

WHERE INTERNATIONAL, INTRANATIONAL, AND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION CONVERGE: EFFECTS OF EAST LOS HIGH, AN ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION WEB SERIES, ON SEXUAL DECISION-MAKING OF YOUNG LATINO/A COUPLES ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

Anu Sachdev
Arvind Singhal

Consider this snatch of conversation between Jacob and Jessie in *East Los High*, a web series produced in Hollywood and exclusively targeted to Latino/a youth in the U.S. The protagonists in this scene are Jacob and Jessie who get intimate over a study session.

Jessie: Wait, wait, wait... I can't do this. I like you and everything...
but I've never...

Jacob: Jessie, you are a virgin?

[Jessie nods]

Jacob: Jessie, it is totally cool.

Jessie: I totally understand if you think I am lame... and if you don't want to hang out anymore.

Jacob: I don't think you are lame... It's my fault... I kinda lost control!

‘Sexual decision-making is a highly complex phenomenon. The qualitative attributes of how such decision-making occurs before, during and after a highly charged sexual encounter will determine the life trajectory of young people and is applicable to youth in international, intranational, and development contexts.’

If the intense encounter continued without Jessie's "time out," sexual intercourse would have naturally followed. However, Jessie interrupted the rising intensity and Jacob respected her actions and showed support. How likely is this to occur in real life between a non-fictional Jessie and Jacob?

Do most girls have the courage to express their desire to “wait“, and do men so easily curb their desires, letting go, and show support?

Latino/a youth in the U.S., exemplified by the likes of Jacob and Jessie, have a very high risk of unplanned pregnancy. Latino women in the U.S. have the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the country with 107 pregnancies per 1000 females (15-19 years) (Kost & Henshaw, 2012) and the highest birth rate of any ethnic groups (Martin et al., 2012). Specifically, the state of Texas reports 65 pregnant teens for every 1000 teens and the city of El Paso located on the U.S.-Mexico border reports 80 pregnancies per 1000 females (Department of Health, El Paso, TX, 2012). Additionally, sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates for Latino/a adolescents are approximately two times higher than white non-Latino Americans (8.93 and 4.3 per 1000, respectively).

Among the many types of sexuality education interventions implemented globally, a widely used development communication strategy centers on entertainment-education (EE) serial dramas. The purpose of this article is to investigate the process of sexual decision-making as influenced by a Hollywood-produced EE intervention (*East Los High*) among young Latino/a couples in the U.S. The present article first discusses the process and phenomenon of sexual decision-making, particularly among Latino/a females and males. The E-E intervention being investigated, *East Los High* described, followed by methods and data-collection procedures. The final section of this paper details the findings, raising implications for practitioners and scholars of development communication interested in implementing strategic interventions for teenage sexuality.

The Complexity of Sexual Decision-Making Processes

Research on sexual decision-making started in the 1960s and continues to be pursued on various fronts as partner negotiation, female agency and mutual responsibility. Juhasz (1975) first outlined the complexity of sexual decision-making, highlighting the dynamic chain of decision points, with different consequences or outcomes. First, should there be intercourse or not? Second, if penetrative intercourse occurs between a couple, will there be ejaculation inside the woman or not? Third, are birth control methods such as condoms, pills, rings and the like are used or not? Are couples protected against the transmission of STIs? Fourth, if the woman conceives, should she keep the baby or abort? Fifth, if the woman decides to give birth

to the child, should she keep it with herself or give up for adoption to other parents? Sixth, should the man and woman get married or remain single? But, the foundational decision-making point centers on “whether or not to have sexual intercourse?”

The process of sexual decision-making is guided by multiple factors, marked by individual differences in motivation, psychological and physical reactions, value system and self-concept. Sexual decision-making is an intense interplay of personal identity, normative socialisation, and adolescent development (Campen & Romero, 2012; Michels, Kropp, Eyre, & Halpern-Felsher, 2005; Shornack, 1986).

Factors Affecting Sexual Decision-Making

Researchers have utilised various research methodologies to shed light on factors affecting sexual decision-making processes. Across cross-cultural populations, research has found affect and emotion as major contributors in young peoples' risky sexual encounters (Von Sadvoszky, Vahey, McKinney, & Keller, 2006). Fantasia (2008) presented a comprehensive concept analysis on adolescent sexual decision-making, reporting six attributes of sexual decision-making among adolescents: First, a desire for intimacy, sexual attraction and a need to be loved or cared about as central point for decisions of sexual engagement (Garwick et al., 2004; Van Sadvoszky et al., 2006). Second, a desire for perceived relationship safety is a misconception, as adolescents usually miscalculate the risks associated with sexual activity and contraception use (Lenoir et al., 2006; Lescano et al., 2006; Manning et al., 2006). Third, lower levels of problem-solving skills mark early initiation of sexual activity (Felton & Bartoces, 2002; Talashek et al., 2006). Fourth, family and peer influence, norms, peer communication relate to relationship and personal characteristics of their partner such as looks, size of breasts, thighs, buttocks, muscularity, tight clothing, etc (Michels, Kropp, Eyre, & Halpern-Felsher, 2005; Zwane et al., 2004). Fifth, concern for pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, the perceived severity of anything happening to them is very low and generally attributed to “others” (Chapin, 2001; Johnson et al., 2002; Kershaw et al., 2003). Sixth, lower level of cognitive ability mark early and risky initiation of sexual activity (Garwick et al., 2004; Talashek et al., 2006). Bandura (1997, 2006) also suggested that belief in one's ability to exert control over one's sexual behaviour or perceived self-efficacy is a major predictor of sexual risk-taking among adolescents.

