

Teenagers and the Media: A Media Analysis of Sexual Content on Television

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Foreword

The media, and particularly television, have long been cited as factors that might influence the sexual attitudes and behaviour of young people.

The amount and explicitness of sexual activity on television is seen to be increasing, leading to fears that this may be encouraging young people to engage in unsafe sexual behaviours, or to begin sexual activity at an earlier age.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency can now present the findings of a detailed analysis of the Irish television landscape, which explores both the amount and explicitness of sex on television. The report also complements these quantitative data with qualitative findings about how young people respond to sexual content on television.

Findings from the report will supplement existing research in this area to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between sex, the media and young people in Ireland. This will help those planning and delivering education and sexual health services for young people. The knowledge from this report will also provide a point of reference for TV producers and policy makers and will be of use in identifying areas for future research.

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Sharon Foley
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Sinead Dalton studied at University College Dublin, where she received a BA honours degree in Library and Information Studies and Sociology. She has recently completed a Masters at DCU on Film and Television Studies.

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the sponsors.

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Executive Summary

This report describes the findings of a research project commissioned by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (CPA), and jointly undertaken by Dublin City University (DCU) and the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (DLIADT). Based on the premise that the media, and television in particular, are a source of information about sex for young people (Sutton, Brown, Wilson and Klein 2002, Bragg and Buckingham 2003), the project set out to provide a comprehensive examination of the level of sexual content across the teenage television environment in Ireland and to investigate aspects of young people's responses to sex on television. Using a combination of content analysis and focus group research, levels of depictions of sex and adolescent responses were explored. This summary first presents the key findings from the focus group research in order to provide a context for the findings from the content analysis which follows.

Focus group research

Methodology

Six schools were used as the base for recruiting focus groups. These were selected to provide a mix of urban/rural, religious/secular and co-education/single-sex schools. Two focus group sessions were run in each school, one with fifteen to sixteen year olds and one with seventeen to nineteen year olds. A total of 76 adolescents participated, in groups containing between five and eight members.

Focus group sessions were semi-structured. Each session covered a number of key areas while also allowing some fluidity for topics and ideas to emerge that were salient to the participants. Sessions were divided into three segments. An informal introductory discussion aimed to establish participants' priorities with regard to sex on television. This was followed by a viewing session of television clips taken from the content analysis study, followed by a discussion of aspects of these clips, in particular the level of realism. The final segment consisted of a more focused discussion, which summed up key points. The participants undertook the second segment, i.e. the viewing and discussion of television clips, on their own with a list of suggestions for discussion. All segments were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Findings

- There was general agreement that there is a lot of sex on TV, and that it has increased over time, but that there is not 'too much'.
- 'Mild' sex was seen as pervasive across all programme types and times of the day
- Some programmes were reported as containing strong sexual depictions in late evening slots, and particularly on the satellite channels. While most participants did not seem to have easy access, they were aware of these programmes, and bemused at some of the formats such as the sex 'documentary'.
- Generally it was argued that there is more sex on television now because it is more a part of everyday life.
- Most participants worried about younger viewers gaining access to these programmes, but felt that it was up to parents to check children's viewing and that much of the content would 'go over their heads'.
- There was a strong feeling generally that it was up to the individual to choose to view, or to switch off the television.

- Television was seen as a means to learn about sex, but mainly in terms of developing relationships rather than finding out 'how to do it'.
- Participants did not believe that television could unduly influence them, though, as mentioned above, they did think that there were 'others' who could be influenced, particularly children. Further, the boys felt that the girls used sex on television as a vehicle for discussion, while the girls thought that the boys were more likely to use television in this way.
- Participants did not think that they came across messages about sexual risk and responsibility (R & R) very often on television. However, most groups provided examples of programmes which did contain some such reference. It was proposed that risk and responsibility were used more as themes or main storylines in some programmes rather than as necessary aspects of sexual relations that should be present in all programmes where sexual behaviours, such as intercourse, take place.
- Most participants reported that they did not talk with their parents about sex, and that both they and their parents were embarrassed when explicit sex came on the television.
- While most participants felt that they learnt most about sex from friends, they did not appear to talk very openly about the subject or to use television as a resource in order to talk about sex.
- Participants did not consider the treatment of sex in fiction genres as realistic. They pointed to many unrealistic aspects of television's treatment. It was pointed out, for example, that no-one ever seemed to have financial difficulties when confronted with a 'crisis' pregnancy.
- Participants reported that television was a source of information about sex, in the absence of other sources, but that they saw it as a poor one.
- Participants reported that there was no sex education or very poor sex education in their schools, and that they were forced to use television as a source of information.
- Participants did not take television messages at face value but tended to critique them as media products, arguing that content is often determined by media-specific criteria e.g. males cannot instigate sex as fast as females without appearing to harass; sexual abstinence is often used as a sign for poor social skills.
- While participants had little difficulty critiquing the role of sex in fiction genres, they found the sex documentary genre more difficult to read critically, and did tend to place more credibility in its messages.
- Participants felt some ambivalence with regard to the role of television: they did not place much trust in the messages they received, yet appreciated the sense of adulthood that television could confer on them.
- While they did not feel sex on television had any impact on their own behaviour, many felt that it did have some influence on them as a source of informal knowledge about sexual relations.

Discussion

The participants in the focus groups expressed strong views on the topic of sex on television. In some groups, the opportunity to talk about such issues was obviously novel and keenly appreciated. Participants were critical of the amount of sex on television, but by and large they adopted quite liberal views, believing that television is simply in step with a more sexualised society and that viewing should be an individual decision. At the same time, most participants expressed concern about the 'third-

person effect' of sex on television. They felt that there were audiences, such as 'younger' people, who could be influenced by the media and they expressed some concern about the role of the media in creating a more sexualised society. In summary, these fifteen to nineteen year olds expressed common 'adult' discourses around sex and television.

Having grown up with media such as television, these adolescents showed a high level of media literacy. As will be seen in the current report, they had many insights into the role that sex plays on television and the particular ways in which television treats sex. They also appreciated the recognition the media give teenagers as sexually active and interested young adults. While critical and sceptical of many aspects of media treatment of sex, participants showed less awareness of the way in which the media use sex to position them as consumers. There were some tentative comments about the role of sex in defining teen movies, but less recognition of the wider process whereby media definitions of sex and youth are almost mutually constitutive, i.e. sex is a defining characteristic of youth while youth is a prerequisite for 'normal' sex. Further, their difficulties in responding to non-fiction genres, such as the 'sex documentary', also underlined the limits of their critical abilities.

Despite their almost intuitive media literacy, some of the participants felt that they were vulnerable as viewers because of their over-reliance on television as a source of information about sex. They could dismiss much of what they saw on television because of a perceived lack of realism. However, participants also felt that television did have some impact on their own understanding, particularly in the absence of any other means to learn about sex. While they could sound out their responses to media messages on most topics, often through casual comments to friends, parents or teachers, they have few means to test their constructs around sex. To their dismay, they pointed out that despite the amount of references to sex on television, it could not be talked about in school. These young people did not appear to receive any information about sex through the school system. Even among their peers, discussing sex on television appeared to be a challenging endeavour as criticism of television forms a key element in establishing identity. One young person explained that expressing spontaneous views about sex on television was not easy because "you'd be worried you'd be laughed at". If young people are learning from friends, it may be a very fraught process. In fact, the only key confidante, other than television, appears to be one's sexual partner. It may only be 'after the horse has bolted' that a young person can begin to resolve some of the confusion and ambiguity that they experience with regard to sex on television.

Content analysis

Methodology

A 'content analysis' methodology was used to examine sexual messages on television. In particular, a methodology developed by the Kaiser Foundation was adopted (Kunkel, Biely, Eyal, Coper-Farrar, Donnerstein, Fandrich (2003). This consisted of two main sampling methods: a 'composite week' and a 'teenage top ten' sample. Composite weeks were devised for each of the four Irish channels (RTE1, RTE 2, TV3 and TG4) and one each to cover the British terrestrial and British satellite channels. Each of the six 'composite weeks' consisted of approximately ten hours of programming per day (2 p.m. to 12 midnight) Monday through to Sunday, made up of programmes randomly selected

between August 2003 and February 2004. The 'teen top ten' sample was devised from the ACNielsen top thirty programmes for that age group. (ACNielsen/Mediavest 2004). It consisted of two randomly selected episodes of each of the top ten eligible programmes. Following the Kaiser model, only 'general audience' programmes, which excluded news programmes, sports and children's programmes, were coded for sexual content. Material was defined as 'sexual' if it either depicted 'sexual behaviour' (flirting, kissing, intimate touching, implied intercourse, intercourse depicted) or included 'talk about sex'. Each scene that contained any sexual reference was coded for the level of focus on the sexual behaviour or talk (e.g. whether it was the central topic or action, or more incidental to the scene), and sexual behaviour was further coded for the degree of explicitness. Other measures included the age of those involved, their gender and their relationships with each other. Each scene was also examined for depictions of 'risk and responsibility' (e.g. references to safe sex, abstinence, crisis pregnancy etc.).

Findings

- 40% of programmes available in multi-channel areas of Ireland contain some scenes of a sexual nature. 52% of general audience television programmes (that is excluding sport, children's programmes and news) contain scenes of a sexual nature. This compares with a figure of 64% from a study of US broadcasting (Kunkel et al. 2003). (Table 3.3)
- 50% of general audience programmes contain 'talk about sex' and 21% contain depictions of 'sexual behaviour' (with some scenes containing both). (Table 3.3)
- The majority of these general audience programmes contain relatively cursory references to sex; 47% contain two scenes or fewer. (Figure 3.2)
- Most of these programmes contain relatively mild sexual references. With regard to 'sexual behaviour', 49% depicted flirting, kissing or touching, 15% contained implied intercourse and 13% contained intercourse depicted. (Table 3.6)
- The level of explicitness, measured by degree of nudity or implied nudity, was relatively high compared to the US study. On a four-point scale where 1 is low level and 4 is high, the Irish sample scored 2.02 while the US score was 1.1. (Table 3.4)
- Of those scenes with sexual intercourse, 31% had an established relationship, 11% knew each other but had no established relationship, 11% had just met and in 47% of cases it was not possible to tell the nature of the relationship. Therefore of the 53% where it was possible to judge the nature of the relationship, 58% had an established relationship, 21% knew each other but had no established relationship and 21% had just met. The perceived age of sexual participants was predominantly in the 25+ age category (87%) and a further 12% were in the 18-24 year-old category. (Table 3.12)
- Females were the main instigators of 'mild' sex (e.g. in 69% of scenes containing flirting, the behaviour was instigated by females) while stronger sex was more mutually instigated (68% intercourse implied/depicted). (Table 3.7)
- Of those programmes with scenes of a sexual nature, 28% made some reference to 'risks and responsibilities'. This compares with 15% for the American study. Of those programmes with intercourse related content, almost half (45%) have some reference to 'risk and responsibility' (26% in the US study). (Table 3.9)
- The degree of emphasis on 'risk and responsibility' was high. In 44% of programmes that contained references, the degree of emphasis was considered 'high' and in a further 36% it was considered 'substantial'. (Table 3.11)
- In 90% of these cases, the message was judged to be 'positive' in that it reinforced

socially accepted moral values as to the importance of taking precautions and assuming responsibility. (Table 3.11)

- The main sources of information with regard to 'risk and responsibility' were peers, with 46% of references from partners or friends; those in healthcare professions made up 21%. (Table 3.11)
- The watershed was well maintained.¹ While there were instances of sexual activity across the total sampling time frame (2 p.m.-12 midnight), there were no instances of stronger sex, such as intercourse depicted, before 9 o'clock. However, there was implied sexual intercourse in both the afternoon and early evening slots. (Table 3.16)
- The number of programmes with scenes of a sexual nature was higher for the 'teenage top ten' (60%, N=12). (Table 3.18)
- The average number of scenes per hour containing sex was the same for the teenage sample (4.5) as for the composite week sample (4.5). (Table 3.18)

Discussion

These findings indicate that sexual references are pervasive across the Irish television landscape, though the vast majority of such references are relatively mild and of low frequency. Further, the 9 o'clock watershed appears to be well maintained in that there were no extreme sexual references in family viewing time. The satellite channels, and indeed private broadcasters, appear to rank higher than the public service broadcasters in terms of amount of sexual content. While there are fewer programmes with sexual content on Irish television than in the US, there are indications that there are pockets of programmes that are highly explicit. As the Kaiser study points out, viewers may find it hard to avoid watching sex on television, particularly after the 9 o'clock watershed. Although the forms of sex before the watershed are 'milder', there is sexual innuendo throughout the schedules, which would warrant further in-depth research. This may be particularly important, given the greater likelihood of misunderstandings of implied sexual messages.

While findings are highly varied, there are some indications from previous research that the amount of sex in mainstream broadcasting may be decreasing slightly (Lowry and Shidler 1993, Olsen 1994, Kunkel et al. 2003). This may be a 'blip' but the present study, which replicates one of these studies, shows that the trend could be continuing. There are also some tentative indications in the Irish study of an increase in references to 'risk and responsibility' (R & R), which has been noted by other researchers (Kunkel et al. 2003, Coper-Farrar and Kunkel 1993). Of course, the increase in the depiction of aspects of risk and responsibility, particularly contraceptives, can depend on an increase in the level of explicitness of sex scenes. Focus group participants pointed out, for example, that television, as a visual medium, has difficulty depicting the use of condoms without also tending to depict more explicit sex. Both the level of sex and the level of references to R & R were higher for the teen sample, though numbers were small and, therefore, only indicative.

While the amount of references to risk and responsibility may be increasing, the manner of depiction should be given further attention. It may seem desirable that references to R & R should be given a central focus, yet many aspects might benefit from a more 'normative' background role. It may be more beneficial, for example, if contraceptives are seen as an unimportant, mundane aspect of sex, rather than the central focus.

¹ The watershed refers to a code of practice whereby broadcasters ensure that programmes aired prior to 9 p.m. do not contain material considered unsuitable for a young audience.

Similarly, it was pointed out by focus group participants that crisis pregnancy as a central theme can tend to revolve around the drama of relationships, rather than the more mundane, yet equally important, aspects such as 'who looks after the baby'. Participants also pointed out that the successful depiction of 'abstinence' may require more than simply a count of the number of instances. It was pointed out that one of the key characteristics used to represent a school 'geek' would be a lack of sexual desire. If the 'geek' is defined by poor sex drive, it may be difficult to cultivate a role model for abstinence.

In an extremely high number of cases (90%), the moral messages underlying the depiction of R & R were deemed to be positive. In other words, socially accepted moral beliefs about the importance of responsibility and the value of avoiding risks, were reinforced. In the same vein, a high number of instances of sexual intercourse were between couples with established relationships. The relationship could only be deemed 'casual' in 11% of cases, where it was possible to tell the relationship. However, it was also noted that in many of those cases the 'casual' nature of the relationships was not seen as the norm, but, in fact, was often explored within the themes of those programmes. In contextual terms, sex on television is generally underpinned by conventional moral codes.

One of the most striking findings from the content analysis concerned the gender of the instigator of sexual activity. Females were by far and away the lead instigators of sexual activities such as kissing and flirting, while the instigation of sexual intercourse was predominantly mutual. This finding links in with some of the more discursive analyses of television 'scripts' which have revealed that, increasingly, women are shown to decide on their own sexual relations but that this is not the case for young men (Batchelor and Kitzinger 1999). Interestingly, some of the young men in the focus groups did report an inability to determine their own sexual relations in that they felt it would be 'all around the convent the next day' if they did not respond to a sexual advance. While television may be providing 'scripts' for females to be self-assertive, this does not appear to be the case for males. Clearly this is another area for further research.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings from the current study, and in the context of the international literature, we offer the following series of targeted recommendations.

Policy makers should:

- Take account of the role of television as a source of information about the sexual character of the society in which we live.
- Provide the means and space for young people to discuss media messages about sexuality. This is particularly important for those young people who are reliant on the media as their main source of information.
- Distinguish more clearly between children and adolescents. While children may need to be 'protected' by measures such as restricted viewing, this may be counterproductive for adolescents.

- Adopt approaches that are based on the assumption that adolescents are capable and caring, rather than vulnerable or indifferent.
- Encourage further research, particularly in the area of audience research, in order to establish the generality of the views expressed in the current research and to explore further the ways in which young people themselves believe television impacts on their lives.

Media educators should assist adolescents to:

- Explore media 'construction' across genres, questioning the authenticity of supposed factual material.
- Develop their insights into the codes and conventions used by television to attract and position audiences.
- Examine representations of youth and the way in which television positions young people as a sophisticated audience.
- Explore media use of innuendo.

Educators in the field of sexuality and relationships should:

- Use ongoing media treatment of issues around sexuality as a resource in exploring young people's responses.
- Link their efforts with media educators to ensure that media messages are more fully questioned.
- Develop their own understanding of the ways in which media messages are more than merely 'reflections' of reality.
- Examine representations of young people in particular, and question how they are positioned as sexual subjects.
- Study sexual 'scripts' to explore issues such as the gender role of sexual instigator.

Television – Mainstream programming should:

- Continue to observe the watershed.
- Monitor programmes with high levels of implied sexual activity that are broadcast in early afternoon and early evening slots.
- Pay particular attention to genres, as messages conveyed by means of non-fiction genres, such as documentary or reality television, are more likely to be taken at face value.

- Develop their awareness of young people's understanding of mediated depictions of sex.
- Consider incorporating messages pertaining to risk and responsibility into programmes.
- Liaise with other agencies to ensure messages are appropriate and accurate.
- Continue to treat issues around risks and responsibilities as main themes or plots but also try to incorporate such messages as an integral, ongoing aspect of sexuality.

Media and Sexual Health Forum

Given the complex nature of these recommendations, and their implications across government departments and bodies, a 'forum' should be put in place to co-ordinate further developments. This 'forum' should consist of key representatives from broadcasting bodies (such as RTE, TV3, the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, Film Makers Ireland); educational/public service bodies (such as the Department of Education and Science, the National Children's Office, curriculum development bodies, parent associations); medical and paramedical bodies (such as the Department of Health, the Crisis Pregnancy Agency) and key researchers and practitioners in the field.

Key tasks for such a forum would include:

- Informing and advising policy makers on an ongoing basis.
- Advising programme makers on the integration of themes with regard to risk and responsibility into Irish produced programmes.
- Assisting in the development of educational materials/courses that could link in with both media education and education programmes that deal with relationships and sexuality.
- Initiating further research that would inform these goals and extend the brief to include other key media.
- Monitoring changes in the media landscape through follow-up research at appropriate intervals.

1.0 Introduction

Television plays a key role in young people's lives. While there is evidence that adolescents tend to move away from television as their immediate social relations outside the home develop (Rosengren 1994) it continues to play a role as a primary means of mediating youth culture (Willis 1990). Young people enjoy television. It is probably the only activity that many are willing to share with parents or siblings. It is not just that television mediates their cultural interests but it does so in a way that affirms their adulthood. Television positions young people as a sophisticated audience (MacKeogh 2002). While the dominant public discourse around youth and the media is one of vulnerability, television aimed at young people addresses them as thinking, discerning adults. Indeed, so discerning are they that they can no longer be taken in by the inauthentic. Youth programming has blazed a trail in breaking televisual codes. The phenomenon of reality television responds to a youth culture that knows that it's 'only tomato ketchup'. It is in this context that television constructs a sexual adolescent, both represented in the media and positioned as a consumer. As Inglis has noted with regard young people: 'The main source of a liberal perspective on sexuality comes from within the media' (Inglis 1998:87). Sexuality in the media is one that acknowledges pleasure and self-fulfillment. Recent research undertaken in Britain, by Bragg and Buckingham, which investigated young people's own views on the role of the media, reported that children value the media as a source of information about sexual issues (2003).

In light of the role played by television in young people's sexual development, the terms of reference proposed by the CPA specified that the current research would:

- identify and analyse sexual content presented in television programmes aired in Ireland.

The study addressed the following research areas:

- the extent of sexual messages on selected TV channels – frequency of sexual talk and behaviour
- the nature and context of sexual messages
- the level of explicitness and mode of communication
- the level of reference to risk and responsibility
- the nature of depiction of positive sexual health messages.

The research brief also included focus group research with young people (fifteen to nineteen year olds) in order to investigate:

- the reliability of the coding for the main content analysis of television programmes
- young people's views on the levels of sexuality in their television viewing
- aspects of young people's understanding of messages of a sexual nature
- the views of young people on the extent and nature of messages about R & R.

While young people say that they value the role of the media, most research in the field is not based on the premise that the media are valuable in this regard. Most research is motivated by a concern, whether implicit or explicit, as to the negative effect that the media may have on young people, particularly with regard to sexuality and violence (Barker and Petely 1997). Much of this research is premised on a view of young people as vulnerable viewers who are susceptible to the messages contained in the media. The endeavour to demonstrate how the media might influence viewers has a long and contentious history. Some studies have shown correlations between media consumption and subsequent beliefs/actions but, as Bragg and Buckingham (2003) have pointed out, correlation should not be mistaken for cause and effect. The television programmes a young person enjoys may just as easily be an outcome of their sexual maturity as a cause of it. The rationale for 'content analysis' is often based on the assumption that the media can impact on audiences. The intention in the current research is not to imply that the media provide blueprints. It is based on the premise that the media provide a resource with which young people actively engage, interpreting messages in ways that are meaningful for them.

Industry research estimates that the average fifteen to sixteen year old in Ireland watches approximately fifteen hours of television weekly, while the average seventeen to nineteen year old watches approximately sixteen hours weekly (AC Nielsen/Mediavest 2004). A recent British study concluded that:

Despite all the hype about new media displacing old media, for most children television remains far and away the most popular medium in terms of time spent with it...television is watched by 99% of children and young people aged 6-17 years. It is watched every or nearly every day, for an average of two and a half hours per day (Livingstone 2002:60).

If it is the case that young Irish people are watching over two hours of television a day, and if they are using the media as a resource in their negotiation of sexual issues, then it is clearly important to establish, in the first place, what kinds of messages these young people are receiving, and secondly, how they relate those messages to their own lives and experiences.

Most of our knowledge about levels of depictions of sex on television originates in the US, due to a strong quantitative tradition. In particular, the Kaiser Foundation have been monitoring US channels biennially since 1997 and are referenced widely by European authorities (e.g. Bragg and Buckingham 2002, Livingstone 2002). They have extensive research and publications on young people and television (<http://www.kff.org/entmedia/index.cfm>). In their recent report they point out that two particular problems have undermined work in the area of content analysis (Kunkel et al. 2003). Firstly, most studies only report on a portion of television content, such as soaps

or prime time, so that it is not possible to talk about the types of messages to which viewers are exposed. Secondly, a 'lack of any common definitions and research measures' makes it difficult to compare between studies (Kunkel et al. 2003:2). The British Broadcasting Standards Commission has also monitored television content and reported on the sexual content of the British terrestrial and satellite channels. While both studies have contributed to the current research, the Kaiser Foundation is of particular interest because it has also investigated the area of 'risk and responsibility' (R & R).

Interpreting the significance of amounts of sex on television is extremely problematic. Findings from the Irish study could be reported as 'young people are exposed to over x amount of sex on television in an average week' or 'there are only x number of instances of explicit sexual activity on television'. While a comparative approach doesn't mitigate the need for a starting point, it does divert attention to change and difference rather than absolute sums.

The current report contains three main sections. The first section looks at some of the literature in the field of television and audience research, in particular at studies that have explored the key areas of adolescence and sexuality. The second section presents the findings from content analysis of the Irish television landscape, and the third section reports on the findings from the focus group research. The report ends with some concluding comments and some points with regard to policy implications.

2.0 Literature review

Research in the field of media, television and audience studies has tended to evolve within one of two dominant paradigms – the social science paradigm or the cultural studies paradigm (see Table 2.1 below) (Curran 1990, Lull 1990, McLeod, Kosicki and Pan 1991).

Table 2.1 Dominant paradigms in television / media research

	US social science / quantitative	European cultural studies / qualitative
Texts / programmes	Content analysis	Discursive analysis
Audiences	Survey research	Ethnographic studies

The social science paradigm has been the more dominant approach in the US and has, by and large, favoured quantitative methods of research, such as content analysis, in terms of researching the texts or programmes, and survey research or experimental research, as a means of investigating audiences. These studies tend to look for 'effects' or 'uses'. They investigate how media messages impact on audiences, and how audiences seek out and use the media for their own purposes. The cultural studies paradigm combines a humanities tradition (roots in British literary studies) with social theory based on more Marxist structuralist approaches. This tradition has tended to use discursive modes of text/television analysis and more ethnographic or qualitative approaches to audiences. It has moved more firmly towards 'active' audience theory, believing that not only might audiences seek out and selectively use the media but that they actively interpret the message content, and can even resist or oppose the meanings intended by the programme makers. In this sense, simply knowing what is contained in the media is not enough. To understand media 'effect' it is necessary to find out how actual audiences interpret media content in particular contexts.

The study of the media and audiences has a long tradition in the US and has a more sustained and differentiated approach. There is a corpus of work that has looked in particular at violence, and to a lesser extent sex, on television. The cultural studies tradition has only more recently begun to study audiences but has benefited from adopting a critical outlook on the survey research model, questioning the assumptions of 'cause and effect' (Bragg and Buckingham 2003).

The current study combines elements of both traditions. It uses the systematic tools of content analysis in order to research media content, and combines this with a more qualitative approach to the study of the young viewers. In this way it has been possible to provide some picture of the types of representations of sex that are available to young people with some insights into how those young people might interpret or make sense of those messages. This review of literature will tend, therefore, to concentrate on the findings from mainly US studies with regard to content and survey research, and mainly

European studies with regard to qualitative approaches to audiences. Of course there are exceptions to this polarity, with researchers such as Lull (1990) who has used ethnographic methods in studies of young teenage audiences in the US, and major studies of media and television content in Europe, such as that conducted in Britain by the Broadcasting Standards Commission (1999).

As will be seen, research into both TV texts and TV audiences tends to be haphazard and varies greatly in terms of the particular facets of the complex product (TV programmes) and the complex process (TV viewing) that it examines. A number of key texts form the backbone of this literature review in that they pull together some of the disparate research in the field. These are Bragg and Buckingham's recent research in Britain, combining survey methods with qualitative interviewing (2003), and, in the US, a number of studies conducted by the Kaiser Foundation along with two collections of research reports, the first edited by Brown, Steele and Walsh-Childers (2002), and the second edited by Greenberg, Brown and Buerkel-Rothfuss (1993a). The latter two texts contain series of studies of the multi-faceted process involved in television audiences' interactions. Journal articles sourced through online search engines supplement these key texts.

