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## INFLUENCE OF EROTIC TELEVISION FILMS ON ADOLESCENT STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS

By

Ngozi J. Onyechi

### Abstract

The Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), with its human and material losses, has continued to pose great health challenges to vulnerable human population groups. The factors driving the exacerbation of the pandemic are persisting, especially among the adolescent cohort, in part due to widespread discrimination and stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS. Previous studies have shown that exposure to mass media could influence attitude and behaviour. This knowledge notwithstanding, empirical data examining the relationship between exposure to erotic television films and adolescents' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS are rare. This study, carried out in Ibadan, Nigeria, investigated the influence of erotic television films on attitude of adolescent students towards people living with HIV/AIDS. The study employed *ex-post facto* and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) research methods. Systematic sampling method was employed in selecting a total of 800 adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 years from secondary and tertiary institutions, who responded to the questionnaire while purposive sampling technique was used in selecting 64 discussants who took part in the FGD. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and One-Way ANOVA. Exposure to erotic television films showed a significant relationship with adolescent students' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS ( $p < 0.05$ ). Scheffe post-hoc analysis showed that increased exposure to erotic television films is associated with less empathy towards people living with HIV/AIDS. The result of the FGD revealed that a little above half of the discussants (52.5%) believed that people tend to show less empathy towards people living with HIV/AIDS because they lack correct information about the disease. With high media diet among the adolescent cohort, broadcast regulatory agencies need to establish stringent ethical measures in ensuring that factual information about the disease is embedded in such films. Intervention programmes embarked upon by Government and Non-Governmental Organizations should aim at reducing adolescents' feeling of apathy towards people living with HIV/AIDS.

**Key words:** Adolescents, HIV/AIDS, Attitude, Erotic television films, Stigmatization and discrimination

## **Introduction**

The tendency to heavy media use amongst the adolescent population should not surprise media researchers. The mass media do not only form an integral part of adolescents' daily life (Onyechi, 2013), they reflect another dimension of young people's lives that may take on special significance during adolescence (L'Engle, Brown and Kenneavy, 2006). Collins, Elliot, Berry, Kanouse, Kunkel, Hunter and Miu (2004) study shows that an average teenager watches an average of three hours of television daily. Critics of television contend that television programmes are not only saturated with sexual messages but also that consequences of risky sexual practices are played down (Amibo, 1990; Adejumo, 2004; Brown, 2002). This concern may be substantiated by the observation made by Collins et al (2004:280e):

Studies of sexual messages in movies and on television (prime time, soaps, and music video have been studied most heavily) have found that over the 20 years, there have been an overall increase in the number of portrayals and the amount of talk about sex in these media and an increase in the explicitness of these portrayals. Furthermore, the television research shows a fairly consistent sexual message across television genres: most portrayals of sex depict or imply heterosexual intercourse between unmarried adults, with little reference to STDs/AIDS, pregnancy, or use of contraception....

By virtue of adolescent's high sexual media diet (SMD), the tendency, therefore, is that they will be exposed to the high dose of television's explicit sexual treatment which Strong and DeVault (1994) long observed is the most pervasive and influential medium affecting people's views of sexuality. Besides, with little or non-reference to HIV/AIDS in these programmes, adolescents may downplay the seriousness of the disease or are likely to trivialize issues relating to the disease. Kucker and Cho, cited by Cates (1991:11), aptly describe this tendency in adolescents:

Many adolescents believe AIDS is a concern only for "other" people. These teenagers believe that AIDS affects only homosexual men and intravenous drug users or that they are not at risk because their sexual activity is

infrequent. They do not see the threat of AIDS, therefore they will not take precautions.

However, HIV/AIDS is not a respecter of person and ignoring HIV/AIDS issue will not only be foolhardy but also suicidal. Leraand(1991:23) captures the grim picture thus:

The AIDS pandemic is possibly the greatest medical and health care challenge of modern times. It will continue to be a worldwide public health problem of immense magnitude. No disease in modern history has carried with it such devastating social and economic consequence as AIDS.

The attitude people have towards AIDS disease and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) has never ceased to be an issue to contend with in the fight against HIV/AIDS pandemic. Stigmatization and discrimination against PLWHA have significantly hampered the effectiveness of AIDS responses and in effect have fuelled the spread of HIV (Executive Summary, AIDS Global Report, 2004). The seriousness of this issue cannot be overstressed considering the non-availability of vaccine against HIV and cure for AIDS. Since ignorance has never been excusable, education is believed to be the vaccine against HIV/AIDS ((Global Media AIDS Initiative, 2004). Uturu (2011) also drew attention to the efforts made by governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to get the masses re-awakened to the existence, and effects of HIV/AIDS. In order to reduce stigmatizing attitudes towards PLWHA, HIV/AIDS education should be strengthened among the general population, especially among youths (Zhang, 2008).

