area. Sanctioned aggressive behaviors might increase the likelihood to aggress. Confounding variables, as in the combination of sex with violence in erotic films, makes interpretation of results more difficult. In addition to normal difficulties matching operational and conceptual definitions, there are also legal definitions that have plagued the Supreme Court for fifty years.

## Content Analyses

*Although all varieties of heterosexual intercourse are shown, there is little emphasis on associated foreplay, afterplay, cuddling, or general tenderness. Women are seen eagerly desiring and participating in sex, often with hysterical euphoria. There's little concern with the consequences of sex or the*

*relational matrix within which most adults find it. Quite recently there has been some increase in sexual materials with more emphasis on relationship, pre- and postcoital behaviors, and a woman's point of view generally, developed primarily to be marketed to women. As yet, however, these comprise only a minuscule part of the \$5 billion market worldwide (Harris, 1994, p. 250).*

As in all areas of mass media effects, the first question to ask is to what extent relevant content occurs in the media. Evidence of content does not presume effect, however. Content analyses confirm that erotica is a significant portion of media content. Television, movies, adult magazines, books, cable channels, videotapes, and the World Wide Web all contain content that includes graphic sexual depictions (**Brown & Bryant, 1989**). Erotic stimuli may appear in a variety of forms, including written, pictorial, or live, ranging from partial or complete nudity to various sexual activities. A mild category involves sexual or romantic fantasy. Kissing, sexual touching and female nudity might be included. Such content is prevalent on soap operas and in music videos. Females tend to be aroused by such content more than males. Males are aroused by more sexually explicit content. This category contains nonviolent sexual themes involving heterosexual intercourse, oral sex, group sex, ejaculation, homosexuality or lesbianism (**Hebditch & Anning, 1988**). The focus is on sexual gratification with little attention paid to foreplay, affection, or building relationships. A third category, much less prevalent but far more dangerous in its attitudinal and behavioral consequences, involves coercion or violent themes with a subcategory showing women eventually enjoying rape (**Weaver, 1994**).

## Paperbacks

**Smith** (1976) content analyzed a sample of 428 *adults only* paperbacks published between 1968 and 1974. The typical character was found to be *young, single, White, physically attractive, and heterosexual* (p. 20). Plot development was minimal. Sixty percent of the time, sex was engaged in for sex's sake. The average number of pages devoted to explicit sexual acts over time steadily increased from an index of .36 in 1968 to an index of .63 in 1974. Sexual acts were dominated by the male with little inducement and *lengthy, frequent, and often rather frenzied sexual encounters* (p. 21). When there were inducements (17 percent of the time), one-third of the time, alcohol was used, one-third of the time drugs, and one-third of the time pornographic materials or live models. The typical episode involved:

*the young, probably rich, sleek, cool, restrained, and poised beauty, the depths of her sexual desires unstirred as yet (particularly, if married, by her*

*husband) until Super Stud arrives, who, despite her initial resistance and piteous pleas for mercy, rather quickly and relentlessly unlocks her real sexual passion to take her to hitherto totally unimagined heights, leaving her begging for his continued ministrations (p. 23).*

When lesbian behavior occurred, in one-third of the acts, it was either instigated by, or forced on, the females by the male. Lesbians who do not respond to male advances often received dire consequences in the plot. Smith found that 20% of the acts in these books depicted rape, with only 3% of the rapists suffering any negative consequences. The victim was rarely portrayed as suffering from the incident. The number of rapes portrayed doubled during the period.

## Magazines

**Malamuth and Spinner (1980)** content analyzed cartoons and pictorials of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines between 1973 and 1977. They found about 10 percent of the cartoons were sexually violent. There was an increase in pictorials containing sexual violence from about one percent to five percent during the period. The aggression was almost exclusively committed by males against females.

**Dietz and Evans (1982)** compared the covers of 1,760 heterosexual sexually explicit magazines between 1970 and 1981. In 1970, magazine covers generally depicted a woman posed alone. By 1981, couples engaged in sexual activity were depicted most frequently and 17.2% of the magazine covers depicted bondage and domination. By 1986, 76% of the covers depicted domination of women and 38% depicted women in bondage (**Dietz, et al., 1986**).

