

American Teenagers' Perceptions of Sex Roles in an African Entertainment-Education Film

Abstract

This paper examines the differences in U.S. teenage viewer perceptions of message-related elements in an entertainment-education film, *Consequences*, produced in Africa. By employing an experimental research design, the present study examines the effects of gender on teenage viewers' attitudes toward characters and educational themes in the film. The results indicate no significant gender differences among male and female viewers with regard to their attitudes toward characters, theme, and identification with the theme and characters of the film.

Introduction

Entertainment-education programs are a relatively new genre of mass media programming. Educational content is intentionally inserted in entertainment genres of such mass media as radio, television, print, or popular music to foster pro-social change (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). In recent years, the entertainment-education strategy has been used to promote many social and educational issues including gender equality, family planning, AIDS prevention and control, adult literacy, prevention of teenage pregnancy, and drinking and driving (see Church & Geller, 1989; Nariman, 1993; Singhal & Rogers, 2003). Communication researchers have found that entertainment education programs often obtain high ratings and can effectively influence knowledge, attitudes, and practices of audience members (Underwood, 2001; Coleman, 1988; Piotrow, 1994; Kincaid et al., 1992; Rogers et al., 1997; Singhal & Rogers, 2003). Research shows that audiences understand and approve of the messages communicated through the entertainment-education strategy (Singhal and Rogers 2003; Kincaid et al., 1988; Piotrow, 1994). A significant percentage of viewers exposed to entertainment-education programs demonstrate

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behavior change such as talking to their spouses, visiting family planning clinics, practicing safe sex, women empowerment, etc. (Rogers et al., 1997).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the differences in the American male and female teenagers' perceptions of message elements in an entertainment-education film produced in Africa. By employing an experimental research design, the present study examined the effect of gender on teenage viewers' attitudes toward characters and education themes in a popular entertainment-education film, *Consequences*, produced by noted Zimbabwean film maker, John Riber. The film promoted teenage sexual responsibility.

Gender Differences

The question of gender differences is a common source of inquiry in evaluating the effects of persuasive messages (Putrevu, 2001; Meyers-Levy & Strenthal, 1991). Research shows that women often elaborate some messages in greater detail than do men (Krugman, 1996). Many past studies indicate that men and women viewers differently perceive the themes and characters they view in the media.

Selectivity Hypothesis

The selectivity hypothesis theory in the information processing literature states that men often select information that is most salient to them and do not review all the evidence associated with a certain issue. On the other hand, women, according to Meyers-Levy (1989), "generally attempt to engage in a rather effortful, comprehensive, piecemeal analysis of all available information" (p. 221). Many studies bearing the selectivity hypothesis reveal gender differences in many such adult and child behaviors as analytical tasks (O'Donnel and Johnson, 2001), spatial skills, linguistic skills (McGuiness, 1976), information processing effectiveness (Chung and Monroe 1998; 2001); interpretation of information (Putrevu, 2001; Kirk, 1995; Hass, 1979), style of interaction, and structural organization (Guilford, 1967; Tyler, 1965).

Socialization is also explained as a factor for the differences in the way the information is processed by men and women. For example, women are often socialized to be "cooperative and maintain social harmony, which would facilitate agreement," and men are generally "socialized to be assertive and independent, which would facilitate resistance to influence" (Eagly, 1978, cited in Petty and Cacioppo, 1981).

The design of entertainment-education messages draws upon several social science theories. Two influential theories are social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and parasocial interaction theory (Horton & Wohl, 1958). According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, humans learn and adopt social behavior by interacting with others and by observing characters in the mass media. According to parasocial interaction theory (Horton & Wohl, 1958), despite the lack of real interaction and feedback, as is common in interpersonal encounters, viewers perceive the media characters as engaging in a quasi interpersonal relationship with them. Given that media models can influence the learning behaviors of viewers, it is important to look at how media portray gender relationships, and how the gender of the viewers influences their information processing.

Gender and Media

Often the differences in the socialization of men and women are also reflected in the media. The media can further reinforce or preserve the gender stereotypes (Livingstone, 1989). Research also indicates that women were also shown in more negative and less important roles than men (Cumberbatch & Howitt, 1989; Livingstone, 1989). They are portrayed as dependent, submissive, and inferior to men in intelligence (Greenberg, Richards, and Henderson, 1980); outnumbered by men (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988; Signorielli, 1990, 1993); holding less prestigious jobs than men; and being less sophisticated than men (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988).