Female Decision Making and Male Responsibility

Sexual decisions are fundamentally communicative, involving at least two people. Even though individuals are guided by personal choices and circumstances, active sexual decision-making seldom involves a couple.

Female decision-making has a direct bearing on contraceptive behaviour, and also on child bearing, abortion and education, to name a few. Theoretically, young women have the agency to negotiate, affirm and attach sexual meanings to their relationships (Wood, Koch, & Masfield, 2006). Men, in their own right, do the same. However, the social construction of female responsiveness to the wants of their male partners and the attached responsibility of maintenance of their sexual relationships makes women's decision-making unpredictable. They tend to lack agency and empowerment to say 'no' (Risman & Schwartz, 2002). Women are muted for men's needs and desires and young women's expressions of desire represent their internalisation (e.g., "the male in the head") of male needs, bodies, and desires (Allen, Husser, Stone, & Jordal, 2008).

The other side of the coin is male engagement and responsibility in sexual decision-making. Male partner's intentions and desires greatly affect the timing of pregnancy and women's desire for becoming pregnant. Once pregnant, male partner also influences how a woman feels about her pregnancy and changes in women's evaluation of pregnancy during pregnancy (Raine et al., 2010). Male participation significantly strengthens and reduces conflict in relationships, and enhances and reinforces a man's responsibility for the children he fathers (Heavey et al., 2008).

In sum, partner communication between men and women are at the heart of sexual decision-making processes, actions and consequences. Just like any other behaviour is guided by the culture, environment and social upbringing, sexual decisions are also shaped by such factors. The complexity of sexual decision-making is particularly of importance in the Latino/a population living in the U.S as it is not just the rapid growth in the Latino/a population demographics in the country among other ethnic groups and cultures, but the problem of unintended, teen pregnancies that looms large among this group.

Latino/a Sexual Decision-Making and Gender Roles

The expansion of the Latino/a community in the U.S. is stupendous, comprising approximately 17% of the total U.S. population (US Census

Bureau, 2012). Unlike other groups, traditional gender roles in Latino/a families are observed (Deardorff et al., 2010). Even now, generally-speaking, men are viewed as providers and hence work outside of homes and women manage the household, raising children. Latino/a men are governed by *machismo* (maleness or male pride) that portrays them as strong, wielding power and ones who take care of others. This trait may lead Latino men to engage in risky sexual behaviours, have multiple sex partners, and engage in unprotected sex. On the other hand, women's traditional role is termed as *simpatía*, emphasising smooth interpersonal relationships and "sexual silence". Women do not initiate discussions on sexual issues and do not negotiate sexual safety with male partners (Amaro & Raj, 2000; Marin, 2003; Russell, Alexander, & Corbo, 2000).

In a relationship, men exercise power in sexual and reproductive matters. Even though the sexual activity is consensual, usually men initiate the desire to have sex. Traditional cultural norms maintain that it is inappropriate for men and women to communicate about sex, even within a sexual relationship. Thus, discomfort with sexual communication among young Latinos may lead to inconsistent contraceptive use (Marin, 2003). These traditional domains of relationship power as decision-making dominance and relationship control influence the sexual behaviours of a couple (Zukoski, Harvey, Oakley & Branch, 2011).

In recent years, development communication interventions for sexual responsibility have employed storytelling to engage audiences and evoke interpersonal dialogue (Singhal, Wang & Rogers, 2013). Entertainment-based genres can provide a platform for audience members to talk on predicaments faced by certain characters, spurring conversations and leading to information and health seeking behaviour (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2011).

Media-Sparked Campaigns and Entertainment Education

A variety of development communication interventions have been implemented globally to address the problems related to youth sexuality, ranging from school-based sex education programmes focusing on abstinence, to community-based skill-building programmes (Kohler, Manhart & Lafferty, 2008). Due to the large audience reach, cost effectiveness and ability to target messages, media programmes represent an important tool in the strategy toolkit to affect socially complex issues.

The use of entertainment (storytelling) and education (information) in melodramatic shows is a widely used development communication strategy. These interventions have proved to be successful around the world in preventing risky sexual and health behaviours (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Slater & Rouner, 2002). Entertainment-education (EE) is defined as “a theory-based communication strategy for purposefully embedding educational and social issues in the creation, production, processing and dissemination process of an entertainment programme, in order to achieve desired individual, community, institutional and societal changes among the intended media user populations” (Wang & Singhal, 2009, 272-273). There are two levels of change that can occur by EE: at the individual level, where the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours may be changed; and at the systemic level, where conditions are enabled for change to occur (Singhal & Rogers, 1999, 2004).

EE frames messages within a narrative rather than overtly and directly promoting the behaviour, which can create counter reactance and resistance (Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002). The engaging format of entertainment narratives makes them less subject to counter-arguing and reactance, unlike the more direct persuasion messaging techniques such as public service announcement and advertising campaigns (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Slater & Rouner, 2002). Entertainment-education programmes are capable of motivating the audience to care about fictional plots and characters and their dilemmas. The most commonly applied theory to understand the audience effects of entertainment-education is Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986, 2004; Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Sood et al., 2004). SCT suggests that in addition to direct and experiential learning, people learn vicariously by observing media role models (Bandura, 2002). Television models can transmit “knowledge, values, cognitive skills and new styles of behaviour” to viewers (Bandura, 2004, p. 78) and audience may emulate and imitate such behaviours.