**Faust (1980)** found that magazines with female nudity had a circulation of around 35 million/month, primarily among men. Erotic magazines were likely to feature women and their sexual characteristics – genital details, sexual activities, lesbianism, use of dildos, etc (**Winick, 1985**). **Scott (1986)** analyzed general readership magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCalls*, *Reader's Digest*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Time* from 1950 to 1980. He found a three-fold increase in articles that discussed sexual behavior and a six-fold increase in the frequency of sexual terms used. References to sex increased 84% during the first decade, 16% in the second, and 68% in the third. Magazines depicting romantic emotional involvement were read by millions of female readers/month (**Lawrence & Herold, 1988**).

*The Kaiser Family Foundation (1997)*, in a year-long study of leading teen magazines such as *Seventeen*, found that two out of every five articles

(42%) about sexual issues focused on sexual health topics. Articles on contraception included discussion of STDs and condoms. The discussion of condoms was up 50% from 10 years earlier. **Durham** (1998), however, concluded after a textual analysis of *Seventeen* and *YM* that young females were presented in a way that simultaneously demands they make themselves sexually alluring to males, yet maintain a chaste lifestyle.

## Television

Shows have developed from *Ozzie and Harriet* where a married couple was depicted sleeping in separate beds through *The Mary Tyler Moore* show where the dating problems of a 30-year-old single woman were an underlying theme of the show to *Murphy Brown* which depicted a 30-year-old single woman who decided to have a baby out of wedlock, attracting the attention of then Vice-President of the United States Dan Quayle. More recent shows like *Seinfeld* and *Friends* focused on the dating problems of the multiple characters, sometimes showing the couples in bed. *Seinfeld*, in particular, discussed such previously taboo subjects as the best birth control device and masturbation. Cable and satellite television, as well as the Internet, have attracted the interest of regulators because of the explicit movies now available, potentially to children.

Over the decades, sex on television has become more explicit, although it is still primarily innuendo, often in a humorous context (**Sprafkin & Silverman**, 1981). They found *ten times the number of sexual innuendos and 25 times the number of both implied and verbal references to sexual intercourse* between 1976 and 1979 (p. 34). More of these references occurred after 9 pm, although a significant number also occurred between 8 and 9. Sexual suggestiveness occurred more often in situation comedies, while implied intercourse occurred more often in movies. Discouraged sexual practices, such as homosexuality, prostitution, and aggressive sexual contacts occurred more often. But no explicit portrayals of sex were found. Frontal nudity, for example was still not shown on network television, far tamer than the content that occurs in other media or subscription services.

**Signorielli** (1987) found that some type of sexual reference was found in 90% of all television programs. **Lowry & Towles** (1989a) coded 722 sexual incidents depicted in a sample of 1987 primetime network television programs, amounting to an average of 10.94/hour. If verbal and physical suggestiveness was not included, the rate was 5.97/hour. The ratio of unmarried partners to married partners was 4.61 to 1 (6.1 to 1 if incidents of prostitution, aggressive sexual contact, homosexuality and incest are included).

**Sapolsky & Tabarlet** (1991) sampled 64 shows on prime-time network television in 1989 and compared the number of sexual incidents found to the



number found in a 1979 sample. They found a slight increase (846 incidents vs. 806). On average, a sexual incident occurred every four minutes on primetime network programming in 1989. Characters spoke of sexual intercourse about once every hour. Most of the incidents in both samples involved sexual innuendo (36%), most often in humorous situations (21.2 incidents/hour vs. 16.2/hour for drama shows and 10.1/hour for crime/adventure shows). There was also an increase in sexual acts being included in dramas in the 1989 sample. Most of the acts involved touching, kissing, and hugging. More incidents occurred between 8 and 9, when young people are more likely to be in the audience, than between 10 and 11, when adults are the main audience. Most sexual activity involved unmarried couples with little concern for safe sex. Sexual intercourse was rarely depicted (4 instances in the 1979 sample and 9 in the 1989 sample). Most incidents were initiated by White (90%) males (75%). In both the 1979 and 1989 seasons, the network with the most sexual incidents had the highest ratings.

