Sex and violence on television have long been assumed to influence the behaviors of viewers. The causal link between violent television programming and desensitization toward violence, in attitudes and in actions, is well documented (National Television Violence Study, 1996, 1997, 1998). However, although there is no lack of public discussion and debate about the effects of adolescents’ consumption of television on their sexual behavior, choices, and beliefs, there is still little research dedicated to untangling whether and how such effects might occur (Brown & Newcomer, 1991; Moore, Miller, Glei, & Morrison, 1998; Peterson, Moore, & Furstenberg, 1991; Strasburger, 1995). In contrast to research linking violent television programming to violent behavior, conducting controlled experimental studies to investigate the relationship between television viewing and adolescent sexual behavior would be problematic; in addition, unlike becoming a violent person, becoming a sexual person in adolescence is quite normal. Thus it is not surprising that very few studies of whether and how television view-

---

Funding for this research was provided by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (Grant No. R01 HD38399-02).
ing influences sexual behavior among adolescents have been conducted—in spite of the reality that teenagers convey a strong sense of identification with characters and their romantic relationships, even when the sex is otherworldly, as illustrated by the 10th-grade girl quoted above.

Meanwhile, in the past few decades, the sexual content of media has increased substantially (Brown, Walsh-Childers, & Wassak, 1990; Greenberg, Lingsangan, et al., 1993) and adolescents continue to consume media in ever larger doses (Greenberg, Brown, & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993), which increases societal concern about its potential effects and the need for research. In recent years, new initiatives for exploring the potential associations between television viewing and early adolescent behavior have appeared (Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002), and it has become clearer that the relationship between television viewing and sexual behavior is likely to be quite complex, possibly involving several competing factors (Bryant & Zillman, 1994). The complexity of this relationship suggests that in addition to methodological care in terms of design and rigor, flexible and creative approaches to analysis are necessary. For example, the relationship between overall amount of television viewing and sexual behavior may not be immediately apparent, but may be observable only in certain circumstances, as when sexually oriented programming is examined more specifically or when viewer involvement is considered (see Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). In this chapter, we describe some approaches that we have taken to expand our repertoire of methods for investigating this relationship.

Television is the most pervasive form of media: 98% of homes have TV sets (Nielsen Media Research, 2000). It forms by far the largest proportion of younger adolescents' total media consumption (Nielsen Media Research, 1998), and adolescents exert increasing control over what they view as they mature (Brown et al., 1990). Though numerous studies have documented the presence of sex on television, these studies have tended to focus on the general population without targeting shows particularly popular with adolescents (Cope-Farrar & Kunkel, 2002). One strategy for expanding the exploration of the influence of television consumption on sexual behavior involves attending to what adolescents are actually watching. Further, rather than investigating television consumption as a whole, as if all adolescents watch the same television programs and all programs are alike in their sexual content, researchers may find it prudent to attend to differences in viewing preferences, as this factor will more accurately represent the reality of adolescent experiences.

A second potential factor in the association between television viewing and sexual behavior is the relational context of viewing—the people with whom adolescents watch and process television. Past studies have found that the presence of parents influences adolescents' interpretations of programming (Austin, Roberts, & Nass, 1990; Corder-Bolz, 1981), in particu-
lar their perceptions of sexual content (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1986; Morgan & Rothschild, 1983). However, as adolescents mature, the influence of peers may outstrip that of parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1970) and watching with peers and romantic partners has been shown to influence both the amount of television watched by adolescents and the sexual content of what is watched (Courtright & Baran, 1980; Greenberg, Lingsangan, et al., 1993). The relational context of viewing may thus play an interesting role in the relationship between television consumption and sexual behaviors.

