

***Sex and Sexuality: A Content Analysis of Soap
Operas on British Television***

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By

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*To the one and only **James Craig**,
whose life, love and wisdom have immensely enriched my life,
as well as the lives of many others.*

Abstract

Over the last decade soap operas shown on British television have been constantly facing severe criticism from the public, politicians and the press for allegedly containing ‘too much sex’; and in the context of rising teenage pregnancies and the spread of STDs and HIV in the UK, concerns over the role of television’s sexual content in general, and that of soap operas’ in particular, in potentially influencing young people’s perception, attitudes and behaviours are most accentuated. The overall objective of this study is to comprehensively identify and analyse, using the method of content analysis, the amount, frequency, type, nature and contexts of sexual activity portrayed across a four-week sample of British and Australian soap operas shown on the UK’s five main terrestrial channels: the sample analysed include the three most popular British soap operas, *Coronation Street* (ITV), *EastEnders* (BBC One), and *Emmerdale* (ITV), the UK’s soap operas most popular with teenagers, *Hollyoaks* (Channel 4) and its late night spin-off *Hollyoaks in the City* (Channel 4), and the two day-time Australian soap operas, *Neighbours* (BBC One) and *Home and Away* (Channel Five). The study also provides a comprehensive quantitative analysis of, first, some of the important thematic aspects and contextual elements of soap operas’ portrayal of sex and sexuality, such as themes of sexual intercourse and other behaviours, accompanying behaviours and outcomes of sexual activity, and, second, the attributes and general profiles of all characters involved in sexual activity. Furthermore, the study aims to identify whether or not soap operas contain safe-sex messages and any references to sexual Risks and Responsibilities (R & R) and provide a detailed analysis of soap operas’ treatment of the various aspects of safe-sex and sexual risks and responsibilities.

The main findings in this current research clearly indicate that day-time and prime-time soap operas: (a) contain relatively moderate amounts of sexual portrayals, compared with post-watershed serialised drama programmes and general TV programming, (b) rarely portray overt and explicit intimate sexual behaviours, (c) rely primarily on narrative devices in their portrayal of sex and sexuality, (d) place primary and substantial emphasis on sexual activity, and (e) dedicate substantial numbers of portrayals and storylines to highlight sexual risks and responsibilities and disseminate safe-sex messages. For instance, in some soap operas, *Coronation Streets* and *EastEnders*, around four out of every ten scenes with sexual content revolved around sexual Risks and Responsibilities.

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Introduction

On 13th February 2009, *The Sun* newspaper broke the controversial story of the baby-faced boy, Alfie Patten, who became a father at the age of just thirteen.¹ A stream of revelations later followed about Alfie's family, the fifteen-year-old girlfriend and the identity of the 'real' father. The story ran for a few weeks as it generated unprecedented media, as well as public, interest and outrage at the same time. The *Guardian*'s news blog wrote: '[t]he story of "child dad" Alfie Patten has lurched from soap opera to farce since it emerged last week that he had become a father at just 13 years of age...it was hard not to be shocked by the sight of the baby-faced teenager, whose voice has not broken yet, posing with his daughter Maisie..' on the front page of *The Sun* newspaper.

Politicians, Conservatives in particular, and members of the public alike, invoked Alfie's case to highlight Britain's social/moral decline and 'broken society',² while the media themselves blamed 'the media' for promoting and 'normalising' irresponsible sexual behaviours and 'sexualising' childhood and youth culture. *Question Time*, the BBC's premier television political discussion programme aired on 19th February 2009, reflected the overall public debate on and reaction to the unfolding story. When asked for their opinions about Alfie's story and teenage pregnancy in the UK, panellists and members of the studio audience lamented and criticised irresponsible parenting, irresponsible teenagers, deteriorating social and moral values, and the government's social policies and inaction. Interestingly, however, Lord Heseltine, a prominent Conservative politician and former Deputy Prime Minister, and Sarah Teather, a Liberal Democrat MP, strongly blamed the media in general and soap operas in particular for inundating teenagers

¹ Hang, L. (2009) Baby-faced boy Alfie Patten is father at 13. [*The Sun*: Online13, February 2009]

² News Blog (2009) The controversy over teen father Alfie Patten: Who's the daddy? [guardian.co.uk, February 2009].

with irresponsible sexual messages, encouraging sexual relationships, and sexualising Britain's youth culture. When stories like that of Alfie's break, much of the blame for the supposed loosening of sexual boundaries and the subsequent 'loss' of children's innocence is placed on the media. The media are often seen to promote an unhealthy 'obsession' with sex that amounts to a form of moral corruption.' (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003: p.11) However, are soap operas and the media in general really to blame here? Are soap operas actually full of sexual messages, particularly irresponsible ones that are encouraging teenagers to behave accordingly?

Historically, public reactions and responses to stories such as Alfie's, and the perceived implicit role of the media in such cases, have often revolved around 'moral panics', the loss of values and traditions, negative influences on young people, and social decline. In recent decades, there have been growing concerns over the 'negative' effects of the media in general, and of television in particular, especially when it comes to young viewers, who are often seen as 'vulnerable' or 'susceptible' to such 'effects'. By and large, those concerns have centred on media (televised) sex and violence and their 'potential' influences on children and young people³. Furthermore, some have even gone as far as claiming that the increasing frequency and explicitness of sexual content on television has contributed to the 'death of childhood' or the demise of traditional notions and forms of childhood innocence. According to this view television is seen as giving children and young people access to sexual secrets at an age when they are incapable of fully understanding or dealing with them, and in this way it promotes the development of 'precocious' or 'premature' sexuality (Postman, 1983) (also see critique of such claims, Buckingham, 2000).

³ More recently, with the publication of an independent review into the sexualisation of young people commissioned by the Home Office (Papadopoulos, 2010), the public debate about the role of the media (old and new) in the 'sexualisation' of young people and the possible link between 'hyper-sexualisation' and violence against girls seems to have gained more momentum particularly since 'sexualisation' of young people' has been looked into within the context of the government's strategy of tackling violence against women and girls (see *Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls: a Strategy*. Available at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>)

However, the concern about the exposure of young people to media sexual content is twofold. First, there are concerns over the increasing possibility of very young children having easy access or being exposed to sexually explicit materials which may result in them showing an interest in sex at an ever earlier age and ultimately in their *premature* sexualisation (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003). Second, there is a widespread belief, as a growing amount of empirical evidence suggests, that exposure to media sexual content which places significant emphasis upon sexual themes among teenagers encourages the initiation of sexual behaviours (sexual intercourse in particular) at an earlier age (Collins et al., 2004; Brown and Newcomer, 1991; Peterson, Moore and Furstenberg, 1991), and consequently contributes to the growth in unwanted teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (Brown, Steel and Walsh-Childers, 2002; Greenberg, Brown and Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993; Strasburger and Wilson, 2002).

Another area of concern is the nature of public opinion about the depiction of sex on television, especially when it occurs in mainstream programmes during peak viewing hours when there may be lots of children in the audience. Public service broadcasters in the UK are required by law to ensure that nothing is broadcast that is likely to offend viewers (Ofcom, 2009). Research by broadcast regulators has provided some insights into the kinds of sexual portrayals that give rise to greatest concern (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992 and 1999; Ramsay, 2003). Although the research reported in this thesis is based on content analysis, it will examine the nature of sexual portrayals and consider whether any portrayals were identified in televised soap operas that might, on the basis of public opinion evidence, prove to be potentially problematic.

Media sex, according to Gunter (2002), has been identified as a contributory factor in those adverse behavioural trends referred to above, and its impact on young people has been hypothesised as operating through the perceptions that (a) 'the media places sex high on the public agenda', (b) 'the media prime people to think about sex a lot', (c) 'the media presents role models for emulation' and (d) 'the role models do not always behave in a responsible fashion'. As a consequence, 'irresponsible sexual conduct and immorality may be learned' (p.5).

Despite the prevalence of these concerns in the early 1980s as a result of the HIV/AIDS outbreak, the debate over the ‘negative’ effects of sexual content in the media seems to have intensified and taken on a new urgency over the last ten years. Two apparent reasons have contributed to bringing these worries to the fore. The first centres on the dramatic changes in the media environment and landscape that have occurred over the last ten to 15 years as a result of the advent and mushrooming of new media technologies, particularly the internet: never before has media sexual content been so readily available, whether on the internet itself, through subscription cable channels or on mainstream television.

By the same token gaining access to sexual content, and to explicit sexual material in particular, has also never been so easy, especially for young people: there is ample evidence that not only can young people, including young children, readily access sexual material in the media, but they actively seek it (BSC, 2001; Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; Hanley, 2002; Helsper, 2005; Ofcom, 2005d). This ‘new media’ environment has posed a considerable challenge to both parents and media regulators in terms of creating a safe media environment for children and young people (Ofcom, 2005a). Further, even at a broader societal level, regulating the media has become politically problematic, as more than ever before consensus on issues such as sexuality and the types of sexual portrayals that should or should not be available in the media is no longer attainable in a pluralistic society (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; Gunter, 2002).

A further reason for the heightened concern stems from the changes observed in the patterns of sexual behaviours among teenagers, the increase in the rates of (unwanted) teenage pregnancies, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that the age at which young people engage in sexual behaviours, and in sexual intercourse in particular, has been steadily declining over the last three or four decades, and that the number of young people who are sexually active has increased significantly in the western world (Moore and Rosenthal, 1993).

A study by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (2006)⁴ found that the UK's teenagers were the most sexually active in Europe, as 38% of all 15-year olds were reported to have had sexual intercourse in the period 2001-2002, compared to just 15% in Poland, 16% in Spain, 22% in France and 28% in Germany. Further, the UK has the highest rates of unplanned teenage pregnancies and abortion in Western Europe: although these witnessed some decline in the mid-1990s and maintained steady rates in the early 2000s, over the last three years they have begun to increase.

According to the latest figures provided by the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS), the number and rate of pregnancies among women under the age of 18 rose from 41.768 in 2006 to 42.918 in 2007 (40.9 and 41.9 per 1000 respectively), with half (50%) of all under 18 pregnancies in 2007 and 48% in 2006 leading to an abortion.⁵

Similarly, the UK has the highest rate of sexually transmitted diseases in Western Europe. Over the past decade the UK has witnessed a substantial increase in the diagnosis of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), particularly among young people, according to the UK's Health Protection Agency (2009). The figures provided for some of the most common STDs are staggering. For instance, the number of Chlamydia cases found per year has more than doubled since 1999, with 123,018 new diagnosed cases found in 2008 alone; and cases of gonorrhoea also dramatically increased between 2005 and 2006, and a record number of people (28,957) were diagnosed in 2008.

Further, as the most common viral STD diagnosed, the number of new diagnoses of genital warts in the UK increased by almost 30 percent since 1999. In 2008 there were 92,525 diagnoses, with the highest rates being among people aged 16-19. Cases of syphilis also rose substantially in the past decade, such that in 2008

⁴ IPPR Press Release (23rd, October, 2006): Sex education in primary schools needed to cut teenage pregnancy and unprotected underage sex : www.ippr.org.uk

⁵ See BBC News [online] (2009) Teen pregnancy rates go back up. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7911684.stm> [accessed on 5 February, 2010]

there were 11 times more primary and secondary diagnoses than in 1999. Even more alarmingly, the number of new HIV positive diagnoses more than doubled since 1999, with 7,298 people diagnosed in 2008 (*Health Protection Agency*, 2008 and 2009).

Media sex in general and portrayal of sex and sexuality on television in particular may serve as a source of sexual information for adolescents, who are at a stage in life where they are discovering, forming and actively developing their sexual as well as social identities. Television and other media provide a readily available source of information and guidance about sex and sexuality in a fashion that poses far fewer difficulties in terms of access or embarrassments than might be encountered by adolescents in using other sources of information such as parents, teachers, and health advisors (Greenberg, Brown and Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993; Kunkel et al., 2005; Sutton, Brown, Wilson and Klein, 2002). Media sex, therefore, may act as an instrument of sexual socialising and social learning (Ward, 2003), as will also be discussed in Chapter One.

The form of influence which media sex may have on young people may not be merely through overt and explicit depictions of sexual behaviours such as sexual intercourse, but also through talk about sex and sexuality. Often, sex and sexuality in the media aimed at younger audiences occur in the form of narratives and conversations about sexual relationships and experiences (BSC 1998; Buckingham and Bragg, 2002; Cumberbatch et al., 2003). These types of narratives can, and have been found to, provide 'sexual scripts' from which young people can learn and through which they achieve sexual socialisation (Ward, 1995; Ward and Rivadeneyra, 1999; Batchelor and Kitzinger, 1999; Batchelor et al., 2004; MacKeogh, 2005).

Young people are increasingly turning to the media, television and the internet in particular, for information on sex and sexuality, and many young people, whether in the US, UK or Ireland, have reported that they do not get adequate information about sex, sexual health and sexual relationships from parents and/or schools during adolescence. In fact, young people in Western Europe and the UK often rank the

media in general and television in particular as one of the most important sources of information alongside peers, parents and formal sex education at school (Brown, Steel and Walsh-Childers, 2002; Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; Kunkel et al., 2005; MacKeogh, 2005). In addition, the media as a source of sexual information have often been referred to as a 'super peer' within the context of young people's sexual socialisation and development (Brown, Halpern, and L'Engle, 2005).

Media Sex: A Cause for Concern?

The concerns about media sex and young people tend to centre as much on the kinds of sexual narratives and scripts available across the media (television, film, magazines and the internet) as on young people's early exposure to nudity and scenes of simulated sexual intercourse. And given the context of rising teenage pregnancies, the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases, and the fall in the age at which adolescents experience their first sexual intercourse encounter, the media have been identified as often presenting the wrong types of sexual behaviours and practices to young people: (a) very rarely do depictions of sex emphasise the risks and responsibility that accompany sexual relationships, (b) sex is depicted as fun and by and large risk-free, (c) casual sex is depicted as the 'norm' among young people, and very little or no emphasis is placed on sex within established and committed relationships, and (d) safe sex practices and messages are rarely incorporated into the portrayal of sex and sexuality (e.g. Brown, Steel and Walsh-Childers, 2002; Greenberg, Brown and Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993; and MacKeogh, 2005).

In addition, the media—television in particular—have been criticised for cultivating a set of values and beliefs that are likely to distort and influence young people's perception of and attitudes toward sex and sexuality: for instance, the cultivation of beliefs that support and perpetuate the myth that women enjoy being raped, that casual sexual coupling and infidelity that convey implicit messages that promiscuity and unfaithfulness are culturally and socially acceptable, and the cultivation of values that underpin the acceptance of sex or childbirth outside marriage or established relationships, and marriage itself as a temporary rather than

a permanent relationship (Zillmann and Bryant, 1982 and 1984; Buerkel-Rothfuss and Strouse, 1993; Courtright and Baran, 1980). However, despite presenting plausible explanations to the media's potential 'effects' and 'influences', it is worth noting that the 'effects models' in general and cultivation effects in particular have been subject to a number of criticisms which touch upon, for instance, failure to allow for differences in the ways in which media consumers interpret and understand media texts, assumptions that correlations are evidence of causality, inability to take full account of the numerous variables such as gender, age, ethnicity socio-economic backgrounds and so on, flaws in methodologies used, reliance on experimental and artificial studies and tendencies to tackle social problems backwards by starting with the media first and then trying to find causal relationships (Buckingham and Bragg, 2002 and 2003; Gauntlett, 1998) (also see Chapter One).

Despite the proliferation of new media and technologies, however, television still continues to dominate young people's media diet. Concerns about sexual content in the media are particularly accentuated when it comes to television (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; Kunkel et al., 2005; MacKeogh, 2005). Research into television's sexual content conducted in the US as well as in the UK indicates, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, that over the last three decades the amount, frequency and explicitness of sexual content on US mainstream television has increased substantially. Nowadays US and UK television programmes contain markedly more overt sexual activity and more talk about sex than they did ten years ago. However, lack of references to, and mention of, safe-sex topics and sexual risks and responsibilities still characterises the television landscape in both countries (Kunkel, 1999 and 2005; MacKeogh, 2005; Millwood-Hargrave, 1992; Cumberbatch et al. 2003).

As the influence of television on social beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours in general tends to occur by a gradual cumulative process that is more likely to develop with repeated and heavy exposure over time to common patterns of behaviours (Kunkel et al. 2003), it is important to identify and account for the common patterns of sexual behaviours and messages that appear on television. In the current research,

however, the focus will be only on sexual content in one particularly important television genre, soap opera, rather than on general television output. The overall objective of this study is to comprehensively identify and analyse, using quantitative measures, the amount, frequency, type, nature and contexts of sexual activity portrayed across a four-week sample of all British and Australian soap operas shown on the UK's five main terrestrial channels. The soap operas analysed in this study included the three most popular and well-established British soap operas, *Coronation Street* (ITV), *EastEnders* (BBC One), and *Emmerdale* (ITV), the UK's soap operas most popular with teenagers, *Hollyoaks* (Channel 4) and its late night spin-off *Hollyoaks in the City* (Channel 4), and the two day-time Australian soap operas, *Neighbours* (BBC One) and *Home and Away* (Channel Five).

Using the method of content analysis, this study aimed to identify and capture: (a) the amount of sexual content across soap operas, (b) the nature and types of sexual content, (c) the centrality of sex and sexuality to the scenes, storylines and the genre overall, (d) the level of sexual explicitness, and (e) the orientation of sexual activity and references to homosexual relationships and homosexuality. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify (a) whether or not soap operas contain safe-sex messages and any references to sexual Risks and Responsibilities (R & R), (b) the types and prevalence of safe-sex and R & R topics, (c) the degree of emphasis placed on, and the valence towards, R & R topics and safe-sex messages, and (d) the source and overall tone of R & R and safe-sex information.

The study also attempted to provide a comprehensive quantitative analysis of, first, some of the important thematic aspects and contextual elements of soap opera's portrayal of sex and sexuality, such as themes of sexual intercourse and other behaviours, accompanying behaviours (presence and/or use of alcohol, drugs, smoking, and violence/aggression), and outcomes of sexual activity, and, second, the attributes and general profiles of all characters involved in sexual activity, including gender, age, ethnicity occupation, as well as relationship status, instigators of sexual behaviours, and motivation for engaging in sexual behaviours.

Why Soap Operas?

The importance of British and Australian soap operas, as a popular television genre and a form of entertainment, to the British audience, as well as to the television broadcasting industry, has been well documented (e.g. Buckingham, 1986, 1993; Gillespie, 1995; Hobson, 1982, 2003). The rationale for focusing specifically on soap operas stems directly from their ubiquity and ability to draw large numbers of viewers, *particularly young viewers*, their topicality, realism and wider appeal, and finally the criticisms and public concerns they have encountered over the last decade with regard to their treatment of sex and sexuality.

Soap opera's consistent and unique ability to attract and reach substantial audiences, and a complete cross-section of age, gender, ethnicity and social class, is widely acknowledged and has made it an invaluable genre to the broadcasting industry in the UK (Hobson, 2003). Every week in Britain well over 35 million viewers tune in to watch the six mainstream soap operas analysed in this study, with the lion's share going to the UK's three most popular soap operas, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, and *Emmerdale*— at times the former two are watched, as will be shown in Chapter Three, by as many as 11 million viewers per episode, according to the UK's Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB, 2007).

As a result of their high audience ratings and popularity, soap operas have become 'the spine of the television schedule', 'at the heart of television' and 'a way to deliver high audience to a channel' (Hobson, 2003: pp. 40-41). David Liddiment, the Director of Programmes at the ITV Network, attributed the vital importance of *Coronation Street* for his ITV Network, as he puts it, to the fact that '..[i]t brings in a large regular audience...and provides a foundation stone for the rest of the evening's viewing. It is valuable in its own right and commercially, in terms of the audience it attracts to the channel, but it is also valuable in terms of what you can schedule off it. What you can promote around it in terms of the rest of the schedule.' (cited in Hobson, 2003: p. 42)

Furthermore, the importance of, and interest in, soap operas has led to substantial expansion in the volume of the already ubiquitous soap operas across the

UK's five terrestrial television channels: as an Ofcom survey showed, the volume of soap operas in peak-time alone rose almost 50% in only four years, from 10.4 hours in 1998 to 15.3 hours in 2002⁶ (Ofcom, 2004).

Soap operas' expansion and their success at reaching substantial numbers of diverse audiences is largely attributed to the genre's inherent characteristics and format, topicality and social realism, which together allow audiences to invest time and involvement, and to build relationships and identify with characters and events (Millwood-Hargrave, 2002). Soap operas' preoccupation with, and portrayal of, the mundane and everyday life in an entertaining format has brought them close to their audiences and to their daily experiences. Their success lies in making the domestic and mundane dramatic and thrilling; and their strength lies in combining controversial content with dramatic imperatives in their storylines to explore a large number of themes pertinent to the everyday life and experiences of their audiences. (Hobson, 2003: p 140)

Soap operas' increasing willingness to tackling serious social issues and problems, such as domestic violence, homosexuality, race and racism and teenage pregnancies—often achieved through yoking together characters who are familiar to the audiences and powerful storylines dealing with social issues—has recently positioned them at the forefront of public service, drawing upon their ability to reach, entertain and educate large numbers of viewers, transcending age, gender, social class and race (Hobson, 2003).

From the turn of the 21st century, however, soap operas shown on UK terrestrial television channels have been constantly facing severe criticism from the public, politicians and the press for containing 'too much sex', 'bad language' and 'too much violence' (BSC, 1998, and 2001; Hanley, 2002; Millwood-Hargrave, 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2003; Ofcom, 2005a; Ramsay, 2003). Yet the qualitative

⁶ This was a common theme across most channels - half an hour extra of *EastEnders* on BBC One, an extra 1.2 hours a week on ITV1 (*Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*), half an hour on Channel 4 (*Hollyoaks*) and 2.5 hours on Five (*Home and Away*).

assessments of soap operas' sexual content offered by the likes of Dorothy Hobson—herself an expert on soap opera—run counter to such criticisms:

‘Soap operas are sometimes criticised for having too much sex included in their storylines, but in fact there is little explicit or visual sexual activity in any of the soaps. This is because the transmission times for all the soap operas are within the period of ‘family viewing’, before the nine o’clock watershed. And there are restrictions on what can be shown. Sex may be a vital aspect of what drives the characters in soap operas, but there is little evidence of the sexual activity taking place in the actual programmes. In fact, there are very few signs of any physical affection, and hugging and kissing—let alone moving further along towards the physical contacts leading to sexual activity—are rarely seen in British soap operas.’ (Hobson, 2003: p. 131)

In the context of rising teenage pregnancies and the spread of STDs, public concerns over soap operas' sexual content in particular have, understandably, prompted both the media regulator and the government to address those concerns. For instance, in 2004 at an Ofcom meeting in Belfast the ‘Content Board’ discussed a review of research which had indentified—although qualitatively—‘soap operas...as the greatest source of problems’ and ‘concerns among viewers about material unsuitable for children being included in the terrestrial broadcasters’ schedule’.

As a result the Board commissioned a series of studies to look into the audiences' concerns and the content of soap operas and watershed programmes, as part of a strategy to provide ‘*A Safe Environment for Children*’ (2005). More recently, the government is reported to have started ‘monitoring sex scenes on television’ and, in reference to soap operas, to have begun to ‘order television chiefs to include more references to condoms and sexually transmitted diseases in their story lines’. Further, the Department of Health ‘will call on television writers to include more dialogue about condoms and plot lines featuring the consequences of unsafe sex such as unwanted pregnancies and disease’ (Kite, 2010).

But to what extent do those *qualitative assumptions* reflect what soap operas actually portray as far as sex and sexuality are concerned? Do soap operas in reality contain sex, and if so, how much? Of all the media and television genres, are soap operas justifiably ‘the greatest source of problems’? Do they, by and large, portray ‘worrying’ and irresponsible sexual behaviours? Do soap operas fail to highlight the consequences of irresponsible sexual behaviours? This current research seeks to provide a comprehensive quantitative analysis of soap operas’ portrayal of sex and sexuality.

Structure of the Thesis

This study is divided into two main parts: *Part I* discusses some of the theoretical models and hypotheses that explain the effects of media sex and provides a review of the relevant literature, particularly that of content analysis studies looking into sexual content on television; and *Part II* begins by discussing the research method, design and content measures used in this study, and thereafter presents and discusses the research findings.

More specifically, *Part I* comprises two chapters. Chapter One reviews and discusses six theoretical models and hypotheses that have attempted to provide explanations of the ‘potential’ effects media sex might have upon media consumers, focusing primarily on the *Social Learning Theory*, which posits that humans learn through observing others and will engage in and imitate behaviours seen as rewarding, and on the *Cultivation Hypothesis*, which assumes that people who watch television more frequently than others, or heavy viewers, are more likely than light viewers to adopt the worldviews offered by television. The other four theoretical perspectives are Sexual Arousal, Catharsis, Disinhibition, and Desensitisation.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the research—primarily content analyses—into television’s portrayal of sex and sexuality, and audience attitudes and opinions with regard to media sex. It begins by reviewing early as well as more recent studies on sexual activity portrayed on mainstream US television networks, with special attention paid to the research concerned with the portrayal of sex in soap operas and prime-time programmes; it also presents findings from research into

sexual content shown on UK and Irish television networks, and the findings of some of the opinion surveys which have attempted to gauge the UK's public attitudes towards and perceptions of media sex across the last two decades.

The second part of the thesis, which comprises five chapters of results and analysis and a concluding chapter, introduces and reviews (in Chapter Three) the study's methodology and sample, content measures, definitions and procedures used in analysing soap operas' sexual content; and then presents, discusses and analyses the study's overall findings on the amount, nature, types and contexts of sexual activity (Chapter Four), the contextual elements embedded in sexual portrayals and accompanying sexual behaviours (Chapter Five), the profile and attributes of characters involved in sexual activity (Chapter Six), and safe-sex messages and risks and responsibilities references (Chapter Seven). Finally, the concluding chapter sums up and discusses the study's key findings and their significance.

Part I:
Media Sex:
Theories and Hypotheses of
Effects -
A Review of the Literature.

Chapter 1

Effects of Media Sex:

Theoretical Perspectives and Hypotheses.

It is often stated that the media in general and television in particular play a key role in people's lives and in adolescents' lives and social development in particular. However, while there is evidence that adolescents tend to move away from television as they grow older and start to develop their own social relations outside the home environment (Arnett, 1995; Greenberg, Brown, and Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993), television still continues to play an important role as a means of mediating youth culture (Livingstone, 2002; Kunkel, 2005).

Further, television, as it has been suggested, tends to position young people as a sophisticated audience, and addresses them as thinking grown-ups and consumers (Buckingham, 2000; MacKeogh 2005; Strasburger and Wilson, 2002), whereas the dominant and prevailing public debate around young people and media focuses particularly on 'vulnerability' and 'influence'. Most audience-oriented research is evidently motivated by concerns, whether implicit or explicit, about the negative effects the media have on audiences, especially young people, with regard to violence and sex and sexuality (Barker and Petley, 1997).

Research on media and television sexual content is largely based on the assumption that such content holds the potential to influence young viewers who are at a stage where they are actively seeking to develop their own views and learn about sex and sexual relationships in order to form their sexual identities. By and large, studies investigating media sex, from the 'effects' perspective, acknowledge the existence of a host of moderating factors in the relationship between audiences and the media, and maintain that the media are not the only factor contributing to young people's sexual development and education processes, since many other

social factors, such as family environment and peer groups and various socialising processes, can impact upon young people's sexual development and behaviour (Buckingham and Brag, 2002 and 2003; Kunkel, 2005).

As the rationale for content analysis studies is often based upon the potential 'effects' and 'influences' of the media on audiences, this current research by no means employs so categorically such a rationale, nor does it claim that soap operas provide mere blueprints for their audiences. This research by contrast is based on the premise that soap operas provide a source of information, be it fictional and/or entertaining, with which various segments of an audience actively engage and which they might interpret in ways that are meaningful to them (MacKeogh, 2005).

This chapter presents and discusses a number of theoretical models and hypotheses which have attempted to provide explanations for the effects of media sex. It begins by looking at social learning theory and cultivation theory: two models which are considered to have great intuitive appeal, as they are often invoked to explain how the media in general affect audiences' attitudes, values and behaviours. It then presents the criticisms both models have faced. Further, this chapter discusses four other hypotheses (Sexual Arousal, Catharsis, Disinhibition and Desensitisation) that have been primarily concerned with explaining the direct effects of exposure to sexually explicit media content.

1.1 Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory, articulated exhaustively by Bandura (1977, 1986, and 2009), emphasises the importance of observational learning through modelling. Bandura (1977) argues that '[l]earning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. Because people learn from example what to do, at least in approximate form, before performing any behaviour, they are spared needless errors' (p.22).

The thrust of the social learning theory is that humans learn by watching others and will engage in and imitate behaviours seen as rewarding. According to this theory, children who see their favourite television characters engage in violent acts will imitate the violent behaviours in anticipation of obtaining the heroic status such characters denote. Similarly, adolescents who see young adults gaining prestige and popularity status as a result of engaging in certain sexual behaviours may feel encouraged to engage in similar behaviours themselves (Bandura, 1977, 2008; Brown, 1993; Gunter, 2002).

Bandura (2009) posits that observational learning through the modelling process is governed by four distinct sub-functions or processes:

Attentional processes: in order to learn, one needs to be paying attention to the ongoing modelled events. Attentional processes determine what is selectively observed and what information is extracted; and here a number of factors influence the exploration, understanding and interpretation of what is modelled. While some of these factors are related to (a) the observer's cognitive skills, perceptions and value preferences, and (b) the modelled activities' salience, attractiveness and functional value, others are intrinsically related structural arrangements of human interactions and accessibility.

Retention processes: one cannot be influenced by observed events unless they are coded (symbolically), remembered and cognitively constructed. Retention involves an active process of transforming and restructuring information conveyed by modelled events into rules and conceptions for memory representation.

Production processes (the behavioural production process): symbolic conceptions are converted into action through a conception-matching process in which conceptions guide the construction and execution of behaviours.

Motivational processes: as people do not perform everything they learn, the execution of observationally learned behaviours is influenced by three major types of incentive motivators: direct, vicarious and self-produced. People are more likely to exhibit modelled behaviour if it confers valued outcomes than if it has unrewarding or undesirable effects. The self-approving and self-censuring reactions

people generate to their own behaviour regulate the kind of learned activities they are most likely to pursue. They often pursue activities which they find satisfying and give them a sense of worth, while reject those of which they personally disapprove. (Bandura, 2009: pp.98-101)

The broader, mostly implicit, assumption of the content analyses of television's portrayals of sex and sexuality from the social learning standpoint revolves around the potential effects sexual content may have upon viewers as they attend to, comprehend and imitate the portrayed sexual behaviours. Although the analyses of sexual content alone, it has been widely argued (Kunkel, 2001; Greenberg, Brown and Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993), can merely speculate about what the effects might be on the viewers, the studies are on firmer ground when they take into account not only how certain frequent portrayals of sexual behaviours occur, but also who the characters are and what are their attributes, how realistic the depictions are, and in what contexts they occur and with what outcomes. In the context of social learning theory, patterns of rewards and punishments associated with specific behaviours can serve as vicarious illustrations of the best and worst behaviours to copy. In addition, of course, the performance of behaviours of characters that are rated by members of the audience as highly attractive and whom they wish to emulate can potentially serve as influential role models (Gunter, 2002). Hence, in order to understand the types of sexual depictions that may have the most powerful effects, it will be important to identify the extent to which these sorts of portrayals occur. If reckless sexual behaviours are portrayed by characters with whom young members of the audience might identify (because of shared demographic attributes or other shared characteristics), these could be regarded as carrying a relatively high risk. On the other hand, narratives that display responsible sexual practices, such as not rushing into a sexual relationship, not having unprotected sex and so on, might project more socially positive and desirable messages.

A growing number of studies, however, have adopted and employed the social learning theory in their theoretical frameworks to explain the acquisition of sexual knowledge, expectations, and attitudes (e.g. Courtright and Baran, 1980; Greenberg, Linsangan, Soderman, Heeter, Lin, Stanley, and Siemicki 1993; Brown et al., 2002)

and how television viewers, particularly children, learn about sex-roles from a vast repertoire of TV gender stereotypes (e.g. Durham, 1999; Durkin 1985; Gunter, 1995).

Greenberg, Linsangan, Soderman, Heeter, Lin, Stanley, and Siemicki (1993) have suggested that observational learning through modelling may be very significant in the acquisition of sexuality and learning sexual behaviours, listing a number of possible outcomes that can come about as a result of the social learning of sexual behaviours. The outcomes include:

- ‘An individual may learn how to behave sexually and to learn which variations on the behaviour are socially acceptable...’
- ‘An individual may learn under what conditions and with whom different sexual behaviours are deemed appropriate...’
- ‘An individual may also derive certain perceptions about the nature of sexual activity, such as the frequency of occurrences of intercourse by a typical married couple.’ (p. 64)

Furthermore, Greenberg, Linsangan, Soderman, Heeter., Lin, Stanley, and Siemicki (1993) have speculated that the above outcomes may additionally result in:

- ‘Expectations about how people will feel or behave sexually. This has implications for one’s communicative interaction with others. For example, if a young woman has been consistently exposed to models who engage in extramarital affairs, and she meets a married man to whom she is attracted, she may expect the man to engage in intercourse with her. The man might be put off by this unexpected behaviour, and terminate further communication with the woman.
- Perceptions about how other people feel or behave sexually. This may have implications for one’s own self-concept and evaluation of others. For example, if a teenage boy perceives that virtually no other teenagers are virgins, he may feel self-conscious about his own virginity.

