

Sex Sells:
An Analysis of Sexual Content on Prime Time TV over the Past 50 Years

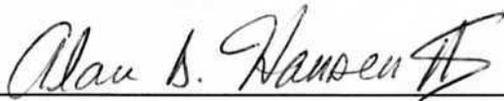
Caley Murphy
Carroll College
Department of Communication Studies
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SIGNATURE PAGE

This Honors Thesis is submitted to Carroll College on this date 30 April 2012, by Caley Murphy, as partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts degree.

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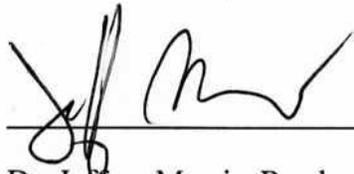
Honors Thesis Committee



Dr. Alan Hansen, Thesis Director

30 April 2012

Date



Dr. Jeffrey Morris, Reader

30 April 2012

Date



Dr. Doreen Kutufam, Reader

30 April 2012.

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....3
Introduction.....4
Literature Review.....6
 Prior Research Findings.....6
 Theoretical Approaches to Media Consumption.....8
 Cultivation.....9
 Mainstreaming.....10
 Priming.....10
Methods.....11
Hypothesis.....15
Results.....15
Discussion.....20

APPENDICES

Appendix A- Bibliography.....26
Appendix B- Show & Episode Table.....29
Appendix C- Coding Chart.....30
Appendix D- Results Chart.....31
Appendix E- Code Book43

ABSTRACT

The prevailing perception is that we have experienced a cultural shift in that today's TV content is markedly more risqué than it has been in the past. In this study, I investigate this view with a content analysis of sexual reference and sexual content in a convenience sample of five popular TV shows: *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Growing Pains*, *Full House*, and *Two & a Half Men*. The purpose of this study was to determine if, and in what manner, sexual content on TV has changed over the past 50 years. I found that sexual reference and sexual content on TV programming has increased from the earliest to the most recent programs. Results of the content analysis on sexual content also were compared to national averages of sexual behavior during this time period. I report that high school students are engaging in sexual behavior at a younger age, with more multiple partners, and a lack of caution. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2009), 46 percent of high school students had already had sexual intercourse and 77 percent of these students did not use any form of birth control. I concluded that, given a trend of increased sexual content on the prime time TV programs analyzed, it is possible that sexual content on television programming is penetrating the minds of young people under the approach that "sex sells."

INTRODUCTION

Sexual content on television programming is a common theme among successful television series. “Television has been accused of allowing producers to push the boundaries of what is acceptable. Primetime dramas and movies feature intimate conversations about impotence and orgasms; situation comedies are filled with sexual innuendo and suggestiveness” (Sapolsky, 1991, 505). But, has sexual content always been the prime focus of prime time television? A cultural shift for media consumers can be cited for the increase in sexual content showcased on prime-time, popular, television series. Today’s successful programming in television seems to be saturated with sexual content.

Sexual content appeared on prime time television gradually. According to Extra 2010, landmarks in the evolution of sexual content include the following. In 1947 the television series *Ozzie and Harriet* featured the first couple to share a bed on screen (they were married off screen), while the 1960s American sitcom of *I Dream of Jeannie* was the first to show a woman in a bikini top on television. The 1964 series of *Bewitched* featured, for the first time, a couple to share a bed on-screen and not be married off-screen. On the other hand, the to show two women kissing on another took place on *L.A. Law* in 1991. Finally, *Dawson’s Creek* pushed the envelope further in 2001, being the first show to air a passionate kiss between two men. Television programming continues to evolve, and boundaries are continually challenged. Part of this evolution can be seen through the increasing amount of sexual content added to programming every consecutive year and decade (Strauss, 2009).

Prime time television programming has capitalized on the multi-billion dollar idea of “sex sells.” One NBC producer states that “When advertising dollars are down you have to cut through — you have to get attention” (Strauss, 2009, 1). Today, such television programs as *Blue Mountain State*, (Spike network), displays on-screen masturbation, while characters on the popular show *Courage Town*, (ABC network), routinely make references to oral sex. The assumption appears to be that increased sexual content results in higher ratings. Sexual content is what a series needs in order to avoid being “out of touch” (Strauss, 2009, 1).

Therefore, examining television programming over time is important in understanding the current world and consumers. “Media portrayals involving sexuality can contribute to the sexual socialization of young people,-” therefore “it is important to understand the nature and extent of sexual information that is being conveyed by television” (Kunkel, 1999, 598). A study conducted by the Kaiser Foundation found that among the top 20 most popular shows watched by teens, 70 percent included sexual content and nearly half (45 percent) included sexual behavior (Graham, 2005). It was also discovered that 77 percent of television shows include sexual content, averaging almost six sexual scenes an hour (Graham, 2005). The range of sexual content displayed on different genres of shows varies: Sitcoms display sexual content 87 percent of the time; drama series 87 percent of the time; and soap operas 85 percent of the time (Graham, 2005). With such a high amount of sexual content displayed in television programming, sexual interaction may be viewed as norms to consumers who watch such shows. For instance, television series such as *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*

seems to imply that everyone in high school is engaging in sexual intercourse, which in turn could contribute to pressure on viewers to conform.

Sexual content thus is an element that television programming is employing to increase viewership and the success of shows. The pattern of increasing sexual content in television programming has been taking place for many decades, and can even be traced to as far back to the 1940s. Increased television ratings for risqué television programming provides positive feedback that sexual content is popular. In essence, by watching sexually filled television programming, consumers have demonstrated that “sex sells.”

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior Research Findings

Today’s television programming is replete with sexual innuendo, sexual contact, and sexual reference (Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse & Hunter, 2004). The question is whether this reflects or constructs sexual behavior among young people. Certainly they who would defend sexual content on television would argue that television does nothing more than reflect society’s shifting values (Beshloss, 1990). The culture’s shifting values are increasing the favorability of the image of sex in media. While ratings are based on any number of factors, “the appeal of sexual titillation” must not be overlooked as one of them (Sapolsky & Tabarlet, 1991, 510).

Sexual content thus is both controversial, and successful in producing ratings. In this study I rely on research that suggests media content contains increasingly high sexual content, leading to the large influence in the devolvement process of adolescents (Harris, 2011). With opportunities for education and socialization, media play an important role in the lives of adolescents (Harris, 2011). Rodger Streitmatter refers to the increased sexual

content in media as “repression to obsession” (Streitmatter, 2004). Streitmatter talks about media playing a leading role in propelling the sexual revolution that has taken over the world.

Children are regularly exposed to sexual content through media. Some scholars venture to state that new media is a form of sexual education that parents are utilizing instead of sitting down with their children to talk (Schneider, 2010). This is relevant considering the amount of time (6-7 hours) the average person spends watching television and engaging other forms of media. “These media have become important sex educators as they include frequent discussion and portrayals of sexual behaviors that affect adolescents conceptions of sexual behavior” (Stern, 2009, 22).

The effect of increased sexual content in media and the use of the television as a sexual education tool lead to multiple negative outcomes for media consumers. A study conducted by Joffe (2006) showed that adolescents with high exposure to sexual content reported having sexual intercourse at an earlier age than individuals with less exposure. Another study, found that adolescents with a high level of exposure to television shows with sexual content were twice as likely to get pregnant or impregnate another person (Landau, 2008).

Media portrayals of sexuality can affect young people’s socialized attitudes toward sex. In discussing potential effects of sexualized media, Stern (2009) states, “One concern is that sexual content posted by teens may prompt the perception among teen viewers that sex is normal, even glamorous, and risk-free” (Stern, 2009, 5). Stern also says that high volumes of sexual content may also lead to pressure for teenagers to become sexually active to join the majority that media is displaying (Stern, 2009). The

escape from sexual content on media is nearly impossible; Landau's (2008) study found that for every hour of daily television programming, sexual content is displayed at least every ten minutes. Young people are being sexually socialized through television programming every time they watch television.

Research also indicates that adolescents may acquire sexual scripts and norms from media examples, with as many as one in five teenagers reporting that television is their most important source of sexual information (Brown, 2002). These sexual scripts may lead to unrealistic expectations about sex and sexuality. "Young people today are faced with often conflicting and confusing message about how they are supposed to behave as sexual adults and socialization institutions in the culture are not in agreement about when, what, or where youth should learn about sexuality" (Brown, 2002, 6). Brown, analyzed sexual content among 45 programs, and found that sexual content was present in 37 of them (Brown, 2002). Sexual content is thus an element that cannot be avoided and could be leading to negative outcomes. "Previous studies have found that sexually related talk and behavior occurs from eight to ten times per hour in primetime programming, with two-thirds of all network prime-time shows including some sexual material" (Brown, 2002, 60). Sexual socialization is leading to teenagers engaging in sex at an earlier age, with more partners, and often without contraception (Sapolsky, 1991). The line of censor has been stepped over by media, especially sexual content in television programming.

Theoretical Approaches to Media Consumption

Media are highly influential in our world. Cultivation, mainstreaming, and priming are means to shift views of consumers through shifting cultural views, habits, and beliefs through the increased amount of sexual content.

Cultivation

Cultivation scholars suggest that television is responsible for shaping, or cultivating, viewers' conceptions of social reality. Cultivation theory suggests that television influences and shapes consumer's standards and behaviors by shaping social reality. "The combined effects of massive television exposure by viewers over time subtly shapes the perception of social reality for individuals and, ultimately, for our culture as a whole" (Griffin, 2006). Exposure to television in the theory of cultivation leads to a shaped perception of reality.

Cultivation theory confirms that people who watch a large amount of television are likely to be more influenced by television than people who watch very little television. Gerbner, who studied television violence, found that heavy television users develop an exaggerated belief in a "mean and scary world" (Gerbner, 2002). Television is society's dominant storyteller, "the dominant force in shaping modern society" (Griffin, 2006, 391).

Thus television has taken over the key role of telling people what is correct, what a person should believe, and how to think. "This discussion also applies to other media and cultural forms, with the difference that television also applies to other media and cultural forms, with the difference that television is the generally non-selectively used universal storyteller of modern society. It is therefore, a more symbolic environment than traditional media" (Gerbner, 2009, 254). Media has the ultimate control over our society

through the use of television programming. Consumers who are exposed to excessive sexual content on television programming are likely to see the world through a sexual lens.

Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is closely related to cultivation as an effect of media. Mainstreaming describes a process of “blurring, blending and bending” which Gerbner (2002, 5) suggested that those with heavy viewing habits undergo. Constant exposure of the same images and labels leads to the development of a common outlook for viewers (Gerbner, 2002). “Other surveys, which include a measure of amount of daily television viewing echo these patterns and provide more hints about the possible consequences of television viewing” (Gerbner, 2002, 338). The process of mainstreaming leads to a shift in culture, beliefs, and views.

Mainstreaming leads to shifted attitudes and desires. The shift in culture can lead to such adoption as increased sexual behavior. Gerbner labels the mix of attitudes and desires as “new populism,” recognizing that heavy viewing habits have been transformed into the mainstream (Gerbner, 2002). The similarity between the television world and real-life circumstance can lead to changing cultivation patterns (Gerbner, 2002). These issues are mainstreamed into the minds of the consumers.

Priming

Priming is the idea that media provide audiences with standards and frames of reference (Domke, 1998). Media primes the audience about what is popular, what is positive, and what is negative. Priming thus has a direct impact on the audience, influencing them on specific issues media considers as important.

Priming allows media to manipulate audiences in subtle ways. Through priming, media programs tell audiences about what a news program looks like, or even what a credible person looks like. “By receiving and processing information, individuals develop memory traces or activation tags, that is, concepts or issues are primed and made more accessible in an individual’s memory” (Scheufele, 2000, 310). Media influence a person’s mind by displaying a filtered view of information. Media also set standards for the public by making some issues more salient than others (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Priming, therefore, can influence government, politics, war, presidential races, or even ethics.

It is important to note that the relationship between media and society is reflexive in nature – each is related to, and builds upon, the other. Society (as it were) tells media what is “cool” or important at the time; media, in turn, then reinforce society by producing it back to society in various ways.

METHODS

In conducting this research I analyzed five popular television series, one series from each of the past five decades. This allows for an analysis of sexual content in prime time television over the past 50 years. The selected television series are: *Leave it to Beaver* (1960s), *The Brady Bunch* (1970s), *Growing Pains* (1980s), *Full House* (1990s), and *Two and a Half Men* (2000s). Each of these series was prominent in primetime television and focused on a family unit which included teenagers.

Except for *Leave it to Beaver*, each television series displays a quirky feature in the family unit, perhaps styled to fit values and push boundaries in the decade in which the series appeared. For example, *The Brady Bunch* displayed a blended family where

each parent was on a second marriage. *Growing Pains* featured a working mother and a stay-at-home (though working) father. *Full House* featured a blended family owing to the death of the mother of the children. And *Two and a Half Men* focuses on a divorced family with the father living with a sibling. Thus while most of the series featured a wrinkle in the family dynamic, each series focuses on a family unit including teenagers.

The series were selected as a convenience sample. Given difficulties related to viewing television series from past decades, access was an issue and became a factor in sampling television shows. I gained access to episodes via internet television viewing sites and Netflix. Despite challenges with access, I was able to establish criteria which every television series met. Criteria were: each appeared on the top thirty ranking of the Nielsen rating system; each series aired for at least three seasons in the appointed decade; each series aired during primetime television on a television (as opposed to cable) network; each series focused on a family unit and was understood to fall in the category of “family comedy;” and regular episodes in each series was thirty minutes in length. Although all of the series aired for five to nine seasons, only the last three seasons within the decade were selected for analysis. Three seasons of each show were selected within the decade to analyze, some of the shows crossed decades. This method was employed to keep the viewing of each series consistent and also to insure that the family unit in each series included teenagers.

Five episodes from the three seasons in each television series were analyzed. This amounted to 15 episodes from each series, a total of 75. Episodes were selected from a strategic sampling process. The first, last, “sweeps week” episode, and also an episode

appearing between the first and sweep week episode, and finally an episode appearing between the “sweeps week” and last episode were selected for analysis.

The content of each episode was analyzed, focusing on sexual content. According to Frey (2000), “Observing and measuring behavior is a central part of many communication research studies” (Frey, 2000, 107). Findings are based on coding of sexual references and behaviors.

Rather than focusing on standardized physical units, this research employs syntactical units to cover meanings related to sexual content, including discrete units of language, such as individual words, sentences, and paragraphs (Frey, 2000). I analyzed discrete verbal references to sexual content and observable behavioral acts of the characters on the selected series. (See Appendix E for the coding sheet utilized in this study.)

Multiple categories were devised in order to determine sexual content in the five television series. In order to capture the complexity of the category system in itself, three trial runs were employed to develop the coding categories a trial period allowed for the coding instrument to evaluate any excess or need for expansion. Three trial runs facilitated developing a coding instrument containing 12 categories within the actions of kissing and sex, 10 within the categories of reference, and 11 within the category of sexual innuendo. The research was based on observation of prime time television series, requiring coding as the best tool to explain and come to a conclusion based on the research results. The research required a coding scheme to best conduct the required research for this project. The coding scheme of research is the classification system that helps to describe and quantify the frequency of select communication behaviors (Frey,

2000). The research that was conducted in this document was a closed coding procedure in that the categories were predetermined.

Coding is generally conducted by two or more people, generally two or more are utilized to achieve reliability and validity of the coded data. In order to achieve reliability, two volunteer coders employed the coding tool by analyzing one episode from each of the selected series. Where a coefficient of 70 percent indicates inter-coder reliability, (Frey, 2000), reliability was 91 percent in this study. This result suggests that coding tool, is reliable.

The purpose of this content analysis is to display the types and frequency of sexual content that appeared in the sampled prime time television series, from each of the past five decades. Units of analysis included individual actions and linguistic references to sexual content. Units are comprised of the primary categories of kissing action, sexual action, sexual reference, kissing reference, pregnancy reference, and sexual innuendo. Each of the six primary categories included 10 to 12 multidimensional concepts, or sub-categories, which facilitate explaining interaction and reference in greater depth. The subcategories for sexual action include: number of instances, whether action is public or private, whether actors are fully clothed, partially clothed, not clothed. The action subcategory also included the location of the instances, whether kisses were on lips, cheek, or shoulder. The subcategories for reference and innuendo included the number of instances, the context (funny or serious), and who the reference was between (father-teen, mother-teen, teen-peer, teen-adult, adult-adult, teen-self, adult-self). The subcategory of object was also included to pertain to the sexual innuendo category. The coding instrument for this research is complex and detailed, but it proved to be a useful method

for finding the amount of sexual content on primetime television for the past 50 years. (See the Coding Instrument in Appendix C).

HYPOTHESIS

This research is based on a single hypothesis of increased sexual content. The hypothesis is stated below.

1. Sexual trends in media content on primetime television will likely increase from the previous decades, following social norms, attitudes, and behavior.

RESULTS

This study examined the sexual content of five selected television series from the past 50 years. Again, the selected series included *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Growing Pains*, *Full House*, and *Two and a Half Men*. The study hypothesized that sexual content would likely increase over time and would be highest in most current series. This study found a general increase in sexual content with increasing years and series.

Leave it to Beaver was the selected series for the 1960s. Out of the 15 episodes analyzed, none of the episodes included sexual reference. The television series also did not display anything to imply that a sexual action took place. *Leave it to Beaver* also had no references to kissing or pregnancy. The show had no instances of sexual innuendo. The only sexual content that took place was a kiss between the parents in the last episode of each of the fifth and sixth seasons (Graph 1, Appendix B). No other kissing action took

place in the sampled episodes. Both kisses took place in a family room and lasted for a brief moment. The kisses were not intimate and took place as a greeting when the father arrived home from work. Other than these two kisses, no other sexual content took place in the other 13 sampled episodes.

The Brady Bunch was the selected series for the 1970 decade. Similar to *Leave it to Beaver*, no sexual references took place in the sampled 15 episodes. Implied sex was also absent from this television series. Out of the 15 episodes samples, kissing references only appeared in the last season sampled. Only one kiss took place in the sampled material in the first episode of the last season (Graph 2, Appendix B). This kiss appeared in public and was not intimate, lasting only briefly. Again, the kiss was a greeting, and did not appear to be sexual. This kiss was on the lips. The reference of kissing was only observed in the last season as well. The first episode in the last season referred to kissing three times (Graph 3, Appendix B). Once averaged, the results show that the average kiss per episode was less than one. This television series only displayed sexual content in the sampled material of the last season, but still did not reference pregnancy or display sexual innuendos.

Growing Pains was the selected series for the 1980s. Every season displayed content of sexual references. Out of 15 episodes, 12 episodes contained sexual reference. Only three episodes displayed no sexual reference. The first season contained seven sexual references, an average of less than one per season, 0.71 (Graph 6, Appendix B). The second season contained a total of eight sexual references, averaging 1.60 an episode (Graph 6, Appendix B). The third season increased with a total of 11 sexual references, an average of 2.20 sexual references per episode (Graph 6, Appendix B). The sampled

episodes included no implied sex or reference to pregnancy. The first season displayed one instance of sexual innuendo, but was not included in the content of the other 14 sampled episodes (Graph 7, Appendix B). No kissing action took place in the sampled first season. The second and third seasons displayed 10 kisses in each season (Graph 4, Appendix B). The second season displayed the parents kissing. The end of the second season as well as the third season featured kissing action between the teenagers and contained an average of two kisses per episode. Out of three seasons sampled, kissing reference only took place in the last two seasons sampled. The second season contained a total of 23 kissing references, an average of 4.60 kisses per episode (Graph 5, Appendix B). The next season displayed a total of 18 kisses, an average of 3.60 kisses per episode (Graph 5, Appendix B). The majority of the kissing references took place between the teenagers.

Full House was the selected series for the 1990 decade. Sexual content took place in all three sampled seasons. For example, each season contained content referring to kissing. The first season had a total of 10 sexual references, an average of two references per episode (Graph 10, Appendix B). The second sampled season displayed five sexual references, an average of one reference per episode (Graph 10, Appendix B). The third sampled season contained three sexual references, an average of less than one reference per episode (Graph 10, Appendix B). Out of 15 episodes, no episodes contained implied sex or pregnancy reference. All three sampled seasons contained the action of kissing. The first season contained 11 kissing actions, an average of 2.20 kisses per episode (Graph 8, Appendix B). The second season contained 27 actions, an average of 5.40 kisses per episode (Graph 8, Appendix B). The third sampled season contained 23

actions, an average of 4.60 kisses per episode (Graph 8, Appendix B). Most kisses took place between family members. All three seasons also contained the reference to kissing. The first sampled season contained 19 references, an average of 3.8 references per episode (Graph 9, Appendix B). The second season decreased to 16 references per episode, an average of 3.20 references (Graph 9, Appendix B). The third season spiked to 23 references, an average of 4.60 references per episode (Graph 9, Appendix B).