*The Kaiser Family Foundation Reports on Sex on TV.* Since the 1990s, The Kaiser Family Foundation has conducted content analyses of the amount and type of sexual content on television. They found that sexual content increased steadily from 1976 to 1996, yielding 8 to 10 incidents of sexual talk or behavior per hour of prime-time programming. Seventy percent of the programming during the "Family Hour" contained sexual content. Most of this content involved discussions about sex rather than behavior (Kunkel, et al., 1996).

Later analyses found that two-thirds of prime-time programs contained sexual talk or behavior (Kunkel, Cope, Farinola, et al., 1999). A biennial analysis of more than 1,100 randomly selected programs during the 1999-2000 TV season compared findings to an earlier analysis conducted over the 1997-1998 season. They found that the amount of sexual content (sexual talk or behavior) on television was increasing. Over two-thirds (68%) of the programs contained sexual content in the latter analysis compared to 56% in the earlier period. The percentage on network programs was even higher, 75% compared to 67% in the earlier period. Most sexual content occurred in movies (89%), sitcoms (84%) and soap operas (80%). Seventy-four percent of television news magazines, however, contained sexual content. Dramas (69%), talk shows (67%), and reality shows (27) completed the list. The study also found that the incidence of sexual behavior involving teenagers increased from 3% to 9% in the later analysis. Discussion of *safe sex*, however, had increased from 10% to 25% over the two-year period.

Brown (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of over 30 articles on sexual content in television programming. She found that sexual content increased

between 1997 and 2000. Content ranged from flirting to sexual intercourse, setting an agenda concerning sexual behavior that tends to be heterosexual, explicit, irresponsible, and risk-free. Females tend to prefer content that deals with establishing relationships and tips for becoming attractive. She concluded that the mass media can influence receivers in three ways:

- a. *by keeping sexual behavior on public and personal agendas;*
- b. *by reinforcing a relatively consistent set of sexual and relationship norms, and*
- c. *rarely including sexually responsible models (p. 44).*

**Fisher** (2004) content analyzed 1,276 shows on 11 network and cable stations from the 2001-2002 television season for their sexual content. Overall, 82.1% of the shows contained some sexual behavior talk. Nearly half of the episodes had a betrayal of physical flirting and about half included kissing and/or touching. Intercourse was implied in 10.5% of the programs and was depicted in 3.9%. Children's cartoons were the least likely to have any depictions of sexual behavior (20.7%). In contrast, 100% of the comedy dramas and television movies contained sexual behavior, along with 92.7% of the feature films shown and 81.3% of televised entertainment magazines, shows that featured stories on celebrities and current events in the entertainment industry. As expected, more sexual behavior was depicted on cable. Intercourse was depicted on 20.5% on the premium movie channels compared to 0.9% on the commercial networks. Only 5.2% of the shows with any sexual content included messages about using sexual precautions when having sex, most often related to the use of condoms. In sum, sexual content was found to be pervasive in television programming, particularly among shows popular with teens. Most sex was portrayed among unmarried persons, with few depictions of precautionary behavior or negative consequences associated with sex.

**Hetsroni** (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 25 articles in 20 publications that examined the frequency of sexual content on primetime network programming between 1975 and 2004. It was found that only depictions of homosexuality and explicit intercourse increased during this time. While there were a greater number of characters on television, little was shown about their sexual activity beyond a hug or kiss. Depictions of explicit intercourse still occurred far less frequently than implicit intercourse. There was also a slight trend for greater discussion of risks and responsibilities in the later years of the analysis.

All other depictions of sexual activity, including discussions, touching, implicit intercourse, and illegal activities such as prostitution significantly

declined over the past three decades. This is not to make the same claim for cable television, however, which has the possibility of having far more frequent and explicit depictions. The audience for network television is still far greater than cable, although steadily declining, and is generally older and more conservative. Hence, more explicit depictions are less tolerated than those on cable.

## Soap Operas

Much of the content analyses of sex on television have focused on daytime soap operas. **Lowry, et al.** (1981) found that erotic touching among unmarried couples was the most frequent type of behavior on daytime soap operas, followed by aggressive sexual contact. **Fernandez-Collado & Greenberg** (1978) found that references to premarital and extramarital episodes outnumbered references to marital sex. Later research found that references to premarital and extramarital sex outnumbered references to marital sex as much as 24 to 1, indicating that sex is primarily for unmarried couples (compared to a ratio of 3.2 to 1 found in 1979 and a ratio of 4.61 to 1 found for primetime programming). There were 7.4 sexual occurrences/hour (compared to a rate of 5.97/hour found for prime time television). Pregnancies were rare and no discussions of sexually transmitted diseases were found (**Lowry & Towles**, 1989b).

