

portrayed rather than discussed second-hand, the pattern is skewed strongly toward positive rather than negative outcomes. Nearly four times as many programs featuring intercourse behavior present primarily positive consequences (27% of shows) as present primarily negative outcomes (7% of shows). A small minority of cases (7%) present mixed consequences.

To summarize, portrayals of sexual intercourse on television most often involve mature adults (age 25+), whereas teens are rarely shown having sex. Only a slim majority of intercourse scenes include characters who have an established relationship with one another. Portrayals of sex between people who have just met are infrequent, but still account for one of every ten scenes of intercourse. When intercourse occurs, it most often is presented without any strong consequences for those involved. In the minority of cases where consequences are clearly conveyed, positive outcomes are far more common than any negative results.

COMPARING PATTERNS OF SEXUAL CONTENT ACROSS PROGRAM GENRES

In the previous sections, we have analyzed the patterns of sexual messages found across all shows of all types included in our sample of television programming. In this section, we examine individual program types, or genres, more closely. Our goal is to look for differences that exist in the patterns of sexual content presented within the following distinct program categories: comedies, dramas, movies, news magazines, soap operas, talk shows, and reality programs (e.g., game shows, documentaries, public affairs, police reality).

Table 13 reports the frequency with which these different genres present sexual material. One of the most striking findings here is the pervasiveness with which sexual messages are found across all the different program types throughout the television landscape. With only a single exception, more than half of all shows in all program genres included some form of sexual content. Only the genre labeled “reality” contained sexual themes in less than half of its shows, including such content in about one of every four programs (23%).

Program types with the greatest likelihood for containing sexual material included soap operas (85%), movies (83%), and talk shows (78%). These findings make clear it would be virtually impossible to avoid sexual themes and messages when watching most shows in these categories.

In comparison, only about half of all situation comedies (56%) contain any sexual messages, a much lower frequency than the three genres indicated above. But with that said, those comedies that include sexual material feature the topic throughout more scenes in the show than any other genre. Sit-coms that include sex average 5.9 scenes per hour with sexual content, a level that is nearly twice the average found across programs overall (3.2 scenes per hour). Most of the sexual material in these programs involves talk about sex (5.8 scenes per hour), which is much more frequent than sexual behavior (20% of shows have any, average of 2.7 scenes per hour). The behaviors they show, however, tend to fall low on the scale of sexual behavior, with most scenes involving only physical flirting and/or kissing.

Drama series present less talk about sex (53% of shows have any, average of 3.4 scenes per hour) than do comedy series, but dramas have a greater probability of including some sexual behavior (32% vs. 20%). While comedies have a somewhat higher rate of scenes per hour with behavior (2.7) than do dramas (1.5), dramas present more advanced sexual behaviors (2.2 vs. 1.7 for comedies on the 4-point scale).

Soap operas have a relatively high rate of talk about sex (84% have any, average of 4.0 scenes per hour), and they also present substantial amounts of sexual behavior (2.2 scenes per hour) which ranks as the highest average level (2.2 on the 4-point scale) portrayed in any genre, although dramas yielded an equivalent behavior rating (also a 2.2 average).

Table 13: Summary of Sexual Content By Genre: Composite Week

ANY SEXUAL CONTENT									
	COMEDY SERIES	DRAMA SERIES	MOVIE	NEWS MAGAZINE	SOAP OPERA	TALK SHOW	REALITY	TOTAL	
	56%	58%	83%	58%	85%	78%	23%	56%	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Content
Of Programs With Any Sex:	5.9	3.4	2.4	2.7	4.4	2.9	3.0	3.2	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Sex
	153	83	134	22	47	39	50	528	N of Shows
	77.5	83	278.5	34	43.5	37.5	40.5	594.5	N of Hours
	458	281	677	91	193	107	123	1930	N of Scenes
TALK ABOUT SEX									
	53%	53%	78%	58%	84%	78%	23%	54%	Percentage of Programs With Any Talk About Sex
Of Programs With Any Talk About Sex:	5.8	3.4	2.1	2.7	4.0	2.9	3.0	3.0	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Talk
	2.7	2.9	2.7	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.1	2.8	Average Level of Talk in Scenes
	146	75	126	22	46	39	50	504	N of Shows
	73.5	75	261.5	34	42.5	37.5	40.5	564.5	N of Hours
	429	253	549	91	168	107	122	1719	N of Scenes With Talk About Sex
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR									
	20%	32%	56%	3%	44%	0%	2%	23%	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	2.7	1.5	1.1	*	2.2	0	1.2	1.4	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior
	1.7	2.2	2.1	*	2.2	0	1.8	2.0	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes
	55	45	91	1	24	0	5	221	N of Shows
	28.5	45	192	1	23	0	5	294.5	N of Hours
	78	66	217	3	50	0	6	420	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior
TOTAL N OF SHOWS	274	142	162	38	55	50	221	942	

Movies contain a substantial amount of talk about sex (78% have any, average of 2.1 scenes per hour), and have the greatest probability of any genre for including sexual behavior (56% of shows). The amount of sexual behavior they contain, however, averages only 1.1 scenes per hour, half of the amount found in soaps and less than half the number of scenes found in comedies.