The last selected series was *Two and a Half Men* for the 2000 decade. All three sampled seasons contained sexual references. All 15 episodes contained sexual reference. The first season contained a total of 128 references, and an average of 25.60 references per episode (Graph 13, Appendix B). The second sampled season contained 108 references, an average of 21.60 references per episode (Graph 13, Appendix B). The third sampled season contained a total of 214 sexual references, an average of 42.80 references per episode (Graph 13, Appendix B). This television series also contained implied sex in all three sampled seasons. The first season contained a total of eight actions of implied sex, an average of 1.60 per episode (Graph 14, Appendix B). The second sampled season contained a total of 17 implied sex actions, an average of 3.40 actions per episode (Graph 14, Appendix B). The third season contained only a total of 10 implied sex actions, an average of two actions per episode (Graph 14, Appendix B). Implied sex took place in 12 out of the 15 sampled episodes. The show also included multiple references to pregnancy. The first sampled season contained a total of 22 references, an average of 4.40 references per episode (Graph 15, Appendix B). Pregnancy references were absent in the sample second season, but appeared a total of eight times in the third season, an average of 1.60 per episode (Graph 15, Appendix B). The action of

kissing took place in 11 of the 15 sampled episodes for this series. The first season contained a total of 14 actions, an average of 2.80 kisses per episode (Graph 11, Appendix B). The second sampled season spiked to 27 actions, an average of 5.40 kisses per episode (Graph 11, Appendix B). The last season only contained a total of five actions, an average of one kiss per episode (Graph 11, Appendix B). Kissing reference only took place in the second and third sampled seasons. The second season had a total of 12 references, an average of 2.40 per episode (Graph 12, Appendix B). The third sampled season contained a total of five references, an average of one reference per episode (Graph 12, Appendix B). No instances of sexual innuendo occurred in the sampled 15 episodes for this series.

All series contained some amount of sexual content. However, none of the selected series contained the actual action sex. Although none of the series display the actual action of sex, one series did contain the action of implied sex. *Two and a Half Men* contained an overall total of 35 actions of implied sex (Graph 21, Appendix B). The first two series contained no sexual content. The 1980s series contained an overall total of 26 sexual references, 1990s series contained an overall total of 18 sexual references, and the 2000s series contained an overall total of 450 sexual references (Graph 20, Appendix B). The 2000 series of *Two and a Half Men* had 17 times more sexual content than the 1980s hit series of *Growing Pains*. That is also 25 times more sexual content than the 1990s hit series of *Full House*. On the other hand, only the 1980s hit of *Growing Pains* contained sexual innuendo. The 1980s and 1990s hits of *Growing Pains* and *Full House* focused on the reference of kissing over sexual references. *Growing Pains* contained an overall kissing reference of 41, while *Full House* contained an overall kissing reference of 58

(Graph 18, Appendix B). *Two and a Half Men* was the only series that contained the reference to pregnancy, an overall total of 30 references. *Leave it to Beaver* and *The Brady Bunch* barely appeared on the ratings. However, *Growing Pains*, *Full House*, and *Two and a Half men* all contained increased sexual content.

The hypothesis of this study, then, is generally upheld in that sexual content has increased in the past 50 years. Increased sexual content on television correlates with increased sexual content in the lives of young people in the United States. In 2009, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention surveyed United States high school student sexual behavior. The study displayed that 46 percent of students had already had sexual intercourse (CDC, 2011). Out of these students, 34 percent had sexual intercourse during the past three months (CDC, 2011). Out of this, 34 percent, thirty-nine percent did not use condoms during intercourse, and 77 percent did not use any form of birth control (CDC, 2011). The Center for Disease Control also found that 400,000 teen girls aged 15-19 gave birth in 2009 (CDC, 2011). These numbers are far greater than reported sexual activity of young people in the 1960s.

DISCUSSION

This study examined sexual content in five selected television series from the past 50 years. None of the five series were entirely exempt from sexual content of at least one type. The hypothesis that sexual trends in media content on primetime television will increase over time was thus supported by this study. The notion that sexual content has become more prominent over the years was confirmed by the general increase in sexual content.

Data gathered from this study confirms that sexual content in media has increased severely from the 1960s to the present day. Kissing took place in every series.

Interestingly enough, kissing and kissing references were more prominent in *Growing Pains* and *Full House*. *Two and a Half Men* had a total of 17 kissing references, while *Growing Pains* contained a total of 41 kissing references, and *Full House* 58 kissing references. Thus while *Two and a Half Men* features more sexual content overall, *Growing Pains* and *Full House* focused their episodes on kissing content. The average kissing reference on *Full House* was 3.89 per episode, while *Growing Pains* contained an average of 2.73 references per episodes, and *Two and a Half Men* with an average of 1.13 references per episode. Thus it appears that sexual content in the 1980s and 1990s was focused on kissing, not sex.

Kissing itself was similar to references to kissing. The 1990s series *Full House* featured the highest amount of kissing overall, an average of 4.07 per episode. *Two and a Half Men* featured an average of 3.07 kisses per episode and *Growing Pains* featured an average of 1.33 discrete kisses per episode. A general increase in the action of kissing was experienced from the first series of *Leave it to Beaver* to the last series of *Two and a Half Men*. However, all of the kissing that took place on the first two series was between the parents and none were intimate. Most of the kissing action of *Growing Pains* and *Full House* also fell under this category as well. However, the action of intimate kissing between the teenagers did become present in later years. All of the kissing action displayed on *Two and a Half Men* was between a person and their significant other, not family. *Two and a Half Men* also focused on intimate kissing that ostensibly leads to sex.

Sexual reference was absent from the selected series of the 1960s and 1970s. However, *Two and a Half Men* displayed an average of 30 references per episode. This is remarkable, considering that the typical episode lasts about 20 minutes. Moreover, the third sampled season of *Two and a Half Men* contained an overall average of 42.80 sexual references per episode or more than two references per minute of programming, on the other hand, the average of sexual content for the three sampled seasons for *Full House* calculated into 1.20 sexual references per episode, while *Growing Pains* was at 1.73 references per episode. Therefore, *Two and a Half Men*, on average, contains the same number per minute as the number of sexual references contained in an entire episode of *Full House* and/or *Growing Pains*. The slow increase of sexual content over the first four decades spikes in the series of *Two and a Half Men*.

Two and a Half exemplifies programming that takes the idea of sexual content and increases it exponentially. Another element of sexual content that was exaggerated in this series was implied sex. The actual action of sex has not appeared on prime time family television yet and the first four series analyzed in this study included no actions of implied sex in the 60 episodes that were examined. *Two and a Half Men* was the only series out of the five series selected that displayed implied sex. Implied sex was observed 35 times in the 15 analyzed episodes. The element of implied sex, on average, appeared 2.33 times per episode. In the three seasons sampled, the male character of Charlie was displayed in multiple situations of implied sex with more than one person. One episode contains implied sex between two men and a woman, while another implied sex between the teenager, Jake, and two other girls was featured as well.

Results of analysis of pregnancy reference were also interesting in that pregnancy reference only occurred in the sample of *Two and a Half Men*. There were 30 pregnancy references overall in the sampled 15 episodes, an average of 2.0 references per episode. The idea of pregnancy was not only referred to for the adults, but also the teenager character. Most of the pregnancy references occurred in interaction between the teenager character and his father. The series featured multiple episodes on unplanned teenage pregnancy. Talk about sex was then displayed, along with options for teen pregnancy. It is interesting that pregnancy reference did not take place in the other four series.

The question of pushing the boundaries of sexual content is a controversial issue in the current times. The increased amount of sexual content may represent a new form of sexual education of youth. Although many people place blame on media for increased sexual content, a reflection on the audience needs to be taken into consideration. Although sexual content appears to be increasing over time, people are tuning into such shows and making them popular. The popularity of shows such as *Two and a Half Men* illustrates that “sex sells” and appears to reflect current societal opinions and beliefs.

Although all of the series displayed sexual content, a pattern of increase can be seen over the years. The difference in the sexual content on the 1990s show *Full House* and the current series *Two and a Half Men* was dramatic. *Two and a Half Men* is at a different level when it comes to sexual content, introducing into the talk such elements of masturbation, orgies, orgasms, pornography, sexually transmitted diseases, and prostitution. Although all of these elements were present in the reality of the 1960s, they were never seen on prime time television. *Two and a Half Men* has introduced this content as mainstay in the show. The main character is displayed having sexual relations

with a multiple women on the series. Sexual content was not absent from any of the episodes of *Two and a Half Men*.

With the increase in sexual content over the past 50 years of prime time television, viewers face an element of desensitization. Today consumers are faced with sexual content in every direction they look, television, radio, billboards, and even clothing. The content displayed on prime time television would have been viewed as obscene or possibly even border-line pornography in the 1960s. Today consumers are presented with nudity and reference to such things as prostitution, and orgies. Although sexual intercourse is not currently seen on prime time television, with increasing sexual content, the question moving forward is “When will sexual intercourse be displayed on prime time television?” The industry seems to be moving toward increased sexual content in both quantity and type of sexual content allowed on prime time television.

Accordingly, it could be that we are in the midst of a cultural shift related to sexual content. The sexual content manifested in references to kissing, pregnancy, and sex as well as actions related to these phenomena has increased since the days of *Leave it to Beaver*. Content is not the only shift that our culture has experienced in television media. The traditional family of the 1960s diminished in present day prime time television. The structure of the family home appears to be an indicator of shifting attitudes as well. The hit series of *Growing Pains* displayed a home where the mother was the bread-winner, while the 1990s show *Full House* showcased a blended family. The current show *Two and a Half Men* displays a divorced family. As our most potent storyteller, prime time television displays these devices as social realities, which display

essentially reproduces and advances them. This also reproduces the notion that “sex sells.”

Increased sexual content in prime time television also may lead to a new form of sexual education that essentially advocates sex among youth by normalizing it.

Television shows such as *Two and a Half Men* implicate that everyone is having sex and that there are no consequences. With such sexual content displayed on prime time television, a need of safety or prevention is not included. The rate of people engaging in sex, sexually transmitted disease, and even pregnancy are on the rise. The promotion of sexual content in primetime television could be related to this increase in sexual behavior.

