Pregnancy and Exposure to Sexual and Pregnancy-Related Media Content:
Evidence from the Relationship Dynamics and Social Life (RDSL) Study*

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Abstract

The proposed poster presents findings from the on-going Relationship Dynamics and Social Life (RDSL) study. We investigate the relationship between having experienced a pregnancy or pregnancy scare or holding positive pregnancy intentions and media preferences—specifically for television programming depicting sexual content or teen pregnancy. Extending existing research that finds a correlation between sexual media content and sexual behavior in teens, we examine the subset of young women with the highest proportions of unintended pregnancies to investigate whether a similar correlation exists with pregnancy. The proposed poster aims to (1) provide a detailed description of media preferences—focusing on sexual and teen pregnancy-related media—for young women who have experienced a pregnancy (and pregnancy-related behaviors or attitudes) in comparison with those who have not and (2) examine changes in pregnancy and related behaviors or attitudes following data collection of media preferences to account for a non-recursive model of media exposure.

Background and Conceptual Approach

The proposed poster submission uses data from the ongoing Relationship Dynamics and Social Life (RDSL) study and aims to explore the links between media preferences and pregnancy, pregnancy scares, and pregnancy-related attitudes and intentions among young women. It builds on a bourgeoning field of research focused on the effects of sexual content in mass media on the sexual behaviors and attitudes of teens. In the wake of research on media's influence on violence and substance abuse (Eron, 1963; Huesmann et al., 2003; Gidwani et al., 2002; Austin and Meili, 1994; etc.), a wave of studies has shown evidence that sexual content in television programming and other media influences sexual attitudes and behaviors among teens (Collins et al., 2004; Pardun et al., 2005; L'Engle et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2006; etc.).

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (NCPTP) has taken a specific interest in monitoring sexual content in media directed at adolescents by working with top media outlets to include responsible messages and depictions of healthy sexual behaviors, pregnancy prevention methods, and consequences of sexual activity—including teen pregnancy. These efforts on the part of the NCPTP suggest a real concern that unmonitored sexual content on television—which studies have shown rarely include prevention methods or consequences—is correlated not only with sexual behaviors and attitudes among teens, but also with teen pregnancy, the majority of which has been defined as unintended (Eyal et al. 2007; Pardun et al., 2005; Kunkel et al., 2005; Finer and Henshaw, 2006). As the NCPTP is a highly-influential organization devoted to the cause of reducing teen pregnancy, their attention illustrates the importance of studying sexual media content in regards to teen pregnancy, yet there is a dearth of research on the relationships between sexual media content and pregnancy for adolescent and young-adult women (Chandra et al., 2008 is the sole exception).

Our overarching research question asks if teen pregnancy-related experiences (i.e., pregnancies or pregnancy scares) or positive pregnancy intentions and attitudes are correlated with preferences for different types of media, including media with varying levels of sexual content or media depicting teen pregnancy. We compare respondents who have reported a previous pregnancy with those who have never been pregnant on a range of measures of media preferences and consumption. We then do the same for respondents who have strong intentions

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to become pregnant or weak intentions to avoid becoming pregnant versus those who have the opposite intentions. Additionally, we will compare respondents who have had a pregnancy scare with those who have not.

We specifically target shows depicting teen pregnancy to determine what type of young adult is watching them and how this is related to efforts such as the NCPTP's media campaign. We investigate whether young adults who have had prior pregnancy-related experiences or those who have not are the primary viewers of these programs. One criticism of the most popular shows depicting teen pregnancy—most notably, MTV's *Sixteen and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* and ABC Family's *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*—is that they may allow young women to empathize with teen pregnancy and see themselves realistically handling the consequences of sex, like their peers on the show. As a result, we look at whether respondents with children, past pregnancies, past pregnancy scares or positive intentions toward pregnancy who are drawn to this media seem to be delaying further pregnancies or childbirth following the collection of our media data. On the other hand, we look at whether respondents without prior pregnancies or related experiences maintain or alter these behaviors and attitudes following the media data collection.

