

Media Justice for Some: Unveiling Bias and Narrative Analysis for Mainstream Media Coverage in the War Against Gaza Strip/Palestine 2023

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Abstract

This paper employs a multifaceted approach to scrutinize media bias in coverage of the war against Palestine in the Gaza Strip. Narrative analysis serves as a foundational tool, dissecting the stories presented by mainstream outlets. This involves deconstructing the language, tone, and framing choices to uncover subtle biases that may influence public perception. Observational techniques supplement narrative analysis, providing a real-time examination of how language is deployed in reporting by major media players, including CNN, BBC, and NBC. This involves monitoring the frequency and context of certain terms, identifying patterns, and discerning any disparities in portraying the Palestinian and Israeli perspectives. This quantitative tool allows for a comprehensive assessment of language patterns, identifying recurring themes and potential editorial biases. Additionally, interviews with media professionals' experts offered a qualitative dimension to the study. Throughout the research, a rigorous triangulation of data sources ensures the robustness of findings. The combination of qualitative and quantitative tools enables a nuanced understanding of how language is wielded in media coverage, pinpointing bias and potential breaches of ethical standards. In conclusion, the methodology deployed in this paper is a holistic and integrated approach, blending narrative analysis, observational techniques, content analysis, and expert interviews. This comprehensive toolkit aims to uncover, dissect, and contextualize the linguistic biases and media ethics in mainstream media coverage of the war against Palestine.

Keywords: Media Politics, Palestine, Media Ethics, Gaza Strip, Conflict Reporting, Narrative Analysis

Introduction

Palestine, officially the State of Palestine, is an Arabic-speaking country located in the Southern Levant region of West Asia and in what is known in today's world as "The Middle East" with a population of 5,446,306 (World population, 2024) in 2024 between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. For years and years, people in Palestine lived in peace until the Zionist movement decided to colonize Palestine and establish a "legal home" for the Jewish people and call it "Israel".

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Figure 1: Occupation 101 Explained (Academy, 2024)

Media and the Occupation

The media's role in supporting the Palestinian cause is often likened to the concept of the Fourth Estate, which underscores its significance as a societal watchdog and influencer. This term encapsulates both the overt advocacy and the subtle framing of political issues carried out by the press and news media. Historically, the ongoing occupation against Palestine has been there since 1948, and Gaza has also been named the world's largest open-air prison under complete siege for the past 18 years by Israel, but many people are unaware of that due to the biased media coverage against Gazans and Palestine.

This paper comes timely to showcase an unbiased, unfiltered, and comprehensive discourse analysis to help bridge the research gap related to the Palestinian cause in media and communications.

In contemporary times, this role has expanded with the emergence of what is now termed the "fifth estate" (Sun, 2023) or citizen journalism. This phenomenon enables individuals to contribute their perspectives and narratives to the public discourse via online platforms such as blogs, YouTube, and Instagram. Through these channels, a diverse range of voices can participate in shaping the narrative surrounding the Palestinian cause, enriching the discourse, and broadening its reach beyond traditional media outlets. Media plays a pivotal role in amplifying and supporting the Palestinian cause, serving as a powerful tool for advocacy and raising awareness of the struggles faced by Palestinians. Through various forms of journalism, documentaries, and social media campaigns, the media sheds light on the injustices, human rights violations, and ongoing occupation documented live by Palestinians challenging misconceptions and offering a counter-narrative to dominant discourses. By disseminating information about Palestinian history, culture, and aspirations, the media fosters empathy and solidarity worldwide, mobilizing support for the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, freedom, and justice, but more importantly serves as a platform to share the authentic unbiased narrative. Furthermore, it holds international organizations accountable for their policies and actions affecting Palestinians, urging them to uphold principles of equality, justice, and human rights. Throughout the ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip, Palestinians have utilized social media platforms such as Instagram to document the atrocities they endure in real-time. Live images and videos from Gaza have been shared globally in the hopes of garnering support and ending the war. However, the coverage has come at a heavy cost, with more than 127 journalists reportedly killed during their efforts to report on the genocide, as documented by Al Jazeera as of February 2024. These killings, deemed war crimes under international humanitarian law, underscore the dangers faced by journalists seeking to bring attention to the situation in Gaza.

Research Problem

Despite the imperative for impartial and ethical journalism, concerns persist regarding the biased portrayal of the Gaza Strip genocide in mainstream media outlets. This research seeks to investigate the extent and nature of some of the mainstream media bias, discerning the factors influencing the framing, language, and overall narrative surrounding the Gaza Strip in the coverage provided.