2.1 Studying television - sex in the texts

While there has been an amount of research undertaken, particularly in the States, into the sexual content of television programmes, approaches with regard to methodology, in particular the sampling frames and the coding of content, have been highly varied. For this reason it is difficult to compare studies. Clearly, the Kaiser study is unique in terms of its longitudinal design (Kunkel et al. 2003). It tracks changes in media content through the replication of a standard methodology. Along with methodological inconsistencies, there are also problems of interpretation. Some authors adopt highly censorious approaches to what they see as a significant amount of sex on television (Sutton et al. 2002). Others focus on the moral valence of those messages and see a positive value. They argue that sex is usually couched in a pro-social heuristic (Greenberg, Stanley, Siemicki, Heeter, Soderman and Linsangan 1993c).

Estimates as to the amount of sex on television vary greatly. In a study of a cross-section of UK/Scottish media during one randomly selected week, Batchelor and Kitzinger (1999) recorded 88.5 hours of broadcasting. In this sample, they found 69 scenes of a sexual nature and three instances of depiction of sexual intercourse (though with a low level of explicitness). These researchers report no direct mention of risk or responsibility in any of these programmes. In print media, particularly magazines, they found evidence of gendered representations; these media provided 'scripts' for females to consider risks and responsibility but none for males. A second British study, the BSC Annual Monitoring Report No. 7 (1999), reported separate findings for terrestrial and satellite broadcasters. They report that 18% of programmes on terrestrial channels contain depictions of sexual activity, while the figure is 40% for the satellite channels. Of those scenes with sexual content, 16% of terrestrial and 20% of satellite content featured pre- and post-coital activity. The ages of those involved were in the 16-29 year age group in 47% of terrestrial and 49% of satellite programmes. Finally, they reported that 52% of characters for terrestrial, and 40% for satellite, were either married or had established relationships. The findings indicate a general decrease in a number of types of sexual activity over the

1990s, though very recent figures show a reversal of that trend, with an increase in some of those activities (BSC 1999). While this study would have made for some interesting comparisons with the current study, given the cultural proximity, this is restricted due to variations in methodology.

One of the largest studies in the US, entitled *Sex on Television*, forms the basis for the current research (Kunkel et al. 2003). This study reports that 64% of general programmes contain scenes of a sexual nature, and that this rises to 71% in a sample of teens' favourite programmes. Looking at patterns over a four-year period, the authors conclude that while there was an increase in sexual scenes over the four-year period, the last two years have seen a decrease. On the other hand, while only modestly, the incidence of references to R & R has increased over the same time. Of programmes with sexual content, the reference to R & R increased from 9% in 1997-98 to 15% in 2001-2002 (p.31). Further, they note that references to safer sex were even higher in those shows where it would be most appropriate; that is in shows that talk about or depict sexual intercourse. This figure increases even further when the shows are those most popular with teen viewers. Nearly half (45%) of shows most watched by teens, and that contain intercourse-related messages, also made a reference to safe sex.

A number of studies have restricted their samples to particular times or types of programmes. Sapolsky and Tabarlet sampled one week of prime-time programming. They report an increase overall in the incidence of sexual activity from 806 instances in 1979 to 846 in 1989. The increase has not been for all forms of sexual activity, with a decline in suggestive behaviour and non-criminal sex acts but an increase in sexual touching. They report that R & R are rarely addressed. A study of soaps and prime-time series that are popular with adolescents (Greenberg et al. 1993c) reports an incidence of 2.7 sex acts per hour in the sample of soaps, with at least one act in all soaps. This is a higher incidence than in the prime-time sample but the depiction is less visual in the soaps. The authors report an increase compared to previous studies but they note that the moral message is generally negative towards sexual exploits. In a sample of prime-time programmes, Lowry and Towles (1989a) found a rate of 5.97 instances of sexual behaviour per hour, indicating a lower level than that recorded in a 1987 study of soaps (7.4 instances).

In an early study of music videos, Sherman and Dominick (1986) report 680 separate sexual episodes but that the depiction was rarely overt and was generally portrayed in a traditional context. If repeated presently, such a study might find very different levels of explicitness. More recent studies have certainly commented on the explicitness of music lyrics (Buerkel-Rothfuss, Strouse, Pettey and Shatzer 1993). A study of daytime talk shows reports that a third of shows dealt with sexual propriety (Greenberg and Smith 2002). The vast majority of the messages that were analysed were judged as reflecting pro-community norms. Finally, a study of R-rated films viewed by adolescents has reported that, with an average of 17.5 sexual portrayals per movie, the typical 90-minute R-rated film contains seven times the amount of sex of a one-hour TV programme (Greenberg, Stanley, Siemicki, Dorfman, Heeter, Soderman and Linsangan 1993a). The authors report that characters tend to be young and that there is virtually no mention of contraception.

A number of studies have concentrated on levels of depiction of risks and responsibilities. In a comparative study of Sex and Soaps, Olsen found that there were signs of a decrease in depictions of sexual behaviour but that talk about sex was still strong, though obviously less visually explicit (Olsen 1994). He reports the beginnings of depictions of R & R in that there were 118 references to pregnancy issues in the 1987 data compared to only seven in the 1977 data. A study by Lowry and Shidler reports a drop in overall sexual behaviours from 10.94 in 1987 to 9.66 in 1991, but they also report a drop in the mentions of risk and responsibility (1993). A study by Coper-Farrar and Kunkel (1993) of sexual messages in teens' favourite primetime television programmes reports that 82% of all programmes contained sexual content. Contrary to similar studies, they report that sexual behaviour is more frequent than sexual talk. They found intercourse was either depicted or strongly implied in 7% of programmes, and that there was little mention of R & R, although there were signs that this was increasing.

While it is questionable as to how comparable these studies are, a number of them report on internally generated comparative data. While some studies report increases in depictions of sexual behaviour, on balance most seem to be reporting a more recent decrease. There are also signs that along with a reduction in the amount of sexual behaviour there is also a drop in the level of explicitness. This, in turn, may be due to the increase in popularity of genres that do not contain highly explicit visual depictions such as reality television and talk shows. Programmes aimed at or favoured by young people are consistently shown to contain more sex than general programming. With regard to R & R, there is greater concurrence. Researchers report an increase in references to R & R, though in some cases the starting point is extremely low.

2.2 Studying audiences – reading sex in the texts

As mentioned above, research into audiences falls into two major categories: quantitative approaches, which include survey research and experimental research, and qualitative approaches, which include ethnographic and focus-group forms of research. As with research into television content, research in the area of audiences also tends to be haphazard, with different studies exploring different aspects of the multi-faceted and complex process of viewing.

A useful categorisation of studies of audiences is provided by Greenberg, Brown and Buerkel-Rothfuss (1993). They divide their book into studies of exposure, studies of reception and studies of understanding (see Appendix 1). Studies of exposure are all quantitative and involve researching the amount of sexual content to which young people are exposed. Studies of reception, in their usage of the term, are also predominantly quantitative and concentrate on intervening variables that might impact on the messages received from television. These studies indicate that background factors such as demographic attributes, family-structure characteristics, self-perceptions and behaviours, and mediation practices used by parents all play a role. Finally, studies of understanding are predominantly qualitative and try to investigate the interpretations that young people themselves make of the sexual messages contained in the programmes that they view.

Exposure and reception, as defined by Greenberg et al. (1993), could be broadly termed 'effects studies' in that they are underpinned by an assumption that if it is possible to establish what young people watch, and if it is possible to control for some of the intervening variables that might impact on that process, then it is feasible to talk about the influence or impact of the media on its audience. These studies have two flaws. As Bragg and Buckingham (2003) point out, they imply a cause-and-effect relationship, which, as mentioned earlier, may not necessarily be the case. Another weakness in the effects model is that while it acknowledges the role of the audience in terms of demographics and a host of micro and macro factors, it does not fundamentally include the perspective of the viewer. Without taking account of the audience point of view, findings will always be second-guessing what that might be. More qualitative research focuses on the participant perspective.

2.2.1 Exposure and reception

Greenberg et al. (1993c) found that young people's preferred prime-time programmes do not contain large amounts of sex but that their preferred movies contain more frequent sexual activity. Further, girls are exposed to more sexual content through daytime soap viewing. Buerkel-Rothfuss et al. (1993) found that R-rated movies were by far and away the most popular category of movies selected by teenagers. They also point out the relatively high exposure of this age group to explicitly sexual music lyrics (68% of sample) and X-rated books (46% of sample).

Reception studies begin to look at the multiple factors that might impact on what may initially appear to be a very straightforward equation between the amount of sex on television, the amount consumed and the impact of that process. Greenberg and Linsangan researched the gender difference in adolescents' media use and the relationship with parental mediation (1993b). They found that there was higher television consumption among females and higher exposure to sexual activity (36 instances per week). They report relatively little parental mediation with 'limitations' rarely imposed and mediation only 'sometimes'. They argue that "by and large, mediation does not occur with any considerable regularity in this age group according to their perception of the situation" (Greenberg and Linsangan 1993:144). In a study of family structure and adolescents' orientation to TV and movie sex, Stanley and Greenberg (1993) found a correlation between adolescent viewing and that of parents. They report more viewing and less parental supervision in families that include divorce. Soderman, Bradley, Greenberg and Linsangan (1993) found that pregnant adolescents watch more TV, though the shows they watch are not necessarily 'sexier'.

A number of reception studies have researched particular genres of programming that are popular with adolescents. Talk shows have been found to play an important role as a source of sexual content for young people, and soaps are a particularly important genre for young women. Buerkel-Rothfuss et al. (1993) found that while general media consumption was not related to sexually permissive attitudes or behaviour, sexually suggestive media (such as soaps and MTV) were important indicators of permissive attitudes. Davis and Mares (1998) found that while young viewers of talk shows tend to overestimate the frequency of deviant behaviours, there is no evidence that they become

de-sensitised to the suffering of others. Further, they report that talk show viewing is positively related to the perceived importance of social issues. In an earlier study, Baran takes yet another slant on the association between sex on television and audiences by exploring the relationship between TV consumption and adolescent sexual self-image (1976). He found that there was a significant relationship between TV portrayals of sex and initial coital satisfaction, in that respondents were disappointed with their initial experience relative to expectations built up through TV viewing. He did not find any relationship between satisfaction with virginity and perceptions of portrayals of sex. Watching sex on television did not make these teens feel any need to lose their virginity.

In a study of adolescents' acceptance of sex / role stereotyping, Walsh-Childers and Brown (1993) found no significant relationship between television viewing and stereotype acceptance, in particular of heterosexual relations and male dominance in social interactions, but there was some variation across race and gender. Further, they report: "In the two instances in which overall television viewing time was a significant predictor of changes in stereotype acceptance, the direction of the influence was negative, contrary to predictions from the cultivation hypothesis". (Walsh-Childers and Brown (1993):130) In other words, the assumption that young people absorb the values inherent in media messages is clearly undermined by this research.

These findings, while highly varied in terms of the intervening variables that they activate, begin to show the complexity of the process. Establishing the amount of sex on TV and the amount of those programmes that adolescents consume can be seen as only 'indicative'. They provide an overview of the landscape but do not tap into the actual process involved in television viewing. Studies of 'reception' begin to indicate the number and range of contextual factors that play a role in that process. By and large, while earlier studies tended to look for 'effects', later studies have begun to question the contextual factors of viewing to see what sexual needs young people might bring to their television viewing.

2.2.2 Understanding

It is important to establish the kinds of programmes with which young people are engaging, and their levels of sexual content. Figures with regard to the levels of viewing of those programmes are also an important part of the jigsaw. However, perhaps the most vital piece is that of young viewers' understanding of those programmes. In terms of methodology, the sheer impossibility of 'controlling' for all potential variables, along with the 'chicken and egg' conundrum (i.e. cause and effect – are young people sexually active because they view particular types of programmes or do they view those programmes because they are sexually active?) make this an important area of investigation. While there are some studies that adopt a quantitative approach to investigating 'understanding', through experimental and survey methods, most studies in this area are qualitative. Quantitative approaches, of their nature, tend to depend ultimately on the researcher's understanding of television, as the researcher must set a priori factors in place. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, attempt to capture the factors that emerge as salient to the adolescent rather than recording an endorsement of what is theorised as salient by the researcher.

Ward, Gorvine and Cytron (2002) showed a series of scenes from four television programmes containing sexual content to a sample of students and surveyed their subsequent interpretations of the shows' sexual content. They found that interpretations were highly varied. No one interpretation of a scene accounted for more than 50% of the responses. They found, however, that there was a high degree of realism attributed to depicted situations but that this involved a third-person effect. In other words, these things did happen but to other people, not themselves. Further, they found that gender played a significant role in interpretation, as did existing attitudes. These findings suggest that the 'cause and effect' conundrum, mentioned above, is indeed complex. Young people are finding out about sexual relations from television but they may be interpreting those messages in a way that complies with their existing beliefs and attitudes with regard to sexuality. In a similar study, Greenberg, Linsangan and Soderman (1993) adopted a more experimental approach by designing their study with two groups – a group that was exposed to sexual television content and a control group. They found that those who watched the sex scenes learned more about the content areas than those who had not. The 'exposed' group understood key terms that had been mentioned in the clips, such as 'shooting blanks' and 'freebie'. However, they also found that beliefs about sexual activity were not impacted in any consistent fashion in the immediate aftermath of viewing. While young people may be picking up on sexual discourses, there is no evidence that this is influencing their value systems with regard to sexual activity.

Brown, Barton-White and Nikopoulou (1993) conducted an ethnographic study of nineteen young females (11-15 yrs). The research consisted of interviews in the adolescents' bedrooms and the study of journal records. The authors found that these teens all actively used the media but in different ways. They found three patterns of sexual media use, which were closely related to the teens' physical maturity and/or sexual experience. These included those who had no sexual experience and tended to be 'disinterested', those who had some sexual experience and tended to be 'intrigued' and a final category of those who were 'resisting' – this group had experienced intercourse/petting below the waist and believed that the media romanticised relationships.

Steele (2002) designed a study that combined focus-group discussion, journals and in-depth interviews. Further, the interviews took place in the adolescents' bedrooms and included a discussion of the artefacts they had gathered and put on display in their bedrooms. Steele concentrated on movies and found that young people gravitated to certain movies because they were produced 'just for them'. She argues that they are attracted to these movies as they "resonate with their sense of who they are" (Steele 2002:250). Further, she found that such movies caused some teens to question taken-for-granted attitudes but that they helped others to reinforce existing notions.

The studies quoted above are all based in the US. With regard to the Irish setting, Bell has pointed out "...historical and literary preoccupations have squeezed out ethnographically based and sociologically informed contemporary cultural studies" (1991:8). This has certainly been true in the field of television research, where issues of national identity and politics have tended to dominate in relation to text analysis. In

1993, Kelly and O'Connor made a similar observation with regard to audience research in Ireland. They pointed out that "to date there has been little published research on Irish audiences and even less from a sociological or cultural perspective" (ibid:12). Taken as a whole, there is a relatively strong European research tradition in the area of children and television consumption (Hodge and Tripp 1986, Buckingham 1996, Gunning 1997) but there is relatively little on the adolescent audience (Willis 1990, Bonfadelli 1993, Gunning 1997, MacKeogh 2002), and less again that has concentrated on television and sexuality. Bragg and Buckingham's recent report fills a very wide gap in that respect (2003).

The Bragg and Buckingham report combines a qualitative and a survey study. The qualitative research includes interviews with groups of students and pairs of students, 'diary' and 'scrapbook' data, and group interviews based on responses to television clips and tabloid news articles. In summarising the qualitative research, they report that young people value the media as a source of information about sex though they do not necessarily 'trust' what they find in the media, often being "highly critical consumers" (Bragg and Buckingham 2003:7). The young people in the research reported varied levels of confidence in different types of media depictions of sexuality, while some children did not always understand sexual references (ibid:8). Further, they attended closely to the moral context of depictions of sexuality. Demographic factors such as a young person's gender impacted on responses and, finally, Bragg and Buckingham report that "The media do not have an autonomous ability either to sexually corrupt children or to sexually liberate them as different parenting styles result in different responses to sexual material" (ibid:8).

In regard to the survey research they report that young people are "enthusiastic about the media" as a source of sexual learning but that they feel that parents underestimate their maturity and their need for information (ibid:9). Many of the young respondents reported that they 'seek out' this material and that they enjoy adult oriented programmes. Bragg and Buckingham found that gender and age are the most significant predictors of attitudes in relation to the media (ibid:10).

An important forthcoming study by Ging explores media consumption among Irish male transition-year students and investigates the role of the media in their construction of gendered identities (Ging: Forthcoming). Phase one of the project involved a survey questionnaire of 187 fifteen to seventeen year old males, and phase two consisted of seven focus-group interview sessions. The survey revealed that 62% of the sample listed television as their preferred spare-time activity. Among the programmes listed as their favourites, are some that the current study analysed and found to contain sex (Friends, Eastenders), and some that while not analysed in the current study, are known to contain sex scenes (Sopranos). However, Ging also found that programmes "typically aimed at a young female audience" (ibid: 31) were also viewed extensively by these young men (e.g. Sex and the City, Ally McBeal). A little over a quarter of the sample listed cinema as a spare-time activity and their lists of 'last 2 films viewed' and 'favourite films of the year' and 'favourite film ever' make interesting reading in terms of the range of movies viewed. They contained a relatively low level of what would be considered R-rated

movies in the US. In concluding her focus-group interviews, Ging argues that while these young men are “active and sophisticated consumers” there is little evidence that their “media use challenges stereotypical concepts of masculinity” (ibid:93). This finding would concur with other research quoted above in terms of the media’s limited ability to impact on existing beliefs and attitudes.

Studies of adolescent audiences show that while young people may actively select the programmes they view, and actively engage in interpreting the messages they receive, key aspects of media messages are often left unchallenged. MacKeogh (2002) found that while young people are often critical and sophisticated viewers, they do not challenge the way in which the media address them as consumers precisely by positioning them as ‘clued-in’. Indeed, knowing how it is all done can undermine a critical stance. As Liebes and Katz (1993) have pointed out, audiences who see programmes as ‘only television’ do not tend to question the values or beliefs that underpin the messages. Similarly, just as the media address adolescents as sexually aware, it is questionable as to whether or not the adolescents reflect on, and question, this positioning.

2.3 Media and sexual learning

In an article entitled ‘Putting Sex Education in its Place’, Cassell (1981) points to the need to distinguish between sex education and sexual learning. Sex education takes place in an academic setting whereas sexual learning is non-formal and incidental, and takes place in multiple settings. According to Cassell, young people report that sex education accounts for very little of their knowledge about sex compared to the role of informal sources. While the precise ranking appears to vary, most studies report that both the media and sex education are perceived to play a role in sexual learning. A survey of fifteen to seventeen year olds in the US found that nearly three out of four teenagers (72%) felt that TV can influence young people ‘somewhat’ or ‘a lot’, although only one in four thought that it influenced their own behaviour (Kaiser 2002). With regard to safe sex, Sutton et al. investigated the sources American adolescents use for contraceptive information (Sutton et al. 2002). Based on the Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescents 1997, they report that adolescents are “hungry for sexual information” (p.49), and that while girls report that television is the third most important source of information for them (after magazines and parents), boys place television at the top of the list (followed by parents and magazines). Sex education is not perceived as playing an important role.

In other studies sex education has been assessed more favourably by young people as a source of information. Bragg and Buckingham reported that 80% of their respondents found sex education lessons ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’, while 66% reported that the media were ‘useful’ sources of information (2003). Similarly, research in the US has reported that school sex-education programmes are a main source of information about sex, with the media ranked in second place (Kaiser 1996). The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) reports that the media are in fourth place as sources of sexual information after parents, friends and school courses (SIECUS 1996).

While studies vary in terms of the precise order of importance, they all indicate that the media are perceived to play a role in sexual learning, and that when sex education is available it is perceived to play an important role. This role has been exploited in a number of countries, both by encouraging more safe-sex messages in mainstream media and by integrating mainstream media into sex education. The use of mainstream media as a means to disperse information has been of particular interest in developing countries, where low levels of literacy have hindered more traditional forms of information dispersal. By and large, these studies report positively on the power of the media, particularly television and film, to spread sex-education messages. Masatu, Kvale and Klepp (2003) surveyed students in Tanzania and found that the mass media ranked first as sources of information on reproductive health. However, they further reported a low-level credibility rating for the media. A similar study in India also found that the media ranked highly as a source of sexual learning, but that misconceptions in relation to this learning were common (Saksena and Saldanha 2003). These studies indicate that while mass media can be used to disperse information with regard to safe sex, they may succeed best when integrated into a critical educational framework. There has been less research conducted in this field in so-called developed countries, but what does exist indicates a similar pattern. In Japan, a popular twelve-week television drama raised awareness about HIV/AIDS leading to increased visits to public health centres (Watts 1998), while in the States, Collins et al. report that a safe-sex message in the television programme *Friends* was recalled by young viewers up to six months after the show (Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse and Hunter 2003). The authors further reported that discussing the show with an adult increased knowledge of contraception even more.

Irrespective of their safe-sex content, programs containing sex in mainstream broadcasting may be a useful resource for sex education. In other words, sexual learning may be positively incorporated into sex education. In a report entitled *Adolescent Sexuality and Popular Culture*, Bankowski (2000) notes the coincidence of the low rates of contraceptive use in the US and a censorial ethos with regard to sex on television. She points to the more open attitude in Europe towards youth sexuality and she advocates that sex education embraces the media and acknowledges the role of popular culture in young people's sexuality.

A number of studies that have explored the relationship between the media and youth sexuality seek to understand what, if any, role the media might play in the lower rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe compared to the US. While factors such as the wider availability of sex education are often cited as part of the explanation, the availability of sex education can, in itself, be seen as part of a wider phenomenon. Brown et al. point out that "A large part of the disparity between US and European patterns of adolescent sexual behaviour could be attributed to a different outlook on youth and youth's sexuality" (Brown et al. 2002:8). They point to a study tour by American researchers which concluded that:

In the countries studied, adolescents are valued, respected, and expected to act responsibly. Equally important, most adults trust adolescents to make responsible choices because they see young people as assets, rather than problems. That message is conveyed in the media, in school texts, and in health care settings (Kelly and Magee 1999:11, quoted in Brown et al. (2002:8)).

In a UK study, a meta-analysis of the factors that might impact on safe sex found that self-confidence and good relations with parents were important factors (Huengsberg and Radcliffe 2002). These findings indicate that a young person's sense that their cultural and sexual choices are acknowledged is a key factor in the relationship between their sexual practices and television. The premise underpinning the interpretation of content analysis from the Kaiser study, and indeed from much of the survey research reported here, is that sexual images in the media can impact on, or change the behaviour of young people. Clearly this premise implies that young people are viewed as vulnerable and easily led. It is important, therefore, that while we may wish to know scientifically the extent to which young people are potentially exposed to sexual messages, that this forms the first step in an endeavour to understand the process more fully.

In this vein, the Kaiser Foundation have more recently partnered with the media on the MTV Public Education Campaign on Sexual Health (Kaiser 2003). The campaign's toll-free hotline has received close to a million calls from young people and nearly half a million copies of their information guide about youth and sexual health have been distributed. In light of their experience in working with mainstream media, the Foundation has published a list of the ten most important 'lessons learned' (Kaiser 1997). They point out that while 'entertainment-education' may be used for promoting knowledge, attitude and behaviour change, it is not always the most appropriate tool for behaviour change objectives. They point to the importance of audience knowledge based on formative research, and the need for follow-up monitoring. A closer collaboration has been reported from the Netherlands, where the National Children's Bureau has been advising scriptwriters and programme makers on the integration of safe-sex messages within the narratives of popular television programmes (Bouman 2003). These researchers report that such a partnership can work well, in that not only do the sex educators provide the programme makers with potential safe-sex scripts, but the programme makers keep in check the sex educators' tendency towards didacticism.

2.4 Conclusions

Research into the levels of sex on television has broadly reported a reduction in the amount that is broadcast and a drop in the level of explicitness. This may partly be accounted for by the increase in popularity of genres that do not contain highly explicit visual depictions such as 'reality television' and 'talk shows'. Despite this trend, it is widely reported that programmes aimed at or favoured by young people are consistently shown to contain more sex than general programming. With regard to R & R, there is greater concurrence. Researchers report an increase in references to R & R, though, in some cases, the starting point is extremely low.

Audience research has pointed to the importance of contextual factors surrounding viewing. While there may be a correlation between viewer age and the level of sex in their selected programmes, there are indications that young people's interest in sexual content is embedded in more immediate life experiences. Factors such as relations with parents, level of sexual activity and views and beliefs with regard to sexuality have been found to relate to viewing preferences. It is also reported that young people's beliefs with regard to sexuality are not easily changed by television viewing.

A number of studies have shown that young people see television as a key source of information about sexual relations. Where sex education is available, it is also reported as playing an important role. Some reports have argued that the role of television in sex education could be developed more strategically. The combining of these information sources into 'edutainment' is advocated, though researchers warn that such initiatives need to be carefully researched and monitored.

3.0 Content analysis of sex on TV

3.1 Methodology

The Kaiser Foundation content analysis approach has been adopted for the current study because of its key focus on risk and responsibility (R & R), and its standing among the research community. This particular approach to content analysis has also been adopted for other large-scale research projects (e.g. at The Centre for Research on the Effects of Television, Cornell University). The Kaiser Foundation has developed a sophisticated coding process to identify and measure both 'talk about sex' and 'sexual behaviour' on television, which they have tested and refined over three biennial surveys. While there are other examples of highly sophisticated content analyses (cf Berelson 1952, Krippendorff 1980), the Kaiser approach has specialised in an area that demands particular coding practices.

3.1.1 Sampling

Two sampling methods have been adapted from the Kaiser study for the current research: composite week sampling and a teenage programme sample (those programmes most frequently watched by the fifteen-to-nineteen-year age group). While the emphasis for the current proposal is on young people's programmes, using the composite week approach is considered important for two reasons. There is evidence of a discrepancy between what young people say they watch and what they actually watch (MacKeogh 2001). Young people attend to many programmes in a way that they would not consider as 'viewing' – they may be dancing to the programme or making fun of characters rather than watching attentively. Simply using ratings, such as AC Nielsen's ratings, to identify relevant programming would not, therefore, be totally valid. Secondly, a cohort of young people who may be unoccupied during the day, and who may be of particular interest to the CPA, would also be under-represented. For these reasons it was decided to adopt a composite week sampling method. In this way the findings can be generalised to the overall television landscape.