A final potential but rarely examined factor involves adolescents' conceptions of gender and beliefs about the importance of compliance with gender norms. Gender is a fundamental organizing concept in our society, and the influence of gender roles and expectations is particularly apparent in adolescence, a time during which cognitive, relational, and emotional processes change and mature (Lerner, Petersen, & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; McCaffree, 1989; Paul & White, 1990; Piaget, 1972). Gender development has also been shown to be a fundamental aspect of sexuality development in adolescence (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), and previous research has shown associations between adolescents' gendered behaviors and television viewing (Morgan, 1987). Therefore, as we explore the relationship between television and sexual behavior, it seems critical to examine the potential role of gender ideology—one's beliefs about what constitutes being a good, normal, and appropriate woman (i.e., femininity ideology; Bartky, 1990; Tolman & Porche, 2000) and what constitutes being a good, normal, and appropriate man (i.e., masculinity ideology; Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993).

The aim of this chapter is to begin to unpack the interplay between television viewing and adolescent sexual behaviors. Focusing on a variety of sexual outcomes (i.e., kissing, touching, or being touched) among girls, we consider the potential role of gender ideology in addition to what girls are watching on television and with whom. We also explore the relationships between these three factors. Finally, using small subsamples of adolescent girls favoring particular characters from two popular television shows, we further tease out some of the nuances existing in these relationships.

PART 1: SURVEY OF ADOLESCENT TELEVISION CONSUMPTION AND SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

This section details methods and findings resulting from the statistical analyses of survey data. In this section, we explore the relationships between sexual outcomes, gender ideology, and relational context of viewing for girls participating in the first wave of a longitudinal study designed to evaluate the effects of television consumption on adolescent sexuality.
Method

Participants

One hundred and thirty-six girls attending the eighth grade in a suburban central school district in the Northeast participated in this study. (Altogether, 272 students participated; the boys were set aside for this analysis.) The girls ranged in age from 11 to 15 years, with an average age of 13. The majority of these girls identified themselves as White (54%), whereas smaller proportions described themselves as Latina (30%), African American (3%), Asian (2%), other (2%), or bi- or multiracial (9%). Fourteen percent of the girls reported being born outside of the 50 states (i.e., Puerto Rico); most of these girls were native Spanish speakers. In this diverse low-income to lower middle-class sample, over half (51%) reported ever having received some form of public assistance, and 31% reported receiving assistance at the time of the data collection.

Procedure

Students responded to a two-part paper-and-pen survey designed to gather information about (a) television consumption (programming watched, how often, in what contexts) and viewing involvement (perceived realism and identification with characters) and (b) sexual attitudes and behaviors, gender ideologies, and demographic characteristics. Surveys were administered during a single 90-minute class period. Informed written consent was obtained from each student's parent or guardian. Participants provided assent prior to the survey administration and were reminded of confidentiality and of their freedom to discontinue participation at any time. All materials were available in Spanish, along with support from a Spanish-speaking researcher.

Measures

Estimated Hours per Day

Students were asked to estimate the number of hours they watched television per day in an open-ended response. Responses were requested for current habits during the school year, not distinguishing weekend from weekday.

Total Prime-Time Viewing

Students were given a list of 56 prime-time television shows popular with teen audiences to record frequency of television viewing and to enable future content analyses of programming viewed. Frequency response categories ranged from 0 to 4 on a 5-point scale, with viewing coded as never/not this season, a few times a month, once a week, a couple times a week; and almost daily. Shows on a weekly programming schedule could not have a
score higher than 2 (once a week), whereas syndicated shows could receive a high score of 4 (almost daily). Sum scores for prime-time viewing were compiled by adding up frequency responses, which provided information about approximate hours of prime-time television viewing.

Prime-Time Drama Viewing and Prime-Time Sitcom Viewing

On the basis of a previous factor analysis of extensive pilot data (Porche, Rosen-Reynoso, & Sorsoli, 2002), two genre groupings—dramas and sitcoms—were suggested from among the programming adolescents reported watching. Although it is self-evident that the networks create these two television genres, factor analysis suggested that adolescents tended to favor one genre over another: Girls reported heavier consumption of dramas and boys watched more sitcoms. Sum scores of total frequency of drama viewing and total frequency of sitcom viewing were tallied to reflect the consumption of each of these genres.1

Adolescents’ Viewing Involvement

Ward and Rivadeneyra (1999) investigated the degree to which adolescents identified with selected characters and perceived programming as real and relevant to their lives and developed an experimental approach to assess level of viewing involvement. Our measure of identification with characters was designed to gather information about how adolescents responded to this construct in the context of natural settings (i.e., reports of viewing involvement in their homes). For this analysis, we focus on one item in which students were asked to name a favorite female character in an open-ended response.