Research Questions

- 1-Does the mainstream media provide biased media coverage during the ongoing genocide against the Gaza Strip?
- 2-How can we move forward to provide more ethical and unbiased media content that complies with Journalism ethics and would bring justice to Palestinians?

By scrutinizing these biases, the study aims to shed light on the ethical implications of such reporting, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of biased media coverage on public perception and global discourse and addressing the existing research gap towards the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

2. Materials and Methods

A meticulous triangulation of data sources has been employed to fortify the reliability and validity of the paper's findings. The integration of a questionnaire and interviews for media professionals and communicators who work in different media outlets and NGOs provided a further layer while shedding light on different perspectives. The in-depth narrative analysis facilitated a nuanced exploration of how language is utilized in media coverage, allowing for the identification of bias and potential deviations from ethical standards. In summary, the methodology employed a holistic and integrated approach, incorporating narrative analysis, content analysis, and expert interviews. The selection criteria for the media outlets aimed to highlight the New York Times as one of the most prominent mainstream media outlets in the world, given the number of readers and fellowships on social media. As for the expert interviews, many of the interviewed experts were selected for easier access and communication as they were willing to take part in the research. The idea was to interview experts working in different areas and fields including NGOs, and English and Arabic media outlets.

The coverage of the Gaza genocide in the New York Times and other major newspapers heavily favored Israel, analysis conducted by other research papers shows. (Israel and Palestine Bias, 2023) The paper revealed many findings and amassed over 1,000 articles from prominent publications such as the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times, focusing on Israel's war with Gaza. They scrutinized the usage of specific terms and the accompanying contexts within these articles through meticulous analysis. The findings underscore a significant disparity in the portrayal of Israelis and pro-Israel perspectives compared to Palestinians and pro-Palestinian viewpoints. The analysis highlights a prevalence of language favoring Israeli narratives while marginalizing Palestinian perspectives. The below keywords and themes have been extracted between October 7th – November 25th, 2023.

Furthermore, adolescents account for about 5 percent of all people living with HIV and about 11 percent of new adult HIV infections (UNICEF, 2022).

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to STIs due to a combination of biological, social, and behavioral factors. During adolescence, hormonal changes significantly affect the reproductive system, and such changes can result in increased sexual desire and experimentation (Stanislaw & Rice, 1988; Corona et al., 2016), which may lead to higher rates of sexual activity and an increased risk of exposure

to STIs (CDC, 2020). This stage is characterized by unstable hormonal profiles since sexual development does not fully mature until years after menarche (Brabin, 2001).

Emotion and social settings, such as when teenagers are with peers or in other affective contexts, can strongly influence adolescent decision-making (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). Adolescents often disregard potential risks and instead view greater potential benefits from risky behavior (Smith et al., 2014). When teenagers engage in such, they typically lack an understanding of the potential consequences (Van den Bos & Hertwig, 2017).

Sex education is used to enhance adolescents' sexual health outcomes. However, some programs have been found to be unsuccessful at lowering risky behaviors. For instance, it was discovered that comprehensive interventions lowered STI rates by 23%, whereas interventions centered on abstinence did not affect teenagers' STI rates (Weaver et al., 2005; Underhill et al., 2007; Petrova & Garcia-Retamero, 2015). Abstinence-only education puts adolescents at greater risk of unprotected intercourse (Shepherd et al., 2017) and leaves little demonstrable impact on teenagers' sexual behaviors (Harper et al., 2010). Furthermore, Leung et al. (2019) found that existing sex education in the United Kingdom did not improve the sexual health outcomes of adolescents. They attributed this to schools not addressing issues that adolescents currently face, like pornography or same-sex relationships, and overlooking the emotional aspect of sexuality. As a result, young people turn to their peers and popular culture to seek these kinds of information (Mckee, 2012).

Teen dramas display an understanding of their audience and engage and spark their interest through representations of gender, age, and popular culture (Aslinger, 2008). However, it is important to note that portrayals of sexuality in media can significantly affect the sexual health behaviors people choose to engage in (Falconer, 2019). Exposure to problematic content may put youth, especially those with impulsive sensation-seeking tendencies, at a higher risk for unhealthy behaviors (Bleakley et al., 2014). Thus, putting forth a realistic and non-stigmatizing portrayal will help to improve sexual health (Eyal et al., 2014). As the type of health messaging can impact the sexual health outcomes of adolescents, the researchers found it critical to analyze the portrayals of sexual risk behaviors and STIs in popular television series. Specifically, this study aims to analyze the content of the Netflix series Sex Education and to describe its portrayal of sexual risk behaviors and the transmission, symptoms, prevention, and treatment of STIs.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to analyze the content of the Netflix series Sex Education and describe how it portrayed adolescent risk behaviors and STIs. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the key themes regarding general sexual health presented in the series?