Composite week sample: In order to cover the range of channels received in various parts of Ireland (to include multi-channel urban and suburban areas) the current study includes twelve channels. These are grouped into six composite weeks: one for each of the Irish channels (RTE 1, RTE 2, TV3 and TG4), one made up of British terrestrial channels (BBC 1, BBC 2, ITV and Channel 4) and one consisting of British satellite channels (Sky 1, E4, MTV and Sky Movies). MTV was not included in the Kaiser sample but, given the key role played by MTV for the particular age group, it was included in the Irish study. Each composite week contains seven days of programming (Monday to Sunday) between 2 p.m. and 12 p.m. These total 380 programmes (376 hours), randomly selected over a twelve-week period in 2003 (mid August to mid December)² As per the Kaiser study, news programmes, sports and children's programmes were excluded because of the low likelihood that they would contain sex. In this way the composite week approach can be refined to emphasise young people's programmes and depictions of sexuality. Table 3.1 shows the distribution of the total number of eligible programmes and hours among the six composite week samples (see Appendix 2 for individual tables of composite weeks). There was some programme overlap where a programme was longer than the half-hour slot in which it began, and ran into a slot that had already been

² The main sampling period in the autumn of 2003 was followed up by a further two weeks' sampling in February 2004. This was undertaken in order to fill missing slots arising out of changed schedules and technical difficulties..

filled. Programmes were coded in their entirety and the total time of the sample increased to cover extended programmes. Also some programmes began at 11.30 p.m. in the last slot but ran on for an hour or more. Again these were coded in their entirety.

Table 3.1 Distribution of programmes and hours among the six composite week samples

	Programmes	Hours	% hours
RTE 1	75	65.5	17%
RTE 2	59	56.2	15%
TV3	66	62.3	17%
TG4	43	47.4	13%
British terrestrial	63	60.2	16%
British satellite	74	84.1	22%
TOTAL	380	375.7	100%

The British satellite channels (made up of Sky 1, E4, MTV and Sky Movies) accounted for 22% of all programme hours deemed eligible for the sample. TG4 contained the smallest percentage of programme hours deemed eligible. This reflects TG4's concentration on children's and sports programmes, which make up relatively little of the satellite channels' programming.

The teenage sample was drawn from the ACNielsen ratings list of top twenty programmes for that age group. It consisted of two randomly selected episodes of each of the top ten eligible programmes. Again, sports were deemed ineligible but also the sample was restricted to regular television programmes (excluding films and 'specials' which it was not possible to capture given the time lag). Table 3.2 below shows the list of programmes that were selected for the teenage sample and the total duration of the sample.

**Table 3.2 Programmes included in the teenage sample
(based on ACNielsen ratings (ACNielsen/Mediavest 2004))**

Rank	Programme Sample	Channel	Duration
1	Coronation Street	TV3	1 hour
2	The Late Late Show	RTE1	5 hours
3	Off The Rails	RTE1	1 hour
4	Fair City	RTE1	1 hour
5	Father Ted	NET2	1 hour
6	Eastenders	RTE1	1 hour
7	Sex And The City	TV3	1 hour
8	Only Fools And Horses	RTE1	1 hour
9	CSI: Crime Scene Investigation	RTE1	2 hours
10	Home And Away	NET2	1 hour
	Total Duration		15 hours

3.1.2 Content measures

The coding procedures for the Irish sample matched those of the Kaiser study. Any doubts as to precise definitions were discussed with the principal researcher on the Kaiser study. Programmes were coded at two levels. At a programme level, details such as time of broadcast, channel, genre, country of origin and amounts of sexual activity were coded. Each programme that was found to contain sexual activity was then coded at a scene level. A scene was defined as an on-screen shift in time or place, or a substantial shift in content (e.g. in studio-based programmes that did not tend to shift in time/space but moved onto the 'next issue'). At scene level sexual content was divided into three types of references – 'sexual behaviour' (depicted visually), 'talk about sex', and references to 'risk and responsibility'. These will be discussed further below.

Scene-level sexual behaviour was divided into six types of activity: 'physical flirting', 'passionate kiss', 'intimate touch', 'intercourse implied', 'intercourse depicted' and 'other' (examples are provided below). The 'other' category was used for behaviour such as erotic dancing. To be considered codable, activities had to "convey a sense of potential or likely sexual intimacy" (Kunkel et al. 2003:7). While these activities might seem fairly straightforward, in practice their occurrence as 'sexual activity' was not always self-evident. For example, a kiss had to be deemed 'passionate', and not just a peck on the cheek, in order to qualify. Such qualifications proved difficult to define. However, all recorded behaviours had to be coded in terms of 'explicitness'. Four levels of explicitness were determined by character appearance. The levels are 'provocative clothes', 'disrobing', 'discreet nudity' or 'nudity'. Thus although a kiss between lovers may have appeared passionate, it was not coded unless some aspect of the characters' appearance was more sexually suggestive. A measure called 'degree of focus' (primary, substantial, minor, inconsequential) was also recorded for every behaviour in order to determine how central a role it played within a scene. Finally, the gender of the instigator was recorded for each depiction of sexual behaviour.

Scene-level sexual talk was also coded into six categories of talk. These were 'comments about own/others sexual interests' (this involved general talk about people's sexual attractiveness or experiences), 'talk about sexual intercourse already occurred' (this was used when a mention was made of a specific instance of sexual intercourse), 'talk towards sex'³ (this was recorded where a character was using language to seduce someone), 'expert advice / technical information' (this involved primarily medical advice and arose in particular in the hospital soaps), 'talk about sex crimes' (for example, references to rape or sexual abuse) and 'other'. Talk about sex often involved implicit rather than direct comments. Innuendo was 'translated' into overt comments and coded accordingly. An example of innuendo was used with the qualitative focus groups to verify 'translation'. A character in a clip warns another character not to be dating strange men in case she "gets into trouble". There was unanimous agreement that 'trouble' implied something of a sexual nature: either rape or pregnancy. The 'other' category was used for verbal content such as sexual jokes. Each category of talk about sex was also coded for age and gender of instigator, and scene focus (primary, substantial, minor or inconsequential).

³Talk towards sex' often overlapped with 'sexual behaviour'. In these instances only the behaviour was coded in order to avoid double coding.

Risk and responsibility was recorded at programme and scene level. At scene level, it was recorded if there was a reference to either risk or responsibility in a scene containing sex. As per the Kaiser study (p.9) these included mention or use of a condom or other contraception, mention of "safe sex", concerns about or depiction of actual AIDS, STDs, unwanted pregnancy or abortion, and mention or depiction of abstinence or waiting for sex. These references were also coded for scene focus, the source of the information (peer, partner, parent, legal authority, reporter/host, healthcare provider and 'other') and the valence of the information as primarily positive (concern about R & R), primarily negative (lack of concern for R & R), mixed, or neutral/can't tell.

3.1.3 Analysis

Two levels of analysis were conducted:

- A programme-level analysis was carried out on all programmes in order to explore the characteristics of programmes with sexual content, as opposed to those without sexual content. Factors such as genre, duration, channel, country of origin and time slot were recorded and analysed. Programme-level measures were also recorded and analysed with regard to overall messages about R & R.
- A scene-level analysis was carried out on programmes that contained scenes with sexual behaviours or talk about sex. R & R was also coded at scene level when it occurred in a scene with either sexual behaviour or talk about sex.

3.1.4 Intercoder reliability

Three coders undertook the task of coding the recorded programmes. Coders familiarised themselves with the coding scheme and, following a series of initial meetings to view and discuss coding indicators, three programmes were selected to check initial intercoder reliability. Each coder coded each of the three programmes and scores were compared. In line with the Kaiser study, these test results were found to be adequate. At that stage, the mean agreement for identifying scenes that contained sexual content across all programmes was 100% on the measures used in the Kaiser study. The consistency for coding scene-level contextual variables was also very strong, achieving 90% or above on sixteen of the nineteen measures. The lowest score was 72% for identification of alcohol in a scene depicting sexual intercourse. This compares with the lowest score in the Kaiser Study at 69%, which was deemed as marginally acceptable in terms of degree of reliability.

During coding a further three programmes were randomly selected and, again, coded independently by each coder. A fourth programme was selected in order to check intercoder reliability with regard to R & R. Again, the scores from these programmes proved to be well on a par with those of the Kaiser study. The overall score for identifying scenes with sexual content was 94%. The consistency for coding scene-level contextual variables was still strong, achieving fifteen of the nineteen measures. The lowest score was still 72%, comparing well with the Kaiser Study in terms of reliability. The genre of reality television proved very problematic for coders and all programmes in that category were double coded (See Appendix 3 for further information on the intercoder testing).

3.2 Findings – frequency of sexual content

The frequency of sexual content is presented in Table 3.3. Slightly more than half of general audience programmes commonly available across the Irish television landscape were found to contain sexual references (52%). This compares with 64% in the Kaiser study for 2002. Sexual content was recorded in 198 of the 380 programmes or 204 of the 376 hours sampled. In those programmes containing sexual content, there was an average of 4.5 scenes per hour. This would indicate that while the Irish television landscape contains slightly fewer programmes with sexual content, it is on a par with the US in terms of the amount of sex contained in those programmes. It is important to note that this figure refers to general audience programmes. As mentioned above, sports and news programmes and children's programmes, such as cartoons, are not included in the sample. If these programmes were included the total programme time would be 516 hours, of which the 204 hours of programmes containing sex would make up 40%.

Similar to the Kaiser study, talk about sex accounted for the majority of the sexual references-occurring in 191 programmes-as opposed to sexual behaviour in 81 programmes. Talk about sex was nearly twice as likely to occur as sexual behaviour in terms of number of hours (197 compared to 106), and three times as likely to occur in terms of number of scenes (727 compared with 233). Talk about sex occurred nearly four times per hour (3.7), as opposed to sexual behaviour, which occurred a little over twice per hour (2.2).

While the overall percentage of programming containing both types of depiction (talk about sex and sexual behaviour) would appear to be lower in the Irish television landscape than in the US, the amount of sex within programmes is very similar. Indeed the Irish programmes appear slightly higher on some measures, such as the number of scenes per hour containing sex.

In interpreting the findings for the US, the Kaiser report points out that:

The data make clear that not only are sexual talk and behavior a common element in television programming, but that most shows including sexual messages devote substantial attention to the topic (Kunkel et al. 2003:14).

This could also be applied to the Irish television landscape. However, one further measure that helps to place the amount of sex on television into perspective is the 'level' of depiction. The coding schema, particularly for sexual behaviour, required a ranking of those behaviours from relatively mild (kissing) to more extreme sexual activities (intercourse depicted).

Table 3.3 General audience programmes with any sexual content

	Any sexual content		
		Kaiser 2002	Irish 2003
	Percentage of programmes with any sexual content	N=595 64%	N=198 52%
Of programmes with any sex	Average number of scenes per hour containing sex	4.4	4.5
	N of shows	595	198
	N of hours	679	204
	N of scenes	2992	925
	Talk about sex		
	Percentage of programmes with any talk about sex	N=571 61%	N=191 50%*
Of programmes with any talk about sex	Average number of scenes per hour containing talk about sex	3.8	3.7
	N of shows	571	191
	N of hours	642.5	197
	N of scenes with talk about sex	2453	727
			[79%]
	Sexual behaviour		
	Percentage of programmes with any sexual behaviour	N=299 32%	N=81 21%*
Of programmes with any sexual behaviour	Average number of scenes per hour containing sexual behaviour	2.1	2.2
	N of shows	299	81
	N of hours	411	106
	N of scenes with sexual behaviour	870	233
			[25%]
Total N of all shows		937	380

*Note: Number of programmes with talk about sex and sexual behaviour are % of total programmes (N=380) and do not therefore add up to 100%. Any given scene may contain talk about sex as well as sexual behaviour. Due to the occurrence of such overlap within scenes, the data for talk about sex cannot be summed with the data for sexual behaviour to yield the findings for any sexual content overall.

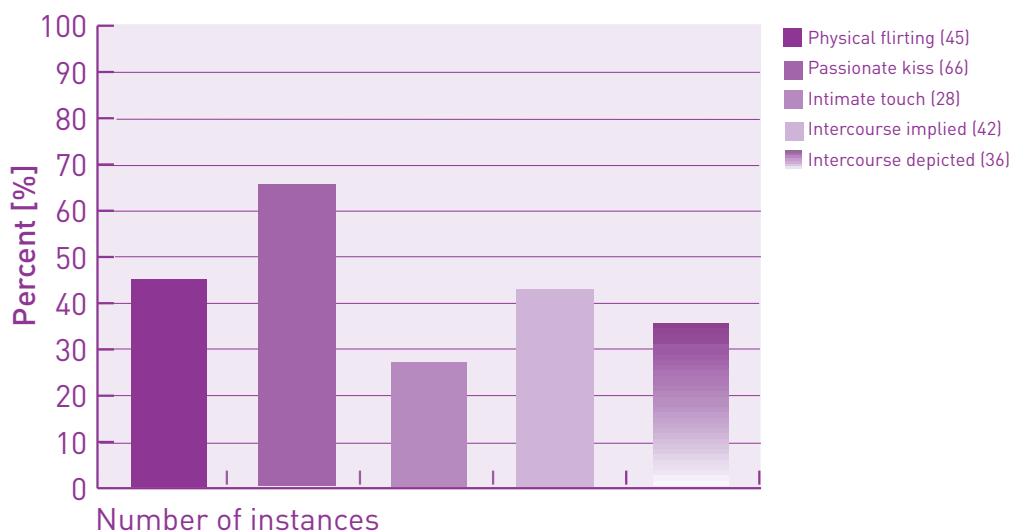


Figure 3.1 Instance of sexual behaviour*

*A sixth category, 'other', is not included in this table.

As the bar chart above (Figure 3.1) shows, the lower level behaviours make up the vast majority of instances of sexual behaviour. This disparity between levels of behaviour will be explored more fully in the following section. Similarly, with regard to talk about sex, categories tended to reflect an increase in specificity from general 'talk about own/others' sexual interests' to 'talk towards sex'⁴. In this regard, the lowest level, 'talk about own/others' sexual practices', made up over 70% of all talk about sex.

It should also be noted that average levels of sexual content can mask wide variations within programmes. It was clear while coding the Irish data that there tended to be extremes, with a small number of programmes containing high levels of sexual content and a large number of programmes containing relatively little sex of a relatively 'mild' nature. As Figure 3.2 shows, this is the case with programmes in the current sample. While the average number of scenes is 4.6 per programme, the standard deviation is 5. In other words, a small number of programmes with highly sexual content are tending to skew the overall findings.

While sixteen programmes have ten or more scenes with sexual content, 51 programmes (over a quarter of the sample) have only one mention, and almost half (46%) have only two or fewer scenes. On certain channels, and at certain times, there is relatively little likelihood of encountering scenes with sexual content while at other times, on other channels, certain programmes are likely to contain references of a highly sexual nature.

⁴Talk about sex is a less satisfactory measure to use with regard to levels of sexual content in that while it does reflect a hierarchy from 'general' to 'specific' references with regard to actual intercourse, some of those 'general' comments may be highly sexual.

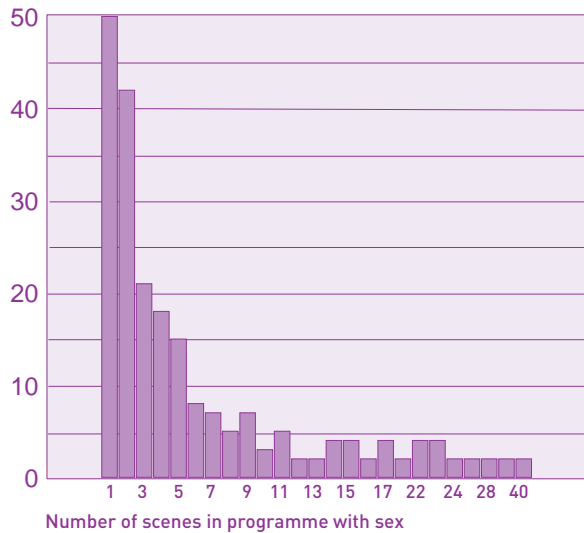


Figure 3.2 Frequency of scenes with sexual behaviours

3.3 Sexual intercourse

As the Kaiser study points out, averages also balance out levels of depiction of sex. In terms of sexual behaviour, some cases could involve a passionate kiss with a character wearing revealing clothing. At the other extreme, an instance of sexual behaviour could involve an explicit depiction of sexual intercourse with a high degree of nudity. In order to get some picture of this disparity, the six variables measuring sexual behaviour were re-coded into two categories: ‘precursory behaviours’ only (containing ‘physical flirting’, ‘passionate kiss’ and ‘intimate touch’) and ‘intercourse behaviours’ (‘sexual intercourse implied’ and ‘sexual intercourse depicted’). (See Table 3.4.)

Table 3.4 Precursory behaviours and intercourse behaviours

Sexual behaviour overall			
		Kaiser 2002	Irish 2004
Of programmes with any sexual behaviour	Percentage of programmes with any sexual behaviour	N=299 32%	N=81 21%
	Average number of scenes per hour containing sexual behaviour	2.1	2.2
	Average level of explicitness	1.1	2.02
	N of shows	299	81
	N of hours	411	106
	N of scenes with sexual behaviour	870	233
Programmes with precursory behaviours			
	Percentage of programmes with precursory behaviours only	N=169 18%	N=61 16%*
	Average number of scenes per hour	1.9	1.6

Of programmes with precursory behaviours only	Average level of explicitness in programme	0.4	1.7
	N of shows	164	59
	N of hours	192.5	70
	N of scenes with precursory behaviours	357	113
Programmes with intercourse behaviours			
	Percentage of programmes with intercourse behaviours	N=131 14%	N=42 11%*
Of programmes with intercourse behaviours	Average number of scenes per hour containing intercourse behaviours	0.9	1.2
	N of shows	135	42
	N of hours	218.5	67
	N of scenes with sexual behaviour	200	78
Total N of all shows		937	380

*Note: Number of programmes with precursory behaviour and intercourse behaviour are % of total programmes (N=380) and do not therefore add up to 100%. Any given scene may contain precursory behaviour and intercourse behaviour. Due to the occurrence of such overlap within scenes, the data cannot be summed to yield the findings for any sexual content overall.

Of the programmes that contain sexual behaviour as opposed to talk about sex (i.e. 21% of all programmes with sexual content), 16% contain scenes with precursory behaviours and 11% contain scenes with intercourse behaviours. Again, there is a pattern of a lower amount of depiction in both measures compared to the Kaiser study (18% and 14% respectively), but there are indications that internal measures, such as levels of explicitness, are higher for the Irish sample (1.7 on the Irish sample compared to 0.4 on the Kaiser sample for precursory behaviours and 2.8 compared to 2.00 for intercourse behaviours). Again this indicates a pattern of less frequency of overall depiction but more explicit content when sex is depicted. Longitudinally, the Kaiser study noted an increase in the number of scenes with intercourse behaviours over the previous five years but that “there was no difference in the average level of explicitness associated with such depictions” (p. 18).

3.4 Talk about sex

The majority of programmes that were coded as containing scenes of a sexual nature contained talk about sex rather than depictions of a sexual behaviour. Of the 925 scenes with sexual content, 79% contained talk about sex while only 25% contained depictions of sexual behaviour (with a small overlap of scenes that contained both). The category of ‘talk about sex’ was made up of six variables. The distribution of talk about sex across categories is presented in Table 3.5 and each category is discussed in more detail below.

Table 3.5 Distribution of types of talk about sex: composite week

Talk about sex		
Types of talk about sex	N	Percentage of cases of talk about sex
Comments about own/other's sexual interests	556	70.3%
Talk about sex crimes	96	12.1%
Talk about sexual intercourse already occurred	56	7.1%
Talk towards sex	19	2.4%
Expert advice/technical information	11	1.4%
Other	53	6.7%
Total incidence of talk about sex	791	100%
Total number of scenes with talk about sex	727	

3.4.1 Comments about own/other's sexual interests

'Comments about own/other's sexual interests' was the most frequent form of talk about sex (70%, N =556). In line with the Kaiser coding, this category included general statements and references to sexual topics and issues as well as more specific or personalised discussions. A number of examples can serve to illustrate the nature of references within this category:

In an episode of Sex and the City, Samantha, Carrie, Charlotte and Miranda discuss their sexual relationships over lunch. (A stock scene in the programme.) Carrie has just discovered that her current boyfriend is bisexual and is unsure how she feels about this. In character, Miranda expresses impatience with 'double dipping', Charlotte yearns for a time when all men were heterosexual while Samantha praises him for being open to all sexual experiences. She points out that she herself is 'tri-sexual' - she'll try any kind of sex. She points out that the younger generation is all about sexual experimentation, that it's hot and that they shouldn't worry about labels (E4).

On a programme called Love Bites, the presenter interviews a man about Irish 'swingers'. The man talks about the parties that followed screenings of the Rocky Horror Show and described the 'orgies' that took place - 'every position you want to think of was being done - on the stairs, in the hallway - whatever you want yourself'. He goes on to talk about the large numbers of couples that are 'swingers' (RTE 2).

In an episode of Emmerdale Trisha, the barmaid, approaches Betty as someone who was 'a bit of a goer in her time' and who knows how to 'rev a man's engine'. She asks her for advice because she is short of ideas in her marriage. Another customer in the bar suggests that she try role-play, saucy underwear and all sorts of things with whipped cream. Betty suggests that she try a bit of 'copula al fresco' to which Trisha grimaces and says that she doesn't like tomato ketchup (UTV).

Most programmes, however, that contain comments about own/others' sexual interests do not entail such extended references. In the majority of cases, where the number of references is in the region of two or three, these tend to be much more curtailed comments:

In an episode of Coronation Street two women discover that they are married to the same man. In their discussion of the timing of his visits to each of them, one woman asks the other woman 'When he called around to see you did you carry on like you were still married?' The other woman responds, 'Sleeping together? No way!' The conversation continues with non-sexual matters (TV3).

At times the comments are more at the level of innuendo:

On an episode of The Bill, a female character and her colleague, who are dating each other, finish work and as they head out of the station she mentions that they will be staying in that night and, with some dramatic pause, suggests a bit of 'Sex and the City' (RTE 1).

As per the Kaiser coding, innuendo was interpreted according to its literal meaning. This comment, therefore, was coded as a suggestion that the couple would have sex themselves that evening. At the lowest end of the scale, a proportion of programmes contained mild but nonetheless sexual comments, such as a reference to a character as 'sex on wheels' or more simply a reference to an affair or sleeping around.

3.4.2 Talk about sex crimes

'Talk about sex crimes' forms an important category, making up 12% of talk about sex. As in the Kaiser study, while there were some instances of references to sex crimes in non-fiction programming (e.g. a mention of child prostitution on Open House), most references were in the fiction categories of drama, film and soap. In the current sample there were, again, extremes in this category; programmes such as Law and Order: Special Victims Unit, or The Bill contained extensive references to sex crimes, while other programmes such as the soaps featured only two or three scenes in sex-crime sub-plots. Some examples are presented below for illustration:

In an episode of Eastenders one of the characters, Mo, is raped by another character known to her. She confides in Kate and over the course of three scenes she describes the rape and hears Kate's story of her mother being raped when she was a young girl (RTE 1).

In an episode of Fair City, two detectives investigate a lap-dancing club and the use of foreign nationals in a prostitution ring. One of the detectives meets with one of the women to discuss how the operation worked (RTE 1).

3.4.3 Talk about sexual intercourse already occurred

'Talk about sexual intercourse already occurred' contained comments about specific instances of sex that had taken place in the past. While only 7% of cases in the current study were coded within this category, these were seen as important because they

referred to concrete instances of sexual intercourse. Further, unlike other variables that tended to contain extreme cases, talk about sexual intercourse already occurred was spread across 40 programmes. While these comments are references to specific sexual relations, they do not tend to be very explicit or extensive, as can be seen from the examples below:

In a film called Stolen Youth, a young man starts an affair with his mother's best friend. As the plot unfolds two key scenes reveal that his parents' sexual relations and that of the women were enmeshed even before he was born. In one scene the mother accuses the friend of sleeping with her then-boyfriend on a particular weekend while she was out of the county. In another scene, the mother berates the father saying that the son, like him, is being 'led by his crotch' and that they should have been thinking about the future rather than sleeping together in 1978 (Sky Movies).

In a drama called The Fearing Mind, a man flirts with his rather shy co-worker whom he is surprised to meet up with later acting in a highly sexual manner. The woman tells him that she is a twin of his co-worker. The man develops sexual relations with both women and, in two scenes, each refers to his relations with the other with terms such as 'Now that you've had Annabel' (TG4).

3.4.4 Talk towards sex

'Talk towards sex' makes up only a small proportion of instances of talk about sex (2%). This low occurrence is mainly because talk towards sex was not coded if there was accompanying sexual behaviour. In other words, only unsuccessful attempts of talk towards sex tended to be coded. The two examples below are representative of this category:

In Life with Bonnie, the main character, Bonnie, takes an afternoon nap and awakes in a dream to find Tom Hanks in her bedroom. Flirting with him, she asks him if he wants to 'make out'. He says that they are due to meet friends for dinner but tells her coyly to 'hold that thought for later'. The scene shifts as the characters move around the bedroom then Tom Hanks tells her that he wants her to be his leading lady in his next movie. Eventually, he leads her back to her bed as she tries to hold on to him and asks him if they could 'get a little action in' (RTE 2).

In the movie Travels with my Aunt, a middle-aged man finds himself in a carriage on the Orient Express next to a young woman he has just met. She opens their adjoining doors and shares some 'herbal' cigarettes with him. She begins to undress, taking off shoes and jumper and opening the buttons of her shirt. She asks him if he minds if they stay together for the night. He is taken aback so she suggests that they just sleep 'if you're not in the mood for anything else' (TG4).

3.4.5 Expert advice

'Expert advice' formed the smallest category of talk about sex, making up only 1%. This low incidence might be expected, given that a didactic approach to sex does not sit easily within drama which, as will be shown later, makes up the majority of programming in the sample. Two examples of this category are provided below:

*In the film *The Object of my Affection*, a central character, who is a social worker, meets with a group of high-school girls for a session during which they can 'talk about anything'. One of the class wants advice because she has met a guy who just 'wants to get into my pants'. After some brief discussion she asks 'Should I do it?' to which the social worker tells her, 'You can say no, keeping your boyfriend happy is not your full time job...you call the shots' (TV3).*

A Fíorscéal documentary explored a group of Australian women's responses to crisis pregnancy, concentrating on the experiences of those women who chose to terminate their pregnancy. One of the contributors was the first doctor to perform an abortion in Australia. She described the process from a medical point of view and also talked of the historical development of attitudes towards abortion (TG4).

3.4.6 'Other' talk about sex

A final category, 'other', was used for comments that had sexual connotations but which could not be coded in any of the other categories. This category contained 6.7% of the total talk about sex. This category included references to such topics as masturbation, a discussion about the size of a penis or fantasies that were not overtly sexual.

3.5 Sexual behaviour

Twenty-one per cent of the programmes sampled contained depictions of sexual behaviour. As described earlier, the coding of the first three activities – physical flirting, passionate kiss and intimate touch – depended on the level of explicitness of dress of those involved. In this way coding was less dependent on trying to establish a definition of a 'passionate kiss' but could code any kiss as passionate if a character was undressing while kissing. This provided a more tangible criterion on which to make judgement calls. As all variables could be double coded, 'physical flirting' often overlapped with other categories of sexual behaviour such as 'passionate kiss' or 'intimate touch'. Table 3.6 shows the distribution of types of sexual behaviour and some examples are provided below.

