Mediated Sexuality and Teen Pregnancy:
Exploring *The Secret Life Of The American Teenager*

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by

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Chapter I

Introduction

High school reflects a time of individual growth and development. High school students today are influenced by constantly evolving technological advances. Television alone, both the technology itself and the program choices, has changed dramatically in the last decade. As such, it is important to understand and explore the impact television viewing has on the lives, values, and beliefs of high school students. Not only do teenagers watch a significant amount of television weekly or even daily (Nielsen, 2009), but they are also at an impressionable time in their lives for exposure to so much mediated influence (e.g. Gentiles & Harrison, 2006; Signorielli, 1991; Tan, Nelson, Dong, & Tan, 1997). Young adulthood includes increasing interest in sexual activity exploration. Furthermore, high school students receive several messages from a variety of sources about sexuality and sexual activity. In particular, ABC Family’s The Secret Life of the American Teenager targets such content. This thesis explores the predominant framing of themes related to sexual activity and sexuality in this program through a content analysis of the programming content.

TV and Socialization of Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs Among Young Adults

The television is on for about seven hours per day in the average US American household (Signorielli, 2001). Each person watches an average of three to four hours of television per day (Wonneberger, Schoenbach, & van Meurs, 2009). While there are a growing number of venues on which video can be viewed (e.g., Internet on a computer, cell phones, iPods, other streaming devices, etc.), according to Nielsen, 99% of all video is still primarily watched on television (as cited in Netherby, 2009) and the primary focus of this thesis will be on televised portrayals and their possibility for influence. Network television is an important part of overall television
viewership, but cable broadcast is as well, and cable viewership has increased. The 2008-2009
cable broadcast season resulted in 54 million viewers, which was a 3 million-viewer spike from
the previous viewing season (Umstead, 2009). In the first viewing quarter of 2009 alone, U.S.
Americans watched an average of 153 hours of television per month (Nielsen data as cited in
Netherby, 2009). Considering the extent to which TV and cable are incorporated into daily habits
and patterns, it is important to examine what messages are being transmitted to young adult
audiences, and how those messages pertaining to sexual activity and teen pregnancy are framing
teenager audiences’ perceptions and attitudes.

Television has been referred to as one of the most influential tools of socialization of our
time (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986, 1994). It is a “centralized system of
storytelling” that transcends literacy and mobility barriers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli,
& Shanahan, 2002, p. 44; Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009, p. 35), and has become a
shared daily ritual common to people of most socio-economic statuses, sexes, ages, and
ethnicities. Social cognitive (SCT) theorists (Bandura, 1986), have postulated that television acts
as a socialization tool and may impact viewers’ attitudes, actions, or behaviors through
observational learning. Theorists using cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1986, 1994) argue that
people can be influenced by the major themes and message common across television
broadcasts.

As such, this thesis employs SCT and cultivation as framing devices for the study of
Secret Life, exploring messages sent to high school students about sexual activity and teen
pregnancy from the popular program. As will be discussed in greater detail, Secret Life was
specifically chosen because it focuses on an adolescent audience and features an almost
exclusively adolescent cast. Additionally, there is primary focus placed on teenage pregnancy
and parenting, as well as teenage experimentation with sexual activity. This program has a great
deal of potential to transmit messages, both positive and negative, to impressionable young adult
audiences about sexual activity norms and behaviors. Evaluating mediated messages as they
pertain to teens’ sexual activity could result in a better understanding of what, if any, impact the
media may have on this aspect of teenage life. Before considering any tie between observational
learning and Secret Life, however, the content must first be explored.

Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2008) argue the need for more research pertaining to how
“emerging adults” (i.e., teenagers or young adults) are influenced by the media. They evaluated
not only teenage audiences but a genre of films that centers on teenagers as well. Teenagers
watch 3 1/2 hours of television daily, an increase of 6% over previous years (Nielsen, 2009).
Adolescents watch a significant amount of television and, as referenced above, engage in the use
of a multitude of other media as well (e.g., Jordan, Trentacoste, Henderson, Manganello, &
Fishbein, 2007; LaFerle, Edwards, & Lee, 2000). High school can be a time of growth, self-
discovery, and heightened peer pressure for adolescents of this age. Mediated messages absorbed
by this particular group are important to study because previous research demonstrates that
adolescents are quite impressionable (e.g., Gentiles & Harrison, 2006; Signorielli, 1991; Tan et
al., 1997).

The Secret Life of the American Teenager

ABC Family’s The Secret Life of the American Teenager (Secret Life) is a recent program
that is popular among high school students because it addresses high school centered themes,
involves teenage casts, and provides ways to think about what typical teens say in response to
such issues as sexual promiscuity, underage drinking, infidelity, and, of course, teen pregnancy.
The Secret Life provides mediated portrayals almost weekly of what is regarded as the typical
American teenager’s life. The show has made a significant impact on viewers and has become ABC Family’s highest rated and most watched series in the network’s history (Dempsey, 2008). For the 2008-2009 cable viewing season, Secret Life was rated the top freshman show (Umstead, 2009). Following the summer viewing season, Secret Life was the top rated scripted program on broadcast or cable television with audiences aged 12 to 34 (Dempsey, 2008). Because television is a socialization tool, and given the rapid growth in popularity of the program directly targeting teenagers, further study of how Secret Life frames influential topics is warranted.

ABC Family’s Secret Life focuses on the life of a 15-year old girl, Amy Juergens, who discovers she is pregnant just as she begins her first year of high school, and the resulting impact that pregnancy has on every aspect of her life (Villarreal, 2009). While Amy’s pregnancy is one of the main foci of the show, there are many other characters and subplots woven throughout each episode that deal with teenage sexual activity, sexuality, relationships, and social problems (e.g., divorce, sexual abuse, underage drinking, and infidelity). Several of the characters also embody “classic” high school stereotypes: Amy, the innocent “band geek”; Ricky, the “bad boy” who is the father of Amy’s baby; Adrian, the school “tramp”; and Grace, the good, “Christian cheerleader” (ABC Family; Lowry, 2008). These stereotyped-characters also accompany stereotypical storylines that grow and evolve throughout the show.

Teens, Sex, and the Media

The portrayal of teenage pregnancy on television isn’t exactly a new plotline. However, the taboo subject is often reserved for minor storylines and Lifetime made-for-television movies. The Secret Life’s centralized attention on the subject is important, given relevant societal trends about teenage pregnancy. The official website of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy states that one in three young women get pregnant at least once before
they reach the age of 20 (National Campaign, 2009). Additionally, the Guttmacher Institute (2006) estimates that nearly 750,000 women between the ages of 15 and 19 become pregnant yearly, and that there were about 6,500 births to women under the age of 14 in 2003 (Guttmacher Institute, 2006). The birth rate of teen mothers had been on the decline until about 2006, when the rate for women aged 15 to 19 rose 3% (Martin et al., 2009). While comprehensive sex education may be a way to combat these figures, the truth remains that many teens are sexually active and some of those teens will get pregnant as a result. Although the overall growth of teen pregnancy is somewhat stagnant, the sheer number of teen girls who are still getting pregnant each year means that measures need to be taken to see what cultural influences could be contributing factors. Examining mediated representations of teen sexual experimentation and teen pregnancy is one such measure.

Examining the mediated messages targeting teens about teenage pregnancy and the depiction of sex-related theme portrayals on *Secret Life* has the potential to inform media research in several ways. This project seeks to add to the growing field of media research in the following three ways. First, if *Secret Life*’s teen audience is considering sexual activity, research can address what types of messages the show provides about sexual activity, communication, and personal relationships. Additionally, any consequences of sexual activities depicted in the program can be explored, as well as any allusion to what precautions should be taken to prevent possible consequences. Second, results from this project can be used to inform future effects research that focuses on audience involvement. For example, if the show’s audience consists of teen mothers, research can address what messages are present that are prominent about their lived experience, and if the depiction of teen pregnancy is realistic or glamorized. Finally, research about *Secret Life* can explore other overarching themes that teen audiences could be
taking away from this show. Content analysis of this popular program allows a more concrete understanding about these issues. As such, this thesis explores how the messages in *Secret Life* portray information about sexual activity and teenage pregnancy that could influence young adults’ decision-making processes regarding sexual activity, and future research could explore if the program gives young adults the idea to become sexually active. The next section explores the extant literature and theory related to this investigation.
Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

The literature review consists of three major parts. First, Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002) is discussed as the primary theoretical framework guiding this investigation, followed by a review of Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 1986, 1994) as secondary theoretical support for the study. Next, the groundwork is established for the importance of studying how media impact a young adult audience. Finally, research pertaining to the portrayal of sexuality and sexual activity on television prior to the emergence of *Secret Life* is examined. Evaluating the work done previously by media researchers on the media’s impact on the young adult audience, combined with research about the types of media to which this audience is drawn, will foster support for the study of programs, such as *Secret Life*, that specifically target the young adult audience.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) was developed out of empirical work on social learning theory (SLT) to account for null findings in studies conducted using SLT (Hendriks, 2002; Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Bandura (2001, 2002, 2009) explains that SCT is based on an agentic conceptual framework. Briefly, this framework credits individuals’ capabilities to be an active force in their development, as opposed to simply reactive as was previously suggested by SLT. He also states that rather than through unidirectional causation, SCT explains certain cognitive and behavioral development through what he calls triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1986). Three points, personal determinants (i.e., cognitive, affective, and biological events), behavioral patterns, and environmental events, all function in a person’s development of new behaviors.
under SCT, which have mutual influence on one another in the triadic reciprocal causation perspective (Bandura, 2009).

Additionally, cognitive, self-regulatory, self-reflective, and vicarious processes are central to SCT (Bandura, 2001, 2009). Human beings have a vast capability for symbolization of basically all aspects of life. Bandura (2009) notes that, “It is with symbols that people process and transform transient experiences into cognitive models that serve as guides for judgment and action” (p. 95). In essence, if humans were incapable of the symbolization necessary for interpreting of the world around them, they would then be potentially incapable of functioning normally, by societal standards. Bandura (2001) states that people are “not only knowers and performers. They are also self-reactors with a capacity for self-direction” (p. 267). This means that people are not mindless robots imitating everything they see and hear in the world. They have the ability to process what is going on around them and then decide what course of action to take appropriate to the situation: to model or not to model, in essence.

According to SCT (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002, 2009), given the right context and circumstances, media have the potential to teach consumers about appropriate norms and behaviors that are socially acceptable. The concept of vicarious involvement is central to this theory, as people have limited direct experience with a wide range of societal standards (e.g., human behaviors, styles, and ways of thinking) in their immediate environment. Observational learning supplies the manner in which most people are exposed to and pick up these different behaviors outside their own day-to-day environment (Bandura, 2001, 2002, 2009). When someone who is unfamiliar with a different culture or behavior is exposed to social standards via a movie or a television show (for example), the observed content provides a framework for thinking about the group and may influence the behaviors or actions toward that group from that
point on. This is especially powerful if the behavior is presented as a repeated theme or representation across other media. For example, the behavior is consistently presented in the same context, involving the same types of characters and actions, each time it is viewed on television, in film, in print, or in song.

However, the potential to model or learn a behavior depends greatly upon many different circumstances involving both the media and the viewer (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002). SCT outlines four major processes involved in observational learning: attention, retention, production, and motivation (Bandura, 2001, 2002, 2009). First, the observer must be attentive to the behavior represented targeted. The more attractive the model is to the observer, the more likely observational learning occurs (Smith et al., 2006). Homophily with the model impacts retention of information from mediated sources (e.g., Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Ferris, Smith, Greenburg, & Smith, 2007; Stern, 2005). The types of models to which people have ready access impact attentional processes (Bandura, 2009).

Information retention is critical for behavioral influence (Bandura, 2009). Retention, involves an observer’s ability to remember the behavior/concept being modeled and then later recall the information (Bandura, 2001, 2002). Symbolization plays a key role here as the observer must be able to interpret the modeled behavior or event into memory codes for future recollection (Bandura, 2001, 2002, 2009). For an event to then be recalled it must be mentally reconstructed rather than abstractly remembered as an event (Bandura, 2009).

The production process, or behavioral production process, deals with the observer’s ability to associate the modeled action with subsequent courses of action and repeat the appropriate behavior (Bandura, 2001; Ferris et al., 2007). According to Bandura (2001), the observer does not necessarily recreate the exact modeled event, but can associate learning with
other similar behaviors in similar contexts. This does not necessarily mean the modeled event is replicated well the first time, it can take basic trial and error before the performance of the behavior is perfected (Bandura, 2009).

The fourth and final subfunction of observational learning, that of motivation, deals with the idea of weighing costs or benefits of the observed behavior (Bandura, 2001, 2002). An observer will be more motivated to model a behavior with more perceived benefits, and fewer associated costs. Conversely, if the costs outweigh the benefits of modeling the behavior, doing so will be rejected. In essence, the more positive the outcome of the observed behavior, the more likely it is to be modeled in the observer’s immediate environment. However, people do not model everything they learn, and judging an act on positive or negative outcomes alone does not justify its performance. As such, social and personal factors influence the final decision to model a behavior, as the potential modeler can experience conflict between social pressure and moral standards (Bandura, 2009).

Different levels of action justification play a role in SCT (Bandura, 2001, 2002, 2009), which can help to explain transgressive behavior. People will avoid actions that cause social consequences as well as those that bring about self-condemnation (Bandura, 2001, 2002, 2009). Media has an impact on this arena as varying social consequences are portrayed in different lights. For example, the hero is not often put on trial for participating in vigilante justice that may result in the death or injury of the villain. The idea of self-regulatory processes is also important in understanding this aspect of SCT. A person can activate and disengage moral self-sanctions to justify that some reprehensible actions are okay or even necessary (Bandura 2001, 2002, 2009). Through these different means of self-sanction disengagement, people are able to justify criminal or inhumane actions without compromising their own moral standards. For example, if the act is
sanctioned by an authority figure, a group of people is doing it (mob mentality, so to speak), the victim is of a ‘lesser’ value.

SCT also has a social prompting function where the actions of others can serve to prompt action from an observer (Bandura, 2001, 2002, 2009). This differs from observational learning because the learning has already taken place, but there may not be sufficient motivation to enact the behavior. Examples of this type of behavior include prompts from advertisements and product placement throughout various popular media (Bandura, 2009). SCT offers a way of explaining a less direct mode of influence and behavior reconstruction in terms of media influence on consumers.

**Research from a social cognitive framework.** Research guided by Social Cognitive Theory addresses how people model what they see in the media, how media shapes behaviors through the establishment of role modeling. For example, audiences are evaluated based on their potential to exhibit certain behaviors after viewing them on a particular type of media (e.g., Moon & Nelson, 2008; Nabi & Clark, 2008). Or, the possibility that too much exposure to a specific type of media (e.g., prime-time television) will garner changes in behaviors, is also explored in the research (e.g., Smith, Nathanson, & Wilson, 2002). Finally, the media’s influence on both antisocial behaviors and prosocial behaviors has been studied, as well (e.g., Krcmar & Greene, 2000; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Stern, 2005). The following literature illustrates research from a SCT framework.