Narrative Involvement

A narrative can be defined as a story with “an identifiable beginning, middle, and end that provides information about scene, characters and conflict; raises unanswered questions or unresolved conflict and provides resolution” (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007, p. 778). The narrative simulation offers involvement by constructing ‘real life’-like events. The interest with which

a viewer follows the story is an indicator of their involvement. Narrative involvement has been synonymously used with absorption, transportation, engagement and engrossment (Bandura, 2004; Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004; Slater & Rouner, 2002).

As the audience experience an EE programme, their emotional responses influence their decision-making processes. When viewers experience positive emotions, they are more likely to judge risks as low and the benefits as high. Conversely, when emotions are negative, viewers are more likely to judge risks as high and benefits as low. A strong emotional response to a stimulus can significantly alter judgments of a viewer who is engaged in the narrative (Finucane, Alhakami, Slovic, & Johnson, 2000; Slovic et al., 2003).

However, cognitive processing of information is not a linear process. An audience member goes through many cognitive and affective processes simultaneously while watching an EE narrative. Cognitive and affective processes that engage the audience in an EE programme are identification and similarity with characters, transportation into the narrative or vicariously interacting with the characters. Specific processes, such as identification and transportation, wishful identification, similarity and parasocial interaction provide features of narrative involvement and effects of EE.

East Los High: Sex, Love, and Revenge

East Los High utilised a transmedia storytelling strategy – one that assumes that the gradual dispersal of media through multiple formats can be an effective way of sustaining widespread audience conversations, while inspiring others in seeking and sharing new information (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). *ELH* was produced in Hollywood under the aegis of Population Media Center, a U.S.-based NGO for Latino/a adolescent and young adults in the United States.

ELH was a teen drama which aired in the summer of 2013 on *Hulu*, a website supporting commercial and popular video streaming. *ELH* was the first *Hulu* series with an all Latino/a cast and targeted for American-Latino/a audience (Population Media Center, 2013). The show depicted the lives of Latino/a high school adolescents living in East Los Angeles. The plot unravelled in layers in the 24-episode series where relationships, family, aspirations and struggles mark decisions and consequences that these adolescents face. In addition, *ELH* included nine transmedia elements and

numerous additional resources that audience could use to seek information and services.

The show centred on a roller coaster plot between cousins Jessie and Maya. The drama fed on the love triangle between the cousins and Jacob, the hottest boy in the high school (See Table 1). The drama unfolded with characters that feed on and off the triangle and peer influences.

Table 1: Character and Character Description of East Los High

Character	Character Description
Jacob Aguilar, Central male character	Jacob is the only son to his father. He is good-looking and a very popular senior in school. He gets in relationship with Jessie, the main female character. He has protected sexual encounters with multiple partners. Later, he falls in love with Maya (Jessie's cousin).
Jessie Martinez, Central female character	A junior in high school, Jessie is the only daughter to her single mother. She is in a relationship with Jacob. She is seduced by Christian Camacho, the dance coach and loses her virginity. She becomes pregnant and finally decides to abort.
Maya Martinez, Jessie's cousin	Jessie's cousin and a rape victim. Maya arrives newly in Los Angeles and returns to high school. She works at Jacob's father's restaurant business. She and Jacob fall in love toward the end of the series.
Vanessa De La Cruz	She is a strong female, senior in high school and leads the dance group, Bomb Squad. She cheats on Jacob and conspires with Christian to have sex with Jessie. She has sexual intercourse with Freddie Garcia, the host of dance show, Dance 5 to get the group in for competition. She later discovers that she is HIV positive.
Freddie Garcia	Freddie hosts dance competition show Dance 5 and has unprotected sexual intercourse with Vanessa in his studio. Later, he refuses to have tested and being HIV positive.
Ceci Camayo	Ceci is a senior in high school and Vanessa's best friend. Ceci gets pregnant with her older boyfriend, Abraham and finally decides to keep and deliver the baby.
Abraham (Abe)	Abe is Ceci's boyfriend. He is older and impregnates Ceci and deserts after impregnating her.
Cristian Camacho	Christian is Vanessa's sex partner and plans a revenge on Jessie for his dance career. He seduces Jessie and then deserts her after she is pregnant.
Paulie Hernandez	Paulie is a senior in high school and Jacob's best friend. He is a joyful boy and a sex addict. He talks about safe sex with humour. He later gets into a relationship with Soli.
Soli Gomez	Soli is a junior in high school and Jessie's best friend. She is a journalist for the school's newsletter and a virgin. She doesn't agree till later to have sex with Paulie and only after her conditions of using condom and being on the pill have been met.

Sex, drugs, relationships and struggle were some of the characteristics of the show. The key events in the series revolved around the major objectives of the show, concerning sexual and reproductive health, pregnancy and abortion. The story highlighted the journey of teenage girls, one who became pregnant (Ceci) and decided to keep the baby, one who got pregnant but decided to abort (Jessie) and one who acquired HIV as a result of having multiple sex

partners (Vanessa). On the other side, the male characters were portrayed as responsible and irresponsible. Among the various male characters, one used a condom all the time, ensuring protection (Jacob). The other indulged in unprotected sex with multiple partners, putting all his partners at risk of pregnancy and infections (Christian). This interesting mix of female sexual decision-making and male sexual responsibility provided Latino/a audience with fodder for dialogue and alternatives.

