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GROWING UP AT DAWSON'S CREEK

Is television an example of romance for the young and inexperienced?

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Growing up at Dawson's Creek. Is television an example of romance for the young and inexperienced?

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Several studies support the assumption that respondents' unrealistic beliefs about relationships tend to reinforce frustration and elicit dissatisfaction with their own relationships (Epstein and Eidelson, 1981; Eidelson and Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1982, 1986). One study summed up the findings by stating: "the more dysfunctional beliefs endorsed, the less happy one is with one's own intimate life" (Haferkamp, 1999: 194).

As most programming incorporates references to sexual and relational issues, television may be an influential source of judgements on romantic relationships and sexuality (Haferkamp, 1999; Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991). In one content analysis Ward (1995) tracked 12 television shows most preferred by adolescents. He assessed an average of 20 references to intercourse per hour. A sample of popular music videos shows frequent sexual suggestivity and provocative clothing (Baxter et al., 1985; Seidman, 1992). Greenberg et al. (1986) estimated that an average adolescent in 1985 saw 2000 instances of sexual behavior. Televised portrayals also emphasize a recreational orientation toward sex rather than depicting procreational or sexual health issues. Wattleton (1987: 379) describes how *"glamorous grown-ups do not use contraception; in fact, they do not plan for sex at all. Being 'swept away' is the romantic ideal"*. Since only a small proportion of the sexual behavior shown on television takes place between two adults who are married to each other, seduction is

a central theme. As extraordinary attractiveness seems to be a 'conditio sine qua non', television offers clues on how to be sexy.

Adolescents may be especially susceptible to these televised portrayals. To construct an adult self-concept adolescents pick up the bits of information on various aspects of adult life they notice in their environment. Using 'examples' they learn how to fulfill social roles and how adults manage. Adolescents try to find out "what is important, what is to be valued, what is to be lived for" (Arnett, 1995: 526). Particularly for romantic relationships, adolescents' lives largely consist of whole new situations (Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993). Of vital importance for the romantic and sexual socialization of the adolescent is to find an answer to the questions: "Am I normal? Do I act normal?". In new circumstances one needs ample scripts to guide behavior, ruled by impressions of what is customary (Roloff, 1981). To cope with the novel expectations of early romantic relationships adolescents start looking for reassuring examples. Content analyses show they may find these examples in media messages.

Adolescents may even have few options other than to search for media examples, because 'live' examples are rare. Except for mild and peripherical expressions of relationships and sexuality, direct observation seldom occurs. It is not an easy subject to talk about, especially not with parents (Gordon & Gilgun, 1987), and education programs usually focus on biological features (Huston, Wartella & Donnerstein, 1998). Consequently, not only is television an omnipresent and often 'consulted' source of sexual and romantic examples, adolescents may even depend strongly on television (Baran, 1976). Regarding sex and relationships television may have a high 'functional value' (Greenberg et al., 1993).

Yet whether television could serve as a source of meanings about relationships has received the attention of only a few researchers. Some studies articulated the hypothesis that adolescents who are confronted with media messages run the risk of forming a biased picture of relationships, since the inexperienced adolescent is not aware of the unrealistic nature of media depictions. On this issue, Baran (1976) reported that the inexperienced are less skeptical of the poor truthfulness of media messages. Likewise, the more time adolescents spend watching television, the harder they find it to accept their lack of experience (Courtright & Baran, 1980) or the less they enjoy their first experimenting. In addition, heavy viewers claim to have started

having sex at an earlier age than light viewers. Calfin, Carroll, & Shmidt (1993) and Strouse & Buerkel-Rothfuss (1987) reported that watching music videos and R-rated movies is positively correlated with liberal opinions on sexual intercourse; heavy viewers also expect that partners need to empathize perfectly which each other and read each others' thoughts for their romantic relationship to stand and succeed (Haferkamp, 1999).

Fragmentary and sparse though such research may be, it does comprise, in our view, important concepts needed for an accurate estimate of the extent to which television viewing may affect relationship-related views. Next to common variables in television research, such as background variables (gender, SES, etc.) and the amount of general television viewing, direct experience and perceived realism are concepts often referred to.