Future research in this area might consider coding two series for each decade. This will allow for a wider scope on the increase of sexual behavior through programming over a larger span of the decade. This will help the validity of the research results. Future research might also consider expanding the number of seasons analyzed. This study only covered the last three seasons of each of the series.

APPENDIX A-

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APPENDIX B-

Table 1: Series and Episode Selection

Leave it to Beaver					
Season	E1	EM	SW	EM	END
4	1	8	18	28	39
5	1	9	19	29	39
6	1	9	19	29	39

The Brady Bunch					
Season	E1	EM	SW	EM	END
3	1	6	11	17	23
4	1	6	11	17	23
5	1	5	10	16	22

Growing Pains					
Season	E1	EM	SW	EM	END
5	1	5	9	18	26
6	1	4	8	16	24
7	1	4	8	16	24

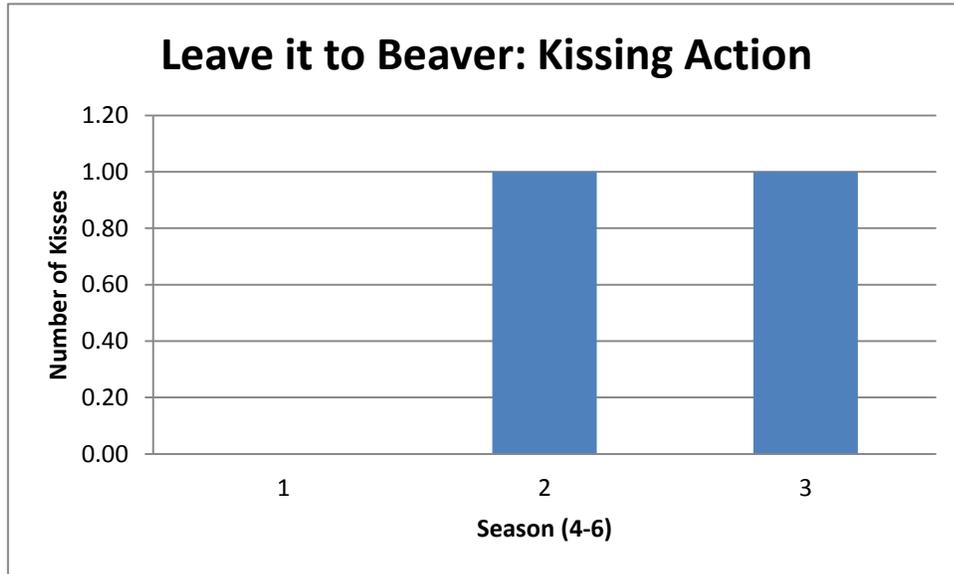
Full House					
Season	E1	EM	SW	EM	END
6	1	4	7	16	24
7	1	5	9	17	24
8	1	4	7	16	24

Two and a Half Men					
Season	E1	EM	SW	EM	END
6	1	4	7	16	24
7	1	4	7	16	22
8	1	4	8	12	16

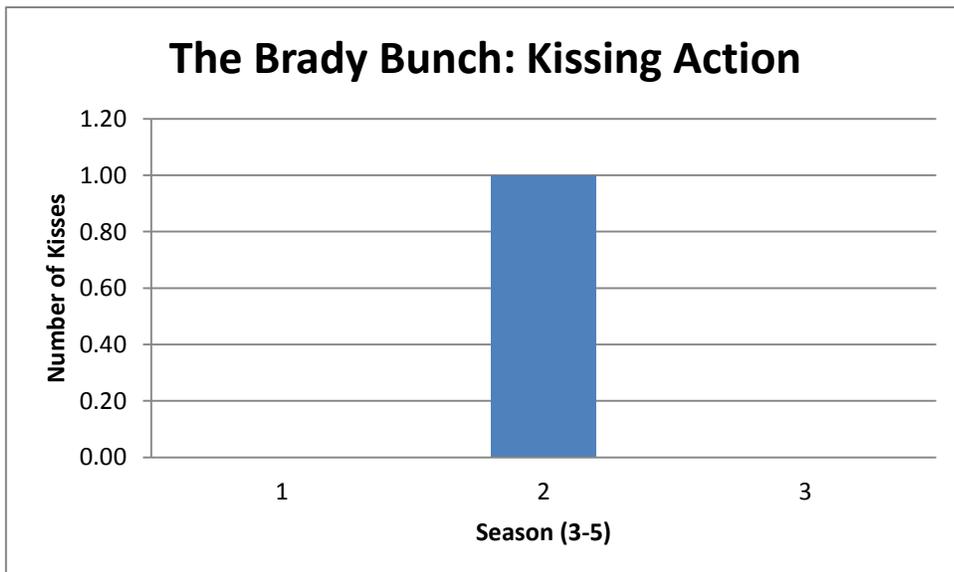
APPENDIX C-

APPENDIX D-

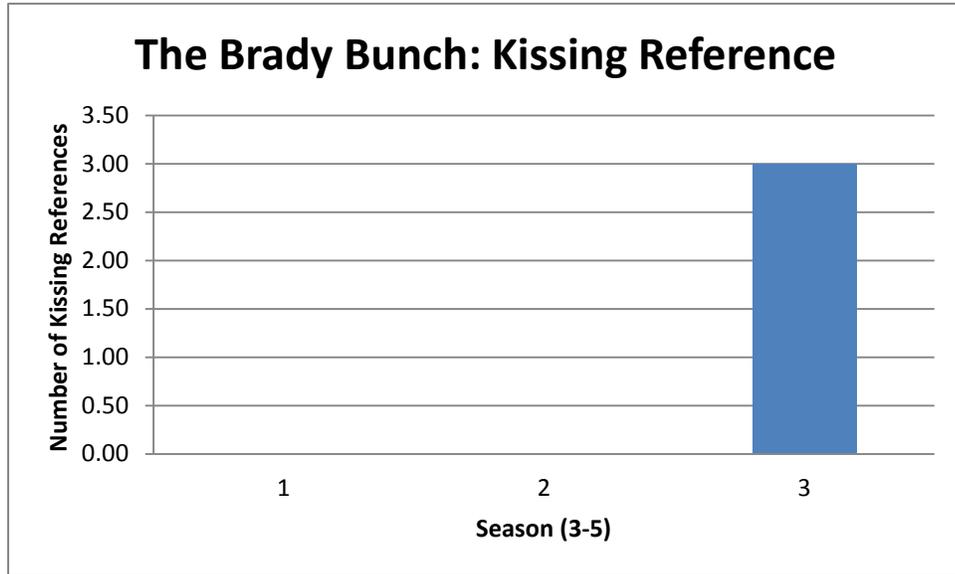
Graph 1- Leave it to Beaver: Kissing Action Total per Season



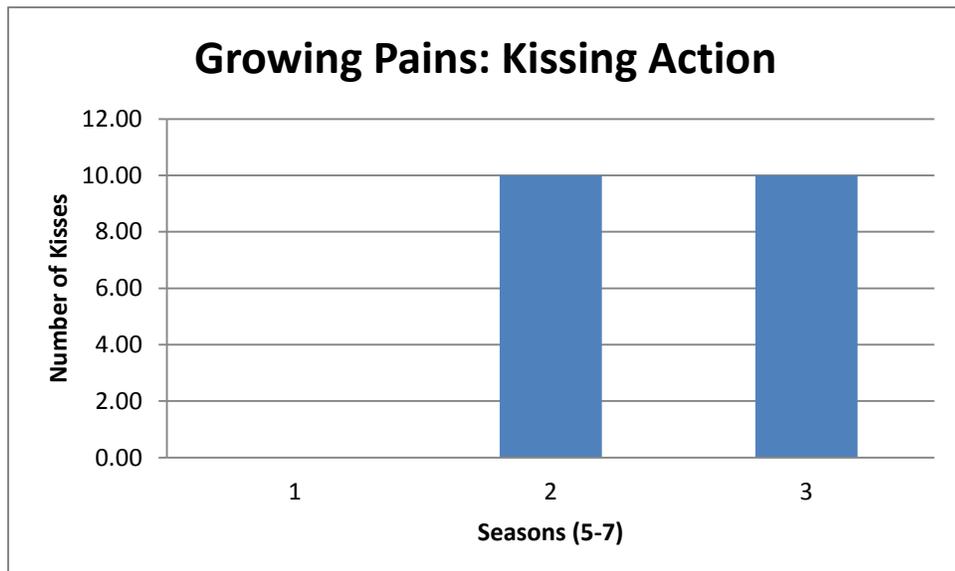
Graph 2- The Brady Bunch: Kissing Action Total per Season



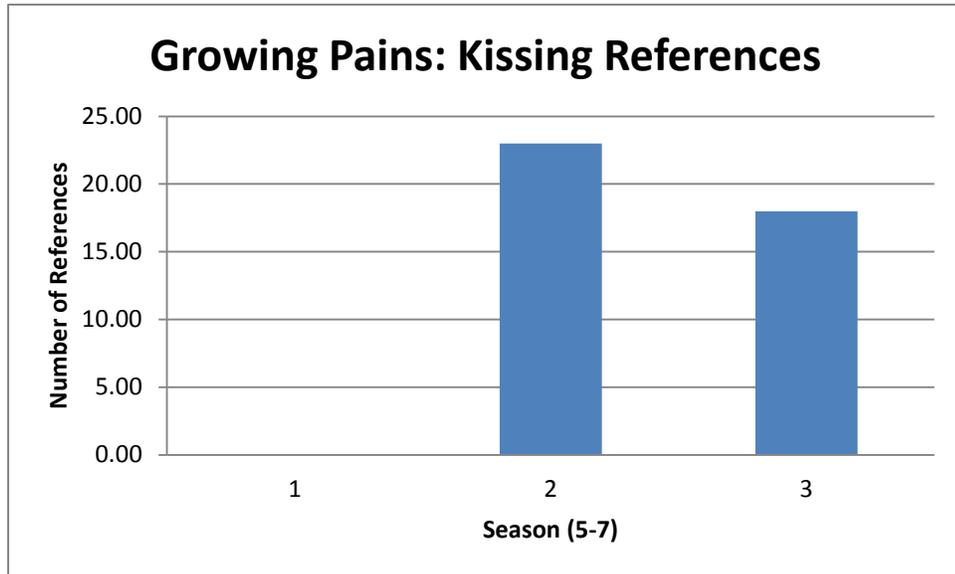
Graph 3- The Brady Bunch: Kissing Reference Total per Season