Guiding Research question: What is effect of the East Los High narrative on the perceptions of sexual decision-making among young Latino/a couples on the U.S.-Mexico border?

Method

This research was conducted at a medium-sized university located on the U.S.-Mexico border in the city of El Paso, TX. The research site was selected because in 2013, about 81.1% of the population of the city of El Paso was accounted as Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014) and the university's student population is majorly Latino/a (78%). Apart from the majority being Latino/a, 85% of the student population at the university is between 18-24 years of age.

Participants

Fifteen Latino/a, unmarried, heterosexual couples participated in this qualitative study. To qualify for recruitment, they had to be of Latino/a background, between the ages 18 and 24, in a heterosexual romantic relationship and at least one of the partners had to be enrolled at the university. Further, both partners must understand and speak English (since *ELH* narrative is in English). For this study, couples who had not watched *ELH* series were recruited. The sample was collected purposefully. Personal snowballing networks were used to enrol couples for the study at the university.

Data Collection

Participant observations and in-depth interviews of couples were used as data collection methods. Each couple viewed a 110-minute feature narrative of *ELH* in a comfortable, private setting. They were then interviewed

about their experience of watching the *ELH* narrative and asked questions regarding their perceptions and influences of the show on their sexual decision-making.

East Los High narrative

ELH is a 24 episode soap opera with each episode on average 22 minutes long. For the purposes of this study, a 110-minute edited feature-length *ELH* narrative film was used including all the major social and teenage sexuality objectives of the show, edited at the University for a parallel experimental evaluation of *ELH*. The video is not available to the audience and was used for research purposes only.

Participant observation and couple in-depth interviews

Participant observations were conducted while the couple viewed the *ELH* narrative, noting real time emotions of the couples to specific situations, allowing for follow-up questioning. Participant observation was combined with in-depth interviews of the couples to gain a fuller and richer understanding of stories, accounts, knowledge, perspectives and experience. When interviewed together as a couple, the participants demonstrated more control over the construction and interpretation of a common story, and problems of anonymity and consent among interviewees were reduced. In addition, a couple or joint interview revealed patterns of communication between the partners (Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2012).

The interview guide was designed and divided into two parts to investigate. First, the couple's narrative involvement and second, their perceptions of sexual behaviours and decision-making portrayed in the narrative.

Data Analysis

Considering the sensitivity and reflexivity of the data, 'rich points' or speech acts such as jargon, slangs or ironies were noted as they especially depict respondents' cultural knowledge. Second, 'turning points' – conversations about critical decisions as they unfolded between the couple were carefully noted. After careful inductive coding (descriptive and interpretive), themes that provide a larger picture of the couples' worldview

were configured and consistent patterns across cases were mapped. Such method allowed for discovering the discrepancies within and between cases. A cross case comparison helped in further highlighting the nuances in the findings (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013).

Effects of East Los High on Sexual Decision-Making

After watching the *ELH* feature, the couples seem to articulate its effect on them in terms of gaining knowledge about sexual decision-making. Second, the narrative involvement and the emotions portrayed highlighted their responses and anxieties to certain plots and decisions. Third, planning behavioural changed through actions and relating the benefits of change to both partners.

The couples said the show reminded them to be safe. The females repeatedly exclaimed that one might think this only happens in movies or shows, but this is how real life is. Stories of their high school, friends and family supported their claim of not being safe. The couples explained how they planned to be 'safe'. Most couples realised that their current strategies are not safe enough to keep them away from pregnancies and STIs. The couples prioritised to change the "pull out" method to effective use of condoms.

Joint decisions such as the males planning to wear a condom during every sexual encounter and not investing in an unprotected sexual intercourse even when the girl is on birth control, were important effects of the narrative. In retrospect, some couples, especially females who had become pregnant and/or had babies and the men who had impregnated females, reflected back, that if they had watched the show earlier, they could have made better decisions for themselves and their partner. The pregnancy and delivery story plot created a sense of anxiety among many couples. Maria anxiously said

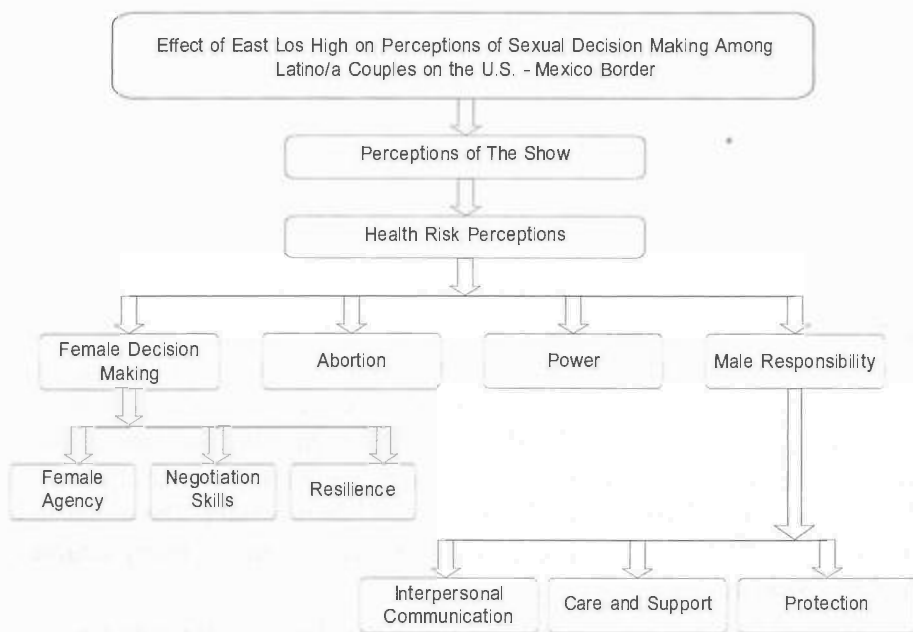
"I guess it is for everything... till u don't realise something in your head, it is unreal. And being irresponsible with sex... that's how it was... I never thought that I was at risk... I never thought about it... I was out of my mind and I don't know how did I get so confident that nothing would happen to me."