**Program-specific studies.** One of the most prevalent themes in SCT research is aggressive or violent behavior resulting from media influence (e.g. Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008; Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay, & Wanner, 2002; Felix & McMahon, 2007). While this thesis does not explore those specific types of behaviors, the pool of media research that does has
the potential to influence this project both theoretically and methodologically. For example, Eyal and Rubin (2003) looked at viewer aggression as a source of identification and perceived homophily with aggressive television characters. They found that an aggressive disposition in the viewers in their study was related to identification with aggressive characters, and that aggressive characters may actually reinforce viewer’s existing dispositions. This could potentially relate to future studies of Secret Life viewer dispositions regarding sexual activity. Furthermore, Smith, Nathanson, and Wilson (2002) content analyzed levels of violence by different network groupings and time of day programming for the televised content. They found that the level of violence present in children’s programming during primetime was higher than that at other viewing times (Smith et al., 2002). Basic cable and broadcast channels depicted some of the most potentially harmful violence. If audiences stick to one particular type of programming, such as child audiences sticking to children’s programming, it is possible that they could observe and subsequently model the violent content (Smith et al., 2002). Research along this line has the potential to inform this project because it demonstrates the way in which audience specific programming (e.g., children, adolescent/teenager, etc.) has the potential to portray certain types of modeling behaviors.

Lachlan, Smith and Tamborini (2005) linked model attractiveness to the likelihood of observational learning taking place in a video game playing context. Video games portray violence in a variety of ways with multiple character roles where players have substantial opportunity to identify with at least one character (Lachlan et al., 2005). If a player is exposed to these types of images, attunes to them, and is attracted to the outcomes, they have an increased chance of reconstructing the modeled behavior. Additionally, Krcmar and Greene (2000) evaluated the link between exposure to violent television and risk-taking behavior (e.g., drinking,
drug use, etc.) among adolescents 11 to 22 years old (Krcmar & Greene, 2000). This research supports the study of genre specific programming as it relates to program specific behaviors. This type of research reinforces the importance of additional work linking results from this content analysis with actual Secret Life audience information.

**Sexually-themed studies.** In addition to violence and aggression, researchers have also largely explored other forms of antisocial behavior, such as sexual conduct, cigarette smoking, and drug or alcohol abuse. For example, Eyal and Kunkel (2008) tested the attitudes of first-year college students about sex after being exposed to television shows that either portrayed positive or negative sexual consequences. Programming depicting negative consequences of sex was related to more negative views among participants about sex. In a study looking at the safe sex self-efficacy of multiple ethnic groups, exposure to sexual content on television was related to perceived social norms about peers’ rates of sexual activity as well as behavior change (Martino, Collins, Kanouse, Elliott, & Berry, 2005). In this study, black and white teens who were exposed to televised examples of sexual talk and sexual behavior were more confident in their ability to practice safe sex than were teens who were not exposed to such televised role models (Martino et al., 2005). Overall, these results demonstrate that media featuring sexually related themes can impact viewers attitudes about sex, in both positive and negative ways.

Finally, prosocial behaviors (e.g., interacting with different kinds of people) can be learned from the media. Prosocial behaviors like acts of helping and sharing (Smith et al., 2006) and social cooperation (Keyton, Warren, Alexander, & Behrand, 2007) are also related to television viewing patterns. Smith, Downs, and Witte (2007) explored the effectiveness of “edutainment” programs about HIV in Ethiopia (Smith et al., 2007). Ortiz and Harwood (2007) evaluated different television shows as a form of intergroup interaction and education. A
reduction of social distance occurred among viewers (who were both straight and White) of the television show *Will and Grace*. Thus, indirect exposure to others through the media can impact beliefs about different cultures. However, minorities can also be depicted in a negative way and such inaccurate representations may also impact beliefs. For example, Mastro and Stern (2003) content analyzed television commercials, examining race and racial portrayals finding that while Black Americans were portrayed in more diverse and equitable ways, other races (i.e., Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans) were underrepresented and, at times, misrepresented. The research examples above demonstrate the potential mediated portrayals of sexual activity on *Secret Life* could have on young audiences. Positive portrayals could also serve to destigmatize teen mothers in the eyes of program viewers who may not know how to socially address this issue. Overall, though, the research highlighted up to this point serves to show that certain media can have an effect on viewers’ behaviors, thus illustrating the importance of exploring the content of those mediated messages. While SCT covers the potential behavioral influences of the media in this study, Cultivation Theory addresses how media impact perceptions and beliefs (Gerbner et al., 1986, 1994).

**Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation theorists believe that television is the most important cultural transmitter and that the more a person is exposed to primary images, themes, and messages through television, the more influenced their attitudes will be by those particular messages (Gerbner et al., 1986, 1994). Of particular interest here is the “message system analysis” prong of Gerbner’s et al. (1986) discussion of the Cultural Indicators project. Through message system analysis, “the most recurrent, stable, and overarching patterns of television content” are identified (Gerbner et al., 2002, p. 49). It is with these pervasive themes, provided they are also characteristic of the
television system as a whole, that cultivation theorist believe television’s most prominent messages are relayed. Additionally, the cultivation concepts of “mainstream”, and “heavy” and “light” viewing are important to explain. According to Gerbner et al. (1994), the mainstream is essentially the dominant current of the most basic, functional, and stable understanding of a culture’s shared meanings and assumptions. Therefore, “television’s central role in our society makes it the primary channel of the mainstream of our culture” (Gerbner et al., 2002, p. 51). Because of television’s centralized role, cultivation theorists assert that the more a person is exposed to its dominant messages, the more they will absorb perceived societal norms or attitudes. However, a distinction is made between people who are considered heavy viewers (i.e., those who watch greater amounts of television) and light viewers (i.e., those who watch little to no television) (Gerbner et al., 1994). It is proposed that heavy viewers are more susceptible to cultivating dominant mediated versions of reality because they are literally exposed to more hours of programming than light viewers.

As Gerbner et al. (1986) intended cultivation, it is predominantly applied across television exposure, and is not utilized at a program-specific level, as is suggested in this study. However, some research has focused on somewhat more specific uses of cultivation (e.g., Potter, 1990) in evaluating television’s cultivation effects. Additionally, it could be argued that with the increased amount of programming (e.g., MTV’s 16 & Pregnant, Teen Mom 1-3) that features pregnant and mothering teens, that a new “teen pregnancy” genre is emerging. Given Secret Life’s potentially high volume of sexually-themed messages and place within this new genre, utilizing cultivation theory proves valuable for future studies examining potential cultivation effects of heavy Secret Life viewers. As follows is a discussion of literature that utilizes
cultivation to evaluate messages that have the potential to produce cultivation effects, as well as literature that discusses audience analysis and the development of certain attitudes and beliefs.

**Research from a Cultivation perspective.** Television exposure has been linked to the development of particular social attitudes in specific contexts. Cultivation effects link heightened exposure to television to developing certain attitudes that carry over into the “real world,” specifically those centering on violence and crime, family life, and marriage (e.g., Perse, Ferguson, & McLeod, 1994; Signorielli, 2001; Minnebo & Eggermont, 2007; Salmi, Smolej, & Kivivuori, 2007). For example, Morton, Wilson, and Laing (1999) found that participants who were more exposed to family sitcoms had more positive social attitudes. Whereas, participants who were more exposed to night shows and sports programming had more negative social attitudes (Morton et al., 1999).

When evaluating the impact of *Secret Life* and its messages on an adolescent audience, it’s important to look at literature that concerns cultivation effects specific to programming and genre as opposed to simply looking at dominant themes present across all television programming. Other researchers have expressed skepticism surrounding the strength of overall cultivation effects found in research studies without consideration for certain intervening variables (e.g., Potter, 1988). In his study of intervening variables (i.e., six psychological measures and participants’ television estimates of occurrence of crime), Potter (1988) found the presence of cultivation effects, but noted weak effects of media on attitudes. In a different study, Potter (1990) argued for the need to explore specific (e.g., targeted) versus generic (e.g., spectrum) television viewing cultivation effects. Potter (1990) contends that certain types of television programming expose audiences to certain types of messages, beyond overall exposure to television in general. Testing not only television exposure, but also specific television program
selections made by audience members as a method of conducting cultivation effects research has strong implications for this study. The expansion of channel selection options and targeted programming to certain demographics necessitates exploring the impact of specific media viewing on attitudes.

**The Adolescent Audience and Media Research**

As follows is a brief discussion of research that focuses specifically on the adolescent viewing audience (as this thesis does), as well as what exactly is meant by “adolescent”.

Following that, past research that either utilizes an adolescent sample or discusses adolescents as target viewers is explored. The age range for the term “adolescents” varies in samples, including participants with ages ranging from 11 to 13 years (Galambos, Almeida, & Peterson, 1990), 10 to 18 years (Gentiles & Harrison, 2006), 12 to 19 years (Jordan et al., 2007), and 11 to 22 years (Krcmar & Greene, 2000). However, primary focus for this study will be placed on adolescents in the high school age range; more specifically, the age range of the teenager characters that *Secret Life* portrays in storylines (ABC Family). According to Nielsen, “teenagers” are considered people between the ages of 13 and 19 (Nielsen, 2009).

Media research focusing on adolescents has covered a wide range of topics, from sex (Eyal & Kunkel, 2008; Martino et al., 2005) to ambivalence toward marriage (Signorielli, 1991) to body image (Botta, 1999; Gentiles & Harrison, 2006; Milkie, 1999) to crime victimization and social trust (Salmi et al., 2007). In one way or another, each of these studies has focused on how television correlates with certain perceived societal ideals that could carry over into real world settings. For example, Rivadeneyra and Ward (2005) looked at the connection between development of stereotyped attitudes about gender among Latino adolescents and television exposure. The results of this study not only indicate support for cultivation effects, but also that
of the adolescents sampled, the ‘heavier viewing’ girls (i.e., girls who view a greater amount of television) developed more traditional gender role attitudes. These results add evidence to the idea that exposure to limited gender roles on television can lead to the development of limited gender role attitudes (Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005).

Underage drinking portrayals impact adolescents’ attitudes about alcohol consumption. For example, Mastro and Atkin (2002) looked at billboards advertising alcohol in Latino neighborhoods and the effect they have on Mexican American high school students. When the SCT observational subprocesses of retention and motivation were increased in participants by viewing the billboards, so too was the approval of underage drinking (Mastro & Atkin, 2002). Likewise, Stern (2005) evaluated the images of teenagers smoking cigarettes, drinking underage, and using illegal drugs in movies featuring teenage main characters. At least once, two-fifths of teen characters drank, one-sixth smoked cigarettes, and one-seventh used illegal drugs. The presence of these types of behaviors can add to an “everyone-is-doing it mentality” (Stern, 2005, p. 340), strengthening its function in modeling behaviors for teens. This could be extended to the portrayals of sex demonstrated in Secret Life.

Media effects on adolescent girls have been studied in various ways. Exposure to ideal-body images on television impact black adolescent girls’ views of their own bodies and perceived views of their same-sex peers. Thus, television viewing impacted whether or not a respondent felt her friends thought she needed to be larger or smaller as well as impacted her own view of her body (Gentiles & Harrison, 2006). Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2008) content analyzed the top 20 grossing teen movies between 1995 and 2005 to evaluate the concept of “mean girls” (i.e., socially aggressive females). Socially cooperative (i.e., prosocial) behaviors
outnumber socially aggressive (i.e., antisocial) behaviors overall, but females were more likely to be rewarded for social aggression than were males (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008).

Calvert, Strouse, and Murray (2006) found that emotional involvement with media characters had an impact on whether or not adolescents considered the characters as role models, an effect that was stronger for females than for males. Thus, adolescents can identify with fictional characters and even go as far as to consider them role models. The Secret Life programming presents a wide range of characters which may therefore potentially elicit emotional attachment to these main characters from audience members in the same way as these previous studies have demonstrated. This will be important when extending the results of this project to include audience involvement in future studies.

Tan et al. (1997) looked at adolescents value acceptance and potential television influence of those values across three different culture groups (i.e., Anglo Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans). Functional values (i.e., values important to being successful in the United States) were accepted across all three groups (Tan et al., 1997). Tan et al. contends that television serves as a tool of socialization, given the extent to which major themes and values viewed on television reflected norms dominant in society. Dominant values viewed on television provide a socializing role to other audiences.

**Sexuality in the Media**

Teen sexuality and sexual activity is often a plot line depicted in popular programming and an increasingly popular topic of research (e.g., Keller & Brown, 2002; Jackson, 2005; Eyal, Kunkel, Biely, & Finnerty, 2007). Furthermore, real world teenage pregnancy figures are high, as discussed previously, which could contribute to an increasing media presence of teenage sexual themes. Evaluating mediated messages as they pertain to teens’ sexual activity could
result in a better understanding of what, if any, impact the media may have on this aspect of teenage life. This section begins more broadly with literature focusing on alternative media sources of discussions about teens and sexuality (e.g., magazines and video games) which can influence the direction of this study, and ends with research about sexual activity on television targeted as messages for teens.

**Alternative media.** Popular teen magazines frequently address the topic of teenage sexuality. For example, Carpenter (1998) content analyzed articles spanning three decades of the longest running teen magazine, *Seventeen*, from 1974 to 1994, and found several themes relating to sexuality. Over time, women were depicted less frequently as sexual objects or as victims as they were in earlier articles, and depicted more frequently as individuals with agency who could experience sexual desire. However, abstinence was treated as a subject more frequently across the years whereas homosexuality and sex for pleasure occurred as topics less frequently across time (Carpenter, 1998). Jackson (2005) found similar results in her study. Written responses in a popular Australian teen magazine often erred on the side of safe sex and abstinence education (Jackson, 2005). Furthermore, columnists often framed advice to teens as if they were unaware of the potential physical or psychological consequences associated with sexual activity. Finally, the magazine discussed homosexuality and sex for pleasure less often than other non “taboo” topics (Jackson, 2005).

Video games represent another media platform that provides a different perspective on depictions of sexuality and ways in which teenagers engage them. Video games are extremely popular with teenagers, according to Lenhart et al. (2008), who found that 97% of the 12-17 year olds in their study sample played at least some form of them. As mentioned, video games also frequently depict sexuality. Content analysis of video game depictions from popular gaming
magazines reveal male characters represented as powerful, dominant, and aggressive (Dill & Thill, 2007). Female characters were often portrayed in passive roles, where the emphasis was on their status as “visions of beauty, objects of men’s heterosexual fantasies, and less important than men” characters (Dill & Thill, 2007, p. 861). While an extreme emphasis is placed on the role of the woman as a sex object in video games, this theme does not occur for men (Dill & Thill, 2007). On video game web sites, female characters are portrayed in a more sexualized manner than are male characters (Robinson, Callister, Clark, & Phillips, 2009). Video game websites depict female characters as thin, young, attractive, and at times with little or no clothing while male characters are fully dressed and without form-fitting attire (Robinson et al., 2009). Video game animators may depict female characters in these ways because they believe gaming is often targeted to male audiences. While this project does not specifically look at audience interpretation of Secret Life character attractiveness, it’s important to note similar research that has potential to influence future studies.