2. What are the adolescent risk behaviors evident in each episode?
3. How are STIs and related issues presented in the series?
4. Based on the results of the study, what curriculum or health policy-making interventions do the researchers propose to address the identified gaps in sex education?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

The Health Belief Model (HBM) suggests that beliefs have an impact on what people do when it comes to their health and that people's willingness to act depends on a variety of variables, namely perceived vulnerability, perceived severity, perceived advantages, perceived barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy (Rosenstock, 1974). It means that the desire to be healthy and the conviction that a particular behavior will improve one's health will make up a health-related behavior (LaMorte, 2022). Abraham and Sheeran (2015) argue that through the HBM, evidence-based health education can have a theoretical and practical foundation if persuasive strategies are used to alter behavior-related attitudes. Specific cues to action, such as mass media initiatives, have the potential to impact individual behaviors by offering precise information, fostering self-confidence, and endorsing attitudes and societal norms that encourage healthy reproductive practices (HIPs, 2017). As such, a health-promoting television series can elevate individuals' understanding of health matters and reinforce positive health attitudes, ultimately fostering the adoption of healthy behaviors (Chew et al., 2010).

Heavily tied with HBM is the social cognitive theory. First proposed as the social learning theory in the 1960s by Albert Bandura, the social cognitive theory (SCT) asserts that "media portrayals can alter perceived social sanctions by the way in which the consequences of different styles of conduct are portrayed" (Bandura, 2002, p. 277). People imitate behaviors that they see after watching others conduct them in action. If individuals observe a successful demonstration of a certain behavior, they can also complete the behavior successfully. Similarly, people anticipate the repercussions of their actions before engaging in the behavior, and these anticipated consequences may influence the successful completion of that behavior (LaMorte, 2022).

Researchers have extensively employed social cognitive theory (SCT) to investigate the intricate relationships between exposure to sexual content in the media and real-world sexual behaviors, encompassing aspects such as sexual consent, violence, and initiation (e.g., Kelly, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2019; Martino et al., 2005; Medley-Rath, 2007). Furthermore, this theory has been instrumental in predicting patterns of entertainment media consumption, including its potential positive and negative impacts (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Given this extensive body of research and the pertinent circumstances, the researchers were compelled to incorporate SCT as a foundational framework in their study.

Literature Review

Sex Education in the Philippines

Young Filipino people tend to exhibit limited knowledge and awareness about topics related to their sexual health. Cordero Jr. (2018) highlighted that society, culture, and environments serve as major factors in their sexual decisions. Filipino women from poor families in rural areas who received limited education are more likely to engage in an unprotected sexual debut before menarche compared to their wealthier, higher-educated counterparts from urban areas (Tey et al., 2019). Due to sex-related issues being considered taboo as a result of predominant Catholic beliefs against premarital sex, contraception, and abortion, limited sex education and the spread of myths and misconceptions among adolescents are common (Tanaka et al., 2020). These include beliefs that contraceptives are only for married people and that withdrawal is an effective way to avoid pregnancy (Habito et al., 2021). In fact, only 27.4% of Filipino youth think they have enough knowledge about sex (DRDF & UPPI, 2016).

Sexuality education was first proposed into the country's public-school curriculum through the passage of the Republic Act No. 10354, commonly known as the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, as part of its efforts to promote "responsible parenthood, informed choice, birth spacing, and respect for life and compliance with universally recognized human rights standards." However, the country has made slow progress ever since. In fact, the United Nations Population Fund (2020) has flagged that there has been a long delay in the integration and implementation of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in the K to 12 curriculum, considering the provisional revisions made after questioning of the law under the Supreme Court in 2014. It was not until August 2018 that the Department of Education (DepEd) finally released its policy guidelines for the said program.

DepEd defines CSE as a "curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality that is scientific, age-and-developmentally appropriate, culturally and gender-responsive, and with rights-based approach" (2018). However, Turalde (as cited in Joven, 2021) revealed that the educational framework being implemented in the country heavily focuses on abstinence, leans towards conservative values and heteronormative messaging, and stigmatizes the sexual activity of young people and their usage of contraceptives—those of which are not taught in CSE modules until students reach Junior High School. These issues are further compounded by the lack of sufficient materials and facilities in schools and inadequate and inaccessible training on sexuality curriculum integration (Saquing & Nordan, 2021).