Seven couples planned to get tested for STIs together. Some women told their partners, that they are going to get themselves checked next week to make sure they are both clear.

It seemed that there was a lot of trust in the relationships, or at least perceived trust, that held the couples back from talking to each other before, during or after sex. After watching the show, the couples decided to talk more often to each other and be more open about their choices. The couples exclaimed that the show helped them realise it is best to wait until both partners are ready, first to have sex and then to have a baby. In relation to the characters and their decisions, the couples noted the most responsible and desirable decisions as asserting their stand as ‘not being ready’, “we need to know more“, “we don’t want that to happen to us.“

Thus, the effects of *ELH* on perception of sexual decision-making were multifold, comprising the ability to generate healthy dialogue among couples about issues that would generally not be spoken of.

Figure 1: Flowchart and Conceptual Map of How Response to RQ#1 is Organised



Specific responses to the research question allowed the examination of narrative involvement on part of the couples, including how their perception of the narrative influenced their sexual decision-making. Findings are presented foremost from the couple’s perception of the *ELH* narrative and their own sexual health risk perception. Further, sexual decision-making in *ELH* is analysed from the viewpoint of (1) female decision-making and (2) male responsibility. Attention is also focused on the importance of abortion

as a shared decision. Figure 1 illustrates the flowchart and conceptual map of how the response to the research question is organised.

Perceptions of the Show

Foremost, the couples were excited to talk immediately after the feature ended. This excitement emphasised their engagement with the show. In general, the show was highlighted as being “modern,” “interesting”, “non-preachy” and “real”. Laura, for instance, rolled her eyes and said: “It actually happens... Everyone sleeps with everyone... and it is nasty...”

For some couples, it was not the first time they had watched a show that talked about teenage pregnancy and STI. Other shows like *Degrassi, 16 and Pregnant* were mentioned.

For many couples, the show seemed to reinforce existing knowledge about teenage pregnancy and STIs. Several participants noted that they enjoyed watching *ELH* without feeling that they were being told to do something. The couples quickly referred to some major episodes/plots in the narrative that stood out for them such as Jessie’s cheating on her boyfriend Jacob, Maya’s journey from being raped to graduating high school, Ceci’s pregnancy and delivery, and Vanessa’s sexual escapades and confirmation of her HIV+ status. The recall of specific storylines suggested a high degree of narrative involvement with most characters.

Health Risk Perception

Health risk perception of the respondents provided a basis to analyse some of the key high-risk sexual behaviours, including the apparent inconsistencies that may (or may not) be influenced by the viewing of *ELH* narrative. Conversation with couples revealed that a lot of them widely use the “pull out” method (coitus interruptus) with tacit consent, having no conversations about sex or contraception, before, during or after sex.

Couples manifested the concept of invincibility after having unsafe sexual intercourse repeatedly. As Amanda said, “I can never get pregnant”, and Raphael said “I thought we were both sterile before she got pregnant”, and Lina noted: “We just wait for my next period.” Joseph confessed “I am lucky as far as safe sex is concerned... [i.e.] intercourse without protection and thinking I could finish inside of her whenever I wanted to... and I did it for years and she never got pregnant... she took forever to get pregnant.”

The couples did not evaluate consequences of having unprotected sex and hence did not perceive themselves at risk to face consequences. Interestingly, ‘others’ were always seen to be at risk. However, some female respondents evaluated their behaviours in conjunction with their feelings and consequences and decided not to use contraceptives even in the future. They partly attributed their behaviours to “trust”, “comfort” and “he is going to be a good father” and “fun.”

Among the thirteen sexually active couples (out of 15) that were interviewed, inconsistencies and contradictions abounded. Most couples claimed to be “protected”. However, further questioning showed they did not exhibit any safe sex practices. Efficacy among females to take decisions and males to take responsibility for their actions was perceived to be high, but responses showed little substantive evidence to support these claims.

Female Decision-Making

Sexual decision-making is a shared dynamic process between partners. In this process, the female counterpart can play a key role through initiation and willingness to engage in sex and/or responsiveness to sexual invitations.