**Film and television.** The most prevalent mediated depictions of content regarding teenage sexual activity comes from feature films and television programming. Fay and Yanoff (2000) conducted focus groups with teens at a youth conference held by the Pennsylvania Coalition to Prevent Teen Pregnancy in 1999. Teens identified television as the most influential of all the media to which they are exposed, including magazines and various forms of advertisements. Participants noted that television and other media depict sex negatively and leave teens “scared or frustrated about sex” (Fay & Yanoff, 2000, p. 173). The media, particularly news programming, portrays negative views of teens leaving this younger generation with a poor public image (Fay & Yanoff, 2000).
Teens’ behaviors vary as a result of the amount of television exposure to sexualized content and their sexual maturity. For example, 12-year-olds who watched higher levels of televised sexual content exhibited sexual attitudes similar to teens 2 to 3 years older who watched lower levels of televised sexual content (Collins et al., 2004). Longitudinal research among adolescents aged 12 to 17, supported the findings that adolescents with prior interest and readiness in sexual activity are heavier viewers of televised sexual content than are teens of the same age without prior interest and readiness (Kim et al., 2006). Teens allowed to have a television set in their bedroom, as well as teens who spent a significant amount of time alone at home, watch significantly more sexual content on television than do teens without those characteristics (Kim et al., 2006). Finally, girls and younger adolescents watch more sexualized content on television than do boys and older adolescents (Kim et al., 2006). Each of these research examples could greatly inform future research focusing on audience involvement.

Brown, Halpern, and Ladin L’Engle (2005) investigated the role the media plays in the lives of girls (average age around 13) who mature faster than their similarly aged counterparts. Early maturing girls are defined as girls who hit puberty earlier than others. These women express more interest in mediated sexual content than do women who mature at the typical cycle (Brown et al., 2005, p. 425). Early maturation is associated with increased interest in sexualized mediated content. Furthermore, this same early maturation group is also more likely than later maturing girls to interpret the televised content as suggesting it is okay to be sexually active. As such, the television may act as a trusted and influential super peer to girls who sexually mature more quickly (Brown et al., 2005).

Teens may potentially encounter a variety of mediated images about sexuality when watching popular programming. For example, Fisher, Hill, Grube, and Gruber (2004), analyzed
sexual content on television shows in the 2001-2002 viewing season with an emphasis on the networks and programming targeting adolescent viewers. A majority (82%) of the shows in their sample included some form of sexual content, with sexual talk more predominant than behavior and discussions of sexual responsibility almost nonexistent (6%) across programs (Fisher et al., 2004). Furthermore, sexual intercourse occurred most often between unmarried partners.

Television movies and comedy dramas had the highest amounts of sexualized content. Feature films and reality television also contained high amounts of sexualized content (Fisher et al., 2004). Overall, teens who watched heavy amounts of comedic programming and cable channel movies are more likely to be exposed to predominantly more sexual talk and behavior than teens who do not watch these types of programming (Fisher et al., 2004).

Cope-Farrar and Kunkel (2002) content analyzed the top 15 television programs watched by adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 in 1996. They found that of the 45 different programs analyzed, 37 (82%) featured some sexual talk or the depiction of a sexual act (Cope-Farrar & Kunkel, 2002). Additionally, Hust, Brown, and Ladin L’Engle (2008) explored differences in sexual content by diverse media, including television, feature films, music, and magazines. When sexual health content, such as condom use, was depicted it was often inaccurate, reinforced gender stereotypes, and used as a source of humor. Additionally, music lyrics were found to contain content that may normalize sexual violence (Hust et al., 2008). There is potential danger in reinforcing gender stereotypes that may socialize teens to develop poor body image, succumb to peer pressures about sexual activity, and have unrealistic expectations of the opposite sex regarding sexual thoughts and activity (Hust et al., 2008).

Most research in this area focuses heavily on the lack of physical consequences portrayed, such as pregnancy or the contraction of a sexually transmitted disease, despite other
types of outcomes outside the physical realm. Aubrey (2004) examines the holistic sexual consequences depicted through media in comparison to physical ones. Content analysis showed that physical consequences of sex occur in 5.5% of scenes that include sexual activity (Aubrey, 2004). When expanding beyond physical consequences, 32.5% of scenes portray overall sexual consequences, which includes emotional, social, and punitive consequences (Aubrey, 2004). Despite the heavy emphasis on physical consequences, emotional and social consequences can be just as, if not more, damaging (Aubrey, 2004).

Up to this point, the discussion has not focused on studies that highlight major differences across ethnicities with regard to effects of exposure to televised sexual content. Longitudinal research on the impact of different media (i.e., television, movies, music, and magazines) on adolescents ages 12 to 14 years-old, supports that white adolescents’ exposure to mediated sexual content accelerates sexual activity and the chance of engaging in sexual intercourse (Brown et al., 2006). Black adolescents may be more influenced by parental communication and peers than media exposure when it comes to sexual activity than adolescents from other ethnicities (Brown et al., 2006). Exposure to portrayals of sexual risk and need for sexual safety may relate to delay of sexual activity among black teens (Collins et al., 2004). Further investigation of the media effects differences along racial lines could help shed light on the results obtained in these studies. Additionally, because the characters on Secret Life are racially diverse, it’s possible that the audience is as well. This diverse audience may not be experiencing sexual portrayals in the same way.

The negative consequences of exposure to mediated portrayals of sexual activity are discussed in the literature frequently. Given the potential for media to produce portrayals that can be perceived in either a positive or negative way by the audience, it’s important to try to
highlight both such discussions within the literature. However, there are fewer research studies that focus on what could be seen as more positive or prosocial aspects of televised content on the topic of sex (e.g., Gavin, 2001). The following literature highlights some such projects that discuss the possible ways that programming is evolving and the positive lessons garnered from adolescent exposure.

Eyal et al. (2007), content analyzed and compared the sexual messages in the top 20 most popular programs among U.S. teens in the 2001-2002 and 2004-2005 viewing seasons. A significant amount of sexualized content on teens’ programming is still prevalent (1 in 2 teen programs features at least some), but positive changes have occurred between those two viewing seasons. Between the viewing seasons, a “more responsible presentation style” emerged where fewer images of younger characters engaging in sexual intercourse were shown as well as more instances of the negative consequences of sex (Eyal et al., 2007, p. 330). Overall portrayals of teen sexual intercourse dropped from 20% in the 2001-2002 viewing season to 8% in the 2004-2005 viewing season, and it was also found that the majority of characters who engaged in sexual intercourse were depicted to be at least 25-years of age or older. Teens’ programming outscored regular programming when depicting themes about sexual risk and responsibility, with 18% of teens’ programming focusing on it in comparison to 0% of the shows in general programming (Eyal et al., 2007).

An episode of the NBC television show Friends depicts one of the characters becoming pregnant, despite the proper use of a condom. The episode assisted parents in educating children about safe sex practices (Collins, Elliot, Berry, Kanouse, & Hunter, 2003). Teens who viewed the episode were more likely to know condom efficacy information six months after viewing. Furthermore, teens who coviewed the episode with an adult and engaged in a conversation about
what they saw were more likely to say they learned something new from the episode (Collins et al., 2003).

Another segment of teen sexuality research focuses on the implementation of educational programs to help teens make safe and healthy decisions. Keller and Brown (2002) provide an overview of the ways in which teens can be reached through media to learn about sex. Some of the methods they suggest include “edutainment” featuring socially responsible messages, embedding subtle health messages into existing programming (e.g., ER, Friends, etc.), media advocacy, and “small media” such as documentaries, pamphlets, and classroom discussions (Keller & Brown, 2002). The American Academy of Pediatrics also broached the subject in 2001 with a list of recommendations to pediatricians and other academy members with ways to encourage and promote sexual education and accurate media portrayals of sexual activity and sexual consequences (American Academy, 2001).

Pinkleton, Austin, Cohen, Chen, and Fitzgerald (2008) evaluated the effectiveness of a media literacy program that helps with sexual education among 11-19 year olds. After participation in the program, teens were less likely to overestimate other teens’ rates of sexual activity involvement, be more aware of myths about sex, and believe they could delay their own sexual involvement (Pinkleton et al., 2008). Additionally, teens were less likely to associate social benefits with sexual activity, finding mediated sexualized content less desirable (Pinkleton et al., 2008). Furthermore, 85% of participants rated the program higher than other sex education programs to which they had been exposed (Pinkleton et al., 2008). While the program is geared toward inclusion with other sex education programs, the overwhelming affinity participants had for the media literacy program speaks to its potential for effective education of teens about being sexually responsible.
Focus of this Study

Young adults extract attitudes, opinions, and values from televised programming (Brown et al., 2006). Tan and colleagues (2007) found support for the influence of, as well as reinforcement by, television on cultural value acceptance. Rivadeneyra’s and Ward’s (2005) research on gendered attitudes and television exposure supports the link between TV and attitude development. Additionally, Calvert et al. (2006) found that adolescents who become deeply involved with media narratives are more likely to consider characters as role models and learn from their behaviors. While this study’s main focus is on the message aspects of one particular teen program, it is important to note the potential effect these messages can have on viewers.

Diverse programming treat content differently, which impact attitude and behavior modeling. For example, reality-dating television emphasizes atypical dating scripts that heavy viewers of such programming endorse as realistic portrayals. Ferris et al. (2007) found three major themes present in reality dating shows: “women are sex objects”, “dating is considered a game”, and “men are sex-driven” (p. 504). Young males with dating experience, who are heavy viewers of this genre, and who perceive television and reality dating shows to be realistic were more likely to reinforce these stereotypes (Ferris et al., 2007). On the other hand, Morton et al. (1999) linked negative social attitudes with sports programming and night shows and positive social attitudes with family sitcoms. Finally, Smith et al. (2002) found that children’s programming contains a considerable amount of violence, particularly during primetime, suggesting the importance of schedule and program selection for certain mediated themes.

SCT and cultivation explicate how media’s messages reinforce attitudes, values, and behaviors (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002, 2009; Gerbner et al., 1986, 1994). For example, through SCT Krcmar and Greene (2000) investigated the link between violent television portrayals and
risk-taking behavior among adolescents. Additionally, Martino et al. (2005) used SCT to
evaluate exposure to either positive or negative television portrayals of sex and the impact on
safe sex practices used by teens thereafter. And, Ortiz and Harwood (2007) explored the role of
various television show messages as a form of intergroup education. Furthermore, Morton et al.
(1999) found cultivation effects for exposure to family sitcoms and positive social attitudes.
Signorielli (1991) content analyzed the televised portrayals of marriage spanning ten years and
found subsequent cultivation effects for high school students’ positive attitudes about future
plans to marry and have children. In order to further explore the effects of Secret Life on young
adults’ attitudes and behaviors about sex, first the programming content addressing such themes
must be explored. As such, this thesis provides a content analysis of the treatment of sexual
themes and content in a popular teen program, ABC Family’s The Secret Life of the American
Teenager (Dempsey, 2008; Umstead, 2008). A content analysis of the show will highlight the
major messages being broadcast to teens about sexual activity and teen pregnancy.

Moreover, Potter (1988) argued the need to examine diverse topics segmented to
individual audiences in order to see what values are embedded in such programming. Teenagers
have the options of engaging media online with a computer, through mobile telephone devices,
with MP3 players, and with DVRs (Nielsen, 2009). In addition to the changing viewing
platforms, thousands of television programs are now spread across hundreds of channels (The
Nielsen Company). This thesis employs such a refined and more decisive programming
approach, with the specific selection of Secret Life, because of the segmentation of television
programming today (Nielsen, 2009).

Teenage years are an influential and impressionable time of overall development (Price,
McKenry, & Murphy, 2000). Secret Life may impact young adults’ norms about sex by
highlighting an “everyone-is-doing it” mentality through the media (Stern, 2005, p. 340).

Because 1.5 million teens watched the season two premiere of the program (Nielsen data as cited by Gorman, 2009), many young adults are vulnerable to the version of reality depicted about what it is like to be a typical American teenager today. However, no research to date identifies how the program addresses sex-related themes.

Given that Secret Life depicts the general life of teens today, the first research question explores the amount of content in the program that features sexual talk or sexual activity of some kind versus non sex-related talk or activity. According to Brown et al. (2002) 80% of Americans were teenagers the first time they had sex, with the average age around 16 years old. If the program focuses more on sex-related themes than other subjects, the programming may establish norms for young adults about the extent to which they should be talking about and engaging in sex with others during their high school years. In conjunction with the SCT discussion of modeling (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002, 2009), determining the amount of sex-related content in the show could lead to an evaluation of the capacity viewers may have to learn and model these sexual issues. This first research question sets the groundwork for all research questions to follow in that it filters out scenes with non-sexual content that are not addressed in the remainder of the study. Therefore, research question one asks:

RQ1: What is the proportion of content related to sexual talk and activity compared to non-sexual talk and activity in Secret Life scenes?

Young adults frequently report avoiding the topic of sex with parents and other adults in general (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). However, when teenagers do discuss sex with their parents it tends to be more incidental than purposeful (Powell, 2008). In her study of sexual information sources for teenagers, Powell (2008) found that friends, school, family, and television were the
most prevalent and trusted sources. Additionally, Sutton, Brown, Wilson, and Klein (2002), explain that as adolescents age they are more likely to seek information from peers than parents about sex. Also, a higher majority of high school girls are likely to learn about safe sex practices from friends than are high school boys, and very few high school students are likely to consult health care professionals at all (Sutton, Brown, Wilson, & Klein, 2002). The second and third research questions explore how Secret Life depicts who young adults communicate with about sex and where such discussions occur. If young adults in the program discuss sexual activity with peers, parents, medical professionals, and other adults in such diverse places as school, home, medical facilities, and other locations, could it potentially set up a system in which viewers feel more comfortable discussing these issues outside of their peer groups? Could the characters in Secret Life be modeling relationships and interactions that contradict previous research findings? Thus, research questions two and three explore:

RQ$_{2A}$: Do scenes addressing sexual talk in Secret Life vary based on the target (peer, parent, medical professional, or other adults)?

RQ$_{2B}$: Do scenes addressing sexual activity in Secret Life vary based on the target (peer, parent, medical professional, or other adults)?

RQ$_{2C}$: Do scenes addressing both sexual talk and sexual activity in Secret Life vary based on the target (peer, parent, medical professional, or other adults)?

RQ$_{3A}$: Do scenes addressing sexual themes in Secret Life depict a primary location of where sexual talk occurs (school, home, medical facilities, and other general locations)?
RQ₃B: Do scenes addressing sexual themes in *Secret Life* depict a primary location of where sexual activity occurs (school, home, medical facilities, and other general locations)?

RQ₃C: Do scenes addressing sexual themes in *Secret Life* depict a primary location of where both sexual talk and sexual activity occurs (school, home, medical facilities, and other general locations)?