- Actual changes in sexual behaviour. A woman, for example, might use techniques for lovemaking described in a novel.’(p.64).

However, most content analysis studies that have relied on the social learning theory in explaining ‘potential media effects’ (eg. Greenberg, Linsangan, Soderman, Heeter, Lin, Stanley, and Siemicki 1993; Heintz-Knowles, 1996) have been criticized for their overemphasis on the ‘negative effects’ and feeding into the ‘effects model’, their inability to explain how meanings might arise and how texts are interpreted by audiences, and their moral overtone and morally driven agenda in the sense that much attention is drawn to the prevalence of socially unacceptable behaviours (e.g. unmarried sex or extramarital affairs) (Buckingham and Bragg, 2002).

Gunter (2002) considered the concept of identification as one of the significant concepts social learning theory offers, as the greater the perceived similarity between the observer and the model character on screen, the greater the likelihood for the observer to imitate the behaviours and actions of the model character. Thus, if young people turn to the behaviours (sexual behaviours and portrayals) of their role-model characters in the media in general, and on television in particular, for information and cues for their own sexual development and learning—as many studies have suggested, young people are increasingly quoting the media, and television in particular, as one of the main sources of sexual information available to them (Buckingham and Brag, 2003; Kunkel et al., 1996 and 2005; Strasburger and Wilson, 2002)—then it is imperative, from a social policy perspective, that media sexual content and portrayals of sexual behaviours incorporate sexual messages that emphasise the need for and importance of safe-sex and responsible sexual behaviours. Gunter (2002) argues that ‘if teenagers turn to television or film for role models in the context of their sexual development, it is important that these models set responsible examples (p. 86). Thus, this study attempts to identify whether or not soap operas portray sexual behaviours in general and risks and responsibilities in particular in ways that confer rewards/punishments.

Overall, as social learning theory presumes learning processes that are ultimately to be converted into actions and behaviours, and as a growing body of evidence indicates young people's reliance upon the media for sexual information, it is paramount that available media sexual content is analysed not only in terms of frequency and amount but also in terms of contexts and nature.

1.2 Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory, formulated by Gerbner and his colleagues in 1960s (Gerbner, 2002; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 2002), assumes that people who watch television more frequently than others (or *heavy* viewers) are more likely than *light* viewers to adopt the worldviews offered by television. Morgan, Shanahan, and Signorielli (2009) argue that 'cultivation analysis focuses on television's contributions to viewers' conceptions of social reality' and state that 'the central hypothesis guiding research is that those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and recurrent messages of the television world, compared to those who watch less television...' (p.34).

The important aspect of cultivation research is that it has always given emphasis to articulating the content profiles of television programmes. In order to determine whether television presents a world that resonates with the real world, it is essential first of all to examine directly the nature of the world of television. This has conventionally been achieved by deploying content analysis methodology to provide statistical counts of frequencies of occurrence of specific social groups, issues and behaviours. The statistics for the 'TV world' can then be compared with equivalent statistics for the 'real world'.

The cultivation model, therefore, suggests that, by offering a steady diet of frequent and repetitive sets of messages over a long or medium period of time, television can create a distorted version of social reality that is more likely to be adopted by heavy viewers than medium or light viewers. In other words, the overall emphasis of the cultivation model is on the correlation between heavy viewing of television and a distorted perception of social reality (Carveth and Alexander, 1985)

Cultivation research, according to Gerbner et al. (2002), entails three steps of analysis: first, systematically analysing TV content (content analysis), second, assessing and examining people's attitudes and assumptions with regard to various aspects of life and society, and third, examining and comparing the responses of viewers according to the varying amounts of exposure to television.

According to the cultivation model, a television worldview that predominantly depicts casual sex, women as sexual conquests or objects, and sex as a means to an end rather than within the contexts of love, marriage and committed relationships, it is argued, cultivates sexual beliefs and attitudes that encourage viewers, especially young viewers, to behave in a similar manner. Sapolsky and Tabarlet (1991) have argued that, from the cultivation perspective:

‘[P]rime-time television offers a consistent and repetitive set of messages regarding sexual behaviour. Sixteen times an hour. Entertainment programmes add to its particular version of the sex world. This world is noted for its overemphasis on sexual activity between unmarried characters and a disregard for the issue of safe sex. Adolescents and teenagers who regularly watch prime time television are offered a steady mix of marital infidelity, casual sex, the objectification of women, and exploitative relationships. As traditional avenues for sexual socialisation have diminished in influence, television has become the electronic educator’. (p. 514).

Although historically cultivation research has predominantly focused on television violence and aggression, and ethnic and sex-role representations (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli 2002), a significant number of studies have investigated, as well as providing empirical evidence on, the link between exposure to media sexual content and people's perceptions of, and attitudes to, sexual behaviours and sexual relationships. For instance, Durham (1999) and Strasburger and Wilson (2002) have found that heavy teenage TV viewers, particularly females, often report on the pressure the media put on them to have sexual and romantic relationships, because of the ubiquity of TV portrayals that cultivate the notion that it is the norm to have sex.

In addition, Brown and Newcomer (1991) and Peterson, Moore and Furstenberg (1991) have reported that heavy exposure to sexual content on TV among teenagers (college students) is related to earlier initiation of sexual intercourse. In another study which analysed a longitudinal sample of young respondents in order to measure and examine the relationship between exposure to sex on TV and adolescents' sexual behaviours in the US., Collins et al. (2004) found that a diet of TV high in sexual content was strongly related to initiation of sexual intercourse and advancement of noncoital activity. Also, they concluded that watching sex on TV predicted and might hasten adolescent sexual initiation, while reducing the amount of sexual content in entertainment programming, reducing adolescent exposure to such content or increasing references to and depictions of possible negative outcomes of sexual activity, could delay the initiation of both coital and non-coital activities. Rather than simply presuming that heavy viewers differed from light viewers in their responses to specific questions about sex, these studies pre-established that viewing television programmes with high levels of sexual content was expected to produce links to early initiation of sexual intercourse. However, despite the existence of some correlations between exposure to media sex and changes in sexual behaviours (early initiation of sexual intercourse in this case), the above studies, like most 'effects studies', presented no evidence of causality.

Similarly, other studies have found that teenagers who identify closely with television role-models and think they are more proficient at sex than they are, or who think that television portrayal of sex and sexual relationships is accurate, have reported great degrees of dissatisfaction with their status as virgins and with their sexual intercourse experiences (Baran, 1976a and 1976b; Baran and Courtright, 1981).

On another aspect, having surveyed 290 college students, Buerkel-Rothfuss and Mayes (1981) found that respondents who were regular and heavy soap opera viewers overestimated the numbers of certain professions, lawyers and doctors in the 'real world' for instance, and gave higher rates of divorce and crime cases, and perceived that the real world was filled with familiar types and inordinate amounts of soap opera problems such as incest, abortion, or emotional and nervous

breakdowns. Also, the respondents exaggerated the number of working-class people, and married couples with a 'happy life'. Likewise, in a later study replicating the previous study, however surveying a slightly smaller number (265) of college students, Carveth and Alexander (1985) reported identical patterns and results to those of Buerkel-Rothfuss and Mayes (1981), confirming the cultivation effects soap operas had on heavy viewers in terms of their distorted perceptions of the real world.

Further, Buerkel-Rothfuss and Strouse (1993) reported that among 343 undergraduate students high levels of exposure to televised sexual behaviours tended to be associated with increased perceptions of the frequencies of those behaviours in the real world; for instance perceiving (a) problems with sexual activity, (b) frequency of sexual activity, and (c) engaging in sex without love in the real world was closely associated with watching soap operas such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* and with other daytime soap operas and serialised dramas.

In the same vein, Strouse and Buerkel-Rothfuss (1993) found that the reported sexual beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of 457 college students were closely associated with the levels of exposure to TV sexual content, and more so with particular TV genres such as soap operas and pop music (MTV) and sexually suggestive content. By comparing the perceptions of soap opera viewers and non-viewers, on the other hand, Larson (1996) found that heavy soap opera viewers were more likely than those who watched less to believe that single mothers in the real world had easy lives, coinciding with soap operas' portrayals of single mothers as being affluent and enjoying great life-styles.

In another study, Signorielli (1989) conducted a two-part study in which, first, a content analysis study of prime-time programmes was carried out and reported that traditional and stereotypical gender roles were prevalent; the study was then followed by a survey of adults who responded to a sexism index which showed that heavy viewers had more traditional sexist images about appropriate roles for men and women. Furthermore, in a survey of 3,000 US college students, Signorielli (1991) found that heavy television viewers were more likely than light viewers to be ambivalent about the idea that marriage was a happy form of relationship between a

man and woman, as this coincided with the representation of marriage on US television networks.

Furthermore, in another survey of 314 US teenage students, Ward and Rivadeneyra (1999) reported that heavy TV viewing in general and that of sexual content in particular was strongly linked to young people's sexual attitudes, expectations and behaviour. For instance, they found greater exposure to TV and sexual content was largely associated with strong endorsement of recreational attitudes towards sex, higher expectations of the sexual activity, as well as of the extensive sexual experience, of one's peers, and more traditional views of dating and gender sex-roles. Likewise, in a more recent study comprised of a controlled experimental study (exposure to TV clips of a sexual and non-sexual nature) and a survey involving 269 US undergraduate students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, Ward (2002) found that, once again, heavier exposure to TV and sexual content was consistently correlated with attitudes exhibiting an understanding of sexual relationships as recreationally oriented, men as sexually driven and more active than women, and women as sexual objects. In addition, heavy viewers, female students in particular, rather than light viewers were found to be offering strong endorsement of sexual stereotypes revolving around themes, such as men sexually active, women inactive, dating as a game, sexual experience and traditional gender roles. Once again, the above studies demonstrated the existence of correlations between exposure to sexual content and reported changes in behaviours, attitudes and beliefs. However, most studies (surveys and experiments) provided no proof of causality.

Criticisms of Social Learning and Cultivation Models

Both social learning and cultivation analysis models have been widely invoked to explain media effects, in somewhat non-linear or indirect fashion compared to the classic and traditional model of effects, which considered the media as the cause of a vast number of behaviours and audiences as homogeneous and passive receivers of media messages. However, despite the vast body of empirical research supporting their hypothesis, both models, and in particular the cultivation process, are questionable and have been increasingly thought of as potentially flawed, as the

media environment with the emergence of new media and technologies has changed beyond recognition from the times in which both models were articulated.

One of the main criticisms directed at the two models revolves around the assumption that all individual members of an audience understand and interpret media texts and messages similarly and in a uniform fashion, as most content analysis studies implicitly assume that audiences read the content in question in a similar manner to the way in which the researcher does (Gunter, 2000; Wimmer and Dominick, 2003).

Likewise, surveys conducted to test the cultivation hypothesis clearly assume that diverse television worldviews are interpreted similarly by large segments of viewers, and experimental studies carried out to test the social learning model presume content stimuli mean the same thing to each participant involved—this despite the fact that both models have indicated the importance of broad moderating and intervening variables such as gender, class, ethnicity and so forth (Brown, 1993; Potter, 1991). Furthermore, as the media environment has become saturated (proliferation of new media and satellite channels) and audiences fragmented across the media landscape as well as across content categories or genres within one medium, it is inappropriate, it can be argued, to assume that there is a uniform and consistent worldview of a particular medium and a large homogenous audience.

Criticism of the cultivation model, despite its wide appeal, has been largely directed at some of the model's core concepts and methodological procedures, and can be summarised in the following four points:

Content measures: as cultivation analysis looks into general TV content, the validity or the premise of exposure to a steady TV diet of repetitive messages is called into question unless the content is wholly uniform. Therefore analysis of TV content, it has been suggested, should be programme or genre specific since television's worldview is by no means consistent within or across TV programming (Brown, 1993; Potter and Chang, 1990; Williams, 2006). Some researchers (e.g. Bilandzic and Busselle, 2008), have stressed the need for TV content analysis to be genre-specific since viewers who, for example, watch crime programmes may be

receiving a disproportionately high amount of crime-related messages than those who watch other a more general diet of TV programmes. Thus the amount of viewing specific TV genre may perhaps play an important role in the cultivation process.

Ambiguity between ‘Media’ and ‘Real’ answers: in trying to assess potential cultivated TV worldviews, researchers have often given respondents choices between television-worldview answers and real-world answers without assessing how and why their choices match respondents’ conceptualizations. Meanwhile these choices often ignore the contexts within which events and actions occur in the television world (Potter, 1991).

Causation: correlations between exposure to TV content and changes in behaviours and attitudes are not necessarily causal, as other factors such as physiological and psychological development, in the case of exposure to sexual content for instance, could equally contribute to influencing young people’s attitudes and behaviours (Buckingham and Bragg, 2002; Williams, 2006). The cultivation model has been criticized for over-simplification as correlations between television viewing and viewers’ idea about reality are not directional but rather reciprocal. For instance, it has been suggested that instead of heavy television viewing leading people to be more fearful, it could be that fearful people are more inclined to watching more television than other people (McQuail, 2002). Furthermore, controls of third variables are shown to minimize or eliminate the cultivation effects. Hirsch stressed that a correlation between exposure to violence on television and fear of crime can be explained by the neighbourhood viewers live in. Those who live in high-crime neighbourhoods could be more likely to stay at home and watch television and also to believe that they are more likely to be attacked than those in low-crime neighbourhoods. (Cited in Livingstone, 1990: p. 16)

Variations in viewers: an overall generalization of the cultivation effects fundamentally ignores the profound differences existing between TV viewers (Buerkel-Rothfuss and Strouse 1993; Cohen and Weimann, 2000; Strouse and Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993). However, the model’s validity in offering an overall

gravitational level effect is stronger within certain groups of some, often smaller, size (Brown, 1993; and Williams, 2006).

1.3 Sexual Arousal

One of the possibly most immediate effects of exposure to sexual media is sexual arousal. Exposure to sexually-explicit materials, whether print or audio-visual media, can cause sexual arousal and can result in heightening and intensifying viewers' or readers' sexual behaviours. Measuring sexual arousal has been carried out using (a) self-rating measures, which involves answering the question of 'how aroused are you?' through rating one's sexual arousal on a point-scale measurement, and (b) various physiological and thermography procedures which measure penile tumescence and vaginal changes (Abel et al., 1978; Gunter, 2002; Harris and Scott, 2002; Harris and Barillet, 2009).

It has been suggested that sexual arousal in response to stimuli that would not naturally result in sexual arousal may well be learned through classical conditioning, as experimental studies have shown (Rachman, 1966; Rachman and Hodgson, 1968). Researchers managed to classically condition heterosexual men to be sexually aroused through women's boots by pairing the boots with photos of nude women, thus providing a model for inducing sexual arousal. Some studies have indicated that a number of factors contribute to the degree and level of sexual arousal. For instance, while exposure to sexually explicit materials is often related to heightened levels of sexual arousal, evidence suggests that the degree of arousal is not necessarily highly correlated with explicitness, as sexually less explicit materials are equally, or at times can be, more arousing than explicit sexual content (Bancroft and Mathews, 1971; Harris and Barillet, 2009; 1971; Malamuth, 1996; Malamuth and Impett, 2001).

Further, other studies have suggested that the degree of arousal can vary considerably across both genders, where, in general, men are typically more aroused by sexual media than women, particularly when it come to exposure to media sex that features sexual violence and dehumanizing sexual content (Murnen and Stockton, 1997; Malamuth and Check 1983a; Malamuth et al., 2000). A large body

of literature, primarily experimental studies, has employed the arousal hypothesis in order to explain audience reactions, mostly among male viewers, to violent sexual content, eventually producing contrasting and discrepant findings—those discrepancies, according to Gunter (2002), can be attributed to the choice of stimuli used in the experiments.

The main focus of such experimental research has not been merely on whether or not arousal is induced among an audience as a response to sexual materials, but also on whether viewers become aggressively aroused (Malamuth and Check, 1983b and 1983a; Malamuth, Check and Briere, 1986; Ramirez, Bryant, and Zillmann, 1982; Zillmann and Bryant, 1984; Zillmann and Weaver, 1989). According to the arousal model, the aggression-induced effect of a violent sexual scene helps further induce sexual arousal in viewers; and once they are aroused in this way, the arousal becomes compounded with their anger to enhance it further. This reaction, consequently, increases the possibility that a viewer will openly display anger in the form of aggression (Gunter, 2002: p. 215).

Early studies examining the reactions of convicted rapists and normal men to both rape and consenting sex found that convicted rapists were aroused by both rape and consenting sex, whereas normal men were aroused only by consenting sex (Abel, Barlow, Blanchard and Guild, 1977; Quincy, Chaplin and Upfold, 1984). Other studies showed that even college students, men rather than women, were aroused by scenes depicting sexual violence and rape, however only when the victims were portrayed as enjoying the forced sexual intercourse (Malamuth and Check, 1983a; Zillmann and Bryant, 1984).

Similarly, Bushman et al. (2003) reported that men who scored high in narcissism found film portrayals of rape that were preceded by consensual and affectionate activity as more entertaining and enjoyable than men who scored low in narcissism. Meanwhile, having assessed a number of personal traits in 160 undergraduate students, Bogaert (2001) reported that students with personality traits of a high self-reported degree of sexual arousal, dominance psychoticism, hyper-masculinity and Machiavellianism were correlated with the likelihood of selecting,

for viewing, erotica and sexual material containing sexual violence, portrayals of women with insatiable sexual appetites, and child pornography, but not with the likelihood of selecting sexual content not containing such themes.

Clearly the findings of the studies reviewed above with regard to the role of media sex in inducing sexual arousal show correlations between exposure and triggering sexual arousal. However, whether or not generalizations such as men are more likely than women to be aroused by sexual media, and that normal men in contrast to convicted rapists are not likely to be aroused only by portrayals of consenting sex are inherently difficult to make. And questioning the external validity of such findings is compounded by the contrived circumstances of the controlled laboratory experiments, by their limited scopes and the sensitivity surrounding the study of sex and sexuality in human subjects. Evidence of correlation and causality between exposure to sexual media in a laboratory environment and triggering physiological sexual behaviours (sexual arousal) may come closer to real-life responding, primarily due to the automatic physiological nature of that response. However, findings of attitudinal and behavioural shifts are much more difficult to demonstrate and corroborate as responding to real-life results through laboratory research conducted under highly artificial settings. The research on sexual arousal reviewed has been understandably concerned with sexually explicit media. However, while one may not expect to find such material in mainstream television or soap operas, this study, being informed by the research findings above, will try to find out whether or not milder forms of depiction (behaviours or narratives), for example, of rape that could convey certain messages about how men and women deal with are portrayed or tackled across soap operas.

1.4 Catharsis

The catharsis hypothesis argues that emotional arousal can be purged through vicarious experiences. Therefore, according to this model, consuming sexually explicit materials facilitates the expression of sexual urges and therefore decreases sexual arousal, invoking the catharsis legend, that is, the emotional release which follows the expression of an impulse. This model, it has been noted, stems directly

from the Freudian psychodynamics models of personality (Harris and Barlett, 2009) and has often been discussed in relation to human aggression (Gunter, 2002). Individuals, the hypothesis argues, can release their aggressive impulses through observing mediated aggression, which means exposure to violence on the screen on the part of viewers will result in the dissipation of their aggressive impulses. However, support for this hypothesis and the empirical research based on this model has been very limited (Gunter, 2002; Scheff, 2007).

Likewise, support for the catharsis hypothesis in relation to the audience's response to sexual media stimuli is weak and limited, as a number of studies produced contradictory findings on whether exposure to media sex increases or decreases sexual arousal (Bushman, Baumeister and Stack, 1999). As the catharsis hypothesis predicts that consuming sexual media (pornographic films or magazines), in conjunction with masturbation, relieves sexual urges, Kutchinsky (1973, 1991), using the catharsis model, has argued for placing fewer restrictions on the availability of pornographic materials. However, Carter et al. (1987), examining the exposure to and uses of pornographic materials by 64 sex offenders, found that most rapists and child molesters reported that they had consumed pornographic materials as a way of relieving or countering their strong sexual urges; but nonetheless they also reported viewing pornographic material prior to committing sexual offences.

Further, Prentky and Night (1991) have found that viewing explicit sexual materials is more likely to increase, not decrease, sexual arousal, and after watching, viewers become more rather than less motivated to engage in sexual behaviours. Therefore consuming pornography in order to moderate sexual arousal is likely to have the opposite effect, and it is not likely to reduce the propensity to rape among sex offenders.

Here the evidence of media role in decreasing sexual impulses is at best ambiguous, patchy and contradictory. The findings reviewed above cannot act as a basis for confirming possible effects of exposure to media sex nor can be generalised, simply because of the experimental nature of those studies and the

artificial conditions through which those findings were arrived at. Never the less, reviewing those findings

1.5 Disinhibition

The disinhibition model derives from psychological and behavioural research into the effects of media violence, and has been applied more specifically to examining audiences' attitudinal and behavioural responses to on-screen sexually motivated violence, primarily laboratory and experimental research (Gunter, 2002; Paul and Linz, 2008). According to the disinhibition hypothesis, viewing TV violence, or playing violent video games, contributes to the disinhibition of ingrained social constraints and lessens an appreciation of the unacceptability of violent behaviours. As viewers are likely to identify with their heroic media characters and models, the use of violence by those characters, as well as its frequent portrayal, in an attractive fashion can serve as a justification for the use of violence in the real world by members of an audience (Josephson, 1987).

As far as the effects of media sex are concerned, exposure to sexual content, in particular sexual content that is socially unacceptable such as sexual violence, abusive sex and child pornography, can contribute to disinhibition toward similar sexual behaviours in real life in a particular group of an audience. Empirical evidence emerging from experimental research indicates that men who watched film scenes in which a woman was raped and appeared to become sexually aroused and experience pleasure showed a reduction of inhibitions against committing such behaviours themselves (Check, 1981; Malamuth, Haber, and Feshbach, 1980).

Similarly, in a more recent experimental study in which 154 undergraduate students were exposed to sexual materials (pornographic films including photos and sexy print advertisements) featuring under-age looking models, Paul and Linz (2008) found that exposure to virtual child pornography, in the form of barely legal sexually explicit depictions, did result in a cognitive effect. Further, they found that exposure to sexually-explicit depictions featuring underage-looking models resulted in viewers being more likely to associate sex and sexuality with subsequent nonsexual depictions of minors. However, despite not finding any support for the

hypothesis that participants exposed to ‘barely-legal content’ would subsequently find sexually explicit material featuring actual minors, or sexual interaction between adults and minors, to be more socially acceptable or legitimate than participants pre-exposed to older-looking sexually explicit depictions, Paul and Linz (2008) concluded that ‘the minimal exposure to pornography in the current study did not result in increases in the estimates of the popularity of content or behaviors that involve the sexualization of minors. Repeated exposure over time may be more likely to desensitize subjects to such content and related behaviors. This desensitization may result in the predicted disinhibition effect.’ (p. 35)

As the findings above show, there is no compelling evidence that correlates exposure to sexual media results in disinhibition. The disinhibition model remains a hypothesis which primarily ‘predicts’ disinhibition and supporting empirical evidence is limited, while its external validity is also subject to the criticisms leveled at controlled laboratory experiments which were largely used to investigate the ‘disinhibition effect’. The results of a few tightly controlled small experiments measuring short-term effects conducted under highly artificial and purposive conditions are unlikely to be able to make credible generalizations. Reviews of such studies have showed that the idea of a basis for behavioural model is overly simplistic and was later replaced by a cognitive model which argued viewers could learn and internalise disinhibition scripts but may not necessarily act upon (Gunter, 2002). As for this study, it is unlikely that soap operas would display any sexually explicit material (or sexual violence) with which the disinhibition studies are concerned. However, milder depictions of rape and sexual violence maybe portrayed or discussed in soap operas. Hence reviewing such findings has informed the development and creation of some sex categories that have been included in the coding analysis.

1.6 Desensitisation

The desensitization hypothesis argues that repeated exposure to particular types of media content (e.g. violence or sex) causes a reduction in emotional responsiveness or habituation to such content (violent or sexual behaviour). Further,

while certain media content can initially evoke a number of strong emotional and behavioural reactions in members of an audience, repeated exposure to such content over a medium or long period of time results in weakening those reactions. (Gunter, 2002; Zillmann and Bryant, 1984).

This hypothesis is derived primarily from relatively old experimental studies conducted in the US in order to measure the effects of exposure to erotica on married couples (Mann, Sidman, and Starr, 1971; Mann, Bekwoitz, Sidman, Starr, and West, 1974), the effects of exposure to pornography on sexual arousal in young men (Howard, Reifler, and Liptzin, 1971; Reifler, Howard, Lipton, Liptzin, and Widmann, 1971), and the effects of exposure to sexually explicit materials, especially sexually motivated violence and aggression, on people's attitudes, perceptions and behaviours (Ceniti and Malamuth, 1984 Zillmann and Bryant, 1984).

Furthermore, a number of studies found that repeated exposure to depictions that juxtaposed violence and sex resulted in diminished affective reactions and the tendency to judge behaviours such as sexual assault and domestic violence as less harmful to women (Donnerstein, Linz, & Penrod, 1987; Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1984,1988; Linz, Adams, & Donnerstein, 1989; Mullin & Linz,1995)

Mann, Sidman and Starr (1971) exposed married couples to both sexually explicit and non-erotic films in an experiment which ran over four consecutive weeks in order to assess their sexual behaviours and attitudes. During and throughout the experiment, participants recorded their sexual activities in diaries, while their attitudes were assessed initially and after the experiment.

The researchers reported that exposure to erotica was found to stimulate sexual behaviour in married couples, however for only a short period, and that sexual activities between those couples were more frequent on exposure days than on the days thereafter. On the other hand, the study reported that the transitory, sex-stimulating effect grew weaker over the weeks and became negligible in the final fourth week.

In another study, Howard, Reifler, and Liptzin, (1971) investigated the dissipation of sexual arousal in men (college students) who were given access and exposed to pornographic materials (films, photographs and reading) on 15 days or sessions over a three-week period, and those who were not given any such materials under controlled conditions. In this experiment participants were free to choose from the pornographic and non-erotic materials in the first 10 sessions, while in the following three sessions the original pornographic materials were replaced by new ones, and in the last two sessions the non-erotic materials were entirely removed. Each of the fifteen sessions lasted 90 minutes, during which participants recorded their activities regularly. Participants were also shown a pornographic film prior to and after the extended exposure treatment. Further, after eight weeks from the experiment, participants were once again shown a pornographic film. A number of measurements of sexual arousal and attitudinal and self-reporting measurements were taken during and after the experiment.

The findings revealed that participants were initially interested in erotic films; however, their interest faded quickly with the repeated exposure. Also, after the unrestricted exposure to pornographic materials, participants evaluated their reaction to explicit materials as boredom, and even the introduction of novel materials failed to revive the participants' levels of interest observed initially. Furthermore, the findings showed that exposure to a pornographic film after the longitudinal experiment produced diminished reactions of sexual excitement. These findings clearly suggested that massive and continued exposure to erotic materials led to some degree of habituation of sexual and autonomic arousal.

In an attempt to study men's behavioural responses to sexually motivated violence and stimuli, Centi and Mulamuth (1984) examined the patterns of sexual arousal (in young males) induced by exposure to portrayals of sexually-motivated violence. The experiment involved 69 adult males who, based on their penile tumescence when exposed to portrayals of rape and consensual sex in a pre-exposure session, were classified into three categories: (1) force-oriented: participants had exhibited relatively high levels of sexual arousal to portrayals of rape and forced sex, (2) non-force-oriented: participants had shown little arousal to

portrayals of rape but high levels of arousal to depictions of consensual sex, and (3) unclassifiable: participants had shown little arousal to both forced and consensual sex.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three exposure groups: sexually violent, sexually non-violent, and control. Those assigned to the first group (violent) were exposed over a four-week period to ten sexually violent stimuli (films, photos, readings). Participants in the second group were exposed to ten sexually nonviolent stimuli only, while those in the control group were not exposed to any stimulus at all. After the exposure sessions, participants returned to the laboratory and were presented with similar depictions to the ones used in the pre-exposure session. Once more, penile tumescence and self-reported arousal were measured.

The results showed that force-oriented participants, whether exposed to sexually-violent or non-violent portrayals, became less aroused to rape depictions in the post-exposure session than those in the control group; also they tended to be less aroused by the post-exposure non-violent depictions. However, participants in the other two categories, non-force-oriented and unclassifiable, showed no significant effects of exposure. The reduced arousal of force-oriented participants resembled the habituation effects found in the earlier experiments (Howard, Reifler, and Liptzin, 1971; Mann, Sidman and Starr, 1971)

In another study, Zillmann and Bryant (1984) conducted an elaborate laboratory-based study that involved 80 female and 80 male undergraduate university students. The study's objective was to examine the excitatory habituation to sexually explicit materials, and the extent to which habituation to erotica generalize to less explicit depictions of sexual behaviours and to portrayals of sexual behaviours and practices with which respondents were relatively unfamiliar. The experiment ran over a nine-week period and involved three groups. Participants in the *massive- exposure condition* watched over a 6-week period 36 short erotic films, a total of 4 hours and 48 minutes; and participants in the *intermediate- exposure condition* watched 18 erotic films, an exposure time of 2 hours and 24 minutes, while participants in the final third group, *no-exposure condition*, were shown 36

non-erotic films. After the initial exposure-treatment period, participants returned to the laboratory on three more occasions (at the end of each of the three consecutive weeks) and were exposed to a variety of pornographic materials assigned to each week.

The study produced a large number of findings, some of which provided clear evidence correlating heavy exposure with habituation to sexual stimuli. The study revealed, among other findings, that: (1) massive intermediate exposure conditions resulted in increased habituation to erotica over the nine-week period and gender differences were not a factor, (2) massive exposure to erotica produced significantly diminished affective reactions to it over time, (3) participants in the massive and intermediate exposure conditions considered pornographic materials as being less pornographic, and reported being less offended by pornographic materials and portrayals of uncommon sexual behaviour practices, and (4) massive and intermediate exposure conditions produced a trend of reduced aggressiveness, decreased arousal and repulsion.

Clearly, all those studies have presented an evidence-base to support their own hypothesis that repeated exposure to certain types of sexual media results in the audience becoming habituated to them and that any strong emotional and behavioural reactions that those types have caused *initially* become *gradually* weakened by repeated exposure. But can those findings be accepted at face value? Once again, those findings were produced using experimental and controlled laboratory techniques, which inevitably brings into question their external validity as experimental conditions do not produce real-world conditions but, rather, at times, they significantly distort the experience of media consumption—particularly with an area such as exposure to sexual media—and therefore make generalizations to the outside-laboratory settings more difficult. As seen in the review of those studies above, the laboratory artificiality conditions which dealt with explicit sexual materials and the patterns of exposure to them, resulted in removing depictions of sex from their original context, detaching them from certain functions and placing artificial constraints that clearly impacted upon the way human subjects behaved or responded. Perhaps those closely controlled research procedures provided a range—

limited and already defined—of available responses to the studied sexual media content, forcing the participants to react in ways they perhaps under natural conditions would not have done so. What is striking about some of the findings above that claimed that massive and continued exposure to erotic materials led to some degree of habituation of sexual and autonomic arousal and some degree of ‘boredom’ (e.g. Howard, Reifler, and Liptzin, 1971) is the fact lack of an explanation as to how and why the consumption of and interest in pornographic media is sustained.

Nevertheless, if those findings have any purchase, it is the aim of this study to identify whether or not milder forms of sexual conveying certain messages (e.g. sexually motivated violence) exist in soap operas which may result, according to desensitisation model, in habituation viewers to such types of messages.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a variety of explanations for the impact media sex may have on audiences. Those theoretical perspectives have demonstrated that the effects of media sex may occur not only on a behavioural level but also a cognitive level. Social learning theory, for instance, holds that human beings learn by observing other people’s actions and will engage in behaviours they see most rewarding, while the cultivation model posits that a regular and heavy diet of media can shape media consumers’ perception of the world and social reality in a way similar to the world-view offered by the media.

Thus, exposure to a regular diet of particular media sex may condition and cultivate inaccurate beliefs about homosexuality, shift and alter prevailing moral codes and norms in relation to promiscuity and sex outside committed relationships, and create distorted impressions that exaggerated sexual behaviours and harmful practices are normal. However, studies that have adopted any of the reviewed theoretical perspectives and models in their investigation of the effects of media sex have shown that those effects themselves are not exclusively linked to sexual behaviours and beliefs, but also to nonsexual audience responses such as emotional reactions and aggression.

Certain types of sexual media content can potentially influence viewers through psychological mechanisms such as disinhibition, desensitisation, and catharsis (emotional release). Audiences watching such types of sexual materials may experience a weakening of social inhibitions against socially undesirable behaviours and practices, may be stimulated to behave in ways akin to those of media role models, and may experience a reduction of concern about the consequences of negative behaviours.