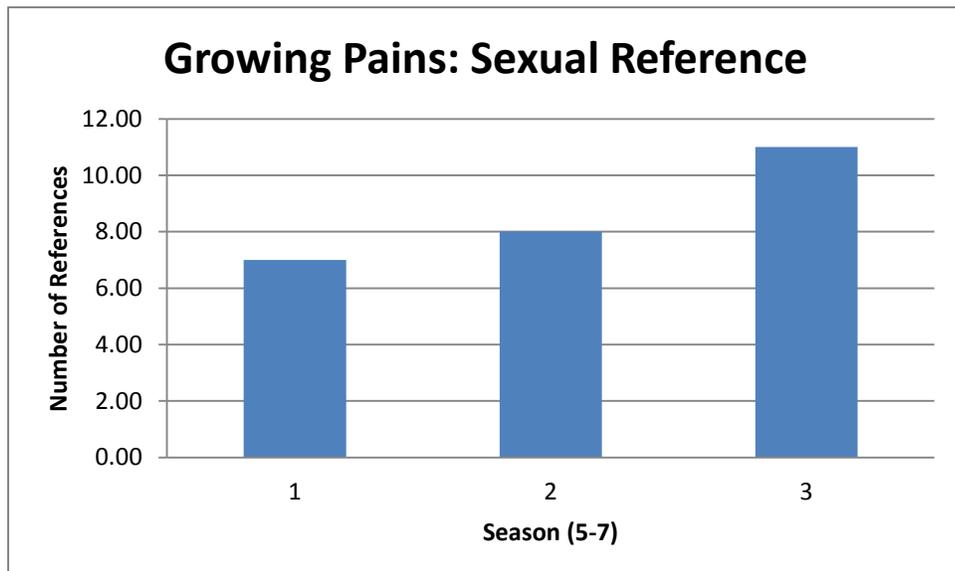
Graph 4- Growing Pains: Kissing Action Total per Season



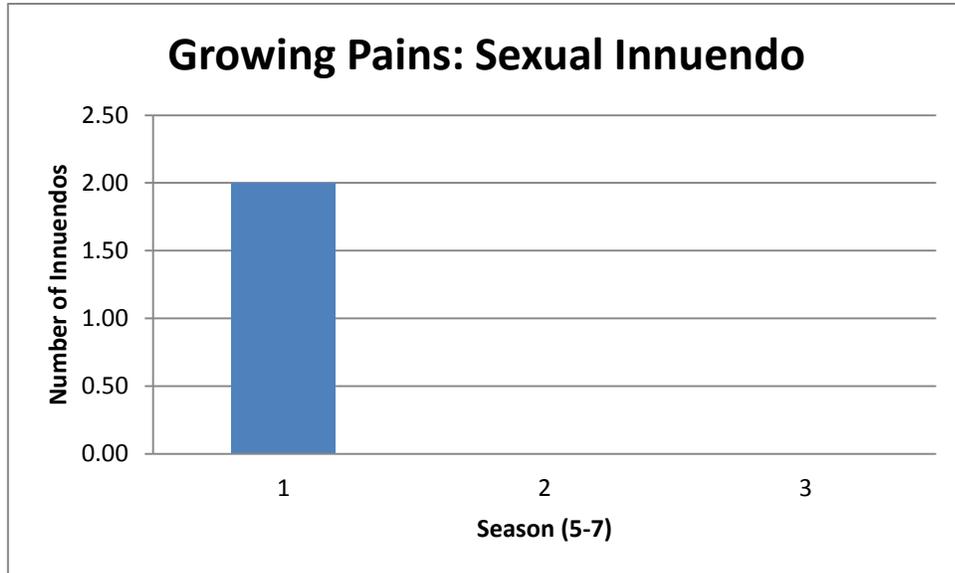
Graph 5- Growing Pains: Kissing Reference Total per Season



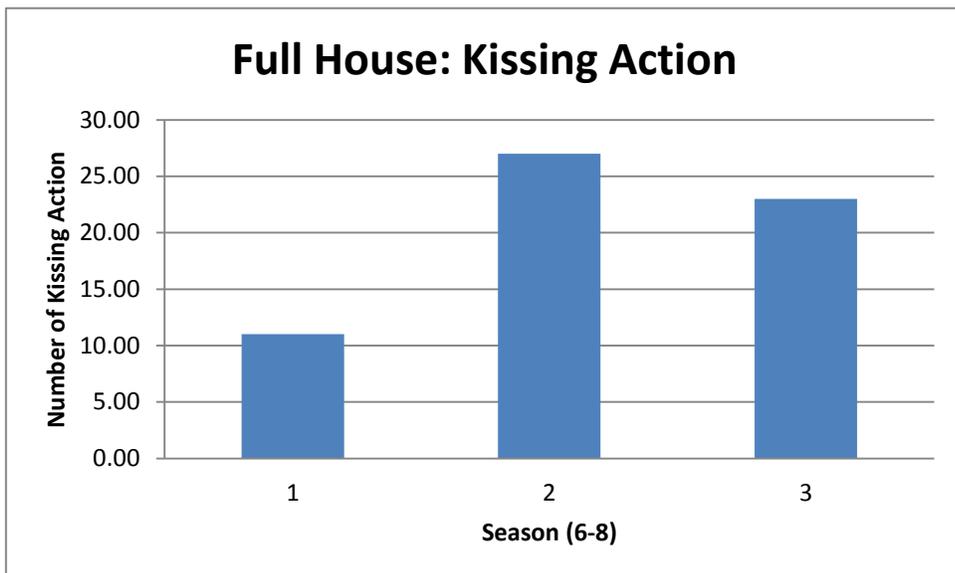
Graph 6-Growing Pains: Sexual Reference Total per Season



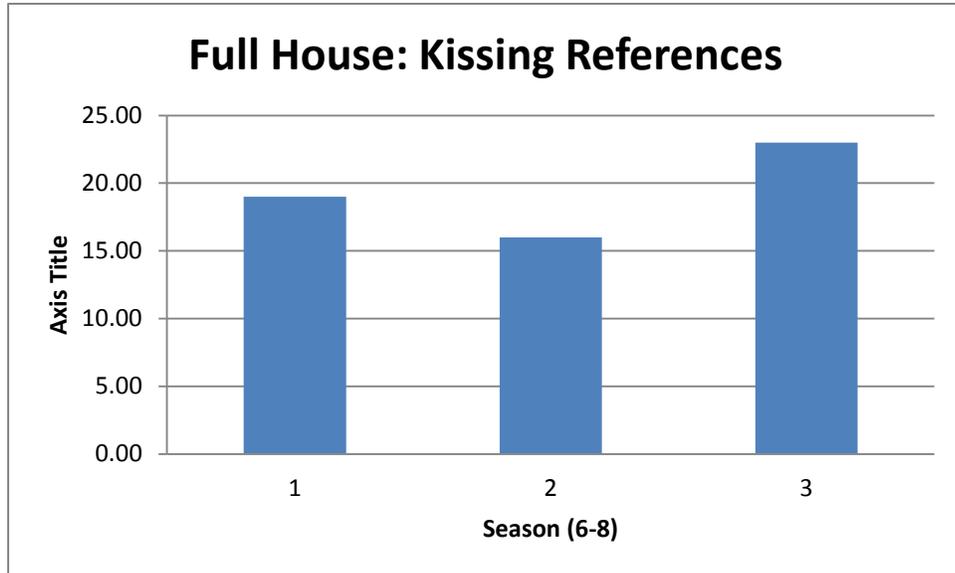
Graph 7- Growing Pains: Sexual Innuendo Total per Season



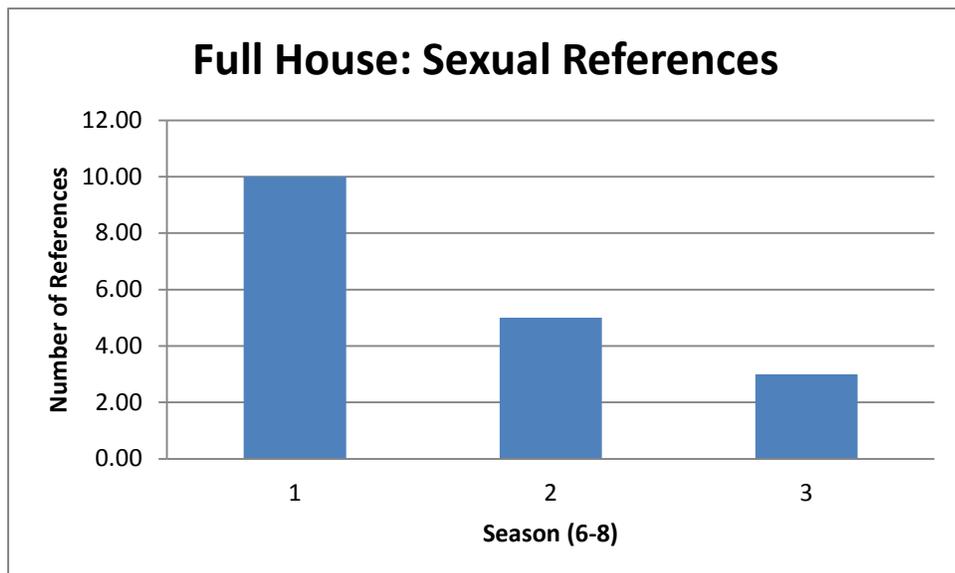
Graph 8- Full House: Kissing Action Total per Season