Considering the vital role that education could play in the fight against the disease, adolescents' high exposure to sexual media contents (including erotic television films) which say little or nothing about HIV/AIDS issues, therefore, may represent a significant omission. What influence could such exposure have on their attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS? This study, therefore, sets out to investigate the influence of exposure to erotic television films on adolescents' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, the study examined whether demographic variables such as age, sex, religious commitment and educational level influenced adolescent students' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS.

The focus on adolescents was borne out of the fact that they bear the greatest brunt of the disease. Adolescents, more tragically, account for half of all new infections worldwide (UNAIDS WHO AIDS Epidemic Update, 2007).

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Media effects have been a thorny issue among researchers and scholars in communication. The reason for this may not be far-fetched. McQuail (2010) explains that the media are rarely likely to be the only necessary or sufficient cause of an effect. However, many theories have been propounded by scholars in this field in order to foster a better understanding of mass media effects on media users. Two of such theories would therefore form the theoretical underpin for this paper. They are the cultivation theory and theory of reasoned action.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation theory (also referred to as cultivation analysis or cultivation hypothesis) was developed by George Gerbner and his associates at the Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. The basis of cultivation theory is that heavy television viewing "cultivates" perceptions of reality consistent with the television portrayal of the world. Gerbner believes that television occupies a central place in the society and that effect of exposure to the same messages produces what he calls "cultivation, or teaching of a common worldview, common roles, and common values" (Severin and Tankard, 1993:249). The research work in support of cultivation theory was based on comparisons between heavy and light television viewers.

According to Gerbner's cultivation hypothesis, the more people are exposed to the mass media, especially television, the more they will come to believe that the real world is like the one they observe. The central hypothesis of the research was that viewing television gradually leads to the adoption of beliefs about the nature of the social world, which conforms to the stereotyped, distorted, and very selective view of reality as portrayed in a systematic way in television fictions and news. Although general cultivation theory holds that heavy viewers should have world views that are more consistent with the world of television than light viewers, there have been modifications and refinements to the theory that have been directed toward understanding variables that may moderate the relation between television viewing and the various cultivation-type judgments (Shrum and Bischak, 2001). One of these

refinements is mainstreaming, which is the view that people's life experiences may moderate the cultivation effect. Specifically, those whose life experiences are more discrepant from the world of television are the most likely to be influenced by the television message (Shrum and Bischak, 2001). Mainstreaming occurs especially with heavy television viewers whose television symbols dominate other sources of information and ideas about the world (Ricci, 2009). Consequently, in the author's view, people's constructed social realities move toward the mainstream. In other words, the culturally dominant reality is more similar to the reality television portrays than the objective, external reality.

Cultivation theory, like any other theory, has been subjected to a litany of criticisms. The theory has been criticized for over simplification. The critics argue that society's view on certain issues can be affected by a number of things, including their background and other people's influence. McQuail and Windahl (1993:102) have further stressed that, "it is almost impossible to deal convincingly with the complexity of posited relationships between symbolic structures, audience behaviour and audience views, given the many intervening and powerful social background factors".

Another point criticized is that cultivation effects are not shown to occur outside of the United States (Chandler, 1995:1). A British study on the same subject found no evidence of a correlation. However, this can be attributed to differences in media culture in different countries. Similarly, the susceptibility of a person to believe what is seen on television must be taken into consideration. Consequently, a more skeptical viewer will not garner as much of their social reality from television when compared to a less skeptical viewer.

Cultivation research work is not based on laboratory experiments – it is based on normal viewing over a long period. As such it is subject to criticism of both content analysis and surveys. Critics argue that breakdowns by content type are more useful than measures of total viewing, because viewers are selective. More specifically, content-based measures would show stronger correlations in cultivation analysis (Condry, 1989:128). Despite these criticisms, which of course are aimed towards refining it, the modification of the concept of mainstreaming and resonance has given great insight into media effects. Given that in general, indeterminate attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS has continued to resonate with adverse implication on the spread of the disease, applying the theory to this study will no doubt provide empirical evidence on media influence on people's attitude towards those affected by HIV/AIDS.