In fact, direct experience is a concept often included in media effects research, as it is believed to overshadow mediated experience. Several researchers have contended that television's influence diminishes as the viewer has direct experiences (e.g. Shapiro & Lang, 1991). In this connection Adoni & Mane (1984) speak of fields of relevance. Domains of reality central to an individual's life are called 'close', whereas aspects of lesser importance are 'remote'. Adoni, Cohen & Mane (1984) suggest that television contributes to social reality on remote domains only. If this rationale is correct, television may not have any effect on adolescents' partner-related expectations, since romantic relationships are assumed to be central to an adolescent's concerns. Yet many adolescents have little or no direct romantic or sexual experience. In other words, the romantic and sexual domain of reality is especially close, although the closeness cannot be attributed to direct experience. An adolescent may look for mediated experience on what is nevertheless a close domain.

Adolescents' direct experiences likely coincide with diverging interpretations of media messages. To varying degrees of experience the responses to media portrayals may differ. As the repertoire of sexual feelings and romantic experiences is expanding, more complex schemata and scripts, and, consequently, differing 'readings' arise. Brown & Newcomer (1991) speak of a reciprocal pattern of interactions between sexual and romantic experiences and media message interpretations.

One dimension of the interpretation of a media message is the perception of its truthfulness. Viewers' perceived trust in the truthfulness of what (s)he notices on the screen might be of importance in explaining different attitudes. Despite the fictional nature of most television programming, many aspects of the portrayals (seem to) look like real life. Consequently, adolescents who are looking for behavioral examples and who themselves have no real-life experiences, may easily be convinced by the apparent realism to accept media depictions as useful models of behavior. "Thus, it is expected that the socializing effect of television's sexual content will be stronger among viewers who perceive its portrayals as more realistic" (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999).

Perceived realism is also often one of the reasons why media researchers include the influence of parents and peers in their models. Rothshild (1984) reported that adolescents who have strong relationships with a group of peers perceive the distinctions between television portrayals and real life less easily. On the other hand, according to Austin, Roberts and Nass (1990) parents when present during media use often emphasize the poor veracity of television. Adolescents compare the meaning of media messages to the meanings that the environment carries, i.e. parents and peers (cf. Roloff, 1981).

Moreover, dimensions of adolescents' relationships with parents and peers have been found to correlate with sexual and romantic attitudes and experiences, too (e.g. Wilson & Medora, 1990; Gordon & Gilgun, 1987). Attachment theory, for instance, deals with the influence of both parents and peers on the development of romantic relationships. Starting-point of the attachment rationale is the assessment that various relationships of one individual shows obvious similarities. For instance, the nature of an adolescent's interactions with peers resembles the way the individual behaved in the nuclear family context as a child (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1988). From such findings, it has been inferred that an individual has some sort of basic blue-print of relationships, shaped in childhood. Social intercourse during childhood, especially the way emotional protection is experienced, fixes some characteristics of how to behave in subsequent relationships. This theory does not imply a simple resemblance of adolescent and adult relationships to parent-child relationships, nor does it deal with relationships as if they merely retraced childhood-relationships. The theory implies

"that specific interactions vary as a function of changing developmental challenges from one age period to the next, but are still guided by internal working models that are essentially stable" (Collins & Repinski, 1994: 13). For example, in a series of short relationships during adolescence, the individual might be inclined to rely on the childhood blue-print of relationships, whereas in more stable, long-standing relationships the individual has the time to adapt the original working model (Collins & Repinski, 1994: 14).

Consequently, in this perspective, an adolescent's behavior is accounted for by both his/her preceding development in family and his/her current efforts to cope with new situations. The attachment approach also suggests not to limit parental or peer influence to passing on information or making an example – as most studies do -, but to involve more qualitative features. As for peer influences, attachment theory calls attention to the strong friendships that arise during puberty. According to Furman & Wehner (1994) close relationships with peers serve as some sort of foretaste of romantic relationships, being an intermediate phase in adapting the original relationship model to adolescent expectations (Connoly & Johnson, 1996; Connoly et al., 2000: 1396). Adolescent friendships are the first relationships that are characterized by comprehensive self-disclosure and mutual confirmations of each other's identity (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). In close relationships with peers the adolescent progressively develops a more complex interaction pattern.

