

Eye on Our Generation

Teen pregnancies tied to tastes for sexy TV shows

By Lindsey Tanner - AP Medical Writer
Courtesy of Associated Press (c) 2008

CHICAGO (AP) -- Groundbreaking research suggests that pregnancy rates are much higher among teens who watch a lot of TV with sexual dialogue and behavior than among those who have tamer viewing tastes.

"Sex and the City," anyone? That was one of the shows used in the research.

The new study is the first to link those viewing habits with teen pregnancy, said lead author Anita Chandra, a Rand Corp. behavioral scientist. Teens who watched the riciest shows were twice as likely to become pregnant over the next three years as those who watched few such programs.

Previous research by some of the same scientists had already found that watching lots of sex on TV can influence teens to have sex at earlier ages.

Shows that highlight only the positive aspects of sexual behavior without the risks can lead teens to have unprotected sex "before they're ready to make responsible and informed decisions," Chandra said.

The study was released Monday in the November issue of *Pediatrics*. It involved 2,003 12- to 17-year-old girls and boys nationwide questioned by telephone about their TV viewing habits in 2001. Teens were re-interviewed twice, the last time in 2004, and asked about pregnancy. Among girls, 58 became pregnant during the follow-up, and among boys, 33 said they had gotten a girl pregnant.

Participants were asked how often they watched any of more than 20 TV shows popular among teens at the time or which were found to have lots of sexual content. The programs included "Sex and the City," "That '70s Show" and "Friends."

Pregnancies were twice as common among those who said they watched such shows regularly, compared with teens who said they hardly ever saw them. There were more pregnancies among the oldest teens interviewed, but the rate of pregnancy remained consistent across all age groups among those who watched the racy programs.

Chandra said TV-watching

was strongly connected with teen pregnancy even when other factors were considered, including grades, family structure and parents' education level.

But the study didn't adequately address other issues, such as self-esteem, family values and income, contends Elizabeth Schroeder, executive director of Answer, a teen sex education program based at Rutgers University.

"The media does have an impact, but we don't know the full extent of it because there are so many other factors," Schroeder said.

But Bill Albert, chief program officer at the nonprofit National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, praised the study and said it "catches up with common sense."

"Media helps shape the social script for teenagers. Most parents know that. This is just good research to confirm that," Albert said.

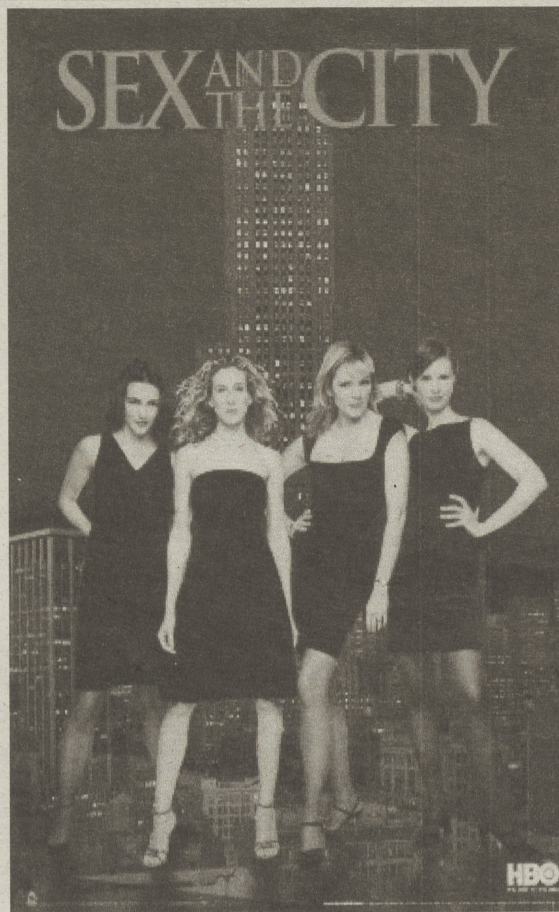
Still, U.S. teen pregnancies were on a 15-year decline until a 3 percent rise in 2006, the latest data available. Experts think that could be just be a statistical blip.

And Albert noted that the downward trend occurred as TV shows were becoming more sexualized, confirming that "it's not the only influence."

Psychologist David Walsh, president of the National Institute on Media and the Family, cited data suggesting only about 19 percent of American teens say they can talk openly with a trusted adult about sex. With many schools not offering sex education, that leaves the media to serve as a sex educator, he said.

"For a kid who no one's talking to about sex, and then he watches sitcoms on TV where sex is presented as this is what the cool people do," the outcome is obvious, Walsh said.

He said the message to parents is to talk to their kids about sex long before children are teens. Parents also should be watching what their kids watch and helping filter messages sex-filled shows are sending, he said.



"Sex in the City" was one of TV shows used in the study on teen pregnancies

Photo courtesy of www.republicaup-date.com

ATHEIST CLUB ON CAMPUS?

By Chris DiEnno - Lion's Eye Editor - cad5241@psu.edu

As a freshman, one of the things that stuck out to me at orientation was the large amount of groups that were offered at Penn State Brandywine, groups that deal with different interests, views and beliefs. Penn State Brandywine has a number of groups that represent different religious beliefs, which helps create a sense of unity between students and also gives people a chance to meet people with a similar outlook on life.

At a meeting earlier this month it was brought to the attention of the newspaper that there is a lack of an Atheist/Agnostic group in our school. The reasons were vague but seemed to revolve around a lack of interest in establishing the group by students and the general thought that people who don't have set beliefs have no need for a group. If there religious based groups such as The Nittany Christian Fellowship on campus, has it just not occurred to students to form an Atheist or Agnostic group? Even if there were enough students willing to form such a group, would the campus allow it to exist? How controversial would it be? The only way those questions can be answered is if an Atheist or Agnostic group was created.

An article found on www.secularstudents.org told the story about a group of Wilfrid Lau-

rier University students trying to promote and start an atheist club on their campus. The article explained, "the goal of the 'Laurier Freethought Alliance' (LFA) is: 'to promote science, freedom of inquiry, skepticism, and a good life without the need for superstition or religious belief.'"

Although seeming fairly reasonable, it took "nine months for a school representative to get back to the leaders about the LFA becoming an 'officially recognized' campus group," as the article states. Benefits are given to groups that are "officially recognized" by the university such as potential grant money for activities, free meeting space, and so on. But the university's response was "no, the club cannot be an officially recognized campus group."

This is only one example of what occurred on one campus, not suggesting the same thing would happen at Brandywine. Realistically, it does not seem like such a group would begin anytime soon. It is important that people with passionate opinions, whether they are considered justified or not, get together and learn to express themselves not only as individuals, but as a group. With more participation and vigor, such a group could easily be created and would help towards the acceptance of the ideals of those beliefs.