Teens receive messages in a variety of ways about sexual activity (Cope-Farrar & Kunkel, 2002; Fisher et al., 2004; Stern, 2005; Eyal et al., 2007). Some mediated messages about sex focus more on preventative sex education messages, such as statistics about pregnancy rates and condom usage (Collins et al., 2003). However, other sex education campaigns focus discussion and interaction more centrally around the consequences and ramifications of sexual activity (Carpenter, 1998). Realistically, all aspects of sexual activity deserve consideration. However, there is no research about how *Secret Life* presents the topic of sexual discussion and sexual activity and if it deals with the topic in more of a proactive or reactive manner. With a television show that centers on high school characters and the pregnancy of one of those characters, it’s important to know how sexual themes are discussed in relation to this topic. What effect could this show have on viewers if teen pregnancy is depicted often, but preventative measures are not? Could this potentially set up a script for teenage viewers where they see more examples of norms concerning teenage pregnancy and teenage parenting, but fewer scripts for practicing safe sex? Thus, research question four addresses the proportion of content in the program related to the pre-sexual activity, sexual activity, and post-sexual activity stages:
RQ$_{4A}$: Do scenes addressing sexual themes in *Secret Life* focus the topic of sexual discussion more frequently in the pre-sexual activity stage, sexual activity stage, or post-sexual activity stage?

RQ$_{4B}$: Do scenes addressing sexual themes in *Secret Life* focus the depiction of sexual activity more frequently in the pre-sexual activity stage, sexual activity stage, or post-sexual activity stage?

RQ$_{4C}$: Do scenes addressing sexual themes in *Secret Life* focus the depiction of both sexual talk and sexual activity more frequently in the pre-sexual stage, sexual activity stage, or post-sexual activity stage?

Not only is the activity stage of sexual activity and discussion important, the tone of such discussions matter as well. For example, negatively valenced or fear-based messages about behavior often are not as effective in changing behavior (Hust et al., 2008). Social norms campaigns often focus more on balanced information presentation and correcting norms rather than fear (Fay & Yanoff, 2000; Keller & Brown, 2002). Central to SCT is the idea of rewarding and punishing modeled behaviors (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002, 2009). If *Secret Life* functions as persuasive content, the valence and manner in which information is presented is pivotal to understanding possible effects on viewers’ attitudes and behaviors. Thus, research question five explores how *Secret Life* deals with sexual discussion and sexual activity:

RQ$_{5A}$: What is the valence of sexual discussion presented in sexually-themes scenes in *Secret Life* (positive valence, negative valence, balanced valence, or neutral valence)?
RQ_{5B}: What is the valence of sexual activity presented in sexually-themed scenes in *Secret Life* (positive valence, negative valence, balanced valence, or neutral valence)?

RQ_{5C}: What is the valence of sexual discussion and sexual activity when presented together in sexually-themed scenes in *Secret Life* (positive valence, negative valence, balanced valence, or neutral valance)?

Because teens often avoid discussion of sexual activity with parents and other adults (Golish & Caughlin, 2002), *Secret Life* may demonstrate more negatively or positively-toned discussions with different audiences about sexual activity. Similar to the previous research question, *Secret Life* may present more rewarded or more punished depictions of how sexual-themed conversations with peers and adults play out. Thus, research question six examines the overall valence of sexual discussion by target:

RQ_{6}: Does the valence (positive valence, negative valence, balanced valence, or neutral valence) of sexual activity discussion vary based on the target (peer, parent, medical professional, or other adults) in sexually-themes scenes of *Secret Life*?

A great deal of the existing literature focuses on programming that is nearly a decade old. Research should explore current trends in teen programming to see how themes in these shows are evolving. It’s important to study the depiction of teens’ sexuality and sexual activity with the understanding that the media is a powerful tool of socialization. By gaining a better understanding of what is out there in the media landscape, a better understanding of what may be going on behind closed doors can be gained. The literature suggests that teens are exposed to a great deal of sexualized content, which may be sexually mature beyond their years. Future
research could help to develop stronger regulations of the content that is reaching these impressionable audiences and potentially help to shape future messages.
Chapter III
Methodology

Sample Selection

The episodes of *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* available on DVD at the start of the project (i.e., “Volumes” One through Four) were coded for the purpose of this study. This included 47 episodes available on four separate DVD sets (the “Volumes”), all of which were unitized in preparation for the content analysis (See Appendix A for a complete list of the episodes). The decision to only code those episodes available for purchase or rent was made because it would limit dependence upon a reliable Internet connection in order to stream those not yet released on hard copy. Additionally, in order to unitize each episode, it was necessary to be in possession of a copy of each episode so that each could be cut into scenes and saved as separate files.

Each episode was unitized into “scenes” to be considered and individually coded for the variables of interest in this study. Scene changes were operationalized in the following ways: 1) when the physical setting changed (i.e., a school setting to a home setting, an indoor setting to an outdoor setting, inside an automobile/bus to outside an automobile/bus) this constituted a scene change; 2) when an additional person(s) entered an ongoing conversation or interaction, this constituted a scene change; 3) when one or more people left an ongoing conversation or interaction, this constituted a scene change. Unitization of the episodes by scenes resulted in varying lengths of scenes (a range of .033 minutes to 5.117 minutes) and varying amounts of scenes per episode (a range of 39 scenes to 67 scenes). The basis for this unit of analysis was grounded in the operationalization of scenes as reflected in Neuendorf and Abelman (1987) with slight modifications to fit the context of this investigation.
Before progressing to thematic and content coding, two coders naïve to the purpose of the study were trained using the above criteria about what constitutes a unit of analysis in this study (Neuendorf, 2002). Initial training took roughly two hours, and sample scenes were coded by both coders and the trainer. After training, coders independently unitized the beginning of each episode for 35 episodes. A Pearson correlation was run on the number of units noted by each coder for each of the 35 segments. Reliability for unitization procedures were strong \((r = .845, p < .05)\). Given the strong reliability for unitization the remaining 47 episodes were unitized into scenes following the same procedures by the coders. The mean length of scenes was 52.36 seconds with a total number of 598 coded units used.

**Coding Procedures**

A quantitative content analysis procedure was followed to code the data once the episodes had been unitized (Neuendorf, 2002). A total of 2,268 possible scenes (derived through unitization of the four full volumes) to code comprised the population of units from which a sample was drawn from the 47 episodes, with each episode on average containing 48 scenes overall. Out of the total population of scenes, roughly 25% of the data (598 scenes) was coded in the final analysis. The premiere and finale of each of the four “Volumes” (aired on ABC Family as seasons) were coded in their entirety. Furthermore, an average episode’s worth of scenes were randomly selected from all available remaining scenes within each of the four volumes. That is, once the average scene count for each volume was calculated, that number of scenes was randomly selected from the pool of scenes in addition to unitization of the entire premiere episode and finale episode for each volume. The premiere and finale were purposefully chosen because *Secret Life* tends to have the most viewers for these episodes in each season, and
therefore messages from those episodes have the potential to reach the show’s widest audience (See Figure 1) (See Appendix D for complete list of ratings source material).

**Figure 1.** The Secret Life of the American Teenager Episode Ratings, Volumes 1-4.

**Coder training.** Before conducting the coding, two coders were trained by going over the codebook together with the primary investigator and jointly coding sample units of analysis (See Appendix B). Training was conducted until complete agreement occurred for the coders during the training session on all variables of interest in the study. Modifications and updates to the codebook were made based on feedback from the training session, as well as to address any issues that arose while the coders trained the data (Neuendorf, 2002). After analyzing coded samples from the codebook training session, discussion ensued until complete agreement
established on the sample units before the coders moved on to the next phase in the quantitative content analysis procedure.

Next, the two coders independently coded 10% of the data, and reliability estimates were computed for each variable where Cohen’s Kappa was used as the index of intercoder reliability. Any variables that did not have satisfactory reliability estimates (Kappa ≥ .70), were reexamined and the coders were retrained with the codebook (Neuendorf, 2002). Once satisfactory levels of intercoder reliability were obtained for each variable, the remaining data was split between the two coders and coded for the fourteen variables of the study. Final Kappas for the variables are summarized within the discussion of each in the Measures section. The coders were given their separate samples of scenes to code on burned DVD discs that could be viewed using most computer media players, so as to aid in independent and convenient coding. The DivX media player was suggested and used during training sessions, but whatever program worked for the coders and their systems was acceptable.

When coding, coders were instructed not to code data at any one sitting for longer than two hours so that coder fatigue or rushed coding did not occur (Neuendorf, 2002). Coders were instructed to flag any units of analysis for which they were uncertain of how to code the unit, and the group then examined these units as a whole and made coding decisions. Furthermore, this was also the case for any variables with units coded as “unknown” (Neuendorf, 2002). To address each of the six research questions and their subsequent parts, fourteen variables were coded from the data, including four demographic variables. Each coder coded their respective scenes independently.

Each scene was coded initially as either containing sexual content or not, and only those scenes with sexual content present were coded for the remaining thirteen variables, including the
demographics. Then, there were two overarching branches to the codebook that the coders would follow: sexual talk or sexual activity. A third, less often used, branch consisting of the presence of both sexual talk and sexual activity was also present in the codebook. When a scene was determined to contain either sexual talk or sexual activity (or both), the remaining variables associated with either sexual talk or sexual activity were coded for the scene. The four demographic variables were coded for every scene that contained a sexual theme, no matter what the theme.

**Coding Process**

As discussed previously, to answer the research questions guiding this investigation, ten main variables and four demographic variables were coded from the data. Each variable is explained here with corresponding sample statements. The coders coded target of sexual talk or activity, location, topic or act, and valence, and demographic information, after coding for the presence of sexually oriented content in the scenes. Non-sexually oriented content scenes were not coded beyond making the determination that the scene did not contain elements of sexual discussion or activity. Overall scene content was the variable derived from the coders’ responses. This variable differentiated between scenes with sexual discussion present, sexual activity present, both sexual discussion and sexual activity present, or neither sexual discussion nor sexual activity present.

**Sexually oriented content.** For the presence of sexually oriented content variable, scenes were coded as being sexually oriented, non-sexually oriented, or unknown. Sexually oriented content was operationalized based on Fisher et al. (2004), and Kunkel et al.’s (1999), Kunkel, Cope-Farrar, Biely, Maynard Farinola, and Donnerstein’s (2001), Kunkel et al.’s (2003), and Kunkel, Eyal, Finnerty, Biely, and Donnerstein’s (2005) operationalization of the variable. The
variable is defined as any depiction of sexual activity, sexually suggestive behavior, or any talk about sexuality or sexual activity or after-effects of sexual activity. Both sexual talk and sexual activity were defined separately with examples of each to aid in the overall coding of each (See Appendix B). Sexual talk included comments about the character’s own or others’ sexual actions or interests, talk about past sexual encounters, talk leading toward a sexual encounter, and talk about sexual crimes (Fisher et al., 2004). Sexual activity included physical flirting, passionate kissing, intimate touching, or sexual intercourse strongly implied (Fisher et al., 2004; Kunkel, et al., 1999, 2001, 2003).

Scenes were coded as sexually oriented if the main topic of conversation or action of the scene could be categorized as falling under the definition provided above or included any of the examples reflected in the codebook. Non-sexually oriented scenes occurred if the main topic of conversation or action of the scene focused on any other topic than sex. By coding these scenes, a measure was developed to assess how dominant the sexually oriented scenes were in comparison to those that featured any topic other than one that was sexual oriented. Coding results of this variable were used to determine which scenes would be coded for the remaining variables. Intercoder reliability for this variable was excellent (Kappa = .93).

**Overall scene content.** This variable was added after the coders completed their analysis, but prior to the researcher’s assessment of the data. A classification of either “sexual discussion”, “sexual activity”, “both”, or “neither” was determined based on the responses of the coders to the remainder of codebook prompts. If the coders indicated, through their coding of the data, that scenes did not contain any sexually oriented material, then the scene was coded as containing “neither”. If the coders indicated that the scene contained only sexual discussion (or sexual activity), through their coding of the sexual discussion (or sexual activity) prompts, then the
scene was coded as “sexual discussion” (or “sexual activity”). If the coders indicated that the scene contained both sexual discussion and sexual activity, through their coding of both sexual discussion and sexual activity prompts, then the scene was coded as “both”. Intercoder reliability for this variable was satisfactory (Kappa = .72).

All remaining variables (e.g., target, location, topic or act, and valence) were coded separately for either the presence of sexual discussion or sexual activity. Prompts in the codebook were worded specifically for sexual discussion and sexual activity separately to account for differences in talk and action. Coders coded for sexual discussion scenes following the designated sexual discussion prompts only, and coded sexual activity scenes similarly for sexual activity prompts on the codebook (See Appendix B). Any scene that contained both sexual discussion and sexual activity was coded twice for each aspect of sexual discussion and sexual activity. Any scene that was not coded as containing sexual content was coded by the researcher as “none” or “neither”.

**Target.** The target of sexual discussion (or activity) variable (see prompts C and D in the codebook, Appendix B) referred to the main person(s) on the receiving end of the sexual conversation (or engagement of sexual activity) within each scene. Scenes containing sexual discussion were coded as self, same-sex peer, opposite-sex peer, same-sex family member (e.g., a sibling), opposite-sex family member, same-sex parent, opposite-sex parent, medical professional, other adult, or parents of both sexes. Intercoder reliability was excellent (Kappa = .86) for target of sexual discussion. Responses to scenes containing sexual activity were coded as self, same-sex peer, opposite-sex peer, medical professional, or other adult. Intercoder reliability was excellent (Kappa = .95) for target of sexual activity.
Scenes were coded as taking place with the “self” if the character was speaking to herself/himself in an internal or external monologue, or engaging in self masturbation or fondling sexual activity. Scenes were coded as taking place with either a “same-sex peer” or “opposite-sex peer” if the character being coded was speaking with (or engaging in a sexual act with) a similarly aged friend of either the same-sex or opposite-sex. Scenes featuring sexual discussion were coded as either “same-sex family member” or “opposite-sex family member” if the character was speaking with a similarly aged family member (e.g., sibling) of the same- or opposite-sex. Scenes featuring sexual discussion were coded as either “same-sex parent” or “opposite-sex parent” if the character was speaking with their own same- or opposite-sex parent or guardian. Scenes were coded as “parents of both sexes” if the character was engaging in a sexual discussion with both of their own parents or guardians of both sexes. Scenes were coded as “medical professional” if the character being coded was speaking with (or engaging in a sexual act with) a medical professional (e.g., doctor, nurse, psychologist, psychiatrist, therapist, or other medically trained person). Scenes were coded as “other adult” if the character being coded was speaking with (or engaging in a sexual act with) another adult other than their own parent or guardian or a medical professional. This could include guidance counselors, religious leaders, or other non-parent and non-medical adults.

**Location.** The location of sexual discussion (or sexual activity) variable was coded based on the main location where the sexual conversation (or engagement in a sexual activity) occurred. The available options for scenes containing sexual discussions and sexual activity were identical. Scenes were coded as school, home, medical facility, or other. Scenes were coded as taking place at “school” if they took place anywhere on school grounds, including classrooms, the guidance counselor’s office, hallways, courtyards, parking lots, or other location associated
with the school. Scenes were coded as taking place at “home” if they take place anywhere inside the home (e.g., a bedroom, kitchen, shared living space, or garage) or outside the home (e.g., front or back yard, or sidewalk with house in background) of one or more characters. Scenes were coded as “medical facility” if they take place in or on the grounds of a medical facility (e.g., a doctor’s office, a free health clinic such as Planned Parenthood, or other location associated with medical professionals). Scenes were coded as “other” if they take place anywhere that cannot be coded as either “school”, “home”, or “medical facility”. This includes scenes taking place in stores or other businesses, or inside automobiles or buses. Intercoder reliability was excellent for both location of discussion (Kappa = .90) and location of activity (Kappa = .95).