Studies and findings on effects reviewed in this chapter are characterised by their approach to the relationship between sexual media and audiences in terms of stimulus and response; therefore those studies were primarily driven to measure and prove the audiences' potential inclination to imitate or copy behaviours they have observed, and/or the way media scripts (depictions of sexual behaviours) are likely to trigger particular behavioural or cognitive reactions. This approach, although acknowledged effects of media are mediated by a range of intervening variables and provided some plausible explanations, has been challenged and criticized for not addressing how audiences interact with, infer and construct meaning(s) of media text. Furthermore the methodological limitations of the reviewed effects studies are all too important to ignore. With the cultivation research and other effects studies, reliance upon the surveys which in themselves can tell very little about causal relationships and where respondents report about their own behaviours and attitudes may not produce reliable findings or statistics, particularly when researching a topic as sensitive as sex and sexuality. As for the experiment and laboratory-based studies, the artificial and highly controlled research techniques and settings used in arriving at their findings bring to questions their external validity and make generalizations to real-world situations very difficult to make. Experiment-based studies try to demonstrate what could possible happen rather than what actually happen in real-world situation. However, the reviewing of the effects theories, models and findings have provided some useful pointers to a number of variables (e.g. areas such as sex-related crimes, sexually motivated violence, rape and incest) that have informed and eventually were incorporated in the study's coding schedule.

The following chapter will provide a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on sex and sexuality in the media. The review will focus on content analysis studies, as well as on opinion surveys and specially commissioned policy-oriented studies and reports, carried out in the US, the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Chapter 2

Sex on Television: A Review of the Literature.

Most of the empirical evidence based on objective, quantitative measures of sex in the media has been gathered using the research method of content analysis. The aim of studies using such a method is to provide objective evidence on the amount, nature, contexts and frequency of sexual content shown in the media, through identifying and cataloguing actions, behaviours, references, texts and imagery that qualify as sexual in nature. Another approach as to how much sex is shown in the media, and the nature of it, has been derived from opinion surveys. This usually involves asking the media audiences about their perceptions of the amount of sex shown in the media, and their preferences and attitudes towards media sex. However, the subjective opinions of media audiences—although very important in terms of media production and regulations—may not necessarily reflect the actual reality of the prevalence and nature of sex in the media. If we wish to understand the potential impact of televised sex on viewers' sex-related beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, it is therefore important to examine directly evidence for the amount, nature and contexts of media sex.

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the research that has attempted to assess, in quantitative terms, sexual content on television. As most of the research into this has originated in the United States, the first part of this chapter begins by reviewing some of the initial studies on sexual activity on mainstream US television conducted in late 1970s and 1980s, and then presents and discusses the findings from later studies and research projects, particularly those commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation from the mid-1990s onwards. The second part focuses on findings from the research looking into sexual content shown on UK and Irish television networks, and reviews the findings of some of the opinion surveys which

have attempted to gauge the UK's public attitudes towards, and perceptions of, media sex across the last two decades.

2.1 Sex on Television: American Research

Reviews of media studies on sex and sexuality (e.g. Buckingham and Bragg, 2002; Ward, 2003) have shown that nearly all the research on media sex has been undertaken in the United States where arguably the nature of media environment and of public attitudes and opinions is very different from that existing in the UK. Reviewing those early and more recent studies will inform our understanding of the development stages of the research into media sex, and the extent to which this research has come to influence UK and Ireland research projects into media sex. Furthermore, the reviews below have informed the development of this study's coding categories and measures.

2.1.1 Prime-time TV & Soap Operas in the 1970s & 1980s

Research on TV sexual content began first in the United States in the mid-1970s. It was trying to examine how much sex was shown, the nature of this content, and the potential effects such content might have on viewers, especially young viewers. The purpose of this research, according to Greenberg, Stanley, Siemicki, Soderman, Heeter, and Linsangan (1993), 'was twofold, first, to provide a baseline against which changes in the presence and/or kind of sexual content could be compared, and second, to provide the basis for originating hypotheses about the potential impact of such content on various groups of viewers.' (p. 29)

In one of the early content analyses of sex and sexuality on US television networks, Franzblau, Sprafkin, and Rubinstein (1977) analysed 50 hours of prime-time and post-watershed TV programmes. In order to identify any occurring sexual activity throughout their sample, Franzblau, Sprafkin, and Rubinstein included in their coding measures thirteen categories of physical intimacy, ranging from intimate behaviours (e.g., intercourse) to casual behaviours (e.g., embracing) and verbalization (e.g., innuendos).

The findings showed that the highest incidences of sexual activities occurred mostly between 8 pm and 9 pm, and that the sexual behaviours were most frequently kissing, embracing, flirting, and non-aggressive touching. No incidences of homosexual activity were found and only two acts of implied heterosexual intercourse were recorded. More than half of the recorded sexual acts were found in situation comedies and variety shows, while intimate kissing and embracing accounted for almost 3.50 acts per hour during 8 to 9 pm, and almost 3 acts per hour for the 9 to 10 time slot. The 8-9 pm slot showed significantly more non-aggressive touching (84.90 per hour) than did the Post-FVT, Family Viewing Time, (just over 55 per hour).

Similarly, in another early study involving a content analysis of 58 hours of television programming shown on US television networks, Fernandez-Collado, Greenberg, Korzenny, and Atkin (1978) found a dramatic increase in sexual activity had occurred when comparing their findings with those of Franzblau, Sprafkin, and Rubinstein (1977). The 1978 study revealed that prime-time TV programmes contained an average of two acts of a sexual nature per hour; while the 9-11 pm. time slot, or post-watershed programmes, had the highest rate of sexual activity per hour, with just under three acts per hour. Most of these acts were 'sexual intercourse' between unmarried partners (41 out of 100 acts detected) and prostitution (28 instances). However, unlike the Franzblau, Sprafkin, and Rubinstein (1977) study, Fernandez-Collado et al. (1978) identified seven portrayals depicting homosexual acts and, further, reported 1.5 acts per hour in programmes most watched by children.

The overall findings of Fernandez-Collado et al. (1978) conflicted with those of the 1977 study primarily due to major discrepancies in the content measures and the coding procedures used in both studies, as will be discussed later. Furthermore, Franzblau et al. (1977) found higher rates of kissing and embracing acts per hour while Fernandez-Collado et al. (1978) found that most common were intercourse and prostitution.

In another study attempting to compare the findings of two seasons, Greenberg, Graef, Fernandez-Collado, Korzenny, and Atkin (1980) content analysed 48.5 hours of prime-time TV programming for the 1977 season and 56 hours for the 1978 season. They reported that most sexual references were those of sexual intercourse among non-married partners with an average of one reference every two hours to non-married couples and less than one fourth to married couples. Further, they found that sexual activity on prime-time TV across the seasons shared 'continuity' (increase in sexual content of certain categories such as kissing, embracing and intercourse cases), as well as 'discontinuity' (fluctuation in frequencies and absence of other types of portrayals such as prostitution and homosexuality).

Sprafkin and Silverman (1981), however, analysed the content of 68 prime-time TV programmes and reported a dramatic increase in references, both implied and verbal, to sexual activity, especially 'sexual intercourse'. Implied sexual intercourse increased from no weekly occurrence in 1975 to 15 occurrences in 1977 and 24 occurrences in 1978; sexual innuendos increased in frequency from about one reference per hour in 1975 to seven in 1977 and to just over 10 in 1978. Furthermore, direct verbal references to sexual intercourse increased most dramatically, from only two references per week in 1975 to six references in 1977 and to 53 references in 1978. However, the only decrease occurred in the frequency of three categories (non-aggressive touching, physical suggestiveness, and aggressive touching). However, Sprafkin and Silverman (1981) reported, due to the inclusion of further categories in their methodology, 15 references to sex education and romance.

Greenberg, Abelman, and Neuendorf (1981) conducted research to analyse the type, frequency, and location of sexual intimacies across day-time televised soap operas. The sample studied contained 65 hours of soap operas aired during the 1976, 1979 and 1980 seasons. The study found that the hourly rate of intimate sexual acts did not increase significantly, in fact slightly decreased in 1980 (2 for 1976, 1.28 for 1979, and 1.80 for 1980). The findings also indicated that petting acts were the most frequently occurring acts, and unmarried partners outnumbered married partners in both incidents and references to intercourse by a ratio of 4 to 1.

Greenberg et al. (1981) concluded that day-time soap operas had more sexual content than prime-time TV programmes; however the type of sexual intimacies portrayed differed. On afternoon soap operas, sexual content mostly comprised 'heavy kissing,' and 'explicit physical petting' while prime-time programmes had high rates of references to intercourse both implied and explicit. On the other hand, Greenberg et al. (1981) have noted that 'soap operas are noteworthy for their minimization of sexual deviance' referring to the absence of homosexuality, prostitution, rape and other 'discouraged sexual practices' (p. 88).

Greenberg and D'Alessio (1985) analysed three episodes of each of the 13 network daytime soap operas—a total of 33.5 hours—for the 1982 season. The study identified 66 acts or references to sexual intercourse (14 visual and 52 verbal), 17 of petting, 3 of rape, 8 of prostitution, and 8 other sexual activities. However, analysing day-time soap operas broadcast in the 1979 season, Lowry, Love and Kirby (1981) found an average of more than six sexual behaviours of erotic touching, implied intercourse and prostitution per hour, and found more than three instances of sexual behaviours involving unmarried couples for every instance of sexual behaviours involving married couples.

In addition, Greenberg, Stanley, Siemiki, Soderman, and Linsangan (1993) analysed three of the most watched and most popular soap operas and 19 other prime-time programmes aired in 1986, and reported that 3.67 sex acts were found per hour for soap operas; most prominent acts were intercourse (accounting for 62% of all coded sexual activity at a rate of 2.29 acts per hour), and long passionate kisses (an average of one act per episode). Prostitution, rape and petting were very infrequent, and homosexuality was absent. For prime-time programmes, sexual activity averaged just under three acts per hour, and similarly, intercourse and long passionate kissing acts were predominant; homosexual and prostitution acts were identified once every two hours of TV programming.

Greenberg et al. (1993) documented an increase in the frequency of sexual content of 103% over a five-year period, from 1980 to 1985, in television soap operas most watched by young people and across prime-time programmes. They

estimated that the average teenage American viewer in the year 1985 was likely to be exposed to between 1,900 and 2,400 sexual references on television. In addition, they found that unmarried intercourse in soap opera sampling was twice as frequent as married intercourse, whereas in prime-time programmes unmarried intercourse accounted for only one-sixth of the intercourse activity. Comparing the findings of soaps and prime-time programmes, the study concluded that:

- ‘Sex acts in preferred daytime soaps are more frequent per programme hour than during preferred prime-time series...
- Prime-time series have more varied sexual activity than the soaps...action-adventure featured unmarried intercourse and prostitution; and situation comedies featured long kisses, intercourse and homosexuality. Soaps featured intercourse and long kisses.
- All soaps have sexual activity.
- Although the majority of all sexual activity is verbal, prime-time sex has more visual material implying sexual intercourse.
- Sexual activity occurring among persons not married to each other nor to anyone is even greater in the prime-time series; extramarital intercourse has more participants in the soaps; premarital intercourse has more participants in the prime-time series...
- More prime-time acts are rated as high in explicitness
- There is no humour in sexual activity in the daytime; there is considerable humour as the context for sex in situation comedy in the evening’. (pp. 41-42)

Further, Lowry and Towels (1989) conducted a content analysis study to examine whether or not prime-time TV programmes had references to sex education and sexual health issues. Most of the 1980s studies included in their analyses categories on sex education and ‘responsible sex’, given that during this period public debates on STDs reached their peak. Lowry and Towels (1989) found that the sample (66 hours of prime-time) had 13.5 behaviours relating to pregnancy

prevention and 18 relating to STD prevention out of 722 codable behaviours. Thirteen references to STD prevention were related to AIDS and all of these references were on one network channel (ABC). The study's other findings had similarities with some of the findings mentioned above, in that more sexual behaviours involving unmarried rather than married partners, and averages of 3.58 acts per hour of physical suggestiveness and intimate sexual behaviours, were identified.

In an analysis of prime-time television, Sapolsky and Tabarlet (1991) compared the findings of the 1979 TV season with that of 1989. They found that television 'has not diminished its portrayal of sex' although some categories, such as criminal sex acts, witnessed a slight decrease in frequency. One week of programme coding in 1989 yielded a total of 906 sexual incidents: 100 incidents more than the total of the 1979 season. Of the categories, sexual touching, grew significantly (N= 215) from the 1978 season and appeared on TV at a rate of 6.37 acts per hour.

Sapolsky and Tabarlet (1991) noted that the most dominant category in both years was that of non-criminal sex acts (kissing, hugging, and touching), and that instances of sexual intercourse were few (four in the 1979 study and 9 in the 1989 study). Due to its developed and elaborate coding frame, the 1989 analysis revealed that sexual language was predominantly used to refer to behaviours such as intercourse, prostitution, and rape; and when sexual language was combined with visual portrayals of intercourse, they accounted for 11.4% of the total sexual acts.

Further, eight in ten characters in the 1989 season were unmarried, compared to three out of four in the 1979 season, and only one out of every ten sexual intercourse cases involved a married couple for the 1989 sample. On other hand, the 1989 study suggested that the presence of sex in serious formats accounted for just a little more than one-third (38.6) of all sexual incidents, whereas in 1979 half (49.2%) of all sexual incidents appeared in comedy and variety programmes. In overall terms, the study revealed that prime-time television in 1989 offered 15.8 acts per hour of sexual imagery (i.e. behaviours) or language, compared to 12.8 acts per hour in 1979.

What characterises the findings that emerged from the 1970s and to some extent from the 1980s research is the lack of physical intimacy shown on TV in this period, the prevalence of implied sexual activities and innuendos, the relative absence of graphically or visually explicit portrayals of sexual intercourse, and a virtual absence homosexuality and homosexual portrayals. Also the most reported sexual acts, innuendos and double-entendres, were confined to certain TV genres such as situation comedies and variety shows; serious drama shows had little sexual content.

Nevertheless, the 1970s studies, for instance Fernandez-Collado et al. (1978), showed that the patterns of sexual relationships (especially intercourse) were those occurring outside marriage and in socially discouraged contexts such as prostitution, while Franzblau, Sprafkin, and Rubinstein (1977) found that programme type was a critical predictor of physical intimacy representation, and concluded that the prevalence of sexual activities in sit-coms and variety shows was due to the conventional notion that 'sex is a disturbing topic and is best handled humorously' (p.167). However, in the mid-1980s there was a shift towards more portrayal of sexual intercourse both visual and implied, increasing sexual activity occurring between unmarried partners, and incorporating sexual activity that had some sort of reference to STD prevention and pregnancy prevention. It could be said that the trend of portraying/presenting sex on TV during the 70s and 80s was one of inconsistency and fluctuation, as sexual content differed in frequency from one season to another.

There have been increases, as well as decreases, in the frequencies of some sexual categories. TV genres determined, at times, the amount and the nature of sexual content. Although the 1980s witnessed public debates on sexual health issues, the amount of sexual content did not decrease, nor did TV offer substantial 'responsible' sexual messages. Sexual content on TV changed from being in humorous contexts in the 70s to being in more serious contexts. Sexual intercourse portrayals were rare in the 70s but becoming prevalent in the 80s.

Greenberg, Stanley, Siemiki, Soderman, and Linsangan (1993) summarise the research findings of these two decades as follows:

- ‘Implied and verbal references to sexual intercourse on television have become more frequent.
- Frequency of references to most kinds of sex, including prostitution and homosexuality, have increased.
- The overall number of sexual acts/references has increased.
- More sex activities occur between people not married to each other than between marital partners by a ratio of 3-1 or 4-1.
- Less than 1 in 10 incidents of sexual intercourse have any visual component.
- Many verbal references to sex on the soaps are denial, wishful thinking, and outright rejection of the activity.’ (p. 29-30).

Almost all of those studies reviewed above utilised theoretical frameworks and hypotheses that presumed, at times mechanically and uncritically, television’s ability to influence viewers, particularly younger, poor, less educated and socio-economically disadvantaged viewers. Those studies rarely were informed by public opinions and attitudes surveys or qualitative research, but rather they were informed by moral and cultural debates of the time, mostly conservative ones, surrounding sex and sexuality. They only speculated about the viewers’ reactions to and relationship with the medium, and presumed one-directional relationship between the medium and viewers, and certain uniformity in the viewers understanding and interpretation of sexual messages. Methodologically, however, those studies had obvious weaknesses and limitations. They merely produced statistical data of the frequencies and occurrences of sexual portrayals on the screen, which were completely decontextualised. Depictions of sex were removed from their original contexts and narratives, and the questions of how meanings can arise or be inferred from such depictions were never addressed. Furthermore, very rarely did those studies use consistent definition and categories of sex and content measures, which ultimately resulted in great discrepancies among similar studies and produced inflated findings. For instance, some researchers (Lowry and Towels, 1989) coded a kiss twice, once for each actor, while others (Franzblau et al 1977; Fernandez-Collado et al. 1978)

coded camera angles and shots as separate occurrences of a sexual behaviour. Additionally, the samples analysed were fairly limited in size and clearly unrepresentative of either the TV genre, in case of soap operas, or general TV landscape, particularly given that longitudinal studies were rarely implemented.

2.1.2 US Studies and Research Projects: 1990s and 2000s

In this section, US content analyses show fairly clearly that both the frequency and explicitness of sexual content on television have increased. Studies commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation, while providing an overview of the sexual messages prevalent across US T networks, are concerned with highlighting the ‘negative’ effects prevailing sexual messages on US television networks have on young viewers, and have argued for the incorporation of more messages of sexual Risks and Responsibilities. Further, other studies provide analyses of sex and sexuality portrayed in US soap operas. Methodologically speaking, the below studies have employed more coherent and sophisticated coding categories and measures than the ones used in the studies reviewed in the previous section.

2.1.2.1 The Family Hour Study

The *Family Hour* study was commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now and carried out by Kunkel and his colleagues in 1996. The Kaiser Family Foundation is a non-profit US organisation, primarily concerned with health care issues and policies, and campaigning for health reforms. A major part of the Kaiser Family Foundation research has focused on media and young people and issues regarding the effects the media might have on them. Further, the Kaiser Family Foundation has often been seen as a policy-driven and anti-media organisation. Buckingham and Bragg (2002), for instance, have argued that what characterises the Kaiser Family Foundation research is its anti-media agenda, which could be seen as an obstacle to offering an objective evaluation of media sexual content in the US.

In the *Family Hour* report, Kunkel, Cope, and Colvin (1996) examined how sexual messages were presented on major American TV networks over a period of

three decades. The overall objective of the study was to compare the depiction of sex on American Family Hour television in 1996 with figures for 1986 and 1976. The study's sample comprised 84 hours of the first hour of prime-time television programming (8:00-9:00 pm) aired in 1996 by the four largest US television networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox.), and 17 hours of the same time slot for the 1976, and 21 hours for the 1986 season. The 1976 and 1986 samples were limited to one episode of each programme aired between 8:00-9:00 pm of these two seasons. The earlier samples were obtained from the research conducted by George Gerbner and his colleague under the *Cultural Indicators Project* (see Morgan, 2002).

The study found that in 1996 '75% of the programmes included some type of sexual content, compared to 65% in 1986 and 43% in 1976...' and that 'the proportion of shows with no sexual content at all diminished from a majority (57%) in 1976 to only a quarter (25%) in 1996.' (Kunkel, Cope, and Colvin; 1996: p. 8) Further, the findings showed that the most common sexual activity was 'talk about sex' which increased significantly over the three-decade period. In 1976, 'talk about sex' featured in only 39% of all sexual activity, in 1986 46%, and in 1996 59%. The sexual behaviour category, however, showed a similar trend as it increased from 26% in 1976 to 61% in 1996. Most predominant sexual behaviours were physical flirting, kissing, and caressing, both accounting for more than 80% of all sexual behaviour. However, in the 1996 sample 15 incidents of sexual intercourse, both implied and depicted, were found; these incidents representing 3% of all sexual behaviour. But no sexual intercourse acts were found in the 1976 and 1986 samples.

The study also revealed that messages about sexual risks and responsibilities received only modest attention in the 1996 programmes, while none of the sexual intercourse incidents found had any reference to sexual health risks or sex education, despite the fact that around 9% of all coded sex acts did include some references to topics such as STD prevention, unwanted pregnancy, or use of a condom.

Kunkel, Cope, and Colvin (1996) concluded that '[t]he depiction of sexual content in "Family Hour" programming has increased consistently over the last 20 years. This pattern applies to the number of shows that included sexual messages as

well as the amount of such messages that programmes contain. Both talk about sex and the depiction of sexually related behaviours are now found in a majority of programmes during the “Family Hour” time frame. The amount of sexual interactions overall in 1996 was up 118% since 1986 and 270% since 1976.’ (p. 33).

One of the obvious areas that needs to be looked into with regard to this type of longitudinal analysis is the validity of comparisons, particularly when we know, as indicated in the preceding section, the limitations, weaknesses and inconsistencies that characterised the early 1970s and 1980s studies and their methodologies: How is it possible to compare those statistical data like for like over a period spanning three decades? Do those comparisons take into account the changing nature of the television programming in general and programmes within the family hours in particular? Do they take into account the actual contexts within which sexual portrayals occurred and the narratives that lend meanings to them? To what extent can one consider the samples studies representative of one TV seasons let alone of three decades’ TV output, and are the individual samples comparable? The study does not seem to have addressed those issues. However what it has done was to collapse the statistical data from three decades into comparable categories. Overall, while those findings provide a baseline for comparisons, albeit quantitative ones, to track the changing nature of family hour TV in terms of the prevalence of depiction of sex, these should not be taken at face value.

2.1.2.2 Soap Operas

Like the content analysis studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, content analyses of soap opera’s sex and sexuality in the 1990s still focused on daytime, rather than prime-time soap operas, as the greatest concentration of young viewers was normally found during daytime and leading up to the family hour viewing (Greenberg and Busselle, 1994).

In one of the 1990s’ earlier studies, Olson (1994) content analysed two weeks worth of three US television networks’ (ABC, CBS, and NBC) daytime soap operas. The sample was selected randomly from the 1989 and 1990 seasons to cover ten weekdays, and produced a total of 105 hours of soap operas episodes. The study

identified 505 sexual acts across the overall sample, with erotic touching (N=136), physical suggestiveness (N=37), and verbal suggestiveness (N=155) being the most frequently occurring sexual activities in daytime soap operas. Talk about sex was more prevalent in the form of discussing an affair (57 acts), innuendos and double-entendres accounted for 132 acts. Sexual health issues were hardly present, as only eight incidents were found: four discussing AIDS and four discussing pregnancy prevention.

The study revealed that of all the 35 sexual intercourse incidents identified, 24 discussed sexual intercourse, nine implicitly depicted it, and only two depictions were physical/visual. Further, the study reported unmarried partners involved in sexual intercourse cases outnumbered married couples by a ratio of 2 to 1.

Greenberg and Busselle (1994) content analysed ten episodes of five soap operas (a total of 50 hours) aired in 1994, and compared three soap series (*General Hospital*, *All My Children*, and *One Life to Live*) with those of the same series shown in 1985. Of the overall sample they identified 333 incidents of sexual activity appearing at a rate of 6.6 sexual acts per hour. The average number of sexual activity incidents per hour was 3.7 for the 1985 soap operas and 5.0 for the 1994 soaps. *All My Children*, for example, had an increase in sexual activity from 5.2 to 6.1, *General Hospital* 3.1 to 3.7, whereas *One Life to Live* witnessed an increase of 88% (from 2.7 to 5.1).

In the other remaining soap operas, which were not included in the 1985 sample, the figures were much bigger. *Days of our Lives* had 11.4 sexual incidents per hour while *The Young and Restless* had 7.0 incidents per hour. As for the type of sexual activity, incidents related to unmarried intercourse were most frequent of all 120 coded incidents, with an average of 2.4 per hour. Discussions of pregnancy, such as 'I am pregnant.' and 'I want a baby', counted for 19% of the total sample (23 incidents). Incidents related to rape came second, with a rate of 1.4 acts per hour; long kissing occurred 1.4 times per episode, and no homosexual acts were identified. The study also reported that visual portrayals outnumbered verbal references, with 225 incidents for the latter and 108 for the former. The

demographic attributes of the characters were as follows: half the participants were men and half women; 87 were white and 10% African-Americans.

In another study Heintz-Knowles (1996) content analysed 97 hours of televised American daytime soap operas. The sample comprised ten hours of each of the ten soap operas shown on major American networks during a five-week period in 1996. The study found that all 97 hours contained 594 sexual behaviours, averaging 6.12 sexual acts per hour. Using a somewhat different coding procedure from those employed in the above studies, Heintz-Knowles (1996) indicated that there were a total of 346 sequences of sexual interactions occurring in the sample, with a rate of 4.3 interactions per programme hour. Further, the study found 73% of the coded behaviours were visual portrayals, while just 27 were verbal.

The most common sexual behaviours were those of short/modest and long/passionate kissing accounting for over 45% of all behaviours. The second most frequent type of sexual behaviour was that of sexual intercourse, both verbal and visual, which accounted for 22% of the overall identified sexual behaviours. However, the findings of verbal references revealed that 44% of the 118 discussions about sexual intercourse involved some talk about planning behaviour (i.e. sexual responsibility) or consequences of sexual activity. These discussions dealt with issues such as pregnancy, prevention of unplanned pregnancies, and STD and AIDS prevention. Interestingly, unlike most previous studies reviewed so far, the Heintz-Knowles (1996) found that when sexual intercourse was depicted visually, it was shown within a context of a committed relationship, with 16 out of 17 sexual intercourse depictions occurring between partners who were in established or committed relationships. Only one depicted sexual intercourse involved unmarried partners. The study's major findings indicated the following:

- The overall amount of specific sexual behaviours remained relatively consistent with previous studies reviewed above.
- In a marked shift from Greenberg and Busselle's (1994) study, sexual behaviours were twice as likely to be visually depicted as verbal depiction, although most

visually depicted behaviours involved “modest” sexual behaviours, such as kissing and caressing.

- Discussions and depiction of planning and consequences of sexual activity increased slightly since 1994, but were largely confined to a few discrete storylines dealing with consequences.
- most sexual interactions occurred between participants involved in established relationships with each other (i.e. married, engaged or monogamous long-term relationships)
- Most sexual activities were depicted as having positive effects on those involved and their relationships (Heintz-Knowles, 1996: p. 5).

Methodologically, these studies marked a departure from those conducted in the previous two decades in that they employed relatively more advanced categories of sex and coding schedules. However, the representativeness of their samples remained limited in scope, given the serialised nature of the genre. They attempted to capture some contextual elements but never accounted for full narratives and storylines. They focused on moral and health aspects of sexual depiction. Conceptually, on the other hand, they remained concerned with ‘effects’, primarily negative ones. And often, although implicitly, the popularity of soap operas among young viewers and their nature of entertainment were treated as a valuable source which reflect reality and from which viewers learn about sex and sexuality.

As far as this study is concerned, those studies have informed the development and construction of coding categories and unit of analysis. The utilisation of health and risks categories in those studies was very beneficial to the development of this study’s sexual risks and responsibilities categories. The inconsistencies in the units and levels of analysis found across those studies also helped this study in developing content measures that would, unlike those of the mentioned studies, yield consistent findings that lend themselves to comparative and longitudinal analysis.

2.1.2.3 Teenage TV Programmes and Talk Shows

In an analysis of TV programmes most popular with teenagers, Cope-Farrar and Kunkel (2002) examined the sexual content of 15 prime-time TV shows most

watched by young people aged 12-17 in the 1996 season. The researchers selected three episodes of each show producing a total of 45 programmes (28.5 hours of TV content). Of those programmes 73% were situation comedies and 27% dramas. The study found that 37 out of the 45 programmes (82%) contained either talk about sex or sexual behaviours, and that both sit-coms and dramas included sexual content almost equally with around 82% of all sit-coms and dramas featuring sexual talks or behaviours of some sort.

Further, talk about sex was found in 67% of all programmes, whereas sexual behaviours were found in 62%. Almost half of the sample included both 'talk' and sexual behaviour. For the overall sample sexual scenes occurred at a rate of 4.5 scenes per programme (seven scenes per hour). However, at the scenes level sexual interactions averaged 7.1 per programme or 11.1 per hour.

The study found that teenagers watching those programmes would encounter sexual behaviours more than talks about sex, where the former accounted for 64% of all interactions and the latter for just 36%. Further, most common types of sexual behaviours involved kissing and romantic touching, while sexual intercourse and intimate petting accounted for just 5% of all sexual behaviours coded: only 3% of all behaviours involved intercourse, a fairly a modest figure compared with other later findings for similar types of programmes (Kunkel et al., 2003, 2005).

Most sexual behaviours, however, occurred between participants who were not married to each other but had 'established' sexual and romantic relationships. Only 26 of interactions occurred between people who had no established relationships. Further, scenes involving sexual intercourse had almost similar numbers of married or unmarried characters, and those unmarried were engaged in romantic relationships, contrary to many previous findings (Greenberg and Busselle 1994; Greenberg and D'Alessio, 1985; Kunkel et al., 1996).

Further, Kunkel and his colleague (2003, 2005) examined the content of 20 television programmes most frequently viewed by adolescents aged between 12-17, as part of a biannual report, titled *Sex on TV*, that was commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation—a review of the findings of those reports will be presented

below. The teen programmes were taken from the 2001-02 and 2004-05 television seasons.

Kunkel et al. (2003) reported that five out of six of the teen programmes (83%) contained some sexual content, and the programmes with sexual messages had an average of 6.7 scenes per hour of topics involving sexual activity. These figures exceeded the levels of the study's two other samples, where in the composite week 64% of all programmes contained sex with an average of 4.4 scenes per hour, and where in the prime-time sample 71% of programmes contained sex with an average of 6.1 scenes per hour. In terms of the type of sexual content, the findings showed that (a) four out of five (80%) of all teen programmes involved 'talk about sex', (b) one out of every two (nearly 50%) teen programmes contained portrayals of sexual behaviours, (c) one in every five teen programmes (20%) included a portrayal of sexual intercourse, and (d) only 4% of all scenes with sexual activity incorporated some treatment of risk or responsibility topics.

In the 2004-05 season, the frequency and amount of sex in the teen programmes were found to have decreased, in some areas to a considerable degree areas. The percentage of programmes with sexual content declined from 83% in 2001-02 to 70% in 2004-05; the percentage of programmes presenting sexual behaviours went from nearly 50% to 45%, and those presenting sexual intercourse decreased from 20% to a mere 8%, while the average number of scenes portraying sexual behaviours dropped from 3.1 to just 2.1 scenes per hour.

As for safe-sex messages, very few increases in the percentages of programmes and of scenes with sexual content were observed, with 12% of programmes with sexual content including some element of risk or responsibility in 2004-05 compared to 4% in 2001-02, and similarly 5% of scenes with sexual content depicted some element of risk or responsibility in 2004-05, compared to 4% in 2001-02.

Kunkel et al. (2005: p. 56) attributed the reduction in the frequency of sexual messages witnessed across the period of the two studies to 'the shifting tides of television program genre' as the list of top 20 programmes most viewed by teenagers was dominated by comedies and drama in 2001-02, whereas the 2004-05

top 20 teen programmes included more reality programmes (the top 20 list was determined by Neilson ratings). Despite the reported decreases in the amount and frequency of sexual messages across the teen programmes, the authors of the reports concluded that the findings ‘lead us to the conclusion that teenagers may be watching more sex on television than almost any other age group...’ (2003: p. 51) and ‘that this largely non-significant reduction still leaves the norms for sexual messages in the most popular teen programs at or above most levels observed in television programming overall.’ (2005: p. 56)

Due to the prevalence of ‘talk about sex’, a trend which became evident in the 1990s’ TV programming, especially across some TV genres such as soap operas and daytime talk shows, Ward (1995), Greenberg, Sherry, Busselle, Hnilo, and Smith (1997), and Greenberg and Smith (2002) conducted content analyses to examine the nature, quantity, and context of sexual talks on television. In an early study of such nature, Ward (1995) content analysed ten prime-time programmes most watched by children aged 2-11 years, and another ten prime-time programmes watched mostly by young people aged 12-17. Both samples were taken from the 1992-1993 television season and were made up of just under 20 hours of TV programming.

Ward analysed the content of all conversations using a basic unit of analysis which comprised an individual interaction. Thus, any segment containing references to sex and sexuality within an individual interaction was considered an incident. Accordingly, the study identified 1,145 interactions, an average of 29.6 interactions per half-hour episode or programming. Of all identified interactions, a total of 337 interactions (around 30%) contained *segments* related to sexuality (in total 713 segments of dialogue, or 37 segments per hour, related to sex and sexuality), with an overall ratio of more than one in four of prime-time TV interactions containing some kind of sexual content.

The study revealed that the most common type of messages (just over 31% of all interactions with sexual content) focused on male sexual roles and how men viewed women. Further, 60% of all characters involved in conversations were males, while female speakers were just 37%. Most conversations revolved around

‘heterosexual’ issues and seemed to have been ‘frank’ and ‘progressive’. Prevalent messages of sexuality were mostly stereotypes, where men viewed women as sexual objects and valued them on the basis of their physical appearance, and women were attracted to specific male stereotypes. Many shows in the sample emphasised the superficial aspect of sexual relationships such as sex as sport or as fun.

Similarly, Greenberg, Sherry, Busselle, Hnilo, and Smith (1997) analysed the 11 most highly rated daytime TV talk shows in the 1995 season, and found that sexual activity was a major issue in 36% of all 11 studied shows, where 21% of talks shows discussed infidelity, and 12% tackled topics revolving around sexual confusion and homosexuality. Similarly, Greenberg and Smith (2002) reported that, in the 1999 sample of the talk shows studied, sexual activity and sexual infidelity were the second most frequent issues discussed, after marital topics, on daytime talk shows (one-third of the shows had topics on sexual activity, one in five shows focused on sexual infidelity, and one in ten focused on sexual orientation).