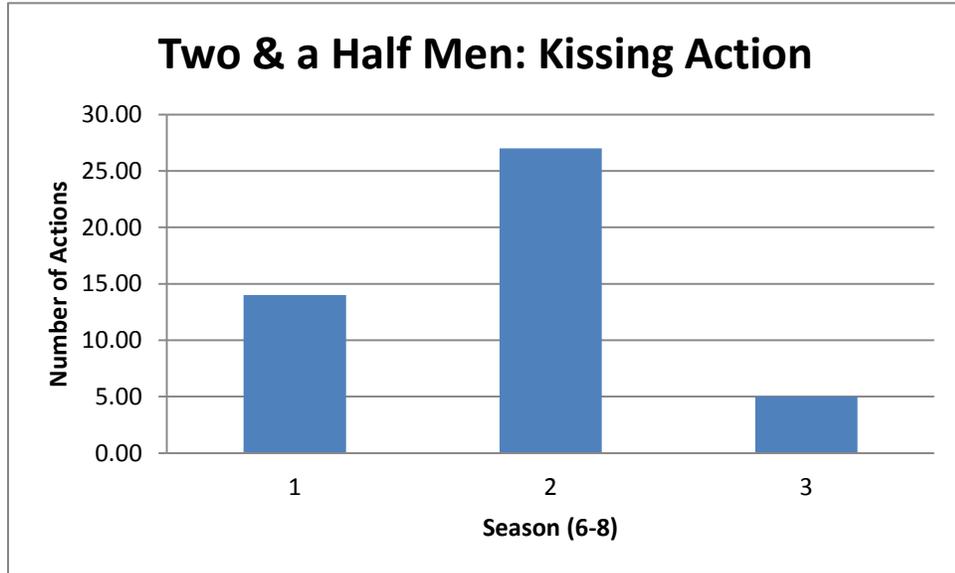
Graph 9- Full House: Kissing Reference Total per Season



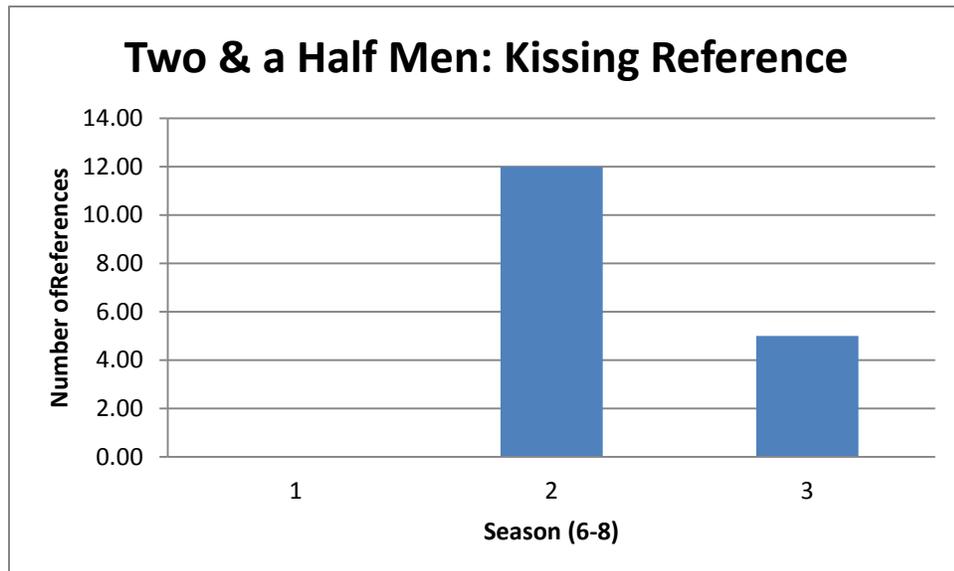
Graph 10- Full House: Sexual Reference Total per Season



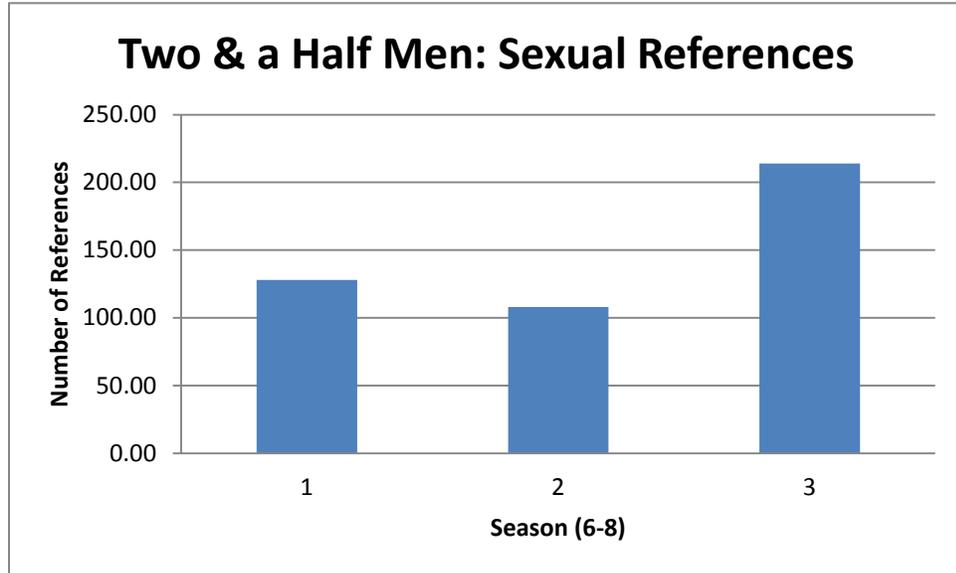
Graph 11- Two & a Half Men: Kissing Action Total per Season



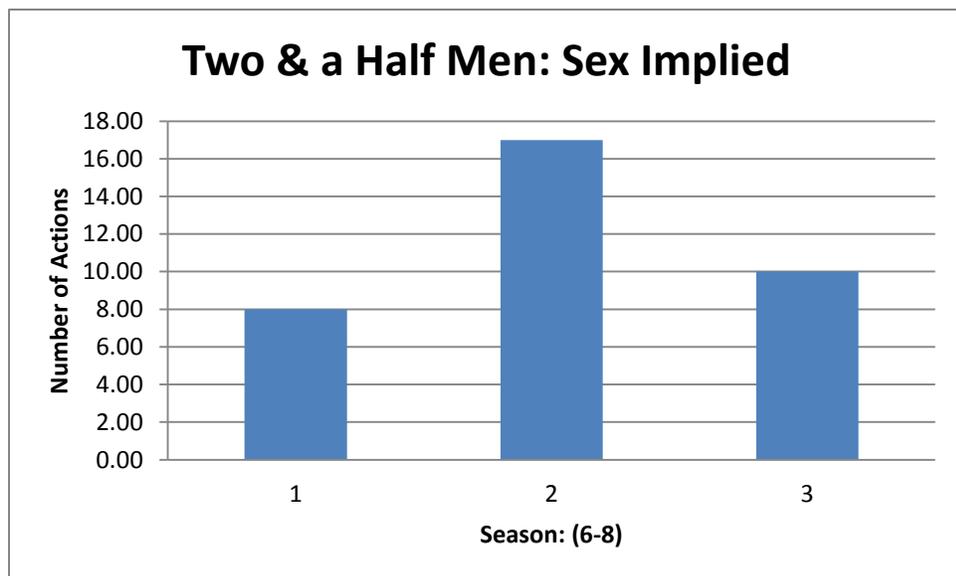
Graph 12- Two & a Half Men: Kissing Reference Total per Season



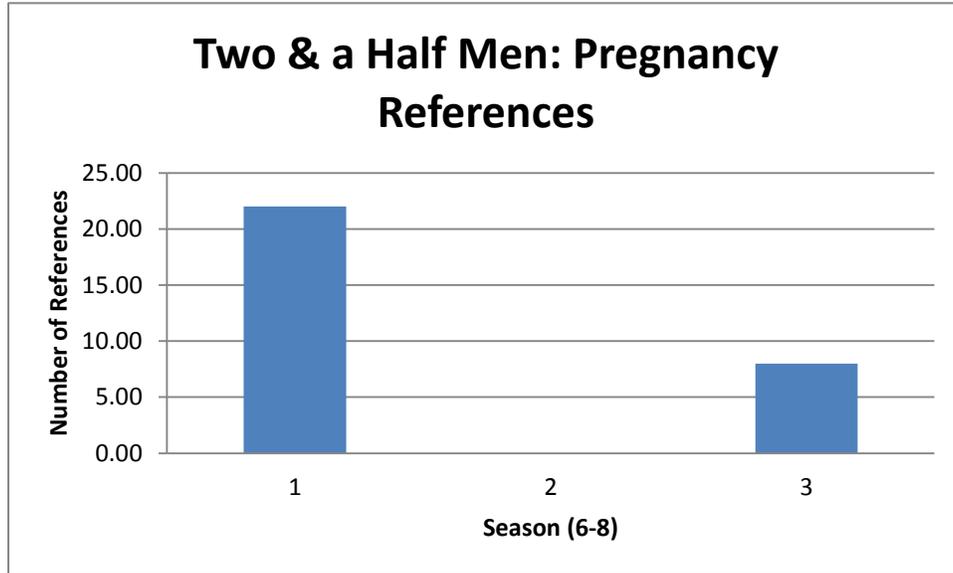
Graph 13- Two & a Half Men: Sexual Reference Total per Season



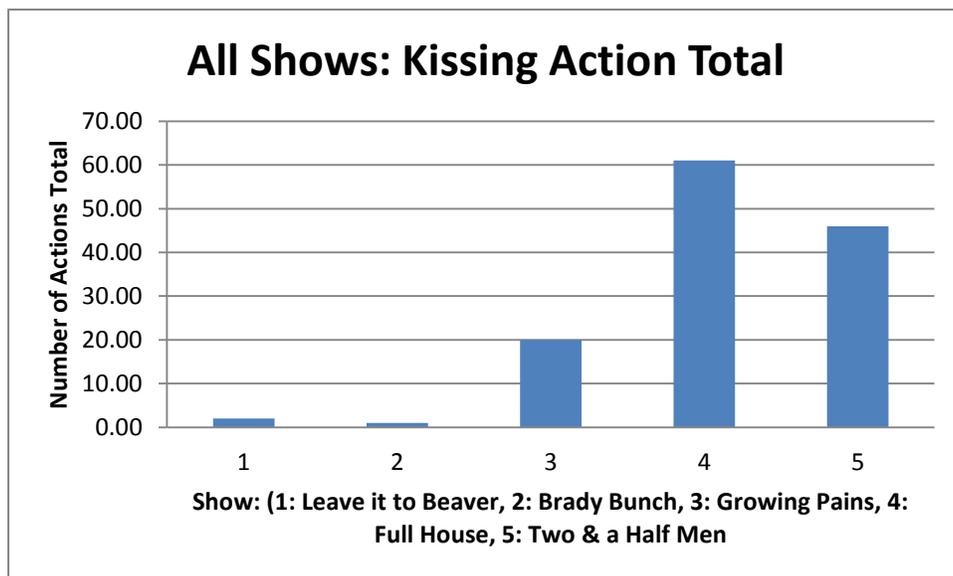
Graph 14- Two & a Half Men: Sex Implied Total per Season