There is a dearth of existing research on the effects of sexual media content on teen pregnancy. Chandra et al. (2008) surveyed boys and girls ages 15–17 over a period of three years and found that after accounting for a variety of other known correlates, high exposure to sexual content on television consistently predicts early pregnancy. The proposed poster offers a unique insight into this correlation. While Chandra et al. focus on a younger subset of teens of both sexes, the RDSL study follows females through older adolescence and emerging adulthood. While it is appropriate for research demonstrating media's effects on the sexual behavior and attitudes to focus on this younger subset of adolescents, as many women in the United States initiate sex before age 18 (Abma et al., 2004), our age group is particularly interesting for studying the relationship between media and pregnancy, as rates of unintended pregnancies dramatically peak among the 18–19 age group (108 per 1,000 as opposed to the 40 per 1,000 rate for 15–17 age group) and do not begin declining significantly until after age 24. Furthermore, the rate of unintended births is more than twice as high for women ages 18–24 than for teens 15–17 and highest among all age groups in general (Finer and Henshaw, 2006). Because continuing an

unintended pregnancy to term is associated with serious negative health and social outcomes for both mother and child during pregnancy as well as after birth, this high rate of unintended births makes the older adolescent and emerging adult subgroup of particular interest (Brown and Eisenberg, 1995; Kost, Landry and Darroch, 1998).

Existing research has found support for a circular, non-recursive relationship between exposure to sexual content and sexual behavior, where sexual activity predicts higher levels of exposure to sexual content in the media and sexual media exposure predicts higher levels of sexual activity (Bleakley et al., 2008; Steele and Brown, 1995). The longitudinal design of the RDSL study gives us the opportunity to directly examine both directions of the relationship; therefore, in addition to examining how pregnancy measures affect media choices, we will also look at the more conventional measure of how behaviors and attitudes change after exposure to media, which will be captured by examining changes in behaviors, intentions and attitudes following self-reporting of media exposure and preferences.

Data and Methods

Sample and Study Design

The data come from a supplemental survey of participants in the ongoing RDSL study. The overarching question for the RDSL study asks how prevalent unintended pregnancy is during the transition to adulthood, and why. The study uses a population-based representative sample of 1,003 young women ages 18–19. A 60-minute baseline survey interview was conducted in person with each respondent, who was then asked to participate in a weekly journal-based study for 2.5 years. The weekly surveys are mixed mode (by phone or online) and ask about current relationships, contraceptive use, pregnancy, as well as pregnancy intentions and attitudes.

In addition, all participants were invited to complete a supplemental survey over a four-week period; approximately 60% did so. The data on media exposure and preferences come from this supplemental survey, while the data on pregnancy experiences and intentions come from the RDSL baseline and weekly surveys (see Questionnaire Items, attached). The innovation of the RDSL lies in the capacity to capture a dynamic picture of relationships over time, including

pregnancy experiences and attitudes; therefore, the final version of the proposed poster will include measures of pregnancy from the baseline survey through the close of the supplemental survey, in addition to pregnancy measures following the supplemental survey in order to track changes after the media exposure was reported. This additional focus is in line with previous studies in the field that use media as the independent variable, and it also allows us to look at the validity of a non-recursive relationship between pregnancy and media, which has not previously been measured.

Sociodemographic Measures

We investigate several sociodemographic measures as of the baseline interviews for the RDSL respondents who completed the supplemental survey (n=594). *Age* is categorical and ranges from 18 to 20 years. *Race* is included as a dichotomous indicator for African American versus non-African American. *School enrollment/type* includes the following categories: 1) not enrolled and did not graduate from high school, 2) not enrolled and graduated from high school, 3) enrolled in high school, 4) enrolled in two year college/vocational/technical/other, and 5) enrolled in four year college. A respondent is coded as *received public assistance* if she reported currently receiving at least one of the following: WIC, FIP, cash welfare, or food stamps. *Family structure* is based on the questions, "While you were growing up, which of the following people did you live with?/Which of these people did you live with for the majority of the time when you were growing up?". It includes the following three categories: 1) Two parents (both biological parents or one biological parent and a step-parent); 2) one biological parent only, and 3) other. We have additional information as of the baseline interview regarding religious importance, cohabitation, age of mother's first birth, mother's education and parents' income, which can be used to further depict the population or as controls.