PARTNER-RELATED EXPECTATIONS

Courtright & Baran (1980) report that the more time adolescents spend watching television, the harder they find it to accept their lack of experience. According to Haferkamp's findings (1999) heavy viewers expect partners to perfectly empathize which each other and read each others' thoughts for their romantic relationship to continue (Haferkamp, 1999). Central to both studies is television's hypothesized impact on some sort of evaluative approach to characteristics of real-life relationships. In the present study we attempt to further these findings, by scrutinizing television's impact on another dimension of a romantic relationship, the preferred characteristics of a potential mate. Assuming that (inexperienced) adolescents' minds are not occupied with abstract features of romantic relationships, but with aspects of

(perceived) immediate importance, concerns about partner-related traits may be central to young adolescents' construction of a sexual self. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to investigate whether the rated importance of characteristics for a romantic partner differs across television viewing patterns and the perceived realism of television messages, as the viewers' social backgrounds, direct experiences, and the quality of peer and parental relationships are accounted for.

More specifically, we focus on the importance of physical attractiveness in a partner, for television is said to portray attractive women as slender and curved and attractive men as slim and muscular (Hofschire & Greenberg, 2001). Content analyses describe that television characters meeting this body type ideal receive significantly more social rewards, often in connection with romantic and sexual success (Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1990). Fouts & Burggraf (1999) report that most women in situation comedies are thin, and that these slender characters are more positively treated by male characters than are female characters above average weight. Ward (1995) described physical attractiveness as an important advantage, even a necessity, in successful dating on television.

However, television characters being beautiful (and, therefore, romantically successful) and sexuality being an important feature across most television genres, does not necessarily mean all relationships portrayed on television are superficial dates between two attractive people. Most content analyses create that impression, because they count the number of sexual instances, report the small percentage of sexual relations in which contraceptives are used, and emphasize the amount of nudity. However, there are several programs that do not support the image of careless adolescents having unprotected sex on a first date. Though not reported on in content analyses, television shows as, for instance, Dawson's Creek, Party of Five and Felicity depict thoughtful and articulate teenagers, carefully reflecting on their romantic lives. These shows may give adolescents the idea that a romantic partner needs more than good looks. In fact, most fiction series in which story lines on romantic relationships are serialized, may do so. As a result, to conceptualize the expectations of a romantic partner we included physical attractiveness, as well as, having a 'good personality'.

AIM OF THE STUDY

This study scrutinized relationships between television viewing, perceived realism and partner beliefs. In order to estimate accurately the extent to which television accounts for the observed variance in partner-related expectations, we wanted to test the relationship in a broader model, adding to the unidimensional television effect relationship three groups of variables, as suggested by literature on television effects and attachment theory. We speak of (1) background variables such as school level and the educational level of parents, (2) the quality of respondents' relationships with their parents and peer friends, and (3) their own romantic relationship experiences. As a result, the following research question is proposed:

> RQ1: To what extent can television viewing and perceived realism predict adolescents' expectations of a romantic partner, after more 'traditional' variables are taken into account?

Since content analyses show the predominant presence of physical attractiveness in television messages, this study expects the rated importance of physical attractiveness in a partner to increase with television viewing. Although more abstract characteristics as having a 'good personality' are not reported on in content analyses, we believe they are implicitly part of most television series too. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated:

> H1: Television viewing and perceived realism will be positively related to the rated importance of physical attractiveness.
>
> H2: Television viewing and perceived realism will be positively related to the rated importance of a 'good personality'.

In this study we also want to unravel in which way direct experience and perceived realism are related, when used as predictors of relationship beliefs.

> RQ2: Does perceived realism contribute to the variance of partner expectations irrespective of direct experience, or does direct experience really overshadow the effect of television?

METHOD

Sample

Although adolescents develop sexual and romantic interests at the beginning of puberty, their actual experiences remain limited. Only by the age of 18 most young men and women have had some sort of relationship experience. Between these ages the adolescent undergoes intense changes (Connoly, Furman & Konarski, 2000: 1395). Thus, since research on sexual and dating patterns labels the age of 15, 16 years old 'an important period of transition' (Connoly, Furman en Konarski, 2000), in which the number of romantic experiences rapidly increases (Feiring, 1996), we surveyed adolescents of that age. Questionnaires were administered to a stratified random sample of pupils in a middle-sized city in [a small European country]. A two-step sampling method was used. First, schools were randomly selected from a list. Next, to ensure a sample that is proportionately stratified for levels in [a small European country]'s high school system, groups of pupils attending classes together were selected in such a way that 40 percent of the sample consists of so-called ASO-level pupils, and 30 percent each of so-called TSO- and BSO-level pupils. ASO-level aims at pupils with higher scholastic aptitude, who can deal with more theoretical schooling in languages and mathematics. TSO-level offers a more practice-oriented formation, and BSO-level comprises vocational training in professions as baker or plasterer, generally attended in the [small European country] system by pupils with lower intellectual abilities.