Table 3.6 Distribution of sexual behaviour: composite week

Sexual behaviour		
Types of sexual behaviour	N	Percentage of cases of sexual behaviour
Physical flirting	45	16%
Passionate kiss	66	23%
Intimate touch	28	10%
Intercourse implied	42	15%
Intercourse depicted	36	13%
Other	66	23%
Total incidence of sexual behaviour	283	100%
Number of scenes with sexual behaviour	233	

3.5.1 Physical flirting

'Physical flirting' made up 16% of all sexual behaviour, with 45 incidents. While this aspect of behaviour was often hard to define, coders kept in mind the overriding notion that behaviours had to "Convey a sense of potential or likely sexual intimacy" (Kunkel et al. 2003:7). The contextual factor of 'level of explicitness' also helped to define the boundary between friendliness and flirting; at least one character had to visibly signal sexual interest through their mode of dress. The examples below are representative of this category:

In an episode of The Pitts, the family take on a new nanny who, in a take-off of the film The Hand that Rocked the Cradle, tries to seduce the father of the family. With the rest of the family out of the way, and wearing a mini, plunge-line dress she comes down the stairs to the living room and flirts with the father. She tells him how long his legs are, suggests a warm bath and purrs loudly (UTV).

In an opening scene in Murder She Wrote, a group of women are working out at an aerobics class. The male body trainer, in figure hugging pants and string top, walks in-between them, commenting on their moves. Two of the women's outfits are particularly revealing, one with buttons open on her front. The body trainer lingers with these women, runs his hand over their shoulders and comments on how good they look. 'What a gorgeous body' he says to one of the women, who responds with 'You sweet-talking devil, you' (BBC 1).

3.5.2 Passionate kiss

'Passionate kiss' is one of the largest categories of sexual behaviour with 66 instances, which accounted for 23% of all sexual behaviour. The 'passionate' prefix indicated the need to distinguish sexual kissing from kisses as forms of greeting. While physical flirting and even intimate touch take some time to 'work up', kissing is a televisual shorthand indicating sexual interest. This can be illustrated by the following examples:

In an episode of Sweet Medicine, two young people are shown playing a strip game. This scene is inter-cut with scenes of the young man's mother at a charity dinner. As the dinner ends the mother is seen to put her coat on. The camera cuts to the couple in bed kissing. They hear a door open downstairs and leap out of bed (UTV).

In the film Bridget Jones's Diary, Bridget and her boss return to her flat. They fall on the couch together and kiss before tumbling onto the floor. He fondles her, pulling her skirt up to her waist. He kisses her on her lips and then on her breasts (Sky Movies).

The second of these scenes would also have been coded for intimate touch.

3.5.3 Intimate touch

'Intimate touch' is the smallest category of sexual behaviour, with 28 instances making up 10% of all sexual behaviours. This aspect of sexual behaviour also tended to overlap with other sexual activities, as the example above shows.

In an episode of The OC Ryan is seduced by the young wife of his friend's grandfather. After a family meal she comes up to his bedroom where he is lying on the bed reading. She begins to leaf through a magazine and talks about how she met with her husband. She turns and tells him how bored she is with him as she begins to caress the inside of his thigh (TG4).

In The Villa, six young women compete for 24 hours to be one of three that will stay in the villa for a week. The winners are selected by three young men that they meet in the villa. Dressed in bikinis and swim trunks, they begin a night's drinking. After a short time couples begin to form. The camera moves among them as they kiss and fondle one another in and around the pool (Sky 1).

3.5.4 Intercourse implied

'Intercourse implied' accounted for 15% of all sexual behaviour, with 42 instances. The most common mode of implying that intercourse has taken place is through showing the couple locked in embrace the 'night before' and then together the next morning. This sexual coding was important for genres such as soaps, but as the examples below show, it was also used in programmes aimed at teenagers:

In an opening scene from Dawson's Creek, Joey and Dawson kiss passionately in a darkened room. The next scene is daylight and the camera pans across the bedroom floor to reveal clothes scattered in a line towards the bed. Joey and Dawson are asleep in the bed (E4).

In the sequel to an episode of Buffy, Spike and Buffy are shown naked on a bed, locked in one another's arms. Buffy whispers in Spike's ear that she loves him. At that moment Spike wakes up in his bed alone (Sky 1).

3.5.5 Intercourse depicted

'Intercourse depicted' was the second smallest category of sexual behaviour, with 36 instances or 13% of the sample behaviours. Generally, intercourse depicted, while explicit in terms of depicting the action actually taking place, tended to have a lower level of explicitness in terms of character appearance. If characters were known to be nude the sexual activity took place under sheets, or showed portions of their bodies. The first clip below is relatively unusual, certainly in mainstream programming, in that the lead characters are shown to be nude and having sexual intercourse.

The Dunphy Show featured an interview with the writer of Sex and The City. By way of introduction, a clip was shown from the programme. The clip showed Samantha, one of the lead characters, and her partner nude having intercourse in a series of different positions (TV3).

In an episode of The Clinic, one of the nurses has intercourse with the cosmetic surgeon who has recently arrived from London. The scene shows the nurse moving up and down in the frame as she climaxes. She wears a pink slip, the straps hanging down her arms. After climaxing she falls back down onto the bed beside the surgeon (RTE 1).

The depiction of intercourse is examined more closely in section 4.6 below.

3.5.6 'Other' sexual behaviour

'Other' was used to code 23% of the depictions of sexual behaviour. The relatively large size of this variable is due to the fact that erotic dancing was coded as 'other'. Most scenes of sexual behaviour involve at least two characters, usually a male and female couple but sometimes involving a gay couple. Because of the highly sexual nature of some of the music videos that formed part of the sample, it was decided to code these as 'other', again depending on a level of explicitness in terms of undress. More than half of the cases involved erotic dancing (these were mainly shown on the satellite channels). Additional types of behaviours that were coded as 'other' included more unusual activities such as undressing for a screen test or playing with a sock to improve penis size.

3.5.7 Instigator of sexual behaviour

In each case where an instance of sexual behaviour was recorded coders determined, where possible, who had instigated the behaviour. In the Irish sample, females were found to be predominantly the instigators with regard to 'physical flirting', 'passionate kiss' and 'intimate touch', and were also slightly more likely to instigate sexual intercourse (both implied and depicted).

Table 3.7 Distribution of instigator of sexual behaviour

Type of behaviour	Instigator of sexual behaviour				
	Total N of scenes	Male	Female	Mutual	Can't tell
Physical flirting	45	9%	69%	22%	0
Passionate kiss / intimate touch	94	14%	26%	59%	1%
Sexual intercourse implied / depicted	78	14%	15%	68%	3%
Total	217	28	67	119	3

However, with regard to sexual intercourse, mutual involvement was the highest recorded pattern of behaviour. This would be mainly due to the fact that although the foreplay is instigated by the female, the male is generally seen as a willing partner.

The Kaiser study reported a similar pattern of females taking the instigator role, though in far less extreme measure. In the 2000 study, 50% of scenes showed females initiating flirting to 31% of males, and 28% of females instigating sexual intercourse (implied and depicted) as opposed to 34% of males and 39% mutual. In 2002, the patterns had increased somewhat in the 'physical flirting' category, where 55% of scenes were instigated by female characters. There was also a significant increase in the 'mutual' category, with regard to sexual intercourse (from 39% to 65%). While the Irish figures are telling a different story with regard to the more social practices such as flirting, both studies concur in terms of a strong emphasis on mutual sexual intercourse.

3.6 Safe-sex messages

Messages with regard to R & R were recorded at both the programme and scene level. Scene-level instances are obviously important because they address an audience that is actually viewing representations of sexual relations. Of the 925 scenes with some sexual reference 5.6% (N=52) contained some mention of the risks and responsibilities of sexual relations (Table 3.8 below). Four of these had references to more than one type of R & R. In order for a scene to qualify for R & R coding, it had to have some sexual reference. This precluded a small amount of scenes where, for example, fear of pregnancy was outside of the context of sexual relations. These instances are, however, picked up in the next section, which looks at R & R at programme level. This is particularly important for some genres of television programme, such as soaps, that might not have sexual content in an episode yet deal with R & R as a social issue. Each of the categories are described and illustrated with examples in the following sections.

The Irish figure for safe-sex messages at scene level (5.6%) is very similar to those of the Kaiser Study, where 6% of sexual scenes contained some reference to R & R. As will be discussed below, reference to crisis pregnancy tends to occur more at programme than scene level.

Table 3.8 Sexual scenes that contain references to risk and responsibility

Types of risk / responsibility	N of scenes	Percentage of sexual scenes that contain R&R
Sexual precaution	22	2.4%
Depiction of risks/ negative consequences	20	2.2%
Sexual patience	14	1.5%
N of scenes with a reference to R & R	52*	5.6%
Total N of scenes with sexual content	925	
*4 scenes contain more than one instance		

3.6.1 Sexual precaution

The first category of R & R records any mention of contraception. Such references were featured in 22 scenes, or 2.4% of all scenes that contained depictions of sex. By and large, 'sexual precaution' forms part of talk about sex, as opposed to any visual representation. However, as the examples below show, there were instances where contraception was depicted visually:

In the film Road Trip a young man who has been the geek of his gang in college is approached at a party by a young woman, Rhonda. Sitting on a swing chatting, he explains that he is still a virgin. In the next scene the two of them are in bed in their underwear kissing. She says to him 'I take it you don't have a condom?' He replies sarcastically 'Ah! I seem to be all out'. The woman replies that her friend, whose room they are in, probably has some in the bedside drawer. Sure enough, there are some in the drawer. He takes them out but is clearly unsure what exactly to do. Rhonda takes them from him, tells him to relax and begins to take his underpants off. The camera pulls back as they pull the sheets up and begin to have sexual intercourse (RTE 1).

A gag in the comedy Will and Grace involves Grace explaining how good her neighbourhood is by pointing out that she meets Robert de Niro in her local drug store '...who seems to be having protected sex' (TV3).

The documentary Love Bites investigates the swingers scene in Dublin. As the presenter interviews various participants, the visuals cut to a series of montages of images of parties, drinks and close-ups of body parts. One of the images that the camera scans is a bedside table with a packet of open condoms (RTE 2).

3.6.2 Risks / negative consequences

Risks / negative consequences recorded twenty instances or 2.2% of scenes of a sexual nature. This category refers primarily to sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV / AIDS, and to unwanted pregnancy and abortion.

In an episode of Law and Order, the detectives are following up on the partners that an HIV-infected man has slept with. They discover that the man's wife has slept with a young student and they approach him to find out if he might have infected others. One of the detectives asks him 'Mike, why didn't you wear a condom?' Mike responds that he is a Catholic and that if his mom caught him

with one he'd be dead. They ask him who he has slept with and he describes the 'really hot woman' who was all over him (TV3).

In an episode of Fair City, Rita tackles her son's girlfriend over the way she is treating him. The girlfriend says that she didn't sleep well the night before and Rita points out that that is not her son's fault (implying that because they broke up the previous day he wasn't in her bed). Rita goes on to say 'You'd want to take a good look at yourself. What were you doing taking a pregnancy test?' She responds that 'Anyone can make a mistake'. Rita tells her that she might not have been so fast to break up with her son if the test had been positive. The young woman responds that the pregnancy scare was 'a wake-up call' (RTE 1).

At the time of sampling a number of programmes contained storylines around pregnancy. In general, pregnancy becomes a story by virtue of being a 'crisis'. Lead characters such as Rachel in Friends or Miranda in Sex and the City were dealing with the outcomes of unexpected pregnancies, though, as mentioned above, these themes are rarely juxtaposed to sex and are therefore not coded at scene level but at programme level only. (See next section.)

3.6.3 Sexual patience

The category of sexual patience involved decisions by characters not to embark on casual sexual relations. It also included any activities that indicated one or more of the participants was not interested in sexual relations on moral grounds, such as when the attempts of a younger woman to seduce an older man are rebuked. There were fourteen instances, which made up only 1.5% of all scenes depicting sex.

In the film Flying High, Pam, an air-hostess, has dated Paul. Back at his apartment she explains to him that she is 'really not good at one-night stands'. Paul asks her if she really means that because he says: 'Neither am I. Who needs them?' Pam protests 'But Paul, you're a man, you must have...?' Paul replies 'Never', other than with his former wife. (TG4).

In an episode of Fair City, a young sixteen year old, Jenny, chats with her friend in a pub. She decides that she wants some excitement and doesn't want to have to go home that night. She asks her friend to introduce her to a man in the pub that her friend knows. Jenny starts to chat with Flloyd and follows him back to his flat, believing that he is 'on for it'. When she arrives she flirts with him but Flloyd decides that it is time for her bed. Jenny asks him what he is waiting for. Flloyd's exasperation makes it clear that he does not mean his bed. He says that it is time for her to go and that he will call her a taxi (RTE 1).

In an episode of the Villa, a young man talks about the girls he is going to spend the night with in the Villa. He says that he is very physically attracted to Rachel. He goes on to explain that a lot of the girls he meets normally are very sophisticated. They tend to be very 'stubborn in their morals' which, he says, is nice in the long term. However, things will be different in the Villa as the girls are only there for a week (Sky 1).

The scene mentioned above from Fair City was shown to the focus groups and, again, their discussion revealed some interesting interpretations. Abstinence is a particularly difficult behaviour to depict, and is often used as a code for 'weirdness'. For example, building a profile of the school 'geek' will generally entail a lack of sexual activity. It should also be noted that only fairly explicit references to abstinence were coded. Scenes that involved sexual activity yet did not lead to sexual intercourse were not coded, although it could be argued that in some cases these constituted depictions of abstinence.

3.6.4 Programme-level references to risk and responsibility

Mentions of R & R might not always occur in the scenes that have sexual content. Indeed, one might expect that issues such as an actual crisis pregnancy will logically have to come at some stage after the scenes containing sex. For this reason a measure was also taken of programme-level references to R & R. However, it should be noted that even this programme-level measure was only applied to programmes that had some sexual content. A small number of programmes, therefore, that made some reference to R & R is not included, as these programmes did not contain any mention of sexual relations. However, it was relatively rare to have mention of R & R without a reference to sex. The proportion of programmes with references to R & R are presented below.

Table 3.9 Proportion of programmes containing references to risk and responsibility

	All programmes with any sexual content	All programmes with intercourse related content*
Percentage of shows with any mention of R & R	28%	45%
N of shows with any mention of R & R	56	30
Total N of shows	198	66*
* Programmes containing 'intercourse depicted', 'intercourse implied', and 'talk about sexual intercourse already occurred'.		

Well over a quarter of programmes that contain references to sexual relations also contain some mention of R & R, and almost half of those programmes that contain references to sexual intercourse also make some mention of R & R. This level of reference compares very favourably with the Kaiser study, where the figures for 2002 were 15% and 26% respectively. This may partly be accounted for by an increase in references to R & R generally over time. The Kaiser study has shown that the increases in references over a four-year span were consistently significant. If that rate continued, then a repeated study in the US for 2004 might be expected to reveal another significant increase (40% of shows might be expected to mention R & R). This is partly accounted

for by the fact that some studies showed no references to R & R up to a short time ago, making any increase seem significant (Coper-Farrar and Kunkel 1993). While some of the disparity might be accounted for in terms of time factors, it is also important to take note of the types of programmes that make up the Irish television landscape (see genre section). Issues such as crisis or troubled pregnancies form a staple of British and Irish soaps.

While the incidence of references to R & R was relatively high for those programmes with sexual content, and particularly those with intercourse related content, it was not generally seen as substantial to the overall plot of the programmes (see Table 3.10 below). While 28% of programmes with sexual content made reference to R & R, only 11% of programmes placed primary emphasis on these factors. With regard to programmes with intercourse related content, where overall 45% of shows made reference to R & R, only 17% of shows made these references central to the plot. In other words, approximately one in nine programmes with sexual content, and one in eight shows that contain intercourse related content, make substantial reference to R & R.

Table 3.10 Programmes with a primary emphasis on risk and responsibility

	All programmes with any sexual content	All programmes with intercourse related content*
Percentage of shows with primary emphasis on R & R	11%	17%
N of shows with primary emphasis on R & R	21	11
Total N of shows	198	66
*Includes 'intercourse implied', 'intercourse depicted' and 'talk about sexual intercourse already occurred'.		

3.6.5 Risk and responsibility – scene-level contextual factors

For every scene where mention was made of risk or responsibility, a number of contextual factors were recorded. The relative emphasis on the subject matter within the scene was recorded as primary, substantial, minor or inconsequential. The valence with which the risks and responsibilities were treated was recorded as positive, negative, mixed or neutral. Finally, the source of the R & R information was also recorded (see Table 3.11)

Table 3.11 Scene-level patterns of reference to risk and responsibility

	Risk and responsibility scenes	
	Degree of emphasis on R & R	
Primary		44%
Substantial		36%
Minor		20%
Inconsequential		0
	Valence towards R & R	
Positive		90%
Negative		5%
Mixed		0
Neutral		5%
	Source of R & R information	
Peer/ partner		46%
Parent		13%
Legal authority		14%
Reporter/host		4%
Healthcare provider		21%
Other		2%
Total N of scenes		56

In the vast majority of cases the reference to R & R was considered to be either 'primary' or 'substantial' (80%). This contrasts with programme-level references where, as was shown above, only 11% placed primary emphasis on R & R. At scene level, where risks or responsibilities were referred to, they were given a high degree of focus. In terms of valence, there was again a concentration of cases in the 'positive' category. Almost 90% of cases contained references to risks and responsibilities that were seen as broadly reinforcing socially accepted moral judgments. Risks and responsibilities, when mentioned, were not treated casually. Risks were not valorised and responsibilities were not diminished.

In most cases the source of information with regard to R & R was a peer or partner. This might be seen to reflect closed communication lines – talking about such matters is only possible within one's own social grouping (again, our focus group findings are interesting on this point). Healthcare providers make up 21% in the current sample and though this comprises a relatively small number of programmes it compares favourably with the Kaiser study, where only 7% of scenes contain information from a professional source.

3.7 Scenes with sexual intercourse

A number of contextual factors were recorded in scenes that had sexual content. Participants' ages, relationships with each other and the presence of alcohol or drugs were all noted (see Table 3.12).

Table 3.12 Contextual elements in scenes with sexual intercourse implied and sexual intercourse depicted

Apparent age of characters involved		
	N	Percentage of characters
Child (<12)	0	0
Teen (13-17)	1	1.3%
Young adult (18-24)	9	11.5%
Adult (25+)	68	87.2%
Total	78	100%
Participants' relationship with one another		
	N	Percentage of scenes
Have an established relationship	31	40%
Have met before but no established relationship	11	14%
Have just met	11	14%
Can't tell/don't know	25	32%
Total	78	100%
Drugs /alcohol		
	N	Percentage of scenes
Use of drugs in scene	3	3.8%
Use of alcohol in scene	11	14.1%
No alcohol or drugs	33	42.3%
Can't tell	31	39.8%
Total N of scenes	78	100%

In 87% of cases where sexual intercourse is either implied or depicted the participating individuals could be defined as 'adult' (over 25 years of age). In a small number of cases (11.5%: N=9), the participants were deemed to be 'young adults' (18-24 years of age), and in one case (1.3%) at least one of the participants was a teenager (13-17 years of age). The character in the programme that was coded as a teenager was in the film *Stolen Youth*. The theme of the film dealt precisely with the issues surrounding an affair between an older woman and a young man. Indeed, in terms of appearance he looked older than seventeen years. This factor underlines the coding difficulty in that age was not immediately evident in most programmes so that ages were estimated.

With regard to relationships, most scenes with sexual intercourse involve couples who have established relationships (40%: N=31) while 14% (N=11) had known each other but did not have an established relationship, and 14% (N=11) had just met prior to having sex. In other words, in eleven scenes sexual intercourse among near strangers was depicted. These eleven scenes were spread across seven programmes, all of them in late-night slots.

Finally, the presence of either alcohol or drugs was recorded. Drugs featured in three scenes with sexual intercourse (4%) while alcohol was a factor in eleven scenes (14%). While it was impossible to know one way or another in almost 40% of the scenes, it was

established that 42% of scenes with sexual intercourse did not involve either drugs or alcohol.

3.8 Patterns of sexual depictions across programme genre

Every programme in the composite week was categorised by genre as per the Kaiser study. The genres were 'comedy series', 'drama series', 'movie', 'news magazine', 'soap opera', 'talk show', and 'reality television'. A number of these categories were expanded to take account of the types of programmes broadcast on the Irish landscape. The 'drama series' category was used for all drama/action programmes (including serials such as *Prime Suspect*), the 'news magazine' category was used for all documentary-type programmes and informative light entertainment programmes (e.g. DIY, cookery programmes) and the 'reality television' category was expanded to include light entertainment programmes with no informational content (e.g. quiz shows, music programmes).

In terms of genre, 'soap opera' contains the highest percentage of programmes with sexual content (79%). The distribution of sexual content by genre is presented in Table 4.11. Soaps also score the highest rating in the Kaiser study (96%). In both studies the soaps also score highest among the genres for talk about sex (79% Irish study, 92% Kaiser). However, in line with the British and Australian more realist mode of soap, sexual behaviour is low in the Irish study (18%) but remains high in the Kaiser study (70%). Comedy series scored the second highest rating for sexual content in the Irish study (72%), again, with a high concentration of talk about sex (67%) over sexual behaviour (23%). Drama series came third highest (68%) with a slightly closer balance between talk about sex and sexual behaviour (65% to 31%). A little over half of the movies in the current sample contained sexual content (54%). As one might expect, given the visual nature of film, the disparity between talk about sex (53%) and sexual behaviour (40%) was the least extreme. The only other programme type for which a close ratio of sexual behaviour to talk about sex was recorded was the reality/ light entertainment category. This figure would be mainly accounted for by music programmes, where erotic dancing was coded as a form of sexual behaviour.

'Reality television' was the lowest scoring category overall in the Kaiser study (28% of programmes had sexual content). As mentioned earlier, this category was seen as the most appropriate in which to put some programme types that did not fit into any of the Kaiser Study categories. For this reason its score is not quite comparable with the Kaiser Study. Reality programmes did not score very high amounts of sexual depiction in the Irish study, particularly in terms of sexual behaviours.

In terms of intensity of depiction of sexual content (a factor best reflected in the measure of scenes per hour), 'news magazine' programmes score highest (8.6 scenes per hour of talk about sex and 6.5 per hour of sexual behaviour). This might seem surprising but it is due to the fact that if a news-type programme has any sexual content at all, it tends to be

the topic of the programme. Thus in the current sample a small number of documentary-type programmes that looked at themes of a sexual nature (abortion, swingers' clubs) contributed to this high incidence of sexual content in a limited number of programmes. Comedy series scored the second highest rate of sexual content in terms of talk about sex and was also one of the second highest (discounting the 'reality' category) in terms of sexual behaviour.

Table 3.13 Distribution of sexual content by genre

		Any sexual content							Total
		Comedy series	Drama series	Movie	News mag.	Soap opera	Talk show	Reality /light ent.	
Percentage of programmes with any sexual content		72%	68%	54%	13%	79%	59%	35%	54%
Of progs. with any sex	Average number of scenes per hour containing sex	5.6	3.3	4	9	4.5	3.1	5.8	5.4
	N of shows	31	46	31	9	49	10	22	19
	N of hours	17	50	61	6	34	13	23	204
	N of scenes	95	199	242	58	155	41	135	925
		Talk about sex							
Percentage of programmes with any talk about sex		67%	65%	53%	11%	79%	59%	34%	50%
Of progs. with any talk about sex	Average number of scenes per hour containing talk	5.5	3.3	2.8	8.6	4.2	2.4	4.0	4.1
	Average level of talk in scenes	1.6	1.8	1.7	1.3	1.6	2.0	1.3	
	N of shows	29	44	30	8	49	10	21	191
	N of hours	16	48	58	6	34	13	22	197
	N of scenes	88	161	163	52	143	31	89	727
		Sexual behaviour							
Percentage of programmes with any sexual behaviour		23%	31%	40%	4%	18%	18%	16%	21%
Of progs. with any sexual behaviour	Average number of scenes per hour containing behaviour	2.6	1.8	1.8	6.5	1.3	2.6	17.6	4.0
	Average level of behaviour in scenes	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.0	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.3
	N of shows	10	21	23	3	11	3	10	81
	N of hours	5	23	46	2	12	5	13	106
	N of scenes	13	42	83	13	16	13	53	233
Total N of shows		43	68	57	71	62	17	62	380

Table 3.14 Risk and responsibility by genre

	Comedy series	Drama series	Movie	News mag.	Soap opera	Talk show	Reality /light ent.	Total
Percentage of shows with any sex that contain R & R	7%	22%	52%	22%	37%	20%	27%	28%
N of shows with any R & R	2	10	16	2	18	2	6	56
N of shows with sex	31	46	31	9	49	10	22	198
Total N of shows	43	68	57	71	62	17	62	380

The programmes that contain the highest proportion of sexual content are also those that contain the highest incidence of messages about R & R (see Table 3.14). Of course, this should be no surprise in that within the popular genres of movies, soaps and drama it would be difficult to develop the themes of R & R without firstly introducing the theme of sex. Apart from light entertainment, they are also among the most popular genres in terms of presence in the schedules. Comedy, with its very low score of 7% of shows containing mention of R & R, stands out, again, as a generic form that can tend to foreground sexual themes without reference to R & R. However, it could be argued that this genre would have particular difficulty broaching such issues without appearing to trivialise them and thus lowering their valence. The high score within the 'movie' category suggested that a more detailed examination might be useful, particularly in terms of teen films versus more general films.

3.9 Comparison of channels - composite weeks

Table 3.15 shows the breakdown of sexual content across the six composite weeks. As can be seen from this table, British satellite channels contain the highest percentage of sexual material (65% of programme hours contain sexual material), while the British terrestrial channels contain the lowest percentage (33%). The BSC Annual Monitoring Report No. 7 (1999) reported a similar disparity between the satellite and terrestrial channels. Overall the report noted lower levels of sexual material than the current study. (Terrestrial - 18% depicted some form of sexual activity and satellite - 40% depicted some form of sexual activity.) This may reflect a different coding system which, in turn, may point to a more restrictive definition of sexual activity in the British study compared to the American coding system.

Among the Irish channels, TV3 contains the highest ratio of sexual to non-sexual material (61% to 39%); RTE 2 contains the second highest ratio (58% to 42%), TG4 the third highest ratio (53.5% to 46.5%), and RTE 1 contains the lowest ratio, with 44% sexual content to 56% non-sexual content. It is important to note at this stage that these figures mask differences in terms of level of explicitness. The number of instances of sexual content may be high for a particular channel but references may be particularly mild. These figures, therefore, need to be read in light of the more detailed analysis of sexual content outlined earlier in the report.