2.1.2.4 Sex on TV: The Biannual Reports

In the largest content analysis research on sexual content on television ever done for the Kaiser Family Foundation, Dale Kunkel and his colleagues have conducted, so far, four content analysis studies or biannual reports (*Sex on TV* 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005) to examine whether or not (a) the frequency of sexual messages is increasing, (b) the way in which sex is presented has changed overtime, and (c) there is an increase in the emphasis on sexual risk or responsibility on TV programmes across a large representative sample taken from a number of major US television networks.

Kunkel et al. (2003: p. 4) asserted that the main objective of these biannual reports was ‘to produce findings that can be generalised to the overall television environment’. Kunkel and his colleagues analysed across the four reports a total of 4,742 television programmes or the equivalence of over 4,000 hours of television programming, spanning a period dating back to the 1997 television season. In the first two reports (*Sex on TV*, 1999, and *Sex on TV 2*, 2001), Kunkel et al. analysed only two composite weeks: a composite week for each of ten of the most viewed TV

channels and an over-sample of broadcast network prime-time programming. Later on Kunkel et al. (2003 and 2005) added a third sample (teenage programme sample) which consisted of three episodes of each of the 20 most frequently viewed television series for viewers aged between 12-17 years.

The importance of those four reports stems directly from their applied robust, identical and sophisticated coding measures that allow for longitudinal and comparative analysis to be made, and from the large and representative samples used. Kunkel et al. (2005) have argued that their studies of *Sex on TV* are consistent and their findings can be generalised to the overall TV content because, unlike most studies in the past which tended to focus on particular TV genres or prime-time TV, they have not limited their analysis to just a fraction of the overall television landscape, and have maintained an overall consistency in terms of defining and measuring sexually-related content across television programming and throughout their four reports. The remainder of this section will review the latest findings from the 2004-05 television season reported in *Sex on TV 4* (2005) and compare them with the findings of the most distant (1997-98) television season and the most recent (2001-02).

In the 2005 report Kunkel et al. analysed a total of 1,154 programmes aired across both terrestrial and satellite channels in the 2002 season. The overall samples comprised:

1. Composite week sample (959 programmes): contained 16 hours of TV programmes taken from each studied channel throughout a complete week between 6:00am and 10:00 pm. The sample was constructed by a procedure of random selection of half-hour time slots for all seven days across a span of approximately six months (October 2004 to April 2005).
2. Prime-time over-sample: taken from the four major channels (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox), covered three-week time span and produced 63 hours per channel.
3. Teenage programme sample: covered three episodes of 20 TV series heavily watched by adolescents aged 12-17 and consisted of 60 programmes—the findings of this sample are presented in the previous section of this chapter.

Kunkel et al. (2005) found that the percentage of programmes that included sexual content increased significantly from 56% in the 1997-98 television season to 64% in 2001-02 to 70% in 2004-05. Likewise, the study reported a significant increase in the number of scenes within each programme that contained sexual content, from 3.2 scenes per hour in 1997-98 to 4.4 scenes per hour in 2001-02 to 5.0 scenes per hour in 2004-05.

In terms of the types of sexual content, the study revealed that the percentage of programmes that featured talk about sex in 2004-05 was significantly higher (at 68%) than the levels in 1997-98 (at 54%) or 2001-02 (at 61%), and so was the average number of scenes per hour for talk about sex, which increased over 50% from 3.0 scenes per hour in 1997-98 to 3.8 scenes per hour in 2001-02, to 4.6 scenes per hour in 2004-05. The findings also showed that the percentage of programmes depicting portrayals of sexual behaviours in 2004-05 (35%) was significantly higher than the percentages observed in 1997-98 (23%), but close to the levels observed in 2001-02 (32%). Further, the number of scenes portraying sexual behaviour per hour jumped from 1.4 scenes in 1997-98 to 2.0 scenes in 2004-05.

In trying to identify the patterns of sexual behaviours, and their increases and/or decreases, across the television landscape, Kunkel et al. divided sexual behaviours into two categories, precursory behaviours (i.e. physical flirting, intimate touching and kissing) and sexual intercourse. Their findings on the prevalence of those behaviours revealed significant increases in precursory behaviours and a sharp and sudden decrease in sexual intercourse—which was increasing dramatically over the three previous seasons prior to 2004-05—across television programmes and over time. The proportion of programmes including such scenes with precursory behaviours increased significantly from 16% in 1997-98 to 24% in 2004-05, while the average number of scenes moved from 1.4 to 1.6 per hour. The percentage of programmes with sexual intercourse decreased from 14% in 2001-202 to 11% in 2004-05; but nevertheless the average number of scenes depicting intercourse per hour remained unchanged and markedly high, at around one scene per hour in 2001-02 and 2004-05, particularly when compared to the figures of the 1997-98 season, which showed that just 7% of all programmes contained sexual intercourse with an

average of 0.7 scene per hour (also see Table 2-1 and Table 2-2 for the frequencies with which different types of sexual behaviours and categories of talk about sex occurred over three seasons across television programmes).

In terms of safe sex and risk and responsibility messages, the four biannual reports revealed that only a small fraction of all scenes involving talk about sex or sexual behaviour included any mention or depiction of risk or responsibility topics, and the frequency with which such topics were shown remained very stable over a long period. In fact, the findings showed that in the 1997-98 television season only a small proportion (4%) all scenes with sexual content included some references to sexual risks and responsibility. However, in the 2001-02 season that figure increased to 6% of all scenes with sexual content, but then returned to the 4% level in the 2004-05 season.

Further, the findings showed that in 1997-98, only 1% of all programmes with sexual content were found to have included substantial emphasis on sexual risks and responsibility, and that level remained unchanged in 2004-05. Programmes that featured intercourse-related content in their storylines in previous years had an equally slight tendency to emphasize sexual risk or responsibility themes throughout an episode (2% of all programmes in 1997-98 and 2001-02), but even that modest level of treatment was later, in 2004-05, found to have diminished, as no such cases were identified. In addition, analysis of the extent to which programmes with any sexual content also included some aspect of risk or responsibility concerns showed that a significant increase occurred over time, from 9% of all programmes with sexual content in 1997-98 to 14% in 2004-05. That increase was first observed in the 2001-02 season, as 15% of all programmes with sexual content included some type of risk or responsibility message, consequently indicating a stable level over a long period. In other words, the frequency of programmes with sexual content that incorporated some mention of risk or responsibility concerns increased from about one in 11 programmes in 1997-98 to around one in every seven programmes in 2004-05.

<i>TV seasons</i>						
<i>Types of Sexual Behaviour</i>	<i>1997-1998 season</i>		<i>2001-2002 season</i>		<i>2004-2005 season</i>	
	N	Percentage of cases of sexual behaviour	N	Percentage of cases of sexual behaviour	N	Percentage of cases of sexual behaviour
Physical Flirting	154	26%	167	15%	206	19%
Passionate Kiss	297	50%	613	54%	583	53%
Intimate Touch	39	7%	149	13%	144	13%
Intercourse Implied	71	12%	165	14%	117	11%
Intercourse depicted	17	3%	35	3%	30	3%
Other	15	3%	5	0%	11	1%
Total	593	100%	1134	100%	1091	100%

Table 2-1 Frequency of types of sexual behaviours shown on major US television networks across three TV seasons (Source: Kunkel et al., 1999, 2003 and 2005)

<i>TV seasons</i>						
<i>Types of Talk about sex</i>	<i>1997-1998 season</i>		<i>2001-2002 season</i>		<i>2004-2005 season</i>	
	N	Percentage of cases of Talk about sex	N	Percentage of cases of Talk about sex	N	Percentage of cases of Talk about sex
Comments about own/other's interests	1356	66%	2024	75%	2627	70%
Sex-related crimes	188	9%	275	10%	591	16%
Sexual intercourse	312	15%	190	7%	178	5%
Talks toward sex	48%	4%	61	2%	76	2%
Expert advice/Technical information	49	2%	14	1%	24	1%
Other	78	4%	142	5%	240	6%
Total	2067	100%	2706	100%	3736	100%

Table 2-2 Frequency of types of 'talk about sex' shown on major US television networks across three TV seasons (Source: Kunkel et al., 1999, 2003 and 2005)

As for the prime-time sample, Kunkel et al. found that the amount of sexual content on network prime-time programming demonstrated patterns of increases akin to those found across the overall television landscape between the 1997-98 and 2004-05 television seasons, and found that prime-time network programming was a major contributor to the pattern of increases over time observed in the sexual messages conveyed across the television landscape.

The prime-time programmes findings showed that (a) the percentage of programmes that included sexual content rose from 67% of all analysed programmes in 1997-98 to 77% in 2004-05, (b) the percentage of programmes depicting sexual behaviours increased from 24% to 38%, and (c) the average number of scenes per hour with sexual content also increased from 5.3 scenes per hour in 1997-98 to 5.9 scenes per hour in 2004-05.

Furthermore, while the percentage of prime-time programmes that included portrayals of sexual intercourse was found to be roughly the same in 2004-05 (10%) as in 1997-98 (9%), the percentage of prime-time programmes with precursory behaviours (i.e. intimate touching and kissing) increased substantially, from 16% of all programmes with sexual content in 1997-98 to 28% of all programmes in 2004-05. However, the percentage of prime-time programmes that included any mention or depiction of sexual risks or responsibility concerns was found to be around the 10% threshold, with 11% of all prime-time programmes with sexual content featuring sexual risk or responsibly topics in the 1997-98 and 2004-05 seasons and 13% in the 2001-02 season.

In sum, evidence emerging from the American studies conducted in the 1990s onwards clearly suggests that sexual content shown on US television networks witnessed:

- A dramatic increase in ‘talk about sex’ over the previous two decades, particularly in the late 1990s, in comparison with the levels observed in the 1970s and 1980s.
- A significant increase in the portrayal of sexual behaviours.
- A tendency towards more visual and explicit depictions of sexual behaviours.
- A substantial increase in presenting sexual intercourse, both verbally and visually.
- A slight increase in the portrayal of, and references to, sexual risks and responsibility themes.

Furthermore, what characterises the American research on televised sexual content over the past two decades is the detailed examination of sexual content across the overall television landscape as well as across particular TV genres, the development of sophisticated and robust content measures, and the longitudinal approach which allowed for consistent comparative analyses over long periods of time. However, the research conducted by Kunkel and his colleagues and which commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation should also be looked at critically

and its findings should be looked be into within the conceptual and methodological parameters underpinning this body of research.

First of all the strengths of the methodology and measures developed and used by Kunkel and his colleagues are fairly obvious and have been widely acknowledged (Buckingham and Bragg, 2002). The biannual study project *Sex on TV*, by repeatedly using the same content measures to allow for consistent comparisons over long time, by avoiding double coding, by providing coding measures that accounted for contextual elements with sexual depictions and by using large representative samples of television output, tried to be less susceptible to criticisms on methodological grounds, and to a large extent Kunkel et al. have provided one of the most authoritative and consistent quantitative research project on the topic to-date ((Buckingham and Bragg, 2002: p. 10). They have successfully managed to track down, in quantitative terms, the significant the changes (decreases and increases of sexual portrayals, levels of explicitness, nature of depictions and prevalence of sexual risk and responsibility messages) in the US television's portrayal of sex and sexuality for over ten year. However, the project confined itself to mainly providing statistical and descriptive account of the charted sexual depictions, and did not escape the criticisms surrounding the decontextualisation of sexual occurrences, addressing the questions of how meanings are generated and attached to the conveyed messages and how they are interpreted by the audience.

The theoretical framework underpinning this project, as well as the other Kaiser Family studies reviewed here, was concerned with the potential 'harmful' and 'negative' effects the depiction of sex on US television can have upon viewers, particularly young and socio-economically disadvantaged people. Their conceptual framework feeds into the effects model, and focuses on media representations as a starting point (often implicitly as a valuable and factual source of sexual information that is accepted uncritically by audiences), while merely speculating about audiences, ignoring their social experiences, psychological development and their interaction with the media. The remit of the *Sex on TV* project and other Kaiser Foundation studies can be understood within the Foundation ideological positioning and policy-driven agenda and campaigning. The Foundation's research on the media

and sex has generated a large statistical base which often used as campaigning tools for changes in policy and regulation (see www.kff.org).

As far as this study is concerned, while the overall theoretical approach of the Kaiser Family studies have informed this study's conceptual framework, particularly in areas such as identifying sexual health information, sexual risks and responsibility themes conveyed, those studies were largely instrumental in defining the sex categories used in this study and in developing and constructing the coding and content measures. They also informed the contextual measures used here (motives, consequences, explicitness of sexual portrayals and degree of focus on sex and sexuality on scene and episode level) and coding measures related to themes of sexual risks and responsibility. (See Chapter Three)

2.2 UK and Irish Research

2.2.1 Public Attitudes and Concerns

In Britain there has been much public debate and concern over whether or not media sex and bad language have been increasing and/or causing offence and embarrassment (Millwood-Hargrave, 2000 and 2003; Ofcom, 2005a and 2005b). Opinion surveys and focus-group studies have attempted to capture the public perceptions of, and attitudes toward, various aspects of sex and sexuality on TV as well as in other media (Millwood-Hargrave 1992 and 1999; Ofcom 2005b).

The overall findings of this pool of research have suggested that people consider there is 'more talk about sex, and more open attitudes towards it on television and in 'real life'; and that public attitudes towards sex on television have become more permissive over the years' (Bragg and Buckingham 2002: p. 3) However, most of the findings reviewed here show that attitudes toward sex on TV are anything but uniform. Attitudes, in general, vary to some extent between different subgroups, depending on variables such as age, gender, class ethnicity and so forth.

In the 1992 BSC⁷ survey Millwood-Hargrave (1992) reported that, out of a large representative national sample, 66% of respondents said there was too much violence on TV, 60 % cited bad language, and 41% were disturbed by the quantity of TV sex. Further, 54% of the respondents thought that the amount of sex on TV was 'the right amount', whereas only 4% said there was 'too little' sex on TV. 56% of people over 55 years of age thought there was 'a lot more' of sex on TV than those aged between 25-34 years (38%); also, women over 55 years of age were more likely to be against any depiction of sex on TV, while respondents aged under 55 were more tolerant of the depiction of sex, although women were more conservative than men in this respect. Nearly two in five adults aged over 55 years said they were offended by the portrayals of sexual activity and switched off the TV. Also, two in five adults said that they had switched off or changed channels when watching TV with their children.

The main reasons for turning off the TV were: portrayal of sexual activity 33%, bad language 28%, and violence 27%. However, when asked about the 'negative' influence of television, 21% of respondents strongly agreed that 'showing sex on TV encourages young people to experiment soon' and 21% thought 'showing sex scenes on TV encouraged immoral behaviour', while 24% disagreed strongly with this statement. On the other hand, when asked about the potential 'educative' role, 43% strongly agreed that 'it should be implied that condoms are used in sex scenes these days to encourage safe sex' (9% strongly disagreed), and 10% also strongly agreed that 'sex scenes give parents a good chance to talk about these things with their children' while 21% strongly disagreed.

In the 1999 BSC survey (Millwood-Hargrave 1999) that followed the 1992, opinions about attitudes to, and the amount of, sex shown on TV were found to have become moderate over less than 10 years, with 57% of the respondents in 1998 and 62% in 1997 thinking that there was 'the right amount', compared with 54% in 1991

⁷ The Broadcasting Standards Commission ceased to exist on 29 December 2003 and its duties were assumed by Ofcom, the Office of Communications, the regulator and competition authority for the communication industries in the United Kingdom.

and 1992. Only 36% of respondents in 1998 said there was ‘too much’ sex on TV. 71% of respondents thought that the amount of sex on TV had increased. Nevertheless, fewer people, 24% rather than 39% in 1992, claimed that they found sex scenes ‘offensive’. Similarly, 68% said they did not find watching sex embarrassing, 71% said they did not mind watching occasional scenes of sex, and 78% expressed the view that sexual activity should be depicted as a part of storyline. 93% agreed with the statement that ‘viewers could turn off or change channel if they were offended by sex scenes’.

Further, the 1999 survey showed that 40% of older people aged over 55 years, who were more likely to express conservative opinions in 1992, agreed strongly that sex on television was offensive, whereas only 14% of those aged below 55 found it offensive. The number of people who thought that the depiction of gay relations on television was acceptable grew from 46% in 1992 to 58% in 1999; and over 70% claimed that it was acceptable to watch homosexual portrayals providing they were broadcast after 10 pm. Viewers ranked certain TV genres higher than others for containing considerable amounts of sex, with 47% of respondents choosing ‘talk show’, 33% dramas, 29% soap operas, and 21% comedies.

In a more recent study Ofcom⁸ (2005c) conducted focus-groups interview using clips that had resulted in complaints to the same regulatory body. The study found that participants thought that there was more sexual imagery on TV than before, and that programmes with sexual content started earlier in the evening; also they stated that casual attitudes towards sex on TV were not acceptable, expressing the view that such materials should only be on subscription channels. Others thought that scenes of sexual activity could be highly offensive even if the imagery itself was not of an explicit nature. However, participants made distinctions between different

⁸ Ofcom or the Office of Communication is the independent regulator and competition authority for the communication industries in the United Kingdom. Ofcom is the new communications sector regulator. Ofcom has inherited the duties of the five existing regulators it replaced in 2003: the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC), the Independent Television Commission (ITC), Oftel, the Radio Authority and the Radio Communications Agency (see www.ofcom.org.uk)

portrayals of sexual activity and thought that nudity, if non-sexual, was acceptable and not offensive.

A further study commissioned by Ofcom, *Consulting with Young People on the Proposed Ofcom Broadcasting Code* (Ofcom, 2005b), young people expressed the view that young children in primary school did not need to be protected from the issue of exposure to sexual content, and felt that the levels of sex and adult themes shown on TV in pre-watershed programming such as soap operas and dramas was acceptable. The study revealed that young people's perception of the amount of sex and the right level of it differed from that of adults. Young people referred to the right level of sex in terms of its allusion to sexual themes rather than to explicit portrayals of sex. Older young males found it acceptable to broadcast sexually graphic materials in the post-11pm timeslot and argued that the whole issue of concerns about these materials being viewed by young people was unnecessarily exacerbated, as TV was seen as the least easy medium through which to have access to such materials given the ease of getting access to, and the availability of, such material on the internet (Ofcom, 2005b).

Evidence emerging from these opinion surveys is that public attitudes toward the portrayal of sex on television have become more relaxed than they used to be in the early 1990s. Sex on TV is becoming less and less a source of embarrassment, disgust or offence for a large proportion of people, and certain sexual portrayals such as homosexual relationships are no longer viewed as unacceptable by a large number of people. Interestingly, however, younger viewers, primarily teenagers, exhibited more relaxed attitudes towards media sex. The relaxation of attitudes towards, and the wider acceptability of, sex on television has largely been attributed to the actual changes and shifts in public attitudes toward sex and sexuality in British society observed over the last 20 years (Buckingham and Bragg, 2002; Hill and Thomson, 2000).

The strength of the findings of the survey studies above lies in the ability to provided some insights into general public perceptions about sex and sexuality in general and media sex in particular. These findings have acted as useful pointers to

the development and construction of this study's coding frame and content measures by providing some indications as to the kinds of soap opera sexual portrayal the general public may find acceptable or offensive. Gunter (2002) has argued that content analyses, '[o]n their own...represent purely descriptive accounts that cannot demonstrate anything about the impact or acceptability of media. To be really useful, content coding frames need to be informed either by public opinion or media effects evidence.' (p.242)

Thus, this study has attempted by creating numerous content categories to identify whether or not sexual portrayals and themes that are likely to offend or draw certain adverse reactions by the viewers are prevalent across day-time and prime-time soap operas. For instance a number of areas or themes such as non-heterosexual sex, underage, casual and crime-related sex, and explicit sexual behaviours have been investigated.

However, the reliability of the findings of such studies is often questioned, particularly when it comes to gauging the public perceptions and attitudes toward a sensitive topic like sex and sexuality. The survey studies reviewed above have a number of limitations inherent to the methodologies used. The nature of the responses obtained depends upon the framing of the topic and wording of questions aimed at exploring, for instance, the perceptions of the amount and nature of sexual depiction across prime-time television programming. As the above studies were commissioned by media regulatory bodies, the framing of questions relating to sensitivity and causes of offence were likely to have had an impact upon the participants' responses. Further, given the sensitivity of the topic of sex and sexuality and the media, respondents may feel inclined to 'perform' responses deemed appropriate for their age, gender, and socio-economic status and so forth. Additionally, the mode of address may have a great impact upon the responses obtained. If respondents are approached directly for their responses or, they are likely to give different responses than those they may have given anonymously. (Buckingham and Bragg, 2002; Gunter, 2002).

The studies above implicitly suggest that the responses of their participants are uniform and equal within the categories they are divided into (e.g. gender, age and ethnicity), leaving room for potential variations or differences among the respondents. The notion that there is a common factor or indicator regarding 'perceptions' or 'attitudes' towards a topic such as sex and sexuality, so complex on many levels (socially culturally), may not be an accurate measure.

2.2.2 Sex on Television: Content Analysis Studies

Millwood-Hargrave's (1992) content analysis is one of the early studies done on sexual content on British television. The study content analysed 277 programmes and 524 advertisements aired during the 18:00-24:00 time slot in 1992. The programmes were taken from four British terrestrial channels, BBC1, BBC2, ITV, and Channel Four. Of the overall sample 57 scenes were found to contain sexual activity of some sort, all of which portrayed only heterosexual sex. The most common type of sexual behaviour was kissing, which accounted for over half (53%) of the scenes. Scenes depicting sexual intercourse accounted for just less than one-quarter (23%) of the scenes, whilst implied sexual behaviours were just 4%.

One in five of all the sex scenes took place before 9:00 pm, but they were of a mild nature and part of the storyline/plot. Less than one in ten of the programmes depicting sexual activity or nudity referred to STDs (four factual programmes referred to AIDS, and three were dramas). Three-quarters of the sexual relationships occurred between characters that were either involved in 'established' relationships or married to each other, whereas only 25% of the all relationships were extra-marital affairs. More nudity scenes (65) were identified than scenes with sexual activity, and in these former scenes nude females outnumbered nude males by a ratio of 3: 2. (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992: p. 66-69).

The Broadcasting Standards Commission's Monitoring Report No. 7 (1999) content analysed a large sample of terrestrial programmes broadcast between 17.30 and midnight on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 during two seven-day composite weeks in 1998. In total 879 programmes were captured with a combined duration of 24,166 minutes (402.8 hours).

The study found that a total of 160 programmes (18% of the overall sample) depicted, in 400 scenes, some form of sexual activity, with three out of ten (29%, N=114) scenes occurring in films, over one in five (22%, N=87) in drama, one in five (20% N=81) in soap operas, one in seven (14%, N=54) in factual programmes, and one in ten (10%, N=38) in comedy programmes. Further, the study found that portrayals of sexual behaviours were predominantly mild in nature, with seven out of ten (71%) scenes depicting kissing –48% depicting a brief kiss on the mouth and 23% depicting kissing with arousal. Pre- and post-coital activity accounted for 16% of all sexual scenes. Scenes depicting simulated sexual intercourse occurred on 32 occasions (18% of scenes), while implied scenes accounted for three per cent of the total.

Portrayal of sexual behaviours occurred twice as frequently in post-watershed programmes as in pre-watershed programming, as 77 re-watershed programmes (15% of all pre-watershed programmes) were found to contain 159 sexual scenes (40% of the overall scenes) accounting for 0.5% of the overall broadcast time before 9.00 p.m., compared to 83 post-watershed programmes (24% of all post-watershed programmes) which contained 241 scenes (60%), accounting for 0.6% of the overall broadcast time after 9.00 p.m. The types of sexual activity depicted prior to and after the watershed varied - kissing scenes made up most (87%) of pre-watershed activity, but just 59% of post-watershed scenes. Pre- and post-coital activity was twice as common post-watershed (20% versus 10% respectively), whilst simulated sex acts were 13 times more likely after 9.00 p.m. (13% versus 1% respectively).

In terms of the contexts within which sexual activities occurred, the study showed that over half (52%) the scenes of sexual activity occurred in married or established non-married relationships, one in nine (11%) occurred when a previous non-sexual relationship became sexual, one in fourteen (7%) in extra-marital affairs, and one in fourteen (7%) in the contexts of first-meeting encounters. Established relationships were far more common before 9.00 p.m. (60% of all sexual activity compared with 46% after 9.00 p.m.). First-time 'pick ups', on the other hand, were more common after the watershed (8% compared with 4% pre-watershed). Scenes

depicting extra-marital affairs accounted for an identical percentage (7%) of both pre- and post-watershed activity.

As for talk about sex, the study found that a total of 311 programmes (35% of all programmes) contained 1658 references to either sexual activity or nudity, with 32% containing 1,140 references to sex and 17% containing 518 references to nudity—references to sex occurred at more than twice the frequency of references to nudity (69% and 31% respectively). Further, references were more prevalent after 9.00 p.m. occurring at over twice the frequency of those observed prior to 9.00 p.m., as 152 pre-watershed programmes (29% of all pre-watershed programmes) contained 564 references, compared to 159 post-watershed programmes (46% of all pre-watershed programmes) containing 1,094 references.

Similarly, in another study commissioned by the BSC, Cumberbatch, Gauntlett, Littlejohns and Collie (2003) content analysed two seven-day composite weeks of all programmes broadcast between 17.30 hrs and midnight on BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, Channel 4 and Five in 2002. Their overall sample included 802 programmes, with a combined duration of 23,815 minutes (396.9 hours). Cumberbatch et al. found that a total of 166 programmes (21% of the sample) depicted some form of sexual activity across a total of 572 scenes which, combined, produced a duration of 97.3 minutes or 0.4% of the overall broadcast time. Scenes with sexual behaviours occurred on average once every 41.6 minutes or at the rate of 1.4 scenes per hour, with one quarter (26%, N=148) of scenes depicting sexual activity in films, just over one in five (21%, N=120) in factual programmes, 12% in light entertainment and 5% in comedy shows; while soap operas and dramas accounted, each separately, for just under one fifth (18%) of the total scenes.

Like the Monitoring Report No. 7, the study found that most of the portrayed sexual behaviours were mild, as four out of ten (39%) scenes depicted mild kissing, two out of ten (22%) kissing with overt sexual arousal, compared to one in six (16%) of all sexual activity scenes depicting pre- and post-coital activity. Further, the study revealed that one in seven (14%) of all sexual activity scenes depicted simulated sexual intercourse, whereas implied scenes comprised just 4% of the total.

Nearly nine out of ten (89%, N=508) scenes were found to depict only heterosexual sexual activity, with just one in nine (11%, N=63) scenes portraying some nudity. On the other hand, sexual activity was twice as likely to occur across post-watershed programmes (at a rate of 1.6 scenes per hour) than across pre-watershed programmes (at a rate of 0.8).

In terms of references to sex and sexuality, a total of 334 programmes (42% of all programmes) were found to contain 2,105 references to sexual activity or nudity. These references occurred at a rate of one every 11.3 minutes (5.3 references per hour). Overall, 303 programmes (38% of all programmes) contained 1,537 references to *sex*, generating a rate of one reference every 15.5 minutes (3.9 references per hour); and a total of 162 programmes (20%) contained 568 references to *nudity*, generating a rate of one reference every 41.9 minutes (1.4 references per hour).

Batchelor, Kitzinger and Burtney (2004) content analysed a cross section of Scottish media during a randomly selected week in 1999. They examined the content of (a) 9 magazines most read by young people, (b) 10 daily and eight Sunday newspapers, and (c) two TV samples comprising programmes aired between 16:00-18:00 on all the five British terrestrial Channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, and Channel Five) and a selection of programmes most watched by audiences of teenagers that were broadcast outside the 16:00-18:00 time slot.

As far as the TV samples were concerned, the study found only three implicit representations of teenagers engaging in heterosexual intercourse and ten implied sexual activities (behaviour). No explicit sexual intercourse and nudity were found throughout the sample. Talk about sex was more prevalent as 35 instances were identified, of which 14 instances were discussions about the opposite sex, (nine) flirting or dating, (seven) sexual bravado and/or teasing, and (five) sexual negotiation. However, no single reference or depiction of safe sex or responsibility was found, contrary to the findings of the magazine sample, where several magazines provided some information about contraception and 12 references to

STDs were identified (Batchelor, Kitzinger and Burtney, 2004; Batchelor and Kitzinger, 1999).

The UK research into the representation of sex and sexuality on television differs in the methods used as well as the conceptual framework from the US body of research reviewed in the preceding sections of this chapter. However, there are slight similarities between the UK and US studies in the content measures used, most notably in the sex categories. The UK studies (BSC, 1999; Cumberbatch et al. 2003; Millwood-Hargrave, 1992) largely offered more descriptive and quantitative accounts of the amount of sex on prime-time television. Their methodological limitations were more pronounced than those critiqued in the US studies—all three studies used three different sets of content measures (units of analysis and sex categories). Double coding and the separations of sexual references from sexual behaviours (in BSC, 1999; Cumberbatch et al. 2003) resulted in inflated findings and made comparisons as well as a coherent understanding of the findings, very difficult. Furthermore, they hardly accounted for contexts or narratives other than the tone of the references and the specific genres such references occurred. The overall objective of those studies was, it seems, to produce a raw evidence base for the amount the types of sexual depictions prevalent on UK terrestrial television. The conceptual frameworks of the US studies (mostly commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation) were concerned with highlighting the negative effects of media sex from a public health and welfare perspective, whereas the UK content studies had a more neutral remit and were, by contrast, informed by public opinions and attitudes studies, and were concerned with providing evidence that would inform further qualitative research and media regulatory bodies.

As far as this study is concerned, those studies informed the content measures employed here, although in avoiding the shortcomings and inconsistencies identified in their adopted methodologies.

Sex on Irish TV

In Ireland the most recent study on TV sexual content was commissioned by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency in Dublin and conducted by MacKeogh (2005), who

used the same methodology developed by Kunkel and his colleagues in their biannual reports, *Sex on TV* (Kunkel et al., 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005). MacKeogh (2005) content analysed, first, two composite weeks consisting of (a) programmes taken from four Irish channels (RTE1, RTE2, TV3, and TG4), and (b) programmes taken from British terrestrial and satellite channels (ten hours per day of programming were taken from all the channels studied during the 2:00 pm-midnight time slot of the 2003-2004 season), and, second, a top-ten teen programme sample, comprising two randomly selected episodes of each of the ten programmes most watched by teenagers.

MacKeogh (2005) found that 40% of programmes available in multi-channel areas of Ireland contained some scenes of a sexual nature, and 52% of general audience television programmes (excluding sport, children's programmes and news) contained scenes of a sexual nature. Further, 50% of general programmes were found to contain 'talk about sex' and 21% depictions of sexual behaviour', with the majority of these general programmes containing relatively cursory references to sex, and just under half (47%) containing two scenes or fewer. In terms of the nature of portrayals, most of these programmes depicted relatively mild sexual behaviours, as 49% of all programmes depicted flirting, kissing or touching, 15% implied intercourse and 13% intercourse depicted.

Of all sexual intercourse scenes, just over three in one (31%) occurred within the contexts of established relationships, one in ten (11%) occurred between couples with no established relationships, and the relationship contexts of less than half (47%) were unknown. In addition, the study found that females were the main instigators of mild sex, with 69% of scenes containing flirting, the behaviours were instigated by females, while stronger sex was more mutually instigated (68% of intercourse implied/depicted). In terms of maintaining the watershed time-slot, the study concluded that 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

As for safe-sex messages and references to sexual risks and responsibility, 28% of programmes with scenes of a sexual nature were reported to have had some reference to risks and responsibilities. In particular, programmes with sexual intercourse portrayals were found to contain high proportions of such references, as almost half (45%) of those programmes included some reference to 'risk and responsibility'. Overall, 90% of sexual risks and responsibility references were 'positive' in that they reinforced the importance of taking precautions and assuming responsibility (p. 48). However, the study found that while the percentage of programmes with scenes of a sexual nature was higher (60%) across the teen programmes than across the general programmes (52%), 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), indicating that teenagers were more likely than adult viewers to encounter sexual content on television.

What emerges from the British content analysis studies is that the portrayal of sex and sexuality on British, Irish and US television shared similar general patterns in terms of frequency and nature, although not in most other aspects. Contrary to the findings of American studies, particularly those conducted by Kunkel et al. (1999, 2001, 2003, and 2005), British research showed that in general sexual content on UK television channels increased only slightly over 1997 to 2002. The amount of sex on British TV channels, however, was significantly less than that on American TV.

MacKeogh (2005) reported that only 40% of the programmes analysed contained some sexual content, compared to 70% of the programmes analysed by Kunkel et al. (2005). But the level of explicitness, measured by the degree of nudity, tended to be higher on British TV than American TV, though most, if not all, of explicit sexual behaviours were restricted to post-watershed programming: level of explicitness across UK and Irish TV programmes scored 2.2 on a four-point scale (MacKeogh, 2005), compared to just 0.9 across US programmes (Kunkel et al., 2005).