Following this procedure, 497 fifteen and sixteen year olds were asked to complete a questionnaire in class. 428 pupils returned it (completion rate of 86 percent). The majority of the participants were male (55 percent). 9.2 percent of their fathers and 7.7 percent of their mothers did not go to high school. Fifteen percent of their fathers and 11.7 percent of their mothers quit high school. To 28.6 percent and 35.4 percent, respectively, high school was the final educational degree completed. About one in five (20.5 percent fathers, 22.7 percent mothers) attended a short-term college education, whereas 19.4 percent and 11.9 percent, respectively, finished a long-term college education.

Measurement

The questionnaire was divided into several sections. First, the respondents were asked about their viewing behavior. The amount of television viewing is a combination of viewing frequencies and the number of hours typically watched on a viewing day. Respondents were asked to estimate how many week-days a week they watch television, how many Fridays they watch television each month, how many Saturdays they watch television each month, and how many Sundays they watch television each month. Second, they were asked to estimate for how many hours they watch on a week-day, a Friday, a Saturday and a Sunday. By multiplying the viewing frequency and the amount of viewing per day, and, consequently, summing these scores, the total amount of viewing in one typical week is estimated.

Next, by using the three-item version of Rubin's Perceived Realism Scale, modified by changing the subject from television in general to relationships on television, respondents were asked to express their belief in the sense of truth of televised romances on a five-point Likert-type scale.

Since the questionnaire would have become too long, we could not include the complete Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Therefore, to develop short scales on the quality of the relationship with peer friends and the quality of the relationship with parents, for each of both, five statements were chosen from the inventory. These statements were believed to assess adolescents' perceptions of their affective ties with their parents and peer friends, or, more specifically, the perceived ease of talking with their parents or peer friends about personal and emotional topics and the derived comfort from these interactions. The respondent rated each item on a five-point Likert-type scale based on how much the item applied to his or her relationships, ranging from 1 = 'strongly agree' to 5 = 'strongly disagree'.

Several studies have used scales to measure the perception of the ideal man or woman (e.g. Stiles et al., 1987). In these studies, respondents were asked to rate the importance of up to 40 characteristics. From Gibbons & Brusi-Figueroa's scale (1997), we selected ten characteristics, five of them believed to indicate physical attractiveness, the other believed to indicate a good personality, and we rephrased the original instructions. We asked the respondents not to rate the characteristics for the

ideal man or woman, but the preferred features of a romantic partner, on a scale ranging from 0 to 10. Items included 'is sexy', 'has a beautiful body', 'has self-knowledge', 'loves children', and 'is polite'.

Finally, an assessment of sexual and romantic experiences is included in the survey questionnaire. Respondents were asked to report how many weeks, if any, they had a girl- or boyfriend. In addition to relationship experience, respondents were also asked to report which of seven sexual behaviors they had experienced, ranging from holding hands, over kissing and petting, to coitus (coded yes = 1 and no = O). Summing these scores indicated sexual experience.

Analytical procedure

First, principal components analyses with varimax rotation were run to determine which items comprise the quality of peer and parent relationships and the partner-related expectations. Next, correlational analyses and hierarchical regressions were conducted to determine the relative influence of demographics, direct experience, the relationship quality and the television variables in predicting the importance of physical attractiveness and a good personality. By means of a second hierarchical regression analysis, the relationship among perceived realism and direct experience was explored.

RESULTS

One adolescent out of four (24.1%), reported never having had a boy- or girlfriend. About half of the sample (48.0%) reported to have had a boy- or girlfriend for 8 weeks maximum. In this sample, 81.1 percent had kissed a girl or boy, 44.6 percent touched the sexual organs of another person, and 37.8 percent reported to have had intercourse.

The mean time spent on television viewing was almost 17 hours per week (M = 16.9, SD = 10.19), or 2.4 hours every day. The quite large standard deviation indicates that concerning viewing behavior great differences exist.