Teenage audiences are often confused by the message discrepancies they encounter in the society and in the mass media. For example, Brooks and Furstenberg (1991) argue that the media's overt portrayal of sex is in contrast to the lack of frankness on the part of parents in discussing sexual topics with their children, and with the rationalistic discussions about sexuality in schools. Thereby, both teenage men and women receive confusing messages about sexual relationships. Research also shows that teenage women rely less on media sources for personal decisions and more on social sources than do teenage men (Harris, Harris, & Davis, 1991).

Entertainment-Education Programs and Gender Equality

Unlike most television programs and commercial films, entertainment-education programs are often consciously designed to break

some of the traditional stereotypes associated with women. For example, in the 1969 Peruvian entertainment-education soap opera, *Simplemente Maria*, the main character, Maria, is portrayed as an independent and ambitious woman who reached the higher rungs of the social class through hard work and determination (Singhal and Rogers, 2003).

In the highly effective entertainment-education film *Amra Dujon* which deals with the issue of family planning in Bangladesh, the lead female character actively participates in discussions related to family planning, which is contrary to the traditional non-assertive and subservient role of the Bangladeshi women. Several such entertainment-education programs exist in which women's empowerment is one of the dominant themes (Church & Geller, 1989; Singhal & Rogers, 1999).

In the entertainment-education film *Consequences*, which is the experimental stimulus for this study, the lead teenage female character, Rita, goes through many travails after an unplanned pregnancy. However, she later takes control of her life when her boyfriend, Richard, deserts her. She obtains a job and becomes independent. Rita's character was designed to serve as a negative role model for younger viewers to dissuade them from becoming pregnant at a young age. The lead male character, Richard, was also portrayed to go through many hardships (for instance, being expelled from school) after impregnating Rita. In the end, both Rita and Richard acknowledge the mistakes they committed and share equal responsibility for their actions. Thus, the film does not stereotype any gender roles; in fact, it attempted to educate the viewers by portraying the lead men and women characters as being equally irresponsible.

Given the fundamental differences in how gender is treated in conventional Hollywood-style entertainment programs versus the theory-based, consciously created entertainment-education programs, it is important to explore how male and female viewers perceive various elements of entertainment-education programs differently. To do so, the following research questions are posed:

RQ#1. Do female viewers attitudes toward the characters of an entertainment-education film, their attitudes toward the theme of the film, their identification with the characters, their identification with the film's theme, and their behavioral intention differ from those of male viewers?

RQ#2. Do female and male viewers differ in their identification with the male and female characters of an entertainment-education film?

RQ#3. Do female and male viewers differ in their identification with positive and negative characters of entertainment-education film?

Method

A posttest only experimental design was employed to investigate the relationship between entertainment-education message stimuli and the attitudes and behavioral intention of the teenage audiences. High school students between the ages 14 to 16 from a midwestern region in the U.S. were included in the study. The ages of the film's lead characters and the setting of the film's context—a school—corresponded to the characteristics of the sample and their physical setting. Six general class sections were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. In addition, inherent randomization was assumed as students were generally assigned randomly to these particular classes by the school authorities. A total of 59 participants were included in the experimental group and 77 participants in the control group.

Stimulus

The film, *Consequences*, represented the experimental stimulus for the study. This film was chosen because of its popularity with audiences in over 65 countries (most of them from the African continent) in communicating the pro-social message of avoiding teenage pregnancy and adopting sexual responsibility to teenagers and parents (Singhal & Svenkerud, 1994; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). *Consequences* was produced by the U.S. born, Zimbabwean-based film producer, John Riber, and distributed by the U.S.-based non-governmental organization called Development for Self-Reliance. It was created with a Zimbabwean cast and setting although its theme and institutional setting are universal. *Consequences* was produced after extensive formative evaluation and the needs assessment of the target audiences. The following represents the storyline of the 54-minute entertainment-education film:

Rita and Richard are high school teenagers who attend school in an urban African city. Both are bright and talented youngsters who are to soon finish school. Both plan to pursue higher studies. Life is good until in a weak social moment, after an intense session of close dancing, Rita and Richard engage in unprotected sex. Soon Rita discovers that she is pregnant. As a result of her pregnancy, her relationship sours with Richard, who refuses to accept the responsibilities of fatherhood. Both undergo terrible hardships as a result of Rita's pregnancy. Richard and Rita, who are the negative role models for the educational message of sexual responsibility and the primary focus of the film's plot, are countered by two positive role models: Albert and Stella. These two characters are close friends of Richard and Rita and are portrayed as a model teenage couple who are in love with each other. They are portrayed as wise couple who are careful not to indulge in premarital sex for the fear of conceiving at a very young age.

Research Instrument

A content analysis of the film was conducted to identify the major educational themes of the film. Then a questionnaire was constructed to measure the appropriate dependent variables based on the film's educational themes. The content analysis revealed five primary educational themes in the film, of which three were emphasized to a greater degree. These three, attitude toward the characters in the film, attitudes toward the educational themes, and identification with characters and theme of the film, were especially incorporated in the questionnaire for this study. The data from the experimental group were gathered using these three constructs.

Results

Research Question 1 asked: Do female viewers' attitudes toward characters, attitudes toward theme of the film, identification with the characters, identification with the theme, and behavioral intention differ from those of male viewers?

As reported in Table 1, the multivariate test of the null hypothesis associated with this question was not significant, Wilks' = .3989, $F(5, 47) = .60122$, $P < .699$. Given the nonsignificant multivariate test, univariate tests are irrelevant, however univariate test results (also nonsignificant) are reported in Table 1. In essence, female viewers of *Consequences* did not significantly differ from male viewers in their attitudes toward the educational themes of the film, identification with

TABLE 1
Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance for Female and Male Viewers'
Attitudes, Knowledge, and Behavioral Intention

	Multivariate (Wilks)					
	Value	Approx. F	Hypoth. DF	Error DF	Prob.	
	.3989	.60122	5.00	47.00	.699	
Variable	Univariate F-tests with (1,51) D.F.					
	Hypoth. SS	Error SS	Hypoth. MS	Error MS	F	Prob
Attitude Toward Characters	.02361	5.36469	.02361	.10519	.22448	.638
Attitude Toward Theme	.11429	16.94684	.11429	.33229	.34394	.560
Identification with Characters	.35472	8.58452	.35472	.16832	2.10737	.153
Identification with Behavioral Intention	.14636	27.80684	.14636	.54523	.26844	.607

the characters, identification with the educational themes, and their behavioral intention with respect to the educational themes of film (for instance, being sexually responsible).

Research Questions 2 asked: Do female and male viewers differ in their identification with male and female characters of an entertainment-education film.

As reported in Table 2, the multivariate test of the null hypothesis associated with this question was not significant, Wilks' = .94295, $F(2, 54) = 1.63363$, $p < .205$. Given the nonsignificant multivariate test, univariate tests are irrelevant, although univariate test results (also nonsignificant) are reported in Table 2.

Although the intent of RQ2 did not call specifically for a test of interaction between viewer gender and character gender on identification, a test for interaction also was conducted as an alternative procedure in a 2×2 factorial design with repeated measures on the lead characters' gender. The test revealed no significant interaction, $F(1, 55) = 1.06$; $p < .308$.

In essence, female and male viewers of *Consequences* did not differ significantly in their identification with male and female characters.

Research Question 3 asked: Do female and male viewers differ in their identification with positive and negative characters of an entertainment-education film.

As reported in Table 3, the multivariate test of the null hypothesis associated with this question was not significant, Wilks' = .93405, $F(2, 54) = 1.90628$, $p < .159$. Given the nonsignificant multivariate test, univariate tests are irrelevant, although univariate test results (also nonsignificant) are reported in Table 3.