Table 3.15 Distribution of sexual content across channels

Channel	% of programmes with sexual content
RTE 1	44%
RTE 2	58%
TV3	61%
TG4	54%
British terrestrial	33%
British satellite	65%

3.10 Time of broadcast – the watershed

All programmes were assigned to one of three time slots depending on the time at which they went out on air. These slots ran from 2.00-5.30 p.m., 6.00-8.30 p.m. and 9.00-11.30 p.m. As can be seen in Table 3.16, there is a pattern of more extreme or explicit sexual content in later time slots.

Table 3.16 Programmes with sexual behaviour: times of commencement of broadcast (%)*

	2 – 5.30 pm		6 – 8.30 pm		9 – 11.30 pm		TOTAL N
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Physical flirting	18	40%	7	16%	20	44%	45
Passionate kiss	13	20%	8	12%	45	68%	66
Intimate touch	3	11%	1	4%	24	85%	28
Intercourse implied	9	21%	10	23%	24	56%	43
Intercourse depicted	0	0%	0	0%	35	100%	35
TOTAL N	43		26		148		217

*Excluding 'other' category

There was no instance of 'intercourse depicted' in the afternoon slot or in the evening slot before the 9 p.m. watershed. While there is a pattern of more extreme sexual depictions in later time slots, there were nine and ten instances of 'intercourse implied' (21%/23%) in both the afternoon slot and the early evening slot respectively. This seemingly more extreme form of sexual depiction, relative to flirting, kissing or intimate touch is, of course, less explicit in terms of visual depiction. There are, therefore, implied messages with regard to sexual intercourse across the schedules, though these are oblique.

3.11 Teen top ten programmes

While the composite week sample provides a comprehensive view of the types of programmes available to young people in Ireland, the teen top ten sample provides a more focused view of the programmes of interest to the specific fifteen-to-nineteen-year-old age group. As mentioned above, the teenage sample was drawn from the ACNielsen ratings list of top twenty programmes for that age group. It consisted of two randomly selected episodes of each of the top ten eligible programmes. Again, sports were deemed ineligible but also the sample was restricted to regular series and serials (excluding films and 'specials' which it was not possible to capture given the time lag). (Appendix 5 shows the ACNielsen top thirty programmes for the sampled week.)

Table 3.17 Teen sample from current research and position in ACNielsen top fifty programmes

Rank	Programme sample	Channel	Duration	ACNielsen top fifty position*
1	Coronation Street	TV3	1 hour	3
2	The Late Late Show	RTE1	5 hours	7
3	Off The Rails 2003	RTE1	1 hour	14
4	Fair City 2003	RTE1	1 hour	18
5	Father Ted	NET2	1 hour	23
6	Eastenders	RTE1	1 hour	24
7	Sex And The City	TV3	1 hour	25
8	Only Fools And Horses	RTE1	1 hour	28
9	CSI: Crime Scene Investigation	RTE1	2 hours	30
10	Home And Away	NET2	1 hour	31
	Total duration		15 hours	

* (ACNielsen/Mediavest 2004)

3.11.1 Sexual content in the teen sample

As can be seen in Table 3.18, the Irish teen top ten sample contains relatively little sex compared to the Kaiser study (60% compared to 83%). This figure would certainly have been somewhat higher if the films that were among the teens' top ten, such as Road Trip and Charlie's Angels, had also been coded (see Appendix 5). Teen movies tend to contain more sex than those aimed at wider audiences (Greenberg et al. 1993a). However, the actual top ten also contained a number of programmes that might be expected to contain no sex (such as Celebrity Farm, The Sunday Game, a documentary on Conrad Gallagher), so that while the overall figure might have been higher this would probably have been distributed across slightly fewer programmes. The Kaiser top ten sample also contains only regular series/serials. While the amount of sex in the teen sample is lower than that of the Kaiser sample it is, nonetheless, higher than the sexual content of the Irish composite week sample, which was 52%. So similar to the Kaiser study, the programmes viewed most frequently by teens have a "higher concentration of sexual content than the levels observed for television overall", but it is not as great a disparity in the Irish top ten as in the American sample. (Greenberg et al. 1993:45)

Table 3.18 Teen top ten programmes: summary of sexual content

Any sexual content				
		Kaiser teen	Irish CW*	Irish teen
	Percentage of programmes with any sexual content	83%	52%	60%
Of programmes with any sex	Average number of scenes per hour containing sex	6.7	4.5	4.5
	N of shows	49	198	12
	N of hours	36.5	204	7.6

	N of scenes	243	925	34
	Talk about sex			
	Percentage of programmes with any talk about sex	80%	50%	55%
Of programmes with any talk about sex	Average number of scenes per hour containing talk about sex	6.0	3.7	4.7
	N of shows	47	191	11
	N of hours	35	197	6.40
	N of scenes with talk about sex	209	727	30
	Sexual behaviour			
	Percentage of programmes with any sexual behaviour	49%	21%	15%
Of programmes with any sexual behaviour	Average number of scenes per hour containing sexual behaviour	3.1	2	2.22
	N of shows	29	81	3
	N of hours	20	106	2
	N of scenes with sexual behaviour	61	233	4
	Total no of shows	59	380	20
*Irish composite week				

While the overall figure for the Irish teen sample is lower than the Kaiser sample, the amount of sex within those programmes is also lower (6.7 scenes compared to 4.5 scenes). Nor does the Irish teen sample contain more sexual scenes than the Irish composite week sample, as is the case with the Kaiser study. The average number of scenes per hour is 4.5 for both Irish samples.

3.12 Safe-sex messages in the teen sample

Two programmes in the teen sample contained references to aspects of R & R. One of these references was at scene level and took place in *Sex and the City*. It involved the four friends sitting over lunch discussing aspects of their sex lives, when Samantha suggests that the way to 'baby-proof' is to use a condom. The second reference was at programme level. In an episode of *Only Fools and Horses*, one of the characters discovers that she is pregnant. At first she is very worried and does not tell her partner, thinking that he will disapprove. When she does finally tell him, at the end of the programme, he is extremely pleased, and the 'crisis' is over.

These figures are extremely low in terms of conducting a quantitative analysis. However, they are reported in the Kaiser study, so for tentative comparative purposes results are reported for the Irish study. With regard to scene-level safe-sex messages, the one instance mentioned above would make up almost 3% of total scenes. This compares with 1% for the Kaiser study (N=2). At programme level, the one instance of a crisis pregnancy means that over 8% of programmes contain a safe-sex message. The Kaiser study reported 12% (N=6) of programmes at this level.

3.13 Conclusions

A number of factors emerged from the content analysis that would warrant further attention. Along with the amount and nature of sex on television and the forms of depiction of R & R, a number of contextual and organisational features also deserve mention (e.g. gender of

instigator, use of alcohol, maintenance of the watershed).

On many counts the levels of sex on television in Ireland are somewhat lower than in the US. Nonetheless, the figures indicate that over half of general audience programmes broadcast on the Irish television landscape contain sexual references, though the vast majority of this material would be considered 'cursory' and 'mild', and would have included references in family viewing programmes such as *Murder She Wrote* or *Ready Steady Cook*. However, the level of explicitness, measured by degree of nudity or implied nudity, was relatively high compared to the Kaiser study. There appears, therefore, to be a pattern not so much of high levels of sex across the television landscape, as of a higher intensity in certain 'regions' of the landscape. These programmes were noted by the focus group participants, who referred to some of the titles, on the satellite channels in particular, as 'pornographic'.

As the Kaiser study points out, viewers may find it hard to avoid watching sex on television, however mild, given its presence in nearly half of all general audience programming. Sex on television is particularly hard to avoid after the nine o'clock watershed, when the proportion of programmes with sex is higher.

A number of factors were observed with regard to the treatment of R & R. Programmes on the Irish television landscape contained more references to R & R than those in the US sample, though this may partly be accounted for by a time lag. References to R & R have been increasing substantially over the years. However, the level of reference may still be considered low; only 12% of programmes with scenes of a sexual nature made some form of reference to risks and responsibilities. This compares with 6% for the American study. Further, only 17% of shows made these references central to the plot.

The focus group interviewing included discussion about the ways in which risks and responsibilities are depicted on television, and the young participants had some interesting insights that helped explain certain aspects. In one focus group the difficulty in visually depicting contraceptive use was highlighted: the sexual content would need to be very explicit to reach the stage where this was shown visually. Indeed, reference to R & R does increase for those programmes with intercourse related content. Almost half (45%) have some reference to R & R, and with a high degree of emphasis on R & R. Of all the forms of R & R 'sexual patience' had the lowest score. Participants noted that this is a particularly difficult behaviour to depict televisually, and is often used as a code for 'weirdness'. Lead characters, particularly male, will generally be represented as sexually active and eager, even if they are not the instigator of encounters. Clearly, further study would be needed into forms of representation of characters' sexuality before any sexual learning could be developed televisually.

Where R & R did enter a scene, it was generally given a high degree of emphasis. This may not necessarily be a positive factor. Again, in focus group discussion a tentative idea developed with regard to the significance of foreground/background placing of risk or responsibility. The more 'background' the treatment is, the more 'normal' it may appear to be. In other words, the camera silently panning across the packet of condoms on the bedside table depicts them as a 'natural' feature of the bedroom. The significance of this form of depiction is unclear but certainly it creates a different message from the kind of depiction that shows contraception as unusual or humorous. In the same vein, it was noted that issues such

as crisis pregnancy are popular plot devices. The centrality of the pregnancy to the fictitious world and the heightened drama, masks the more mundane aspects of such a dilemma. Again focus group participants drew attention to issues such as the financial implications of a crisis pregnancy, which were ignored in the television treatment of the topic.

Just as crisis pregnancy was a popular storyline, so too was the 'trying to get pregnant' plot. A storyline in *Batchelor's Walk* involved a young man discovering that his girlfriend was pregnant. He confides in his friends, telling them that he feels he is too young to be a father. By the end of the programme he has come to terms with the pregnancy and tells his girlfriend that he will be there for her. He discovers that she wanted to get pregnant, but doesn't want a relationship with him. This programme was coded as R & R in recognition of the father's crisis, but does underline the need for further in-depth analysis of programme storylines.

In 90% of the cases of R & R, the message was judged to be 'positive' in that it reinforced socially accepted moral beliefs as to the value of taking precautions and the importance of responsibility. Risks and responsibilities were often used as a source of drama, which tended to favour strong moral responses. Of those scenes with sexual intercourse where it was possible to judge the nature of the relationship, 58% had an established relationship, 21% knew each other but had no established relationship and 21% had just met. In those cases where characters had 'just met' it was noted that programmes did not depict 'casual sex' casually. In most cases, the casual sex is a theme in the programme as, for example, in *Queer as Folk* (the lifestyle of gays) or the *Fearing Mind and Species* (where psychotic, predatory females seduce men). There are relatively few instances of sex on television where casual sex takes place without a link to a storyline. In other words, the fact that it is 'casual' features in the storyline. One of the characters in *Sex and the City*, Samantha, was referred to in focus groups because of her casual sexual attitudes. Samantha is 'out there' 'looking for it'. She positively enjoys casual sex. All participants expressed amazement at her character. But even in this instance, her casual attitude to sex forms a central theme and is counterpointed by the attitudes of other characters who take opposing views.

One of the most interesting contextual factors to emerge involved the gender of the instigator of sexual relations. The instigator was predominantly female, particularly with regard to milder sexual activities. Given that a small proportion of the sex scenes featured male gay couples (programmes such as *Queer as Folk* or the film *the Object of My Affection*), the ratio of females to males who initiate sexual relations is very high. In the course of coding, this pattern of women seducing men was noted. It may be summed up by the film *Species*, mentioned above – a story about a female predator who stalks men in an effort to become impregnated. The Kaiser study reported a similar pattern of females taking the instigator role, though in far less extreme measure. While the Irish figures are telling a different story with regard to the more social practices such as flirting, both studies concur in terms of a strong emphasis on mutual instigation of sexual intercourse. Research in Scotland has drawn attention to the fact that while there are 'scripts' in the media for young women to play some role in determining their sexual relations, this is not the case for young men (Batchelor and Kitlinger 1999). While the researchers on the current report theorised as to the gender implications of such patterns of behaviour, a young participant in the focus group study provided a very plausible media-specific rationale when she pointed out that television often has to depict sexual relations developing quite rapidly and that using the female as instigator

allows this to happen without the same implication of coercion or aggressiveness. Again, this topic has a bearing on the kind of gender scripts that television suggests, albeit for reasons that have little to do with sexual relations. Further research into the nature of these gender scripts, taking account of the determinants of television's visual language, would be useful in informing both sex and media education.

There was relatively little use of alcohol or drugs in scenes that contained sex. While it was impossible to know one way or another in almost 40% of the scenes, it was established that 42% of scenes with sexual intercourse did not involve either drugs or alcohol. This may be one of the more 'unrealistic' aspects of television's depiction of sexual relations. Again, according to focus group participants, alcohol plays a bigger role, certainly in initial sexual encounters, than may appear to be the case in television depictions.

The teen sample contained a higher level of programmes with sexual content than the composite week sample (60% to 52%). In other words, about two-thirds of teenagers' preferred programmes contained scenes of a sexual nature. This was not as high as in the Kaiser study, where 83% of the teen sample contained programmes with sex.

Finally, there are indications that the watershed does act as a cut-off point for certain types of sexual behaviour. There were no instances of sexual intercourse depicted prior to the nine o'clock mark. However, there were instances of implied sexual intercourse at all times of the day. While clearly not as direct or evident as visual depictions, innuendo is a form of sexual reference that would warrant further research in terms of the greater likelihood for misconceptions.

4.0 Qualitative focus group research

4.1 Introduction

Text as meaning is produced at the moment of reading, not at the moment of writing (Fiske 1987:305).

Discovering how much sex there is on television has little purpose unless we believe it can have some impact on television viewers. That impact is not self-evident nor is it directly related to television messages. Young people do not imitate or obey television any more than adults do. They interpret media content in highly complex ways, filtering the messages they receive through their own accumulated ideas and social experiences.

Focus group interviews, as a form of audience research, were used in the current study to complement the content analysis and to tentatively explore the level of shared constructs of sexuality between the researchers and a selected sample of young viewers. This more qualitative approach allowed the researchers to explore how young people understand representations of sexuality. Along with examining aspects of young people's interpretations of messages, the focus group research also explored how and in what ways young people might identify with aspects of media depictions of sexuality. Focus group discussions examined whether media depictions provide role models or whether such depictions are viewed as media constructs; whether television messages are seen as reflecting aspects of teenage reality or as fabrications to attract and seduce young people. Finally, the focus group sessions helped us to understand how young people distance themselves from the roles provided for them on the television. No-one ever sees their precise self represented in the media, yet one may see characters with whom it is possible to identify. Focus group research explored if, and in what ways, young people construe the gap between their selves and those characters that address them, and the part played by depictions of sexuality in that process of identification and distancing.

The focus groups sought to investigate a number of factors in relation to the quantitative study. They were designed to:

- check the coding process – that young people's interpretations of certain visual and linguistic signs coincided with those of the study
- investigate the perceived realism of selected television programmes – the extent to which young people consider depictions on television as reflecting their own life experiences
- learn participants' views as to the extent and nature of depictions of sex on television
- learn participants' views as to the extent and nature of depictions of risk and responsibility on television
- learn participants' views as to the impact or influence that depictions of sex on television might have on themselves or younger viewers.

4.2 Methodology

Schools were used as the base for recruiting the focus groups. This form of access allowed the researchers to work with ready-formed peer groups and to access parents for permission to conduct the research. Twelve focus group interviews were conducted in six schools. Each focus group contained approximately six participants. In total, 76 young people participated. Certain demographic factors were taken into account when forming the focus groups. Of particular relevance to the current proposed study were gender, age and place of residence (urban (Urb) and rural (Rur)). As Table 4.1 shows, groupings took account of both single-sex and mixed-sex profiles, whether or not participants live in multi-channel areas and the diversity among the range of ages. A problem presented in one school where male students were not available to join the group. Schools were also selected to allow for religious and secular ethos. This ‘sampling’ of students according to key demographic profiles is not intended as a means to achieve representative findings. Given the relatively small number of participants, their views cannot be generalised to a wider population. However, it might be expected that achieving a mix of student backgrounds will provide a wider range of views and opinions, while not claiming to reflect all.

Table 4.1 Focus group demographic factors

Gender	Male (M)				Female (F)				Mixed			
Age	15-16 yrs		17-19 yrs		15-16 yrs		17-19 yrs		15-16 yrs		17-19 yrs	
Location	Urb	Rur	Urb	Rur	Urb	Rur	Urb	Rur	Urb	Rur	Urb	Rur
	9	6	5	6	7	6	7	6	M/F	M/F	M/F	F6*
									3/3	3/3	3/3	

* There were no male students available at the time of interviewing for this group

While focus group research has been criticized because of the key role played by group dynamics, this aspect played an important role for the current study. This study is precisely interested in how young people construct responses to depictions of sexuality within social contexts, such as peer groups. However, peer-group discussions as part of a research project do not in any way replicate the kinds of spontaneous and ‘naturally occurring’ discussion that would form a major part of young people’s construct formation. All focus group sessions were recorded on digital mini-disc and the discussions were transcribed. In order to create a more conducive ‘space’ for exploring what can be quite sensitive issues students in the current research conducted independent discussions of selected television clips, without the researcher present. It was expected that this process might allow students to feel less ‘observed’ or under study. This method of data capture, which removes the explicit presence of the researcher, has been successfully used in relation to other sensitive topics (Barker 1996). This proved a little ambitious in the context of a single visit to each school, but these independent sessions did give students a greater sense of control of the focus group sessions even if it did not remove the ‘research’ context. As such, the findings need to be read in the light of the precise research conditions under which the data was collected.

Of necessity, focus groups were selectively sampled using teacher networks rather than any random process. Within schools participants were also selected by teachers on the basis that they had views and opinions that they felt confident enough to express. The potential for bias on the basis of teacher selection is acknowledged, although it might be pointed out that this is a ‘known’ bias that will be taken into account when considering the findings.

Focus group sessions lasted between 90 minutes and two hours and were divided into three blocks of approximately 30/40 minutes each. Block one consisted of a pre-discussion of issues around sexuality, television and risks and responsibilities. This discussion formed around a list of statements that reflect views on the topics from a variety of perspectives – that of young people themselves, parents, the broadcasters etc. Block two was conducted without the researcher present. It involved participants viewing selected clips from the content analysis sample, which covered various genres and types of programmes. These included clips from Fair City (soap), Bachelor's Walk (comedy), Road Trip (film) Dawson's Creek (drama) and the MTV Music Awards. Using a list of prompts, groups discussed the clips among themselves. The prompts were designed to facilitate discussion (see Appendix 4). Block three consisted of a final, more conventional, facilitated focus-group discussion. In this session some of the themes, such as the depiction of risk and responsibility (R & R), were tackled in a more coherent way with a focus that permitted some cross-references between the twelve groups.

This analysis of the focus group discussions begins with an overview of the impact of some of the background factors that were used to select groups. It briefly reviews the role that gender and age were found to play in the discussions. The following sections investigate aspects of coder reliability. The remaining sections concentrate on participants' perceptions – perceptions with regard to levels of sexuality on television, perceptions of levels of realism, perceptions of the role of television in terms of learning about sex and perceptions of television's treatment of R & R. In reporting quotes from the transcripts B denotes boy, G denotes girl, and R is used to denote the researcher.

4.3 Overview – bringing a sense of self to the discussions

Participants were recruited from among the more articulate in their classes and this certainly showed through in terms of their level of openness to discuss the topic of sex on television. While there was some initial reticence in each group, with participants tending to refer to sex as 'it', this quickly evaporated and the students talked very openly about sex on television. Some topics and references to some characters and issues did cause groups to snigger and use innuendo. This response was seen as significant in that it was most prevalent when the respondents were talking about programmes that contained high levels of sexual expression, but also those that featured more overt sexual depictions. That is, those that were seen as more 'sex for sex's sake', without any of the traditional televisual discourses such as romance or even crime. There was certainly an element of performance in that young people were sometimes talking for the first time in such an overt fashion about the topic and, as such, expressing aspects of themselves that reflected on their own sexual identity. However, participants and researchers relied heavily on projective techniques – focusing on younger brothers and sisters – to avoid overly personal or intrusive discussions. In some groups, particularly the single-sex groups, there were participants who were keen to let it be known that they were sexually active. However, there were also moments of awkwardness, indicating that there were still aspects of sexuality that they considered more private and personal.

As mentioned above, participants in single-sex groups talked more openly about their own beliefs and sometimes even their practices. However, there was little gender difference in terms of the participants' contributions other than when they themselves made comparisons across gender. In other words, in response to questions such as the amount of sex on

television or levels of explicitness there didn't appear to be a gender difference. The girls and the boys were as likely to give similar answers. There was general agreement that while there is more sex on television than there used to be, there is not 'too much' and it is up to individuals to 'turn off if they don't like what they see'. In terms of the realism of characters and situations, again, there seemed to be no gender pattern in terms of participants' views and opinions. At another level, however, they themselves attributed gender roles in terms of making sense of the messages on television, and the social mores they experience. This attribution of gender was also noted by Bragg and Buckingham (2003) and is clearly a key heuristic used by young people in making sense of the sexual relations that they perceive on television. There was a tendency among the females to think that boys might be more influenced by television than they were. They argued that boys found it much more difficult to talk among themselves about sex so that they depended more on television to learn about sexual relations. On the other hand, the boys attributed the girls with a higher engagement with television, particularly with genres such as soaps.

A debate about the sexualisation of women in music videos brought out a gender division among one group of mixed-sex participants. While the boys described how sexual the female dancers are on MTV, one girl argued that they were just dancing, and that just because the dancers show parts of their bodies, it shouldn't be seen as necessarily sexy. However, there were just as likely to be differences of opinions within gender as between genders. One group of girls had a long discussion about the tendency for television to imply that women who sleep around are 'slags' while men are simply doing what is natural for them. In another group, two boys disagreed with each other as to the realism of a clip that depicted a man forgetting that his girlfriend had told him the night before that she was pregnant.

In terms of age, the younger groups tended to be more forthcoming with their views and opinions and less reticent to talk, certainly initially. This might seem unusual given that it might be expected that older students would have more experience and therefore more to contribute. However, in developmental terms the younger students did not feel as much 'ownership' of their views and opinions. The older students, on the other hand, were more aware of expressing a view or opinion rather than merely a soundbite. Among the younger boys there did tend to be a bit more bravado and more competition to show how much they knew about the sex programmes. Similarly, among the younger girls there was a stronger tendency to disapprove of some of the more explicitly sexual programmes. While gender and age did combine to produce a level of differentiation, this tended to dissipate as individuals began expressing more in-depth responses.

4.4 Coding reliability – reading between the lines

One of the key aims of the focus group research was to verify aspects of the coding for the content analysis. Participants were shown a series of clips taken from the sample for the content analysis. These clips contained examples of both sexual behaviour and talk about sex. In particular, they were shown samples of 'implied' sexual activity. This category is the most difficult to establish due to the oblique nature of such depictions. A clip from Dawson's Creek involved the camera panning across clothes scattered on a bedroom floor. When asked what we are meant to understand has taken place, all the respondents replied that the couple had had sex. Indeed, this convention was seen as so obvious that some respondents replied sarcastically, that they 'needed their washing done'. Indeed, as will be discussed later, many of the respondents made very insightful readings of the clips. They interpreted the convention

as implying not just that sex had taken place but that it had been passionate sex, with implications of 'making love' rather than having sex.

Similarly, a clip which showed a female character warning a younger woman to be careful about meeting men in bars because 'you never know what might happen' was interpreted as implying that something of a sexual nature could take place. The appropriateness of coding such content as sexual was supported by the focus group findings. Given the extent to which sexual activity is often implied, particularly in programmes broadcast before the watershed, a common understanding of this content was important for the study.

Participants were also asked about levels of explicitness. A clip was used from the film *Road Trip* where a young woman strips to her panties, climbs on top of a young man lying clothed on a bed and begins to kiss and fondle him. This was coded in the study as an example of 'intercourse implied', with a level two degree of explicitness (begin disrobing, body parts shown). There was a very mixed response as to whether this scene might be considered explicit. It was seen as explicit compared to the other clips and the mainstay of television programming, but relative to what could be seen on television it was less explicit. Many of the respondents talked about the availability of more pornographic-type material - particularly on the satellite channels, indicating that the *Road Trip* clip was relatively mild. One focus group expanded on this point and talked about explicitness as a factor of storyline in that it is not the amount of nudity per se but whether it is there as part of the storyline or whether the storyline is an excuse for nudity - where it is 'in your face'. In interpreting our findings from the content analysis this would indicate that these young people may have a higher tolerance to explicitness or, indeed, a more nuanced understanding of explicitness. Overall, responses to clips indicated that the coding had not been overly stringent. Young people read sexual messages very readily even where the content is ambivalent.

4.5 Perceived level of sex – a lot but not too much

There was broad agreement among respondents that the amount of sex on television has increased over the years, and that it can turn up in unexpected places. Comments such as 'sex is everywhere now' or 'I think it's got to the stage that we don't notice it any more - it's coming on earlier - it's coming into the soaps and all' give a sense of how pervasive young people view media depictions of sex. One group pointed out:

B1⁵ Sex is in the ads and everything.

B2 It's in between programmes - it's in the ads - Tommy Hillfiger.

B1 Sure what was the ad and the word just kept flashing up - 'Oh, ah - you like it' and it turns out to be an ad for fabric softening - touch me feel me - and it says in the last 30 seconds 'bet you thought about sex'. If you're a fella no matter what the ad says of course in the last 30 seconds you've thought about sex [laughing]. It's getting like...it's showing more and more and eventually like they'll be showing porn films on television.
(Senior group - boys only)

⁵ B1 refers to boy 1, B2 to boy 2 etc. G1 refers to girl 1, G2 to girl 2 etc. I stands for interviewer.

