Positive Sexuality

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KEYWORDS
television, entertainment fiction, sexuality

BRIEF DESCRIPTION
The emergence of the sex positivity movement and increased attention to positive sexuality development in psychology (Harden, 2014) suggest the importance of considering messages that could enhance viewers’ sexuality (i.e., positive sexuality messages). Despite this, prior studies have largely overlooked such potentially beneficial messages. Particularly, existing content analytical work on sexuality messages on television has primarily focused on identifying harmful content, such as the reinforcement of sexual gender stereotypes (Aubrey et al., 2021). However, this narrow focus may not fully capture viewers’ actual experiences with television, especially in today’s context. In response, we introduced a new instrument for analyzing the presence of positive sexuality (PS) messages on television, drawing on theoretical frameworks of positive sexuality development in the literature (Maes et al., 2023).

FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION
The measurement instrument for positive sexuality (PS) messages draws upon theoretical frameworks concerning the development of positive sexuality (Harden, 2014; Maes et al., 2023). It comprises four key components. Firstly, a positive approach to sexual relationships emphasizes ethical and responsible behavior towards a partner’s sexuality, encompassing open and respectful communication about sexual topics, acceptance of sexual and emotional responsibilities, engagement in safe sexual practices, participation in mutually controllable interactions, and pursuit of mutually satisfying experiences. Secondly, acceptance of one’s own sexual feelings and desires. Thirdly, a respectful approach to the diverse sexual expressions of others entails responding respectfully to others’ sexual feelings, desires, or abilities. Lastly, resilience to negative sexuality-related experiences involves viewing adverse relational or sexual encounters, such as break-ups, as opportunities for learning and emotional growth (Maes et al., 2023). This instrument enables the examination of PS messages within television series and movies at both the scene and character levels, facilitating analysis of message presence per scene and identification of PS components within individual television characters.

REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION
Prior research exists that has departed from a negative perspective when exploring the presence of sexuality messages on television. For instance, research has coded the inattention to sexual risks, responsibilities, and inconveniences (Aubrey, 2004), the presence of gender-stereotypical roles and the heterosexual script (Terán et al., 2022), and the presence of sexualizing practices on television (Ward, 2016). Yet, the presence of negative sexuality messages is entirely different from the presence of positive sexuality messages, with the latter departing from the theoretical conceptualization of developing a positive sexuality (e.g., Harden, 2014; Maes et al., 2023). Hence, these codes are not comparable. As for positive sexuality messages, content analytical work remains scarce. Döring and Miller (2022) pay attention to consent communication, though in the context of pornography. When it comes to television, so far only the study of Maes and Vandenbosch (2022) developed and tested the measurement instrument of positive sexuality messages on television. This measurement instrument has been used in their content analytical work and has been used to code storylines writ-
ten down by adolescents in a longitudinal study (Maes et al., 2023).

**Example study:** Maes and Vandenbosch (2021)

**INFORMATION ON MAES AND VANDENBOSCH (2021)**

**Authors:** Chelly Maes, & Laura Vandenbosch

**Research questions:** RQ1: How frequently are PS messages depicted in the scenes and portrayed by the characters in youth-oriented series? RQ2: Are there differences in male and female characters’ portrayals of PS messages in popular youth-oriented series? RQ3: Are there differences in heterosexual and non-heterosexual characters’ portrayals of PS messages in popular youth-oriented series? RQ4: Are there differences in the occurrence of PS message depictions in the scenes and portrayals by the characters in youth comedies and dramas? RQ5: Is there a relation between positive and negative sexuality messages in the scenes in youth-oriented series?

**Object of analysis:** The codes were applied to examples of six youth-oriented television series (Riverdale, 13 Reasons Why, Elite, Atypical, Sex Education, and Big Mouth). In total, 3,151 scenes and 126 characters were coded.

**Time frame of analysis:** 2021

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE VARIABLES**

**Variables:**

For clarity: character level data were coded separately per character and thus does not rely on aggregated data from the scene level data.

1. For a positive approach to sexual relationships, four subcomponents can be coded in scenes. An open and mutually respectful communication style can be coded for the characters’ open and respectful dialogue about sexuality or relationships (e.g. absence of mocking or embarrassing another character). Safe sexual interactions can be coded for sexual behavior between sober partners (i.e. no illegal drug or excessive alcohol use) and contraceptive use. Mutually controllable sexual interactions can be coded for the occurrence of consensual sexual behavior. Mutually satisfying sexual interactions can be coded for the characters’ apparent enjoyment of or indications of consideration for their partner’s preferences regarding sexual behavior. At a character level, a character’s open and respectful dialogue about sexuality and relationships at least once during the season can be coded. Also, a character’s responsible behavior regarding their sexual health and/or others’ sexual health and feelings at least once during the entire season can be coded.

2. Acceptance of one’s sexuality can only be coded at character level and not at scene level. It can be coded for the character’s acceptance of their sexual feelings, desires and/or skills at least once during the entire season.

3. For a respectful approach to the different sexual expressions of others, the occurrence of a positive response to others’ expression of their sexual feelings, desires, or skills can be at a scene and character level (if the character showed this at least once throughout the season).

4. Resilience to negative sexual experiences can be coded for the characters’ responses to negative sexual experiences by revolting, rationalizing, ignoring, or creating distractions at a scene level. For characters, a character’s insusceptibility to negative sexual experiences at least once during the season can be coded. Insusceptibility was demonstrated in revolt, rationalizing, ignoring, or distraction in response to negative sexual experiences.

**Level of analysis:** Television scenes and characters

**Values:** 0 = no occurrence in scenes/absent in characters/not resilient in characters, 1 = occurrence in scenes/present in characters/resilient in characters

**Reliability:** The content analysis was conducted by four master’s students and the first author. Following established methods in content analysis (e.g., Jensen, 2010), the students underwent approximately three hours of rigorous training in coding before analyzing the sample. The first author provided comprehensive instruction on the components of the PS, elucidating their significance and the application of the codebook. Any queries or uncertainties regarding the categories were addressed and resolved during the training sessions. To refine their skills and troubleshoot issues within the codebook, the students collectively coded a separate episode, distinct from the sample. Adjustments to the codebook were made based on the encountered challenges and insights gained during this practice session. Following the training, each student independently coded the initial episode of every television series to assess inter-rater reliability. Krippendorff’s alpha was employed to evaluate inter-rater reliability for categorical variables, while accounting for chance (Krippendorff, 1980). Alpha values between .67
and .80 indicated substantial reliability, while values exceeding .80 indicated almost perfect reliability (Krippendorff, 1980). Across character and scene levels, Krippendorff’s alpha ranged from .7 to .9 for all categories, affirming the reliability of all coded variables.

**Codebook**: can be found via OSF [https://osf.io/kbej6/?view_only=4661f7a877e-94271be064256a9172047](https://osf.io/kbej6/?view_only=4661f7a877e-94271be064256a9172047)

**REFERENCES**


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