**Topic or activity.** The sexual topic or type of sexual activity variable was into one of three categories. Overall, this coding schema focuses on how the topic/action relates to the activity of sexual intercourse. Scenes were coded as pre-activity, activity, or post-activity. Sexual discussion scenes were coded as “pre-activity” if the main topic of discussion included discussions of topics corresponding to events that occurred prior to a sexual act. For example, this could include discussions about the use of birth control or other contraceptives (e.g., condoms) prior to engaging in a sexual act, pressure to engage in or not engage in a sexual act, or planning events leading up to a sexual act. Sexual activity scenes were coded as “pre-activity” if the main action in the scene features actions associated with events that occur prior to a sexual act. This could include depicting the use of birth control or other contraceptives (e.g., condoms), pressure to engage in or not engage in a sexual act, or flirtatious gestures or enticements.

Sexual discussion scenes were coded as “activity” if the main topic of discussion included discussions of tactics, the actual sexual act, physical touching and implications of a
sexual act, or discussions of what constitutes sex (e.g., oral sex). Sexual activity scenes were coded as “activity” if the main action in the scene included depictions of the actual act, physical touching and implications of a sexual act, or scenes in which the characters were in bed or undressed. Sexual discussion scenes were coded as “post-activity” if the main topic of discussion includes discussions that occur after the character(s) has engaged in a sexual act. This could include discussions of the experience of physical or emotional consequences or after effects, discussions of the quality of a sexual act, or discussions of the main character’s pregnancy. Sexual activity scenes were coded as “post-activity” if the main action of the scene featured elements such as depictions of physical or emotional consequences or depictions of events associated with the main character’s pregnancy. Intercoder reliability was excellent for sexual discussion topic coding (Kappa = .88) and high for thematic sexual activity coding (Kappa = .95).

**Valence.** The valence variable of sexual discussion or sexual activity was coded into one of four categories. Overall, this coding schema focused on the overall assessed or implied tone of the discussion about sex or sexual encounters. Scenes were coded as positive, negative, ambivalent, or neutral, and the coding schema was identical for both “talk” and “act” variables. Scenes were coded as “positive” if the main topic of discussion or depiction of sexual activity included discussions of sex framed in a positive light. This could include excited or happy speech and nonverbal behaviors, or other implications of positive anticipation, happiness, enjoyment, excitement about having engaged in a sexual act or at the thought of engaging in a sexual act. Scenes were coded as “negative” if the main topic of discussion or depiction of sexual action included discussions of or engagement in the act of sex framed in a negative light. This could include the use of sarcasm when discussing sex, avoidance of discussing the act or topic,
or implications of regret, sadness, anger, fear, anxiety, or depression at having engaged in sex or at the thought of engaging in sex. For sexual discussion scenes, this could also include a discussion of barriers to preferred activities as a result of having engaged in a sexual act.

Scenes were coded as “ambivalent” if the main topic of discussion or depiction of activity includes discussions of or engagement in the act of sex that is equally positive and negative. This could include a representation of seeing both sides of the issue, or placing equal weight in the character’s discussion. Scenes were coded as “neutral” if the main topic of discussion or depiction of sexual activity included no major positive or negative discussion of sex or the engagement in a sex act, or if the scene is more informational without emotive reactions. Intercoder reliability was excellent for both sexual discussion valence coding (Kappa = .81) and for sexual activity valence coding (Kappa = .95).

**Demographics.** Demographic variables were used to identify characters and add substance to subsequent analysis of additional variables. Demographic variables examined included character ID, and sex, race, and age of characters in the scene. Demographics were coded for characters in each scene as a whole and were only done for scenes featuring the sexually oriented content. A “Character ID” sheet was prepared for the coders to facilitate ease with identifying basic details about characters for demographic analysis (see Appendix C). The sheet included character name, alphabetical and numerical ID (e.g., A1, A2, J1, etc.), clearly identifiable picture of the character, and brief description of the character. The description included age range, education status, and family associations, because this information was necessary for coding many of the variables that include family and peer associations. Intercoder reliability for character ID coding was excellent (Kappa = .86). The “sex” demographic consisted of three options, only female characters in a scene, only male characters in a scene, and mixed
female and male characters in a scene. Intercoder reliability for the sex demographic was excellent (Kappa = .86). The “race” demographic consisted of three options, only white character(s) in a scene, only non-white character(s) in a scene, and characters of multiple races in a scene. Intercoder reliability for the race demographic was excellent (Kappa = .86). The final demographic variable, “age”, consisted of seven codable options. Intercoder reliability for the age demographic was excellent (Kappa = .90). Scenes were coded as having junior high school student(s) only in the scene, high school students only in the scene, adult(s) only in the scene, mixed junior high and high school students, mixed junior high and adults, mixed high school students and adults, or mixed junior high, high school students, and adults in the scene.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics and frequencies were calculated using SPSS and have been reported for all tests of intercoder reliability, and assessment of all fourteen variables. To address research questions one through five, and their subsequent parts, variables were assessed using one-sample chi-square tests. For each test, a uniform distribution across all categories for comparison was assumed. Research question six was addressed with a two-way contingency analysis of the target variables by the valence variables.
Chapter IV

Results

Sexually Oriented Content

Research question 1a examined the proportion of content related to sexual talk and sexual activity compared to non-sexual talk and activity in Secret Life scenes. A one-sample chi-square test determined if the number of scenes featuring sexually oriented content present in the sample was significantly different from the proportion of scenes featuring non-sexually oriented content. The results of the chi-square test were significant, $\chi^2 (1, N = 592) = 22.73, p < .01, ES = .04$. The proportion of scenes featuring non-sexually oriented content ($P = .598$) was greater than the expected proportion of .50, and the proportion of scenes featuring sexually oriented content ($P = .402$) was smaller than the expected proportion of .50. Overall, these results indicate that non-sexually oriented content is featured more frequently than sexually oriented content (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Overall Secret Life scene distribution.](image-url)
Overall Scene Content

Research question 1b explored the proportion of scenes featuring sexual activity that were sexual talk only or sexual activity only scenes or scenes containing both sexual talk and sexual activity. A one-sample chi-square test determined if the overall scene content for the three categories (sexual discussion, sexual talk, or both) was significantly different from the hypothesized proportions for the scenes featuring sexually oriented content. The results of the chi-square test were significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 238) = 313.12, p < .01, ES = .66$. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual discussion only ($P = .874$) was greater than the expected proportion of .33. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual activity only ($P = .071$) and featuring both sexual discussion and sexual activity ($P = .055$) were significantly smaller than the expected proportion of .33. Overall, these results indicate that scenes feature sexual discussion more frequently than they do sexual activity or both sexual discussion and sexual activity.

Target

Research question 2a examines differences in the proportion of sexual discussion based on target in the scene. A one-sample chi-square test determined for sexual discussions if differences existed about who is most often depicted as on the receiving end of sexual talk (the self, same-sex peers, opposite-sex peers, same-sex family members, opposite-sex family members, same-sex parents, opposite-sex parents, parents of both sexes, medical professionals, or other adults). The results of the chi-square test were significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 208) = 200.65, p < .01, ES = .11$. The proportion of scenes featuring only sexual talk that targeted same-sex peers ($P = .231$) and opposite-sex peers ($P = .322$) were significantly greater than the expected proportion of .10. The proportion of scenes featuring only sexual talk that targeted the self ($P = .019$), opposite-sex parents ($P = .029$), medical professionals ($P = .024$), and parents of both
sexes ($P = .005$) were significantly smaller than the expected proportion of .10. Overall, these results indicate that both same-sex and opposite-sex peers are most frequently depicted as the preferred targets of sexual discussions and that the self, opposite-sex parents, medical professionals, and parents of both sexes are depicted less frequently as preferred targets of sexual discussion.

Research question 2b examines differences in the proportion of sexual activity based on target in the scene. A one-sample chi-square test determined for sexual activity if differences existed about who is most often depicted as on the receiving end of sexual activity (the self, same-sex peers, opposite-sex peers, medical professionals, or other adults). Coders only noted cases for the self, same-sex peers, and opposite-sex peers. The results of the chi-square test run on these cases were significant, $\chi^2, (2, N = 17) = 18.47, p < .01, ES = .54$. The proportion of scenes featuring only sexual activity that targeted opposite-sex peers ($P = .824$) were greater than the expected proportion of .33. The proportion of scenes featuring only sexual activity that targeted the self ($P = .118$) and same-sex peers ($P = .059$) were significantly smaller than the expected proportion of .33. Overall, these results indicate that opposite-sex peers are depicted most frequently as the preferred targets of sexual activity and the self and same-sex peers are depicted less frequently on the program as preferred targets of sexual activity.

Research question 2c addresses differences in the proportion of both sexual talk and sexual activity based on target in the scene. A one-sample chi-square test determined who is on the receiving end more frequently when both sexual activity and sexual discussion were present in the scene (the self, same-sex peers, opposite-sex peers, medical professionals, or other adults). Cases were only observed for same-sex peers, opposite-sex peers, and other adults. The results of the chi-square test run on these cases were significant, $\chi^2, (2, N = 13) = 11.23, p < .01, ES = .43$. 
The proportion of scenes featuring both sexual discussion and sexual activity that targeted opposite-sex peers \((P = .769)\) were greater than the expected proportion of .33. The proportion of sexually oriented scenes featuring both sexual discussion and sexual activity that targeted same-sex peers \((P = .154)\) and other adults \((P = .077)\) were significantly smaller than the expected proportion of .33. Overall, these results indicate that opposite-sex peers are most frequently depicted as the preferred target in scenes featuring both sexual activity and sexual discussion and same-sex peers and other adults are targeted least often as preferred targets under these same conditions.

**Location**

Research question 3a addresses differences in the proportion of sexual discussion based on location of the scene. A one-sample chi-square test determined for sexual discussions if differences existed about where these discussions take place most frequently (school, home, a medical facility, or another location other than one that could fall under the other three). The results of the chi-square test were significant, \(\chi^2, (3, N = 208) = 64.04, p < .01, ES = .10\). The proportion of scenes featuring only sexual discussion taking place in the home \((P = .48)\) was greater than the expected proportion of .25. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual discussion taking place in a medical facility \((P = .15)\) or another location \((P = .13)\) were significantly smaller than the expected proportion of .25. Overall, these results indicate that sexual discussions were depicted most frequently as occurring in the home and depicted on the program as occurring least often in medical facilities or other locations.

Research question 3b examines differences in the proportion of sexual activity based on location of the scene. A one-sample chi-square test determined for sexual activity if differences existed about where these interactions take place most frequently (school, home, a medical
facility, or another location other than one that could fall under the other three). The results of the chi-square test were significant, $\chi^2$, (3, $N = 17$) = 11.47, $p<.01$, ES = .22. The proportion of scenes featuring only sexual activity that took place in the home ($P = .588$) were greater than the expected proportion of .25. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual activity only that took place on school grounds ($P = .118$) or in a medical facility ($P = .059$) were significantly smaller than the expected proportion of .25. Overall, these results indicate that sexual activity was depicted most frequently as occurring in the home and least often depicted in scenes taking place on school grounds or in medical facilities.

Research question 3c addresses differences in the proportion of both sexual discussion and sexual activity based on location of the scene. A one-sample chi-square test determined for both sexual discussions and sexual activity if differences existed about where these interactions take place most frequently (school, home, a medical facility, or another location other than one that could fall under the other three). The results of the chi-square test were not significant, $\chi^2$, (3, $N = 13$) = 6.39, $p<.01$, ES = .16.

**Topic or Activity**

Research question 4a addresses the differences in the depiction of topics of sexual discussions in *Secret Life* scenes. A one-sample chi-square test determined for sexual discussions if differences existed about what these discussions are about most frequently (pre-sexual activity, (during) sexual activity, or post-sexual activity topics). The results of the chi-square test were significant, $\chi^2$, (2, $N = 208$) = 79.63, $p<.01$, ES = .19. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual discussion only that focused on post-activity topics ($P = .62$) was greater than the expected proportion of .33. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual discussion only that focused on (during) sexual activity topics ($P = .144$) and pre-sexual activity topics ($P = .24$) were
significantly smaller than the expected proportion of .33. Overall, these results indicate that sexual discussions were depicted most frequently with a focus on post-activity topics.

Research question 4b addresses the differences in the depiction of the type of activity shown in scenes. A one-sample chi-square test determined for sexual activity if differences existed about when these discussions take place most frequently (pre-sexual activity events, sexual activity events, or post-sexual activity events). The results of the chi-square test were not significant, $\chi^2, (2, N = 17) = 5.77, p = .06$. Research question 4c examines the differences in the depiction of the type of activity shown in scenes featuring both sexual discussion and sexual activity. A one-sample chi-square test determined for both sexual discussion and sexual activity if differences existed about when these interactions take place most frequently (pre-sexual activity events, sexual activity events, or post-sexual activity events). The results of the chi-square test were not significant, $\chi^2, (2, N = 13) = 2.92, p = .23$.

Valence

Research question 5a examines the depiction of valence of topics discussed in scenes. A one-sample chi-square test determined for sexual discussions if differences existed about the most frequently depicted valence for these discussions (positive, negative, ambivalent, or neutral valence). The results of the chi-square test were significant, $\chi^2, (3, N = 208) = 22.39, p < .01$, $ES = .04$. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual discussion with a negative valence ($P = .39$) was greater than the expected proportion of .25. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual discussion with a neutral valence ($P = .178$) were significantly smaller than the expected proportion of .25. Finally, scenes featuring sexual discussion with either an ambivalent valence ($P = .216$) or a positive valence ($P = .216$) were both close to the expected proportion of .25. Overall, these
results indicate that sexual discussions were most frequently depicted with a negative valence and scenes with a neutral valence were depicted least frequently.

Research question 5b examines the depiction of valence of sexual activity in scenes. A one-sample chi-square test determined for sexual activity if differences existed about the most frequently depicted valence for these interactions (positive, negative, ambivalent, or neutral valence). There were no observed cases of ambivalent valence. The results of the chi-square test run on observed cases was significant, $\chi^2, (2, N = 17) = 18.47, p<.01, ES = .54$. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual activity only that portrayed sexual activity with a positive valence ($P = .824$) was greater than the expected proportion of .33. The proportion of scenes featuring sexual activity only that portrayed sexual activity with a negative valence ($P = .118$) or a neutral valence ($P = .059$) were significantly smaller than the expected proportion of .33. Overall, these results indicate that sexual activity is most frequently portrayed with a positive valence and is depicted least often with a negative or neutral valence.