Relational Context of Television Consumption

Using a 5-point scale, adolescents reported how frequently they watched television (never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always) with various people in their lives (parents, siblings, friends, boyfriends or girlfriends). This yielded a single relational context score for each of the four categories of persons.

Sexual Behaviors

Adolescents’ experiences with sexual behaviors were scored as 1 (had ever experienced) or 0 (had never experienced) for each of the following behaviors: holding hands, kissing on the mouth, touching another person (underneath that person’s clothes or with no clothes on), being touched (underneath clothes or with no clothes on), and sexual intercourse.

1Dramas: Angel, Charmed, Dark Angel, Dharma & Greg, Dawson’s Creek, ER, Felicity, Friends, Gilmore Girls, Roswell, Sabrina the Teenage Witch, 7th Heaven, Smallville, 24 (α = .84).
Sitcoms: The Bernie Mac Show, Drew Carey, Everybody Loves Raymond, The Family Guy, Futurama, Just Shoot Me, King of the Hill, Malcolm in the Middle, The Simpsons, Scrubs, South Park, That ’70s Show, Will & Grace (α = .77).
Gender Ideology

To measure femininity ideology, we used the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale (AFIS; Tolman & Porche, 2000) which is composed of two 10-item subscales: Inauthentic Self in Relationship (ISR), which measures internalization of beliefs about relationships, and Objectified Relationship to Body (ORB), which measures internalization of relating to one's body as an object. Respondents rate their agreement with statements on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher mean scores reflect greater alignment with conventional and stereotypically feminine ideas about how girls should think and behave within the context of interpersonal relationships and in relation to their bodies. To measure masculinity ideology, we used the Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS; Chu, Porche, & Tolman, in press), which is composed of 12 belief statements regarding male behaviors within the context of interpersonal relationships. Respondents indicate agreement on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (disagree a lot) to 4 (agree a lot). Higher mean scores reflect greater alignment with conventional and more stereotypically masculine ideas about the ways boys should feel and act in relationships with peers and romantic partners.

Demographic Control Variables

Several background measures known to be correlated with media and sexuality outcomes were also included in this analysis (e.g., Chilman, 1983; Comstock & Paik, 1991; Hayes, 1987; Strasburger, 1995). These included a socioeconomic indicator (student report of whether or not the family had ever received any public assistance, including free lunch), student-identified race or ethnicity, religiosity, and educational aspirations.

Results

All of the girls reported watching at least some television on a regular basis, ranging from one-half hour to 12 hours per day, with approximately 3½ hours of television consumption per day on average. Television viewing by genre indicated an average score of 17 for drama. Because dramas tend to be one-hour shows, we can interpret this score as reflecting a prototypical adolescent's regular weekly viewing of approximately eight different nonsyndicated programs. The average viewing score of 10 for sitcoms, which tend to be half-hour shows, similarly suggests regular viewing of 10 different nonsyndicated programs per week.

Girls indicated a wide variety of female television characters as their favorites. In all, over 30 different characters (or actresses) were named and thus no overwhelming standout existed among girls in this sample. Rather, there were many smaller groups of girls with common favorites. When results
were tallied up, even the two largest of these groups were quite small: 9 girls named Buffy the Vampire Slayer as their favorite female character and 10 girls named Rachel from Friends. This result appeared to indicate a real diversity of female characters on television, reflecting a continuum of female gender roles.