It is interesting to note that across all of the genre breakdowns, some of the major content trends that were observed at the level of programs overall tend to hold relatively stable within virtually all of the different genres. For example, the trend for scenes with talk about sex to substantially outnumber scenes with sexual behavior holds very solid across all program types. In other cases, however, the variance across genres was quite substantial, in particular for the portrayals of sexual behavior. Sexual behavior was found in some substantial quantity within movies, soap operas, dramas, and comedies; but was absent or extremely rare in news magazines, reality programs, and talk shows.

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SEXUAL MESSAGES INVOLVING TEENAGERS

How sexual messages on television affect a viewer depends upon a number of factors. One of the most important of these is the model's similarity to the viewer. The greater the similarity of a model who is shown engaged in sexual behavior to the viewer who is watching, the greater the probability of an effect on that viewer. Because teenagers are obviously considered a particularly important audience for possible influence from media portrayals of sex, we need to take a careful look at the extent to which teenage characters are involved in sexual messages on television.

Across the composite week sample, a total of 8% (N=77) of all programs contained some sexual content (either talk or behavior) involving teens. A more focused perspective is offered by examining the proportion of all scenes with any sexual content that involved a teenage character. Table 14 reports that one of every ten scenes with sexual content (10%) included a teenager. This percentage held relatively stable across scenes involving both talk about sex (10% include teens) and sexual behavior (8% include teens). Teenagers were involved in 12% of all cases of precursory behavior (e.g., kissing, touching), though they accounted for a much smaller share of all cases of intercourse identified in the study (3%).

Another perspective is offered by isolating all scenes with sexual content involving teens and examining their patterns across the range of measures for talk about sex and sexual behavior. The large majority of these scenes (83%) feature solely talk about sex. In contrast, only about one of every six scenes with teenagers (17%) presents any physical behaviors.

Interestingly, the relative frequency with which different types of talk and behavior are shown involving teen characters looks remarkably similar to the pattern for all characters, which was reported previously. Table 15 presents the breakdown for the types of talk about sex that involve teens. By far, most talk involves comments about one's own or others' sexual interests (62% of all talk involving teens), such as the following examples.

Table 14: Teenaged Characters Involved in Sex: Composite Week

PERCENTAGE OF SCENES INVOLVING TEENS	
Of all scenes containing sexual content	10%
Total N of Scenes	1930
Of all scenes containing talk about sex	10%
Total N of Scenes	1719
Of all scenes containing sexual behavior	8%
Total N of Scenes	420
Of all scenes containing precursory behavior	12%
Total N of Scenes	244
Of all scenes containing intercourse behavior	3%
Total N of Scenes	88

Table 15: Talk About Sex Involving Teens: Composite Week

TALK ABOUT SEX			
Types of Talk About Sex	N	Percent of Cases of Talk About Sex Involving Teens	Percent of Cases of Talk About Sex Involving All Characters
Comments About Own/Other's Interests	125	62%	66%
Talk About Sexual Intercourse Already Occurred	27	13%	15%
Talk About Sex-Related Crimes	25	12%	9%
Talk Toward Sex	6	3%	4%
Expert Advice/Technical Information	6	3%	2%
Other	12	6%	4%
TOTAL	201	100%	100%

Several teenagers from Capeside High are serving detention in the library. To pass the time, they start a game of truth or dare. Joey questions Jen, her rival for Dawson's affection, in aggressive fashion about her sexual interest in Dawson. Joey asks, "Out of all of the guys at Capeside, is Dawson the one you are most attracted to?" Jen says yes, but Joey retorts, "No, I didn't ask if you liked him the best, I asked you if he's the one you're most attracted to?" Jen pauses for a moment. Dawson, who is observing, prods her by adding, "Attractive, like physically attractive," referring to himself. Joey proceeds, "Yeah, is he the guy you're hot for? When you look at Dawson do you want to just jump his bones, or do you like his personality the best, but in terms of lust you'd rather boink somebody else?" Flustered, Jen confesses that she likes Dawson, but Joey keeps up the pressure, responding immediately with, "Yeah, but do you lust for him?" Finally giving in, Jen boldly exclaims, "Yes I lust for Dawson. OK, I'm hot for Dawson! There, now are you happy, Joey?" (Dawson's Creek, KTLAIWB)

Two teenage girls are having a private, intimate conversation about sex. Sarah tells her friend Emily how her boyfriend Nicolas left a bag of condoms for her to find. Emily asks, "Well, do you think you are ready?" Sarah responds, "I don't know. I knew that if Nicolas and I stayed together that we'd eventually get into that, but isn't this a little too soon?" Emily explains that sex isn't like a manual that says "first you go this far and after such and such a time you go that far." As the conversation continues, Sarah says that she is a virgin but that Nicolas seems very experienced, so she starts to worry she may lose him if they don't begin to have sex. (General Hospital, ABC)

About one of every eight exchanges (13% of all talk involving teens) is a discussion about sexual intercourse that has already occurred. Note that the frequency distribution for talk about sex involving teens is almost a mirror image of the findings overall, which are also presented on the table for comparison purposes.