A girls' group expressed a similar response, though with a slightly stronger note of disapproval:

- G1 Did you ever see the music channels late at night – they have these x-rated videos and they're just porn videos.
 G2 They're disgusting.
 G1 Yeah you'd be going through the guide and it's just sex, sex, sex.
 G2 Yeah they'd have a story, say, about a couple – and they go to a hotel and it'd be all like disgusting.
 [Laughter]
 G1 Pure sex.
 G3 No storylines.
 G1 Just pure and utter porn.
 I And there's no storyline?
 G2 Ten sentences – straight into whatever and then stop – and then into it again.
 I Should this ever be on?
 G1 Well not never but there's just so much of it.
 G2 Well pointless things like that – that's just stupid.
 (Junior group – girls only)

It is worth noting that in this group G1, who appears the most offended by the 'porn', was sexually active herself. Their annoyance at the amount of sex is not simply on moral grounds, but also based on the low quality of the programmes and their 'parading' as a form of drama. Generally it was perceived that the sexual content is also getting more explicit on particular channels:

- B There's never really anything too bad on normal telly – not that I'd ever watch it [laughter] but there's games shows on Sky Digital and after 12 they turn into... There's numbers you can ring on the side – there are four boxes with four different women and they're taking off their clothes – and that's on from 12 until probably 7 o'clock in the morning... probably [laughter].
 (Senior group - boys only)

A number of groups drew attention to these new forms of programmes. While participants talked about the difficulties in gaining access, many were familiar with the types of programmes⁶. Others pointed out that there was quite explicit material on at times on the main channels. In particular, documentaries about sex were seen as a means to simply show more sex.

- R What would have the most explicit sex?
 B1 Probably the documentaries that are on late at night: Bravo or Laid Bare.
 R These are documentaries?
 B1 [Laughter] – They're documentaries.
 B2 They're fake documentaries.
 B1 They're on the digital.
 B2 I'd go to a mate's house.
 R1 To see those documentaries?

⁶ Given the number of providers of satellite/cable programming it is difficult to ascertain what kind of access to adult programming young people may have. According to preliminary discussions with the providers, digital services are provided to approximately 1 in 10 customers (of those approximately 2.5% of households have accessed Playboy on a monthly pay-per-view basis).

B2 Ah not really – [laughter] At the start it was kind of novel – a bit risky – the parents were out and you thought you were class but...the novelty soon wore off.

B3 They'd be the worst- they're different from the drama.

B1 The drama put a storyline behind the sex – they're just the sex themselves.

(Junior group - boys only)

The incongruity of showing explicit sex as 'documentary' was not lost on these participants. This quote also shows the ability these young men have to reflect on the ways in which they use these programmes as a means of self-identifying as sexual, and therefore, mature.

As some of the quotes above show, a number of groups commented negatively on the convention of using programme genres, such as documentary or drama, preferring to know when sex might turn up. This may be due to feelings of embarrassment that many reported when viewing with parents.

By and large the satellite channels and Channel 4 were cited as the main sources of sex, though others pointed out that TG4 was good for the foreign films. One young man pointed out:

B It's foreign films that mostly have all the sex in them anyway – all those French films and all – They think that's art, like, you know over there in France and over here we just call it sex – they show it on telly to four year olds.

(Senior group – boys only)

Some participants noted the subjective nature of such judgements, pointing out that there may have been as much sex when they were younger but that they just didn't notice it. They are now more motivated to find sex on television and this impacts on their awareness. As one young man pointed out:

B Ah there is like – to be honest – there's Sally... Sally – it's not visual like – they don't show it but it's thrown around – the word is thrown around. I don't know is it that I didn't notice it a few years ago – like six or seven years ago was it there – you just wouldn't have copped it. That's what I'm saying: you wouldn't have copped it or it wasn't there.

(Senior group – boys only)

Despite a perceived increase, and the devious means by which it appears in programmes, most participants felt that there was 'not too much' sex on television. One of the main arguments used to provide a context for the increased amount of sex was that it had become more a part of everyday life. "It's part of everyday life – so why shouldn't it be on the telly, like? You can't cover it up" was a fairly typical response.

While none of the participants thought that there was too much sex for young people their age, some did feel that there was too much for younger viewers (and for older viewers who couldn't handle it); most expressed a concern for young viewers who would be 'confused' by the amount and nature of the sex depicted.

G1 Channel 4 can be very open.

B1 But I don't see what's wrong with them – why hide it?

- G1 Well if you have a six or seven year old watching.
- B2 It might confuse them – make them ask questions.
- B1 But that's not a bad thing. It's up to the parents to say they're not allowed to watch.
[All agree]
- G1 To a certain extent they should let them watch – let them experience what's out there – 'cos in the real world it's not all fun and games. A lot have TVs in their bedrooms so parents can't...
- B1 I think children should have a choice 'cos if it's too explicit they just won't watch it – I made my own choices.
- B2 But if you're watching an x-rated TV come on you're going to watch it, you're going to be very confused.
- B1 At the end of the day television has an influence but you make up your own mind – there's no reason why people from twelve couldn't watch 'cos you make up your own mind – if you're streetwise no-one's going to tell you what to do.
(Senior group – mixed)

This extended quote highlights some of the range of views and opinions that the participants expressed. While the more extreme opinion of 'let them watch what they want' was unusual, the view that 'it was up to the parents' was very common. This links in with the equally strong view that choice generally should be left to the individual. The quote also pulls out a common idea that television only reflects what is happening in the 'real' world. This theme will be explored further in the next section.

Later in the discussion quoted above, one participant summed up what they saw as the unreasonable attitude that parents can have:

- B There are a lot of people saying, 'the human body is a natural thing but if you show it to my children I will kill you'.
(Senior group – boys only)

This quote highlights some of the ambivalence that young people experience: on the one hand they feel they are living in a fairly liberal and increasingly permissive society but on the other hand they are feeling increasingly protected. Of course, this correlation makes sense to parents, but to young people aspiring to adulthood it is one of many contradictions that they encounter.

While some participants questioned why young people should be 'protected', in most groups it was not seen as an issue – it went without saying that 'young' people (i.e. younger than themselves) should be monitored with regard to sex on television. However, as shown above, there was a strong feeling from many of the groups that it was the responsibility of parents to ensure that young people were not exposed to material that might influence them. People, they felt, had a choice. As one young person put it: "If they didn't like the amount of sex on television then they should switch it off – or switch channels".

While levels of sex on television and degrees of explicitness were discussed, there was also an awareness that the moral message underpinning the depictions of sex was a key factor in deciding how 'sexual' a programme is. Sex and The City proved to be a good programme for exploring this aspect. On one level some participants thought that too much was made of the

programme, that it was less about sex and more about friendship among girls, shopping and talking about 'fellas'. One group felt that the message as to finding Mr Right was so strong that the programme should be renamed 'Marriage and the City'. On another level, however, participants often referred back to the programme because of the particular nature of the sexual practices of one of the key characters: Samantha.

All of the participants were familiar with Sex and the City, even though some had only ever watched occasionally or no longer watched. A lively discussion emerged at the first focus group session around the programme because each of the central characters represents a different moral position with regard to sexual practices. The programme was introduced into subsequent focus group sessions as a means of grounding discussions on types of sexuality and the level of realism. One of the characters, Samantha, was seen as particularly 'sexual'. Her name was generally expressed amid innuendo and sniggers. She clearly represents a form of sexuality that members considered unusual. She was described by one participant as a 'whore' in that she operated none of the conventional codes. She was described as someone who 'enjoyed sex', and this was seen as extreme not just because of the amount or level of explicitness, but the moral stance that was reflected.

Overall, these participants felt that there was a lot of sex on television, that it surfaced in many guises and that it seemed to be increasing. However, they felt that there was 'not too much' because the individual could always decide not to view. They did think, by and large, that children needed to be protected and monitored. Participants seemed to have relatively little objection to mainstream television programming, arguing that the depictions of sex reflected more open attitudes in society. They also pointed out that while certain channels at certain times showed quite explicit material, this was not the case during normal viewing times on the terrestrial channels. Indeed, they pointed out that there was a lot of innuendo but actually not too much explicit sex.

4.6 Realism – possible but not probable sex

There was a common belief that sex was more prevalent on television because it was generally more prevalent in society. Television was seen to reflect a more sexualised social reality:

B1 On Coronation Street they had the first gay couple – it's showing what it's really like. It's reality these days – they're showing it for what it is.

B1 Yeah – it's more realistic – they're showing what happens, like, with kids.

B1 Yeah teenage pregnancy, abortion and stuff like that.

R And that reflects what is happening?

B1 Yeah – there's no point trying to hide it – trying to keep soaps...

(Senior group – boys only)

While the issues were seen as 'real', there were very mixed views with regard to the level of realism with which they were depicted. Some of the clips that were viewed by the focus groups were seen as realistic in some ways and not in others. Broadly, a common thread emerged indicating that often the types of behaviour depicted were perceived as realistic but how they were shown was not realistic. Often behaviours were seen as possible but not probable. For example, a Fair City clip showed a young sixteen-year-old girl trying to seduce an older man. This was seen as having a high degree of realism because younger women do

tend to want to go out with older men. However, the details of how she went about trying to seduce the man were not seen as realistic. This was, therefore, seen as a possible situation but certain details made it improbable. In particular, subtle aspects of the scenario, such as the fact that the young woman's friend does not try to stop her from 'making a fool of herself', were seen as very unrealistic by female respondents. Many of the participants debated how drunk the character was because if she was not drunk enough then it certainly wasn't realistic. There was also much debate as to the probability that a man would turn down such advances. Similarly, a clip from *Batchelor's Walk* was seen as having some verisimilitude in terms of the events that had taken place (one of the characters gets his girlfriend pregnant on their first night of sex) but lacking realism in the way in which the main character responded. Groups thought it was very funny that the character was moaning about losing two years of his life, as if that was a realistic length of commitment needed for a baby.

Many participants argued that television was often not realistic in terms of the consequences of people's actions. Participants felt that while there were depictions of pregnancy, they were presented in an unrealistic way. In programmes such as *Friends* and *Sex and the City* there were storylines around what could be termed 'crisis pregnancies' in that they were unplanned and caused some consternation, at least initially. It was pointed out that these depictions of single parenthood were very unrealistic in that, for example, the women continue in their careers without any money considerations.

G But you see them and they go out of the house like – you've no idea where the baby is – it just seems like it's there sometimes and it's not there sometimes – you can get rid of it when you want.

(Junior group – girls only)

A boys' group made a similar observation in terms of consequences in *Sex and the City*.

B They never seem to end up with a sexually transmitted disease or anything like that – and only one of them got pregnant when most weekend nights they have sex all the time with loads of different fellas. So it's not really like – something would have happened to one of them after all the years – it's not really realistic.

(Junior group – boys only)

Many groups noted how television can take 'real life' events but either over dramatises them or simply 'piles them on' so thickly that they no longer reflect reality.

R Are they realistic in any way?

G1 No there's too many problems.

G2 No they're good, like, but they're not realistic.

G1 You'd be able to relate to one of the problems but not them all.

G2 Yeah – most people only get one crisis in a lifetime and they get hundreds of them...if it was one problem at a time.

(Junior group – girls only)

In a similar vein, in relation to drama, a participant commented that while pregnancy was often shown as quite a realistic outcome of sex, it was noted that the discovery tended to emerge the next day.

Participants tackled some subtle points with regard to realism on television, trying to square up a sense that programmes, such as soaps, did hit on aspects of life that they imagined were realistic with the fact that where they overlapped with their personal experience they fell short. They noted that television often shows what can happen in real life but that it doesn't 'reflect life'; that the emotions can be realistic while the plots may be heavy-handed.

These participants also used sexual practices as a means of determining a programme's credibility. One young man thought a particular programme was unrealistic because the actors were not very good-looking and yet they were shown to attract women: "Look at Gary and he has three birds – that just doesn't add up."

The American programmes (Dawson's Creek and Road Trip) tended to be seen as less realistic. The Dawson's Creek clip, where the boyfriend leaves a rose for his lover to find when she wakes up, was ridiculed as overly romantic. The seduction scene in Road Trip was seen as realistic (again the idea of the girl seducing the boy) but the notion that she would video the scene was broadly seen as unrealistic. However, as will be discussed below, participants reported that this scene was important in terms of the storyline as the whole film revolves around stopping the young man's girlfriend from seeing the video.

Certain genres of programme depicted more authentic issues and lifestyles. The sex-documentary genre, which has been discussed above, has a bearing on arguments with regard to realism. These programmes set themselves up as pseudo-factual, claiming to reflect some form of 'real' activities. They were viewed with some scepticism, but most felt that the 'facts' they presented must be real. One group talked about factsheets that formed part of a reality television series and discussed the information at face value. As will be discussed later, young people are very aware of the constructed nature of fiction programming and, indeed, of many of the televisual constraints that determine those genres, but they do not tend to question the veracity of factual programming. They are aware that the sex documentary is a ploy to put sex on the screen but they are not sure how to judge the material depicted, particularly if a device such as a factsheet forms part of the documentary style.

Sex and the City also proved to be a fruitful programme from the point of view of discussing realism. As mentioned above, the female groups talked about how realistic it is in terms of its depiction of the women's relationships and their way of talking about their men. It was not seen as realistic in terms of its depiction of sexual relationships. All groups were very aware of the contrasts developed between characters, particularly the character Charlotte, who stands for virtue, and Samantha, who stands for permissiveness. The recognition of this fundamental narrative device of using polarities to create drama made it possible for this group to question the realism of the programme.

The Irish programmes tended to be viewed as the most realistic, but at the same time, they were criticised for bad acting. Clearly, the settings, characters and issues were felt to be more convincing given their familiarity, but by the same token of familiarity they were more critically viewed and often described as 'embarrassing'. While the American programmes were seen as less realistic, certainly compared to the British soaps, participants felt that maybe life was 'like that' in America.

While it is difficult to sum up the variation that emerged in these discussions, generally the clips viewed were not seen as having a high modal status. This finding would indicate that young people do not readily identify with the characters they see on television. They are not seen as realistic within young people's own life experiences, though they are given some credence as perhaps reflecting real situations elsewhere or for others. A number of groups commented that the behaviours they viewed on television may be true for the people depicted. It was argued with regard to Road Trip that it might be an accurate reflection of how college students in America behaved. In a similar vein, participants felt that parents sometimes couldn't gauge the realism of what they watched. However, what perhaps is more important than the precise judgements that the participants made was their ease in discussing the programmes as programmes, be they 'drama' or 'documentary'. While certain genres confused them, they generally do not take television at face value, but seem well-versed in discussing its relationship to the 'real'. It reflects abstract issues and themes that seem realistic to them but there is very little evidence that they 'identify' with characters on television.

4.7 Role of television in learning about sex

Respondents fell easily into common discourses as to the 'effects' of too much television. One participant pointed out that "you become immune – you sit there like a zombie", while another referred to viewing television as "vegetating". On further discussion, however, most felt that television was a source of 'learning'. What exactly was meant by 'learning' and what was learnt proved to be a much more complex set of propositions than a zombie might ever be expected to deal with.

Television was quoted as an important source of information about sex.

- B When [parents] were younger they didn't know about it until a certain age and they want their kids to be the same, but they're already aware of it – you can't hide them from it – television is full of it – even if you watch soaps – there's always a pregnancy or someone's husband is involved in something – it's not going to stop – even if you put laws in it's not going to stop – it's not going to stop people from growing up 'cos that's what it is.
(Senior group – boys only)

However, television was not seen as the primary source of learning nor was it seen as an ideal source. Television was not nearly as important as learning from your friends, learning 'on the street' or from older siblings. However, after these key sources, it was seen as playing an important role, though this idea was often couched in a 'third-person' format: It either plays a role for younger people or it provides models for what it might be like when 'you are older'. Further, there were subtle distinctions drawn as to the particular aspects of sex on which television could impact and what precisely was involved in 'learning'. Finally, while the girls tended to think that it might be more important for the boys, the boys tended to think that it might play a role for the girls.

While there was much to be learnt about sex from television, it was always ranked after first-hand sources, particularly friends.

- B Television isn't responsible for the young gang that are sleeping with each other – it's their friends – it's who you hang around with. If you're hanging around with older people then you're going to want to talk about the same things they're talking about.

(Senior group – boys only)

However, it became clear in some of the groups that if young people are learning primarily from each other, they don't always find it easy to talk openly among themselves about sex. It might be expected that depictions of sex on television would provide a resource for young people in such discussions. But even friends do not seem to be a highly reliable source of learning. When asked if they discussed the sexual content of television among themselves, most participants indicated that they did not in any great detail.

R Would you talk among yourselves?

B1 You'd come in to school the next day and say 'Did you see that film?'

B2 'Did you see the girl in that film?'

G1 That's all you'd say – you'd talk about the soaps but if you saw a film you'd just say 'aw wasn't that class', or whatever. You'd talk more about the soaps.

R No discussion of the sex?

G1 With the boys you might but not with the girls.

B1 Not really – you'd hear some sometime.

B2 But not much...we wouldn't go into it.

(Junior group – mixed)

In another boys-only session it was explained that boys don't share what they learn on television, in the same way that girls might, in case they might be ridiculed.

B1 You might be scared that others hadn't seen it.

B2 If you're the only person who had seen it – you're a sad sack. [Laughter]

(Junior group – boys only)

They thought that maybe girls talked more about television because they were more open with each other whereas boys have to be on guard. Choice of television programme and responses to programmes are important in expressing self-identity among boys, making them reticent to express spontaneous views. As mentioned above, in other ways the boys attributed a reliance on television to girls; one group argued that programmes such as *Sex and the City* offered role models for young girls. The girls, however, thought that because boys were less open to discussion among themselves, they were more reliant on television.

There was general agreement among participants that however strong a role television plays first-hand experience and peer pressure are far more significant.

B You'd know that's not true 'cos you hang around with girls and you know what they're like.

(Junior group – boys only)

Peer pressure was the main force that countered any danger that young people might copy what they see on television. In contrast to Samantha's pleasure in sex, young people felt that such behaviour would not be seen as desirable in their own social settings. As one young woman put it, "They'd get a name - nobody wants a name for themselves".

In terms of 'learning' from television, the bottom line for participants was that real-life experiences were much more important. As one young man put it, with regard to sexual relations, "You know from hanging around with girls..."

There was some debate as to how precisely it might be possible to learn about sex from television, given that the sex didn't tend to be very explicit. If there was nudity there didn't tend to be much sexual activity shown, and if there was sexual activity then there didn't tend to be much nudity.

In one focus group it was argued that television was a means of finding out about how to 'do it':

G1 Your mam doesn't sit you down – she'll explain the facts of life but she doesn't tell you there's this position and that position. What you know about sex is what you see on TV or what your friends tell you – word of mouth. And they usually see that from TV anyway – it's what's on TV 'cos no one tells you otherwise so you don't know otherwise.

(Junior group – girls only)

Most groups, however, felt that television could not provide much practical information. It was often cited as playing a more important role in terms of depicting relationships.

G1 There's a lot of things you'd pick up for the first time on television – different relationships – you're watching how people make friendships.

B1 You're watching how people relate – what to do, not to do.

(Senior group – mixed)

B1 Sometimes they inform you about what they want in relationships – how to treat women – sometimes ...how not to.

(Senior group – boys only)

While television is seen as playing some role in demonstrating social interaction, it is not seen as providing anything very tangible. Similar to Bragg and Buckingham's findings (2003), for these young people, television is not seen as a 'how-to' medium, although young people felt that parents were worried that it might be.

G1 I don't think there's anything to be worried about – they're just programmes. You're not actually going to turn around ten years from now and act like Samantha – go up to every Tom Dick and Harry and talk, like – you're not going to start doing it.

(Junior group – girls only)

One participant pointed out that there is little logic to the notion of young people copying television:

B You can't hold television responsible for a lot of it 'cos things don't happen like they do on television.

(Senior group – boys only)

There was general agreement as to the illogicality of any notion that young people might copy what they see on television. Participants often gave examples as a way of underlining how ludicrous the notion of imitating or copying is: "No you don't walk up to some bird and say what Joey might say" or "It's not influencing, though – they're not like saying I'm going to go on Friday night now and do what I saw there on telly". Young people are very aware that they

are viewed as a vulnerable audience. They often spelled out what this meant in practice – that they might start acting like characters on television – in an effort to show how irrational they thought such a fear was. However, they themselves were very vocal about the potential danger that television might exert on 'others'.

There was debate as to who might be influenced and a number of potential candidates were suggested. The primary category was "younger people", but also people who might be totally "naïve" or "insecure" or "more easily led".

While young people discounted any notion of being influenced or led by the media they did point to the media's ability to make certain social interactions or practices seem 'normal'. One girl pointed out how characters in *Friends* talk about porn and commented that they make porn sound OK, as if it were an "everyday thing whereas in Ireland you never really see it". The media's potential to 'normalise' was cited by a number of the groups.

While young people felt that they certainly were picking up some forms of information with regard to sexual practice, they saw this as primarily in terms of social relations and even then the learning was not simply a process of copying or mimicking but more one of viewing a range of possible behaviours. With regard to even this limited form of 'learning' there was a strong sense of what could be termed resentment that young people found themselves relying in any way on television in order to find out about sex. Participants were unanimous in their complaints that schools failed to inform them. Often they put it bluntly: If they were not informed in an adult fashion how could they be expected to act in an adult fashion? Whose fault was it if young people relied on television to find out more about sex?

It became clear when analysing the transcripts that participants may have viewed the research as linked to sex education. Their statements became more direct and even more personal – sometimes shifting from the third-person voice to first person: "If you talk to us about it maybe we wouldn't [need to learn from television], maybe we'd be more mature about it." Or, in another group: "We're not being educated properly – you can't blame us if we're not being educated".

There was a palpable anger at the juxtaposition of sex on television and a lack of sex education, which was seen as ludicrous. Despite their criticisms of television with regard to its ability to deliver sex education, it provided some source of information and also addressed them as sexual beings.

The young people in the current study did not appear to learn much about sex from their parents. All of the participants reported feeling embarrassed if sex was depicted on television while they were viewing with their parents. It was reported that parents tended to get even more embarrassed than the children did and had a number of ploys for handling the situation:

G1 We put one on the other night – there with mammy and daddy – Three Thousand Miles to Gracelands, or something, and they're all sitting there talking and next you see these two people [laughter] and dad fairly flipped the channels [laughter].

R Would that happen in most homes?

G2 Yeah. My dad would leave.

G3 Yeah. Or he'd be kinda awkward watching it.

G1 They'd ask you a question to break the silence.
(Senior group – girls only)

One young man had had quite a different experience and volunteered a story about viewing in his friend's house:

B1 Can I just say something – about my friend's ma? - I'm not messing- One time I was staying in his house and his ma came down and switched Men and Motors on for him.

B2 Really?

I Were you surprised?

B1 Yeah – I couldn't believe it.

(Junior group – boys only)

This young man's shock at his friend's mother's openness in many ways underlines the point that most young people are not comfortable dealing with sex in the presence of their parents.

Bragg and Buckingham (2003) have reported that the young people they interviewed did not think very highly of sex education in school. The young people in this study had a very different view and, as has been mentioned above, felt let down by the education system. Some had had some sex education in primary school and while they acknowledged that they didn't (or couldn't be seen to) take it very seriously they felt that it had played an important role in their ability to deal with their sexuality.

B1 When we were in primary school people came in to talk to us about it – they gave us hand-outs and everything.

B2 It started us off – if you relied on telly you'd think 'oh you walk up to some girl and you just take her home and you end up having sex'.

G1 Yeah it gives you a more sensible point of view.

B1 Yeah – before you did sex education you had a bit of a clue but...

G1 All you knew was the birds and the bees – that's all you'd hear and then they came in and made you more aware.

B1 Yeah – it was very vague.

B2 Yeah, they made it – you'd understand.

G1 You'd think we'd be too young – we'd be laughing but...

B2 You'd still think it was good.

(Junior group – mixed)

It was clear from talking with these young people that even if they did feel that they learnt some of what they know about sex from television, that it was not a preferred source. As one young man put it: "That's the only understanding we have of it, of STDs, it's what we see on the telly – we don't get told."

B1 I think most parents are afraid of education – afraid to tell their children about sex – afraid of underage sex – it's not something you talk to your parents about and they're feeling the same. It's funny- you hardly see in any of the schools a proper sex education. Fair enough in science they tell you the fundamentals – in biology but in school you get education about AIDS and diseases but they don't tell you the basic like – about putting on a condom properly – or about taking the pill – that if a girl is taking the pill she has to take one every day and if she misses a day the cycle is messed up – none of that is told in schools and they're wondering about pregnancy. (Senior group – boys only)

One group defined 'learning' quite narrowly and felt that television did not provide any educational material that might form the basis of learning. However, most groups saw an important role for television in terms of informal learning. This was primarily in terms of interpersonal relations as opposed to any more practical sex education. It was also seen as far less important than primary influences such as peer groups. However, even peer-group interactions did not appear to involve any explicit or direct discussion of sex. The process appeared to be more one of picking up bits and pieces of information, with television being one of the sites for morsels of information. Parents appeared to be positively discouraged from entering the terrain, while there was a loud and spontaneous call for schools to take a more active role. This call for more school involvement did not seem to be related to any controversy with regard to sex education. However, it was so consistent across groups that it may have arisen from a belief that the purpose of the research was to focus on schools as much as television.

4.8 Risk and responsibility

Participants thought that there was very little reference on television to any risks or responsibilities in relation to sex. Television's role in this regard only arose spontaneously in two of the groups, where it was pointed out as part of the lack of realism in programmes dealing with sex. While there was general agreement that there was little reference to either risk or responsibility, most groups were able to point to specific programmes that had dealt with issues around risks in particular. MTV's AIDS' Day was cited, as were particular episodes in soaps where outcomes such as an unwanted pregnancy had formed a main storyline. The dramatic potential for dealing with risks was pointed out by participants. It was observed that taking precautions, such as the use of condoms, rarely figured in depictions of sexual behaviour though, again, most participants could think of examples when the use of contraception had formed a key theme within a programme. The episode of Friends referred to in the literature review, which mentioned that condoms are not 100% safe, was cited as a case in point by participants.

While risks make for good drama, contraception and responsibility tend to make for good humour. Again, *Sex and the City* provides a good example. The character played by Charlotte is the antithesis of Samantha the sexual predator. Charlotte was described in the focus groups as the romantic – she represents belief in marriage and a level of abstinence while waiting for true love. Charlotte is the church-goer who is 'saving herself'. Neither of these characters was seen as realistic, although some groups did question whether a character like Samantha might be credible in New York. Charlotte, on the other hand, was seen as 'weird'. Her 'abstinence' was represented in such a way as to create humour and make her appear odd.

One participant made the point that risks and responsibilities, when they were mentioned or featured, tended to be a central focus. In other words, they rarely played an ongoing, background role as something that was 'naturally' or 'normally' associated with sex.

Participants provided various explanations as to why there tended to be little reference to R & R. It was pointed out that a scene would need to be fairly sexually explicit to reach the stage where a condom would be shown. It was also seen as an educational issue, and therefore anathema to television's drive towards entertainment.

- B1 It would make you think – a lot of the time they're just having sex and they wouldn't stop and say 'let's use a condom' – it does take away a bit – when you're watching it – they have to put everything on hold. They have to make a joke of it when you're watching it.
- B2 In erotic thrillers – they don't say 'get a condom'. You don't know if they have one or not.
(Junior group – boys only)

As with the more general issue of sex, it was felt by participants that while they shouldn't need to depend on the television, it was sometimes better than getting unreliable information from someone else. They were critical of the fact that they had depended on 'piecing bits and pieces together' from television, especially as television had a different agenda in terms of its portrayal of risks and responsibilities. This was very clear in terms of how it picks particular dramatic or humourous aspects to highlight but also in the lack of realism in terms of how it treats particular topics.