The Role of Mass Media in Sexual Health

Information that young people seek is lacking in the sex education programs implemented in schools. This is why young people often resort to media, particularly popular culture, for more knowledge and information (Dalangin, 2021). Its portrayals of norms and expectations toward teens have earned it the reputation of being a "super sexual peer" (Farrar & Kunkel, 2003) and wields significant influence over the sexuality of young individuals (Fisher et al., 2004). In fact, Bleakley et al.'s (2018) study discovered that among adolescents aged 14-17 years old, 42% and 41% had learned about condoms and hormonal methods through media, respectively, and 66% percent of teenagers learn about romantic relationships through their parents, 58% from their classmates, and 60% from media. Similarly, 7 out of 10 young people aged 12 to 24 think that everything valuable they learned about sex, love, or relationships was from television shows or popular media; as a result, media ranked 3rd as a source where adolescent girls learn about romantic relationships (Nightingale, 2019).

Mass media is a convenient and effective source of knowledge. Mckee (2012) argues that entertainment media is crucial because the youth actively seek it and it provides them with “the information they want, in ways that seem relevant to them” (p. 499). Entertainment education has been found to be a compelling way to model behavior, teach skills, provide behavioral clues, and simulate the consequences of risky behaviors using media characters from various media and genres (Slater & Rouner, 2006). Students can acquire key lessons as they proceed from just simply learning definitions to learning from the many examples of sub-genres (Neustifter et al., 2015).

Overall, individuals who watched edutainment media were more likely to participate in safer sexual actions than those who were not. Viewer audiences can gain ideas for practicing consent and exploring enjoyment in sexual acts (Neustifter et al., 2015). Two television shows aimed to address sexual and reproductive health concerns: “East Los High,” a scripted drama targeting Latinas, and 16 and Pregnant, a reality show featuring teen mothers. East Los High, through its relatable characters, encouraged viewers to get tested for STIs and pregnancy and discuss sexual health (Wang & Singhal, 2016). “16 and Pregnant,” while criticized for potentially glamorizing teen pregnancy, is linked to a decrease in teen birth rates (Kearney & Levine, 2014). Both shows highlight the importance of open communication and responsible sexual behavior. Moreover, current statistics report significant effects like a decrease in sexual partners, and in unsafe and unprotected sex among the youth, as well as an increase in STI testing and management (Orozco-Olvera et al., 2019).

Television depictions of sexuality can have a beneficial influence on the sexual health activities that individuals choose to engage in. Garcia-Retamero and Cokely (2013) found that more participants reported condom use when they had read a more positively framed message instead of a negatively framed message, highlighting the need for visual aids to communicate these messages more effectively. More positive emotional framing of a health risk behavior, as opposed to a more negative fear-based emotional framing, is better for the promotion of healthy behavior (Ort & Fahr, 2020). Showing and normalizing accurate information about sexuality on television has the potential to develop attitudes, regulate actions, and enhance self-efficacy (Falconer, 2019).

Television Framing of Adolescent Sexual Health Issues

Eyal *et al.* (2007) argue that television programs do not adequately address topics of sexual risk and responsibility and that lacking these aspects may trivialize the negative consequences of sexual intercourse. Depictions of drinking and sexual behavior that are common in popular entertainment television are often glamorized, trivial and risk-free (Bond & Drogos, 2014; Bradley, 2013; Kunkel *et al.*, 1999; Murphy *et al.*, 2008; Russell & Russell, 2009; Wright, 2009). In their content analysis of the top 15 US TV shows watched by young people aged 12-17 years old, Cope-Farrar and Kunkel (2008) revealed that only 14% of discussions about sex on TV mentioned the risk and responsibilities, and only 3% mentioned risk combined with sexual behavior. Kinsler *et al.* (2019) found similar findings among 19 top-rated TV shows released in 2015, citing that instead of educational information on the risks and consequences of sexual behaviors, portrayals of sexual violence, casual sex between adults, and lack of contraception use were much common. Carpentier *et al.*'s (2017) analysis of 25 popular television shows also reported that very few scenes had messages specific to safe sex and that sexual content in television shows tends to lean more suggestive.

There has also been an underlying double standard between the depiction of men and women in media concerning their sexuality. Media frequently portrays males as actively seeking sexual connections and stressing over their sexual performance (Kim et al., 2007). Women, on the other hand, are depicted as setting sexual boundaries, appearing sexually passive, luring men in with their attractiveness, seeking emotional ties, and minimizing their own desires (Ward et al., 2011). Despite this, negative consequences are often prevalent in scenes where female characters take the initiative in sexual encounters, as opposed to scenes in which male characters initiate such interactions (Aubrey, 2004).