Table 16, which reports the complementary breakdown for types of sexual behavior involving teens, yields nearly the same result. The most common behavior involves kissing, which accounts for 63% of teen sexual behavior as compared to 50% for characters overall.

Table 16: Sexual Behavior Involving Teens: Composite Week

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR			
Types of Sexual Behavior	N	Percent of Cases of Sexual Behavior Involving Teens	Percent of Cases of Sexual Behavior Involving All Characters
Physical Flirting	11	27%	26%
Passionate Kiss	25	63%	50%
Intimate Touch	1	3%	7%
Sexual Intercourse Implied	3	8%	12%
Sexual Intercourse Depicted	0	0%	3%
Other	0	0%	3%
TOTAL	40	100%	100%

Buffy and Angel both appear to be normal teenagers, but in fact, Angel is an immortal who is hundreds of years old. The two have a romantic interest, and she tries to impress him by dressing up in 18th century attire for Halloween. Later, in a quiet moment in Buffy's bedroom, Angel asks her why she chose that costume. He tells her she doesn't need to try to impress him, and that he's been looking to meet someone "exciting . . . interesting." The moment grows more intimate as Buffy advances her face very near to his, asking "Really, interesting, how?" He responds by moving his face closer to hers and the two begin to touch their faces together sensuously before proceeding to a deep passionate kiss. (Buffy the Vampire Slayer, KTLAIWB)

The only distinction between the pattern of behavior for teens and the overall findings is that teens are slightly less likely to be engaged in sexual intercourse. Only 8% of teenagers' sexual behavior involved intercourse, whereas the finding was 15% (12% implied + 3% depicted) for all characters observed in the study.

Risk and responsibility messages are about twice as likely to be found in programs that present sexual content involving teenagers, as compared to the industry-wide average for all sexual messages. Of the 74 programs that contained sexual content with teenage characters, 18% (N=13) included some treatment of risk and responsibility concerns. This compares to the 9% average that was observed across all programs that contained sexual material.

To summarize the findings about sexual content involving teens, we see that only a modest proportion of programs (8% of all shows sampled) include such portrayals. However, the profile of those portrayals that are presented – that is, the distribution of the different types of talk about sex and sexual behaviors that are depicted – looks remarkably similar to the pattern established for sexual portrayals involving

characters of all ages. In other words, while teenagers are not shown in sexual situations as often as are adults, when they are shown they tend to engage in the same types and levels of sexual talk and behavior as do any other characters. And most significantly, when teenagers are involved in sexual messages on television, the prospect that risk and responsibility concerns will be included in some way literally doubles, as compared to the pattern that exists across all sexual content.

SEXUAL MESSAGES IN PRIME-TIME NETWORK PROGRAMMING

Separate analyses were performed on the three week over-sample of prime-time broadcast network programs. These analyses indicate that there is substantially more sexual content on network prime-time shows than is the norm found across the television landscape overall (see Table 17). Two of every three network prime-time programs (67%) include sexual content, and these programs average 5.3 scenes per hour involving sexual talk and/or behavior. This compares to 56% of shows that contain sexual material and an average of 3.2 scenes per hour in the broader sample of television overall.

Most of the difference in sexual content associated with the prime-time programs is found in the realm of talk about sex. Almost two of every three network prime-time shows (65%) include some talk about sex, with such shows averaging 5.2 scenes per hour of sexual dialogue. For television as a whole, as measured in the composite week sample, 54% of all shows included some form of talk about sex, averaging 3.0 scenes per hour with such content. The level of talk in prime-time was slightly higher (2.9) on the four-point scale than was found across television overall (2.8), with both findings reflecting a moderate focus on sex within each scene.