In addition, portrayals of sexual behaviours across the majority of programmes whether on UK, Irish or US television were predominantly of a mild sexual nature and ‘talk about sex’ was twice as likely to be depicted as sexual behaviours. However, references to sexual health issues, sexual risks and responsibility were more prevalent across UK and Irish television programmes than across American programmes. For instance, of all UK and Irish television programmes containing sexual content, 28% had references to sexual risks and responsibility compared to 14% of all US television programmes; also, nearly half (47%) of the British and Irish programmes with sexual intercourse activity had references to ‘risk and responsibility’, compared to 26% in similar US programmes (MacKeogh, 2005; Kunkel et al. 2005).

Having used precisely the same methodology to that of the *Sex on TV* reports conducted by Kunkel et al., and having content analysed a week worth of programmes taken from British terrestrial and satellite channels, including five of the seven soap operas analysed in this study, MacKeogh’s (2005) work has provided some useful pointers in terms of identifying the prevalence and nature of sexual depictions across soap operas, and in terms of allowing for some comparative analyses to be made with the findings of this research as well as with the findings of the US studies in the proceeding chapters.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed research into the amount, frequency and nature of sexual content shown across the television landscape as well as across particular television genres and programmes in the US, UK and Ireland. It has also reviewed some of the public’s concerns and opinions on media sex in the UK. The overall picture painted by the findings of the studies conducted over the last three decades in the US, and those conducted in the UK over the last two decades, shows that the portrayals of sex and sexuality are nowadays more prevalent across the television landscape, whether in the US or UK, than they were in the 1990s, 1980s and late 1970s.

The sharp increases in the amount of sexual content and particularly the amount of explicit sexual portrayals, on television seem to have occurred from the late 1990s onwards. However, much of the sex shown on television has over a long period been predominantly ‘talk about sex’ rather than visual portrayals of intimate sexual behaviours. Further, depictions of sexual behaviours, when portrayed, have primarily been of a mild sexual nature, and explicit portrayals of sexual intercourse have rarely been depicted in pre-watershed and mainstream television programmes.

As concerns over sexual health issues became widespread in the 1980s and onwards, television programmes started to incorporate portrayals and themes revolving around sexual risks and responsibilities, safe-sex, and STDs. However, references to such themes, and the rates of their increases, have remained insignificant, particularly in the US, in comparison to the overall amount of sexual content portrayed on television.

Opinion survey studies on sex and sexuality in the media conducted in the UK have shown that public attitudes towards the increase in the amount of sexual content on TV, explicit portrayals of sexual behaviours, and portrayals of homosexuality in 2000 have become considerably more relaxed than they used to be ten years earlier. However, although attitudes are becoming ‘permissive’ towards, and more accepting of, the portrayal of sex in the media, people are more restrictive about screening explicit sexual behaviours and adult materials on terrestrial television in terms of maintaining the watershed, but are less so when it comes to satellite and subscription channels.

It is worth noting here, however, the studies and the findings reviewed in this chapter have been criticised and challenged on both methodological and conceptual grounds, despite offering an evidence base of the nature, types and frequencies of sexual representations available to audiences. The methods used are often characterised by inconsistencies where very rarely do researchers use same content measures (categories, definitions of sex and units of analysis) in analysing the same media texts. Thus sounds comparisons are always difficult to make. Further, the sampling methods used often do not represent the actual genres or general media

output studied. And accounting for contexts and relevance to narratives has also been one of more obvious limitations those studies have. Content analyses of media sex have been at time harshly criticised for offering ‘a rather superficial analysis’ particularly because ‘[t]heir accounts of media texts largely ignore context, meaning, representation, register and mode of address (Buckingham and Bragg, 2002: p. 14).

As far as the conceptual frameworks as concerned, those studies are often seen as feeding into the ‘effects’ model, although it is not within the remit of content analyses to tell us about whether or not, or how media sex representations are used and interacted with by media consumers. Some of the US studies approached the depiction of sex on television from health and welfare perspectives rather than from a media or cultural perspective and underscored the potential harmful effects of the depictions of ‘irresponsible’ and ‘risky’ sexual behaviours. While, UK content analyses took a more neutral approach and were informed by public opinion surveys to allow for further qualitative research and to inform media regulatory bodies.

Mindful of, and attempting to avoid, the weaknesses and shortcomings in literature reviewed, this study has tried to account for some of the contextual features of the portrayals of sex and sexuality across soap operas by constructing a coding frame that will comprehensively identify types of behaviours, motives, consequences (positive and negative), relevance to storylines, themes of sexual risks and responsibilities, relationship contexts, accompanying behaviours and so on, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Comprising five chapters, the next part of this study, Part II, will present the research methodology and design used in this current research in analysing the portrayal of sex and sexuality in soap operas. And it will also present and discuss, in four chapters, the research findings.

***Part II:
Research Methodology
& Findings.***

Introduction

The influence of television programmes in general, and soap operas in particular, on social beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, it has been widely argued, occurs through a gradual cumulative process that is potentially likely to develop with repetitive exposure over time to the portrayals of common patterns of behaviours (Brown and Newcomer, 1991; Gunter, 2002; Huston et al, 1998; Kunkel et al, 1999, 2001, 2003). Thus, identifying and analysing sexual content portrayed in and conveyed by soap operas contributes to the understanding of the nature, types and patterns of sexual information available to substantial numbers of audiences, and eventually to the understanding of the potential influence/effects of exposure to sexual content.

The overall objective of this research is to comprehensively identify and analyse the portrayal of sex and sexuality in the British and Australian soap operas shown on the UK's terrestrial televisions channels; and, by using the methodology of content analysis, this current research primarily aims to account for and capture any existing broader patterns of:

- the amount of sexual content across all soap operas—frequencies of sexual portrayals across the genre as well as in each individual soap opera, and averages of sexual scenes per episode and/or per hour.
- the nature of sexual portrayals (sexual talk and sexual behaviour)
- types (themes and contexts) of sexual talks and sexual behaviours.
- the centrality of sex and sexuality to the scenes, storylines and soap operas overall.
- the level of sexual explicitness (visual explicitness)
- the orientation of sexual activity and references to homosexual relationships and homosexuality.

This study aims, first, to identify any differences, for example, in the amount, nature, types or level of explicitness and so forth, of sexual portrayals, which may exist, on the one hand between individual soap operas, and on the other, between

groups of soap operas (e.g., day-time vs. prime-time soap operas, or late night, post watershed soap opera spin-off; or soap operas aimed at young audiences vs. those aimed at general older audiences), and, second, to compare soap operas' sexual portrayals and content, the findings of this analysis, with those of general TV programmes and other TV genres as well as those of soap operas whether aired in the UK, US or elsewhere.

Furthermore, this study attempts to provide a comprehensive quantitative analysis of the various thematic aspects and contextual components of soap operas' portrayals of sex and sexuality through looking in detail at some important and salient contextual elements that are, as it has widely been argued, likely to influence, shape and therefore change viewers' attitudes and perceptions of sex and sexuality, as well as generate strong reactions and raise the public's concern. For this purpose, two groups of contextual elements have been identified and analysed separately in this study. The first group encompasses a number of contextual factors and behavioural elements that are directly related to sexual activity and the portrayal of sex and sexuality in soap operas, as the broader aim is to capture:

- the major themes of sexual intercourse in order to see whether or not there are clear patterns of portraying sexual intercourse within the contexts of extra-marital affairs, infidelity, first-time sexual intercourse/loss of virginity, or general established sexual/romantic relationships.
- any references to homosexuality, whether negative or positive, and their prevalence.
- any patterns of accompanying behaviours: presence and/or use of alcohol, drugs, smoking, and violence/aggression.
- the outcomes (negative and/or positive) of sexual activity.

On the other hand, the second group focuses primarily on the attributes and general profile of all characters involved in sexual activity, as this study is designed to capture the gender, ethnicity, age, and occupation of all participants, as well as their relationship status, sexual orientation, instigators of sexual behaviours, motivation for engaging in sexual behaviours.

Furthermore, given soap operas' acknowledged consistent ability to gain large audiences and reach highly representative cross-sections of age, social-classes and ethnicities (Buckingham, 1987; Hobson, 2003), one of the main objectives of this study is to examine whether or not soap operas include any sexual messages laden with direct or indirect, clear educational values that can potentially reach a large segment of young, primarily teenage viewers. Thus, the study also aims to capture

- any safe-sex messages and references to Risks and Responsibilities (R & R) associated with sexual behaviours embedded in sexual portrayals.
- the types and prevalence of safe-sex messages and R & R references, and any clear patterns of, and differences in, portraying such references across the board as well as in each of the soap operas analysed.
- the degree of emphasis placed on, and the valence towards, R & R topics and safe-sex messages.
- the source and overall tone of R & R and safe-sex information.

Comprising five separate chapters, the second part of the study begins with introducing and reviewing the research methodology employed, the study's sample, and the content measures, definitions and procedures used to analyse soap operas' sexual content (Chapter Three); and then presents the study's core findings on (a) the amount, nature, and types of sexual content (Chapter Four), (b) the contextual elements embedded in sexual portrayals and accompanying sexual behaviours (Chapter Five), (c) the profile and attributes of characters involved in sexual activity (Chapter Six), and finally (d) safe-sex messages and risks and responsibilities references (Chapter Seven).

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Comprising three main sections, this chapter provides an overview of the methodology of content analysis in general, and the procedures employed in analysing sexual content in soap operas. The first section briefly discusses the various definitions of content analysis, and the claims and counterclaims of its ability to yield scientific, objective and systematic results. Further, it reviews the applications and uses of the method across social sciences in general and communication studies in particular, and finally discusses its limitations as well as advantages.

The second section begins by explaining the sampling procedures (rationale, size of sample, and time of recording) and thereafter provides a brief introduction to each of the soap operas included in the study's sample. The third section presents and discusses the overall technical procedures and the content coding measures used in analysing soap opera sexual content, including the definition of sex, categories and variables employed, the structure of the coding schedule, and the inter-coder reliability checks.

3.1 Content Analysis: An Overview

3.1.1 Definitions and uses

Soap operas, as media texts, are often studied for their content and the potential impact or influence such content may have on audiences; hence content analysis, as a method, is widely and frequently used to capture the nature of representations and portrayals prevalent in soap operas—as mentioned in the literature review, Chapter Two. An early definition of content analysis is that of Berelson, who describes the method as ‘a research technique for objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.’ (1952: p. 147). This

particular definition reveals to an extent the origins and concerns of content analysis: (a) the claim of ‘objectivity’ which highlights the possibility of arriving at value-free or judgment-free findings and analyses; (b) the emphasis on the ‘manifest’ or ‘observable’, which brings the rigour and robustness of natural sciences into the study of social phenomena.

Those two features have preoccupied media researchers who have attempted, according to Allen, to break down complex social phenomena into their constituent parts, leading to the concept that ‘aggregated knowledge about controlled aspects of the whole’ would ultimately produce knowledge about phenomenon too complex to fit the natural science model (1985: p. 35).

Gunter (2000) has observed that Berelson’s view of content analysis dominated and underpinned communication research from the early 1950s to late 1970s, and has highlighted three main reasons for which Berelson’s definition has been criticised. This definition, according to Gunter, is (1) ‘restricted to a purely quantitative analysis’, (2) ‘concerned with manifest content only,’ and (3) ‘purely descriptive instead of yielding data from which one might infer influences of media content on audience perceptions of social reality’ (p. 56).

Other scholars have offered more recent but not very dissimilar definitions of content analysis, perhaps placing greater emphasis on the ‘scientific’, ‘objective’ and ‘systematic’. Holsti (1969) has adopted the following definition: ‘*content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages*’ (italics original) (p. 14). Krippendorff (1980) defines content analysis as ‘a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context’ (p. 21). While Kerlinger considers content analysis as ‘a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables’ (in Wimmer and Dominic 2003: p. 141) For Kerlinger, content analysis is, first, *systematic* whereby media content is selected, coded and analysed according to explicit and consistently applied sets of rules and procedures; second, *objective*, in that the researcher’s personal idiosyncrasies and biases should not affect the analysis

and findings; third, *quantifiable*, where the main focus is on counting occurrences of already defined entities in a media text. The last two concepts, objective and quantifiable, seem to have generated much controversy and debate as to how valid and robust a methodology content analysis is when it comes to studying media content. (Allen, 1985; Gunter, 2000; Hansen et al. 1998)

Hansen et al. note that critics of the ‘objectivity requirement’ have rightly argued that such requirement in content analysis, as well as other forms of scientific research, is unattainable and is ‘an impossible ideal serving only to cover cosmetically and mystify the values, interests, and means of knowledge production which underpins such research’ (1998: p. 95). Perfect objectivity is unattainable in content analysis since the researcher, in choosing the specifications of units of analysis and the definitions of categories, is always making subjective choices despite the fact that those choices tend to be informed by a body of theoretical literature relevant to the research concerned.

The purpose of content analysis is to identify and count the occurrence of predefined characteristics or features embedded within media texts, be it film, advertisement, newspaper articles or TV programmes, in order to be able to say something about the constituent parts and the whole of such texts; put differently, the aim of this method is the provision of a systematic means for quantifying textual and thematic features across a large volume of media output. The thrust of this method, however, is to provide a descriptive account of what media texts contain in such a way that can be reproduced by others; thus, content analysis should satisfy the requirements of being systematic, replicable and by and large objective—the latter much debated, and it is largely accepted that the value-free concept of objectivity should have not been used in the definitions of content analysis (Deacon et al. 2007; Hansen et al. 1998).

Clearly, by breaking down media texts into categories and constituents, and therefore quantifying and accounting for their frequencies, content analysis provides some indication of the ‘relative prominence and absence of key characteristics in media texts’, the statistics that capture the salience of certain features in a given

media output are used to make broader inferences about the intrinsic production processes and values and the politics of representation. However, analytical inferences deduced from such indications will ultimately depend upon the theoretical framework and context within which those texts are studied. (Hansen et al. 1998: p. 95)

One of the fundamental questions raised with regard to content analysis, which is classified as a quantitative method, is how far quantification is taken into the method, and what the rationale is for such a process in terms of what it can offer to the understanding of (a) the ‘meaning’ and ‘significance’ of texts, (b) the potential influence of texts, and (c) the relationship between media representations and a host of ‘realities’ which they may reflect.

Gunter (2000) sees that the applications of content analysis can go beyond simple descriptions and frequencies to provide insights into the intentions or objectives of media content producers and into the potential effect of media content on audiences. Meanwhile, others, (Deacon et al. 2007; Hansen et al. 1998; Neuendorf, 2002) have emphasised that the real weight of content analysis as a method lies not within the practice of counting frequencies and quantifying salient text features, but rather within the method’s ability to flag up the quantitative indicators, and therefore the potential meanings and significance they may hold.

Allen (1985) suggested that the dichotomy of ‘counting’ versus ‘interpreting’ is not the central issue; but rather, it is the adequacy of the particular conceptualisation and analysis offered to the phenomenon concerned. Holsti (1969) suggested that researchers using content analysis should employ both qualitative and quantitative methods as a way of supplementing each other, and that through the combination of the two methods researchers can say something about the meaning arising from the texts analysed. By the same token, Gunter offers the following:

‘Counting and quantifying needs to be supplemented by interpretive procedures that can define the weight of a media message in terms of its potential impact upon the audience. Ascertaining the frequency with which certain social groups or social behaviours appear can reveal important information at one level about the motives

or agenda of media procedures or cultivation effects upon audiences. But frequency of occurrence is not all. Sometimes, infrequent, but highly salient or significant, events can have the greatest impact on the audience.’ (2000: p. 57)

Wimmer and Dominick (2003) have identified five uses of content analysis that are widely applied in communication research. Content analysis is used to:

1. describe communication content by identifying and cataloguing characteristics, patterns and trends in media texts over short as well as long periods of time.
2. test hypotheses of message characteristics which can reveal the source of a given body of messages, policies and aims of media producers.
3. compare media content to the ‘real world’ and accounting for the congruence that may exist between representations and the ‘real world’.
4. assess the representation of particular groups, women, ethnic minorities, and so forth.
5. establish a starting point for the study of media effects, audiences and agenda setting through finding whether or not there are correlations between viewing media content and behaviours.

3.1.2 Soap Operas and Content Analysis

The method of content analysis has been used in analysing various aspects of soap opera content: representations of ethnic minorities (Costera, 2001), age and representations of elderly people (Hall, 2005), rates of mortality (Crayford et al, 1997), use of alcohol, drugs and smoking (Adams and White, 2007; Coyne and Ahmed, 2009; Diener, 2007; Furnham et al. 1997; Van Hoof et al. 2009), health (Thompson et al. 2000) sexual content (Greenberg and Busselle, 1994; Heintz-Knowles, 1996, also see the literature review in Chapter Two) and so forth.

A large body of studies of soap opera content in general and sexual content in particular has originated in the US, where regulatory bodies seem to have considered content analysis studies as one of the valuable sources for making cultural and media texts available for calculation and therefore social policy and regulation (Brag and Buckingham, 2002; Strasburger and Wilson, 2002); however, the use of the

method in analysing soap opera content has been criticised for its general approach and limitation, as discussed below, and for the general assumptions of potential impact of certain analysed media texts on audiences, and for the comparisons drawn by researchers between media representations and the ‘real world’.

One of the criticisms levelled, somewhat unjustifiably, against content analysis in studying soap operas’ content is the claim that content analysis’ aim is frequently used to assess the degree to which soap operas present a distortion of the ‘real world’; according to Allen, who critiques early US content analyses of soap operas in his book *Speaking of Soap Operas*,

‘The ‘world’ of soap opera has been compared to the ‘real world’ in such categories as occupational and sex roles, alcohol abuse, causes of death and disease, interpersonal communication patterns, and sexual behaviour...the problems of empiricist research in general are compounded because what is being observed for its irregularities is not some aspect of a real-life society but a fictional construction...the insistence upon making soap operas an appendage of the ‘real world’ is perhaps most telling in the empiricist refusal to distinguish ‘characters’ in soap operas from ‘people’ in the real world and in the assumption that viewers are equally unable to do so’ (Allen, 1985: pp. 36-39).

It is rather the theoretical frameworks of those studies, or perhaps the operational definitions and procedures that informed those content analyses that should have been criticised, not the methodology of content analysis as such—that is, of course, not to say the methodology is not open to criticism. It is not within the methodology’s remit *per se* to make the assumption that soap operas and their characters represent the ‘real world’ and ‘real people’ or even attribute perceptions of reality to soap operas and their content (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003).

Soap operas, as a distinct TV genre, have various elements of realism, whether social or emotional, and their audiences, although completely aware of the fictional constructions, continue to associate soap operas with social realities as well as derive a sense or senses of realism from the genre (Ang, 1991; Creeper, 2001; Dorothy, 2003) Similarly, Allen argues that content analysis fails to capture the

‘aesthetic experience’ existing between the text and viewer, or as he puts it, ‘denies the possibility of aesthetic experience’ to the viewers. Here, again the assumption made is that content analysis should account for the interaction and the arising meanings as a consequence, between media texts and their consumers.

Content analysis provides insights into the type of patterns, portrayals and representations that exist in the media texts but does not account for the aesthetic features and values experienced by the audience. However, studies (mainly audience oriented) combining qualitative and quantitative methods have indeed sought to account for the audience ‘experience’ and the potential influence of media texts (Bragg and Buckingham, 2002; Buckingham, 1987; Livingstone, 1990)

3.1.3 Content Analysis: Advantages and Limitations

Content analysis is often considered to be an unobtrusive and flexible form of methods (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 1981): unobtrusive in that practices and processes of retrieving information, modelling and analysis do not interfere with the behaviour of the phenomenon studied; flexible in that content analysis, unlike other qualitative and quantitative methods, can be conducted with relatively fewer restrictions in terms of time, space, and other operational and logistical issues; a content analyst, for instance, can study the content of past newspapers issues and television programmes. Furthermore, content analysis has the ability to deal with large volumes of data, where for instance a researcher can content analyse a large quantity of specific media texts over a long period of time, therefore allowing for longitudinal comparative analyses to be made with the findings of other similar studies (Neuendorf, 2002; Wimmer and Dominick, 2003).

Also content analysis has its limitations, which are widely acknowledged by communications scholars (Gunter 2000; Hansen et al. 1998; Holsti, 1969; Wimmer and Dominic 2003). One of the most cited limitations is that content analysis is a quantitative method that produces mainly descriptive accounts of the various features and characteristics of media output; thus ‘it cannot serve as the sole basis for claims about media effects’ unless coupled with interpretative and qualitative techniques (Wimmer and Dominick 2003: p. 144).

Another is that the quantification of predefined characteristics in media texts analysed does not capture the way in which meaning arises from the interaction of the constituent parts of those texts. Additionally, the findings of a specific content analysis study may differ from those of a similar study on the same topic as a result of potential differences in the frameworks of the categories and definitions adopted by both studies, whereby researchers may not use uniform definitions and variables to measure an identical media text.

From an operational perspective, content analysis tends to be a time-consuming and laborious task, especially if the study concerned involves examining large volumes of media output. However, despite its limitations, content analysis continues to be widely used as a technique to examine various media outputs across many disciplines. Hansen et al. observe that much of the criticism directed at content analysis has, in essence, highlighted problems related to the ‘potential’ and ‘actual (mis)-uses and abuses of the method’ rather than to ‘any inherent weaknesses of it as a method of data collection’ (1998: p. 98).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the limitations that pervade the reviewed content analyses were essentially related to the inconsistencies in the content measures used, the decontextualising of sexual depictions and provision of statistical data that was deemed by some (e.g. Buckingham and Bragg, 2002) as descriptive and superficial, and the theoretical frameworks that underpinned those studies, particularly those of the Kaiser Family Foundation in the US which presented their findings with the context of highlighting the detrimental ‘effects’ sexual depictions on TV may have upon viewers especially young ones.

This research has tried to counter some of these limitations. The content measures and categories used in analysing soap operas’ sexual portrayal have been designed to capture some significant contexts (e.g. motivations and outcomes of behaviours, relationship contexts) and have been informed by qualitative audience research findings (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992 and 2002; Ofcom, 2005b and 2005c) and opinion survey studies (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992 and 1999) to identify whether or not soap operas portrays specific types of sexual depictions to which viewers are

known to have raised their concerns or been offended by or felt they should be included. For instance, viewers feel that soap operas contain ‘too much sex’ and too many storylines portraying sensational sexual relationships (cheating, extramarital-affairs, and casual sex) (Millwood-Hargrave, 1999 and 2002), and certain age groups of an audience feel offended by depictions featuring explicit sexual behaviours or certain non-heterosexual portrayals (Millwood-Hargrave, 1999) . Therefore, this study has included categories that would allow capturing and cataloguing such sexual portrayals to account for their prevalence and/or absence.

3.2 Research Design and Procedures

3.2.1 Sampling Procedures

The main goal of this study is to identify and analyse the patterns, trends, existing representations and portrayals of sex and sexuality in soap operas, and to be able to produce findings that can, eventually, be generalised to the genre as a whole. Also, the purpose of this study is to account for any existing differences and/or similarities in soap operas and compare those findings across the various soap operas.

To do so, the issue of a representative sampling came to the fore and presented a challenge to the implementation and therefore the validity of the study’s analysis and findings. Initially, a *composite month* spanning four months was contemplated, but later dropped as the articulations of the study’s theoretical framework, coding categories and their definitions were fully developed. The collation of a ‘representative sample’ of soap operas for content analysis in itself proved to be problematic, mainly due to the nature of the genre.

Both the Kaiser Family Foundation studies (1996, 2001) and Heintz-Knowles (1996) acknowledge that a four-week or five-week snapshot may not be representative of the entire content of soap operas, given the long and continuous trajectory of their plots and storylines, the slow development of their characters and the longevity that seems to characterise the genre in general. As a direct result of the development of this study’s research questions and design, a decision was made to content analyse a four-week block, rather than a composite month, of seven soap

operas to allow for some development in the storylines and overall plot, which is an essential element in capturing certain characteristics that may otherwise be missed—this will be discussed in the next section.

The selection of the study's seven soap operas was straightforward. The initial proposal was to content analyse all those programmes that fitted the definition of soap opera genre as 'television drama in serial form' (Hobson, 2003: 1), 'long running *serials* concerned with everyday life' (Chandler, 1994) or any form of television drama that has elements of 'seriality' in the structure of its narratives (Creeber, 2001). This potentially meant that only long-running television dramas would be selected. TV dramas such as the BBC's *Holby City* and *Casualty*, and ITV's *The Bill*, all running for a relatively long time, were considered as drama *series* not long-running *serials*, and therefore were ruled out except for *Hollyoaks in the City*, which is considered by the producer, Channel 4, as a spin-off drama from the long-running soap opera *Hollyoaks*. Consequently, the sample is comprised of the BBC's *EastEnders* and *Neighbours*, ITV's *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*, Channel 4's *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City*, and finally Channel Five's *Home and Away*.

The time-period of transmission was randomly selected. All of the seven soap operas aired between the 27th of November and 24th of December of 2006 were selected to comprise a four-week block of soap opera episodes. However, some doubt was raised as to whether or not the run-up to Christmas and the festive season might alter the trajectory of storylines and present sub-plots that dealt with Christmas and festivity themes which would consequently replace other 'normal' and 'relevant' themes that might otherwise have been presented. Nevertheless this was not deemed a problematic issue. Historically, soap operas have incorporated special themes or parallel plots to coincide with whatever goes on in the real world, disasters, political events, festive seasons and so forth (Hobson, 2003). Hence this study is not concerned with a time-specific selection, but rather with capturing a random snapshot of running soap operas regardless of the time-period.

The episodes of the seven soap operas selected were then recorded on DVD discs using a digital DVD recorder. The total sample of four weeks yielded a total of 133 half-hour long episodes for the main six soap operas, and a total of 15 one-hour long episodes for *Hollyoaks in the City*, Channel 4. The total number of soap opera hours recorded is 81.5 hours, including commercial breaks. However, only *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*, ITV1, *Hollyoaks*, Channel 4, *Home and Away*, Channel Five, and *Hollyoaks in the City*, Channel 4 contained commercial breaks. The first four soap operas had one four-to-five-minute commercial break in the middle of the episodes, whereas *Hollyoaks in the City*, Channel 4 had three four-minute long advertisements.

Due to a technical problem, the digital DVD recorder failed to automatically recognise and record three episodes, one of each of the following soap operas: *Neighbours* 28th November and *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City* 6th December. The recorder was set to automatically identify and record all the intended episodes but failed nevertheless. As a result of this, a precautionary measure to avoid further incidents was taken; all the recording from 6th December was manually handled before the start of each episode, which was an inconvenient task. In addition, an extra fifth week of soap operas was recorded in case of data loss or disc damage. To compensate for the loss of the three episodes, an episode of *Neighbours* and another of *Hollyoaks* on 27th December were selected from the consecutive fifth week. However, the missed episode of *Hollyoaks in the City* could not be replaced as the last episode in the series was shown on 21st December.

3.2.2 Soap Operas: The Study's Sample

3.2.2.1 Coronation Street

Coronation Street is the longest-running and most popular soap opera in Britain, produced by Granada plc TV Production Company. Its first episode was broadcast on 9th December 1960; since then *Coronation Street* has been broadcast continuously, going from two episodes a week to three in October 1989, and four in December 1996, and remains at the heart of ITV's prime-time schedule. The programme is currently shown in Great Britain in five episodes over four evenings a

week, with an omnibus version on Saturday afternoon on the ITV1 and the ITV network. At the time the sample was recorded, November and December 2006, also five episodes were shown on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday evenings at 7:30pm and 8:30pm for the double-episode screening on Mondays. (www.itv.com)

Coronation Street had and still has remarkably high ratings compared to other drama series and TV programmes shown on British TV networks. It is watched by about one-third of the British population and is almost always among the top-ten most watched TV programmes in Britain (BARB, 2009). The episodes analysed in this study were watched, according to BARB (Broadcasting Audience Research Board), by an average of over 10 million viewers per episode (see TV ratings in Table 3-1). Historically speaking, *Coronation Street* tends to be watched by more women than men, older people than young people, and in particular by people from the lower socio-economic classes (Livingstone, 1990: p. 55).

<i>Coronation Street</i> ITV1 (2006) BARB Ratings [in millions]			
<i>Monday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
27 th Nov	29 th Nov	1 st Dec	3 rd Dec
11.87 11.27	10.95	10.61 10.40	10.33
4 th Dec	6 th Nov	8 th Dec	10 th Dec
11.10 11.75	10.27	10.30	9.85
11 th Dec	13 th Dec	15 th Dec	17 th Dec
11.50 11.07	10.23	10.23	10.33
18 th Dec	20 th Dec	22 nd Dec	24 th Dec
11.40 11.08	10.80	10.05	8.44

Table 3-1 *Coronation Street*: TV viewing ratings from 27th Nov to 24th Dec 2006

Set in the fictional Weatherfield, part of the Manchester conurbation in North-West England, it portrays ordinary industrial working-class people in their everyday-life situations in a warm-hearted way that is appealing to a large audience. *Coronation Street* fans' website (www.corrie.net) boasts that the attraction of this soap lies in the mundane and believable situations on offer, and in the quality of its stories. Its storylines and plots revolve around the lives, relationships, businesses of the residents of the street and their Neighbours in the three adjacent streets, Rosamund Street, Victoria Street, and Viaduct Street. Communal gatherings and social events take place in the famous Rovers Return Inn, the café, and the street's

shop, The Kabin. *Coronation Street* has always thrived on a wide range of strong characters especially female characters who tend to be middle-aged, dominant and more important and present than their male counterparts. Its storylines deal with personal events rather than directly tackling social issues. Finding romance and love is always a recurring theme. Daniel Chandler (1994) notes that *Coronation Street*:

‘[i]ncludes strong and positive middle-aged females who are the first to spring to mind when viewers are asked to recall the characters. It deals with personal events. Work away from the home is seldom shown. Political and social explanations for events are largely supplanted by personal explanations based on the innate psychological factors of individuals or (occasionally) on luck... People meet in shops and the pub to comment on events. Life seems to revolve around finding a partner. The introduction of outsiders to the community is usually presented as a threat.’⁹

In the past, *Coronation Street* was often criticised for not having major non-white characters in its storylines to reflect the multicultural demography of the UK, and not handling big social issues, such as unemployment, alcoholism, domestic violence, homosexuality, teenage pregnancy and so forth (Goodwin & Whannel 1990: p. 124; McQueen, 1998) However, Hobson (2003) acknowledges the fact that *Coronation Street* struggled to incorporate blacks and Asians into its storylines and ‘has never been obvious in its social stories’ whilst maintaining that ‘in recent years it has become one of the leading series for the inclusion of serious issues and is now absolutely at the forefront of this aspect of the genre,’ and it has recently tried carefully to incorporate ethnic characters to give positive representations (pp.114-126).

3.2.2.2 EastEnders

Produced by the BBC, *EastEnders* was first broadcast on 19th February 1985 on BBC1, and it has continued to be broadcast ever since. It originally started as two

⁹ In Chandler, D. (1994) *The TV Soap Opera Genre and Its Viewers*. Aberystwyth University [Online], available at: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Modules/TF33120/soaps.html> [Accessed on 7, June, 2009]

half-hour episodes per week. At the time of this research, four episodes were shown at 8:00 pm. over four evenings per week, and an omnibus edition on Sunday afternoons. In November and December of 2006, a half-hour episode of *EastEnders* was normally screened on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings at 8:00 pm; also, an extra episode was shown on Christmas Eve. Each of those episodes was watched by an average of 9 to 10 million viewers (see the TV Ratings Table). *EastEnders'* share of viewers is currently averaging 35% of the total British television audience; and it is almost always among the top-ten most watched TV programmes on all the BBC channels, and comes second in TV ratings and popularity after *Coronation Street* (see BARB TV ratings in Table 3-2). It tends to be watched by more women than men and by more viewers from the lower socio-economic classes. However, *EastEnders* tends to attract more young people than its rival *Coronation Street*. (Hobson, 2003; Livingston, 1990)

EastEnders storylines revolve around the domestic, personal and professional lives of the people living and working in the fictional borough of Walford in the London area of East End. The primary focus of *EastEnders* is on the residents of Albert Square, a Victorian square of terraced houses, and its neighbouring streets of Bridge Street, Turpin Road and George Street. The square encompasses a pub and street market—both at the heart of most storylines—and night club, community centre, cafe and various small businesses.

Characters in *EastEnders* are mainly from a working-class background. Although women characters tend to be generally more prevalent, young characters and men are also given primary and important roles. *EastEnders* has had a number of black, Asian, Turkish and other ethnic characters to reflect the multicultural make-up of the East End. The producers have always emphasised that *EastEnders* is about 'everyday life' and about 'relating to people'. *EastEnders* has had a long history of concerning itself with major and at times controversial social issues. It has been argued that this particular feature of *EastEnders*, which distinguishes it from other soap operas, stems directly from the producer's responsibility, being a public broadcasting service, to benefit the public by shedding light on issues that matter to

the public. (Buckingham, 1987; Geraghty 1991; Goodwin and Whannel 1990; Hobson, 2003)

<i>EastEnders</i> BBC1 (2006) BARB Ratings [in millions]				
<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
27 th Nov	28 th Nov	30 th Nov	1 st Dec	3 rd Dec
10.02	7.13	9.63	10.08	
4 th Dec	5 th Dec	7 th Dec	8 th Dec	10 th Dec
9.82	9.24	8.64	8.41	
11 th Dec	12 th Dec	14 th Dec	15 th Dec	17 th Dec
9.85	9.54	8.3	8.78	
18 th Dec	19 th Dec	21 st Dec	22 nd Dec	24 th Dec
9.05	9.90	9.27	8.81	8.30

Table 3-2 *EastEnders* BBC1: TV viewing ratings from 27th Nov to 24th Dec 2006.

