

# “Can Being Healthy Be Sexy?”

## An Exploration of ‘Health Edu-tainment’ and its Impact on Millennials Attitudes and Behaviors

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### PURPOSE

As rates of obesity, hypertension, and heart disease continue to rise, how do you make preventive health and wellness issues relevant and captivating so Millennials will take notice and act? We gathered data from 155 Millennials to examine the effects of ‘health edu-tainment’ on intentions to get more health information.

### BACKGROUND

One disturbing Millennial health trend is the increased incidences of obesity. Among Millennials, over 9 million are recognized as being overweight. The Millennial sedentary lifestyle, which began when they were children, may lead to increased rates of chronic illnesses as they mature (Strauss & Howe, 2006).

Furthermore, citizens in the U.S. watch more television and consume more media than ever before. With the Let’s Move campaign initiated by First Lady Michelle Obama, our society is now focusing on the use of media to make us healthy. Especially for Millennials, it is believed that films and TV programs can play an influential role in addressing health issues that are constructive, relevant and entertaining (Strauss & Howe, 2006). Therefore, could television designed to educate and entertain (health edu-tainment) be considered sexy enough to get an audience’s attention and improve health outcomes?

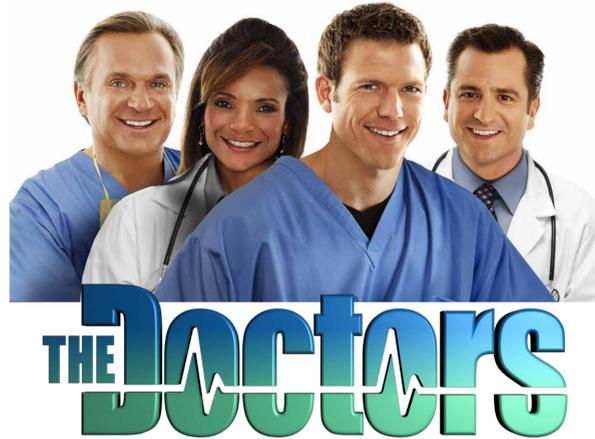
### HEALTH EDU-TAINMENT

The existing literature on “edu-tainment” focuses on learning and the educational process. In the public health and policy arenas, scholars call this concept, “entertainment education” or “transformation entertainment.” However, when you look at the health communications literature from a marketing perspective, it is difficult to find literature on “health edu-tainment” and how health information can be packaged in an engaging and relevant manner to ultimately impact behavior.

Dramatic appeals have the advantage of using characters and story to portray a direct experience with the goal of successfully arousing feelings and emotions from the audience (Deighton et al. 1989). Argo et al. (2008) identify this experience as “transportation” and define it as one’s ability to become fully absorbed or lost in a story. According to Green and Brock (2000, 2002) transportation of individuals into the world of a story is the principal device of narrative persuasion.

Moreover, from a cognitive perspective, the theory of positive affect and its effects on learning and decision making can also support the use of ‘health edu-tainment.’ Gregory et al. (1999) suggests that positive affect greatly influences the outcomes of many cognitive activities, from memory to problem solving. Isen (2001) states that positive affect augments learning, decision making and problem solving that leads to cognitive flexibility.

Specifically, the author’s research in the healthcare domain show that the benefits of positive affect strongly influences areas of doctor-patient communication (Isen, 2001).



### Therefore, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 1:** Health Edu-tainment is more entertaining than programming that is considered entertaining or direct health programming.

**Hypothesis 2:** Health Edu-tainment results in the absorption of more educational information than programming that is considered direct health programming.

**Hypothesis 3:** Health Edu-tainment results in more healthy intentions than programming that is considered direct health programming.

### METHODOLOGY

To begin testing our hypotheses, we compared health edu-tainment television programming, such as ABC’s Private Practice, with direct health programming, like the nationally syndicated program, The Doctors. The Bravo television program, Project Runway, was treated as the control group since it was an example of purely entertainment programming. Both the Private Practice and The Doctors episodes featured health information on ADHD.

Our data sample of 155 undergraduate students was randomly separated into three conditions. The participants were instructed to watch the TV clip that appeared onscreen (either Private Practice, The Doctors or Project Runway).

Afterwards, they answered questions about the television clip (i.e. Did you find the TV clip entertaining? Did you find the TV clip educational?) and their own health behaviors. The PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988) was included to assess mood. Additionally, we included the TV Program Connectedness Scale (Russell et al., 2004) to assist in better defining the relationship a viewer develops with the characters and context of a television program. The scale is comprised of a sixteen 5-point Likert scales made up of six factors- escape, fashion, imitation, modeling, aspiration and paraphernalia. Such scale items included- “I would love to meet the characters of \_\_\_\_\_;” “I relate to what happens on TV to my own life.”



### DATA ANALYSIS

We used a one-way ANOVA to test Hypothesis 1. Our results support H1 showing that Private Practice was more entertaining than Project Runway and The Doctors (MPrivate Practice = 8.75; MProject Runway = 7.00; MDrs = 5.98. (F(2,152) = 8.367, p < .0001). Post-hoc tests indicate that Private Practice was significantly more entertaining than Project Runway (p = .028) and The Doctors (p < .0001).

Hypothesis 2 was also supported showing that Private Practice was more educational than Project Runway (p < .0001), however the difference between Private Practice and The Doctors was not significant (p = .937), indicating that while Private Practice was considered more entertaining, they were equally as educational with regards to ADHD (MPrivate Practice = 9.12; MProject Runway = 3.13; MDrs = 8.94, (F(2,152) = 90.597, p < .0001).

Additionally, hypothesis 3 was not significantly supported, but was directionally supported in that the health edu-tainment clip (Private Practice) increased health intentions when the participants were asked if they would be interested in receiving additional information on ADHD (MPrivate Practice = 5.98; MProject Runway = 4.11; MDrs = 5.18; F(2,152) = 3.528, p = .031). Post hoc tests indicated that Private Practice and The Doctors both increased intentions to get additional information when compared to Project Runway (p = .024 and p = .291 respectively). However, Private Practice indicates directional support for hypothesis 3, the difference between Private Practice and The Doctors for intentions to get additional information on ADHD, was not significant (p = .508).

Furthermore, given the role positive affect plays in learning and decision-making, we ran a simple mediation analysis to determine whether positive affect mediates the relationship between TV clip and the absorption of educational information. As recommended by Hayes (2013), we subjected the data to a simple mediation analysis using the SPSS macro and methodology (model 4) with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. A 95% bootstrap confidence interval that did not include zero, revealed a significant indirect effect of TV clip on the absorption of educational information through positive affect (-.4999, -.0158). Thus, these findings indicate that positive affect likely drives the effect of TV clip on the absorption of educational information.

### CONCLUSION

The results of this initial research begin to show that media programming that is packaged in an entertaining and educational manner, relying a great deal on storytelling, can be effective in influencing health behaviors. Perhaps the key to making a difference in the lives of Millennials and their health may be by leveraging this combination.

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