**Greenberg, Stanley, et al.** (1993) also found that sexual references occurred more often in daytime serials than on prime-time TV, but that evening programming contained more references to intercourse and sexual deviants.

Greenberg and his associates (**Greenberg, et al.**, 1981; 1993; **Greenberg & D'Alessilo**, 1985; **Greenberg & Busselle**, 1996) have content analyzed the number of sexual incidents per hour on soap operas since 1976. They have found a steady 35% increase on average from 2.0 acts per hour in 1976 to 3.7 in 1984 to 6.6 in 1994. The highest incidence in 1994 occurred on *Days of Our Lives* (11.4) and *The Young and the Restless* (7.0). Most of the increase concerned sexual intercourse between unmarried couples and included both visual and verbal acts (discussions).

More of the incidents were verbal than visual (35% vs. 28%). It was also noted that some of the discussions involved the expression of disapproval by other characters. The most frequent age group consisted of characters in their 20s, but 12% of the participants were teenagers. Half of the sex participants had positive attitudes toward what they were doing, but 20% were clearly negative. In the 1985 sample, 87% of the visual content was of the long kiss variety. In the 1994 sample 25% of the visual incidents involved unmarried

intercourse, 57% a long kiss. Although expressions of attitudes toward having sex were generally positive, 19% of the sexual incidents involving unmarried couples were discussions of pregnancy and these were generally negative. Safe sex was mentioned only five times in a total of 333 sexual incidents occurring in the 1994 sample. Two date-rape storylines appeared on two of the soaps in the 1994 sample. More sexual references overall occurred on daytime soaps, although there were more references to intercourse and sexual deviance on prime-time programming, most of these occurring on action/adventure shows.

A 1996 content analysis of five weeks of soap operas also found sexual depictions at about six/hour. The majority (165 incidents) of the depictions involved *passionate kissing*, followed by *verbal discussions* (66), *petting/caressing* (30), *prostitution* (27), *visual depictions of intercourse* (17), and *rape* (13). For the first time, a character was introduced on *General Hospital* who had HIV. He and a female partner discussed the need to use a condom if they chose to have sex. *All My Children* depicted a teen-age couple that became sexually active and a wrapped condom was shown (Heintz-Knowles, 1996).

### MTV, Music Videos, and CDs

Brown & Campbell (1986) coded 112 music videos played on *MTV* and *Black Entertainment Television (BET)* in 1984 for prosocial and antisocial themes. Over half of the behaviors depicted were antisocial compared to one-third that was prosocial. Males and females were equally likely to initiate or receive the antisocial behavior. White performers were significantly more likely to engage in antisocial behavior (60% for males, 56% for females). Blacks were more likely to engage in prosocial behavior (50% for males, 56% for females). About 12 percent of the behaviors depicted in all the videos were overtly sexual (kissing, embracing, and implied intercourse).

Content analyses of music videos found that 50-75% contained some type of sexual references. Baxter, et al. (1985) examined 62 music videos and found that over half contained sexual content. This most often consisted of wearing sexy clothes, provocative dancing, embracing, and kissing.

Sherman and Dominick (1986) content analyzed 166 *concept* television videos. They found that sex in videos was implied rather than explicit. *Visual sexual intimacy* was present in 75% of the videos studied and on average there were four sexual acts/video. Non-intimate touching was the most frequent sexual act, followed by intimate touching, kissing, hugging, and flirtation. All of these acts occurred at about twice the rate than on conventional television. Homosexuality was implied in about one-fourth of

the sexual depictions. Incidents of exhibitionism, bondage, and transvestitism were rare, accounting for less than three percent of all episodes. But half of the videos contained violence and 80% of the videos that contained violence also contained sexual references. Women were often portrayed as provocatively dressed upper-class sex objects for lower class males seeking sexual conquest (p. 89).