EastEnders has over a long period run storylines with themes, some of which were very controversial and generated a lot of complaints by the viewers, on domestic violence, homosexuality and sexual confusion, HIV cases, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, arranged marriage, alcoholism, single-parent families, infidelity and so forth. In September 2008, *EastEnders* ran a storyline, which the *Guardian* dubbed as the ‘most controversial storyline yet’,¹⁰ on grooming and paedophilia involving an underage girl. The storyline generated over 150 complaints which were submitted to Ofcom,¹¹ which later declared that *EastEnders* did not breach media broadcasting decency standards. However, *EastEnders* has often been criticised for the way in which such social issues have been tackled within its storylines. Critics, as well as viewers, have noted that certain episodes tend to be overshadowed by a didactic style when dealing with social issues, prompting its producers to reiterate almost always that *EastEnders* is not an ‘issue-based’ or ‘issue-led’ soap opera. (Buckingham, 1987; Hobson, 2003)

3.2.2.3 Emmerdale

Emmerdale, previously known as *Emmerdale Farm* until 1989, was first broadcast on ITV Network on 16th October 1972. It was originally produced as a daytime soap opera fitting an afternoon slot, but by the late 1970s and early 1980s moved to an early evening slot, 7:00 pm. At the time of this research, five half-hour

¹⁰ Edemariam, A. (2008) Dark Days in Albert Square. MediaGuardian

¹¹ McMahon, K. (2009) EastEnders paedophile story cleared. www.broadcastnow.co.uk

episodes were shown at 7:00 pm from Monday to Friday—Tuesday’s episode is usually an hour long. In November and December 2006, six half-hour episodes were broadcast every evening at 7:00pm except for Saturday evenings. Only, one episode on Tuesday, 28th November, was an hour in length. The sample’s episodes were watched by an average of 8 million viewers per episode (see TV Ratings Table: 3-3). *Emmerdale* is now the third most popular British soap opera, behind *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, and is now aiming to overtake the latter in the TV ratings war.¹²

<i>Emmerdale</i> ITV1 (2006) BARB Ratings [in millions]					
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sunday
27 th Nov	28 th Nov	29 th Nov	30 th Nov	1 st Dec	3 rd Dec
9.01	7.98	8.25	8.19	8.06	7.20
4 th Dec	5 th Dec	6 th Nov	7 th Dec	8 th Dec	10 th Dec
8.26	8.25	8.30	8.15	7.86	7.03
11 th Dec	12 th Dec	13 th Dec	14 th Dec	15 th Dec	17 th Dec
8.85	8.02	8.16	7.63	7.81	7.03
18 th Dec	19 th Dec	20 th Dec	21 st Dec	22 nd Dec	24 th Dec
8.54	8.36	8.22	8.08	7.52	7.12

Table 3-3 *Emmerdale*: TV viewing ratings from 27th Nov to 24th Dec 2006

It is set in the fictional village of *Emmerdale*, which was known as Beckindale until 1994, in the West of Yorkshire, England. It portrays a rural and slow-paced lifestyle and is, for its audience, ‘based less on class than on a specific country style of living.’ However, the storylines revolve around the personal, domestic, business, and romantic relationships of the residents of the small village. Hobson (2003) suggests that ‘for many years it was perceived as the soap opera for the middle-aged and the middle classes, but the reality is that *Emmerdale* has managed to attract a large and diverse audience since the early 1990s as its recent ratings indicate’ (p. 125).

What catapulted *Emmerdale* to achieving higher ratings and challenging the dominance of *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* has been the introduction of dramatic and major storylines that have had a great impact on the future of the programme. The 1994 plane crash storyline, in which a plane crashed on the village killing a number of major characters, is considered one of the reasons behind its

¹² Sweney, M. (2008) *Emmerdale* on *EastEnders*' tail. www.guardian.co.uk

recent popularity. The story of the plane crash was reminiscent of the 1988 tragedy of the Lockerbie air crash. *Emmerdale* has also touched upon serious social problems, however, differently from urban and city-based soaps, reflecting the social problems of rural England. For instance, past storylines dealt with environmental issues and teenage pregnancy (Hobson, 2003).

3.2.2.4 Neighbours

Neighbours is an Australian soap opera aimed at young people. It was first broadcast in Australia in 1985. In the UK, the BBC aired the series in 1986. *Neighbours* centres on the lives and families of Ramsay Street, a short cul-de-sac in the fictional middle-class suburb of Erinsborough, Australia. *Neighbours'* storylines explore the romances, family problems, and minutiae of everyday life and other social issues affecting the residents. It tackles mostly social issues that are relevant to young people and family life. Past storylines, such as those in 2005, dealt with HIV, teenage sex and pregnancy, and presented themes encapsulating new and different attitudes to issues such as work, gender and negative social stereotyping.

In November and December 2006, *Neighbours* was broadcast on BBC One at 1:35pm and repeated at 5:35pm on week days. It attracted around 3 million viewers, mostly young people, for its 1.35pm lunchtime showing, and around 2.6 million for its 5.35pm repeat. In May 2007, the BBC announced that *Neighbours* would no longer be shown on BBC1 as of the following spring, ending 21 years of presence on the BBC screen¹³. On 8th February 2008, it moved to Channel Five. Hobson (2003) attributes the importance of *Neighbours* to its ability to attract a large numbers of young people, mainly teenagers, through the deft inclusion of a younger cast, and provision of new positive representations of young people with which teenagers can identify. It has, however, been criticised for featuring only very attractive young people, and also for its lack of non-white characters.

¹³. Dowell, B. (2007) BBC loses *Neighbours*. *MediaGuardian*

3.2.2.5 Home and Away

Home and Away is an Australian soap opera targeted at young audiences. It was broadcast in the UK on the ITV network from 1989 to 2000. In 2000 Channel Five secured the rights to broadcast the programme as of 2001, and to this date Channel Five has the exclusive rights to the programme in the UK. *Home and Away* is currently shown on weekdays at 6:00pm and is in Channel Five's top-ten programmes. It is watched by an average of two million people, mainly young people, per episode. The sample's episodes were also scheduled at 6:00pm on weekdays, and similarly had an average of just under two million viewers per episode. (see BARB TV rating in Table 3-4).

<i>Home and Away Channel Five [2006] BARB Ratings</i>						
<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
27 th Nov	28 th Nov	29 th Nov	30 th Nov	1 st Dec	2 nd Dec	3 rd Dec
1.29	1.73	1.73	1.78	1.85		
4 th Dec	5 th Dec	6 th Nov	7 th Dec	8 th Dec	9 th Dec	10 th Dec
1.90	1.78	1.82	1.74	1.68		
11 th Dec	12 th Dec	13 th Dec	14 th Dec	15 th Dec	16 th Dec	17 th Dec
1.78	1.84	1.78	1.86	1.70		
18 th Dec	19 th Dec	20 th Dec	21 st Dec	22 nd Dec	23 rd Dec	24 th Dec
1.82	1.75	1.79	1.69	1.78		

Table 3-4 *Home and Away* Channel Five: TV viewing ratings from 27th Nov to 24th Dec 2006

The storylines centre on the lives, relationships and businesses of the closely-knit residents of Summer Bay community, Sydney, Australia. *Home and Away* features a mostly young and very attractive cast in summery beach settings, hence its popularity among young audiences. It has always included storylines dealing with rebellious and trouble-making teenagers, teenage romance and sex, and generational conflicts. It has also touched upon social and health issues such as teenage pregnancy, breast cancer, HIV and underage sex.

3.2.2.6 Hollyoaks

Hollyoaks is a Channel 4 production soap opera, also aimed at young people. It was first broadcast in October 1995 and is still running to this date on Channel 4. It is shown on weekdays at 6:30pm in a half-hour episode format. It attracts an average of two million viewers per episode, predominantly young viewers, and is among Channel 4's top-ten most viewed programmes. The sample's episodes were also

watched by almost two million viewers per episode (see BARB TV ratings in Table 3-5).

<i>Hollyoaks Channel 4 (2006) BARB Ratings [in millions]</i>						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
27 th Nov	28 th Nov	29 th Nov	30 th Nov	1 st Dec	2 nd Dec	3 rd Dec
2.27	2.14	2.16	2.14	1.98		
4 th Dec	5 th Dec	6 th Nov	7 th Dec	8 th Dec	9 th Dec	10 th Dec
2.04	2.12	1.96	2.17	N/A		
11 th Dec	12 th Dec	13 th Dec	14 th Dec	15 th Dec	16 th Dec	17 th Dec
2.04	1.82	1.81	1.95	1.84		
18 th Dec	19 th Dec	20 th Dec	21 st Dec	22 nd Dec	23 rd Dec	24 th Dec
2.22	2.03	2.05	2.14	N/A		

Table 3-5 *Hollyoaks* Channel 4: TV viewing ratings from 27th Nov to 24th Dec 2006

The programme is set in and around the fictional suburb of *Hollyoaks*, Chester, and is centred on a local higher education college called *Hollyoaks* Community College with the characters generally being in their late teens or early twenties. Newspapers, *The Times* and *The Guardian*, as well as popular soap websites, often refer to *Hollyoaks* as a ‘teen soap’ and ‘issue-led’ soap opera because of its young cast and storylines that deals with ‘teens’ issues’. Channel 4 implicitly gives the impression that its programme is indeed ‘issue-led’ when displaying at the end of the screening various telephone help-lines dealing with issues that may have been discussed earlier in the programme. *Hollyoaks* follows the lives of a group of students, and to some extent their families, at the community college. It deals with student issues, relationships, romance and sexuality. It is considered, by the media, audiences and even its own producers¹⁴, to be very daring in its approach to controversial and taboo issues. It has included storylines that have dealt with serious and taboo issues such as suicide, racism, bisexuality, homosexuality, homophobia, sexual confusion, alcoholism, drug abuse, rape, male rape, cancer, eating disorder, child abuse and molestation, domestic violence, incest, sexual harassment.

3.2.2.7 Hollyoaks in the City

Hollyoaks in the City is a British drama series commissioned for, and produced by, Channel 4, and is part of the many *Hollyoaks* spin-off series that began broadcasting in 2001 and continues to run until this date; the latest spin-off is

¹⁴ Teeman, T. (2009) *Hollyoaks*: it’s OK, we love it too. www.TimesOnline.co.uk

Hollyoaks Later. The episodes in the study's sample were shown from Monday to Friday around midnight. The series consisted of twenty hour-long episodes, the last shown on 21 December 2006. It attracted late-night young viewers and was watched by an average of two to three hundred thousand people per episode¹⁵. *Hollyoaks in the City*'s main storylines were revolving around a modelling agency, Gloss, its owner, models and their close friends. The agency itself became a cover for an up-market escorting business. It featured physically attractive and glamorous young characters, and focused only on their professional lives, relationships, romance and sexuality, plunging most of the time into very daring adult themes.

3.3 Measuring Sexual Content: Definitions, Unit of Analysis, and Coding Measures Procedures

The study's content measures/categories and by and large coding procedures have been informed by older studies (Greenberg and D'Alessio, 1985; Fernandez-Collado et al., 1978; Franzblau et al., 1977) and by some more recent studies (Greenberg and Busselle, 1994; Heintz-Knowles, 1996; Kunkel et al., 1996, 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005). The Kaiser Family Foundation Biennial Reports, in particular, have been instrumental in the development of this study's coding categories and procedures.

Kunkel and his colleagues have devised and used very sophisticated content measures and coding schedule in their analyses to capture and account for the patterns and types of sexual messages portrayed across a wide-ranging sample of TV programmes in the US. The strength of the content measures used in their content analyses studies stems from the fact that (a) they have been developed over a long period of time which has allowed for rigorous testing and gradual improvements to be made, (b) they are constructed in such a way that allows for existing nuances and details within a scene and programme to be captured without a great deal of discrepancies, and (c) they have been used in numerous studies and reports to

¹⁵ Conlan, T. (2007) *Hollyoaks* spin-off axed. MediaGuardian

produce findings that can make possible longitudinal comparative analyses (MacKeogh, 2005).

This study has availed itself of Kunkel et al.'s (1999) methodological framework and its sophisticated characteristics, and adopted some of the categories and definitions employed in the Kaiser Family Foundation studies to content analyse the study's sample and therefore avoid producing what could be seen as inflated or deflated findings, especially when comparing some of this study's findings with those of other studies, and to ensure that this study is in line with, and building upon previous research and studies on the topic. This section will explain the range of categories, variables, and coding measures and procedures applied in the study as well as present the basic definitions employed, in order to identify and capture the various aspects of sexual content and portrayals.

3.3.1 Definition of Sex and Unit of Analysis

The content measures employed in this study were tested and refined over a period of almost two years. Certain categories of analysis, as well as levels of analysis, have either been modified and refined to suit the framework of the study, or dropped altogether after being tested and found to be of little use or significance to the study. Many other new categories and coding procedures have been specifically devised to identify and capture characteristics embedded in both the scene and the entire programme or episodes.

Due to the nature of the study's sample, soap operas, careful attention has been particularly paid to the narratives and storyline development in an effort to capture not only salient characteristics of scenes containing sexual content but also other smaller but significant details that may not be identified otherwise—upon testing the study's initial coding schedule and measures which included some major and unaltered categories from the Kaiser Family Foundation Studies (e.g. Kunkel et al, 2005), serious caveats were detected as far as soap opera sexual content was concerned. While this study acknowledges the benefit of adopting some measures, e.g., focus, explicitness, and R & R measures, from the Kaiser Family Foundation Studies, it is important to note that the measures used in this study are by no means

identical to, and by no means used in the same way as, those used in the Kaiser Family Foundation Study. The measures borrowed have been re-tailored and appropriated to suit the purpose of this study, as will be explained below in the coding measures, content categories and their definitions.

In this study, however, sexual content was defined as any depiction or portrayal of talk/behaviour that involves sexuality, sexual suggestiveness and sexual activities/relationships. Sexual content within a scene was classified either as Sexual Talk (ST) or Sexual Behaviour (SB); and both were evaluated or measured separately. Specifically, the following examples were included in the definition of sex:

- Verbal depictions/discussions of any aspect of sexuality;
- Invitations or solicitations: actions or words that are clearly, but not necessarily directly, intended to suggest, promote, or/and pursue sexual activity either immediately or in the future.
- Seductive display of the body, when there is clear intent to attract sexual behaviour as a response from others;
- Explicit or implied references to sexual behaviour or sexual/sensual body parts and organs;
- Explicit or implied depictions of overt sexual behaviours.

For *Sexual Behaviour*, affection that implied potential or likely sexual intimacy was considered as sexual. Therefore, a friend kissing another friend goodbye or a parent kissing his/her child goodnight was not deemed to be sexual, and thus was not coded—the element of intimacy is crucial here. Sexual behaviour incidents should be clear-cut in that they involve and portray physical intimacy.

For *Sexual Talk*, however, any mention of reproductive issues, such as specific instances of contraception or abortion, or sexually-transmitted diseases were considered as sexual in order to capture topics that deal with Risk and Responsibility (R & R) and consequences of sexual activities. By contrast, depictions of behaviours associated with maternity/birth were not deemed as sexual. Consequently, a conversation about whether or not a female character ‘got herself pregnant’ as a

result of a 'one-night stand' or 'not being careful' was coded in this study; while, on the other hand, a discussion about whether it was safe to consume alcohol or smoke cigarettes in the third month of pregnancy was not coded. Further, a discussion between two teenage girls, one of whom or both are pregnant, about whether or not they would consider an abortion was coded; while a conversation between two characters about the ethical or ideological implications of abortion was not considered as ST, and therefore was not coded. The definition of sexual content here is largely based on commonsensical understanding of what sexual behaviours and/or verbal references to sex and sexuality are, and is similar to the definitions used in the Sex on TV reports conducted by Kunkel et al. for the Kaiser Family Foundation, in the soap opera content analyses (Greenberg and Busselle, 1994; Heintz-Knowles, 1996), and in British content analyses of general TV output (Millwood-Hragrave, 1992; Cumberbatch et al. 2003).

Unit of analysis

Choosing and agreeing on what constitutes 'units' of analysis in studies concerned with analysing sexual content seems to have presented some challenges to researchers; in fact it has been perhaps the most contentious concept that researchers have invariably defined and utilised differently. Previous studies (Lowry and Towels, 1989; Franzblau et al, 1977; Fernandez-Collado et al., 1978), for instance, used completely different units of analysis and consequently produced findings that were conflicting and not appropriate for serious and sound comparative analysis, according to the authors' own admission.

Franzblau et al (1977) coded a kiss between a man and a woman twice, one for each, and considered the unit to be the act rather than the scene. Lowry and Towels (1989), on the other hand, considered the camera shot as their unit of analysis, explaining their procedures as follows: 'if three women in bikinis walked together directly in front of the camera this was counted as one instance of physical suggestiveness, but if there were three different camera shots of one woman in a bikini this was counted as three instances.' (p. 350) As a matter of fact, this dilemma highlights one of the limitations of content analysis when researchers resort to

choosing different units, definitions and coding procedures (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003).

In this study the most basic unit of analysis was the ‘scene’. A scene was broadly defined as a sequence in which both the place and time hold constant. A shift in time or place signalled the beginning or end of a scene. Scenes could also be considered as a passage in a story; a soap opera scene ended when the cameras shifts from one distinct setting/locale in time to another new and different one, interrupting the flow of the ongoing action. However, some studies (e.g. Greenberg and Busselle, 1994; Heintz-Knowles, 1996) choose their basic unit of analysis to be either an individual sexual behaviour or verbal reference. This consequently resulted in providing only raw, and arguably inflated, statistics for behaviours and verbal reference without accounting for other contextual elements such as relevance of those behaviours/references to scene and ultimately to overall context. The use of the scene as the most basic unit counters such a limitation. Kunkel et al. (e.g. 2005) and Millwood-Hargrave, 1992) have deployed the scene level measurement.

Identifying individual scenes in soap operas tended to be straightforward most of the time; however, in protracted scenes with no clear-cut shifts in either time or place, the beginning and/or end of a scene was determined by either a change of story or topic, or the introduction of new characters who bring a sudden and radical change to the trajectory of the ongoing story.¹⁶

Scenes were coded and evaluated according the categories and definitions below *only* when they were identified as containing sexual content. Accounting for and analysing the nature and context of sexual portrayals was carried out in this study only at one level of analysis, the scene level. Having pre-tested the study’s coding measures, it was evident that the storylines—and the overall plot of the soap opera

¹⁶ A very few lengthy scenes, where the time and place held constant for over 6 minutes, were found in *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*. Those scenes tended to be shot outdoors or in a pub/restaurant, where the cameras moved seamlessly among various couples or groups of people, each engaging in different dialogues and storylines. It was an easy task to make out what constituted a scene; of course, a judgement based on a combination of topicality and camera-shots was required.

borne in mind when coding—in each individual episode were sufficient to enable the coder to capture contextual elements embedded in the scenes, as well as overall themes and patterns of portrayal; therefore no further levels of analysis were required.

3.3.2 Nature and Types of Sexual Activity

The type or nature of portrayal/scene was determined by the nature of the ongoing sexual activity in any given scene. Thus a scene with sexual content¹⁷ was coded either as containing ‘sexual talk’ or ‘sexual behaviour’—both are referred to in this study as the *two types of portrayal*—and thereafter assessed for whether or not it contained any references to ‘Risk & Responsibility’ (R & R) and/or safe-sex messages. Audience research studies have claimed that greater exposure to sexual risks messages could encourage the adoption of safe-sex practices and raise the awareness of the devastating consequences of irresponsible sexual behaviours among young viewers, as the media, television in particular, are hypothesised to provide sets of models and a source of social learning (Brown and Newcomer, 1991; MacKeogh, 2005; Moore and Furstenberg, 1991). For this reason, sexual risk and responsibility categories used here will show whether or not soap operas’ portrayals of sex and sexuality convey such messages. Furthermore, each of sexual talk and sexual behaviour portrayals/scenes were assessed for the types of talk or behaviours they depicted.

3.3.2.1 Portrayal of Sexual Talk

Sexual talk encompassed a range of different types of sexual discussion conversations. A scene featuring ‘sexual talk’ in this study was coded as one of the following fourteen types/categories:

1. Comments about one’s own or others’ sexual interests/intentions/ acts
2. Talk about sexual intercourse
3. Talk about oral sex

¹⁷ It is imperative that portrayals fit the above definition of sex in order for scenes to be coded.

4. Talk toward sex (intimate/ seductive)
5. Talk toward sex (coercive)
6. Expert advice or technical information
7. Talk about pregnancy/abortion
8. Direct talk about Risk and Responsibility
9. Talk about rape/attempted rape
10. Talk about incest
11. Talk about prostitution
12. Sexual innuendos
13. Talk about sex-related crimes
14. Other

The first four categories were by and large the broadest, covering dialogues, topics, and verbal exchanges about sexual relations that people ‘are having now’, ‘intent upon having’, or ‘had in the past’ and so forth. However, the intercourse category was only and specifically concerned with sexual intercourse that had already happened. For instance, a character saying ‘I told you I had sex with Oson last night’ would count as sexual intercourse, whereas a character saying ‘I would like to have sex with you’ would not—it would count as comments about one’s own sexual interests (see category/type one of sexual talks).

Further, Talk toward sex involved conversations about sex or sexuality that were intended to promote or pursue sexual activities. The verbal interaction occurred between the interested character(s) and the target of their desire. However, when talk toward sex (categories four and five) occurred simultaneously with, or accompanied by, any sexual behaviours, it was not coded as ‘sexual talk’ but rather as ‘sexual behaviour’ to avoid double-coding.

Types/categories six, seven and eight were concerned with capturing any lines of dialogue that highlighted issues of sex and sexuality in relation to outcomes such as pregnancy and/or abortion, and aspects that might otherwise not be deemed purely

and directly related to sex and sexuality such as sexual caution, responsibility, risk and awareness of possible negative outcomes. The inclusion of those three categories was mainly for the purpose of identifying R & R themes that were not solely embedded within, or were part of purely sexual narratives, but nonetheless were substantial themes which came into existence as a consequence of sexual behaviours, despite the fact that the latter might not have been spelt out in the scenes in question. For instance, if a character just said ‘oh, yeah, I had sex with her just a couple of times, but I always practise safe sex’, the reference to ‘safe sex’, which is only part of the dialogue, would be measured at a later stage using the R & R content coding measure, as will be explained below; however, if two female characters were merely discussing consequences of sexual intercourse such as pregnancy or abortion without any reference to any sexual behaviours, then the scene would be coded as containing sexual talk, categories 6, 7 or 8—here R & R was *the* substantial theme, not a reference embedded in a sexual theme.

Categories nine, 10, 11 and 13 dealt with illegal and socially frowned upon sexual acts. Talk about rape/attempted rape encompassed any comments, stories, crime investigations or discussions of rape, which by definition is any form of forced sex that is a violation of law and therefore a punishable crime (Holmes and Holmes, 2002). Talk about prostitution covered references, stories and details that clearly state and allude to incidents and themes revolving around trading sex for money.

Furthermore, talk about incest (category 10) encompassed comments, references, stories or discussions of incestuous relationships. Incest was defined in this study as any sexual activity between closely related persons that is illegal by law, and socially and culturally considered a taboo, e.g. sexual relationships within members of the immediate family, a brother and sister or a father and daughter (Holmes and Holmes, 2002).

Talk about sex-related crimes involved any comments, references to illegal sex acts whether they had occurred or were the subject of ongoing discussions or investigation. Here topics and conversations on sexual harassment, indecency

offences, underage sex, sexual assault and paedophilia were all considered under this category.

Five of the categories above (categories, 1, 2, 4, 6 and 13) were borrowed from, or used as those developed by, Kunkel et al. (2005) and Heintz-Knowles, 1996). While the construction of other categories was informed by the opinion survey studies and effect research reviewed in chapter One and Two. For instance, viewers tend to raise concerns about the sensational and controversial nature of some sexual storylines soap operas often portray such as cheating, underage sex, crime-related sex, prostitution, rape and incest (Hobson, 2003; Millwood-Hargrave, 1999; 2002). Thus those categories will try to capture the prevalence of such portrayals.

3.3.2.2 Portrayal of Sexual Behaviour

‘**Sexual behaviour**’ was measured using ten categories. Scenes were coded here *only* when *visually* exhibiting *physical* sexual intimacy, as defined above, and when sexual behaviours comprised a reasonably substantial part of the scene. For instance if two ‘extras’ were kissing passionately in a park, in the background, while the two major characters were talking about or quarrelling over a serious family problem, then the behaviour in the background was considered minor and will not be included. This study employed a pyramid-like hierarchy of behaviours in order to avoid double-coding and inflated findings, and also to indicate that sexually-related behaviours were not equated exclusively with the consummated sexual behaviour of intercourse.

On top of the pyramid were sexual intercourse and oral sex categories (implied and depicted), followed by ‘passionate kissing’ and ‘intimate touching’ respectively, while physical flirting sat at the bottom of the pyramid. Very rarely did scenes featuring sexual behaviours have only a single type of behaviour. Scenes containing sexual intercourse behaviours were often accompanied by physical flirting, intimate touching and/or passionate kissing, and therefore counting those peripheral behaviours was in itself of no substantial value, unless they were lone behaviours not accompanied by sexual intercourse. Here are the ten categories:

1. Physical flirting or suggestiveness

2. Intimate touching
3. Passionate/intimate kissing.
4. Sexual intercourse depicted
5. Sexual intercourse implied
6. Oral sex depicted
7. Oral sex implied
8. Rape/attempted rape
9. Sexual assault
10. Other.

The first five categories above were used almost in the same way other studies (e.g. Kunkel et al. 2005; Heintz-Knowles, 1996; BSC, 1999; Cumberbatch et al. 2003) tried to capture those sexual behaviours. The rape and sexual assault categories were constructed in order to see whether or not such controversial and problematic behaviours are portrayed in soap operas and if so which soap operas are likely to have such visual depictions. Hobson (2003) has noted that it is such controversial storylines (visual portrayals when they occur are often mild in nature) lend soap operas a reputation for sensationalism that stays with soap opera audiences. Furthermore, research into media effects has suggested that exposure to some socially unacceptable and illegal behaviours such as rape and sexual violence may result in a reduction of inhibitions against committing such behaviours in male viewers (e.g. Check, 1981; Malamuth, Haber, and Feshbach, 1980), and/or may result in viewers getting habituated/desensitized over mid or long-terms of exposure to such portrayals (e.g. Ceniti and Malamuth, 1984 Zillmann and Bryant, 1984). For this reason, this study is aiming to identify whether such problematic behaviours are portrayed, although it is expected that such portrayals are likely to be mild and discrete in day-time and prime-time soap operas.

‘Physical flirting or suggestiveness’ referred to behavioural actions meant to arouse or promote sexual interest; actions such as a woman licking and biting her

lips provocatively while eyeing a man seated opposite her at a bar, or a woman wearing a very short skirt provocatively crossing her legs to expose her thighs to the man sitting opposite, were classified under this category. Similarly, ‘intimate touching’ referred to actions meant to arouse and promote sexual interest, such as fondling or caressing body parts in a sexually intimate way. ‘Passionate/intimate kissing’, however, referred to kisses intimate and romantic in nature, and implying or suggesting the potential for ‘more’ in terms of sexual relations and activities—these kisses are commonly known as French kisses.

‘Sexual intercourse depicted’ was designed to capture the portrayals of intercourse shown in some capacity on screen. An act of sexual intercourse was coded as ‘depicted’ when the camera showed a direct view of the characters as they were engaged in the act. Mild and discreet portrayals, however, may show two characters from the shoulders up when engaging in the act, or show four entangled legs moving up and down indicating an act of sexual intercourse is taking place.

By contrast, the ‘sexual intercourse implied’ category was concerned with capturing sexual intercourse depictions when the behaviour itself was not shown literally and/or explicitly on screen. Implied portrayals only convey the message that sexual intercourse has occurred; this often happened when a programme shows all the events leading up to the act but not the act itself, or showed the events that directly follow the act. Further, immediately adjacent scenes and a sequence of narratives often conveyed the occurrence of intercourse.

Some examples of implied intercourse include portrayals of a couple kissing, touching, and undressing each other as they stumble into a dimly-lighted bedroom, with the scene dissolving well before the actual act of intercourse begins, or two characters shown waking in bed together and talking about and reflecting on the experience of lovemaking they had performed before falling asleep.

The oral sex categories referred to the use of one person’s mouth on the sexual organs of another person in order to sexually arouse or gratify that person. ‘Depicted’ and ‘implied’ oral sex behaviours were coded when, for the former, the physical action or part of it was shown, and for the latter, when the behaviour was

not shown literally but inferred through the sequence of narratives or scenes—judged exactly the same as in the intercourse categories.

Portrayals and incidents of sexual violence, rape and/or attempted rape, whether implied or depicted, were coded separately (categories 9 and 10) when the storylines and narratives indicated that illegal and violent sexual behaviours or sexual intercourse without consent were taking place or attempted. A final category of ‘other’ was included to capture other highly infrequent behaviours that did not fit the other nine mentioned categories.

3.3.3 Themes and Context: Special Content Measures

All scenes containing ‘sexual behaviour’ or ‘sexual talk’ have been subjected to further analysis to evaluate thematic and contextual details embedded within the scenes. However, some special content coding measures were applied to portrayals featuring ‘sexual behaviours’ only to capture additional contextual details, as will be separately explained below. The rationale for constructing and borrowing some of these measures lies in the ways audiences react to such contextual variables. UK Opinion survey studies have shown certain members of an audience, for instance, disapprove of the prevalence of the portrayal of explicit intimate sexual behaviours, homosexual sex, extra-marital affair and cheating (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992 and 1999; Hill and Thomson, 2000), while others are more accepting of portrayal of sexual behaviours if they were integral to storylines and overall contexts (Hill and Thomson, 2000).

‘**Sexual intercourse**’ portrayals, whether ‘behaviour’ or ‘talk’, were also measured separately by using two distinct categories that look further into the themes of intercourse. The ‘First-time sexual intercourse’ category refers to sexual intercourse activities where, at least for one of the characters, this was the first time or experience of engaging in sexual intercourse. Topics on and depictions of ‘losing virginity’ and first-time sexual experiences are prime examples. The second category, ‘sexual intercourse that involves cheating/infidelity’ refers to sexual intercourse activities that represent a violation of a relationship between two people who are strongly committed to each other, and who consider their relationship to be

monogamous. These measures have been borrowed from the *Sex on TV* study (Kunkel et al. 2005). However, while Kunkel et al. confined the use of these measures to just visual portrayals of sexual intercourse, this study applied these measures to both talk about intercourse cases and visual depictions of intercourse, since soap operas are known to revolve more around narratives of sexual relationships.

Orientation of sexual activity was classified as one of the three categories below. A scene with either sexual behaviour or talk was coded here when the overall theme encompassed the general definition of:

1. Heterosexual: sexual behaviours between people of opposite sex.
2. Homosexual: sexual behaviours between people of the same sex.
3. Bisexual: people who are erotically/physically attracted to, or have sexual relationships with people of both sexes/genders.

Furthermore, to establish whether or not dialogues in scenes have any **references to homosexuality and homosexual sex**, a separate category was devised to capture the presence and absence (yes/no) of such references in scenes. However, to avoid double-coding, this category was not coded when the **orientation of sexual activity** was already determined as 'homosexual', but nonetheless if explicit references to homosexuality (gayness) were made in a scene depicting homosexual sex, then such references were coded. These variables were specifically designed for this study.

The **level of explicitness (visual sexual explicitness)** in all scenes with sexual content was assessed by using the six categories below which captured the physical appearance of the characters involved in the sexual behaviour or talk:

0. No explicitness.
1. Provocative or suggestive dress or appearance: Clothes alone that reflect a strong and clear intent to flaunt one's sexuality; an example would be a female character trying to seduce her boyfriend by wearing tight sexy cloths, and then performing sexual moves.

2. Characters begin disrobing: the removing of clothes that reveal parts of the body—disrobing was identified only when in a sexual setting indicating that sexual behaviours were imminent and/or occurring.
3. Partial but high level of nudity: characters wandering around in underwear, or wearing very little clothing
4. Discreet nudity: characters are understood to be nude, yet explicitly full nudity is not shown—private parts of the body are not shown on the screen. For instance, a character could be covered by a sheet or other item, yet it was clear that the character was otherwise nude or a character could be completely nude but private parts were not shown because of the careful selection of camera angles and editing.
5. Nudity: the baring and revealing of normally private parts of the anatomy, such as men's/women's genitals and buttocks, and women's breasts.

The measure of explicitness was built upon the original measure used in the *Sex on TV* study (Kunkel et al. 2005). This measure included a new third variable (Partial but high level of nudity) and was, unlike in the *Sex on TV*, applied to both portrayals of behaviour and talk about sex, as the process of testing the coding frame showed that a reasonable number of portrayals included characters conversing about sex while partially naked (here no sexual behaviours were shown, and often those topics discussed related to own' or others' sexuality or sexual preferences).

Additionally, scenes were measured and evaluated for their **degree of focus** on sexual activities and dialogues. This measure was designed to evaluate (a) how central and important the sexual activity was to the scene, storyline and overall plot, and (b) to what extent sexual activity was embedded within the scene. The degree of focus differentiates 'inconsequential' and 'minor' sexual references and depictions from others that have 'substantial' and 'primary' weight within the scene. These measures were borrowed, as they are, from the *Sex on TV* study (Kunkel et al. 2005).