Early Pregnancy-Related Measures

Multiple early pregnancy-related experiences reported at the baseline interview are also included. A dichotomous measure indicates whether a respondent e*ver had sex* or *ever had sex without birth control*. *Age at first sex* is coded as 14 years or less, 15 or 16 years, and 17 or greater. Number of sexual partners is categorical and ranges from one partner to six or more partners. *Number of prior pregnancies* is coded as: 1) respondents who have never had sex, 2) none, 3) one, and 4) two or more.

Pregnancy Measures

In the preliminary results, we also investigate several pregnancy measures as of the baseline interview; the final poster will include similar measures based on the weekly surveys. A dichotomous measure indicates *pregnancy status*—that is, whether a respondent was currently pregnant. We operationalize a pregnancy as a report of a positive pregnancy test or a respondent reporting that she is "probably pregnant." We examine both positive and negative *pregnancy intentions*. Positive intentions are based on a question that asks: "How much do you want <u>to</u> get pregnant during the next month? Please give a number between 0 and 5, where 0 means you don't at all want to get pregnant and 5 means you really want to get pregnant." Negative pregnancy intentions are based on a question that asks: "How much do you want to <u>avoid</u> getting pregnant during the next month? Please give a number between 0 and 5, where 0 means you don't at all want to avoid getting pregnant and 5 means you really want to avoid getting pregnant."

Media Measures

Measures of media exposure and preference come from open-response questionnaire items from the supplemental survey. Respondents were asked "What are your three favorite (TV shows/movies/magazines/musical artists or groups)?" and "What were the last three (movies you saw/books you read)?" As our current focus is on television media, two random episodes were selected from each of over 300 series self-reported by respondents.[1] Existing research primarily relies on data collected by the Kaiser Family Foundation, which asks respondents to track their daily exposure to a pre-determined list of the top 20–25 shows found to be most popular among their demographic (one exception is Pardun et al., 2005, who code 71 of the 140 shows reported by their respondents). One major contribution of our research is that we use open-ended, self-reported data—each of the 594 respondents reported their three favorite shows—which resulted in about 330 unique television shows from the nearly 1,800 collective responses.

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[1] Due to the large number of individual shows collected and limited resources, one limitation of our measure is not being able to follow Manganello et. al.'s recommendation of using three episodes to effectively represent an entire series; Manganello et al. do not present data on two episodes, so the reliability cannot be definitively determined, but is assumed to fall somewhere between the reliability for one and three episodes (Manganello, Franzi and Jordan, 2008).

The open-ended responses are currently being coded by a process of in-depth content analysis. In depth analysis will look for the prevalence of different levels and types of sexual messages and depictions across the media, including nudity, sexual innuendo or flirtations, light touching or kissing, heavy touching or kissing, talk about sexual intercourse, sexual intercourse (implied or depicted), and more. As studies have found that sheer quantity of sexual content is more relevant than the level of explicitness (i.e., talking about sex or depicting sex), we will count all instances equally (Pardun et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2006).

Preliminary Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Table 1 presents the percentage distributions of a select set of sociodemographic characteristics as of the baseline interview. The majority of respondents are 19 years old and 27.4% are African American. About 12.8% of respondents were enrolled in high school at the time of the baseline interview, over half were enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college, and less than a third were not enrolled in school. 21% of respondents reported currently receiving public assistance. Over half reported that they lived with two parents while growing up, including those who lived with one biological parent and a step-parent, and over one-third had lived with only one parent. These percentages are among those RDSL respondents who completed the supplementary survey; however, the percentages presented here are similar to those of the RDSL sample as a whole.

Early Pregnancy-Related Characteristics

Table 1 also shows percentage distributions of early pregnancy-related measures as of the baseline interview. Nearly three-quarters of respondents have ever had sex, and of these respondents over half have ever had sex without birth control. The average age at first sex was 15 or 16. Nearly a quarter of respondents have had one sexual partner in their lifetime and 19.1% have had six or more. 15.7% have ever been pregnant.