- I Are there outcomes that aren't shown?
- G1 Abortion.
- G2 Yeah.
- G1 Abortion – the trauma.
- G2 Telling your parents – getting information – you know, when they find out they're pregnant they don't show who they talk to – they skip that part.
- I Why not show that?
- G1 'Cos of the storyline.
- B1 Either that or it might be a bit drab.
- G1 It might upset people.
- B1 People don't want to know the outcomes.
- G1 They can't really give advice or opinions on television – just in case – they might say tell your ma but you might tell your ma and get battered.
(Senior group – mixed)

These participants noted that the more mundane aspects of the actual experience of something like an abortion do not make for very interesting television material. But they also note that programme makers may be constrained in terms of the information that they can provide. One group pointed out that it is very rare to have a storyline where the characters cannot cope with an unplanned pregnancy. They discussed a character in Coronation Street who is very young and expecting her second baby. They point out, with amazement, that this young person's mother is delighted for her.

Participants thought that television could play a bigger role in informing people about risks and responsibilities. Many participants remembered being very impressed by the ads for AIDS, some of which depicted a young man with AIDS. The current ads for smoking were also cited as effective. One group also talked about a programme on abortion, which they had been shown in school and which had shocked many of the students.

- B If they keep showing it that's all good and well but they have to show consequences – things like teenage pregnancy – like is she going to have an abortion? Is she going to keep it? What effect is that going to have on her life? If they show things like that, that's going to stop you from being influenced by what's shown on the telly.
(Senior group – boys only)

In telling the story of how these young people make sense of their television viewing, there can be a danger of bringing more structure to bear on their views and opinions than actually exists. Contradictory views and opinions are often expressed, indeed, often by the same person. As the quote above shows, certain aspects of learning from television don't make much sense. Overall, television was not seen as doing a very good job of spreading information about risk and responsibility, though participants were able to discuss particular instances quite vividly. These young people showed an awareness as to why there is not more mention of risk and responsibility, but also queried whether television was the appropriate medium for such messages.

4.9 Critical viewers

Participants were able to make quite subtle readings of the televisual codes used to depict sex on television. A number of their observations have been mentioned already, such as the significance of clothes strewn across a bedroom floor. This was interpreted not only as denoting that sex had taken place but as connoting particular aspects of the type of sex. These young people were often aware of the contrivance of depictions through inappropriate minor details. In a scene in Dawson's Creek a young man brings breakfast to his girlfriend on a tray. This scene was generally seen as unrealistic and one participant pointed out how unlikely it would be that someone like that would find cups and a tray (in a school residence).

In a similar vein, one participant noted the different connotations of showing a sex scene at night as opposed to the morning after. Night-time indicates a 'quickie' whereas waking up together tends to indicate a longer relationship. These subtle readings of television sex coding show the degree of critical distance that young people can bring to their viewing. Television may be a source of information about sex, but young people read that information with a degree of scepticism, certainly in relation to the genres and programmes that are aimed at them.

All of the groups talked, at some stage, about the role of sex on television. They pointed out that television "uses sex" and that "sex sells".

G1 You have affairs and all that put into Eastenders to get people watching.
(Junior group - mixed)

The hype around 'uncut' versions of films, which tended to contain more sex, was also seen as a marketing ploy.

G1 [There's] a lot in the uncut.
B1 To make extra money – there's an uncut version.
G1 And sex would be the main thing.
(Junior group – mixed)

In discussing a recent RTE programme, The Big BowWow, a group talked about the 'huge' sex scene that was shown as RTE trying to get higher rating and win awards.

The imperative of television to win and retain audiences was repeatedly mentioned.

G They're thinking about what people want to watch rather than what message they'll put across.

R So they'd be more worried about getting their viewers?

G Yeah they'd be more worried about getting their viewers.

(Junior group - mixed)

For this reason programme makers have to make 'normal' lives more interesting:

B If they were the normal people their age it wouldn't be interesting at all so they have to change it to make it a bit sensational or whatever – to make it more interesting.

(Junior group – boys only)

As mentioned above, participants talked about the use of dramatic outcomes such as pregnancy as a means to hook viewers. One group pointed out that this dramatic ploy depended on the genre of programme. It was used a lot in soaps, where the theme could be developed over a series of programmes. Showing such outcomes in film would be a lot harder:

G In soaps they do – well they have to show the consequences 'cos they're following it up but in films – they're not going to have 'Part 2 – She's Pregnant!'

(Junior group – girls only)

It was also noted that if sex is referred to, particularly in the soaps, then the viewers might expect that there would be an outcome. Sex in the soaps tends to be meaningful; it is not a scene filler. Sex will generally be a portent for some problems to come.

However, just as pregnancy could be a dramatic outcome, other aspects of risks and responsibilities might be seen as very entertaining. A few groups discussed the difficulty of depicting things such as contraception and remaining entertaining. Many felt that television is primarily an entertainment medium:

B It's TV and the whole point is entertainment – if you show the bad side of sex - STDs or pregnancy - you'd turn over. You wouldn't watch it.

(Junior group – boys only)

As has been pointed out, there was general agreement that sex was now a part of social reality: a part of our culture. In line with this argument, one participant pointed out that if there was no sex, certain programmes would seem unrealistic:

G I think that's why programmes are getting more viewers because they are more realistic. If you saw a programme and there was a couple and they never talked about sex you'd know it was rubbish – fiction.

R It would seem unreal?

I Yeah.

(Junior group – girls only)

In discussing the role of sex on television, a number of participants argued that films aimed at teenagers are almost defined by their sexual content.

- B A lot of films that come out - like American Pie and all them – all the good films that teenagers watch – the teenage-based films - they always involve sex.
- B When you go to teenage films like that you expect it.
- G You don't expect anything less.
- B I think that's the selling point – they advertise it.
- R Does every character engage in sex?
- G Well except they'd probably be the real nerds – studios kinda.
(Junior group – mixed)

Not only are teenage films expected to have sexual content but characters within the films are developed partly through their sexual practices. Not to want or have sex in these films is ascribed to the nerd. In other words, in order to develop a 'nerd' character, it is not just a matter of geeky looks but also poor sexual ability. On the other hand, overly sexualised characters are also aberrations, particularly if they are female. Samantha in *Sex and the City* was seen by all as an example of an overly sexualised character.

Following this logic another group went on to explain that teen movies generally get their 15PG classification because of sex, whereas the 18 classification usually infers that a film will be some form of psychological thriller.

It was noted in the content analysis of television programmes that females figure prominently as the instigators of sex. While there is clearly a socio-cultural explanation that provides a context for this phenomenon, some of the participants also pointed out a televisual explanation:

- G1 If you're trying to get the message across in a programme – like the done thing is that a guy goes up to a girl, say, in a bar and he'd be texting her or something for a while and then it might happen, but if no-one wants to wait around to see that, it's easier just to have the girl approach the guy.
- R How do you mean easier?
- G1 They won't be dragging it out.
- R You're saying if the guy makes the approach then you have to wait?
- G1 Any normal guy would wait but like it's TV and all – it's shocking but it's quicker.
(Junior group – girls only)

Television can speed up the development of sexual relations by using the female as the instigator. It would be hard to develop a male character who could approach sex at the same speed because this would seem overly aggressive.

4.10 Conclusions

While focus groups were selected in order to check for varied responses along gender lines, these were not as pronounced as other studies have indicated (Bragg and Buckingham 2003). There was some level of bravado on the part of the young male-only groups, but this was minimal and may partly be accounted for by the intimacy of the interview context. In relation to their views and opinions with regard to sex on television, both the males and females believed that the level had increased over the years and that sex was now quite pervasive. It was also felt that the level of explicitness had risen, especially on the satellite channels late at night. These young people expressed a certain amount of shock at the pornographic nature of some of this material. Many participants drew attention to the 'ploys' that were used to

broadcast sex, in particular the documentary and reality television styles. While aware of the reason for using these genres as ways of depicting sex, they were unsure as to the authenticity of the messages in these programmes.

These young people did not think that there was 'too much' sex on television, partly they argued that society had become more sexualised and television was reflecting this, but they also believed that it was up to the individual to choose to view or not to view. They did believe that there is too much sex for 'others', in particular younger viewers; however, they felt that parents should be monitoring young people's viewing. While they argued that the level of sex on television was related to the level of sex in society, they did not see the forms of representation of sex on television as very realistic. Certainly, when measured against their own life experiences, they were very critical of the level of realism. Again there was a sense that perhaps 'others' were depicted realistically, but they did not identify themselves or any of their primary social group with characters on television.

Participants' interpretation of the sexual learning that television provides was also multifaceted. They did not think that television was a reliable way to learn about sex in that it was not designed as a 'how-to' instrument. However, it was seen as playing a role in depicting social interaction. Again, it was pointed out that it was not simply a matter that young people would copy behaviour that they saw on television, but that it provided some form of parameter in an area where they had no other sources of information. Not surprisingly, participants' views were somewhat contradictory in terms of effects: they felt that by and large others were affected, but also that they themselves were in some ways.

Participants were very vocal with regard to the failure of education to provide them with the means by which they could make more informed judgements about sex on television. Participants did not perceive the role of television as being as important as their own peer group as a source of sexual learning. However, on further discussion it became apparent that these young people did not talk explicitly about sex among themselves, and television programmes did not seem to provide any resource in terms of facilitating such discussion. Their responses to programmes are enmeshed in their performances of identity. Television content is not neutral, but is loaded with cultural meaning; levels of engagement with programme content has to be carefully monitored in terms of how such engagement reflects on the individual.

Participants were under no illusion as to the nature of television's engagement with issues such as risk and responsibility. Such themes would only be present if it suited the scene or plot. This meant that these issues tended to be dealt with only as key themes. On the one hand it might seem an advantage that such themes are given a central focus, but clearly this connotes that outcomes or activities related to R & R are less normative and more exceptional on the television landscape. While they argued that there was very little reference to risk or responsibility on television, participants were nonetheless able to provide lively discussions on recent storylines that explored crisis pregnancy and contraception. They also had vivid memories of AIDS publicity campaigns that had been broadcast some years ago.

5.0 Conclusion

The young people in the focus group sessions predicted quite well many of the findings from the content analysis in the current study. They talked about the presence of 'mild' sex across the broadcasting spectrum along with a smaller amount of more 'pornographic' material in late slots and on particular channels. While there was some disapproval of this strong sexual content, other participants dismissed the more 'pornographic' programmes as being badly produced. Whether approving or disapproving, however, there was general agreement that it was the prerogative of the individual to decide to view or not to view such programmes.

Although the content analysis indicated a relatively high level of reference to risk and responsibility (R & R), particularly in scenes that contained references to intercourse, participants did not think that this was adequate. However, they also expressed doubts that messages with regard to R & R, particularly if in any way didactic, could be blended in easily in programmes designed to be entertaining. Although they felt that outcomes such as crisis pregnancy were not handled realistically they were aware of media-specific factors that determined such treatment. Participants were eager for more information and appreciated what they learnt from television. However, it angered them that there can be so much sex in the public domain yet they do not have an opportunity to question or discuss this in a school context.

It was found in the content analysis that the morality underpinning sex on television was judged to be broadly in line with social values: risks were viewed negatively and responsibility was generally reinforced. However, there was very little explicit reference to 'abstinence'. It should be noted that 'implied abstinence' was not coded. Clearly, the codes and conventions of television have created particular stereotypes associated with overt sexual constraint. On the other hand, casual sex was equally stereotyped. Sexual relations leading to intercourse were predominantly depicted in more permanent relationships, and this appeared to be in line with the common view held by participants. Those who engaged in casual sex were generally regarded as immoral, or at least out of the norm.

Most of the participants in the current study believed that 'younger' viewers needed to be protected from exposure to depictions of strong sex. While they believed that others could be influenced by what they saw on television, they didn't feel that they themselves were vulnerable. Certainly the idea of any copycat behaviour was seen as ludicrous. At the same time, participants felt that they were 'learning' from television in ways that they themselves found difficult to pin down. While they thought that many characters and actions were realistic, they did not relate them to their immediate environment.

Research has shown that while there are currently strong 'scripts' in the media for young women to develop their sexuality independently, this is not the case for young men. Indeed, one all-male focus group talked about their feelings of frustration in that they did not feel free to choose not to have sexual relations.

A high proportion of 'stronger' sexual activity on television takes the form of implied sex. Participants in the current study had little difficulty interpreting implicit meanings, often decoding subtle nuances that had not been observed by the researchers.

Finally, while these young participants showed a high level of media knowledge there were key areas that caused them problems. It was noted that they found it difficult to critique documentary and reality genres, and that many found it hard to see how they themselves were positioned as sexually active by television.

Overall, young people are exposed to a large amount of sex on television, though the incidence of 'hard sex' is relatively restricted. While they do not relate much of the sexual activity that they view to their own life experiences, and while they can be quite a critical audience, they themselves argued that there should be sex education so that they do not rely on mediated messages. In as much as they can view with a certain level of media awareness, they are on less firm ground in terms of their sexual awareness.

6.0 Further research

Audience – quantitative

There is a need to systematically explore adolescents' exposure to and understanding of sex on television through a survey of a representative sample of Irish teenagers. In light of the amount of sex that is available on Irish television, further research should:

- explore the kinds of programmes young people are viewing
- question whether young people, generally, think that they learn about sex from television, and what it is that they learn
- explore the prevalence of the liberal ethos expressed in the current focus group research
- examine the range of programme genres that adolescents find problematic in terms of their sexual messages.

Audience – qualitative

Young people feel that they are influenced by the media but are uncertain in what ways and to what extent. Further research based on one-to-one or small-group interviews with adolescents could help to pinpoint the types of messages that are most salient to young people both in terms of their content and their mode of address.

Sexual innuendo is a common element in television messages and implied intercourse was noted across the television schedules. Research into levels of understanding of implicit sexual references, relative to age, would be important to inform developments in education.

Parents and teachers can play an important role in helping young people to interpret television messages, particularly those that they find problematic. In light of this, it would be important to establish their views on the role of sex on television. Such research would explore areas such as:

- how respondents see television impacting on the lives of young people
- whether respondents think that young people are a vulnerable audience
- whether respondents find it easy or difficult to discuss the kind of sexual content that is available on television.

Text – discursive

The current research has reported on the amounts of sex on television, along with key contextual factors. Further research on programmes would explore the kinds of 'scripts' that underpin the sexual messages on television in the Irish environment. In particular, it would examine:

- the precise values systems that programmes draw on
- how Irish television depicts gender roles within sexual relations
- whether patterns emerge in terms of the sexual interests in which different age groups are expected to engage
- how themes such as abstinence and casual sex are represented and whether they are exploited.

Broadcasters / media producers

Further research into television should examine the kinds of sexual learning messages that have been successfully integrated into mainstream programming in other countries, and how Irish broadcasters might adopt similar codes of practice. It would explore what procedures are undertaken to anticipate the interpretations that young audience might make of these messages and to ensure accuracy. It would also explore the forms of liaison that might be put in place between broadcasters and educationalists.

Television research should be extended to include other media such as film, magazines, radio chat shows, and the Internet. It is important to explore the roles that these media play in young people's knowledge and understanding of sex, and how they might be integrated into a media learning approach.

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Appendix 1 Literature review matrix

Content analysis		Sample used	Findings
British studies	Teenage Sexuality and the Media. (Batchelor and Kitzinger 1999)	Cross section of UK/Scottish media during one randomly selected week (9 magazines, 10 newspapers; 88.5 hrs of broadcasting)	TV findings: 69 scenes - 3 instances of heterosexual intercourse (low explicitness); 10 instances of implied sexual activity; 35 instances of talk about sexuality. No direct mention of R & R. 35 items in press/196 items in magazines - mentions of sexuality in relation to young people. Evidence of strong gendered representations - 'scripts' for females to consider R & R but none for males.
	BSC Annual Monitoring Report No 7. (BSC 1999)	880 terrestrial programmes and 225 satellite programmes.	Terrestrial: 18% depicted some form of sexual activity. Pre- and post-coital activity - 16% of all sexual scenes. Most intensive scenes in film and drama. 47% aged 16-29 yrs; 52% in married or established relationships Satellite: 40% depicted some form of sexual activity. Pre & post-coital activity - 20% of all sexual scenes. Most intensive scenes in film and drama. 49% aged 16-29 yrs; 40% in married or established relationships.
US studies	Sex on TV (Kunkel et al. 2003)	Composite week sample of 1,344 hours of network TV + prime-time sample + programmes popular with adolescents.	4.4 scenes per hr in composite week (64% of programmes) and 6.7 in teen sample (71% of programmes). Up over past 4 years but down over past 2 years. Mention of R & R shows modest increase from 4% to 6% of scenes containing sex.
	Sex in Primetime Television: 1979 versus 1989 (Sapolsky and Tabarlet 1991)	One week of prime-time network TV.	Decline in suggestive sexual displays and non-criminal sex acts but increase in sexual touching. 846 sexual incidents in 1989 / 806 in 1979. Explicit intercourse not in evidence in 1979 but shown in 1989. R & R rarely addressed. Male typically initiated sex. Unmarried to married: 10 to 1.

Content analysis	Sample used	Findings
US studies (Contd.)	Sex Content in Soaps and Primetime Series Most Popular with Adolescents (Greenberg et al. 1993c)	Multiple episodes of 3 soaps and 19 prime-time programmes. 2.7 sex acts per hr with at least one act in all soaps – more than in prime time but prime time more visual. Shows an increase compared with previous studies' rates of sexual content (approximately 1 of unmarried intercourse). Notes moral messages generally negative towards sexual exploits. Characters primarily talk about sex rather than do it.
	Sexual Messages in Teens' Favorite Prime-Time Television Programs (Coper-Farrar and Kunkel 1993)	3 episodes of 15 TV shows most popular with 12-17 yr olds. 82% of all programmes coded contained some sexual content. Sexual behaviour more frequent than sexual talk. Intercourse depicted or strongly implied in 7% of programmes – little mention of risk or responsibilities (11%) but signs of increase.
	Prime Time TV Portrayals of Sex, Contraception and Venereal Diseases. (Lowry and Towles 1989a)	One week composite prime-time programmes on 3 US networks – 66 hours. 5.97 sexual behaviours per hour (or 10.94 including suggestive behaviours) vs. 7.4 in 1987. Soap sample: 13.5 behaviours relating to pregnancy prevention and 18 relating to STD prevention. Unmarried to married 4.6 to 1. Explicit intercourse not 'hard core'.
	Primetime TV Portrayals of Sex, 'Safe Sex' and AIDS: A Longitudinal Analysis. (Lowry and Shidler 1993)	Stratified random sample of one composite week for 4 US networks 1987-91. Drop in overall behaviours: 9.66 in 1991 programmes from 10.94 in 1987. Physical suggestiveness dropped from 3.58 per hr to 0.43 per hr. but mention of R & R also decreased. Also studied promos: 5.91 sexual behaviours per hr.
	Sex and Soaps: A Comparative Content Analysis of Health Issues. (Olsen 1994)	105 hours of daytime soap opera. Sexual behaviour 4.8 times per hour on average – instances of some behaviours down but talk still strong (therefore sex less explicit). Married partners shown .54 times per hr, up slightly from 1987 data and beginnings of R & R (118 pregnancy issues up from 7 in 1977).
	Soap Opera Portrayals of Sex, Contraception	Replication of 1979 study - Sample of all network soaps – No major increase of sexual behaviour in soaps despite increase in prime-time TV

Content analysis	Sample used	Findings	
US studies (Contd.)	and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (Lowry and Towles 1989b)	52.5 hours. Increase in prime time but not in soap.	overall. No mention of risk and responsibility – contraception rarely mentioned yet pregnancy rare. Big increase in ‘unmarried’ partners: 3.2 unmarried to 1 married in 1979 – 24 to 1 in 1987.
	Violence and Sex in Music Videos: TV and Rock ‘n’ Roll, (Sherman and Dominick 1986)	166 concept videos from 3 channels.	680 separate sexual episodes (4 per video the norm) but sex is seldom overt and generally portrayed in a traditional context; MTV is the ‘sexiest’ network
	Daytime Talk Show: Up Close and In Your Face (Greenberg and Smith 2002)	Study of top 10 episodes each of 11 talk shows.	1/3 of shows dealt with sexual propriety – vast majority supportive of community norms. (80% of guest responses and 60% of host responses.)
	Sex content in R-Rated Films Viewed by Adolescents. (Greenberg et al. 1993a)	Visual & verbal sex acts in 16 R-rated movies.	Typical 90-min R-rated film contains 7 times the amount of sex of a one-hour TV programme (average of 17.5 sexual portrayals per movie). Greater use of visuals, and more alcohol, drugs and profanity in films. Characters tend to be single and young, and virtually no mention of contraception.
	Title	Method	Findings
Studies of Exposure	Adolescents’ Exposure to Television and Movie Sex (Greenberg et al. 1993) Aim – identify the characteristics of young people which are associated with their media sex experiences.	Survey 1,300 grade 9/10 students. Survey questionnaire measuring demographics, media consumption, self-perception.	Preferred prime-time programmes do not contain heavy amounts of sex (mainly Talk) but preferred movies contain more frequent sexual activity, more variety and more visual form. Viewing is a social activity. Girls exposed to more sex due to daytime soap viewing. TV & film viewing increasingly a social activity. “Traditional” nuclear family is connected to less viewing sexual material, though discussing TV with a parent is positively related to more exposure to sex content. Race and gender are good predictors.

	Title	Method	Findings
Studies of Exposure (Contd.)	Adolescents'/ Young Adults' exposure to Sexually Oriented and Sexually Explicit Media. (Buerkel-Rothfuss et al. 1993)	Survey of 178 high school (13-18 year olds) & 609 college students (17-22 yrs).	R-rated movies by far and away the most popular category, though relatively high exposure to explicitly sexual music lyrics (68%) and x-rated books (46%).
Studies of Reception	Adolescents' Acceptance of Sex/Role Stereotypes and Television Viewing (Walsh-Childers and Brown 1993)	Survey of adolescents and their mothers.	No significant relationship between overall television viewing and stereotype acceptance of sexual practices.
	Gender Differences in Adolescents' Media Use, Exposure to Sexual Content and Parental Mediation (Greenberg and Linsangan 1993b)	Survey of 1,200 high school students' exposure to TV/movie sex content/ parent mediation.	Higher television consumption among females and higher exposure to sexual activity (36 instances per week). Mediation of TV 'sometimes', discussion 'not often' and limitations 'never' or 'not often'.
	Family Structure and Adolescents' Orientation to TV and Movie Sex (Stanley and Greenberg 1993)	Survey: 1,300 grade 9/10 students - measuring parental mediation.	Correlation between adolescent viewing and that of parents - 3 family types - single mother, mother and stepfather, natural mother and father.
	Pregnant and Non-pregnant Adolescents' Television and Movie Experiences (Soderman, Bradley et al. 1993)	Survey: 649 females (ninth/tenth graders) & 146 pregnant adolescents (average age 15 yrs).	Pregnant adolescents watch more TV but not possible to know whether this is cause or effect. Do not watch 'sexier' shows.
	Media Exposure and the Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors of College Students. (Buerkel-Rothfuss and Strouse 1993)	Survey: 457 college students average age 19 yrs.	General media consumption not related to sexually permissive attitudes or behaviour but sexually suggestive media (soaps and MTV) were important indicators of permissive attitudes. Religiosity was a significant predictor of sexual attitudes for females.

	Title	Method	Findings
Studies of Reception (Contd.)	Effects of Talk Show Viewing on Adolescents. (Davis and Mares 1998)	Survey: 282 high school students.	Viewers overestimate the frequency of deviant behaviours; no evidence that viewers become desensitised to suffering of others. Talk show viewing was positively related to perceived importance of social issues.
	Sex on TV and Adolescent Sexual Self Image. (Baran Winter 1976)	242 students, 14-18 yrs old.	Significant relationship between TV portrayals of sex and initial coital satisfaction (disappointed compared to their view of how characters perform on TV), but no relationship between satisfaction with virginity and perceptions of portrayals of sex.
Studies of Understanding	Would That Really Happen? Adolescents' Perceptions of Sexual Relationships According to Prime-Time Television (Ward et al. 2002)	314 university students (18-24 yrs) viewed selected TV scenes and were then surveyed.	Interpretation of scenes highly variable – no one interpretation of a scene accounted for more than 50% of the responses. High degree of realism attributed to depicted situations but third-person effect (happens to others). Strong impact of gender role and existing attitudes in viewers interpretations.
	Adolescents' Reactions to Television Sex. (Greenberg et al. 1993)	Experimental study: 443 aged 15-17 years. Experimental group exposed to TV clips with scenes of a sexual nature.	Those who watched televised scenes learned more about the content areas than those who did not e.g. understood better terms such as 'shooting blanks', 'freebie'. Beliefs about sexual activity were not impacted in any consistent fashion in the immediate aftermath of viewing.
	Disinterest, Intrigue, Resistance: Early Adolescent Girls' Use of Sexual Media Content. (Brown et al. 1993)	Ethnographic study of 19 white, middle class 11- to 15-year-old females – journal, interview in bedroom.	3 patterns of sexual media use – closely related to physical maturity and/or sexual experience: Disinterested – no sexual experience. Intrigued- some sexual experience. Resisting – experienced intercourse/petting below the waist – see media as romanticised. All actively use media – but in different ways.

	Title	Method	Findings
Studies of Understanding (Contd.)	Teens and Movies: Something to Do, Plenty to Learn. (Steele 2002)	8 focus group discussions; media journals (N=13), 'room tours'/ in-depth interviews (N=14).	Movies seen as 'stories about the way the world is'; entertainment produced 'just for them'. Rarely talked about such topics with parents or adults. Gravitate to movies that resonate with their sense of 'who they are'. Caused some teens to question taken-for-granted attitudes with regard to sex and other issues but helped others to reinforce existing notions.
	Young People, Media and Personal Relationships. (Bragg and Buckingham 2003)	Qualitative (interviews with groups of students and pairs of students, 'diary' and 'scrapbook' data, and group interviews based on responses to television clips and tabloid news articles) and a survey study. Quantitative – survey of 119 students in same school as qualitative research (9-10; 11-12; 13-14 age groups).	In regard to the survey research they report that young people are "enthusiastic about the media" as a source of sexual learning but that they feel that parents underestimate their maturity and their need for information (p9). Many of the young respondents reported that they 'seek out' this material and that they enjoy adult oriented programmes. Bragg and Buckingham found that gender and age are the most significant predictors of attitudes in relation to the media (p10). Qualitative section - Reports that young people value the media as a source of information about sex though they do not necessarily 'trust' what they find in the media, often being "highly critical consumers" (p7). They attended closely to the moral context of depictions of sexuality. Demographic factors such as a young person's gender impacted on responses. Media power with regard moral values found to be limited.