Stereotypes about the LGBTQIA+ community are also perpetuated in mainstream media. Their sexuality is usually depicted by heterosexual characters framing them as humorous subjects that are not to be taken seriously (Bond et al., 2018). As opposed to these prevailing themes, other demeaning depictions often portray LGBTQIA+ characters as having deviant sexual beliefs and behaviors, with immoral and criminal motivations and urges (Adamczyk et al. 2017; Baisley, 2015). They are characterized as deviant outgroups that threaten the dominantly heterosexual focus, who bring social disorder through unsafe sex, HIV/AIDS, criminal behavior and promiscuity (Jacobs & Meeusen, 2020).

However, in recent years, there has been a significant shift in the way popular television shows depict adolescent sexual health issues. Tauty et al. (2021) found that some of the most-watched teen television series on Netflix promotes diverse sexual health messages among the youth. The themes mostly revolved around romantic relationships, discrimination, planned or unplanned pregnancies, sexual violence, and harassment among others. TV shows *GLOW*, *Sex Education*, *Euphoria*, and *Shrill* portray abortion as occurring in calm and clean “medical facilities...in which the women are treated professionally and promptly by the clinic staff,” as well as having the women who get abortions as feeling relief and being happy with their decisions (Freeman, 2021).

Dudek et al. (2021) investigated the series *Sex Education* and how it portrayed teenagers as producers and consumers of porn and discovered that the series frames teens as active knowledge seekers, ready and willing to find, modify, produce, and utilize relevant content to engage with sexual health issues more authentically than could be possible in conventional sex education programs. Using qualitative analysis of framing, Aruah (2021) sought to understand how the first two seasons of the series *Sex Education* portrayed various sexual health concerns. Teaching sexual responsibility and de-stigmatizing actions like asking for information were the common themes identified. The program also included depictions of the harmful effects of sexual assault and the options available for those who decide to seek assistance for sexual trauma.

2. Materials and Methods

Study Design

This study employed content analysis, which generally involves developing or selecting a coding framework, choosing a sample, establishing a coding procedure, and identifying a unit of analysis. Holsti (1968) defines content analysis as “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages.” Qualitative content analysis transcends mere word counts and objective analysis. It delves deeper, exploring the meaningful themes and

patterns, both explicit and implicit, within a text, empowering researchers to access subjective yet scientifically valid understandings of social reality (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Sampling

Purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, is a non-probability sampling method wherein the researcher selects elements for a specified purpose (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). It is frequently employed in content analysis studies (Holtzhausen, 2010), making it much easier for researchers to obtain relevant message content (Neuendorf, 2002). Samples for qualitative content analysis usually consist of purposely selected texts that can inform the research questions being investigated (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Among the popular teenage television programs within the last four years, the researchers found the Netflix show *Sex Education* to be the most relevant and suited to the researchers' topic of interest, specifically regarding adolescent sexual risk behaviors and STIs. Netflix is the leading streaming service platform in the Philippines (Statista, 2022) and the country ranked third for the highest demand for this series (Zurian et al., 2021). As of March 2023, the series comprised three seasons with 8 episodes each. Several studies have analyzed the first and second seasons (e.g. Tauty et al., 2021; Aruah, 2021; Dudek et al., 2021) yet no study so far has focused on season three. With that being said, the researchers opted to analyze it, as with every season and every episode, there could be new narratives to encounter and new health issues that could arise and be portrayed within the series.

Data Analysis

This study employed a coding framework through Framing Theory. All the relevant content from each episode of *Sex Education* using directed qualitative content analysis (QCA). Directed QCA is a deductive form of qualitative content analysis wherein the researcher determines a theory or framework with a sufficient coding scheme to guide data collection and analysis in their own study (Kibiswa, 2019). Framing Theory, specifically Entman's (1993) framing typology, guided the coding and data analysis of this study. Framing theory or framing analysis first took root in the field of sociology through Erving Goffman's book published in 1974, *Frame Analysis*, which analyzed the ways humans construct, organize, and differentiate the different meanings of their experience when they are put in any setting (Chi, 2019). Framing gives context for comprehending and interpreting information, allowing individuals to identify and name concepts and generate meaning from several views on the same issue (Goffman, 1974).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Key Themes Regarding Sexual Health Presented in the Series

Identity, Partner Communication, and Sexual Exploration. Sex Education season three delves into the complexities of identity, partner communication, and sexual exploration, highlighting their significance in promoting sexual health. Self-awareness of one's identity is depicted to promote healthy relationships by enabling individuals to communicate their needs and desires effectively. For much of the series, emphasis is made on mutual consent with partners, communicating preferences, sexual roles and responsibilities and setting boundaries. In addition, the show's relentless portrayal of the

awkwardness and humor associated with novel sexual experiences fosters a sense of relatability among its characters, despite their frequent missteps and embarrassing moments. Finally, the season addresses the potential risks associated with sexual exploration, promoting responsible decision-making and the use of contraception.