The principal components analysis run on the ratings of romantic partner characteristics yielded two factors with eigenvalue greater than 1.0 (Table 1). As

could be expected, both components seem conceptually coherent and can be labeled the rated importance of physical attractiveness and of a good personality in a romantic partner. The first factor includes 'good-looking', 'sexy', 'beautiful body', 'well dressed' and 'modern'. It explained 32 percent of the total variance. The reliability of these items as indicated by Cronbach's alpha was high at .81. The second factor includes 'responsible', 'calm', 'polite', 'self-knowledge', and 'loves children'. Of the total variance, 17 percent is explained by this factor (Cronbach's alpha was .70). The means of the items in both factors were very much alike, and relatively high: all characteristics were deemed important in a romantic partner. Only three characteristics showed a significant difference between males and females; more than girls, boys find it important to have a partner who is good-looking ($t(427)=-3.24$, $p<.001$), is sexy ($t(426)=-3.42$, $p<.001$), and has a beautiful body ($t(424)=-4.25$, $p<.0001$).

TABLE 1

A second principal components analysis (table 2) showed that five items of which it could be expected comprised the factor Quality of the Relationship with Peer Friends. It accounted for 36 percent of the variance (eigenvalue = 3.61; Cronbach's Alpha was .81). The second factor is the Quality of the Relationship with Parents, accounting for 26.5 percent of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.65; Cronbach's Alpha was .88). The overall mean of the quality of the peer relationships was 2.19, and of the quality of the relationship with parents 2.55. This finding shows that adolescents in this sample rate the relationship with their friends slightly better than the relationship with their parents.

TABLE 2

In order to test the two hypotheses, correlational analyses were run. Results in table 3 show that relationship nor sexual experiences were significantly linked to the importance of physical attractiveness. Among the background variables, only gender ($r = .14$, $P < .01$) and school level ($r = .22$, $p < .001$) were: boys find it more

important to have an attractive partner, and the lower a respondent's school level, the more attractiveness matters. Furthermore, the relationship with parents was significantly related to the importance of a partner being beautiful ($r = -.12$, $p < .05$), indicating that adolescents who reported a satisfying relationship with their parents, scored higher on the physical attractiveness concept. This result does not apply to the relationship with peer friends. Finally, both television viewing ($r = .24$, $p < .001$), and perceived realism ($r = .19$, $p < .001$) were significantly related. To heavy viewers, more than to light viewers, and to respondents who believe that televised relationships in some way resemble real-life relationships, more than to respondents who do not, physical attractiveness matters.

As for the importance of a partner having a good personality correlational analysis paints a slightly different picture. First, respondents' direct experiences are not related to having a good personality either. Among the background variables gender is not, but school level is quite strongly related to 'good personality' ($r = .37$, $P < .001$). Pupils in a less difficult program, expect their partners to have a fine character. Results in table 3 also show significant correlations for both relationship variables, indicating that those who have poor relationships with their parents ($r = -.27$, $p < .001$) and peer friends ($r = -.18$, $p < .001$), find a good personality less important. Finally, this correlational analysis suggests that adolescents who watch television more frequently ($r = .27$, $p < .001$) and tend to believe the televised portrayals of romance ($r = .20$, $p < .001$), expect a romantic partner to have a good personality.

TABLE 3

To answer the first research question on how direct experiences, background variables, the quality of peer and parent relationships, television viewing and perceived realism can predict partner-related expectations, a hierarchical regression was run. Results in table 3 show that relationship experience can be considered a significant predictor of physical attractiveness (beta = .13, $p < .1$), however only when we tolerantly deem $p < .10$ a sufficient significance level. The only significant background predictor of attractiveness is gender (beta = .15, $p < .05$). The background variables explained 4 percent of the variance. Further, the relationship with parents,

nor the relationship with peer friends can significantly predict the importance of having a beautiful partner. Finally, the amount of television viewing (beta = . 19, p < .01) and the perceived truthfulness of televised relationships (beta = .12, p < .1) were significant predictors, however, the latter only when a significance-level of .10 is tolerated. Both television variables explained an additional 5 percent of variance. The total amount of variance explained was 12 percent.

None of the experience variables and among the background variables, only the school level was a significant predictor of the importance of a good personality in a romantic partner (beta = .28, p < .001), explaining 12 percent of the total variance. Further, the quality of the relationship with parents (beta = -.24, p < .001), as well as, with peer friends (beta = -.13, p < .05) were significant predictors. These variables explain 9 percent of the variance. Finally, the amount of television viewing significantly predicted the importance of a good personality (beta = .19, p < .01). The additional variance explained was 3 percent; the total amount of explained variance was 24 percent.