TABLE 2
Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance for Female and Male Viewers' Attitude
Toward Gender of the Character

	Multivariate Test (Wilks)					
	Value	Approx. F	Hypoth. DF	Error DF	Prob	
	.94295	1.63363	2.00	54.00	.205	
Univariate F-tests with (1,55) D.F.						
Variable	Hypoth. SS	Error SS	Hypoth. MS	Error MS	F	Prob.
Female Lead						
Character	.19782	29.23201	.19782	.53149	.37219	.544
Male Lead						
Character	1.34051	22.87879	1.34051	.41598	3.22255	.078

Although the intent of RQ3 did not call specifically for a test of interaction between viewer gender and character valence on identification, a test for interaction was conducted as an alternative procedure in a 2×2 factorial design with repeated measures on the lead character valence. The test revealed no significant interaction, $F(1, 55) = 1.96; p < .167$.

In essence, female and male viewers of *Consequences* did not differ significantly in their identification with positive and negative characters.

Conclusion

The present study was premised on literature that indicated differences among men and women in the way they process information. The mass media, often tend to reinforce these gender stereotypes, promoting rather than breaking them. However, in the context of entertainment-education programs, no significant gender differences were found among viewers with regard to their attitudes toward the characters, attitudes toward the educational theme, degree of identification with the characters, degree of identification with the theme, and behavioral intention to be sexually responsible. The gender differences among the viewers in their attitudes toward the male and female characters and positive and negative characters were also non-significant.

These findings seem to suggest that carefully designed entertainment-education programs could engender a similar effect among male and female respondents. This study provides strong evidence of

TABLE 3
Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance for Viewer Gender on Positive and Negative Lead Characters in the Film

Variable	Multivariate Test (Wilks)					
	Value	Approx. F	Hypoth. DF	Error DF	Prob	
	.93405	1.90628	2.00	54.00	.159	
Variable	Univariate F-tests with (1,55) D.F.					
	Hypoth. SS	Error SS	Hypoth. MS	Error MS	F	Prob.
Positive						
Characters	.11010	56.89867	.11010	1.03452	.10642	.745
Negative						
Characters	3.74183	54.00379	3.74183	.98189	3.81085	.056

gender parity among viewers in their perception of various message elements, including the gender of the characters in the entertainment-education programs. The results from this study also indicate that the promotion of gender equality among the viewers of entertainment-education can also be effective in culturally diverse settings, given *Consequences* was originally produced in Africa.

The findings of the present study differ from past studies that have shown differences in how men and women select information. Perhaps this is because of the careful design and production of the entertainment-education programs. The deliberate detail and the formative evaluation that go into the design and execution of the entertainment-education message strategy is intended to minimize, if not prevent, the potential differences in how the male and female perceive the messages presented to them. A recent study conducted among Thai viewers by Udornpim and Singhal (1997) on the effects of "Oshin", a highly popular Japanese entertainment-education soap opera, showed similar results. No gender differences were observed with respect to viewers' learning of pro-social behaviors from Oshin, the central female character.

Another reason that may explain the lack of gender differences among the viewers of *Consequences* is the engaging and educational nature of the film in which the lives of two teenagers are wrecked because of their weakness in a highly-charged social moment. The hardships faced by the characters, their parents, friends, and teachers probably elicited a strong emotional or affective reaction from the viewers that drowned some of the potential gender differences.

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Communicating Skills for Collaboration in the Classroom

Abstract

The authors examine the effectiveness of pilot communication skills workshop designed to help public school teachers become more competent communicators in the classroom. Many ineffective communication habits seem to be the “natural” response; however, these ineffective verbal habits can be changed. The workshop focused on fostering effective communication skills to develop a learning community where teachers can collaborate with students. The objective of this project was to train teachers to be competent communicators in the classroom, and to effectively model these skills to parents. This objective was addressed through a variety of methods including, reading material, video presentations, interactive exercises, role-playing, share pair discussions, group discussions, and skits.

Introduction

Some public school teachers do not receive adequate communication training. Prior to 2003, many Florida education majors were not required to complete any speech communication classes. If our educators are to teach these skills to their students they must first be adequately taught. Without the proper training in communication their effectiveness as teachers is in jeopardy. Communication skills are like an athlete’s abilities, they are never totally perfected and can continuously be improved. Continuing education in this vital area of speech communication is warranted for teachers. A speech communication workshop was provided with the objective of training teachers to be competent communicators in the classroom, and to effectively model these skills to parents. The workshops were designed as a pilot study of the effectiveness of providing communication training for public school teachers. The Pilot program was designed to see if this was an

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