Therapy as an Effective Method for Mitigating Sexual-Assault Related Trauma: Sexual assault and its consequences are not trivialized and are taken seriously. Associated trauma is shown to irreversibly change the victim’s life, including aspects of their personality and interpersonal relationships. As a solution, therapy is portrayed as aiming to foster clarity regarding the event and to develop appropriate and healthful coping mechanisms to help the victim grow around its repercussions and lead a happier life. This was shown to be made possible through a professional who is empathetic, supportive and provides a place to be vulnerable without shame.

Idealized Depictions of Sex and Human Genitalia in Pornography. Sex Education season three also delves into the harmful effects of pornography on self-image and self-esteem. Characters grapple with feelings of inadequacy and insecurity as they compare themselves to the idealized bodies and sexual acts they see in pornography. These skewed views are tackled and addressed throughout the season, clarifying myths, dismantling harmful stereotypes and educating individuals about the natural variations in human genitalia. By raising awareness of the potential harms of pornography and promoting a more holistic understanding of sexuality, the show empowers viewers to make informed choices about their sexual lives.

3.2 Adolescent Risk Behaviors Evident in Each Episode

Season three illustrates several adolescent risk behaviors dispersed across its episodes. In Episode 1, Otis engages in casual relationships, highlighting a common risk behavior among adolescents. Additionally, in the same episode, the portrayal of Dex’s girlfriend having multiple sexual partners introduces another risk behavior. In Episode 2, the risk behavior of engaging in casual relationships persists as Otis grapples with the “no-strings-attached approach” with Ruby.

Table 1: List of Sexual Risk Behaviors Depicted and Corresponding Episodes.

Episode Number	Sexual Risk Behavior	Characters Involved
Episode 1	Multiple Sexual Partners	Dex’s Girlfriend
Episode 2	Casual Sexual Relationship	Otis, Ruby
Episode 3	None	None
Episode 4	Unprotected Sex	Olivia, Malek
Episode 5	Sexting	Vivienne, Eugene
Episode 6	None	None
Episode 7	None	None
Episode 8	None	None

Episode 4 introduces the risk behavior of unprotected sex through the storyline of Olivia and Malek and Episode 5 with sexting as exemplified by Viv and her boyfriend. Despite depicting these behaviors, some of their consequences were not made apparent in the season. Thus, teenage viewers who have not watched the previous seasons beforehand may be misled to believe that some of these behaviors are safe and normal.

3.3 Results of Framing Analysis

Problem Frame

Sex Education season three exposes the harms of media sensationalism by depicting its negative impact on Otis's clinic and the exaggerated coverage of a chlamydia outbreak (which turned out to be mass hysteria). It urges viewers to be critical consumers in today's world of rampant misinformation and fake news. The show also critiques the conservative approach to sex education, portraying it as an institutional problem that fosters misinformation and stifles open discussions. It illustrates the detrimental effects of abstinence-only education, exemplified through the repressive actions of school administrators and the contrast with Otis Milburn's more progressive and holistic approach. Aside from these, the show also portrayed various issues in the social and individual context. Belittlement and inconsideration of teenage concerns, enforcing unnecessary disciplinary actions for voicing them out, and public humiliation as experienced by various characters in the show are framed as socially problematic.

Causation Frame

Season three portrays the influence of shame and stereotypes as the primary driving forces of sexual health problems, especially among adolescents. Shame was depicted to discourage self-expression and help-seeking. In the series, it was used as ammunition that supported Hope's agenda of abstinence in order to maintain a good public image. Stereotypes, on the other hand, were framed to have a large part in spreading harmful sexual disinformation, ultimately influencing the characters' beliefs and behaviors. For instance, in Episode 4, Moordale students were required to watch "educational" videos during their Sex Education class. In the male classroom, the narrator in the video mentioned that:

“Homosexual activities have a much higher rate of leading to sexually transmitted diseases such as herpes, syphilis, HIV, and AIDS.”