In contrast to the treatment of talk, portrayals of sexually-related behavior tend to look quite similar in prime-time network shows as compared to the patterns found in programming industry-wide. One in every four prime-time programs (24%) contained some sexual

Table 17: Summary of Sexual Content: Broadcast Network Prime-Time

ANY SEXUAL CONTENT		
	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Content	67%
Of Programs With Any Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Sex	5.3
	N of Shows	184
	N of Hours	152.5
	N of Scenes	810
TALK ABOUT SEX		
	Percentage of Programs With Any Talk About Sex	65%
Of Programs With Any Talk About Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Talk	5.2
	Average Level of Talk in Scenes	2.9
	N of Shows	178
	N of Hours	147
	N of Scenes With Talk About Sex	763
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR		
	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behaviors	24%
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	1.8
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.0
	N of Shows	67
	N of Hours	64.5
	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	113
	TOTAL N OF SHOWS	274

behavior, almost exactly the same proportion (23%) as that found in the overall sample of programs. The average number of scenes of behavior per hour for the networks (1.8) is slightly higher than the average for the composite week sample as a whole (1.4), while the average level of sexual behavior in the portrayals (2.0 on a 4-point scale) is identical.

A more detailed breakdown of the sexual behaviors portrayed in network prime-time programming is presented in Table 18. Here again we see that the networks' pattern of portrayals is quite comparable to that of the television environment overall. Programs that contain only precursory sexual behaviors represent 16% of all shows, the same finding observed in the larger composite week sample. A total of 9% of all network prime-time shows included sexual intercourse (either depicted or implied), just slightly higher than the 7% figure that was found for the industry overall. Similarly, the average level of sexual behavior (2.6 vs. 2.5) and the explicitness of the portrayals (1.9 vs. 1.9) for the network shows were highly consistent with the means observed for programming overall.

An analysis of sexual content across different program genres is presented in Table 19. This table reveals that the networks' greater emphasis on talk about sex is centered largely within the realm of comedy series. Primetime network sit-coms include sexual material at a 77% rate as compared to 56% of comedies across television overall. Similarly, whereas only

Table 18: Summary of Sexual Behavior: Broadcast Network Prime-Time

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OVERALL		
	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior	24%
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	1.8
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.0
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	1.1
	N of Shows	67
	N of Hours	64.5
	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	113
	PROGRAMS WITH PRECURSORY BEHAVIOR ONLY	
	Percentage of Programs With Precursory Behaviors Only	16%
Of Programs With Precursory Behaviors Only:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Precursory Behavior	1.7
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	1.6
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	0.7
	N of Shows	43
	N of Hours	36
	N of Scenes With Precursory	61
	PROGRAMS WITH SEXUAL INTERCOURSE	
	Percentage of Programs With Intercourse Behaviors	9%
Of Programs With Intercourse Behaviors:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Intercourse Behavior	1.8
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.6
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	1.9
	N of Shows	24
	N of Hours	28.5
	N of Scenes With Intercourse	31
	N of All Sexual Behavior Scenes	52
	TOTAL N OF SHOWS	274

Table 19: Summary of Sexual Content By Genre: Broadcast Network Prime-Time

ANY SEXUAL CONTENT									
	COMEDY SERIES	DRAMA SERIES	MOVIE	NEWS MAGAZINE	SOAP OPERA	TALK SHOW	REALITY	TOTAL	
	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Content	77%	57%	72%	65%	n/a	n/a	50%	67%
Of Programs With Any Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Sex	6.7	5.2	2.9	6.7	n/a	n/a	2.8	5.3
	N of Shows	92	53	13	17	n/a	n/a	9	184
	N of Hours	46	53	27.5	18	n/a	n/a	8	152.5
	N of Scenes	310	278	79	121	n/a	n/a	22	810
TALK ABOUT SEX									
	Percentage of Programs With Any Talk About Sex	75%	55%	67%	65%	n/a	n/a	50%	65%
Of Programs With Any Talk About Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Talk	6.7	5.0	2.6	6.7	n/a	n/a	2.5	5.2
	Average Level of Talk in Scenes	2.7	2.9	2.9	3.5	n/a	n/a	3.3	2.9
	N of Shows	89	51	12	17	n/a	n/a	9	178
	N of Hours	44.5	51	25.5	18	n/a	n/a	8	147
	N of Scenes With Talk About Sex	299	257	66	121	n/a	n/a	20	763
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR									
	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior	22%	28%	50%	8%	n/a	n/a	22%	24%
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	2.7	1.9	1.0	*	n/a	n/a	*	1.8
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	1.7	2.2	2.4	*	n/a	n/a	*	2.0
	N of Shows	26	26	9	2	n/a	n/a	4	67
	N of Hours	13	26	19.5	2	n/a	n/a	4	64.5
	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	35	49	20	4	n/a	n/a	5	113
TOTAL N OF SHOWS		119	93	18	26	0	0	18	274

* Indicates cases are too few to provide stable estimates.

about half of sit-coms (53%) on television as a whole include any talk about sex, three fourths (75%) of network prime-time comedies include such material. One other factor here is that the network dramas and news magazines that include sexual content tend to present a much greater number of scenes with talk about sexual topics than is found in similar programs elsewhere on television.