TABLE 4

The second research question was to unravel the relationship among direct experience and perceived realism in predicting partner-related expectations. The results of the correlational analysis and the hierarchical regression analysis show striking differences between the zero-order correlation coefficients and the standardized regression estimates (beta). Whereas the correlation coefficient between perceived realism and physical attractiveness is .19 (p < .001), the predictive value of perceived realism is only .12 and hardly significant. As for the relationship between perceived realism and 'good personality', the correlation coefficient is .20 (p < .001); however, the beta is only .02 and not significant. These results indicate that one or more of the other variables in the regression model is/are responsible for this change. Literature on television effects suggests direct experience is one of the variables responsible. To explore this suggestion, we ran a second hierarchical regression analysis (table 4). In stage 1 we entered the first block, which comprised perceived realism only. Results in table 4 show that in a simple regression equation perceived realism is a significant

predictor of both physical attractiveness and good personality, indicated by standardized estimates of .18 ($p < .01$) and .20 ($p < .001$). In stage 2, we added a second block of all other variables. However, these variables were entered stepwise in the regression equation, in order to identify which variables may be responsible for the difference between the zero-order correlation coefficient and the standardized estimate. As for physical attractiveness, the final regression equation indicates that the beta for perceived realism is lower, but remains significant (beta = -.12, $p < .05$). Of all other variables only gender (beta = .17, $p < .01$) and the amount of television viewing (beta = .20, $p < .001$) are significant predictors. The direct experience variables are not. The total amount of variance explained was 32 percent.

In the final regression equation for 'good personality', perceived realism turned out not to be a significant predictor, nor was direct experience. School level (beta = 23, $p < .001$), the relationship with parents (beta = -.23, $p < .001$), and, again, the amount of television viewing (beta = 20, $p < .O1$) can significantly predict the importance of a good personality. The total amount of variance explained was .21 percent.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Since the perspective informing most investigations on this topic has been a unidimensional effects model in which television use is considered simply to undermine sexual prudence and restraints, few of the findings provide convincing insights in the role of media portrayals in sexual socialization. Focusing on risky behavior, researchers have missed one essential step, well characterized by Comstock et al. (1978). They argued that *"portrayals may influence behavior through the acquisition of new responses or through altering the likelihood of the performance of newly or previously acquired responses. Such alteration may occur through the changing of expectations regarding the outcome of behavior, through identification with the perpetrator of an act, (...) and by assigning certain meanings to a class of behavior."* Emphasizing the importance of attitudes and perceptions, Comstock et al. (1978) believe that television may offer a context in which certain meanings and expectations are attached to various topics. Accordingly, the specific hypothesis in the present study was that an adolescent learns partly from television which characteristics of a romantic partner are appropriate.

Television viewing, as well as perceived realism, are found to be positively linked to the importance of physical attractiveness and a good personality. Thus, H1 and H2 were supported. As for the first research question, results show that partner-related expectations are significantly predicted by television viewing, when direct experiences, background variables, and the quality of relationships with parents and peer friends are controlled. Perceived realism is also a significant predictor of attractiveness. However, this finding does not hold true for perceived realism in predicting the importance of a good personality.

In answering the second research question, it turned out that the zero-order relationship between perceived realism and the importance of a good personality is spurious. School level, the relationship with parents, and television viewing seemed more accurate predictors. Yet perceived realism is an accurate predictor of the importance of attractiveness, although the zero-order correlation is partly accounted for by gender, and television viewing.

Of course, this study does not provide a final conclusion on the effect of television viewing on partner expectations. However, it is important to notice that the predictive power of television viewing remains, albeit not strong, consistent, when controlling for several other variables. In the second hierarchical regression analysis using the probability of F as stepping method the amount of television viewing is the only predictor meeting the enter-criterion in both equations. Since this result is found on a topic on which sparse research exists, it is reason enough to further these investigations.

The main argument, in our view, for investigating television's impact on the sexual socialization of adolescents, is their limited direct experience. A lack of real-life experiences may lead to a naive acceptance of televised portrayals. Yet, the present study suggests that there is some influence of television viewing on romantic expectations, irrespective of a respondent's direct experience.

One explanation is that the romantic and sexual experience of 15- and 16-year-olds is not rich enough to counterbalance expectations, that, if shaped by television, have been cultivated through years of viewing. Another explanation for this finding may be

the way adolescents perceive their direct experiences. They may view their romantic and sexual experiences as mere experimenting, assuming that 'the real thing' about sex and romance has not yet begun. Thus, when asked about expectations for a romantic partner, they may have given an answer about the future. Direct experiences, then, do not intermediate between television viewing and relationship expectations, for direct experiences are now, whereas the image cultivated by television is about the future.