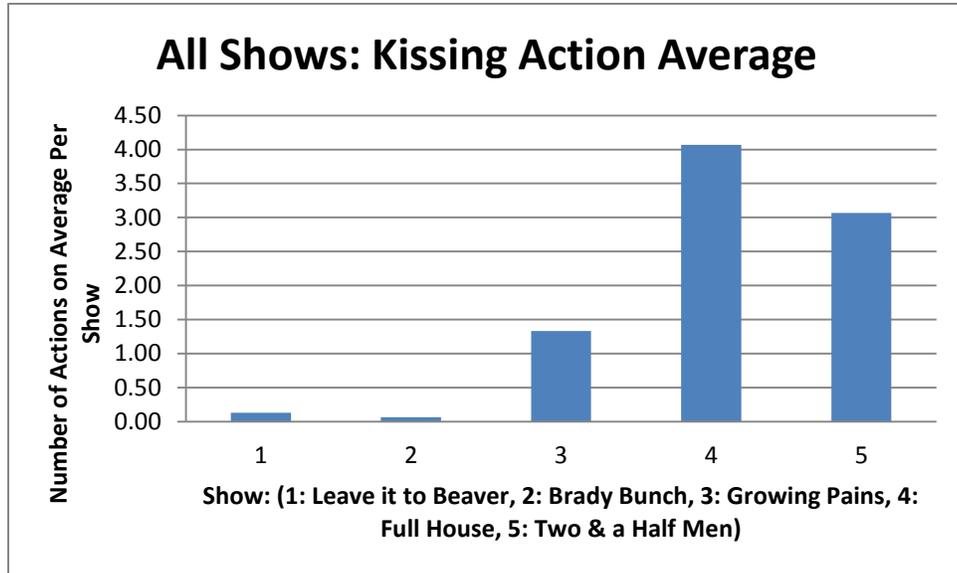
Graph 15- Two & a Half Men: Pregnancy Reference Total per Season



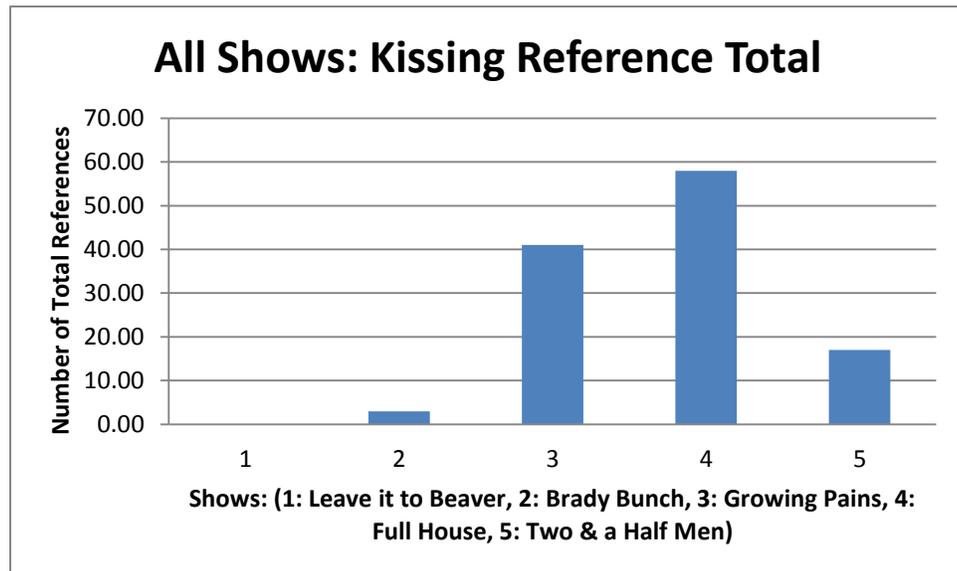
Graph 16- All Shows: Kissing Action Total per Season



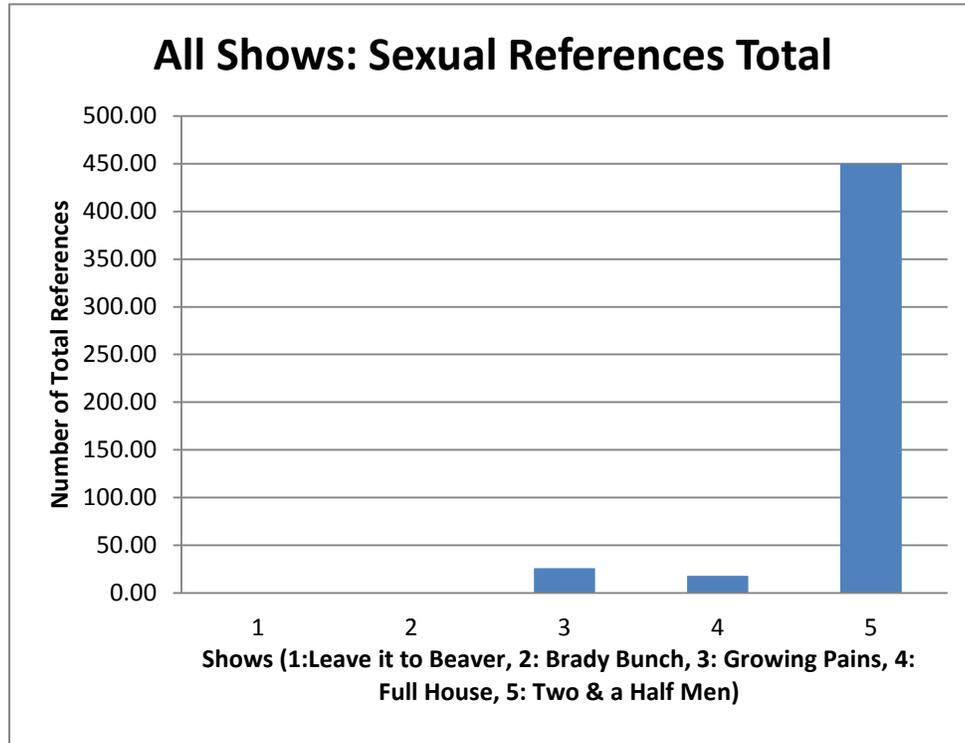
Graph 17- All Shows: Kissing Action Average by Show



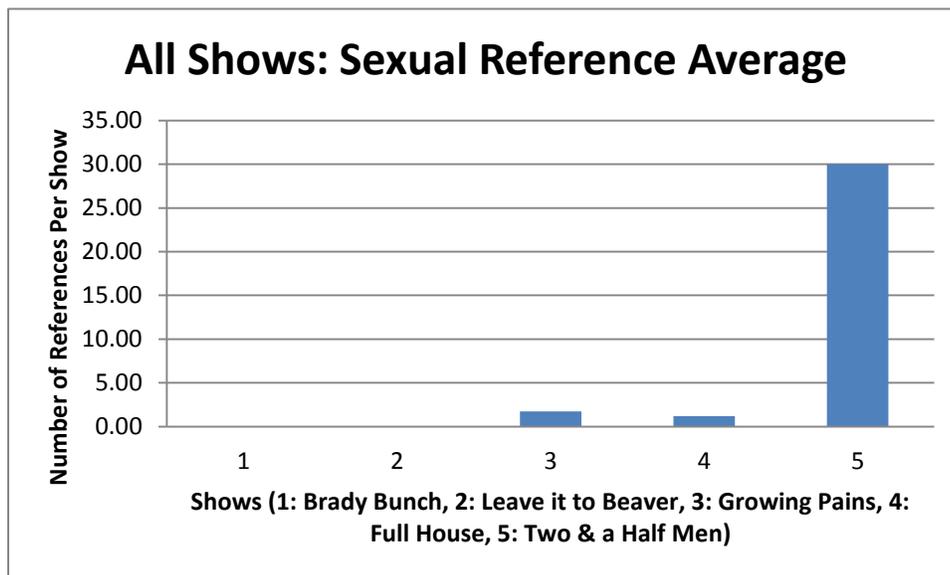
Graph 18- All Shows: Kissing Reference Total by Show



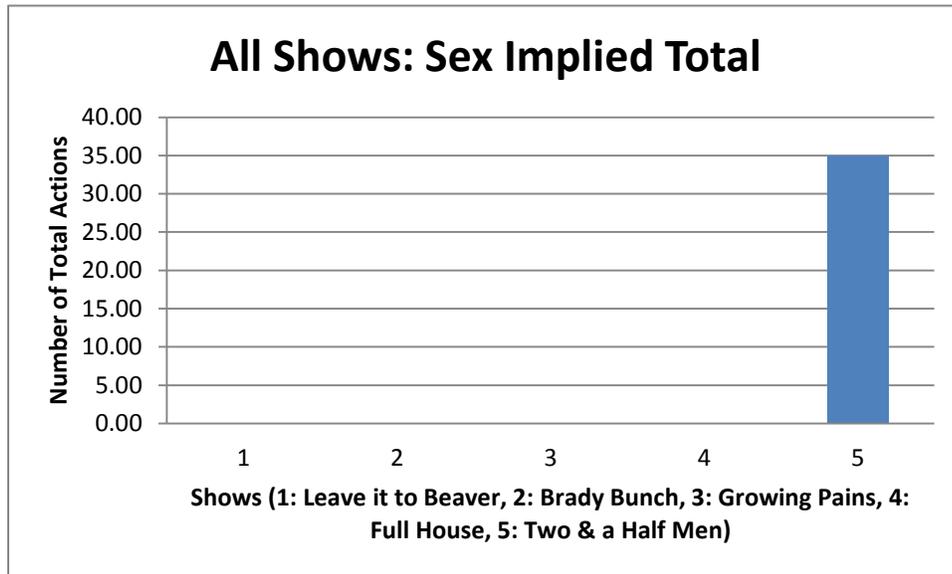
Graph 19- All Shows: Sexual Reference Total by Show