In terms of the treatment of risk and responsibility concerns, prime-time network shows include such topics in 11% of all programs containing any sexual messages (see Table 20). This is a small notch above the 9% level that was found across all programs on all channels in the composite week sample. Within distinct program genres, most of the comparisons held remarkably stable in prime-time as compared to television overall, with two notable exceptions.

One of the most impressive findings for prime-time is that nearly one out of every four network drama series (23%) that include sexual material also address some issue concerning sexual risks or responsibilities at some point within the show. This compares with only 5% of dramas that include such topics elsewhere on television. Similarly, prime-time programs classified as "reality" included issues regarding sexual risks and responsibilities in 22% of all shows with any sexual content. This compares favorably to a 16% level that was found in the same type of programs in the overall composite sample.

**Table 20: Distribution of Risk/Responsibility Portrayals by Genre:
Broadcast Network Prime-Time**

	COMEDY SERIES	DRAMA SERIES	MOVIE	NEWS MAGAZINE	SOAP OPERA	TALK SHOW	REALITY	TOTAL
Percentage of Shows With Any Sex That Contain R/R	3%	23%	8%	18%	0%	0%	22%	11%
N of Shows with Any R/R	3	12	1	3	0	0	2	21
N of Shows With Sex	92	53	13	17	0	0	9	184
Total N of Shows	120	93	18	25	0	0	18	274

Overall, the data indicate that viewers have a slightly better chance of encountering a risk and responsibility topic when they see sexual material in network prime-time shows than when sexual content is presented at other times and/or on other channels. Ironically, the genre which presents more scenes with sexual messages than any other program category -- situation comedies -- has the lowest probability (3%) of including any risk and responsibility concerns when addressing sexual topics. News magazines clearly reflect some effort to incorporate this perspective, as do reality programs. But the most noteworthy finding in this realm is that prime-time drama series, which represent a substantial proportion of each network's schedule, engage risk and responsibility concerns in almost one of every four programs including sexual content.

A final point, however, tempers the possible influence one might expect from these portrayals of the possible risks and responsibilities of sexual activity. It is important

to note that the measures of risk and responsibility we report here are at the scene level. While these scenes may be meaningful for the viewer, a more broad-based analysis was conducted at the program level, assessing whether each show placed overall emphasis on such themes. At this level, where we could be more confident about the potential for influencing the audience and sensitizing viewers, we found only 6 programs across three weeks' worth of prime-time programming (N=276 shows) on all four broadcast networks that featured a strong emphasis throughout the program on sexual risks and responsibilities. This translates to 3% of all programs including sexual content (N=184 shows), a figure slightly above the 1% finding that emerged for the overall composite week sample of programming.

While prime-time offers slightly more treatment of issues concerning sexual risks and responsibilities than does television programming overall, the margin of difference is a very small one.

SEXUAL MESSAGES IN CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

The composite week sample of programs included 228 children's shows, which we have chosen to analyze separately here. As we indicated earlier in this report, our rationale for isolating the examination of children's shows was based on the expectation that these programs would contain very little content of a sexual nature, and thus potentially obscure the patterns of sexual content in the more widely-viewed general audience programming. Our findings confirmed our initial expectations.

Across all children's programs, 5% contained any scenes involving sexual material (see Table 21). The programs that included some sexual content averaged 1.5 scenes per show, although it is important to note that this finding is based on a very small number of programs. In fact, the entire sample of children's shows contained only 13 scenes of talk about sex and 8 scenes of sexual behavior spread across a total of 12 programs.

The lower portion of Table 21 differentiates the two primary types of sexual content examined in the study: talk about sex and sexual behavior. This table indicates that both talk about sex and sexual behavior occurred with similar frequency in children's shows. Only 4% of all children's shows contained any talk about sex and only 3% contained any sexual behavior.

The occasional scenes which involved talk about sex included examples such as the following scene from a cartoon show.

Table 21: Children's Programs: Composite Week

ANY SEXUAL CONTENT		
	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Content	5%
Of Programs With Any Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Sex	1.5
	N of Shows	12
	N of Scenes	18
	TALK ABOUT SEX	
	Percentage of Talk	4%
Of Programs With Any Talk About Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Talk	1.3
	Average Level of Talk in Scenes	2.6
	N of Shows	10
	N of Scenes With Talk About Sex	13
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR		
	Percentage of Behavior	3%
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	1.1
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	1.6
	N of Shows	7
	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	8
TOTAL N OF CHILDREN'S SHOWS		228

The title character is a part-human, part-animal superhero who works as a uniformed police officer. Dragon, as he is called, is hurt in the line of duty and returns to the station. After reporting the incident, he encounters Rita, an attractive young female officer. Rita fawns over Dragon, commenting, "You should be in bed with someone taking care of you. Someone like me." Dragon responds awkwardly, apparently wishing to avoid her, but she grabs him by his tie and pulls him toward her, asking seductively, "Where does it hurt?" Dragon says that he is getting better quickly, but Rita persists, saying "Good, I wouldn't want you to miss the ball. So are you taking anyone?" Dragon replies, "Oh... well ... I ... haven't actually asked anyone." Sensing her chance, Rita says assertively, "Then we can go together. You won't regret this, Dragon." Rita rubs his chest and says seductively, "You know I could be pretty savage myself!" (Savage Dragon, USA Network)

In most of the cases, the talk about sex received substantial emphasis within the scene and thus the talk level indicates an average in the moderate range (2.6) on the 4-point scale. The occasional scenes which involved behaviors fell solely at the low end of the 4-point scale. These cases were limited to scenes involving flirtatious behavior and kissing, such as the following example.