Table 2: Effect of ELH on Female Decision Making

Female Decision-Making Behaviours Adopted from the Show	
Female agency <i>Safe guarding self</i>	No sexual intercourse without using condom Self care management Reminding the male partner about protection Self respect Character most wished to be like- SOLI
Definite NO	Stop talking to him Don't care about his frustrations Character most wished to be like- SOLI
Negotiation skills	Interpersonal communication about the nature of sexual activity Keeping each other informed Communicating with love Making sure he wears a condoms every time Getting both the partners checked for STIs (even when maintaining monogamy) Character most wished to be like- SOLI Character de-identified with- VANESSA
Resilience	Continuing school even after child birth Retaining self respect Responsibility of the baby and work Assertive behaviour with partners Practicing safe sex to avoid more pregnancies Character most identified with- CECI and JESSIE

Either beginning conversations about safe sex or asserting choices in line with their desires and self-respect, females can guide the decision-making process. Out of the thirteen sexually active females (out of the 15 interviewed) and one woman who did not indulge in penetrative intercourse, eight felt comfortable initiating the conversation for having sex and almost all of the females never practiced saying “no” to their partner. Even though they mentioned that communication about not having sex was as easy as saying “I am tired” or “let’s not do it today”, the partner could very easily persuade them by being insistent.

In this light, the decisions that female makes about having or not having sex hold grave consequences for them and their partners. *ELH* narrative affected their (1) female agency, the feeling of being capable, (2) negotiation skills, reaching agreement without argument and (3) resilience. Table 2 highlights the behaviours that were adopted from *ELH* for female decision-making.

Male Responsibility

Most couples actively co-engaged in the conversation and it was evident through overlapping responses, restating and sometimes, countering their partners’ response. Even when the questions were directed for females, some men took the initiative in answering and supporting female’s trust in them.

Table 3: Effect of *ELH* on Male Responsibility

Male Responsible Behaviours Adopted from the Show	
Interpersonal communication	Frequently talking about pregnancy and options Not having sex when there is no condom Reminding partner about birth control pills Not pressuring partner for sex Maintaining menstrual calendar Character identified with- JACOB AND PAULIE
Care and support	Maintaining monogamy Financial and emotional support during pregnancy Character most wished to be like- JACOB Characters found to be most responsible- PAULINA AND MAYA
Protection	Always carrying condoms Protecting both the partners from pregnancy and STIs Characters that enable behaviours related to protection- PAULIE AND JACOB

Three types of behaviours were perceived as being responsible and seemed to be influenced by their viewing of the *ELH* narrative; enhanced interpersonal communication between partners; care and support for the

female partner; protection of both the partners from pregnancy and STIs. Table 3 depicts the male responsible behaviours that were adopted from the show.

Abortion, a Shared Decision

All the couples stated that they had already discussed the possibility of pregnancy (even if they felt invulnerable) and they knew what they were going to do in case it happened (planned or unplanned). Eleven out of 15 couples expressed themselves as being anti-abortion. The couples disliked the notion of abortion in *ELH* and in their own decision-making. The attribution in most cases was related to their religious learning, being Catholic or Christian.

Perceived self-efficacy among the couples to be able to take responsibility of the child was another major reason for not having abortion but the same was not felt for the characters. While watching the feature, Lauren said she wanted the characters to get an abortion but not for herself as she thought she was capable of taking care of the kid, if she was to be pregnant herself. Lauren had not thought of abortion in the two teen pregnancies she had at age 16 and 17.

On the other hand, four out of the 15 couples seemed to be in favour of abortion. Abortion is perceived to be a taboo act, but it is a decision that couples favour taking together. *ELH* did not seem to alter couple's judgment of abortion and it was still perceived as a decision that 'others' should take. Future research may consider researching age as well as culture specific motivations for abortions.

Conclusions and Discussion

The present article investigated the effects of *ELH*, a Hollywood-produced EE web series on the sexual decision-making of Latino/a youth on the U.S.-Mexico border, emphasising that international, intranational, and development communication mediascapes are rapidly converging. Fifteen Latino/a couples watched the *ELH* narrative and provided their impressions and opinions about the sexual encounters portrayed in the show.

The findings suggest important implications for scholars and practitioners of development communication interventions. Sexual decision-making is a highly complex process and may be affected through de-personalised communication to raise dialogue. The process of creating a system where

audience is not going through the process themselves but learning vicariously can create a system of empathy; break the cycle of invulnerability through identification and mass-mediated transportation. Narrative involvement with the characters evokes hope or wishes to become like certain positive characters, giving rise to aspiration. Identification with certain desirable behaviours of certain characters can motivate audience to take up their sexually responsible behaviours too. For example, Jacob's responsible behaviour at work and his vocalised aspiration to go to college was a highly identified behaviour among the male respondents. Not surprisingly, his condom-using sexually-responsible-behaviours were most referred to as being necessary and appropriate.

ELH created a dialogue among the couples and a seemingly face-to-face relationship with the characters or *parasocial interaction* (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The findings suggest that couples rarely engage in interpersonal communication before, during or even after sexual activities. Therefore, they never talk about consequences that may accrue. However, couples did engage in "cognitively-oriented" parasocial interaction. That is, after exposure to *ELH*, they paid careful attention to the characters and their stories, and talked about the educational messages of each sexual encounter. For instance, Jessie's character was well followed by the couples, through display of real-time emotions such as disgust, anger and frustration. Her decision of having sex with Christian and then Jacob disturbed most couples. The couples became critical of her decisions and she was perceived as an irresponsible and negative character, at least in those encounters. Research has suggested that this kind of reiteration on the educational subjects may facilitate audience recognition and they may be able to change behaviours that put them at risk (Papa et al., 2000; Sood et al., 2004).