The girls in the study also reported a range of sexual experiences. Though most of the girls either had already dated or were dating at the time of the survey, 25% reported that they had never been in a dating relationship. Of the girls who had dated, 84% reported having held hands; 66% had kissed on the mouth; 24% had touched someone else underneath that person's clothing or with no clothing on; and 35% had been touched under their clothing or with no clothing on. In an approximation of national trends (Singh & Darroch, 1999), sexual intercourse was an experience reported by 10% of these girls.

A full range of scores for each of the AFIS subscales were reported; mean scores tended to be in the middle of the 6-point scale. The girls' responses indicated slightly less conventional beliefs about masculinity ideology, as measured by the AMIRS. None of the control variables were associated with gender ideologies or reported sexual behaviors, however; the only consumption measure related to demographic indicators was the association between having ever been on welfare and lesser tendency to report watching television with parents ($r = -.21, p < .01$).

**Relationships to Sexual Behaviors**

As expected, correlations revealed that the traditional measure of television consumption—the reported number of hours of viewing per day—was not significantly related to sexual behaviors. However, when television watching was analyzed by separate genres, significant associations between genre and behavior were present (see Table 2.1). Frequency of watching sitcoms was positively associated with reports of the following sexual behaviors: touching, being touched, and sexual intercourse; however, frequency of watching drama was not associated with reported sexual behaviors. In regard to relational context, on average, girls reported watching with parents sometimes and watching with boyfriends rarely. Girls who reported watching television with a boyfriend also tended to report the full range of sexual behaviors, including holding hands, kissing, touching, being touched, and sexual intercourse. In contrast, reports of touching someone and having had sexual intercourse were negatively associated with watching television with parents. The context of watching with siblings was similar to that of watching with parents and negatively associated with reports of touching or being touched. Watching with friends was positively associated with reports of hand-holding but not other sexual behaviors.

In this sample, scores on only one of the two femininity ideology subscales were related to sexual behaviors (Table 2.1). Girls with lower scores...
TABLE 2.1  
Correlations Among Consumption, Ideology, and Sexual Behavior Variables (n = 131–136)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television consumption</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Watching dramas</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Watching sitcoms</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Watching with parent(s)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Watching with boyfriend</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Watching with sibling(s)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Watching with friend(s)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual behaviors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Holding hands</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Kissing</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Touching</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Being touched</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender ideology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Femininity ideology (ISR)</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Femininity ideology (ORB)</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Masculinity ideology (AMIRS)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>17.31</td>
<td>10.06</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>10.88</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. AMIRS = Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale; ISR = Inauthentic Self in Relationship; ORB = Objectified Relationship to Body.  
†p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
on the ISR subscale were significantly more likely to report touching, being touched, and having had sexual intercourse. Neither the ORB subscale nor masculinity ideology (AMIRS) was related to any sexual behaviors.

Relationships Among Variables

There were no significant relationships between gender ideologies and the separate genres of prime-time television watching (dramas and sitcoms). However, there was a trend for girls who reported having a more objectified relationship with their bodies (ORB) to report watching television more often with a boyfriend, and they were significantly less likely to watch with a parent. Finally, though watching with parents was not associated with either genre of prime-time television watching, girls who watched television with a boyfriend were more likely to report higher frequency of watching sitcoms.

PART 2: EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF POPULAR FEMALE TELEVISION CHARACTERS

This section details the methods and findings of an exploratory analysis of television characters popular with girls. The purpose of this analysis was to explore the ways the associations between gender ideology, sexual outcomes, and relational context of viewing might differ for girls identifying with different kinds of females characters.

Method

Procedure and Participants

In an effort to shed further light on the survey results, an exploratory analysis was conducted on the content of two television shows popular with this sample of eighth-grade girls. The shows Friends and Buffy the Vampire Slayer were selected for this analysis because these shows featured favorite characters of the largest subgroups of girls. The subsample thus included the 9 girls naming Buffy the Vampire Slayer as their favorite female character and the 10 girls naming Rachel from Friends. This exploratory analysis involved a content review of concurrent episodes of these shows, as well as a comparison of the two subgroups of girls naming these two characters as their favorite females on television.

