

CONTACT: Andrea Browning
SRCD Communications
(202) 289-7905
abrowning@srcd.org

FOR RELEASE: Sunday April 1, 2007
10:30 AM (Eastern)

Sex on TV—Does it Affect Sexual Behavior Among Young Children?

Major Federally Funded Study Looks at Impact of Sexual Content of TV Programs on Teen Sexuality

The media are often criticized for presenting increasingly provocative and sexual images during primetime programming. Researchers, policy-makers and parents argue that in order to protect our youth, we must remove the threat of potential exposure. Young boys and girls are active—rather than passive—consumers of the media, which means that in considering the impact of the sexual content of television programs on youth sexual behaviors, such as initiation of intercourse, safe sex, male and female sexual stereotypes, it is important to understand the viewers as well as the content viewed.

The 2007 meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development will bring together four presentations from a large-scale, federally-funded study that examined the relationship between primetime television consumption and adolescent sexuality. The presentations used three different types of data—survey, focus group interview, and in-depth content analysis of popular primetime television programming.

The presentations will cover a variety of important research questions:

- What are the different categories of television watchers among adolescents? How do the “romance dabblers” differ from the “female fanatics?”
- Do adolescents believe that they can be influenced by what they see on television?
- If teenagers know that watching violence on television does not make them violent, do they believe that watching sexual content will make them sexually active?
- Can media literacy programs be used to protect teenagers from potential negative effects of the sexual content of primetime television programming?
- Do age and gender play a role in sexual behaviors and attitudes influenced by sexual content in primetime television?
- What is the effect of television’s sexual content on “good girls?”

Researchers: Lynn Sorsoli & Deborah Tolman, San Francisco State University; Janna Kim, California State University, Fullerton; Deborah Schooler, Brown University.