Both explanations suggest concepts that should be assessed in future research. First, assessing how adolescents perceive their direct experience may lead to a review of the conclusion that it is not an intermediate factor. Second, it would be useful to make a distinction between current and future expectations. Defining the dependent variable as expectations, without specifying a stage of life, may not have revealed the exact role of direct experiences in television effects research of this kind.

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Table 1 Factor loadings (principal components. varimax rotation) of 10 characteristics (N = 412)

	Mean	SD	Factors 1	2
Fysical attractiveness				
Good-looking	7.76	2.29	.90	
Sexy	7.67	2.47	.88	
Beautiful body	7.98	2.19	.80	
Well dressed	7.86	2.13	.60	
Modern	7.64	2.39	.56	
Good personality				
Responsible	8.27	1.93		.69
Calm	7.62	2.21		.69
Polite	7.84	2.31		.62
Has self-knowledge	7.48	2.27		.61
Loves children	8.18	2.16		.51
Eigenvalue			3.53	1.87
Variance explained			32.09	17.04
Cronbach's alpha			.81	.70

Table 2 Factor loadings (principal components, varimax rotation) of relationship with peers and parents (N = 412)

	Mean	SD	Factors 1	2
Relationship with peers				
My friends are fairly easy to talk to	2,67	1,28	.85	
I can count on my friends when I need to get something off my chest	2,36	1,24	.85	
I can tell my friends about my problems and troubles	3,05	1,34	.85	
My friends help me to understand myself better	2,65	1,23	.85	
My friends can tell when I'm upset about something	2,07	1,15	.70	
Relationship with parents				
My parents are fairly easy to talk to	1,72	,85		.65
I can tell my friends about my problems and troubles	1,92	,98		.78
I tell my parents what is bothering me	2,54	1,21		.79
My parents help me to understand myself better	2,52	1,12		.77
My parents can tell when I'm upset about something	2,24	1,11		.75
Eigenvalue			3.61	2.65
Variance explained			36.13	26.53
Cronbach's alpha			.81	.88

Table 3 Correlational analysis and hierarchical regression analysis of 'Fysical attractiveness' and 'Good personality' using demographics, parental and peer relationships, related attitudes and television as predictors.

	Fysical attractiveness		Good personality	
Predictors	r	beta	r	beta
Block 1: Experience				
Sexual experience	.07	.04	-.02	-.10
Relationship exp.	.07	.13°	.02	-.03
R^2		.02		.00
Block 2: Demographics				
Gender	.14**	.15*	-.08	.00
School level	.22***	.00	.37***	.28***
School level father	-.06	.08	-.07	.03
School level mother	-.09	-.09	-.09	-.03
Change in R^2		.04*		.12***
Incremental R^2		.06		.12
Block 3: Relationships				
Relationship with parents	-.12*	-.04	-.27***	-.24***
Relationship with peers	-.07	-.06	-18***	-.13*
Change in R^2		.01		.09***
Incremental R^2		.07		.21
Block 4: Television				
Viewing volume	.24***	.19**	.27***	.19**
Perceived realism	.19***	.12°	.20***	.02
Change in R^2		.05**		.03**
Final R^2		.12		.24

Note. Beta indicates standardized beta coefficients from final regression equations with all blocks of variables included ° $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 4 Hierarchical regression analysis of 'Fysical attractiveness' and 'Good personality', in block 2 with use of the stepwise method#

	Fysical attractiveness		Good personality	
	1	2	1	2
Predictors	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Block 1: Perceived realism	.18**	.12*	.20***	.20***
Block 2: All other variables				
Sexual experience		(excluded)		(excluded)
Relationship exp.		(excluded)		(excluded)
Gender		.17**		(excluded)
School level		(excluded)		.23***
School level father		(excluded)		(excluded)
School level mother		(excluded)		(excluded)
Relationship with parents		(excluded)		-.23***
Relationship with peers		(excluded)		(excluded)
Viewing volume		.20***		.20**
	$R^2 = .03$	$R^2 = .32$	$R^2 = .04$	$R^2 = .21$

Note. The column indicated with '1' contains the standardized beta coefficient from the regression equation with block 1 only. In the column indicated with '2' are the standardized beta coefficients from the final regression equation. # The probability of F is used as stepping method criterium; entry: .01, removal: .05. ° $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$