Differences Between Shows

Episodes from Friends and Buffy the Vampire Slayer were recorded at the same time during the 2000–2001 season. Both shows are in syndication and appear on television at least once every day, as well as holding coveted 8:00 p.m. prime-time slots on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. The situation comedy Friends is a show about six friends living in New York who often meet to talk in a local coffee house. The character Rachel typically takes part in
conventional activities, such as shopping; she works in the fashion industry and embodies a strong and overt interest in attracting a romantic partner. During one scene in this analysis, she and a friend discussed "date moves," which for her involved both manipulating a man emotionally and making herself into a sexual object. In contrast, Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a show in which the witty characters, led by Buffy, routinely save the world from demons, vampires, and other assorted evils. Buffy is aggressive and action-oriented, a master of martial arts, and very outspoken. One analyzed scene involved her physically fighting and subsequently defeating a much larger male character while screaming, "You killed my date?" However, a scene-by-scene analysis of episodes from these two shows revealed that these observable differences between Buffy and Rachel disappear during scenes involving potential or actual romantic partners. In the context of romance, the diversity in these portrayals of femininity collapses and even Buffy, the girl who routinely saves the day, is suddenly dependent on a man to save her. Both thin, white, and beautiful, these characters are similarly submissive, passive, overly emotional, and concerned with appearance in the presence of men, thus illustrating that conventional femininity messages can exist in spite of a feminist subtext.

Differences Between Subsamples

Using t tests to compare the two groups of girls, we found no differences in either femininity ideology or reported sexual behaviors between the group identifying Buffy as their favorite television character and the group identifying Rachel as their favorite character. However, the two groups were statistically different in the tendency to watch television with a boyfriend as well as their scores on the masculinity ideology scale (AMIRS): Girls choosing Rachel as a favorite character expressed more conventional views about masculinity and less often watched with a boyfriend (Table 2.2). Further, these two groups differed from the full sample of girls in that certain sexual experiences were positively associated with more conventional masculinity ideology scores: reports of sexual intercourse for the Buffy group, \( r(9) = .90, p < .001 \), and touching under clothing for the Rachel group, \( r(10) = .64, p < .05 \).

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we have explored a number of factors that might be important in the process of influencing adolescent viewers as well as the complexity of the relationships between these factors. At this point, the con-

---

2Willow, another character on Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and the only character from either of these two shows endorsed by the National Organization for Women Feminist Primetime Report (2002), was not a favorite among these girls. Willow is extremely resistant to characteristics of femininity ideology and conventional dating scripts normally portrayed on television, including having serious and meaningful relationships with both men and women.

3Because of the small sample size, however, we interpret these results with caution and acknowledge the need for more systematic analyses with larger samples and a more extensive content analysis.
TABLE 2.2
Comparing Buffys With Rachels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Girls who report that their favorite character is Buffy ($n = 9$)</th>
<th>Girls who report that their favorite character is Rachel ($n = 10$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average hours of viewing per night</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch soap operas (%)</td>
<td>78**</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch talk shows (%)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch with boyfriend*</td>
<td>2.1*</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age at first date (years)</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have held hands (%)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have kissed on the mouth (%)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have touched someone under that person's clothing (%)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have been touched under their clothing (%)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have had sexual intercourse (%)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I can see myself responding and behaving to situations the same way the character does&quot;</td>
<td>6.1*</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity ideology (AMIRS)</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininity ideology (ISR)</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininity ideology (ORB)</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. AMIRS = Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale; ISR = Inauthentic Self in Relationship; ORB = Objectified Relationship to Body.

*On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

*p < .05. **p < .01. Difference indicated by t tests (df = 17).