This dialogue can also drive change by creating self-efficacy; clarifying perceptions so that audience can set actions and plan to undertake change in present behaviours. Findings suggest that self-efficacy is compromised in cases where communication fails to happen with respect to the use of condoms, contraception and even refusing or asserting no to one's partner. Collective efficacy of both partners in understanding safer sex practices (such as use of condoms, contraceptive pills) and regular screening for STIs through maintaining interpersonal communication at all times is critical in shaping behavioural change.

Thus, behavioural change in sexual decisions is collective and communicative among partners. The couples in this study frequently

talked about their present sexual decisions and finding similarity with the character's lives. Some couples dialogued about their own decision-making through these characters, thus making their own communication easy through indirect and with a third person reference (character).

In summary, the effects of this *ELH* feature can be described at three levels. First, at the pre sexual encounter, the couples decided to talk more about their sexual behaviours, initiation and continuation using protective measures such as condoms and birth control pills. Second is during sex, also the time when couples can mostly oversee the importance of a condom and may engage in unsafe sexual activity. The couples developed a sense of vulnerability after watching *ELH* and hence planned to use a condom every time they engage in sexual intercourse. This claim was especially strongly put forward by the females, showing more impact of *ELH* on them than males. They also decided to get an emergency contraceptive if at any time intercourse happened without a condom and not wait until the next menstrual cycle or take pregnancy as it comes. Third is the after sex phase where conversations among partners are crucial, especially if pregnancy results.

Sexual decision-making is a highly complex phenomenon. The qualitative attributes of how such decision-making occurs before, during and after a highly charged sexual encounter will determine the life trajectory of young people and is applicable to youth in international, intranational, and development contexts. This study suggests that entertainment-education narratives can alter some of these trajectories for the good.

References

- Allen, K.R., Husser, E.K., Stone, D.J., & Jordal, C. E. (2008). Agency and error in young adults' stories of sexual decision-making. *Family Relations*, 57(4), 517-529.
- Amaro, H. & Raj, A. (2000). On the margin: The realities of power and women's HIV risk reduction strategies. *Journal of Sex Roles*, 42(7/8), 723-749.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W. H. Freeman.
- Bandura, A. (2002). Social Cognitive Theory in Cultural Context. *Applied Psychology*, 51(2), 269-290. doi: 10.1111/1464-0597.00092
- Bandura, A. (2004). Health Promotion by Social Cognitive Means. *Health Education & Behavior*, 31(2), 143-164. doi: 10.1177/1090198104263660
- Bjørnholt, M. & Farstad, G. R. (2012). 'Am I rambling?' on the advantages of interviewing couples together. *Qualitative Research*, 14, 3-19. doi: 10.1177/1468794112459671
- Brown, J.D., Steele, J.R. & Walsh-Childers, K. (2002). *Sexual Teens, Sexual Media. Investigating Media's influence on Adolescent Sexuality*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Campen, K. S.V., Romero, A. J. (2012). How are self-efficacy and family involvement associated with less sexual risk taking among ethnic minority adolescents?. *Family Relations*, 61, 548-558. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2012.00721.x
- Chapin, J. (2001). It won't happen to me: The role of optimistic bias in African American teens' risky sexual practices. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 12, 49-59.
- Deardorff, J., Tschann, M., Flores, E., et al. (2010). Sexual values and risky sexual behaviors among Latino