The time frame of sexual activity in general was also captured. Four categories, 'current', 'past', 'future', and 'fantasy/dream' were used to determine the time frame

of occurrence for sexual behaviour or talk; the latter was considered more carefully as to whether or not it occurred, strictly speaking, in the past. If sexual talk in a given scene dealt with past sexual themes that had a clear and substantial impact on the present and future, then the time frame of such talks was considered as ‘current’; however, if they were purely recounting past sexual incidents—here gossip can be thought of as a prime example—then they were coded as ‘past’.

Outcomes of sexual activity were captured using seventeen categories, nine for ‘negative outcomes’ and eight for ‘positive outcomes’. The unfolding storylines and narratives should allow for outcomes to be identified fairly easily. If two outcomes, one negative and one positive, were portrayed for the same sexual activity involving two characters in one scene, then both outcomes would be coded in this study—a given sexual activity may well have two different outcomes for characters involved. Category ‘neutral’ indicated that *no clear* or *no* depictions/dialogues of consequences, either positive or negative, were portrayed or mentioned. Outcomes that did not fit the categories below were coded in the category ‘other’. The rest of the categories are:

Negative outcomes

1. Experiencing personal guilt or remorse
2. Damaging/ending relationship
3. Diminishing status, prestige or popularity
4. Peer rejection
5. Causing worry about unwanted pregnancy
6. Causing worry about abortion
7. Causing worry about actual AIDS/STDs
8. Other

Positive outcomes

1. Gaining status/prestige/popularity
2. Gaining peer approval

3. Furthering a career
4. Establishing or enhancing romantic/sexual relationship
5. Material gain
6. Achieving pregnancy
7. Other

These measures were informed by both the cultivation and social learning theoretical frameworks discussed earlier (see Chapter One). Outcomes of sexual behaviours are particularly significant within the context of social learning. The aim of this research is to know what kinds of outcomes are associated with soap operas' portrayal of sexual relationships. As social learning theory posits, the portrayal of behaviours that bestow rewards or punishment upon popular television characters may determine which of such behaviours an observer may copy. Furthermore, from a cultivation perspective, this study aims to know what kinds of consequences associated with sexual behaviours soap operas are likely to cultivate among their audiences. Some (precisely) six of those variables were borrowed from Heintz-Knowles (1996); however, they were coded differently. In this study *all* portrayals were evaluated for the outcomes sexual activity may have, unlike Heintz-Knowles (1996) who just coded portrayals of behaviours. The soap opera narratives made possible the identification of those outcomes in a great number of portrayals. The other variables were developed in the process of testing the coding frame as the need for more variable became obvious in order to capture other significant outcomes such as peer rejection or approval and sexual risks and responsibility outcomes.

Accompanying behaviours in scenes were also accounted for in this study. Four distinct categories were utilised to identify the use and/or presence of drugs, alcohol, smoking and aggressive and violent behaviours. Additionally, the length of scene and number of characters involved in sexual activity are also captured. Those measures were constructed for this study as some accompanying behaviours were identified as problematic (e.g. fetishising and glamorising smoking, association of sexual intercourse with alcohol consumption, and sexual violence) by some studies as will be discussed later (see Chapter Five).

Sexual behaviours were evaluated using ‘special content measures’¹⁸ to capture salient sexual themes for non-generic sexual behaviours. Theme of sexual behaviour included two main categories, ‘prostitution’, and ‘incest’, to identify the themes and context within which various types of behaviours occurred; a third category, ‘other’, was incorporated for incidents that did not fit the previous two categories.

3.3.4 Risk & Responsibility (R & R) and Safe-sex Messages

Scenes with sexual content were also assessed as to whether or not they included any mention or depiction of R & R themes. The term Risk & Responsibility is used here to describe a host of issues related to the potentially serious outcomes associated with sexual behaviours (Kunkel, 2003). Sexual Risks (first R) include unwanted pregnancies, abortion and contraction of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Sexual Responsibility (second R) may include sexual patience, awareness and caution. Measures used in R & R are designed to capture various aspects of R & R references embedded within sexual portrayals, or talks and topics directly dealing with R & R as discussed in the ‘type of sexual talk’ section.

Here a growing body of research underlines the importance of using such measures to identify whether or not soap operas portrayal of sexual relationships includes themes and topics that highlight sexual risks and responsibilities. Evidence emerging from relatively recent studies (e.g. Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; MacKeogh, 2005; Collins et al. 2003) indicates that incorporating risk or responsibility messages into television programs with sexual themes and topics can significantly increase viewer sensitivity to critical sexual health concerns. The measures used below were borrowed from the *Sex on TV* study (Kunkel et al. 2005), with some alterations to a number of variables and coding procedures to suit the nature of the soap opera genre, given that Kunkel et al. were concerned with capturing R & R themes across a more general TV output.

¹⁸ Having tested the study’s content measure and coding schedule, it became apparent that accounting just for ‘the type of behaviour’ would lose sight of the theme and context within which those behaviours occurred. For instance, passionate kisses or sexual intercourse between a prostitute and client would only be considered as sexual behaviours, and result in losing sight of the context; therefore these special measures were devised to address this imbalance.

The first measure deals with the type of reference which includes nine categories— categories 2 to 9 are similar to those used by Kunkel et al. (2005); they only differ in terms of the coding procedures, where in Kunkel (2005) multiple coding was adopted. The first category in this study was used to identify more than one R & R reference or theme. The categories below are self-explanatory:

1. Mention of multiple R & R issues.
2. Mention/presence/use of condom
3. Mention/presence/use of contraception or birth control
4. Mention of ‘safe sex’ terminology
5. Mention of concerns about HIV/AIDS
6. Mention of concerns about general STDs
7. Mention of risks of actual unwanted/unplanned pregnancy
8. Mention of /debating abortion
9. Mention of virginity/abstinence/sexual patience.

Thereafter, the weight of the coded references was evaluated by the ‘**degree of focus**’ measure which classified an R & R reference as either ‘inconsequential’, ‘minor’, ‘substantial’, or ‘primary’. Furthermore, the **valence** of R & R topics was measured using four categories. ‘**Valence**’ refers to the treatment of R & R topics in an evaluative manner:

1. Primarily positive (concern expressed over R&R): positive treatment indicates that R & R topics are supported, endorsed, promoted and portrayed as desirable.
2. Primarily negative (lack of concern for R&R): negative treatment indicates that R & R topics are criticised, ridiculed, devalued, discouraged and portrayed as undesirable.
3. Mixed: a combination of the previous two categories.
4. Neutral: none of the above is communicated.

The degree of focus and valence measures were similar to those employed in Kunkel et al. (2005). They, however, differed in terms of levels of analysis, which in the Kunkel study was done at the programme level compared to the scene level used in this study.

In addition, this study employed a measure to assess **the overall emphasis on R & R messages/themes** communicated in the narratives and overall plot—this measure, borrowed from Kunkel et al. (2005), was done on the scene level only, relying however on soap opera narratives and plot development. The nature of soap opera narratives was a major factor in allowing this specific measure to be captured on a scene level rather than on a programme level as used in the Sex on TV. R & R references and safe-sex topics were coded as one of the four categories:

1. Sexual patience: emphasis on abstinence from sexual behaviours, waiting until a relationship matured, etc...
2. Sexual precaution: storylines/scenes placing emphasis on actual use of preventative measures or serious discussions of such measures.
3. Sexual risks or negative consequences: storylines highlighting hardships (emotional and otherwise) and other consequences of STDs, unwanted pregnancies and abortions.
4. No emphasis on R&R themes/messages.

Finally, the source of information was classified as one of four categories that referred broadly to the relationship of those involved in R & R themes, and these included 'peer to peer', 'partner to partner', 'parent to child', 'healthcare provider to any'. Also a fifth category, 'other', was used for cases that did not fit the previous categories.

3.3.5 Characters' Profile and Attributes

This study also looked in detail at some salient attributes of those involved in sexual behaviours and talks. Up to four individual characters in each scene were coded. Only characters playing substantial roles in sexual activity were analysed. If

more than four characters were taking part in a scene, then those—only four—deemed to be integral to the activity were evaluated.

The importance of the measures discussed above stems directly from their ability to shed some light upon the various contexts within which sexual activities occur. For instance, do soap operas portray sexual behaviours within committed relationships or within non-committal and extra-marital contexts? Is there an evidence base that one can suggest, from a cultivation perspective, that soap operas cultivate certain values such as sex outside marriage or committed relationship as the cultural norms, as some studies have speculated about the long-term influence of such portrayals (Brown et. al. 2002; Buerkel-Rothfuss and Strouse, 1993; Courtright and Baran, 1980)? Do sexual relationships in soap operas primarily occur between young people? Might young characters serve as models for younger audiences? Are there certain stereotypical features in the roles of instigating sexual behaviours across both genders?

Characters' attributes captured in this study included gender, ethnicity, age, occupation, sexual orientation and initiator of sexual behaviour. Also, two separate measures were used to assess if and when characters involved in sexual activity were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Some of these measures have been deployed by a number of studies but often applied to only a small numbers of portrayals (e.g. sexual intercourse cases in Kunkel et al. 2005, or 'sexual interactions' in Heintz-Knowles, 1996). In this study all core participants in all scenes with sexual content were coded.

Moreover, characters' motivation for engaging in sexual behaviours—only behaviours—was captured using a range of motives (fifteen categories). This measure was borrowed from Heintz-Knowles (1996). If a scene and narratives did not reveal enough information with regard to characters' motivation in engaging in sexual behaviours, category 'unknown' was coded; and if motivation did not fit the thirteen categories below, category 'other' was coded instead. The rest of motivations included:

1. Personal satisfaction

2. Provide satisfaction for partner
3. Gain status/prestige/popularity
4. Peer approval
5. Further own career
6. Further partner's career
7. Establish or benefit relationship with partner
8. Material gain
9. Achieve pregnancy
10. To forget problems/escape
11. Revenge
12. Trap partner/'Honey Trap'
13. Sexual assault

Finally, characters' relationship status was captured to ascertain whether or not participants in sexual activity had an established romantic or sexual relationship, were married, just dating, or were having an extra-marital affair. It is worth noting that this measure was used for characters involved in both sexual 'talk' and 'behaviours'. The criterion for coding participants in 'sexual talk' is that characters should be talking about their own sexual actions, preferences and interest with a potential partner/target, or engaging in 'talk toward sex'. Examples of these include a character saying to another 'we used to have great sex', or 'I fancy a shag with you later'; and a couple arguing about each other's infidelity, one says 'how many times did you do it?'

3.3.6 Content Coding and Reliability Checks

Having tested, refined and finalised the content measures and coding schedule, the researcher undertook the task of coding the content of the entire study's sample. Coding was done over an entire two-month period, March and April 2009, with an average of eight hours of content coding allocated per day, spreading over four sessions per day to avoid fatigue and coding errors. Furthermore, coding was carried

out using coding sheets, PC and DVD software player (CyberLink Power DVD) which had sophisticated features that allowed for the length of scenes to be captured precisely and fairly easily.

Episodes were coded in their orderly sequence to ensure that narratives and storylines were captured in the due process. Also, simultaneous coding of episodes from different soap operas was not performed. Coding moved from one soap opera to the next. And having completed coding the entire sample, the researcher also transferred the data from the coding sheets into two separate SPSS¹⁹ files, one for the sexual activity measures and another for characters' attributes. The statistical results of this study were produced primarily by performing SPSS 'Descriptive Statistics' using a number of commands such as descriptive, frequencies and cross-tabulations.

Inter-coder Reliability

Before the actual coding of the study's sample was carried out, a set of procedures had been performed to check and ensure the adequacy of inter-coder reliability in this study. Following Neuendorf's (2002) recommendations, two reliability checks, *pilot* and *final*, were performed. The pilot reliability check²⁰ was carried out on a sample of seven randomly selected episodes of three soap operas. The results showed a few major caveats within the structure of the coding schedule and in fact within some content measures, which were either altered and eventually rectified or dropped altogether. The third and final pilot check produced more or less similar results to those of the final reliability check.

For the final check, a sub-sample of fifteen episodes was selected. The sample was purposely selected to ensure that a wide spectrum of sexual behaviours and talks were going to be coded to cover the entire content measures included in the coding schedule, in particular R & R references and topics. The sub-sample comprised two hour-long episodes of *Hollyoaks in the City*, ten half-hour episodes

¹⁹ SPSS, a software programme: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

²⁰ As a matter of fact, three pilot checks were performed. Each time a few problems were detected and eventually rectified.

of *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* (five each), and finally three half-hour long episodes of *Home and Away*. The size of the sub-sample, almost 10% of the study's total sample, was in line with what Wimmer and Dominick (2003) considered to be appropriate for the implementation of reliability assessment.

Two coders, both social science research students, undertook the task of coding the selected sub-sample, each coding independently from the other. However, prior to the actual coding, the researcher had given them a codebook containing detailed instructions and examples, and explained the nature of the task over eight separate hour-long sessions. The sub-sample analysed by the two coders yielded 62 scenes with sexual content, of which 21 were portrayals of sexual behaviour and 41 were portrayals of sexual talk. Having received the sample data (coding sheets), the researcher compared the data and calculated percentages of agreement between the two coders.

The results of the reliability test for all the content measures were found to be adequate and in line with the Kaiser Family Foundation Studies (Kunkel et al. 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005) and MacKeogh (2005), where in the former studies (specifically Kunkel et al. 2005) the overall means of agreement for all measures was between 75% for the lowest and 100% for the highest.

The mean agreement on unitising, i.e. identifying scenes containing sexual content within episodes, in the entire sub-sample was 100%. Average agreement on the most important measures used in the study was well above 90%. Only six out of the thirty-five measures had an average agreement of just below 90%, and only two below 80%: Table (3-6) contains the means of agreement for most of the measures used in the study.

<i>Content Measures</i>	<i>Means</i>	<i>Content Measures</i>	<i>Means</i>
Nature of sexual activity	100 %	<i>Risk & Responsibility Measures:</i>	
Type of sexual talk	96 %	Scene/sexual activity refers to R & R	100 %
Type of sexual behaviour	98 %	Type of reference	95 %
Theme of sexual intercourse	94 %	Degree of focus	93 %
Theme of sexual behaviour [SB only]	100 %	Source of Information	87 %
Orientation of sexual activity	91 %	Valence of Reference to R & R	94 %
Dialogue contains references to homosexuality	100 %	Theme/Message of Risk & Responsibility	97 %
Sexual behaviour contains [SB only]	92 %	<i>Characters' Attributes Measures</i>	
Level of explicitness	96 %	Gender	100 %
Degree of focus	92 %	Ethnicity	98 %
Time frame of sexual activity	90 %	Age	100 %
Location of sexual activity	100 %	Occupation	89 %
Use/presence of drugs in scene	98 %	Character's sexual orientation	97 %
Use/presence of alcohol in scene	100 %	Initiator of sexual behaviour	92 %
Use/presence of smoking in scene	100 %	Motivation for engaging in sexual behaviour	79 %
Use/presence of aggression/violence in scene	100 %	Relationship status	93 %
Negative outcomes of sexual activity	78 %	Character under influence of drugs	81 %
Positive outcomes of sexual activity	83 %	Character under influence of alcohol	87 %
Number of characters involved in sex act	98 %		

Table 3-6 Inter-coders' means of agreements (in percentages) for the study's content measures.

Chapter 4
Sexual Content in Soap Operas:
Amount, Nature, Types and Contextual Features
of Sexual Portrayals

Soap operas are often criticised for containing ‘too much sex’ and for frequently featuring storylines that deal with sexuality and sexual relationships. Opinion surveys, as well as the media themselves (e.g. newspapers and TV documentaries), have invariably suggested that there is almost a universal consensus that soap operas are full of sexual content, and can only thrive on controversial storylines that deal with sexual relationships. Furthermore, some studies identified the main concern with respect to soap operas as being their ability to “‘fan the fire’ of antisocial and sexually explicit behaviours amongst young people.” (Ofcom, 2005a: p. 5) Some politicians and policy makers have also singled out soap operas for focusing too much on sex and sexuality, and blamed them for the rise in teenage pregnancies, and influencing young people’s sexual behaviours. But do these ‘concerns’ and ‘accusations’ really reflect what soap operas are actually portraying?

This chapter presents and discusses some of the study’s core findings that deal directly with the amount, nature and distribution of sexual content across seven soap operas. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section presents the overall findings related to the amount, duration and nature of sexual portrayals and the types of sexual activity found in soap operas, and accounts for the major prevailing patterns of portrayals and the general trends found across the board, as well as across each of the seven soap operas.

The second section assesses and looks into a number of contextual elements within individual scenes/portrayals. It, first of all, examines the level of sexual explicitness (visual) and the degree of focus on sexual topics across all catalogued

sexual scenes, and then identifies the orientation of sexual activity, themes of general sexual behaviours as well as those of sexual intercourse behaviours, and finally identifies the existence of any references to homosexuality within all sexual portrayals. The third and final section summarises and discusses the findings and their significance, and compares them with those of previous studies in order to see how soap opera sexual content fares, at least in terms of amount and nature, with other sexual content portrayed in various TV genres, whether in the UK, US or elsewhere.

4.1 Amount, Nature and Types of Sexual Portrayals in Soap Operas

4.1.1 Prevalence and Amount of Sexual Content

The study's four-week sample yielded a total of 77 hours of soap operas, which was made up of 124 half-hour episodes (*EastEnders* 17 episodes, *Coronation Street* 21, *Emmerdale* 25, and *Neighbours*, *Hollyoaks*, *Home and Away*, 20 episodes each) and 15 hour-long episodes of *Hollyoaks in the City*. All seven soap operas were found to contain sexual content of some sort. Not every single episode did so, however. Of the 139 episodes, 31 contained no sexual content at all. Only 13 out of the 25 *Emmerdale* episodes contained sexual content, which was a considerably smaller proportion than other serials such as *Hollyoaks* 19 out of 20, *Coronation Street* 19 out of 21, and *EastEnders* 15 out of 17. *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* individually had 13 episodes out of 20 containing scenes with sexual content, whereas all the 15 hour-long *Hollyoaks in the City* episodes included sexual content.

The seven soap operas collectively were found to contain a total of 506 scenes with sexual content. *Hollyoaks in the City*, the only post-watershed serial drama, accounted on its own for nearly half (47.8%; 242 scenes) of the entire 506 catalogued scenes. Together, the other six remaining soap operas accounted for just over half (52%) of the scenes containing sexual content (see Figure 4-1). It is very interesting to see that *Hollyoaks* accounted for the second largest chunk of scenes, 79 (15.5%), coming second only to its spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*. *Emmerdale*, however, contained the lowest number of scenes, only 29 (5.7%), a notably small

total considering the size of its sample (25 episodes). Similarly, *Neighbours* contained the smallest percentage of scenes, with just under 5% (only 25 scenes), while *Home and Away* had a slightly bigger percentage of just over 7% (37 scenes). Furthermore, the two rivals, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* were found to contain, to some extent, similar ratios of scenes with sexual content (10.5% and 8.1% respectively), again a perhaps surprisingly small number in view of the size of both soap operas' sample.

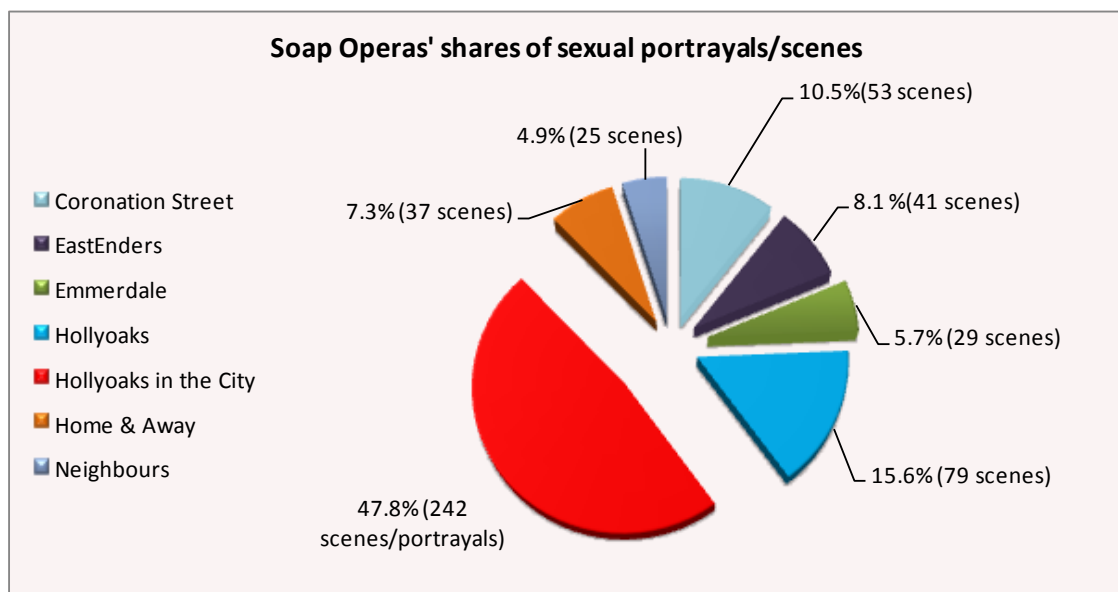


Figure 4-1 Percentages of scenes with sexual content found in each of the seven soap operas.

These soap operas showed an average of just above 3.6 scenes per episode—taking into account the entire sample including *Hollyoaks in the City* whose episodes were hour-long (124 half-hour episodes and 15 hour-long episodes, in total 139 episodes)—or an average of just above 6.5 scenes per hour for the 77 hours of soap opera output.

Table 4-1 shows that the ‘scene average’ fluctuated between 1.16 and 4 scenes per episode across the main six soap operas when looked at individually, and inflated dramatically to just over 16 per episode/per hour in the case of *Hollyoaks in the City* alone. *Emmerdale* had the lowest average per episodes (precisely 1.16), whilst the highest average (almost 4 per episode) was that of *Hollyoaks*. In between came *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* with virtually identical averages of 2.5 scenes per episode. However, the exclusion of *Hollyoaks in the City*’s contribution

resulted in a significant deflation of the overall average of scenes for the other soap operas, from 3.6 to 2.1 scenes per episode²¹ or 6.5 to 4.2 scenes per hour. The contribution of *Hollyoaks in the City* to such inflation, as well as the inclusion of it within the soap operas, *proper*, sample will need to be qualified, as will be explained further below.

Soap Opera	Scenes per episode
<i>Coronation Street</i>	2.5
<i>EastEnders</i>	2.4
<i>Emmerdale</i>	1.16
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	3.98
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	16.1
<i>Home and Away</i>	1.85
<i>Neighbours</i>	1.25

Table 4-1 Average number of scenes with sexual content per episode for each one of the seven soap operas.

4.1.2 Prevalence vs. Nature of Sexual Content

In this study, two main types of portrayals were catalogued and examined according to the nature of the ongoing sexual activity within the scenes. The first type, ‘sexual talk’, encompassed references to or discussions of any aspects of sexual relationships and sex and sexuality in general. Accordingly, interactions involving ‘sexual talk’ were only verbal, and *were not* accompanied by overt sexual behaviours of any sort. The second type, ‘sexual behaviour’, encompassed any physical interactions that implied potential sexual intimacy; thus, in order for behaviours to be considered in this type, they had to be sexually intimate and physically overt. Dialogue and discussion of sexual nature embedded within scenes catalogued as ‘sexual behaviour’ were not coded again as ‘sexual talk’, simply to avoid double coding and therefore inflated findings.

It was found that ‘sexual talk’ portrayals were much more prevalent than portrayals of ‘sexual behaviour’. The former accounted for just over 62% (315 portrayals) of the entire sexual content found across the seven soap operas, whereas ‘sexual behaviour’ portrayals accounted for 38% (191 portrayals). This particular

²¹ Note that *Hollyoaks in the City* episodes were hour-long

finding, more talk than visually depicted behaviours, is in line with the findings of many studies reviewed in the preceding chapters (Chapters One and Two) especially those of the Kaiser Family Foundation.

In terms of the average number of scenes per hour for each of the two main types, the results in general indicate that there were 2.5 scenes per hour featuring sexual behaviours and 4 scenes per hour of sexual talks; but when the contribution of *Hollyoaks in the City* was excluded, the averages shrank to 1.6 scenes per hour for the former, and 2.6 scenes per hour for the latter. *Hollyoaks in the City*'s averages, however, were considerably bigger, 10 scenes per hour of 'sexual talk' portrayals and 6 scenes per hour of 'sexual behaviour'.

These two overall percentages mentioned above were not replicated across the board when each soap opera was looked at separately as Table 4-2 shows. Soap opera comparisons indicated that there were noticeable differences in the type of portrayals used by individual soap operas to depict sex and sexuality, and such differences were found to be statistically significant ($X^2=15.356$, $df=6$, $p<.02$).

Soap Operas		Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		
		Sexual Talk	Sexual Behaviour	Total
<i>Coronation Street</i>	Count	40	13	53
	% within Soap Operas	75.5%	24.5%	100.0%
<i>EastEnders</i>	Count	31	10	41
	% within Soap Operas	75.6%	24.4%	100.0%
<i>Emmerdale</i>	Count	19	10	29
	% within Soap Operas	65.5%	34.5%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	Count	42	37	79
	% within Soap Operas	53.2%	46.8%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	Count	151	91	242
	% within Soap Operas	62.4%	37.6%	100.0%
<i>Home & Away</i>	Count	22	15	37
	% within Soap Operas	59.5%	40.5%	100.0%
<i>Neighbours</i>	Count	10	15	25
	% within Soap Operas	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	315	191	506
	% within Soap Operas	62.3%	37.7%	100.0%

Table 4-2 Distribution of the two main types of sexual portrayals (Talk & Behaviour) across each of the seven soap operas

Comparisons showed that *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* were three times more likely to depict sex and sexuality in portrayals of 'sexual talk' than 'sexual

behaviour', as just over three-quarters (75%) of all sexual portrayals in the two soap operas were sexual talks, compared to just one-quarter (25%) sexual behaviours. This 3 to 1 ratio was by far the highest among all the soap operas, which overall showed some relative consistency in portraying sexual content more frequently through sexual narratives rather than through overt sexual behaviours.

The percentages of 'sexual behaviour' portrayals did not exceed 47% in each one of the six main soap operas with the exception of *Neighbours* which had 60% of its portrayals as sexual behaviour, as opposed to 40% as sexual talk. Interestingly, *Hollyoaks in the City*, the post-watershed spin-off which featured adult themes, remained within the exact parameters of the overall percentages for types, 62% sexual talk and 38% sexual behaviour.

4.1.3 Sexual Activity: Duration of Portrayals

In this study, the duration of each scene catalogued was measured in seconds to see whether or not there were differences in the amount of screen time occupied by portrayals of sexual behaviour and sexual talk, as well as differences in the time allocated to different sexual themes and storylines across the seven soap operas.

The total amount of running time occupied by portrayals of both sexual talk and behaviour in soap operas was just over 9 hours (540 minutes precisely). This time accounted for almost 12% of the entire 77 hours of soap opera output analysed in this study. The average length of a scene for the 506 scenes was just over 64 seconds, and scenes' durations ranged from as few as three seconds to a maximum of 480 seconds. However, the duration differences among all the 506 catalogued scenes were found to be statistically significant ($t(505)=33.099$, $p=001$). It is worth noting, however, that this time does not necessarily mean an average of purely sexual 'actions' or 'dialogues', but rather indicates the overall measured time of scenes containing sexual content.

A scene of 78 seconds may have only a 30-second-long portrayal of a specific sexual behaviour, while the rest of the time is dedicated to other aspects of either the act itself or the development of a storyline which may have been pivotal to the activity in question. But having said that, the 'degree of focus' measurement, which

will be discussed later, gives us, to some extent, an idea about the weight of sexual activity within a scene which may indicate whether or not the sexual theme constituted a small or significant part of a scene.

The average duration of scenes with sexual content for each of the seven soap operas separately was not markedly different from the overall average of 64 seconds per scene, with the exception of *EastEnders*, which had the highest average of almost 80 seconds per scene, and *Home and Away*, the lowest average of 58 seconds per scene. The other five soap operas had averages of duration that oscillated between 62 to 67 seconds per scene (see Table 4-3)

One of the significant elements in terms of the duration patterns found in almost all the soap operas was the difference in the duration of sexual activity observed across the two main types of sexual portrayals. Scenes containing 'sexual talk' portrayals tended to be much lengthier than those containing 'sexual behaviour'. The average duration of scenes with 'sexual talk' for the overall sample was around 70 seconds, whilst the average for scenes with 'sexual behaviour' was around 54 seconds.

Further, the observed differences between the two types of portrayals in terms of scenes duration were found to be statistically significant ($t(504)=4.049$, $p=001$). Table 4-4 shows the duration averages of scenes containing either sexual talk or behaviour for each of the seven soap operas separately. The differences across soaps with regard to the scene duration between the two types, 'talk' and 'behaviour' were significant. In fact, soap operas individually reflected the overall duration patterns of lengthier scenes for 'sexual talk', and shorter ones for 'sexual behaviour', with the exception, once again, of *EastEnders*, whose lengthier scenes were those involving sexual talk with an average of 83 seconds. The average duration of scenes in *Hollyoaks* was noticeably different from the rest in that the scenes with sexual talk were more than twice as long as those with sexual behaviour (83 seconds per scene for sexual talk and 44 seconds for sexual behaviour).

Soap Opera	Length of scene in seconds
<i>Coronation Street</i>	62.53
<i>EastEnders</i>	79.12
<i>Emmerdale</i>	66.90
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	65.29
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	61.67
<i>Home and Away</i>	65.16
<i>Neighbours</i>	58.12

Table 4-3 Average length of scenes with sexual content for each of the seven soap operas.

Soap Opera	Nature of sexual activity (Length of scene in seconds)	
	Sexual Behaviour	Sexual Talk
<i>Coronation Street</i>	57.77	64.08
<i>EastEnders</i>	82.50	78.03
<i>Emmerdale</i>	61.10	70.00
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	44.68	83.45
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	54.12	66.21
<i>Home and Away</i>	53.73	73.00
<i>Neighbours</i>	52.00	67.30

Table 4-4 Average length of scenes with sexual ‘talk’ and ‘behaviour’ for each of the seven soap operas.

4.1.4 Types of Sexual Activity: Types of Talks & Types of Behaviours

Content analyses of sexual content in television programming have often indicated that different types of sexual activity are shown on screen with frequencies that may vary depending on many factors, such as the type of channel, time of transmission, genre, topicality and storyline developments etc. Some American studies, for instance, showed that sexual activity in daytime TV programmes tended to be verbal compared to prime-time programmes, which often tended to visually portray sexual activity such as sexual intercourse and passionate kissing. Also, it was found that programmes most viewed by teenagers had a much higher concentration of sexual content levels than those observed in prime-time programming (Greenberg, Stanley, Siemicki, Soderman, Heeter, and Linsangan, 1993; Kunkel et al., 1999, 2003). Likewise, British and Irish research revealed that mild sex portrayals in the forms of passionate kissing and intimate touching were more pervasive on TV than depictions of sexual intercourse and explicit sexual materials (Millwood Hargrave, 1992; MacKeogh, 2005).

This research examined the frequencies of sexual types and their prevalence and distribution across the various soap operas. As mentioned earlier, sexual activity in this study was classified in terms of whether it was portrayed as sexual talk (verbal interaction only) or as sexual behaviour (overt physical behaviours). Furthermore, those portrayals were categorised into thirteen types of sexual talk and ten types of sexual behaviour. Sexual content within a scene was coded as one of the above 23 categories only to avoid producing inflated and misleading findings.

When a scene was potentially codable under more than one category, a judgement was made based upon the weight of the theme/category and storyline development. It is worth noting, however, that very rarely did a single sexual activity or interaction fit simultaneously in more than one category throughout the sample, and when that occurred the storylines and narratives made it clear which category a sexual interaction fitted most. A by-product finding, as it were, emerged from the initial phases of testing the coding schedule, and more importantly from the subsequent coding procedures which made it almost self-evident that soap opera, as a TV genre, very seldom tackled more than one sexual theme or issue per scene; and this was observed right across the board. Scenes with sexual content were, in and of themselves, mini self-contained themes carried forward from one episode to the next by the unravelling narratives of storylines.

For the both main types of portrayals a hierarchy of sexual activity was employed. The structure of this hierarchy can be thought of as a pyramid. First, in the sexual talk type, only 'talk about sexual intercourse' which had *already occurred* sat at the top of the pyramid, which meant that any reference to sexual intercourse in whatever conversations, diverse, short or long, automatically qualified the sexual portrayal in question to be coded under the 'talk about sexual intercourse' category, except for conversations that involved prostitution and incest themes. Secondly, in the behaviour type the sexual intercourse and oral sex categories sat at the top of the pyramid followed by passionate kissing, intimate touching, and physical suggestiveness respectively.

4.1.4.1 Types of Sexual Talk

The results in this research showed that the distribution of a range of different types of sexual talk across the seven soap operas was to some extent balanced, in that no single type accounted for the overwhelming majority of sexual talk, but nevertheless disparities in the distribution of sexual portrayals across the various types of sexual talk were found to be statistically very significant ($X^2=260.810$, $df=11$, $p<.001$). Of the total 315 scenes containing only sexual talk (62% of the overall sexual content), 84 scenes (27%) were ‘comments about own or others’ sexual interests, acts and intentions’, followed by ‘talk about sexual intercourse’, 61 scenes (19.5%). These two categories combined accounted for nearly half of the sexual talk in the entire sample, and were clearly by far the most common types of sexual talk (see Figure 4-2).