Bugs Bunny stars in this parody of the 'Three Little Bears' tale. The Bear family returns home to find Bugs eating their porridge. The bears are on the verge of physically attacking the intruder, when Bugs invents a ruse to save himself. He begins to flirt seductively with the Mama Bear, who quickly falls for his charms. Bugs croons to her, "Your eyes, your lips ... why, you're beautiful!" and he kisses her long and hard on the lips, ending with a big "Smack!" Mama Bear is so smitten with Bugs that she protects him from the other bears, and then pursues him relentlessly, wanting more of Bugs' attention. She pleads, "Tell me more about my eyes," as she caresses his face and tries to embrace Bugs, who wants no part of her affection. He races into his rabbit hole but she follows and he soon emerges covered with lipstick all over his body. (Bugs Bunny, TNT)

No portrayals of intercourse either depicted or implied were found in children's programming.

To summarize, sexual messages were highly infrequent in children's programming. Those messages that were presented were typically an isolated scene that involved talk or a relatively modest sexually-related behavior.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As we indicated at the outset of this study, the relevant theory and research regarding media portrayals involving sex suggests that television plays a meaningful role in sexual socialization, in particular for young viewers (Huston, Wartella, & Donnerstein, 1998). Sexual socialization consists of learning the answers to such questions as who to have sex with, when to have sex with someone, and what precautions, if any, are appropriate. Such learning about sexual matters may occur from observing people talk about sexual matters as well as from watching them engage in sexually-related behavior. Consequently, this study examined both types of portrayals to evaluate their presence across the television landscape, and to weigh the types of messages they are likely to be communicating.

As with most other aspects of media influence, the effect of viewing sexual content is not thought to be direct and powerful, with a single exposure to a particular program leading a viewer to think or act in any given way. Rather, the effects of televised messages about sex are seen more as the product of a slow and cumulative process. Because media influence tends to be gradual in nature, it is the overall pattern of messages across programs to which viewers are exposed that is of primary interest for explaining such effects.

Prior studies of sexual content have examined different sub-parts of the television environment, focusing on such elements as soap operas, talk shows, or prime-time network programming. Yet many aspects of the television landscape have remained unexplored, and no single study has previously assessed both broadcast and cable television, despite the growth of cable viewership that has occurred in recent years.

By offering the first truly comprehensive view of the pattern of sexual messages presented across all types of television channels as well as at all times throughout the day, this study provides the most thorough assessment of televised sex yet produced by scientific research. Its findings offer valuable information to help better understand television's potential effects on sexual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. We turn now to a summary and review of the most important findings in the content patterns we have observed in the study.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Across the full range of programming examined by this research, sexual messages proved to be a highly common element across all of television, appearing in 56% of programs. In other words, a little over half of all programs contain some sexual material, either talk about sex, sexually-related behavior, or a combination of both.

To place this finding about the prevalence of sexual messages in some relative perspective, consider the well established conclusion that violence is a widespread part of television content. Most recently, the National Television Violence Study (Smith et al., 1998) reported that an average of 61% of programs included violence

during the 1996-97 season. That finding was based upon a large-scale composite week sample of programs (N=2741) virtually identical in design (it also excluded newscasts and sports programming) to that gathered for the present research on sex. Comparing these two findings, it would appear that sexual messages are found nearly as often in programs as are depictions of violence. In fact, however, closer examination suggests a viewpoint from which sexual content may be found as frequently as violence.

In calculating the 61% frequency with which programs contain violence, the NTVS analysis included children's shows in its count. In contrast, the present study excluded children's programming in its analysis. Interestingly, if one excludes programming from consideration, the frequency with which shows include sex or violence on television becomes virtually undifferentiated. A reanalysis of the 1996-97 NTVS data, excluding children's programs from consideration, indicates that 58.5% of shows contain any violence. Given this perspective, it is reasonable to conclude that children who have passed the point where they view mostly children's programming are about as likely to encounter sexual messages on television as they are to see violence in the programs they watch.

How much and what type of sexual content are viewers likely to encounter? Across all programs on television that contain sexual content, an average of 3.2 scenes per hour present messages involving sex. Given that children and teens average more than 20 hours per week watching television (Nielsen, 1998), it is apparent that collective exposure to the medium will represent a substantial base of sexual learning experiences for most youths.