Anwar states:

“My rash could be syphilis, herpes, or HIV. I think I'm gonna die.”

—Episode 4 (00:18:06 - 00:18:18)

Alarmed by this, he and his friends consult a health clinic near their school. The nurse asks

“Nurse: Now, tell me. Do you engage in unprotected sex?

Anwar: Every film I've seen with a gay person ends with them having sex and dying of AIDS. I don't wanna die. So, yeah, I always use a condom.”

—Episode 4 (00:31:54 - 00:32:06)

The first line emphasizes the common stereotype of associating homosexuality with a higher risk of contracting STIs. Anwar's response in the second line reflects the impact of these stereotypes on an individual level. While condom use on its own is a positive health behavior, Anwar's action was relatively fear-based and may not necessarily be beneficial in the long run, as these kinds of responses can further reinforce homophobia and stigmatization.

Consequence Frame

Unexpected pregnancy in itself was not framed as a problem nor a consequence. Rather, the psychosocial changes that occurred to the character as a result were framed as consequences, which are: burden of unwanted commitment associated with the sexual partner, maternal anxiety and responsibility, and family reconfiguration for individuals with children from different partners. The series also framed sexual assault as having severe psychosocial consequences ranging from body image issues and sexual dysfunction to partner avoidance and struggle for emotional safety. Characters are depicted to have exaggerated and fearful reactions to sexual situations and STI Anxiety after being presented with misinformation.

Solution Frame

The series portrays diffusing stigma, normality, acceptance, seeking help, and awareness as effective ways of addressing various sexual health issues. Characters are shown to embrace their genitalia's unique shapes and sizes, clear misconceptions surrounding intercourse and pleasure, and seek to empower each other and the community as a whole. A notable framing device in the show was Aimee's vulva cupcakes. These cupcakes, not only associated with celebration but also skillfully decorated to exhibit the diverse appearances of the female vulva, provided an ingenious, humorous and thought-provoking element to the show. Season three also highlights the importance of seeking help, whether from partners, peers, or a healthcare professional in resolving sexual health issues. Likewise, therapy is framed as a holistic process, seeking to foster clarity regarding the traumatic event, helping the patient grow and cope with it but not totally resolve it.

Responsibility Frame

Contraceptive Use. Sex Education portrays characters as assuming responsibility for the transmission of STIs and the prevention of unintended pregnancy through the use of contraceptives. For instance, in season two episode 1, Otis and Eric ask Jackson whether he could have possibly passed down Chlamydia to his former sexual partners. He replied that it would be highly unlikely since he engages in regular testing and utilizes protection. By depicting characters engaging in a conversation about testing and protection, the show encourages viewers to consider and prioritize their sexual health. It suggests that open communication about STIs and preventive measures is an integral part of responsible sexual conduct, fostering awareness and a sense of responsibility among the audience. In episode 7, a similar scenario unfolds where Ruby and Otis promptly purchase the "morning-after pill" due to uncertainty regarding condom usage. This sense of responsibility is also observed in various instances involving Olivia in season three, episode 4.

Malek: Can I put it in without a condom?

Olivia: Hmm?

Malek: You know it feels so much better. Please?

Olivia: Just remember to pull out before you come.

Malek: Mm-hmm.

Olivia: Mm. Okay?"

— Episode 4 (00:00:54 - 00:01:04)

This scene illustrates Olivia exercising her moral agency as she expresses hesitation about participating in unprotected sex with Malek. Nevertheless, she does not insist on this responsibility and they proceed with unsafe intercourse. Sex is an activity that necessitates careful consideration to ensure that both participants can enjoy pleasure comfortably, even in casual arrangements. In this context, it is essential to prioritize a positive experience for both individuals before, during, and after the act. This scene reveals that the "pull-out" method tends to be more comfortable and pleasurable for the male party, while the female party grapples with concerns about unintended pregnancy, causing discomfort. In addition, although not literally depicted, the use of the "morning-after pill" after sexual intercourse was implied in the same episode. After viewing a frightening video on the consequences of teenage pregnancy on SRE class, Olivia says:

Olivia: Sometimes me and Malek don't use a condom. He pulls out. I thought that if something went wrong, I would just get the morning-after pill. That's okay, right? Yeah, that's okay."