Appendix 2 Composite week samples

RTE 1	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
2.00	Murder She Wrote 10/11	Murder She Wrote 23/9	Murder She Wrote 17/9	Murder She Wrote 23/10	Murder She Wrote 12/12	Sports	Touched By an Angel 26/10 (14.15-15.15)
2.30					Home & Away 10/10	Fair City 13/9	
3.00	Holby City 8/9	Holby City 9/9	About The House 24/9	Off The Rails 16/10	Holby City 5/9 (15.00-16.00)		My Family 26/10 (15.10-15.45)
3.30					Open House 31/10		
4.00	Open House 29/9 (15.30-16.50)	Open House 7/10 (15.30-16.50)	Open House 5/11	Open House 30/10		Young Indiana Jones 8/11	Breakfast with Einstein 12/10 (15.35-17.20)
4.30					Telly Bingo 21/11		
5.00	Hocus Pocus 27/10 (16.05-18.01)	Shortland Street 16/9	Shortland Street 10/12	Jenny Bristow 11/9	Shortland St. 19/12	Xena Warrior Princess 18/10	
5.30		The Bill 16/12	The Bill 10/12	The Bill 11/9	The Bill 19/12		
6.00	News	News	News	News	News	News	News
6.30	News						Close Encounters 7/9
7.00	Nationwide	Out of The Blue 18/11	Nationwide	Ear to the Ground 11/9	Nationwide	The Kid 20/9	Fame Game on The Run 14/9
7.30	Leargas 10/11	Eastenders 26/8	Nevin Cooks 3/9	Eastenders 11/12	Sports		Delegation 14/9
8.00	Eastenders 6/10	Fair City 2/12	Fair City 12/11	Fair City 4/9	Eastenders 12/12		House of Love 23/11
8.30	All Kinds of Everything 1/9	About The House 28/10	Off The Rails 8/10	The Health Squad 23/10	Fair City 24/10	Winning Streak 1/11	
9.00	News	News	News	News	News		News
9.30	Rose of Tralee 25/8	Bachelor's Walk 2/9	Unbreakable (Film) 1/10 (21.30-23.35)	Prime Time 27/11 (21.30 - 22.30)		Up For The Match 27/9 (21.30-23.00)	The Clinic 12/10 (21.30-22.30)
10.00				WYB 13/11 (22.10-22.40)	Late Late Show 26/9 (21.30 - 23.40)		
10.30		For Better or Worse 23/9 (22.00-23.00)	Road Trip 10/9 (22.30-00.20)	Prime Time 11/9		Sinners 7/2/04 (21.40-23.30)	Before Women Had Wings 7/9 (22-30 - 00.10)
11.00	Questions & Answers 7/12 (22.30 -23.30)	The View 4/11 (23.10 - 23.55)		Entrepreneur of the Year 11/9			
11.30	News / The Late Late Show 8/12 (23.30 - 01.30)			The Clinic 30/10 (22.40 - 23.40)			

RTE 2	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
2.00	A Bridge Too Far 26/10	Children's Programming	Children's Programming	Children's Programming	Children's Programming	Sports	In Laws 19/10
2.30							What?! Movie 7/12
3.00							Sport
3.30							
4.00							
4.30							Fair City Omnibus 7/9 (15.40-17.40)
5.00	That's So Raven 13/10	News / The Life of Bonnie 7/10	Budget News 3/12	News / Greetings from Tuscon 23/10	Sabrina 5/9		
5.30	Neighbours 20/10	Neighbours 21/10	Neighbours 12/11	Neighbours 11/12	Neighbours 25/9		
6.00	Simpsons 22/9	Simpsons 7/10	Simpsons 17/9	Simpsons 6/11	Simpsons 31/10	A-Team 25/10	The Great Escape 14/9 (15.35-20.35)
6.30	Home and Away 13/10	Home & Away 9/12	Home & Away 19/11	Home & Away 2/10	Home & Away 26/9		
7.00	Sabrina 17/11	Dawson's Creek 23/9	Home & Away 10/9	The Parkers 6/11	Alias 7/11	Sport	
7.30	70s Show 25/8			Oliver Breen 4/9		Sports	
8.00	70's Show 25/8	National Geographic 3/2/04	Mc Hales' Navy 10/9 (19.40-21.45)	N2 Wild 18/9	Nigella Forever Summer 7/11	N2 History The Conquistadors 15/11	
8.30	N2 Wild 13/10 (20.00-21.00)						
9.00	Friends 1/12			Simpsons 23/9		Friends 23/10	
9.30	Face Off 27/10 (21.25-00.00)	CSI Miami 23/9	Love Bites 10/9 (21.45-22.15)	Austin Powers 28/8 (21.30 23.15)	Terminator 5/9	Music Video Awards 8/11 (21.05-23.25)	Sunday Game
10.00	Gimme, Gimme, Gimme 8/9					Sports	
10.30	Face Off [as above]	Boomtown / News 21/10					Street Time 21/9
11.00	News					Last Broadcast 13/9 (23.00-00.30)	
11.30	Jackass 6/10 (23.35-00.30)	News / Sport			The Secret Life of Us 21/11 (22.50-23.50)		Street Time 7/12 (23.00-00.00)

TV 3	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	
2.00	Oprah 9/2/04 [13.40-14.35]	Charlie's Angels 16/9	Oprah 8/10 13.40-14.35	Charlie's Angels 11/9	Oprah 19/9 & 12/12	Emmerdale Omnibus 20/9 (12.30-15.30)	Coronation Street Omnibus 14/3 (13.00-15.30)	
2.30	All Saints 15/9	Mad About You 30/9	All Saints 8/10	All Saints 2/10	All Saints 7/11			
3.00		All Saints 7/10 (14.30-15.30)						
3.30	Stripped 3/11	Emmerdale 2/9	Emmerdale 10/12	Emmerdale 18/12	Emmerdale 14/11	VIP 25/10	Sea People (Film) 19/10	
4.00	Coronation Street 20/10	Coronation Street 16/9	Dogs with Jobs 3/12 (15.30-16.30)	Coronation Street 18/9	The Look for Less 21/11			
4.30	Judge Judy 8/9		Judge Judy 29/10	Judge Judy 25/9	Judge Judy 29/10			
5.00		Judge Judy 9/12			Hollywood Star 6/9			
5.30	News	News	News	News	News	News	News	
6.00	Family Affairs 20/10	News	Family Affairs 26/11	Family Affairs 16/10	Family Affairs 17/10	The Excaliber Kid 20/9	Coronation Street 19/10	
6.30	News	News	News	News	News		Coronation St. Special 7/9	
7.00	Emmerdale 20/10	Emmerdale 21/10	Emmerdale 8/10	Emmerdale 6/2/04	Emmerdale 17/10		Coronation Street 16/11	
7.30	Coronation Street 1/12	Sport	Coronation Street 11/2/04	Popcorn 13/2/04	Coronation Street 5/12	Sport	The Royal 16/11	
8.00	Sport		Judging Judy 3/9	Buffy the Vampire Slayer 4/9	All Saints 21/11			
8.30	Coronation Street 9/2/04		Hush (Film) 5/11	Footballers' Wives 4/9	The Dunphy Show 5/9			The Object of my Affection 20/9
9.00	I'm a Celebrity... 9/2/04							
9.30	Law & Order 29/9							
10.00		Extremely Dangerous 11/11 (21.00-23.00)	Sex and The City 23/10	Will and Grace 13/11				
10.30	Law & Order 20/10 (22.00-23.00)							
11.00	News	News /Sports	News	News	News	Dunphy Show (Repeat)		
11.30	Sport	Sports	Sports / Beyond Belief 3/9 (23.30-00.40)	Sports	Sports			

TG4	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	
2.30	Wall of Noise 29/9 (13.30 – 15.30)	The Admiral was a Lady 9/9	Flying High 15/10	Children's	Highway 301 26/9 (13.25 – 15.00)	Children's	Treasure Island 7/9 (13.30-15.00)	
3.00					Children's		Children's	Children's
3.30	Children's	Children's	Children's		Sports		Sports	
4.00								
4.30								
5.00							Timpeall an Tíre 12/10	
5.30		News					The Man from UNCLE 14/9	
6.00	Family Affairs 1/9	Sports	What I like about you 22/10			Good Morning Miami 12/12		Pop TV 28/9
6.30	Children's	Children's	Children's			Children's	Timpeall na Tíre 0/9	
7.00	Nuacht	Nuacht	Nuacht		Nuacht	Nuacht	Nuacht	Nuacht
7.30	Cogar 1/9	Sport	Ice Pirates (Film) 3/9	Comhra 6/11	Toast of New Orleans 29/8	Survivor 18/10 (19.15-21.00)	An Tuath Nua 7/12	
8.00	Sports	Sports		An Tuath Nua 23/10				Feire Fo Thoinn/ Teach na Céibhe 7/9
8.30	Quantrill's Raiders (Film) 6/10 (20.35-21.55)	Mo Laethanta Saoire 2/9	Mae West 10/12 (20.35-22.20)	Ros na Run 11/12)				
9.00		GAA 2/9 (21.00-22.00)		Fast Lane 25/9				
9.30		Kaislen Klaus 11/11			Séidéal Staire 12/9	The OC 7/2/04	Cogar 19/10	
10.00	Sports	Excaliber 21/10	Fiorsceal 1/10	Amu le Hector 23/10	Nightwatch 31/10 (22.25 - 00.25)	Ardan 15/11	Abair Amhrain 23/11	
10.30	Celtic Footballers 8/9						Survivor 6/11 (22.30-23.30)	
11.00	Fearing Mind 1/9			Twilight Zone 5/11				
11.30	Paths of Danger 1/9				OZ 18/9 (23.30-00.30)			Fiorsceal 14/9

British Terrestrial							
	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
2.00	Theodore Roosevelt 8/12 BBC 2 (13.40-15.30)	A Child is Waiting 21/10 Ch 4 (12.45-14.30)	Mr Blanding Builds his dream house 19/11 BBC2 (14-15.00)	Snooker BBC 2 Snooker BBC 2	Henry V 3/10 BBC 2 (13.00-15.30)	British Touring Cars 27/9 UTV	Sports BBC 2
2.30	Murder She Wrote 6/10 BBC 1	Conference 2003 BBC 2	Murder She Wrote 1/10 BBC 1	Fifteen To One 25/9 Ch 4		King of The Khybers 27/9 BBC 2 (14.30-16.10)	
3.00				Countdown 25/9 Ch 4			
3.30	Flog It 27/10 BBC 2	Escape to the Country 11/11 BBC 2	Countdown 12/11 Ch 4	Cartoons BBC 1	Children's 17/10 UTV	Sports BBC 1	
4.00							Sport BBC2
4.30	Jackie Chan 22/9 BBC 1	A Place in the Sun Ch 4 18/11 (16.00-17.00)	Children's - BBC 1	Snooker BBC 2	Ready Steady Cook 14/11 BBC 2 (16.30-17.15)	The Great War 25/10 BBC 2 (4.10-4.50)	Athletics BBC 1
5.00	Ready Steady Cook 29/9 BBC 2	Boot Sale 4/11 UTV	I'm a Celebrity... 4/2/04 UTV	24 Hour Quiz 19/2/04 UTV	Snooker / Weakest Link 10/10 BBC 2	The Pitts 13/8 UTV	The Good Life 6/12 BBC 2
5.30	Weakest Link 29/9 BBC 2	UTV Live UTV	UTV Live UTV	Election BBC 1			Bill Oddie 6/12 BBC 2
6.00	Simpsons 1/12 BBC 2	The Salon 28/10 Ch 4	News UTV	The Salon 30/10 Ch 4	News UTV	The Naked Spur 29/11 BBC 2	The Natural World 26/10 BBC 2 (17.55-18.45)
6.30	News BBC 1	Star Trek 2/9 BBC 2	News BBC 1	News BBC 1	News UTV		Dowry Cops 16/11 BBC 2 (19.15 - 20.00)
7.00	Time Commanders 10/11 BBC 2 (18.45-19.30)		Emmerdale 29/10 UTV	Emmerdale 29/10 UTV	Emmerdale 28/8 UTV	Sport BBC 2	Who Wants to be a Millionaire? 13/9 UTV
7.30	Cricket Ch 4	Time Flyers 9/12 BBC 2	News Ch 4	Home Sweet Home 6/2/04 UTV	Sport BBC 2	Pop Idol 30/8 UTV	
8.00	Tonight with Trevor McDonald 20/10 UTV	What the Industrial Revolution... 14/10 BBC 2	The Bill 12/11 UTV	Time Commanders 18/8 BBC 2	Friends 6/2/04 Ch 4	100 Greatest Scary Moments 25/10 Ch 4	Waking The Dead 21/9 BBC 1
8.30	Coronation St 26/10 UTV	Hidden Treasure 16/9 BBC 2					
9.00	Trial and Retribution 1/9 UTV	Trial and Retribution 2/9 UTV	X Men 22/10 UTV (21.00-23.00)	Dunkirk 19/2/04 BBC2 (20.30-21.30)	Will & Grace 24/10 BBC 1	The Deal 28/9 Ch4 (21.00-22.30)	
9.30				Sweet Medicine 16/10 UTV	What the Romans Did For Us 19/9 BBC 2		
10.00				News UTV	News BBC 1		
10.30				Newsnight BBC 2	News UTV		
11.00	Lost Treasures of Kabul 8/9 BBC 2	TV's Naughtiest Blunders 9/12 UTV	News UTV		Sports UTV	Sports UTV	News UTV
11.30		Snooker BBC 2	Snooker BBC 2	Newsnight BBC 2	The Life of a £10 Note 26/9 BBC 2 (23.30-01.00)	Frank Skinner Show 11/10 UTV	Sport BBC 2

British Satellite								
	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	
2.00	Stolen Youth 3/11 Sky1 (12.15-16.00)	Fantastic 17/10 MTV	Salon Live 11/10 E4	Beverly Hills 28/8 Sky 1	All New Cribs 7/2/04 MTV	MTV Road Rules 20/9	Salon Live 8/2 E4	
2.30		Stolen from the Heart 18/11 Sky 1 (14.15- 16.00)	Marilyn & Me 26/11 Sky 1 (14.15 - 16.00)				MTV Music Video Awards 11/9 (13.00-16.00)	Beverly Hills 10/10 Sky 1
3.00	Monday Night Mayhem 8/12 Sky M1 (14.45- 16.30)		Star Trek 17/2/04 Sky 1	Joshua 17/9 Sky M1 (15.20- 17.00)	Buffy 6/2/04 Sky 1	MTV Special 10/10	Star Trek 4/10 Sky 1	Star Trek Voyager 19/10 Sky 1
3.30		Relic Hunter 8/12 Sky 1 (16.00-17.00)						
4.00			Relic Hunter 12/12 Sky 1 (16.00-17.00)	MTV Special 10/2/04 MTV (17.30-19.00)	Beverly Hillbillies Sky M2 (16.45- 18.25)	As If 19/2/04 E4	The Final Fantasy 15/11 Sky M1 (17.40 - 19.30)	
4.30	Buffy 25/8 Sky 1	Salon Live 8/10 E4	Smallville The Early Years 15/10 E4	MTV Special 19/2/04	The Salon 3/10 E4	Simpsons 6/9 Sky 1	Baby's Day Out 12/10 Sky M Premier (18.15- 20.00)	
5.00	Simpsons 6/10 Sky 1	Dawson's Creek 18/11 E4	Smallville The Early Years 15/10 E4	The Simpsons 23/10 Sky 1	Superman 10/10 E4			Kate and Leopold 14/9 Sky M Premier
5.30	Simpsons 2/2/04 Sky 1	Friends 17/11 E4	Tremors 3 15/10 Sky M Max	Little Monsters 9/10 Sky 1 (20.00- 21.00)	Jeepers Creepers 5/9 Sky M Max (20.00- 21.35)	Fear Factor 20/9 Sky 1		
6.00	Bleeding Osbornes 22/9 MTV	Dragon Fly 9/12 Sky M (20.00- 22.00)	Mr. Personality 1/10 Sky 1	Fear Factor 9/10 Sky 1 (21.00- 22.00)	Jamie's Kitchen 4/12 E4 (21.00-22.00)	Kirsty's Home Videos 4/10 Sky 1		
6.30	Buffy 10/11 Sky 1 (21.00- 22.50)	The Villa 17/9 Sky 1	Tremors 3 15/10 Sky M Max				Wife Swap 31/10 E4	Joe Millionaire 25/10 E4
7.00	Buffy 10/11 Sky 1 (21.00- 22.50)		Vanilla Sky 16/9 Sky M1 (21.45- 00.05)	Black Hawk Down 10/12 Sky M1 (22.00-00.30)	Scare Tactics 25/9 Sky 1 (22.00- 22.30)	From Hell 26/9 Sky M Premier (23.00-1.10)	Bridget Jones's Diary 8/11 Sky Movies	
7.30	Friends 17/11 E4	Dragon Fly 9/12 Sky M (20.00- 22.00)	Mr. Personality 1/10 Sky 1	Little Monsters 9/10 Sky 1 (20.00- 21.00)	Jeepers Creepers 5/9 Sky M Max (20.00- 21.35)	Fear Factor 20/9 Sky 1	Kate and Leopold 14/9 Sky M Premier	
8.00	Bleeding Osbornes 22/9 MTV	Dragon Fly 9/12 Sky M (20.00- 22.00)	Mr. Personality 1/10 Sky 1	Little Monsters 9/10 Sky 1 (20.00- 21.00)	Jeepers Creepers 5/9 Sky M Max (20.00- 21.35)	Fear Factor 20/9 Sky 1	Kate and Leopold 14/9 Sky M Premier	
8.30	Buffy 10/11 Sky 1 (21.00- 22.50)	Dragon Fly 9/12 Sky M (20.00- 22.00)	Mr. Personality 1/10 Sky 1	Little Monsters 9/10 Sky 1 (20.00- 21.00)	Jeepers Creepers 5/9 Sky M Max (20.00- 21.35)	Fear Factor 20/9 Sky 1	Kate and Leopold 14/9 Sky M Premier	
9.00	Buffy 10/11 Sky 1 (21.00- 22.50)	Dragon Fly 9/12 Sky M (20.00- 22.00)	Mr. Personality 1/10 Sky 1	Little Monsters 9/10 Sky 1 (20.00- 21.00)	Jeepers Creepers 5/9 Sky M Max (20.00- 21.35)	Fear Factor 20/9 Sky 1	Kate and Leopold 14/9 Sky M Premier	
9.30	Bleeding Osbornes 22/9 MTV	Dragon Fly 9/12 Sky M (20.00- 22.00)	Mr. Personality 1/10 Sky 1	Little Monsters 9/10 Sky 1 (20.00- 21.00)	Jeepers Creepers 5/9 Sky M Max (20.00- 21.35)	Fear Factor 20/9 Sky 1	Kate and Leopold 14/9 Sky M Premier	
10.00	Sex and the City 17/11 E4	Vanilla Sky 16/9 Sky M1 (21.45- 00.05)	The Villa 17/9 Sky 1	Scare Tactics 25/9 Sky 1 (22.00- 22.30)	Wife Swap 31/10 E4	Joe Millionaire 25/10 E4	Pearl Harbour 16/11 Sky M1 (22.00 - 01.05)	
10.30	Kirsty's Home Videos Uncut 1/9 Sky 1	Vanilla Sky 16/9 Sky M1 (21.45- 00.05)	The Villa 17/9 Sky 1	Scare Tactics 25/9 Sky 1 (22.00- 22.30)	Wife Swap 31/10 E4	Joe Millionaire 25/10 E4	Pearl Harbour 16/11 Sky M1 (22.00 - 01.05)	
11.00	Species 15/9 Sky 1 (22.00- 00.00)	Vanilla Sky 16/9 Sky M1 (21.45- 00.05)	Black Hawk Down 10/12 Sky M1 (22.00-00.30)	Queer as Folk 2/10 E4 (23.05-23.50)	From Hell 26/9 Sky M Premier (23.00-1.10)	Bridget Jones's Diary 8/11 Sky Movies	Pearl Harbour 16/11 Sky M1 (22.00 - 01.05)	
11.30	Species 15/9 Sky 1 (22.00- 00.00)	Vanilla Sky 16/9 Sky M1 (21.45- 00.05)	Black Hawk Down 10/12 Sky M1 (22.00-00.30)	Queer as Folk 2/10 E4 (23.05-23.50)	From Hell 26/9 Sky M Premier (23.00-1.10)	Bridget Jones's Diary 8/11 Sky Movies	Pearl Harbour 16/11 Sky M1 (22.00 - 01.05)	

Appendix 3 Intercoder testing results

Programme	Coronation Street	Friends	Parkers	The Clinic	Will and Grace	Coronation Street	Totals
Scene range	3-4	5-6	4-8	4-5	1	5-6	
Scene mode	3	5	4	4	1	5	
CIAM	100%	100%	66%	100%	100%	100%	94%
Type of sexual behaviour	Physical flirting	78%	100%	100%	100%	100%	95%
	Passionate kiss	93%	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%
	Intimate touch	100%	100%	100%	100%	94%	99%
	Intercourse implied	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Intercourse depicted	93%	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%
	Other	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Type of talk about sex	Own/others sexual interests	86%	92%	83%	100%	94%	92%
	Talk about sex already occurred	93%	89%	100%	100%	94%	96%
	Talk towards sex	100%	100%	100%	100%	83%	97%
	Expert advice	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Talk about sex crimes	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Other	100%	83%	100%	100%	100%	97%
Scene information	Scene focus	86%	58%	83%	67%	50%	72%
	Gender of instigator	86%	83%	58%	100%	89%	84%
	Age	86%	100%	58%	100%	89%	83%
	Explicitness	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Intercourse depicted	Relationship	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	94%	94%
	Alcohol	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	72%	72%

Appendix 4 Interview schedule and prompts for programme viewing

Introduction 30 minutes

Intro – Debbie Carol / DCU

Research for the Crisis Pregnancy Agency – anyone heard of them?
We've been studying television programmes to see what kind of messages they contain about sexuality.

We want to get the views of people your age about some of these messages.

Check – understood and signed consent forms.

Identify names of each member.

Check – anybody any worries?

Viewing Practices

1. Could we just ask each of you to let us know how much television you might watch in a week and if you have any favourite programmes.

Name XX how about yourself...?
(Name each participant.)

Could I just quickly ask each of you again what channels you have and also whether you'd watch many videos?

Name XX – do you mind if I start with you again?
(Name each participant.)

- 2 Do any of you have a favourite time for viewing – weekends / week days?
Would you view late at night?

(social nature?)

Do you like to watch on your own or with others? Vary for particular programmes?

Do you talk much with your friends about what you've been watching?

- 3 Discuss selected programmes

A few of you mentioned XX as one of your favourite programmes – what makes that good to watch?

X – you mentioned (a programme likely to have sex) – does any one else know that programme? What do you enjoy in that?

Do any of you watch XX (selected programmes with sex)? How would you describe it?
(Try to get a response from everyone.)

Would this be a suitable programme for a younger viewer?

If NO – why is that?

If YES – some people think that there is too much sex in those/those programme – what do you think of that view?

Viewing of clips

Could you describe what is happening in each of the three clips?

In the first clip (A) what did you think X meant by XXX (sex implied)?

Do you think Y handled the situation well in (named clip)?

Do you think Z made the right choice in (named clip)?

Do you think X's reaction was realistic – is that how it would happen in real life?

Did the XX scene seem realistic – is that how young people would respond?

Do you think all of these could be shown during the day or should some of them only be on at night?

Final Discussion

Check viewing of clips – capture explicitness / scene focus.

Do you remember the first clip you viewed? What was the main point in that scene?

Was there any message about sex?

In the third clip (recap) – was there any doubt about what was going on? How did you feel watching it?

In the second clip (recap) what was the main message? (Pick up on risk and responsibility message? If not, point it out). Did you think this was how it might happen in real life?

Feelings:

Do you ever get uncomfortable viewing a programme with family members or friends?

Did you ever when you were younger?

Source of learning:

Do you think young people learn much from television – say 13/14 year olds? Is it a way to learn about sex? Is that a good or a bad thing?

Reflect on 'adult' talk:

You often hear it said that there's too much sex on television – do you think that's true?

Do you think adults/parents worry too much? Why do you think they worry?

Is there anything that shouldn't be shown?

Influence:

Do you think young people are influenced by what they see on television?

Do you think there might be young people who would have more sex because they see it on television?

Risk & responsibility:

Do you think television could show more of the risks that there are to having sex?

Do you think it would make any difference if programmes showed more people taking precautions like using contraceptives?

Would you ever talk about these kinds of things with your friends?

Fair City

In the first set of clips from Fair City, what does Jenny hope will happen between herself and Floyd?

How did Floyd handle the situation? Is that how you think someone his age would handle it?

What advice does Sara (Jenny's friend) give her in the last scene? What does she mean by '...you're going to end up in trouble...anything could happen'?

END 5.30

Dawson's Creek

When we see the clothes strewn on the floor what are we meant to think has happened between the couple?

What does Joey mean when she says '...we should probably stop and think about this...'?

How realistic is this scene?

END 09.05

Batchelor's Walk

Are there characters like these in real life? Which character is the most realistic and why do you think so?

END 11.03

Road Trip (Scene One)

How far do you think this couple are going to go? Are we meant to think that they had sex?

How realistic does this scene seem to you? Discuss your answer.

END 13.49

MTV Music Video Awards

What message are these guys sending? Who do they think will pick up on the message?

END of tape

Appendix 5

Teenage top thirty programmes (ACNielsen/Mediavest 2004)

Rank	Programme	Chan
1	Fair City Specials	RTE1
2	Celebrity Farm	RTE1
3	Coronation Street	TV3
4	Enemy Of The State	TV3
5	Sunday Game Live 200	NET2
6	Charlie's Angels	TV3
7	The Late Late Show	RTE1
8	Road Trip	RTE1
9	Coronation Street	TV3
10	Coyote Ugly	RTE1
11	Conrad Gallagher (Documentary)	RTE1
12	Coronation Street Special	TV3
13	Look Who's Talking	TV3
14	Off The Rails 2003	RTE1
15	Virtual Sexuality	TV3
16	Me, Myself And Irene	RTE1
17	Up For The Match	RTE1
18	Fair City 2003	RTE1
19	Little Man Tate	TV3
20	Meet The Parents	RTE1
21	Coronation Street (Special)	TV3
22	Crimeline	RTE1
23	Father Ted	NET2
24	Eastenders	RTE1
25	Sex And The City	TV3
26	Fair City	RTE1
27	Weather	RTE1
28	Only Fools And Horses	RTE1
29	Coronation Street Special	TV3
30	CSI : Crime Scene Investigation	RTE1

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