In terms of the type of sexual content shown on television, talk about sex appears far more often than the portrayal of any sexually-related behaviors. About half of all programs (54%) include some talk about sex, while only about a quarter of them (23%) present any physical behavior. In programs with sexual material, scenes with talk (average of 3.0 per hour) outnumber the scenes with any sexual behavior (average of 1.4 per hour) by a ratio of slightly more than two to one. Thus, from an overall perspective, there are roughly four times as many scenes of talk about sex as there are scenes involving sexual behavior presented on television. The predominance of talk about sex is even more pronounced in prime-time network programs, where nearly two-thirds of all shows (65%) include it, averaging more than five scenes (5.2) per hour.

The most common form of talk involves comments to others that convey people's interest in sex (66%), for example mentioning to friends the specific targets of one's sexual attraction and what one might like to do with them. Nearly one in five cases of talk about sex involve either talk about intercourse that has already occurred (15%), or talk toward sex (4%), which represents efforts intended to initiate sexual intercourse. From a socialization perspective, such talk certainly contributes information about sexual norms and values to the audience whether or not it is accompanied by the more overt portrayal of sexual behaviors.

The sexual behavior measured for this study included actions beginning with physical flirting, which was defined as using the body to attract sexual interest. Most behavior presented was labeled as precursory, or not directly related to any actual sexual intercourse. Physical flirting (26%) and passionate kissing (50%) collectively accounted for three-quarters of all sexually-related behavior shown on television.

Thus, we see that most sexual behavior on television does not actually involve the initiation of sexual intercourse.

Scenes involving intercourse accounted for 15% of all sexual behavior (12% were intercourse strongly implied, and 3% intercourse depicted) observed in the study, with such scenes appearing in 7% of all shows examined. While these findings do not indicate that portrayals of intercourse are widespread on television, they do suggest that viewers are likely to encounter such content on a fairly regular basis, given the substantial amount of time most individuals devote to television.

The finding that in many cases intercourse is strongly and clearly implied in a story rather than depicted directly does not diminish its likely socialization effects for young viewers. Indeed, children who are old enough to have developed physically and emotionally such that they are interested in sexual topics will also be old enough to clearly draw the intended inference from scenes of intercourse strongly implied. This interpretation is corroborated by focus group research with children as young as age 8 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1996).

When intercourse is portrayed, it typically involves adults, with only rare instances including teens. A slight majority of scenes (53%) involve characters with an established relationship, although one out of ten cases of intercourse depicted or implied (10%) shows people who have just met having sex together.

Well over half of the programs in which characters were engaging in intercourse (59%) showed no clear consequences as a result of such sexual behavior, at least within the confines of that particular episode. This study did not track story-lines over the duration of an entire season, so it is possible that some consequences that might emerge later in a program's long-term plot development could have been overlooked. When consequences of intercourse were clearly portrayed in the programs sampled, they tended to be much more positive (27%) than negative (7%).

Also rare throughout the television landscape is the treatment of any topics related to the risks or responsibilities of sexual activity. This study focused on three specific categories within this realm: sexual patience, sexual precaution, and the depiction of the risks and/or negative consequences of unprotected sexual behavior. Only about one in every ten shows (9%) that included sexual content contained any mention of these topics. Programs that placed strong emphasis on such themes were even more rare, accounting for just 1% of all programs with sexual content.

If this very small level of overall attention to the risks or responsibilities of sexual activity seems out of balance with the realities of sex in the world today, an even more sobering finding is that only 7 of the 70 programs in the study that either depicted or implied sexual intercourse included any mention of issues of sexual risks or responsibilities, and none emphasized these issues in the program as a whole. The predominant pattern for portrayals of sexual intercourse on television is likely to convey the message to viewers that there is little to worry about and that people rarely take any steps to protect themselves against such possible harms as sexually-transmitted disease.

One of the more positive findings of the study was that prime-time network programming does a slightly better job (11% of shows) of including risk and responsibility topics within its programs containing sexual content, as compared to

television as a whole. In particular, prime-time drama series have achieved the highest frequency (23%) for treatment of these topics within programs that include sexual material. That finding stands in contrast to the treatment of such issues in dramas outside of prime-time, which was only 5% of all such programs including sexual content. Also worth noting within the prime-time domain is that network reality programs (22%) and news magazines (18%) are above average in terms of including messages concerning sexual risks and responsibilities.

