

# Risky behaviors on TV may be modeled by inexperienced viewers

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Content analyses demonstrate that TV programming is highly saturated with sexual content and risky sexual behavior. A new study in the *Journal of Communication* shows that people with direct experience with such behavior are not influenced by its portrayal on TV. However, those without direct experience are more likely to participate in the unsafe behavior in the future, regardless of the consequences displayed.

Robin L. Nabi and Shannon Clark of the University of California conducted two studies to assess whether or not televised depictions of risky sexual behaviors alter viewers' expectations of their own future sexual behaviors, regardless of their consequences.

In the first study, researchers examined the contents of TV programming schemas and found that viewers expect main characters to ultimately survive and thrive despite the adversity they face. In the second study, college women were exposed to various portrayals of promiscuous sexual behavior, such as one night stands, that were edited to display more or less positive or negative outcomes.

Portrayals of the risky behavior were likely to affect only those without direct experience with the target behavior. The portrayal of outcomes—good or bad—did not affect attitudes or intentions regarding that behavior.

Specifically, for those who had not previously had a one night stand, viewing fictional depictions of this behavior significantly increased

expectations of the likelihood of having one in the future, regardless of the positive or negative outcomes portrayed.

"Even when behaviors are negatively portrayed, audiences may be motivated to model them anyways," the authors conclude. "We hope this research stimulates greater care in the application and testing of psychological theories to the study of media content and effects."

Source: Wiley

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