## **Theory of Reasoned Action**

The Theory of Reasoned Action, which was formulated by Fishbein and Ajzen, aims at explaining volitional behaviour. Bentler and Speckart, cited in Hale, Householder and Green (1993), posit that this excludes wide range of behaviours such as those that are spontaneous, impulsive, habitual. They hinged such exclusion on the argument that these behaviours may not be voluntary or because engaging in the behaviour might not involve a conscious decision on the part of the actor. The theory makes an assumption that human beings are usually quite rational and that people normally consider the implications of their actions in a given context at a given time before they take a decision to engage or refrain from any given behavior. The Theory places great emphasis on the role of personal intention in determining whether behaviour will occur. It postulates that a person's behaviour is determined by the behavioural intention to perform that behaviour. Specifically, the Theory of Reasoned Action predicts that behavioural intent is created or caused by two factors: attitude (towards the behaviour) and subjective norms (expectation of other people). Ajzen and Fishbein, cited in Vallerand, Pelletier, Deshaies, Cuenier and Mongeau (1992), argue that the relative importance of the attitudinal and normative components in determining intention is expected to vary according to the behaviour, the situation and individual differences. Attitude of a person towards a behavior is determined by his beliefs in the consequences of this behavior. Beliefs are defined by the person's subjective probability that performing a particular behavior will produce specific results. Behavioural intention is also determined by normative beliefs (or subjective norms), which generally focus on what an individual believes other people, especially influential people, would expect him/her to do.

This theory has been tested in both laboratory and field studies. Vallerand et al. (1992) cited such field studies that dealt with diverse topics such as dental hygiene (Mccauley et al. 1998), contraceptive behaviour (Miller and Grush, 1986), smoking (Budd, 1986), breast, cervical and testicular examination (Timko, 1987; Hennig and Knowles, 1990; Brubaker and Fowler, 1990), blood donation (Burnkrant and Page, 1988), seat-belt use (Budd et al. 1984) and voting behaviour (Netmeyer and Burton (1990). Mbaka (2013) similarly observed that the theory has been employed in several studies in the field of communication and psychology and such studies have found relatively strong support for its predictions. Applying this theory to the study of such a topical health issue of attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS is therefore justified.

## METHOD

The research methodology employed for this study includes ex-post facto and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The samples in this study included 14-19 year-old adolescent students at both secondary and tertiary levels in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Secondary schools were stratified according to the Local Government Areas (LGAs), while tertiary institutions were stratified based on the sex of occupants. The samples were systematically drawn from 10 out of 103 secondary schools in the metropolis duly approved and registered by the state government, and 6 halls of residence that were randomly selected. A total of 900 students, comprising 450 students from each of the educational levels, responded to the questionnaire; while 64 students who participated in the FGD were purposively selected. However, only 800 out of 900 copies of the questionnaire administered to the students were found usable. All the selected schools agreed to participate; a formal permission was also secured from the school authorities to enable students to participate in the study.

Both the school (secondary) and halls of residence (tertiary) registers formed the sampling frame from where the students were systematically selected. Students who participated in the FGD were purposively selected to ensure that those who responded to the questionnaire were not selected. Out of the 800 respondents, 440(55%) were females and 360(45%) males; the 64 discussants consisted of 32(50%) males and 32(50%) females.

The media survey included questions designed to measure frequency of adolescents' exposure to erotic television films, their opinions on the influence and usefulness of such films. Respondents were also provided with a checklist of sources and asked to pick one that provided ready information about sexual issues. The sexual media diet (SMD) measure was created to assess the pattern of exposure to erotic television films by the respondents. This was based on "always", "occasionally" and "never" responses by the respondents.

The attitude questions probed into respondents' disposition towards people living with HIV/AIDS. Part of these questions included a 4-item attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS inventory, which was used in Bosompro (1989) secondary data analysis study. These questions specifically dealt with adolescents' reaction towards people infected with HIV/AIDS. These were self-report items with four graded responses in a Likert Scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. These questions were

designed to measure respondents' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS.

Descriptive statistics, expressed in values of frequency counts and percentages, were used in describing adolescents' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS. One Way ANOVA and T-test statistical expression were used to establish the relationship between exposure to erotic television films and adolescent students' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS as well as to assess the impact of some demographic variables (age, sex, religious commitment and educational level) on adolescent students' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS.

## RESULTS

**Table 1 Frequency of Exposure to Erotic Television Films**

Frequency of Exposure	Number	Percentage
Always	103	12.9
Occasionally	575	71.9
Never	122	15.2
Total	800	100

Pattern of exposure to erotic television films by adolescent students in Ibadan (Table 1) showed that a majority of the respondents occasionally get exposed to these films. A total of 12.9% of adolescents were always exposed to erotic television films, 71.9% occasionally got exposed to erotic television films, while 15.2% never got exposed to such films.