— Episode 4 (00:21:30 - 00:21:46)

This monologue frames the utilization of the "morning-after pill" as a last resort to prevent unintended pregnancy, resulting from Olivia and Malek engaging in unprotected sex. Despite Malek being aware of this fact, there are no depictions of him taking the initiative to obtain contraceptive pills for his girlfriend. In contrast to how it was depicted with Ruby and Otis in season two, this absence of male agency may imply that the male party's involvement in acquiring and using the morning-after pill is discretionary. Such an implication could lead viewers to believe that the use of the morning-after pill falls exclusively on the woman's shoulders, fostering a misconception that may diminish the male partner's sense of responsibility and concern for unintended pregnancy.

This dynamic further prompts Olivia to assert her agency by expressing reluctance toward unsafe sex. Another scenario unfolds after a visit to the sexual health nurse, who enlightens Olivia about the unreliability of the "pull-out" method:

Nurse: Is your boyfriend putting pressure on you not use a condom?

Olivia: He says it makes it feel better for him.

Nurse: How does it feel for you?

Olivia: Like I can't enjoy the sex 'cause I'm scared of getting pregnant.

Nurse: Well, that's no good for anyone, is it?"

— Episode 4 (00:31:38 - 00:31:52)

The nurse suggests that prioritizing one partner's pleasure over the other's well-being, especially regarding contraception, is not a healthy or equitable approach. This pivotal scene communicates the importance of mutual and informed consent among sexual partners. In the latter part of the episode, Olivia felt empowered to express this concern to his partner, offering a practical example of open communication. This scene is valuable for parents facing challenges in initiating 'the talk' with their children, addressing the complexities of sexual health discussions. It provides a relatable scenario for parents to use as a reference, emphasizing the significance of mutual consent, the well-being of both partners and shared responsibility in contraception decisions. Furthermore, it illustrates the impact of such conversations on Olivia, showcasing how effective communication can lead to informed decision-making and a sense of agency for children.

Regular Testing and PrEP for Prevention of HIV. Taking responsibility for sexual health involves consciously deciding to prevent disease infection. In Season 3, Episode 4 (00:32:06 - 00:32:24), the nurse at the sexual health clinic provides Anwar with information on common methods

for HIV prevention, emphasizing the importance of engaging in protected sex and undergoing regular HIV testing:

“**Nurse:** So long as you and your partner, or partners, are practicing safer sex, getting tested regularly, you're very unlikely to contract HIV.”

Furthermore, the nurse introduces Anwar to a novel prevention method, commonly known as PrEP or pre-exposure prophylaxis:

“**Nurse:** There's a medication now called PrEP that protects people from contracting HIV if they are engaging in frequent casual sex in situations that might be putting them at high risk. And for those that do contract the virus, there's medicines now that enable them to live a long and healthy life, even get to the stage where the virus is undetectable, which means it can't be passed on to somebody else. So, I don't think you're gonna be dying for a while yet.”

Introducing PrEP is beneficial for individuals who may not be aware of this preventive method, offering them a viable option for protecting themselves from contracting HIV. This helps expand knowledge about available preventive measures, empowering individuals to make informed decisions regarding their sexual health. The depicted scenes highlight these preventive measures as readily accessible options, emphasizing that individuals can choose to pursue them at their own discretion. The conveyed dialogue emphasizes the individual's responsibility for vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, underscoring the importance of actively adopting preventive measures for one's health.

4. Conclusion

Sex Education season three explores key themes related to sexual health, emphasizing the importance of identity, partner communication, and sexual exploration, therapy as an effective method for mitigating sexual assault-related trauma, and addressing idealized depictions of sex and human genitalia in pornography. The show portrays STIs with a focus on promoting open communication, informed consent, and shared responsibility among sexual partners. It creatively addresses stereotypes and consistently emphasizes the importance of being responsible for one's sexual health, while acknowledging the potential consequences of STIs and unintended pregnancy. By depicting these issues in a realistic and relatable way, the series encourages viewers to make informed decisions and take their sexual health seriously.

The TV series “Sex Education” highlights the need for a more gender-inclusive, age-appropriate, science-oriented, holistic, and comprehensive approach to sex education. Implementing these programs with a more sex-positive and non-judgmental approach will help to create a safe space for students to learn without fear of shame or stigma. By focusing on healthy communication, mutual decision-making, and understanding in relationships, CSE programs could empower students to build respectful connections. The Philippine government should solidify its commitment to “deliver comprehensive sexuality education for the youth” as indicated in the RH Law by providing extensive support and funding to stakeholders to implement these programs effectively.

Producers and media forerunners alike may use this paper as a reference to enhance public understanding and perception of pertinent sexual and reproductive health issues and contextualize their content to better suit audience demands and cultural nuances.

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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