The consistency of the relationships between sexual behaviors and both what adolescent girls are watching and with whom suggests that these factors deserve continued investigation. In particular, our finding that girls who watch television with a boyfriend tend to have more sexual experiences whereas those watching with parents tend to have fewer is striking, though not entirely surprising; it offers a new way to think about past studies of the ways parents influence perceptions of sexual content (Courtright & Baran, 1980; Gerbner et al., 1986; Morgan & Rothschild, 1983) and the influence of peers in terms of what and how much sexual content is being watched (Courtright & Baran, 1980; Greenberg, Lingsangan, et al., 1993). Though no less promising, the role that gender ideology may play in this system of relationships seems much less straightforward: Conventional femininity (ORB) is associated on one hand with the people with whom a girl watches television and on the other hand (ISR) with certain sexual behaviors. The complexity of these relationships was particularly clear in our exploratory analysis of the subsample of girls where we found relationships between masculinity ideology (AMIRS) and sexual behaviors that did not exist when we looked across the entire

GIRLS, TELEVISION, AND SEX 35
sample; this finding suggests that for particular groups of girls, beliefs about what makes a good girl or boy may play different roles in these relationships.

To unravel the role of gender ideology, we used sexual scripting theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), which is especially relevant to understanding the process by which adolescents might take in prime-time television messages about how to enter into and maintain sexual relationships. Scripting theory provides an alternative to earlier applications of social learning theory to the study of media effects (e.g., Brown & Steele, 1995), suggesting that television may act more immediately by providing adolescent viewers with certain informative “scripts” that dictate a variety of behaviors (in this case, sexual behaviors). The theory suggests that the scripts become so internalized and automatic that adolescents may become quite nonreflective about behaviors such as who makes the first move and, as suggested cryptically by the girl quoted at the beginning of this paper, who is likely to leave the relationship and why.

In addition to these scripts, the female characters on television seem to exhibit a continuum of conventionality regarding gender ideology, which has been associated with sexual outcomes among adolescent girls (Tolman, 1999). Past research (e.g., Ward, Gorvine, & Cytron, 2002) has suggested a circularity in the relationships between viewers, television portrayals, and personal beliefs: Viewers with certain personal attitudes identify more strongly with what they see on television, which then strengthens those attitudes and beliefs. Girls who identify strongly with the characters they see on television may thus be more likely to emulate behaviors and beliefs represented by those characters, though particular responses to television may also have to do with race and class (see, e.g., Press, 1989, 1991). Overall, however, as indicated by Ward and Harrison (see chap. 1, this volume), television’s range of gender roles for girls tends to be constricted; given our findings, it seems as though even when television does offer girls choices about how to be in the world (i.e., whether they would like to be more like Buffy or more like Rachel), it tends to restrict them to a single script in terms of romantic relationships. This suggests that ever more complex and nuanced investigations may be necessary to understand how the sexual behaviors of girls may be associated with what, how much, and with whom they watch television.

CONCLUSION

Assumptions about how to account for television viewing in earlier research on media effects may have led to a simplification of the process of influencing viewers, particularly girls, who may be more strongly affected than boys in this realm (see chap. 1, this volume). Our research suggests that the ways we think about and measure television consumption could be instrumental in identifying patterns in associations between consumption and
sexual behavior. Extending our concept of consumption beyond simply hours per day watched to include prime-time genres, identification with characters, and relational context of viewing has proven to be informative, as has the expansion of our exploration to the sexual behaviors beyond intercourse.

Considering the complex role of gender ideologies has also proven to be informative. The importance of evaluating both femininity and masculinity ideologies as a potential factor in the relationship between consumption and sexual behavior is particularly evident in our small exploratory analysis contrasting girls who chose different female characters as a favorite. This exploration highlights the fact that masculinity ideology might play a role for young women even when femininity ideology does not, and that the role played by masculinity might be of particular importance for certain groups of girls, such as those who, for example, might be worried about "being left for an alien." The importance of masculinity in this study of girls prompts us to remember that providing girls with more flexibility in expressing femininity needs to be coupled with equal attention toward alternatives for boys, both in and out of romantic relationships. Following the lead of Ward (1995), we continue to move forward in our efforts to understand the content of sexual interactions on television, the ways they reflect scripts about sexuality in our culture, and the impact these portrayals might have on adolescent sexuality.

REFERENCES