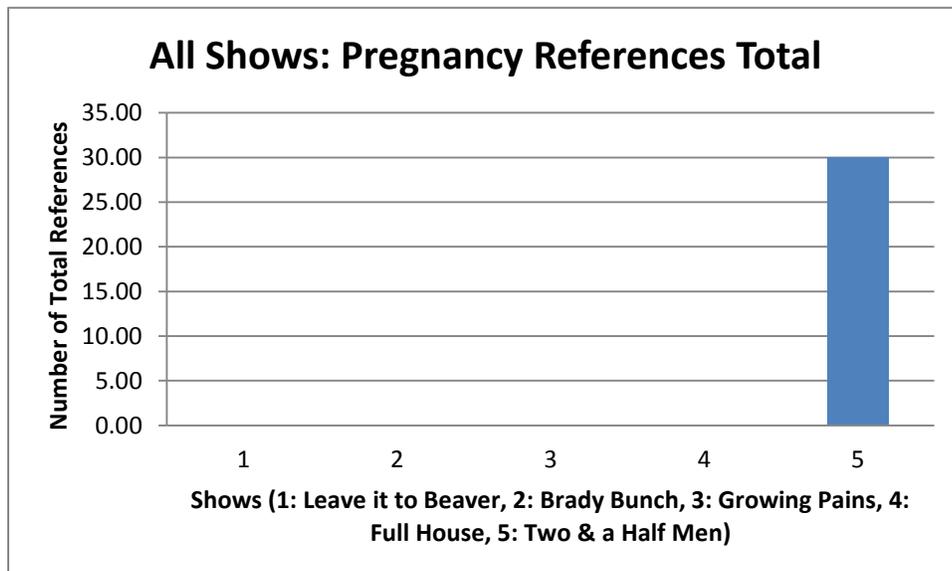
Graph 20- All Shows: Sexual Reference Average by Show



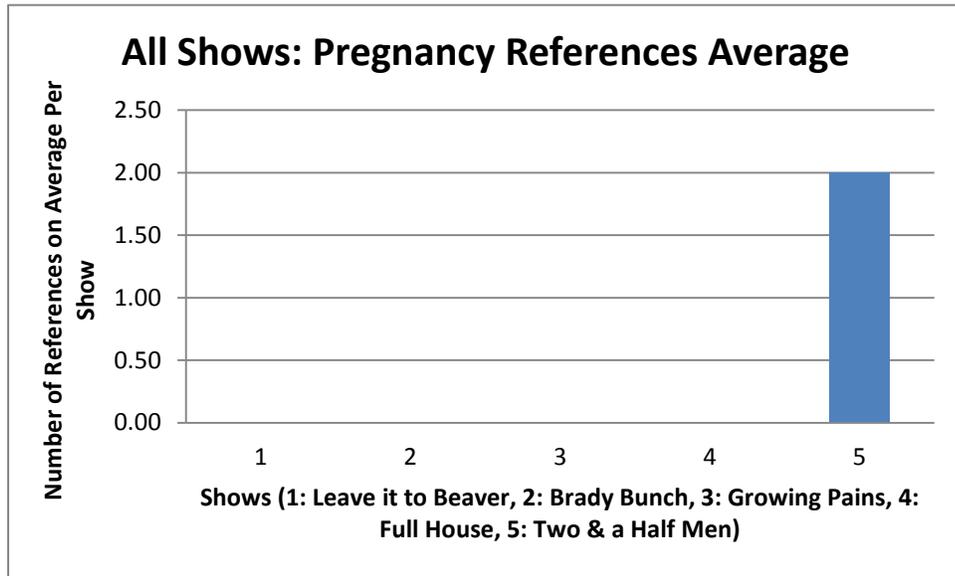
Graph 21- All Shows: Sex Implied Total by Show



Graph 22- All Shows: Pregnancy Reference Total by Show



Graph 23- All Shows: Pregnancy Reference Average by Show



APPENDIX E-

CODE BOOK

This codebook is designed to help an outsider in the process of coding any of the selected five television series for the analysis of sexual content. Each variable that is listed is defined on a base that can be utilized for the study and research of sexual content in primetime television. The coder is to follow the below requirements and instructions in attempting to code an episode within a television series.

This is a study of the frequency of sexual content within the medium of television series. This study is looking for different types of sexual references and actions. The coders job is to record any actions or words that pertain to sexual content within each episode. After identifying all references and actions within a selected episode the coder will take the tallied worksheet and combined it into numerical form corresponding to the categories within the coding scheme. The results will then be used to analyze and draw conclusions on.

The coder will use the following definitions and information to conduct an efficient analysis of the required episodes within each of the television series. This code book will allow for further clarification and correct uses of efficiently coding the sexual content of this research.

Basic Instructions:

1. Gather the 15 episodes within the three seasons of one television series.
2. Open electronic version of the coding scheme
3. View one episode in one sitting

4. Pay close attention to the episode for all existence of sexual reference and action. Be careful to not bypass over a reference or action because you are recording. Utilize the feature of pausing the selected episode to correctly record the instance and not miss any upcoming reference or action. The variables that are sought after have been split up into six categories and ten to eleven sub-categories for each instance. This may seem detailed, but is the best method to acquiring the knowledge the researcher needs to make accurate conclusions.
5. When a sexual action or reference appears look for the appropriate category and place a tally mark in the number subcategory and also a tally mark in the defining factors subcategory as well.
6. After the conclusion of the episode count up all instances in each box for a total in each category and subcategory.
7. Watch all episodes within one season in one sitting for an efficient method of coding.
8. The coder is to code only the episodes that are assigned from each three seasons of the five series.

Definitions of variables 1-6:

1. **Kissing Action:** The action of kissing is defined by any interaction where a person uses their lips to kiss another person. The action of kissing is not restricted to only lip action. This study will cover any action that includes lip to lip interaction, or lip to any other body part. The coding tool describes multiple kissing sub-categories such as lips, shoulder, cheek, or other. These sub-

- categories were created to discover a detailed description of each kissing interaction to describe the sexual content further. One tally mark will describe one interaction of a person's lips touching some part of another person. Any pauses between actual touching of the lips will be counted as multiple kisses.
2. **Sexual Action:** The action of sex is defined by any interaction that displays the intercourse between two or more people. This action will display any type of penetration between two or more people.
 3. **Sexual Action Implied:** The action of sex implied is defined as any display of two or more people that implies that the participants just finished engaging in a sexual encounter. This can be a scene where two or more people are shown in bed with minimal clothing, out of breath, and/or talking about the implied sexual action.
 4. **Kissing Reference:** A kissing reference is defined as any mention of the interaction of people engaging in a kiss. The coder will record any reference to kissing. Other terms that need to be recorded under this category include "mack-ing," kissing, making-out, lip-locking, and/or "smooching."
 5. **Sexual Reference:** A sexual reference is defined as any mention to the interaction of people engaging in sexual relations. The coder will record any reference to sexual content. Terms that are included in this category are sex, oral sex, orgasm, masturbation, condoms, sexually transmitted diseases, masturbation, hookers, orgy, porn, and/or "four-play."
 6. **Pregnancy Reference:** A pregnancy reference is defined by any mention of a person bearing a child. The coder will record any reference to pregnancy. Terms

that are included in this category are pregnancy, pregnant, stagnant, “prego,” and/or “knocked-up.”

7. **Sexual Innuendo:** A sexual innuendo is defined as an allusive or oblique remark or hint that is suggestive of a sexual action or reference.

Definitions of action factors 1-14:

1. **Number:** The definition of a number is any action of kissing, sex, and/or sex implied. The number is a result of any recognition of the described actions, which is described by a tally mark. Once all coding is accomplished the tally marks will then be added up to calculate results.
2. **Public:** Public is described as community or appearing in front of other people. This category was created to describe where the interactions take place. Some examples of this are an interaction happening at school, a shopping center, or in a common area such as a bus station.
3. **Private:** Private is described as being exclusive, secret, or confidential. This category was created to describe where the interactions take place. Some examples of this are an interaction occurring inside a house, behind closed doors, or in a secluded place.
4. **Full Clothing:** Full clothing is defined as a person having all of their clothes on. All clothing can be described as typical wear for the correct season. An example of this is a female wearing pants and a t-shirt.
5. **Partial Clothing:** Partial clothing is defined as a person having only some of their clothes on, not having the assumed amount that is considered full. An example of this is a person displayed in their undergarments.

6. **No Clothing:** No clothing is defined as a person having no clothing on. This could be displayed as a naked body, or a person in bed with clothes laying on the floor.
7. **Location Lips:** The definition of location lips is any action of kissing another person on their lips. The action of kissing needs to be lips to lips for this subcategory.
8. **Location Cheek:** The definition of location cheek is any action of kissing another person on their cheek. The action of kissing needs to be lips to cheek for this subcategory.
9. **Location Shoulder:** The definition of location shoulder is any action of kissing another person on their shoulders. The action of kissing needs to be lips to shoulder for this subcategory.
10. **Location Other:** The definition of location other is any action of kissing that takes place on another body part that is not defined under lips, cheek, or shoulders. The action of kissing needs to be an interaction of a person kissing another person on their body for this category.
11. **Location Bedroom:** The definition of location bedroom is any action of kissing, sex, and/or sex implied that takes place in this location.
12. **Location House Other:** The definition of location house is any action of kissing, sex, and/or sex implied that takes place in this location.
13. **Location Public:** The definition of location public is any action of kissing, sex, and/or sex implied that takes place in a public setting, outside of a private manner.

14. **Location Other:** The definition of location other is any action of kissing, sex, and/or sex implied that takes place in a setting that is not described under bedroom, house other, and/or private.

The definitions of reference and innuendo factors 1-11:

1. **Number:** The definition of a number is any action of kissing, sex, and/or sex implied. The number is a result of any recognition of the described actions, which is described by a tally mark. Once all coding is accomplished the tally marks will then be added up to calculate results.
2. **Funny Context:** Funny context is defined as a context in which a reference occurs that is intended to be humorous or causing laughter.
3. **Serious Context:** Serious context is defined as a context in which a reference occurs that is intended to be severe, important, and not funny.
4. **Father-Teen:** Father-Teen is defined as the reference to the relationship between the two participants in which a reference is conducted.
5. **Mother-Teen:** Mother-Teen is defined as the reference to the relationship between the two participants in which a reference is conducted.
6. **Teen-Peer:** Teen-Peer is defined as the reference to the relationship between the two participants in which a reference is conducted.
7. **Teen-Adult:** Teen-Adult is defined as the reference to the relationship between the two participants in which a reference is conducted.
8. **Adult-Adult:** Adult-Adult is defined as the reference to the relationship between the two participants in which a reference is conducted.

9. **Teen-Self:** Teen-Self is defined as the reference to the relationship between the two participants in which a reference is conducted.
10. **Adult-Self:** Adult-Self is defined as the reference to the relationship between the two participants in which a reference is conducted.
11. **Object:** The definition of object is a material thing that can be touched or seen.
This subcategory refers to the sexual innuendo category. The actual object will be recorded for this category.