Research question 5c addresses the depiction of valence of scenes featuring both sexual discussions and sexual activity. A one-sample chi-square test determined for both sexual discussion and sexual activity if differences existed about the most frequently depicted valence for these interactions (positive, negative, ambivalent, or neutral valence). The results of the chi-square test were significant, $\chi^2, (3, N = 13) = 9.46, p<.05, ES = .24$. The proportion of scenes featuring both sexual discussion and sexual activity portrayed with a positive valence ($P = .615$) was greater than the expected proportion of .25. The proportion of scenes featuring both sexual discussion and sexual activity portrayed with a negative valence ($P = .077$), an ambivalent valence ($P = .154$), or a neutral valence ($P = .154$) were significantly smaller than the expected
proportion of .25. Overall, these results indicate that scenes featuring both sexual discussions and sexual activity were most frequently depicted with a positive valence.

**Topic Valence Variation by Target**

Research question 6 explores whether the valence of topics addressed in sexual discussions would vary based on target in scenes featuring sexual discussion only. A two-way chi-square analysis determined for sexual discussions if differences existed about the most frequently depicted valence for these discussions (positive, negative, ambivalent, or neutral valence) based on who is most often depicted as on the receiving end of sexual talk (the self, same-sex peers, opposite-sex peers, same-sex family members, opposite-sex family members, same-sex parents, opposite-sex parents, parents of both sexes, medical professionals, or other adults). The results of this test were not significant, $\chi^2, (15, N = 208) = 16.42, p<.01$. Overall, these results indicate that there is no significant difference between the valences of topics depicted in scenes amongst targets of sexual discussion (see Table 1).
Table 1

Sexual Discussion Target and Valence Topic Coding in Secret Life Scenes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Positive Valence</th>
<th>Negative Valence</th>
<th>Ambivalent Valence</th>
<th>Neutral Valence</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>2 (.9)</td>
<td>2 (1.6)</td>
<td>0 (.9)</td>
<td>0 (.7)</td>
<td>4 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>29 (24.9)</td>
<td>41 (44.8)</td>
<td>20 (24.9)</td>
<td>25 (20.5)</td>
<td>115 (55.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Members</td>
<td>6 (9.1)</td>
<td>18 (16.4)</td>
<td>12 (9.1)</td>
<td>6 (7.5)</td>
<td>42 (20.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>2 (3.9)</td>
<td>10 (7)</td>
<td>5 (3.9)</td>
<td>1 (3.2)</td>
<td>18 (8.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Professionals</td>
<td>0 (1.1)</td>
<td>2 (1.9)</td>
<td>1 (1.1)</td>
<td>2 (.9)</td>
<td>5 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Adults</td>
<td>6 (5.2)</td>
<td>8 (9.3)</td>
<td>7 (5.2)</td>
<td>3 (4.3)</td>
<td>24 (11.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall total</td>
<td>45 (21.6%)</td>
<td>81 (38.9%)</td>
<td>45 (21.6%)</td>
<td>37 (17.8%)</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Each cell reflects two frequencies. The first frequency is the observed n followed in parentheses by the expected n for the cell. For the total row and column, the first number is the total observations for each target followed by the percentage that frequency makes up of the overall total.
Chapter V

Discussion

Above all other types of media, such as magazines and various forms of advertising, teens identify television as most influential in their lives (Fay & Yanoff, 2000). The present study examines a popular ABC Family television program, *The Secret Life of the American Teenager (Secret Life)*, that many teens are turning to and to which they are potentially relating (Dempsey, 2008; Werts, 2010). This study explores how the program portrays discussion about sex and suggests what impressionable teens may be considering normal scripts about sexual discussion through the lens of program analysis (e.g., Ferris et al., 2007). The program specifically targets a teen audience and features fictional themes almost entirely oriented around teen sexuality and teen pregnancy (Dempsey, 2008; Werts, 2010). When a television program, or even a feature film, deals with sexuality and pregnancy, it is most often that of consenting adults and not teenagers in high school (e.g., Eyal et al., 2007). A limited amount of research presents analysis about television programming both targeting young adults and featuring the sexual lives of them as well. Through a quantitative content analysis, several patterns emerged about the ways in which teenage sexual activity and teenage pregnancy are portrayed and how messages about those subjects are communicated on the program.

The focus of *Secret Life* stands out in the network’s history and current lineup because it marks a significant thematic change from its previous programming. ABC Family was originally created by Pat Robertson in the late 1970s to serve as a Christian family-oriented cable-satellite channel called the Christian Broadcasting Network, and had a long history of pro-family and pro-Christian programming (Ostrow, 2001; Werts, 2010). Renamed repeatedly, first “the Family Channel” and then “the Fox Family” channel after purchased by Fox, the network was acquired
by Walt Disney Co. in 2001 and redesigned under its current moniker (Ostrow, 2001). Although the channel was contractually obligated to continue to feature some CBN programs, like the 700 Club, restrictions did not apply universally to their entire schedule (Ostrow, 2001). According to Werts (2010), ABC Family’s current lineup “hit the buzz sweet spot” because not only do teens and young adults gravitate toward it, but their parents do as well. Since undergoing an “identity” makeover in 2003, ABC Family’s adult (18-49) audience grew by 70% and its younger (12-34) viewing audience doubled (Werts, 2010). The channel targets the young adult, millennial audience with its wide lineup, both currently (e.g., Make It or Break It, Melissa & Joey, Pretty Little Liars, Switched at Birth, and Secret Life) and previously (e.g., Greek, Huge, Kyle XY, and Lincoln Heights) (ABC Family; Werts, 2010). The majority of the programs on ABC Family’s current schedule focus on somewhat controversial themes, but none as controversial as the Secret Life of the American Teenager. The show stands out because its sole concentration, from the pilot and on, is placed on teenage sexual experimentation and teenage pregnancy and parenting (ABC Family).

Given that teens tend to watch this program (Werts, 2010), and guided predominantly by the social cognitive theory concept that mediated portrayals can influence behavior (Bandura, 1986), with a focus toward future research these findings could explore through SCT and cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1994), the results of this thesis can demonstrate what these viewers might be learning through consumption of the program. This study addresses the messages the show provides about sexual activity, communication, and personal relationships to which Secret Life’s teen audience is exposed. Media has the potential to teach viewers about appropriate norms and behaviors, and through observational learning, teens are supplied with models of different behaviors that exist outside their day-to-day environment (Bandura, 2001,
2002, 2009). Because that teen audience could potentially be considering sexual activity, this study also explores any consequences of sexual activities depicted in the program, as well as any insinuation as to what precautions should be taken to prevent said possible consequences. Furthermore, this thesis also explores if *Secret Life* gives young adults the idea to become sexually active, and how it informs and educates their decision-making process regarding sexual activity.

**Summary of Findings and Implications**

Of the 592 total scenes in the sample for this study, 40% (238 scenes) featured sexually oriented content, compared to 60% (354) of scenes identified as non-sexually oriented. This corresponds well with patterns observed by Eyal et al. (2007) about the increase in sexual discussion in teen programs compared to depictions of sexual intercourse. While this study assumed an equal proportion of sexual content and non-sexual content, most studies actually suggest the proportion is more likely to be somewhere around 15% sexually-oriented to 85% non-sexually oriented programming (Aubrey, 2004; Hust et al., 2008). While there’s a significantly lower proportion in other studies overall, the proportion found in this content analysis is noteworthy. Thus, *Secret Life* is a source that presents significantly more discussion of sex and teen pregnancy than other programs that target an adolescent audience. Put into context, the results of the study suggest that roughly, within one 42-minute episode of this program, at least 17 full minutes of it will be entirely about sex.

According to Bandura (1986), television acts as a socialization tool and can have an impact on viewers’ attitudes, actions, or behaviors. SCT provides a way of explaining the media’s less direct influence on teens’ behaviors than, for example, peers or family members. Furthermore, Fisher et al. (2004) explained that the frequency and manner in which television
portrays sexual activity can impact viewers’ decisions about sex in their own lives. For example, the more frequently and unrealistically positive sex is represented, the more likely audience members are to make misinformed and dangerous decisions about it (Fisher et al., 2004). The results of this study indicate that Secret Life viewing audiences are exposed to a variety of messages – some with the potential to foster pro-social effects and influence attitude development and some with the potential to reinforce stereotypes about teenagers and sexual activity.

Target and location. Overall, the message that Secret Life sends is that a teenager likely will turn to her or his (opposite- or same-sex) peers to talk about sex more than they will anyone else. Furthermore, the least likely targets depicted for sexual discussion were opposite-sex parents, both parents together, or medical professionals. In addition to whom Secret Life portrays their teen characters talking to about sex, this study also examines where those conversations and interactions are taking place. Generally, Secret Life shows that conversations about sex happen in the home. Taken into context with real-life situations, it’s not surprising who the teenagers on the show are portrayed as talking to about sex. Findings from this content analysis coincide with Fay and Yanoff’s (2000), Powell’s (2008) and Sutton’s et al. (2002) research showing that real-life teens are more likely to seek out peers’ advice or input on sex than any other source, least of all medical professionals. By portraying more realistic scenarios that teens may find themselves in – or may have already experienced at some point – Secret Life’s characters could be achieving a better likeness with their target audience. In accordance with SCT (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002, 2009), this likeness then creates a higher chance that teen viewers will perceive the character’s behaviors as ‘normal’ or socially acceptable and model them. Therefore, the more rewarding it is for the characters on Secret Life to talk predominantly to their peers about sex, the more likely
viewers of the show may be to talk predominantly to their peers about sex. However, this is only one of the many possible outcomes for depictions of this nature – depending on perceived homophily with *Secret Life* characters, viewers may also be deterred from modeling their portrayed behaviors.

Interestingly, *Secret Life* suggests parents and other adults are not often turned to for advice about sexual topics. Moreover, when the teenage characters do turn to other characters on the show, the valence of the conversation is most often negative. Other researchers have noted that real-life teens avoid talking about sexual experiences with their parents (e.g., Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Guerrero and Afifi (1995) found high avoidance overall with topics about sex between adolescents and their parents, but less resistance to talking to same-sex parents about certain sexual or relational topics. This corresponds directly with the previously mentioned way *Secret Life* portrays (or does not portray) these types of conversations with parents: infrequently with parents in general and rarely, if ever, with parents of the opposite sex. This creates a scenario in which teen viewers are not seeing positive character interaction between teens and parents when it comes to discussions about sex, and could fear negative consequences of these real-life conversations. This produces a different kind of situation, where teens on the program are not discussing sex with their parents (or other adults) and not providing an opportunity to demonstrate to young viewers that having these conversations can be beneficial. Additionally, this could send the message to parents who also watch the show that their teenagers really do not want to talk to them about sex.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight what message the program could be sending by reflecting a more realistic representation of these types of conversations between teens and their parents. According to previous research, noted above, *Secret Life* mirrors the
types of conversations teens are already having about sex, thus creating more opportunities for viewers to perceive more likeness between themselves and the characters on the program. *Secret Life* may have less appeal and teens may evaluate it as unrealistic if it depicted more parental discussions about sex. By presenting realistic portrayals, teen viewers are more likely to continue watching the show and create opportunities for modeling and learning – as per SCT and cultivation. Overall, these findings suggest that parents may need to counter balance messages the program presents about sexuality with their own intervening messages to help shape sexual behavioral development and attitudes. *Secret Life*’s portrayal of teen life adheres to the idea that teenagers mostly talk to their friends about sex and shy away from their parents.

The vast majority of conversations about sex on *Secret Life* take place in the home. These findings suggest that the program models such conversations as considered private matters. It’s worth noting, however, that despite the prevalence of portrayals of in-home sexual discussions, very few of those conversations happened with the teen characters’ parents. This could potentially demonstrate that these types of conversations are meant to be private and that while teens may want to have them in private spaces, they still do not talk to their parents about sex. This sets up a rather complicated scenario in which a character may be seeking the comfort of their own home for a private conversation, but may not be comfortable enough with their family to have it. Thus, viewers looking to *Secret Life* for models on teen behavior in these kinds of delicate circumstances are being exposed to messages that could potentially deter them from confiding in their parents about sex, which is again a general reflection of the manner in which real-life teens deal with these circumstances.

It is possible for teens to learn positive sexual health messages from popular television programming. For example, Collins et al. (2003) demonstrated that the inclusion of sexual health
messages on popular programming has the potential to positively influence audiences. After watching an episode of Friends that focused heavily on the use of condoms, the researchers noted that many teen fans of the show were more likely to know condom efficacy long after the episode aired (Collins et al., 2003). While condom use is not necessarily equivalent to seeking professional medical advice, it is a portrayal of productive sexual health information seeking. Additionally, Martino et al. (2005) found that black and white teens who were exposed to mediated portrayals of sexual talk and sexual behavior were more confident in their ability to understand and practice safe sex in their own lives.

However, previous research on the portrayal of sexual health and responsibility has noted a similar lack of portrayals of these topics on other entertainment programming. For example, Hust et al. (2008) found that less than half of 1% (.2%) of their sample portrayed messages related to sexual health compared to the 12% (almost 30,000 units) of the sample that featured sexual content. Eyal et al. (2007) found that only 4%-5% of their sample of scenes from popular television programs between 2001-2002 and 2004-2005 focused on sexual risk and responsibility. Fisher et al. (2004) found similar results where sexual responsibility was present in only about 6% of the programs in their study and 13% of shows portraying intercourse. The television program, *Secret Life*, locates this burden of responsibility about sexual education primarily with teens rather than medical officials and parents. These findings add to this previous research about whose responsibility it is to provide sexual education. If teens are rarely exposed to portrayals of a sexually active or pregnant teen seeking medical advice or parental advice, it could imply there are no good scripts available for how to engage in such dialogues in a meaningful manner. However, this is only one interpretation of this portrayal of reality. It is also
possible that increased instances of sexual responsibility were located outside the coded sample or that pushing sexual responsibility too hard would turn off the viewing audience.

**Topic and activity.** One of the main themes of *Secret Life*, in addition to sexual behaviors, is the consequence of teen pregnancy. What was of interest in this part of the present study was how this show would portray discussions and activities surrounding the incident of sex – including pre-sexual activity topics, such as the use of birth control or other contraceptives, or post-sexual activity topics, such as physical or emotional consequences and, of course, pregnancy. This relates, in part, to Eyal et al.’s (2007) variable of “risk and responsibility” messages, which look at portrayals of sexual patience and precautions, as well as risks or negative consequences of sex (p. 320). One of the preliminary assumptions about the messages sent by *Secret Life* was that, with a program focused so heavily on teenage pregnancy, preventative measures would be a prominent topic once news of the young main character’s pregnancy broke. However, only 25% of the conversations about sex on the program focused on “pre-activity” topics, including those very same preventative measures. Eyal et al. (2007) found a similar pattern, with 20% of the scenes in each of their samples focusing on risk and responsibility, but an overall increase in the presence of these messages on teen programming in comparison to non-teen programming.

According to Carpenter (1998), some sex education campaigns place a central focus on the consequences and ramifications of sexual activity. Collins’ et al. (2003) findings compliment these results, adding that mediated messages about sex that place an emphasis on preventative sex education often do so through the use of statistics about pregnancy and condom usage. *Secret Life* does not completely reinforce these patterns when it comes to prevention. Overall, an emphasis is placed on post-sexual activity topics (comprising 60% of sexual conversations) and
the valence of these discussions tends to be negative, regardless of the target. This does demonstrate the program’s focus on consequences and ramifications of engaging in sex, but messages do not as often address specific preventative measures.