The qualitative data from the FGD more than corroborated this research finding. Discussants believed that although adolescents always love to watch love (erotic) films, more than any other kind of films, sometimes they are not privileged to do so. A 16-year old girl in SS2 asserted that, "adolescents love to watch these love films, if it is possible." Another 17-year old undergraduate stated that, "adolescents watch love films often, especially when their parents are not around." According to another 17-year old undergraduate boy, "one can spend hours watching these films without getting bored."

**Table 2 One-Way ANOVA Comparing Respondents' Attitude Towards People Living with HIV/AIDS Grouped by Frequency of Exposure.**

Groups	Sum square	of Dt	Mean Square	F	Sig	Comment
Between Groups	146.076	2	73.039	13.542	.000	Sig
Within groups	4298.610	797	5.393			
<b>Total</b>	<b>4444.689</b>	<b>799</b>				

The result, as reflected in the table above, shows that F-ratio is 13.542 at  $p < 0.05$ . This confirms that there is a significant relationship between exposure to erotic television films and adolescent students' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS. The result of the FGD reveals that a little above half of the discussants (52.5%) were of the opinion that exposure to erotic television films could influence adolescent attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS, while 47.5% of the discussants had a contrary opinion. Discussants believed that these films give little or no information about HIV/AIDS. The implication, according to an 18-year old undergraduate girl, is that "some young people do not believe that the disease can affect them and are bound to treat affected people badly". Another male undergraduate stated that "if only these films could provide information at least about the means of contracting the disease, many youths will stop avoiding people who are living with the disease". An SS2 boy said that "people discriminate against people living with AIDS because they do not have correct information about the disease and these films do not give such information". However, a 16-year old SS1 girl asserted that, "I do not see how watching the film would influence how one reacts to someone that has AIDS". Similarly, an 18-year old undergraduate boy stated that, "people discriminate against those living with HIV/AIDS, whether they watch erotic films or not, it is a thing of the mind".

**Table 3: Scheffe Post Hoc Analysis Comparing Frequency of Exposure on Attitude towards People Living with HIV/AIDS.**

Group 1 (A)	Group 2 (B)	Mean Diff (A-B)	Std Error	Sig	Comment
Always	Occasionally	1.099	.248	.000	Sig
Always	Never	-.306	.310	.614	N.S
Occasionally	Never	.793	.231	.003	Sig

The result of the Scheffe Post Hoc Analysis, as shown in Table 3 above, revealed that only one comparison did not show a significant relationship between increased exposure to erotic television films and negative attitude (less empathy) towards people living with HIV/AIDS. However, this alone will not invalidate the other two results. The result, therefore, shows that increased exposure to erotic television films is associated with less empathy towards people living with HIV/AIDS. This result upholds Bosompra's (1993) secondary data analysis which shows that increased television viewing appeared to be associated with negative attitude towards AIDS. Demographic variables (age, sex, religious commitment and educational level) in this study appeared not to be associated with less empathy towards people living with HIV/AIDS.

**DISCUSSION**

The finding showed that adolescent students are occasionally exposed to erotic television films. This result contrasts with the finding of a related research by Collin et al. (2004) which showed that an average American teenager watches three hours of television daily. Earlier studies (Weigel and Jessor, 1973; Csikszentmihalyi and Kubey, 1981; Katz, Haas and Gurevitch 1997 and Blanchard-Fields, Coon and Mathews 1987) also showed that time spent on television had reached such a magnitude that it had apparently not only usurped time previously devoted to other mass media, but had also eaten into substantial portions of time previously spent on various other forms of leisure.

Some plausible explanations for the media behaviour of adolescents in this present study may be attributed to constant power outages, which have become a common phenomenon in the country. Intermittent power supply or

total blackout is an ordeal Nigerians have learnt to live with. Another possible explanation which was implied by some of the discussants during the FGD was the issue of parental mediation. Some of them claimed that parents directly or indirectly control what they watch on television. Family viewing studies have also shown that parents do mediate in the television viewing behaviour of their children (Akin, Heeter and Baldwin, 1989; Akin, Greenberg and Baldwin, 1991). Mediation would reflect parental concern about what children (including adolescents) watch on television. Parental mediation could take two forms- restrictive mediation when parents set rules for viewing or prohibitive type of viewing and nonrestrictive mediation, when parents watch with their children, provide recommendations on which programmes to watch, and also discuss these programmes with their children.