Pregnancy and Media Characteristics

Table 2 shows the relationship between having a preference for teen pregnancy programming and baseline pregnancy status and intentions. The teen pregnancy programs included in these measures are *Sixteen and Pregnant*, *Teen Mom,* and *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*. Preliminary results show that 33.3% of teens who were pregnant as of the baseline interview prefer teen pregnancy programming, as opposed to 11.4% of teens who were not. This result was statistically significant (p = .001). While preliminary pregnancy intention results also show variation, they are not statistically significant. Differences for both positive and negative intentions were relatively small between those who prefer teen pregnancy programming and those who do not, with preference for teen pregnancy programming resulting in a slightly higher desire to get pregnant (+.02) and a slightly lower desire to avoid pregnancy (–.03). However, these intentions are taken from the baseline interview, which can be up to two years prior to the supplemental survey. While the reports of a prior pregnancy will not change, intentions have a huge potential to change over time, so these results do not necessarily mean that significance will not present itself when measured at a time closer to the supplemental survey. The final poster will fill this gap in time for all measures by drawing data from the baseline survey and all weekly surveys, with over half of the respondents having completed a full two and a half years in the study by the end of spring 2011.

Future Plans

The final poster will include more measures of pregnancy status and intentions, as well as measures of pregnancy scares. We define a pregnancy scare as a respondent indicating that she was probably pregnant in a weekly survey and then in a subsequent weekly survey indicating that she is no longer pregnant and never reported a pregnancy test confirmation in a prior weekly survey. Measures of pregnancy scares are currently being developed and will be included in the final version of this poster. This measure will capture a wider range of young women who may not have had a prior pregnancy, but who may be at risk of becoming pregnant. Our three-fold system of measuring pregnancy, pregnancy scares, and pregnancy intentions is a novel approach and we hope to show that attending to these intersections is necessary to paint the true picture of teen pregnancy in regards to studying media in the future.

The final poster will also include measures of sex content across over 300 television shows and how sex content relates to teen pregnancy and related experiences. Furthermore, we intend to look more deeply at the media choices of our respondents by examining their preferences for shows that deal primarily with pregnancy of non-teens—such as TLC's *A Baby Story* or *Jon and Kate Plus 8*—to compare results for pregnancy content in general with pregnancy content directed at teens. Additionally, for all programming that has a particular focus on teen pregnancy, a new coding scheme will be developed to target content related to the pregnancy, including demographics of pregnant teens, discussion of how the teen became pregnant, obstacles facing the pregnant teen, different forms of support (i.e. family, partner, government, etc.), and a range of other measures.

As coding is also underway for several other forms of media (music, movies, books, and magazines), it is possible that we will expand the scope of media forms we consider. Overall, we intend to present an in-depth portrait of respondents who have experienced a pregnancy, pregnancy scare, or who hold positive pregnancy intentions and those who do not in regards to their exposure to and preferences for media with sexual and pregnancy content. Early results indicate that teens who have experienced a pregnancy are more likely to watch programming dealing with teen pregnancy. This could be an important finding for campaigns aimed at providing teens with responsible information about sex and pregnancy, as it could suggest that a greater effort be put into stressing delay of next pregnancy among young women who have already been pregnant or given birth.

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Table 1. Baseline Sociodemographic Characteristics and Early Pregnancy-Related Experiences[1]

Sociodemographic Characteristics		Early Pregnancy-Related Experiences	
Age		Ever had sex[2]	
18 years old	42.4	Yes	70.5
19 years old	48.8	No	29.5
20 years old	8.8	Ever had sex without birth control	
Race		Yes	58.5
White	70.2	No	41.5
Black	27.4	Age at first sex	
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.4	14 or less	19.1
Native American	1.0	15 or 16	43.4
School enrollment/type		17 or greater	37.5
Not enrolled and did not graduate	5.1	Lifetime number of sexual partners	
Not enrolled and did graduate	18.2	1 partner	24.8
Enrolled in high school	12.8	2 partners	19.3
Enrolled in 2 year college/vocational/technical/other	30.6	3 partners	19.3
Enrolled in 4 year college	33.3	4 partners	9.8
Public assistance		5 partners	7.6
Yes	21.0	6+ partners	19.1
No	79.0	Number of prior pregnancies	
Family structure		No sex	29.5
Two parents	59.6	0 prior pregnancies	54.9
One biological parent only	34.3	1 prior pregnancy	11.8
Other	6.1	2 or more prior pregnancies	3.8

[1] *Of those respondents (n=594) who completed the supplemental survey; the composition of this sub-population does not differ in any substantive way from the total RDSL study population (n=992)*