- youths. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 42, 23.
- El Paso County Quick Facts from the U.S. Census Bureau. (2014). Available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48141.html>
- Fantasia, H. C. (2008). Concept analysis: Sexual decision-making in adolescence. *Nursing Forum*, 43 (2), 80-90.
- Felton, G. M., & Bartoces, M. (2002). Predictors of initiation of early sex in black and white female adolescents. *Public Health Nursing*, 19 (1), 59-67.
- Garwick, A., Nerdahl, P., Banken, R., Muenzenberger-Bretl, L., & Sieving, R. (2004). Risk and protective factors for sexual risk taking among adolescents involved in prime time. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, 19(5), 340-350.
- Green, M. C. & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 701-721.
- Heavey, E. J. et al. (2008). Female adolescents' perceptions of male partners' pregnancy desire. *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health*, 53(4), 338-344. DOI: 10.1016/j.jmwh.2007.12.002
- Hinyard, L. J., & Kreuter, M. W. (2007). Using narrative communication as a tool for health behavior change: A conceptual, theoretical, and empirical overview. *Health Education & Behavior*, 34, 777-792.
- Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Juhasz, A. (1975). A chain of sexual decision-making. *The Family Coordinator*, 24(1), 43-49.
- Johnson, R. J., McCaul, K. D., & Klein, W. M. P. (2002). Risk involvement and risk perception among adolescents and young adults. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 25(1), 67-82.
- Kershaw, T. S., Ethier, K. A., Niccolai, L. M., Lewis, J. B., & Ickovics, J. R. (2003). Misperceived risk among female adolescents: Social and psychological factors associated with sexual risk accuracy. *Health Psychology*, 22(5), 523-532.
- Kohler, P. K., Manhart, L. E., & Lafferty, W. E. (2008). Abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education and the initiation of sexual activity and teen pregnancy. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 42, 344-351. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.08.026
- Kost, K. & Henshaw, S. (2012). *U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2008: State Trends by Age, Race and Ethnicity*, New York: Guttmacher Institute.
- Lescano, C. M., Vazquez, E. A., Brown, L. K., Litvin, E. B., & Pugatch, D. (2006). Condom use with "casual" and "main" partners: What's in a name? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39, 443e1-443e7.
- Lenoir, C. D., Ader, N. E., Borzekowski, D. L. G., Tschann, J. M., & Ellen, J. M. (2006). What you don't know can hurt you: Perceptions of sex-partner concurrency and partner-reported behavior. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 38, 179-185.
- Manning, W. D., Giordano, P. C., & Longmore, M. A. (2006). Hooking up: The relationship contexts of "nonrelational" sex. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 21(5), 459-483.
- Marin, B. V. (2003). HIV prevention in the Hispanic community: sex, culture, and empowerment. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 14(3), 186-192.
- Martin J.A. et al. (2012) Births: final data for 2010, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 61(1).
- Michels, T. M., Kropp, R. Y., Eyre, S. L., & Halpern-Felsher, B. L. (2005). Initiating sexual experiences: How do young adolescents make decisions regarding early sexual activity? *Journal of Research On Adolescence*, 15(4), 583-607.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M. & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Moyer-Gusé, E., Nabi, R. L. (2011). Comparing the effects of entertainment and educational television programming on risky sexual behavior. *Health Communication*, 26, 416-426. DOI: 10.1080/10410236.2011.552481.
- Moyer-Gusé, E., & Nabi, R. L. (2010). Explaining the persuasive effects of entertainment-education: An empirical comparison of three theories. *Human Communication Research*, 36, 26-52.
- Papa, M. J., Singhal, A., Law, S., Pant, S., Sood, S., Rogers, E. M., et al. (2000). Entertainment-education and social change: An analysis of parasocial interaction, social learning, collective efficacy, and paradoxical communication. *Journal of Communication*, 50(4), 31-55.
- Raine, T. R., et al. (2010). Contraceptive decision-making in sexual relationships: young men's experiences, attitudes and values. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 12(4), 373-386.
- Risman, B., & Schwartz, P. (2002). After the sexual revolution: Gender politics in teen dating. *Contexts*, 1, 16-24.
- Russell, L.D., Alexander, M. K. & Corbo, K. F. (2000). Developing culture-specific interventions for Latinos to reduce HIV high-risk behaviors. *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, 11(3), 70-76.
- Shornack, L.L. (1986). Teenage Pregnancy: A problem of sexual decision-making or of social organisation? *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 16 (2), 307-326.
- Singhal, A., & Rogers, E. M. (1999). Entertainment-education: A communication strategy for social change.

Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Singhal, A. & Rogers, E. M. (2004). The status of entertainment-education worldwide. In A. Singhal, M. J. Cody, E.M. Rogers, & M. Sabido (eds.), *Entertainment-Education and social Change: History, research, and practice* (pp. 3-20). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Singhal, A., Wang, H. & Rogers, E. M. (2013). The entertainment-education communication strategy in communication campaigns. In R.E. Rice and C. Atkins (eds.) *Public communication campaigns* (pp. 321-334). 4th edition. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Slater, M. D., & Rouner, D. (2002). Entertainment-education and elaboration likelihood: Understanding the processing of narrative persuasion. *Communication Theory*, 12, 173-191.
- Slovic, P., Finucane, M. L., Peters, E., & MacGregor, D. (2003). Risk as Analysis and Risk as Feelings: Some Thoughts about Affect, Reason, Risk, and Rationality. Paper presented at the National Cancer Institute workshop on Conceptualising and Measuring Risk Perceptions, Washington, D.C., February 13-14, 2003
- Sood, S., Menard, T., & Witte, K. (2004). The theory behind entertainment-education. In A. Singhal, M. J. Cody, E. M. Rogers, & M. Sabido (Eds.), *Entertainment-education and social change: History, research, and practice* (pp. 117-145). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Talashke, M. L., Alba, M. L., & Patel, A. (2006). Untangling the health disparities of teen pregnancy. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing*, 11 (1), 14-27.
- Texas Adolescent Reproductive Health Facts. (2011). Available from <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-health-topics/reproductive-health/states/tx.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2013). Current population survey, annual social and economic supplement, 2012. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau. DOI: 10.1080/13691050903524769
- Von Sadovszky, V., Vahey, D. C., McKinney, K., & Keller, M. L. (2006). Emotions involved in college students' sexual encounters. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 28(7), 864-879.
- Wang, H. & Singhal, A. (2009). Entertainment-education through digital games. In Ritterfeld, U., Cody, M. J., & Vorderer, P. (Eds.) *Serious games: Mechanisms and Effects* (pp. 271-292). New York: Routledge.
- Wood, J. M., Koch, P. B., & Mansfield, P. K. (2006). Women's sexual desire: A feminist critique. *Journal of Sex Research*, 43, 236-244.
- Zukoski, A. P., Harvey, S. M., Oakley, O., & Branch, M. (2011). Exploring power and sexual decision making among young Latinos residing in rural communities. *Women's Health Issues*, 21(6), 450-457.
- Zwane, I. T., Mngadi, P. T., & Nxumalo, M. P. (2004). Adolescents' views on decision-risky sexual behavior. *International Nursing Review*, 51, 15-22.



Anu Sachdev earned MA degrees from University of Delhi and the University of Texas at El Paso and presently serves as Programme Manager, PCI Media Impact, New York, a global NGO that works in the entertainment-education and community mobilisation space.



Arvind Singhal is the Samuel Shirley and Edna Holt Marston Endowed Professor of Communication, The University of Texas at El Paso and Professor 2, Hedmark University College, Norway. He works in areas of entertainment-education and organising for social change.