Accessibility issue may yet be another contributing factor, since half of the respondents who are undergraduate students reside in halls of residences where television sets may not readily be available either in the common rooms or their individual rooms. Equally important is the fact that these respondents are all students and by implication, their time will be largely devoted to academic pursuit leaving little or no time for leisure.

The nature of the films may explain the relationship between increased exposure to erotic television films and less empathy towards people living with HIV/AIDS. Sex is often presented as a casual activity without risks or consequences (Collins et al., 2004). One of such consequences is the contraction of HIV. If such films say little or nothing about HIV/AIDS, this may explain why some young people not only see HIV/AIDS as a disease for other people (Kucker and Cho quoted by Cates, 1991), but discriminate and stigmatize people living with HIV/AIDS (Raizada, 2004). Stigmatization and discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS is not uncommon. Some studies have provided evidence to the effect that people living with HIV/AIDS face stigma and discrimination. The study by Vermud, Turner and Roger (1989) which focused on attitude of adolescents towards people living with HIV/AIDS reveals that there exists a total stigmatization of persons with AIDS, as well as feelings leading to physical and social isolation.

National Demographic Health Survey (2003) reveals that only 20% of women and 25% of men stated that they would purchase fresh vegetables from a person with the AIDS virus. Also, only 23% of women and 27% of men agreed that a female teacher with the AIDS virus should be allowed to continue teaching in the school system. In order to put up a meaningful fight

against the spread of HIV/AIDS, a change of attitude is being advocated (Haruna, 2003; Nwagwu, 2004; Obi, 2001).

The attitude people have towards people living with HIV/AIDS is very vital in the fight against the disease. In *UNAIDS Executive Summary, AIDS Global Report (2004)* it was observed that stigma and discrimination are part of the major challenges in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Similarly, in another earlier report (UNAIDS, 2000), it was also observed that because people with HIV/AIDS fear stigma and discrimination, they might be deterred from being open about their serostatus. Not only would affected people be hindered from being open about their status, they are unlikely to avail themselves of available treatment facilities as well as shorn needed counseling. Furthermore, people will be deterred from going for voluntary testing for fear of being stigmatized and discriminated against for testing positive.

This finding of this study goes to support cultivation theory which hypothesizes that the more people are exposed to the mass media, especially television, the more they will come to believe that the real world is like the one they observe. Viewing television would gradually lead to the adoption of beliefs about the nature of the social world, which conforms to the stereotyped, distorted, and very selective view of reality as portrayed in a systematic way in television fictions and news. This finding also lends support to the claims made by the proponents of the Theory of Reasoned Action that a person's behavioural intention is guided by his attitude towards the behaviour as well as his normative beliefs (or subjective norms) which generally focuses on what an individual believes other people, especially influential people, would expect him/her to do. Discrimination and stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS are common phenomena, so the apathetic disposition displayed by the adolescent respondents is, therefore, not surprising.

All the demographic variables (age, sex, religious commitment and educational level) in this study appeared not to be associated with less empathy towards people living with HIV/AIDS. However, findings of similar study which examined among other things, the influence of age on attitude towards people living with HIV did not corroborate this finding. Cliff and Sear (1989) study established a relationship between age of adolescents and their tolerance towards those living with HIV. It should also not surprise anyone that adolescents' religious commitment does not influence their attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS when one considers the fact that AIDS issue is still seen as moral issue rather than a health problem (UNAIDS,

1989). In his paper that explained various dehumanizing and humiliating ways in which HIV/AIDS patients are being treated among slum/riverine communities in Lagos, Obi (2001:2) observes that people in the study communities believe that, "HIV/AIDS is a direct punishment from "God" for heinous crimes committed by sufferers and therefore does not call for an iota of sympathy". Lau, Tsui and Chan (2005) reported that over one-third (35.7%) of all respondents in their study believed that the majority of PLWHA were promiscuous. An assertion by a 17-year old SS3 student during the FGD that "I do not pity those with AIDS because they are rewarded for their sins" also goes to show the level of ignorance that pervades our society.

In conclusion, the findings suggest a strong relationship between increased exposure to erotic television films and less empathy towards people living with HIV/AIDS. Demographic factors (age, sex, religious commitment and educational level) appeared not to have any significant relationship with adolescent students' attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS. Considering the heavy media diet among the adolescent cohort, broadcast regulatory agencies need to establish stringent ethical measures in ensuring that messages about AIDS are embedded in such films in order to increase their awareness and knowledge of the disease. Intervention programmes embarked upon by Government and Non-governmental organizations should aim at reducing adolescents' feeling of apathy (to the barest level) towards people living with HIV/AIDS.

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