Furthermore, although condom usage was not specifically coded, it was included in the pre-activity coding schema along with similar activities. Pre-activity sexual discussions were emphasized in less than a quarter of the conversations about sexual activity. While this figure represents a possible increase in sexual health discussions in comparison to results found by Hust et al. (2008) with .2% and 4%-5% found by Eyal et al. (2007) as discussed above, it’s still low for a program almost entirely dedicated to the sex lives of teenagers. Furthermore, the majority of these conversations are portrayed as taking place with peers, who could potentially be equally uninformed about sexual health. Thus, sexual health is an infrequent topic of discussion and the conversations take place with less knowledgeable and experienced counterparts. Overall, these results question the positive role modeling of prosocial behaviors in Secret Life that curious and impressionable teen viewers could observe.

However, in accordance with SCT, the presence of these messages can be used to explore potential for behavioral influence. By presenting the events surrounding the main characters pregnancy, it is possible that young viewers’ behaviors could be influenced both positively and negatively. According to Bandura (1986, 2001, 2002, 2009), exposing viewers to systems of rewards or punishments will influence their decisions to model certain behaviors that are demonstrated through the media – but, the decision to model is still dependent on mitigating factors and reward or punishment alone does not solely determine modeling. In the case of Amy’s pregnancy on Secret Life, because she is not exactly rewarded for experimenting with sex and getting pregnant, a viewer may choose to take precautions to avoid modeling her behavior.
However, it is also possible that a viewer may still model her behavior anyway. Future research that includes audience involvement will help to further explore these types of SCT media effects.

According to SCT, when someone who is unfamiliar with a different behavioral concept is exposed to social standards via a television show, the observed content provides a framework for thinking about the concept and may influence their behaviors or actions when faced with decisions regarding that concept from that point on (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002, 2009). By watching *Secret Life*, teenage viewers are provided with some information about what they should do when in pre-sexual situations, with the majority of the televised content focusing on what can happen after they’ve had sex. Ultimately, these patterns can leave uncertainty, tension, and questions for teenagers about sexual activity and their own sexual health. But, the portrayal of teen sexual experimentation and teen pregnancy and parenting can still provide positive outcomes as well. While questions may still remain for teens who regularly watch *Secret Life*, their exposure to these themes and patterns still provides a version of reality that may either differ or reinforce the one they are currently experiencing. This has the potential to provide them with role models and scripts for dealing with similar encounters.

**Valence.** In addition to all the other factors taken into consideration in this content analysis of *Secret Life*’s portrayal of teens’ sexual activity, one of the most important and potentially most revealing are those dealing with the valence of the sexual content of scenes. The message most clearly sent by this show is that when a teen has a conversation about sex, it is most frequently a negative one. However, when they have an actual sexual encounter, it is most likely to be a positive one. This poses an interesting contrast between what the program demonstrates through talk (negativity about sex) and what they portray through action (positivity about sex). This, of course, needs to be considered in conjunction with the proportion of scenes
featuring sexual talk only (comprising 87% of sexually oriented scenes) and sexual action only and sexual action and sexual discussion together (comprising the remaining 13% of sexually oriented scenes). The program sends mixed messages to its viewers, who could have a hard time internalizing them and applying meaning to their own real life situations.

The manner in which this program depicts its messages is important because, as stated previously, positive or negative portrayals could either reinforce or deter viewers’ modeling of these behaviors (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002, 2009). By most often portraying negatively valenced discussions of sexual interaction, *Secret Life* does have the potential to discourage teen viewers from discussing sex openly beforehand and encourage sexual experimentation that may result in unplanned pregnancies or other consequences. Hust’s et al. (2008) findings suggest that negatively valenced messages are not as effective in changing sexual behaviors because they elicit feelings of humiliation in viewers who turn to mediated portrayals out of embarrassment. If teens are mostly exposed to negative messages about sexual activity, it could create fear about sexual discussions and lead to reinforcing topic avoidance norms about sexual discussion (Hust et al., 2008). Additionally, Eyal and Kunkel (2008) found that programs depicting negative consequences of sex are related to more negative interpretations of sex among viewers. In fact, in Fay and Yanoff’s (2000) study, teenage participants claimed that the media’s negative portrayal of sex leaves them “scared or frustrated about sex” (p. 173). *Secret Life*’s few positively valenced portrayals of sexual activity and predominance of negative sexual discussions could also relate to both Carpenter’s (1998) and Jackson’s (2005) findings examining columnists’ advice about sexual activity in teen magazines that focused heavily on abstinence and least often highlighted sex for pleasure.
In this study, there are several different factors that contribute to coding a scene with sexual activity as negatively valenced, such as the portrayal of regret, sadness, anger, fear, anxiety or depression, which could also be troubling to an audience member. However, Fay and Yanoff (2000) demonstrated that teens are open to discussing sex but want to do so in a factual, judgment-free environment. Predominantly negative portrayals of sexual interaction may not reach teens because they may appear to be uncharacteristic; sex is not always negative. Thus, the greater proportion of negatively-valenced sexual discussions could have the opposite impact on viewers who may judge Secret Life’s portrayals as unrealistic. What may be more helpful would be a mediated portrayal of sex that is more balanced and realistic, which Secret Life could be doing by including depictions that are negatively valenced in some cases and positively valenced in others within the same scene.

**Study Limitations**

With a content analysis project such as this one, certain limitations are expected. Similar studies have identified potential problems with sample sizes and selection, findings applicability, coding schema and coder training, (e.g., Eyal et al., 2007; Ferris et al., 2007; Keyton et al., 2007). While the results of this study have shown an array of both significant and insignificant findings from the content analysis, several limitations to the study should be considered. In particular, the timeliness of the study and episode sample could have contributed to study results and could have implications for future research.

The time taken to carry out this study is also a limitation that needs to be acknowledged. This project was started in 2009 when much of the shock over Secret Life and its content was fresh, however as this study has carried on it’s possible that this subject is no longer taboo. Furthermore, production of this program continues and three additional seasons have aired in that
time, which, if evaluated in the style of this content analysis, could have an impact on this study’s results. For example, a homosexual male character was added and became one of the closest friends to the main character’s younger sister, which would have put him in many scenes, and a second teenage main character on the show became pregnant and her storyline dealt heavily with abortion and, subsequently, loss. On the other hand, because this show is still on air and currently in production for another season, that could make analyzing its early content even more relevant.

Finally, the magnitude of the project itself could be considered a limitation of the study. The codebook was quite dense and variables could have been broken down even more specifically than they already were. For example, with the ‘sexual topic/sexual act’ coding, it’s possible that the main character’s pregnancy and discussions of it should have been its own variable rather than attached to one category. Had her pregnancy (or her mother’s) been coded on its own, the results of this study could have been vastly different.

Future Directions

This study has opened up the possibility for a great deal of additional research about *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*. The quantitative content analysis performed for this thesis has only scratched the surface of the content and messages present on a program focused entirely about teenage sexual interaction and teenage pregnancy and parenting. An additional examination of the specific conversations occurring just between teens and their parents on the show could help to examine all the nuanced ways in which the show does still portray these interactions. Additionally, each new season so far has focused on a new pregnancy and new storylines. For example, the first two volumes (season one) focused on Amy’s pregnancy (the primary topic of this project), the third and fourth volumes (season two) featured Ann’s (Amy’s
mother) pregnancy, and the fifth and sixth volumes (season three) focused on Adrian’s pregnancy. A future study could examine Secret Life’s portrayal of the treatment of pregnant and mothering teens, because the show has demonstrated a pattern of keeping this topic central to their plot. As an extension, a future study could also specifically examine the portrayal of preventative sexual health practices on the show. As discussed above, this study did not focus on that concept alone, but combined with other pre-sexual activity topics and depictions within the larger framework of topic coding schemas.

Also not examined in this study, but a potential extension of it, future studies could look at Secret Life’s portrayal of both threat and efficacy as related to sexual acts. In time, research in this vein could explore the program’s treatment of the threat of having or pressure to have or to not have sex and how that relates to the relationships portrayed on the program. Future research could also the examine efficacy of being able to effectively use birth control or condoms or even the maturity involved in these decisions. Something not considered in the present study was the emotional maturity of the characters involved in these situations on the program and how that could have had an impact on results. According to Aubrey (2004), the portrayal of emotional and social consequences of sexual interactions are often underscored and need to be further examined by media effects researchers. A possible extension of this study could also specifically look at the emotional and social portrayal of teenager sexual activity on Secret Life. Of course, of ultimate concern is how this program and others like it can influence the attitudes, values and behaviors of its viewers. Therefore, a natural, and important, extension of this project is one that actually involves the audience that engages with Secret Life.

Audience involvement. Results from this project can be used to inform future research that focuses on and includes elements of audience involvement. For example, if the show’s
audience consists of teen mothers, research can address what messages are present that are prominent about their lived experience, and if the depiction of teen pregnancy is realistic or glamorized. Previous considerations of the focus of this project using cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1994) would greatly inform future directions of this work and extensions of the present study’s results. According to Gerbner et al. (1994), “heavy viewers” of television are more susceptible to cultivating dominant views of reality, and Potter (1990) contends that specific television genre viewing has the ability to produce cultivation effects beyond generic television viewing. Additionally, the increased number of television programming focusing on teen pregnancy has reinforced a ‘teen pregnancy’ genre. In essence, this could inform an extension of this study evaluating heavy viewers of Secret Life and the teen pregnancy genre and their potential to cultivate the predominant values and attitudes about teens’ sexual activity in the program in conjunction with their viewing patterns.

Additional studies could incorporate audience members in any number of methodological ways, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups, but emphasis here will be placed on new variables that could grow out of these results. According to Calvert et al. (2006), emotional involvement with media characters had a significant impact on whether or not adolescents considered characters role models. Furthermore, because model attractiveness impacts whether or not viewers ‘learn’ from patterned mediated behaviors (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2002, 2009), an entire line of research could be developed based on teen audiences’ interaction with Secret Life characters. Therefore, projects involving viewers could look at involvement with characters, such as attachment and parasocial interactions, and the impact this has on modeling the messages and behaviors endorsed by these characters.
A future study could examine the extent to which young adults endorse the reality offered by *Secret Life* and extend that to their own interpretation of teen sexual activity and teen pregnancy. This could lead to an examination of safe sex practices of viewers, before and after watching the program, as well as how the portrayal of teen sexual activity and teenage pregnancy and parenting could affect the viewers’ future plans for sexual interactions and family planning. *Secret Life*’s potential to elicit prosocial attitudes about sexual activity and sexual health as a result of viewing the program are important to examine, given the emphasis teens place on television’s role in their lives (Fay and Yanoff, 2000). Furthermore, as suggested by Pinkleton’s et al. (2008) findings, a deeper examination of audience interactions with the program could help understanding the role media literacy programs could play in mediating teens’ development of sexual attitudes and behaviors.

An additional consideration for future research is to examine parents and teen viewers co-viewing and interaction patterns about the show and its content. While this could certainly prove to be a difficult population to track down, a study that examines this particular viewing audience could provide valuable insight into the implications of watching a television show about teen sex with ones’ parents. Communication between teens and their parents about sex is often avoided (e.g., Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995), but perhaps *Secret Life* could create a unique situation in which these conversations occur more naturally as the parent and child have them through the guise of discussing a program they enjoy together.

**Conclusion**

The results of this thesis ultimately reinforce the findings of previous research teams (e.g., Fisher et al., 2004; Kunkel et al., 2007; and Sutton et al., 2002) that have looked at sexual activity on teen-oriented programs. However, with this pre-cursor study about one specific
fictional program’s depiction of teenage sexual activity and teenage pregnancy and parenting, an entire avenue of future research exists. Not only does this study illustrate the sexualized content of the popular *Secret Life*, but it also provides evidence about how closely the program mimics real-life patterns of teens’ communication and attitudes toward sexual activity. A great deal of future research could utilize these preliminary results to incorporate teen audiences more fully in the research process about their perceptions related to televised content. Because there are other programs that focus specifically on the lives of teenagers, it is possible to also begin examining the manner in which genre and program specific content can impact audiences’ value, attitude, and behavior development. With technological advancements (e.g., DVR, TiVo, and other Internet-based programmatic streaming) that enable an audience member’s ability to pick and choose specific television viewing over being subjected to broadcast schedules, the need for research that examines media effects based on choice is becoming increasingly more important. This thesis represents the beginning of gaining a better understanding of what impact targeted viewing effects can have on teen audiences.
Appendix A

*The Secret Life of the American Teenager* Episode List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode #</th>
<th>Episode Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volume 1:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aired,</strong> July 2008 – September 2008; <strong>DVD Release,</strong> December 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Falling in Love</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>You Are My Everything</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>I Feel Sick</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Caught</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>What Have You Done to Me?</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Love For Sale</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Absent</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Your Cheatin’ Heart</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Slice of Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Back to School Special</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Just Say No</td>
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<td><strong>Volume 2:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aired,</strong> January 2009 – March 2009; <strong>DVD Release,</strong> June 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Secret Wedding of the American Teenager</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Baked Nevada</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The Father and the Son</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>That’s Enough of That</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Chocolate Cake</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Unforgiven</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Making Up Is Hard to Do</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Money for Nothing, Chicks for Free</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Maybe Baby</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Whoomp! (There It Is)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>One Night at Band Camp</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>And Unto Us, a Child Is Born</td>
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<td><strong>Volume 3:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aired,</strong> June 2009 – September 2009; <strong>DVD Release,</strong> December 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Big One</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>What’s Done Is Done</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Par for the Course</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Ciao</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Born Free</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The Summer of our Discontent</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Summertime</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>A New Kind of Green</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Hot Nuts</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Knocked Up, Who’s there?</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Crammed</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Be My, Be My Baby</td>
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<td>Episode #</td>
<td>Episode Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volume 4:</td>
<td>Aired, January 2010 – March 2010; DVD Release, June 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“You Don’t Know What You’ve Got…”</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>“Til It’s Gone”</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Loved &amp; Lost</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Just Say Me</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The Second Time Around</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Let’s Try That Again</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>The Rhythm of Life</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Mistakes Were Made</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Choices</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Good Girls &amp; Boys</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>I Got You, Babe</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Ben There, Done That</td>
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Appendix B

Final SL Codebook

I. Sexual Talk/Activity Variables: When coding for the following variables, only one variable will be coded at a time when watching an episode. For example, the episode will be started, and the first variable (Sexually Oriented Content) will be coded without any attention paid to the remaining variables or subvariables (Target, Location, Sexual Act or Topic, or Valence). Once this variable has been coded to the coders’ satisfaction, the next variable will be independently coded. Once the first variable has been coded, only scenes determined to contain sexually oriented material will be coded for the remaining four variables. If at any time it is unclear as to how a scene should be coded, the scene should be marked as “unknown” so as to flag it for further discussion.

Sexually oriented content is defined, in part, as any depiction of sexual activity, sexually suggestive behavior, or any talk about sexuality or sexual activity or after-effects of sexual activity; this includes everything listed below.