[2] *Subsequent 3 variables: of those who answered yes to "ever had sex"*

Table 2. Baseline Pregnancy Status and Intentions by Preference for Teen Pregnancy Programming[1] (n=594)

	Doesn't Prefer Teen Pregnancy Programming	Prefers Teen Pregnancy Programming	All Respondents
Pregnancy Status*			
Not Currently Pregnant	88.60%	11.40%	95.96%
Currently Pregnant	66.70%	33.30%	4.04%
Pregnancy Intentions[2]			
Positive	0.14	0.16	0.14
Negative	4.81	4.78	4.81

***Chi-square test significant (p=.001)

[1] *Programs measured are* Sixteen and Pregnant, Teen Mom *and* The Secret Life of the American Teenager

[2] *Mean pregnancy intentions range from 0-5; pregnant respondents are excluded (n=562)*

<center>**<u>Questionnaire Items</u>**</center>

Media – Supplemental Survey
- What are your 3 favorite TV shows?
- What are your 3 favorite movies?
- What are your 3 favorite magazines?
- What are your 3 favorite musical artists or groups?
- What were the last 3 movies you saw?
- What were the last 3 books you read?

Pregnancy – Supplemental Survey
- Getting pregnant at this time in your life is one of the worst things that could happen to you.
- If you got pregnant now, you could handle the responsibilities of parenting.
- If you got pregnant now, you would have to quit school.
- If you got pregnant now, your partner would be happy.
- If you got pregnant now, you could not afford to raise the child.
- If you got pregnant now, your family would help you raise the child.
- It wouldn't be all that bad if you got pregnant at this time in your life.
- Pregnancy is something that should be planned.
- It doesn't matter whether you use birth control or not; when it is your time to get pregnant, it will happen.
- Every pregnancy is a blessing.
- Which is more risky to a woman's health: taking birth control pills for a year or having a baby, including the pregnancy, labor, and delivery?

Pregnancy – Journal and Baseline[1]
- How much do you want <u>to</u> get pregnant during the next month? Please give a number between 0 and 5, where 0 means you don't at all want to get pregnant and 5 means you really want to get pregnant.
- How much do you want to <u>avoid</u> getting pregnant during the next month? Please give a number between 0 and 5, where 0 means you don't at all want to avoid getting pregnant and 5 means you really want to avoid getting pregnant.
- How much do you think {CUR_PARTNAME} wants you <u>to</u> get pregnant during the next month? Please give a number between 0 and 5, where 0 means he doesn't at all want you to get pregnant and 5 means he really wants you to get pregnant.
- How much do you think {CUR_PARTNAME} wants you to <u>avoid</u> getting pregnant during the next month? Please give a number between 0 and 5, where 0 means he doesn't at all want you to avoid getting pregnant and 5 means he really wants you to avoid getting pregnant.
- In the past {DAYS_MISS7} days (since {TODAY-7}), has {CUR_PARTNAME} told you that during the upcoming month he wants you to get pregnant with him?
- ***In the past {DAYS_MISS7} days (since {TODAY-7}), did you and {CUR_PARTNAME} talk about your [possible] pregnancy?[2]
- In the past {DAYS_MISS7} days (since {TODAY-7}), did you have sexual intercourse with {CUR_PARTNAME}? By sexual intercourse, we mean when a man puts his penis into a woman's vagina.[3]
- How much do you want <u>to</u> get pregnant with {CUR_PARTNAME} during the next month? Please give a number between 0 and 5, where 0 means you don't at all want to get pregnant with him and 5 means you really want to get pregnant with him.
- How much do you want to <u>avoid</u> getting pregnant with {CUR_PARTNAME} during the next month? Please give a number between 0 and 5, where 0 means you don't at all want to avoid getting pregnant with him and 5 means you really want to avoid getting pregnant with him.
- If you were to get pregnant in the upcoming month, would you move in with {CUR_PARTNAME}?
- If you were to get pregnant in the upcoming month, would you get married to {CUR_PARTNAME} (IF ENGAGED: earlier than planned)?

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[1] *Baseline survey asked addition, more in-depth questions that are not listed here.*
[2] *Not asked at baseline.*
[3] *At baseline, asked have you <u>ever</u> had sexual intercourse with current partner.*