**Zillmann & Mundorf** (1987) found that viewers rated the sexual content of music videos as highly appealing but the violent content as less so. **Hansen & Hansen** (1990) performed two experiments in which a total of 753 subjects viewed videos selected for their high, medium or low sexual or violent content. They found that greater sexual content increased the appeal of the video and increased feelings of happiness while high violent content decreased the appeal but increased feelings of anger. A combination of sexual and violent content was found to be the least appealing. **Christenson** (1992) found that warning labels on CDs can make the CD **less** appealing to middle-school children.

## Films

Most of the research on the effects of sexually explicit material has been concerned with movies of the **hard-core, explicit** variety. **Weaver** (1991a), in a review of the research, found that 90% of visual erotica involved sexual intercourse. Settings and scenes show little variation with an emphasis on sexual gratification with minimal development of relationships.

The **Kinsey Institute's** archives of erotic films are generally regarded as the most historically comprehensive collection in the world (**Slade**, 1984). Researchers tabulated sexual behavior in erotic films from their inception at the turn of the century to the 1980s. Such films included brute violence rarely, generally less than 10% of the time. In 1,333 examples from 1915 to 1972, rape occurred 67 times, or five percent of the total. Under age females appeared at the rate of only about 2 per decade from the 1930s to the 1950s. Only recently have sexually explicit films become more popular as violence in such films has become more popular as well.

## Stag Films

Named such by the *New York Society for the Suppression of Vice* in 1925, stag films were originally produced as 8mm shorts lasting 10 to 12 minutes without sound designed for private viewing. A hard-core version, defined as one in which genital manipulation and penetration are visible, wasn't shown in a public theater until 1969 in New York City. Of the estimated two dozen

stag films made between 1910 and 1919, only six remain. American, French, and German producers made between 70 and 80 erotic films during the 1920s, although only 50 have survived. Approximately 140 were produced in the 1930s with 100 surviving. About 105 of an estimated 120 erotic films produced in the 1940s survive. Stag films during these periods showed a low but steadily increasing level of violence, ranging from about 6% of the films produced in the 1920s to about 9% of those produced in the 1940s. Eighteen films of a sample of 155 (11.6%) produced in the 1950s contained acts of force or threat.

Availability of the 8mm projector increased production of the stag film markedly in the 1960s and by the end of the decade sexually explicit feature films were also popular. Two films produced in the early 1970s, *Deep Throat*, starring Harry Reems and Linda Lovelace, and *Behind the Green Door*, starring Marilyn Chambers, increased the popularity of erotic feature films tremendously. Members of the Colombo crime family in New York produced *Deep Throat* for \$25,000 in 1972. Adult theaters in major cities showed it 24 hours/day. It's estimated to have grossed \$600 million. Reems (Herbert Streicher) was paid \$250. He was arrested in 1974 for conspiracy to distribute obscenity across state lines. He became a 2-quart-a-day alcohol drinker, begging on the streets and sleeping in dumpsters. He recovered in the late 1980s, got married, and became a real estate broker. He died in 2013.

The Mitchell brothers produced *Behind the Green Door*. Its popularity was increased because its star was featured on Ivory Soap boxes released at the same time allowing the producers of the film to advertise her as 99 and  $\frac{1}{4}\%$  pure. The film was produced for \$60,000 and grossed over \$60 million. Purloined copies of the film were shown in adult theaters across the country leading the Mitchell Brothers to sue for copyright invasion (**Mitchell Brothers, 1979**). For the first time, allegedly pornographic material was allowed copyright protection. Jim Mitchell shot and killed his brother Artie in 1991 over an argument concerning Artie's drug use. Jim claimed amnesia in his defense and was found guilty of manslaughter, serving three years of a six-year sentence in San Quentin. Their story was told in *Rated X*, a movie released in 2000 starring brothers Charles Sheen and Emilio Estavez playing Artie and Jim Mitchell.

One of the most famous male stars of sexually explicit films was John Holmes. It's estimated that he performed in over 2,000 such films. Holmes was implicated in the brutal *Wonderland* murders in 1981, named after the street on which the four victims lived. Holmes was a drug addict by this time and apparently planned the robbery of Ed Nash, a reputed drug dealer. Nash allegedly committed the murders with a cohort in retribution. The trial was the first time a videotape of the crime scene was shown to the jury as