Scenes coded as Sexual Talk include the following:

Comments about own/others’ sexual actions or interests: Can include discussion of desires, interests, activities, future plans

Talk about past sexual encounters: Discussions about past sexual actions or interests.

Talk leading toward a sexual encounter: Intentionally intimate or seductive communication that could lead toward sex

Talk about sex crimes: Can include discussions of sexual violence, rape, incest, or molestation.

Other: Unsure exact nature – further discussion warranted.

Scenes coded as Sexual Activity include the following:

Physical flirting: Using the body or parts of the body or nearby items in a sexually suggestive manner

Passionate kissing: Kissing on the lips, “making out”, using mouth or tongue anywhere on the head, neck, or hands in a seductive way

Intimate touching: Touching a body in such a way as to bring about sexual arousal or imply sexual activity

Sexual intercourse strongly implied: Situations where sexual intercourse (e.g., vaginal, oral, anal, manual, or masturbation) is not directly depicted but is strongly implied to have occurred or is to occur soon

Other: All other sexual activity or anything that is particularly unclear – further discussion warranted.
A. Sexually Oriented Content: Record the main topic of conversation or action in the scene.
1. Sexually oriented: Main topic of conversation or action of the scene focuses on sexual intercourse, or consequences of sex acts (e.g., pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, emotional or psychological impact of sex).
2. Non-sexually oriented: Main topic of conversation or action of the scene focuses on any other topic than sex.
3. Unknown: Can’t discern the main topic of conversation in the scene.

B. Overall Scene Content: Identify the main sexual component in the scene:
1. Sexual discussion Scene content focuses mainly on characters engaging in sexual discussion.
2. Sexual activity Scene content focuses mainly on characters engaging in sexual activity.
3. Both Scene content focuses on characters both discussing sexual activity and engaging in sexual activity.
0. Neither Scene content does not focus on sexual discussion or sexual activity.

C. Target of sexual discussion: Record the main person on the receiving end of the sexual conversation in the scene.
1. Self: Character is speaking to oneself in an internal or external monologue.
2. Same-sex Peer: Character is speaking to a similarly aged friend of the same sex about sex.
3. Opposite-sex Peer: Character is speaking to a similarly aged friend of the opposite sex about sex.
4. Same-sex Family Member: Character is speaking to a similarly aged family member (e.g., a sibling) of the same sex about sex.
5. Opposite-sex Family Member: Character is speaking to a similarly aged family member (e.g., a sibling) of the opposite sex about sex.
6. Same-sex Parent: Character is speaking to own same-sex parent (mother or father) or guardian about sex.
7. Opposite-sex Parent: Character is speaking to own opposite-sex parent (mother or father) or guardian about sex.
8. Medical Professional: Character is speaking to a medical professional (e.g. doctor, nurse, psychologist, psychiatrist, therapist, or other medically trained person) about sex.
9. Other adult: Character is speaking to another adult (e.g. guidance counselor, religious leader) other than own parent or guardian, or medical professional about sex.
10. **Parents of both sexes:** Character is speaking to own opposite- and same-sex parents (mother and father) or guardians about sex.

**D. Target of sexual activity:** Record the main person on the receiving end (i.e., the aggressed) of the sexual activity in the scene.

1. **Self:** Character is engaging in a sexual act with themself.
2. **Same-sex Peer:** Character is engaging in a sexual act with a similarly aged friend of the same sex.
3. **Opposite-sex Peer:** Character is engaging in a sexual act with a similarly aged friend of the opposite sex.
4. **Medical Professional:** Character is engaging in a sexual act with a medical professional (e.g., doctor, nurse, psychologist, psychiatrist, therapist, or other medically trained person).
5. **Other adult:** Character is engaging in a sexual act with another adult (e.g., guidance counselor, religious leader) other than own parent or guardian, or medical professional.

**E. Location of sexual discussion:** Record the location where the sexual conversation occurred.

1. **School:** Discussion of sexual activity takes place on school grounds (e.g., in a classroom, counselor’s office, hallway, courtyard, cafeteria, parking lot, or other location associated with the school).
2. **Home:** Discussion of sexual activity takes place in the home of one or more characters. Home includes indoor (e.g., bedroom, kitchen, other shared living space, garage) and outdoor spaces (e.g., front or backyard, sidewalk with house in background).
3. **Medical facility:** Discussion of sexual activity takes place in or on the grounds of a medical facility (e.g., doctor’s office, free health clinic like Planned Parenthood, or other location associated with medical professionals).
4. **Other:** Discussion of sexual activity takes place in another location (e.g., a store or other business, inside an automobile or bus, etc.).
F. Location of engagement in sexual activity: Record the location where the engagement in sexual activity occurred.

1. School: Engagement in sexual activity takes place on school grounds (e.g., in a classroom, counselor’s office, hallway, courtyard, cafeteria, parking lot, or other location associated with the school).
2. Home: Engagement in sexual activity takes place in the home of one or more characters. Home includes indoor (e.g., bedroom, kitchen, other shared living space, garage) and outdoor spaces (e.g., front or backyard, sidewalk with house in background).
3. Medical facility: Engagement in sexual activity takes place in or on the grounds of a medical facility (e.g., doctor’s office, free health clinic like Planned Parenthood, or other location associated with medical professionals).
4. Other: Engagement in sexual activity takes place in another location (e.g., a store or other business, inside an automobile or bus, etc.).

G. Sexual Topic Coding: Record where the main topic of the sexual discussion falls into one of the following categories:

1. Pre-activity: Includes discussions of topics prior to a sexual act. This can include discussions about the use of birth control/contraceptives, pressure to engage or not engage in the act, planning events leading up to the act.
2. Activity: Includes discussions of the actual act, physical touching and implications of a sexual act, scenes in which the character(s) are in bed/undressed, scenes discussing what constitutes sex (e.g., oral sex).
3. Post-activity: Includes discussions that occur after the character(s) has engaged in a sexual act. This can include discussions of the experience of physical/emotional consequences or after effects, discussions of a main character’s pregnancy.

H. Sexual Act Coding: Record where the main depiction of the sexual activity falls into one of the following categories:

1. Pre-activity: Includes depictions of action prior to a sexual act. This can include the use of birth control/contraceptives, pressure to engage or not engage in the act, flirtatious gestures/enticements.
2. Activity: Includes depictions of the actual act, physical touching and implications of a sexual act, scenes in which the characters are in bed/undressed.
3. Post-activity: Includes depictions of physical/emotional consequences, depictions of events associated with main character’s pregnancy.
I. Sexual Topic Valence Coding: Record where the main topic of the sexual discussion falls into one of the following categories:

1. Positive: Includes discussions of sex framed in a positive light, excited/happy speech and nonverbal behaviors, implications of positive anticipation, happiness, enjoyment, and excitement about having engaged in a sexual act or at the thought of engaging in a sexual act.

2. Negative: Includes discussions of sex framed in a negative light, use of sarcasm when discussing sex, avoidance of discussing the act or topic, implications of regret, sadness, anger, fear, anxiety, or depression about having engaged in a sexual act, at the thought of engaging in a sexual act, or when discussing barriers to preferred activities as a result of having engaged in a sexual act.

3. Ambivalent: Includes discussions of sex that is equally positive and negative, seeing both sides of the issue, equal weight in the conversation.

4. Neutral: No major positive or negative discussion of sex, or the scene is more informational without emotional reaction.

J. Sexual Act Valence Coding: Record where the main depiction of sexual activity falls into one of the following categories:

1. Positive: Includes depictions of the engagement in the act of sex framed in a positive light, excited/happy speech and nonverbal behaviors, implications of positive anticipation, happiness, enjoyment, excitement about having engaged in a sexual act or at the thought of engaging in a sexual act.

2. Negative: Includes depictions of the engagement in the act of sex framed in a negative light, implications of regret, sadness, anger, fear, anxiety, or depression at having engaged in a sexual act or at the thought of engaging in a sexual act.

3. Ambivalent: Includes depictions of the engagement in the act of sex that are equally positive and negative.

4. Neutral: No major positive or negative depiction of the engagement in a sexual act, or the scene is more informational without emotional reaction.
II. Character Demographics: Demographics for characters need only to be recorded for scenes coded as having sexually-oriented content. Please follow the directions below for the four demographic variables. First, record the Character ID for each main, speaking character in the scene, one at a time. For example, if the scene centers around three characters engaged in a conversation, the Character ID variable needs to be addressed for each of the three characters, one at a time, beginning with the first character to speak. The three remaining demographic variables need only to be recorded once per scene.

K. Character ID: You will be provided with a sheet of Character IDs and accompanying character photographs, please record the correct character ID for each speaking character in the scene, beginning with the first speaking part.

L. Sex: Record the specifically mentioned, implied, or inferred sex of the character(s) in the scene.

1. Only female characters in scene.
2. Only male characters in scene.
3. Mixed female and male characters in scene.

M. Race: Record the specifically mentioned, implied, or inferred race of the character(s) in the scene.

1. Only White character(s) in scene.
2. Only non-White character(s) in scene.
3. Characters of multiple races in scene.

N. Age: Record the specifically mentioned, implied, or inferred school year range of the character(s) in the scene.

1. Junior High school student(s) only in scene.
2. High School student(s) only in scene
3. Adult(s) only in scene.
4. Mixed Junior High and High School students in scene.
5. Mixed Junior High and Adults in scene.
6. Mixed High School students and Adults in scene.
7. Mixed Junior High and High School students and Adults in scene.
Appendix C

SL Character ID Sheet

I. Main Characters

Amy Juergens – Character ID: A1=1
- High School freshman at the beginning of Volume One.
- Older sister of Ashley Juergens.
- Daughter of George and Anne Juergens.
- Mother of John Juergens.

John Juergens – Character ID: J0=2
- Son of Amy Juergens and Ricky Underwood
- Nephew of Ashley Juergens
- Grandson of George and Anne Juergens
- Foster grandson of Margaret and Shakur

Ashley Juergens – Character ID: A2=3
- Junior High School student in Volumes One and Two,
  High School freshman in Volumes Three and Four
- Younger sister of Amy Juergens.
- Daughter of George and Anne Juergens.
- Aunt of John Juergens.

George Juergens – Character ID: G1=4
- Father of Amy and Ashley Juergens.
- Father of Robby Juergens (Volume 4).
- Husband/Ex-husband of Anne Juergens.
- Grandfather of John Juergens.

Anne Juergens – Character ID: A3=5
- Mother of Amy and Ashley Juergens.
- Mother of Robby Juergens (Volume 4).
- Wife/Ex-wife of George Juergens.
- Grandmother of John Juergens.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Name</th>
<th>Character ID</th>
<th>Age/Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ricky Underwood</strong></td>
<td>R1=6</td>
<td>High School student, Foster child of Margaret and Shakur, Father of John Juergens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ben Boykewich</strong></td>
<td>B1=7</td>
<td>High School freshman at the beginning of Volume One, Son of Leo Boykewich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leo Boykewich</strong></td>
<td>L1=8</td>
<td>Father of Ben Boykewich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adrian Lee</strong></td>
<td>A4=9</td>
<td>High School student, Daughter of Cindy Lee and Ruben Enriquez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ruben Enriquez</strong></td>
<td>R2=10</td>
<td>Adrian’s father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grace Bowman</strong></td>
<td>G2=11</td>
<td>High School student, Daughter of Marshall and Kathleen Bowman, Adoptive sister of Tom Bowman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tom Bowman</strong></td>
<td>T1=12</td>
<td>Grace’s adopted brother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kathleen Bowman – Character ID: K1=13
-Grace’s mother
-Tom’s adoptive mother
-Marshall’s wife, then widow

Jack Pappas – Character ID: J1=14
-High School student

Henry “Hank” Miller – Character ID: H1=15
-High School freshman starting in Volume 1

Alice Valko – Character ID: V1=16
-High School freshman starting in Volume 1

Madison Cooperstein – Character ID: M1=17
-High School freshman starting in Volume 1

Lauren Treacy – Character ID: L2=18
-High School freshman starting in Volume 1

Griffin – Character ID: G3=19
-High School freshman starting in Volume 3
## II. Minor/Recurring Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Name</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Molina</td>
<td>M2=20</td>
<td>High School Guidance Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Hampton</td>
<td>J2=21</td>
<td>High School Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Fields</td>
<td>F1=22</td>
<td>Ricky’s Therapist, Lauren’s father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall Bowman</td>
<td>M3=23</td>
<td>Grace’s father, Tom’s adoptive father, Kathleen’s husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>B2=24</td>
<td>Tom’s friend, Leo Boykewich’s fiancé and then wife, Ben Boykewich’s stepmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy Lee</td>
<td>C1=25</td>
<td>Adrian’s mother, Ex of Ruben, then fiancé and wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Margaret</strong></td>
<td>M4=26</td>
<td>Ricky’s foster mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wife of Shakur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Foster grandmother of John Juergens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shakur</strong></td>
<td>S1=27</td>
<td>Ricky’s foster father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Husband of Margaret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Foster grandfather of John Juergens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mimsy</strong></td>
<td>M5=28</td>
<td>Mother of Anne Juergens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grandmother of Amy and Ashley Juergens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Great grandmother of John Juergens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dr. Jeff Zegay</strong></td>
<td>Z1=29</td>
<td>Boyfriend of Kathleen Bowman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shawna</strong></td>
<td>S2=30</td>
<td>Girlfriend of Jack Pappas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Out of high school, 19 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grant</strong></td>
<td>G4=31</td>
<td>Cousin of Griffin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boyfriend of Ashley, end of season 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dr. Kposowa</strong></td>
<td>K2=32</td>
<td>Amy’s OB/GYN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zoe</strong></td>
<td>Z2=33</td>
<td>- High school student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bunny</strong></td>
<td>B3=34</td>
<td>- Employee of Leo Boykewich - Manager of Ricky and Ben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jimmy Nash</strong></td>
<td>N1=35</td>
<td>- Dates Amy briefly - High School student - Son of Josh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Josh Nash</strong></td>
<td>N2=36</td>
<td>- Anne’s HS Boyfriend - Father of Jimmy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Max</strong></td>
<td>X1=37</td>
<td>- Ruben’s stepson - Adrian’s stepbrother - Dates Adrian - HS student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tammy</strong></td>
<td>T2=38</td>
<td>- Tom’s girlfriend - Out of HS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**David** – Character ID: D1=39  
-Anne’s Boyfriend, boss

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**Dr. Wilameena Bink** – Character ID: W1=40  
-High School Guidance counselor after Mr. Molina  
-PhD

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**Jesse** – Character ID: E1=41  
-Lauren’s boyfriend  
-High school student

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**Mimsy’s Husband** – Character ID: H2=42  
-Mimsy’s new husband

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**Nora** – Character ID: N3=43  
-Ricky’s biological mother
Appendix D

SL Episode Ratings, Volumes 1-4, Source List


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http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117990803

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Seidman, R. (2009, February 3). The Closer, Monk, and Burn Notice lead weekly cable viewing. *TV by the Numbers*. Retrieved from

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Seidman, R. (2009, September 1). Cable ratings: Wizards of Waverly Place, the Closer, WWE Raw & Royal Pains. *TV by the Numbers*. Retrieved from


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