In the future debate about sex on television, it may well be more important to consider *how* sex is shown rather than simply *how much* it is shown. This study confirms that sexual messages are a frequent part of the television landscape, but it also makes clear that such messages follow a pattern that poses cause for some concern. When television presents sexual content, there is scant attention devoted to sexual health issues that are essential considerations in weighing one's options for sexual activity today. By providing more balance in addressing these concerns, television could be helping young people make more informed -- perhaps even life-saving -- decisions about sex in their own lives.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

COMPOSITE WEEK SAMPLE

APPENDIX B:

BROADCAST NETWORK PRIME-TIME OVER-SAMPLE

APPENDIX A:

COMPOSITE WEEK SAMPLE

**Composite Week Sample
ABC**

	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7:00 am	One Saturday 7-11am 11/22 TV-Y	News 10/19					
7:30 am		EX	Good Morning America 10/27	Good Morning America 10/21	Good Morning America 11/5	Good Morning America 10/30	Good Morning America 10/24
8:00 am	One Saturday 10/18	Good Morning America 10/26					
8:30 am		EX	EX	EX	EX	EX	EX
9:00 am	TV-Y	News 11/2	Regis & Kathie Lee 11/3	Regis & Kathie Lee 10/28	Regis & Kathie Lee 11/12	Regis & Kathie Lee 10/23	Regis & Kathie Lee 11/7
9:30 am	Bugs Bunny 'n' Tweety 11/8 TV-Y	EX	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-
### am	Jungle Cubs 10/18 TV-Y	This Week	The View 10/27	The View 1/20	The View 11/12	The View 11/6	The View 11/7
### am	Winnie the Pooh 2/7 TV-Y	EX	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-
### am	Science Court 11/1 TV-Y	The Secret Garden 10/26	Port Charles 10/20	Port Charles 11/11	Port Charles 12/3	Port Charles 10/23	Port Charles 11/7
### am	Animal Adventures	EX	EX	EX	EX	EX	EX
### pm		TV-Y	All My Children 10/20	All My Children 10/28	All My Children 11/12	All My Children 11/13	All My Children 11/14
### pm		EX	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-
1:00 pm		TV. COM 10/19	One Life to Live 11/3	One Life to Live 10/21	One Life to Live 10/29	One Life to Live 10/30	One Life to Live 10/31
1:30 pm		EX	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-
2:00 pm	College Football 10/25	Radical Power 10/19	General Hospital 10/20	General Hospital 10/21	General Hospital 11/19	General Hospital 11/6	General Hospital 10/24
2:30 pm		EX	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-
3:00 pm		Figure Skating 3-5pm 11/9	Oprah Winfrey 10/20	Oprah Winfrey 11/4	Oprah Winfrey 10/29	Oprah Winfrey 10/23	Oprah Winfrey 10/31
3:30 pm		EX	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-	TV-
4:00 pm	Golf 4-6:30pm 11/1 EX	Looking Beyond 11/2	EX	News 10/28	News 10/22	News 10/23	News 10/31
4:30 pm	More Than a Game 10/18 EX	TV-	ABC News 11/10	EX	EX	EX	EX
5:00 pm	Looking Beyond 10/25	ABC News 10/26	News 11/3	News 11/4	News 10/29	News 11/13	News 11/14
5:30 pm	TV-	Jeopardy! 11/9	EX	EX	EX	EX	EX
6:00 pm	Golf (con't) 11/1 EX	EX		EX	EX	EX	EX
6:30 pm	News 11/1 EX	Siskel & Ebert 2/8		ABC News 11/4	ABC News 10/22	ABC News 11/6	ABC News 11/7
7:00 pm	Jeopardy! 2/14 NR		Monday Night Football 11/3	Jeopardy! 11/4	Jeopardy! 11/19	Jeopardy! 11/13	Jeopardy! 11/14
7:30 pm	Wheel of Fortune	Cinderella 11/2		Wheel of Fortune	Wheel of Fortune	Wheel of Fortune	Wheel of Fortune
8:00 pm	C-16 10/18			Grace Under Fire	Spin City	Nothing Sacred	Sabrina 11/21
8:30 pm	TV-	V.L. TV-	EX	Over the Top 10/21	Dharma & Greg 12/10	11/13	Boy Meets World
9:00 pm	Total Security 10/25		20/20 1/12	Home Improvement 11/4	Drew Carey 10/22	Cracker 11/6	Boy Meets World
9:30 pm	TV-	L	EX	Hiller & Diller 11/4	TV-	TV-	You Wish 10/24
### pm	News Saturday Night 1/24	Dead by Midnight 11/23	Touched by a Dolphin 12/1	NYPD Blue 10/28	Prime Time Live 11/12	20/20 10/30	20/20 12/5
### pm		TV-	V	TV-	V.L. EX	EX	EX

Each program's V-Chip rating is indicated on this grid. Within each program block, the age-based rating is on the left side, and the content descriptor, if the program received one, is on the right side.
 EX = Exempt - according to the guidelines, news and sports programs do not qualify for a rating.
 NR = Not Rated - these programs were unrated, but according to the guidelines, should have been rated.