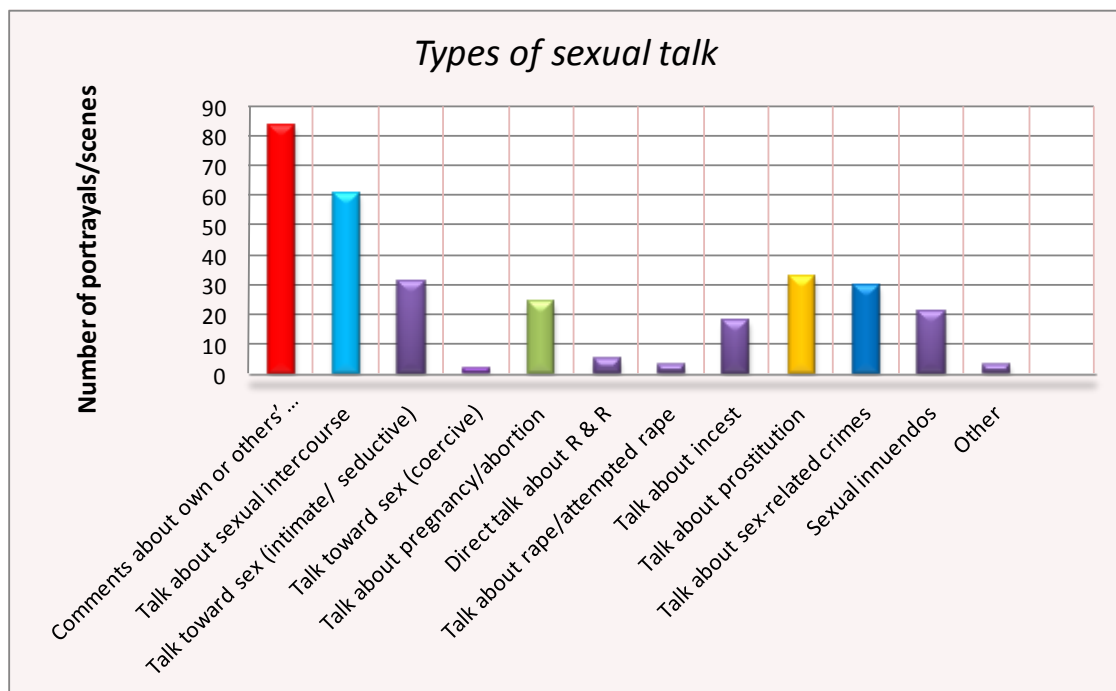


Figure 4-2 The overall frequencies of all sexual types²² found across the entire sample.

The second most reoccurring categories were talk toward sex (10.5%), talk about prostitution (10.5) and talk about sex-related crimes (9.5%). The three categories that dealt directly with sexual risks and responsibilities (R & R) themes,

²² Note there were no portrayals featuring ‘expert advice or technical information’. Therefore, only 12 types were included in this bar-chart.

which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven, represented a significant 9%. The talk about incest category, the most controversial type of all, represented a relatively large percentage of almost 6% (18 portrayals). Sexual innuendoes made up nearly 7% of all sexual talks. Finally, only 3 scenes (1%) were not codable under any of the already mentioned categories. Box (1) provides an idea of the types and contexts of sexual talk identified in soap operas and coded in this study, as two fully transcribed scenes of the most frequently reoccurring types of sexual talk in this study are included in the box below.

The frequencies of sexual talk categories varied dramatically in each one of the seven soaps, contrary to the observed frequency patterns found across the two main types of talks and behaviours, which were more consistent and uniform in terms of their distribution across the board, as well as within each of the soap operas individually (see Table 5); and, further, the differences found across the seven soap operas were statistically significant, ($X^2=3.495$, $df=66$, $p<.001$).

‘Comments about own and others’ sexual interests and actions’ category, which was the most commonly occurring type overall, occurred least frequently in *Coronation Street* (only 7.5%)²³, *Home and Away* (9%) and *EastEnders* (10%), and most frequently in *Hollyoaks in the City* (39%) *Emmerdale* (37%) *Neighbours* (20%) and *Hollyoaks* (19%); *Hollyoaks in the City*’s contribution alone to this category, which heavily skewed the overall percentage, was the largest among all seven soap operas, with 70% (59 scenes out of 84) of all ‘Comments about own and others’ sexual interests and actions’ scenes found in this soap opera.

Likewise, the second most common type, ‘talk about sexual intercourse’, was distributed so unevenly among the seven soaps with, once again, *Coronation Street* having the fewest occurrences (only 5% of its overall sexual talk portrayals) and the following soap operas having the most occurrences: *EastEnders* (32%) *Hollyoaks in the City* (22%) *Emmerdale* (21%) *Neighbours* (20%) *Hollyoaks* (18%) *Home and Away* (9%). ‘Talk toward sex’ in general was present in all the soap operas but once

²³ Percentages mentioned here are just those of the sexual talk categories within each individual soap opera, not the overall sexual talks reported across the entire sample.

again unevenly distributed across the seven. In *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*, for instance, ‘talk toward sex’ portrayals accounted for considerable proportions of the sexual talk within them (20% for the former, and 37% for the latter), whereas in *Hollyoaks in the City* such portrayals accounted for 3% of the their total sexual talk scenes (also see Table 4-5 for the number of scenes/portrayals)

BOX (4-1)

Scene [1]

In the following scene Charlie, a builder, and his girlfriend Tracy, a single mother, are having problems in keeping their relationship going. Charlie thinks his relationship with Tracy is over now, making her unwillingness to have an intimate sexual relationship with him an excuse to end the relationship and to further manipulate her. Charlie has just informed Tracy that their relationship is over now:

Tracy [astonishingly replying]: ‘What do you mean that’s it?’

Charlie [replies emphatically]: ‘We’re finished, it’s over.’

Tracy [furiously interrupts]: ‘Well because I do not jump in the... with you as soon you click your fingers.’

Charlie [promptly]: ‘But we used to have...’

Tracy [interrupting again]: ‘You can’t expect things to be like they were in the olden days, Charlie!’

Charlie [very cool, reading his newspaper while sitting on the sofa putting his feet up on the coffee table]: ‘A healthy sex life is what made us tick.’

The couple end their conversation with various accusations of disloyalty.

[Coronation Street: this scene was coded as ‘comments about own or others’ sexual interests, acts and intentions’]

Scene [2]

Lisa, a young model working for the modelling agency Gloss, is broken hearted as she broke up with her boyfriend Ben, a young bouncer, whom Lisa discovered having sex with her best friend Poll, and decided that their relationship was over. Distraught and drunk the night before, Lisa had sex with Oson, a young film director, to escape from her pain and reality. In this scene, Ben enters the house which he shared with Lisa and other friends to collect his things, Lisa encounters him and asks him to leave the house immediately; Ben pleads with her to allow him to talk with her for a couple of minutes to explain his position. Lisa lashes out at him and reveals what she has been up to since they broke up:

Lisa [angrily]: ‘I had sex with Oson last night.’

Ben: ‘I know you wanna hurt me, I can understand why.’

Lisa [furiously and provocatively]: ‘Did you hear what I just said? Me and Oson shagging each other.’

Ben [angrily]: ‘Don’t say these things, alright, I don’t wanna know.’

Lisa [more provocative]: ‘Do you want to know if he is better than you?’

Ben: ‘no I don’t.’

Lisa: ‘Guess what Ben! He was. You wouldn’t think it’s luck with him, would you? But they always say it is the quiet ones, don’t they?’

Ben: ‘I’m sorry about what happened.’

Lisa [interrupting]: ‘What? You mean you and Polly, or me finding about you and Polly?’

Ben: ‘It was a shitty way to find out...’

Lisa: ‘It was a shitty thing to do.’

Ben [sad and guilty, dropping his head]: ‘It just happened.’

Lisa [dashes off and leaves him alone]: ‘Spare me....’ [End of scene]

[Hollyoaks in the City: this scene was coded as ‘talk about sexual intercourse.’]

Type of Sexual Talk		Soap Operas							
		<i>Coronation Street</i>	<i>EastEnders</i>	<i>Emmerdale</i>	<i>Hollyoaks</i>	<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	<i>Home & Away</i>	<i>Neighbours</i>	<i>Total</i>
Comments about own or others' sexual interests/intentions/acts	Count	3	3	7	8	59	2	2	84
	% within Soap Operas	7.5%	9.7%	36.8%	19.0%	39.1%	9.1%	20.0%	26.7%
Talk about sexual intercourse	Count	2	10	4	7	34	2	2	61
	% within Soap Operas	5.0%	32.3%	21.1%	16.7%	22.5%	9.1%	20.0%	19.4%
Talk toward sex (intimate/ seductive)	Count	8	2	7	3	5	4	2	31
	% within Soap Operas	20.0%	6.5%	36.8%	7.1%	3.3%	18.2%	20.0%	9.8%
Talk toward sex (coercive)	Count	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	3.2%	.0%	.0%	.7%	.0%	.0%	.6%
Talk about pregnancy/abortion	Count	9	11	0	0	1	0	3	24
	% within Soap Operas	22.5%	35.5%	.0%	.0%	.7%	.0%	30.0%	7.6%
Direct talk about Risk and Responsibility	Count	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	5
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.8%	.0%	13.6%	.0%	1.6%
Talk about rape/attempted rape	Count	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.0%	.0%	.0%	1.0%
Talk about incest	Count	17	0	0	0	1	0	0	18
	% within Soap Operas	42.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.7%	.0%	.0%	5.7%
Talk about prostitution	Count	0	0	0	5	28	0	0	33
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	11.9%	18.5%	.0%	.0%	10.5%
Sexual innuendos	Count	1	4	1	3	7	4	1	21
	% within Soap Operas	2.5%	12.9%	5.3%	7.1%	4.6%	18.2%	10.0%	6.7%
Talk about sex-related crimes	Count	0	0	0	14	9	7	0	30
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	33.3%	6.0%	31.8%	.0%	9.5%
Other	Count	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.0%	.0%	.0%	1.0%
Total	Count	40	31	19	42	151	22	10	315
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4-5 Frequencies and percentages of types of sexual talk found in each of the seven soap operas.

On the other hand, the theme-specific sexual talk portrayals were largely concentrated in soap operas that were more likely to have featured themes of direct relevance to the sexual activity concerned. Thus, ‘talk about prostitution’, which was made up of a substantial 10% of the overall sexual talk, was found only in *Hollyoaks in the City* (28 portrayals) and *Hollyoaks* (five portrayals) representing, respectively, 18.5% and 12% of the sexual talk portrayals within the mentioned soap operas. Similarly, 18 scenes containing ‘talk about incest’ were found only in *Coronation Street* (17 scenes; almost 43% of sexual talk in the soap) and in *Hollyoaks in the City* (one scene only).

The sex crime category, which accounted for 9.5% of the overall talk, was concentrated in just three soaps operas and represented, respectively, 33% and 32% of *Hollyoaks*’ and *Home and Away*’s overall sexual talks. *Hollyoaks in the City* was found to contain the only three scenes that dealt with rape found in the sample, alongside nine more scenes that dealt with various sex-crime related portrayals; those two categories combined constituted just 8% of the soap’s sexual talks. Sexual innuendoes were found in the seven soaps, and were more or less evenly distributed.

Scenes involving direct talks about pregnancy/abortion and general R & R themes occurred predominantly in the two most popular soaps, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, comprising therefore significantly large percentages of the overall sexual talks found in them; of a total of 29 scenes, 11 were found in *EastEnders*, constituting the most featured sexual talk (35% of all the talks in the soap), and 9 in *Coronation Street* (22%, the second most common talk category). However, *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City*, although both accounting for over 60% of the overall sexual talk, had between them as few as three scenes featuring direct R & R themes out of the total 193 scenes (see Chapter Seven).

4.1.4.2 Types of Sexual Behaviours

The distribution of scenes with sexual behaviours across the ten types or categories of behaviours was heavily imbalanced, primarily in favour of just two types—differences were statistically very significant ($X^2=570.518$, $df=9$, $p<.001$). Table (6) shows clearly that only two types of behaviours were most commonly

portrayed, comprising over two-thirds (78%) of the entire 191 scenes identified as sexual behaviours across the seven soap operas. Not only was 'Passionate kissing' the most occurring type of sexual behaviours, but it was also found to be the most frequent type of portrayal overall, accounting for over 22% (114 scenes) of all portrayals, talks and behaviours combined, and for almost 60% of behaviours alone.

The second most common sexual behaviour was 'sexual intercourse implied', representing 18% of sexual behaviours and almost 7% of the overall sexual portrayals, which is significantly less than the 'passionate kissing' percentages. By contrast, 'sexual intercourse depicted' represented less than 5% of sexual behaviours which, in other words, means that soap operas were almost four times more likely to portray sexual intercourse as implied than depicted.

Three scenes (less than 2%) of 'oral sex' behaviours, one implied and two depicted, were identified and found to be of a quite explicit and controversial nature. Both 'physical suggestiveness' and 'intimate touching', on the other hand, accounted for less than 9% of behaviours, and rape and sexual assault for only 2%. There were 10 sexual behaviours (5%) coded as 'other', which were not codable under any of the previous nine behaviours; those behaviours included mainly masturbation, strip-tease and lap-dancing, and sexual photo shoots, and screening of pornographic materials. Box (4-2) provides examples (two transcribed scenes) of sexual behaviours most frequently portrayed in soap operas.

Box (4-2)

Scene [1]

Max, a married middle-aged man, went to his young son Bradley to find out what had happened between him and his girl friend, Stacy. Bradley had already asked his father not to intervene; but in the end, a fight broke out in which Max ended up punching his son in the face. Angry at his own reaction towards his son, Max retreats to Tracy's place to tell her about what has happened; after a long conversation

Tracy believes that her relationship with Bradley is irreparable; angry and emotionally disturbed, Stacy feels that Max is interested in her and wants her to break up with his son Bradley:

Max: 'I just want to make you feel alright.'

Stacy [standing in front of Max, inches away]: 'Do you really Max?'

Max: 'That's all I ever wanted.'

Stacy: 'Do you Max? Is that what you really want?' [Bringing her face closer to his]

Max [looking into her eyes and mouth as she speaks]: 'What do you mean?'

Stacy: 'Well look at you now!'

Max: 'I don't know what you're talking about.'

Stacy (softly caressing his chest): 'I think you do.' [She takes his hands and puts them on her waist, saying]: 'come on... you can touch me...no one is saying no...'

Max [still holding her]: 'You've got this all wrong.'

Stacy: 'I don't think I have...I know you...I know what you're like...knew it the first time I saw you...'nice shoes' you said you couldn't take your eyes off my belly and feet....[tightening her hands on his and pushing them aggressively towards her breast]

Max [feeling uncomfortable]: 'Stacy, I am a married man; you're my son's girlfriend.'

Stacy [promptly]: 'Not anymore....don't you wanna know what it's like... just to kiss me.'

Max [unconvincingly]: ‘Noh’. Stacy kisses him first on the mouth, Max says, ‘this is wrong’, Stacy replies, ‘but it’s nice though’, and then both start kissing frantically till the end of the scene.

[EastEnders: this scene was coded as ‘passionate kissing’]

Scene [2]

Les and Yana, both in their early fifties, are sleeping on the sofa, with Les in his underwear, indicating that they’ve just had sexual intercourse. Suddenly, Chesney, Les’ thirteen-year old son, opens the door and barges in; the couple instantly wake up and panic, realizing they may have been caught; they try to put their clothes on quickly so as not to raise Chesney’s suspicion, but it is too late. Chesney comes closer to them and stands in front of the sofa and asks where his mother is while his eyes are surveying the scene and sensing the discomfort and unease in the air. Les quickly responds as he is doing his shirt buttons, ‘I don’t know’, Chesney asks, ‘has she not come back then’, a long pause, silence prevails; Chesney eventually comprehends what has been going on, and promptly asks: ‘what’s going on?’, Les trying to divert his attention, replies: ‘I don’t know till I speak to her...I will try her mobile phone and’; Chesney interrupts him, ‘no, I mean what’s going on with you too?’, Yana, doing up her dress buttons and adjusting herself, replies ‘nothing Chesney love’;

Chesney [agitated]: ‘I am not thick you know, I am twelve, I know what’s what’; **Yana**: ‘I didn’t feel so well, I just needed a lie-down’

Chesney: ‘A lie-down!! With your buttons undone!’

Les [shouting]: ‘That’s enough’.

Chesney turns his back on them and leaves the scene.

[Coronation Street: this scene was coded as ‘sexual intercourse implied’]

Major disparities were found in terms of each soap opera’s share of sexual behaviours, as well as in the distribution of different types of sexual behaviours across each of the seven soaps operas ($X^2=69.564$, $df=54$, $p<.02$).

Once again, *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Hollyoaks* were found to contain significantly more sexual behaviours (almost two-thirds, 67%, of all the 191 behaviours) than the rest of the soaps put together. *Hollyoaks in the City*, alone, accounted for almost 48% (91 portrayals) of the overall behaviours and *Hollyoaks* for 19% (37 portrayals); whereas the three mainstream soaps combined accounted for only 17% (*Coronation Street* 7% (13 portrayals), *EastEnders* 5% and *Emmerdale* 5%), and the *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* for 8% (15 portrayals) each.

Furthermore, portrayals of sexual behaviour were even more unevenly distributed among the seven soap operas than those of their counterparts of sexual talk, with some behaviours concentrated solely in one or two soap operas as Table 4-6 shows. 'Passionate kissing', the most common type of behaviour, was clearly present in all the soaps, constituting the highest proportion of the overall sexual behaviours portrayed within each one of the seven soap operas, with percentages as high as 87% (13 portrayals out of 15) for *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, 80% for *Emmerdale*, 70% for *EastEnders*, 69% for *Coronation Street*, 67% for *Hollyoaks* and 43% for *Hollyoaks in the City*. 'Intimate touching' depictions (9 cases in total), however, were found in five soaps. 'Physical flirting and suggestiveness' occurred 9 times only, once in *Hollyoaks* and 8 times in *Hollyoaks in the City*.

'Sexual intercourse implied' portrayals, although the second most commonly occurring behaviour (18% of all behaviours), were found in only four soap operas and occurred far more frequently in just two. *Hollyoaks in the City*, again, portrayed implied intercourse 21 times, *Hollyoaks* eight times, *Coronation Street* three times, *Home and Away* twice and *Neighbours* only once, while *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale* did not show any. On the other hand, portrayals of 'sexual intercourse depicted' occurred nine times and were found *exclusively* in *Hollyoaks in the City*. Similarly, three oral sex portrayals, implied (1) and depicted (2), were also found *only* in *Hollyoaks in the City*.

Coronation Street featured one incident of sexual assault at a 'cocktail party', while *Hollyoaks in the City* showed two very sexually explicit and controversial rape

scenes in which a young model was drugged and gang-raped at an ‘underwear’ (adult theme) party.

Type of Sexual Behaviour		Soap Operas							
		<i>Coronation Street</i>	<i>EastEnders</i>	<i>Emmerdale</i>	<i>Hollyoaks</i>	<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	<i>Home & Away</i>	<i>Neighbours</i>	<i>Total</i>
Physical flirting or suggestiveness	Count	0	0	0	1	8	0	0	9
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.7%	8.8%	.0%	.0%	4.7%
Intimate touching	Count	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	7
	% within Soap Operas	7.7%	10.0%	20.0%	5.4%	1.1%	.0%	.0%	3.7%
Passionate/intimate kissing	Count	9	7	8	25	39	13	13	114
	% within Soap Operas	69.2%	70.0%	80.0%	67.6%	42.9%	86.7%	86.7%	59.7%
Sexual intercourse depicted	Count	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	9
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	9.9%	.0%	.0%	4.7%
Sexual intercourse implied	Count	3	0	0	8	21	2	1	35
	% within Soap Operas	23.1%	.0%	.0%	21.6%	23.1%	13.3%	6.7%	18.3%
Oral sex depicted	Count	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.2%	.0%	.0%	1.0%
Oral sex implied	Count	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.1%	.0%	.0%	.5%
Rape/attempted rape	Count	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.2%	.0%	.0%	1.0%
Sexual assault	Count	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	10.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	6.7%	1.0%
Other	Count	0	1	0	1	8	0	0	10
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	10.0%	.0%	2.7%	8.8%	.0%	.0%	5.2%
Total	Count	13	10	10	37	91	15	15	191
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4-6 Frequencies and percentages of types of sexual behaviours found in each of the seven soap operas.

4.1.5 Sexual Portrayals: Levels of Visual Sexual Explicitness

In this study all the scenes containing sexual content, regardless of whether they depicted behaviour or talk,²⁴ were assessed for the level of explicitness (visual explicitness), despite the fact that quantifying explicitness is quite difficult to pin down; but nevertheless the measure used here will provide some indication as to whether or not soap operas portrayed any sexually explicit materials. Explicitness here comprised five levels, the highest being full nudity: (0) no explicitness, (1) provocative or suggestive dress or appearance (2) disrobing: characters begin to undress themselves as they engage in sexual acts, (3) partial but high level of nudity: characters are wearing very little clothing or are semi-naked, (4) discreet nudity: it is inferred that characters are naked, and (5) nudity (frontal and non-frontal nudity): characters are shown completely naked and parts of either their genitalia, buttocks or, in women's case, breasts, are shown.

Having measured both behaviours and talks, it is perhaps misleading to conflate and present both results together, since visual explicitness, in terms of nudity, is strongly associated with behavioural portrayals rather than with those of narratives. But nonetheless, it is very helpful to first establish, or have a brief overview of, how explicit the overall sexual content was, and then look at each type of portrayal separately.

Of the total 506 scenes identified as containing sexual content, a great number of scenes (N=401), representing almost 80% of the overall scenes with sexual content, had zero explicitness. Meanwhile, the remaining 105 scenes (nearly 20%) were found to contain varying degrees of explicitness. The three highest levels of explicitness were most prevalent in the majority of the 105 scenes, with 'full nudity'

²⁴ The rationale for assessing the level of explicitness in scenes containing only sexual talks is that, after testing the coding categories on a few episodes, especially those selected from *Hollyoaks in the City*, *Home and Away* and *Hollyoaks*, it was very evident that some conversations occurred among characters who were completely or partially naked for various reasons, which at times included 'aftermath of sexual behaviour' or 'parties of adult themes'. The interactions within those scenes were not tantamount to 'sexual behaviours' of any sort; however, the dialogues were of a sexual nature and paramount. It was important in those cases to capture both the dialogue and level of explicitness.

found in 12 scenes, ‘discreet nudity’ in 34, and similarly ‘partial but high level of nudity’ in 34. ‘Provocative or suggestive appearance’ and ‘disrobing’ were also found in 25 scenes (see Figure 4-3 for percentages). The reported differences in the levels of explicitness found across the 506 scenes were statistically very significant ($X^2=1434.277$, $df=5$, $p<.001$).

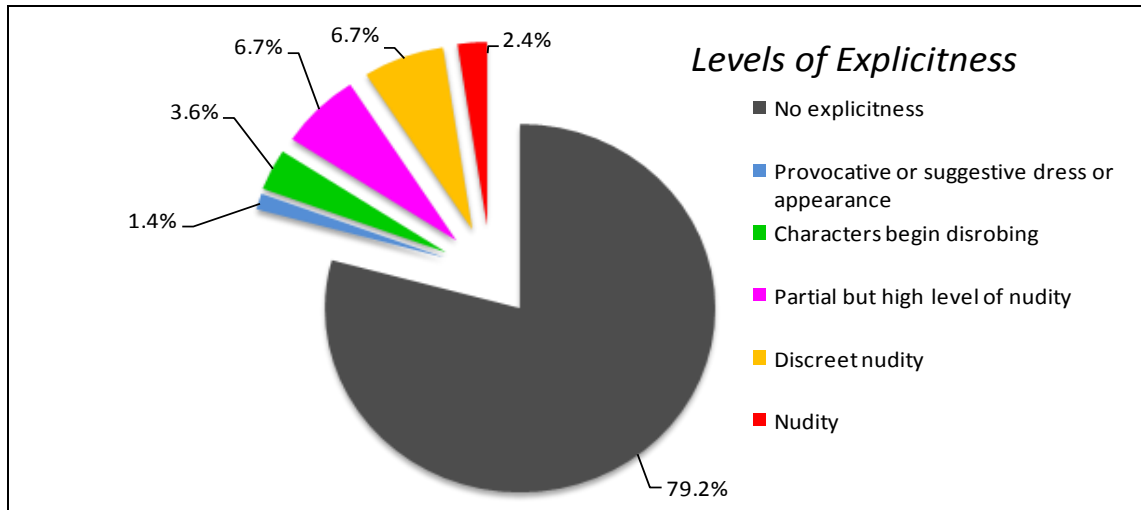


Figure 4-3 Levels of explicitness across all sexual portrayals.

Likewise, there were noticeable differences among the seven soap operas with regard to the levels of sexual explicitness displayed across both types of portrayals (talks and behaviours). Those differences were also found to be statistically significant ($X^2=68.559$, $df=30$, $p<.001$), (see Appendix: Table 1.1).

As Figure 4-4 below shows, 106 scenes (just over 55%) of the overall scenes containing sexual behaviours were found not to be of an explicit nature at all. It is perhaps a fair reflection given that the majority of behaviours (almost 60%) found in this study were passionate kissing portrayals; nevertheless this did not necessarily indicate that cases of passionate kissing were not accompanied by varying degrees of explicitness. For instance, there seems to be a correlation between increases in the level of intimacy and increases in the level of explicitness.

Most sexual intercourse portrayals, depicted as well as implied (27 out of 44), featured high levels of explicitness, discreet and full nudity, compared to a very few of scenes containing passionate kissing (six out of 114 portrayals of passionate kissing)—(see Appendix: Table 1.2). However, the three highest levels of

explicitness, again, accounted for what can be considered as a significant portion of the total numbers of behaviours, 65 (34%) portrayals of sexual behaviours. Interestingly, 4% (eight scenes) of behavioural portrayals contained ‘full nudity’, almost 17% (32 scenes) ‘discreet nudity’ and 13% (25 scenes) partial but high level of nudity. 20 scenes were found to contain ‘disrobing’ and ‘provocative or suggestive appearance’, representing respectively almost 9% (17 scenes) and 1.6% (three scenes) of the overall sexual behaviours.

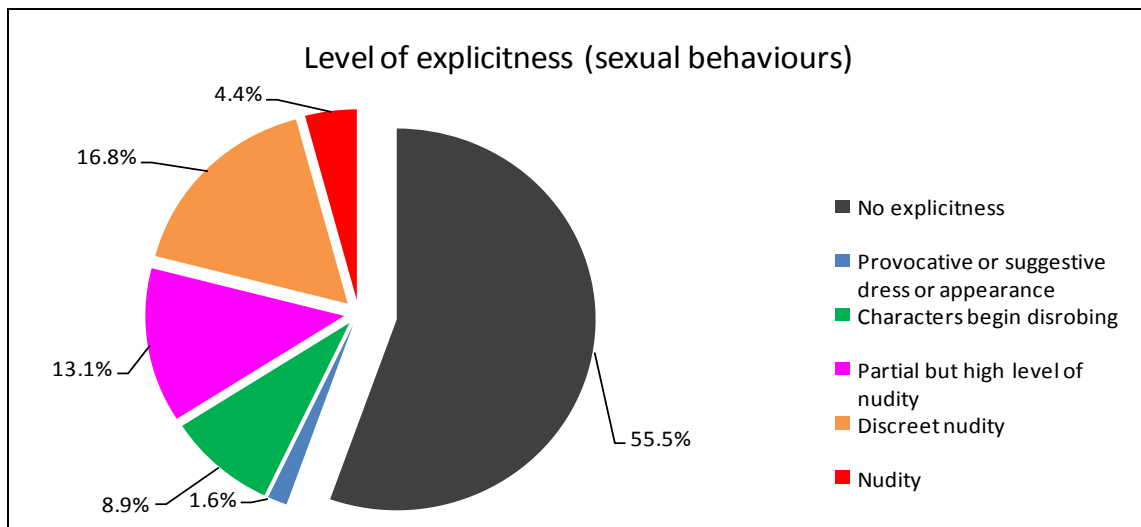


Figure 4-4 Levels of explicitness in scenes featuring Sexual Behaviours only.

The distribution of those levels of explicitness of *sexual behaviours* across all the soaps, however, revealed the extent to which a particular soap opera or a cluster of soaps may show sexual content in an explicit format. Once again, the differences in the distribution of sexual behaviours among individual soap operas in terms of their explicitness were quite significant ($X^2=75.433$, $df=30$, $p<.001$).

Given its large proportion of sexual intercourse portrayals, *Hollyoaks in the City* had by far the highest numbers of scenes of all the five levels of explicitness, including the lowest and the highest. It was found to contain the most explicit sexual behaviours, accounting for (a) all the eight scenes featuring ‘full nudity’, (b) 23 out of 32 scenes featuring ‘discreet nudity’, (c) 22 out of 25 scenes featuring ‘partial but high level of nudity’, and (d) nine out of 20 scenes featuring ‘disrobing’ and ‘provocative or suggestive appearance’. To describe *Hollyoaks in the City*’s explicitness differently, it is sufficient to have a look at the number of scenes that

had zero explicitness (29 scenes only) and those that exhibited some degree of explicitness (62 scenes) and also consider the huge proportion of its explicit scenes and those of the other six soap operas: of the entire 85 scenes with some degree of explicitness found across all the soaps, only 23 (a quarter) were found across the six soap operas.

Hollyoaks, on the other hand, had eight scenes containing ‘discreet nudity’, three ‘partial but high level of nudity’ and five ‘disrobing’, making it second in terms of explicitness. *Coronation Street* and *Home and Away* had virtually no explicit scenes except for two each, which were just disrobing and discreet nudity. Meanwhile, *EastEnders* and *Neighbours* had the lowest level of explicitness (zero explicitness) which basically means that not a single portrayal of sexual behaviour was explicit. To sum up the level of explicitness in sexual behaviours, it is very clear that the behaviours with explicit nature were disproportionately concentrated in *Hollyoaks in the City*, whilst the other six soap operas had virtually zero or very insignificant levels of explicitness (Figure 4-5).

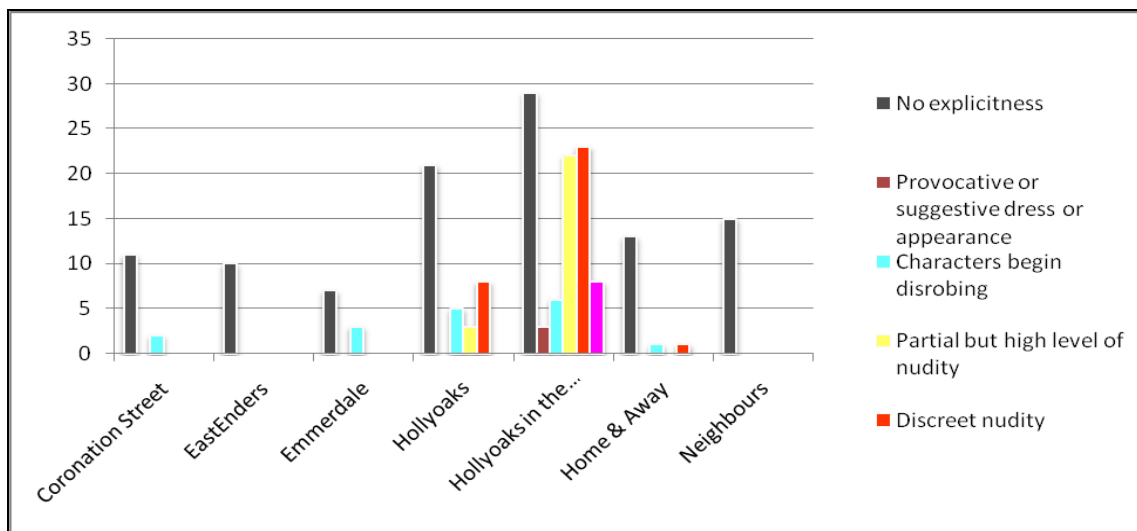


Figure 4-5 Frequencies of scenes with sexual explicitness (only sexual behaviours) for each of the seven soap operas.

As for the level of explicitness in scenes containing *only* sexual talk, nearly 94% (295) of those scenes did not contain sexually explicit content of any sort; while 20 scenes (6%) had varying degrees of explicitness and nudity (Figure 4-6).

The latter scenes were mainly found, once again, in *Hollyoaks in the City* (15 scenes) which included ‘full nudity’ (two scenes), ‘discreet nudity’ (two scenes), ‘partial but high level of nudity’ (seven scenes) and ‘disrobing’ (one scene). *Hollyoaks* also had two scenes with ‘full nudity’ and one with ‘disrobing’; while *Home and Away* accounted for the remaining two scenes containing partial but high levels of nudity. Again, the most popular soap operas, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, *Emmerdale* and *Neighbours* had zero explicitness as far as sexual talks were concerned. It is worth noting that the differences in the distribution of portrayals with sexual talk in terms of their explicitness across each of the seven soap operas were statistically non-significant ($X^2=20.792$, $df=30$, $p<.894$).

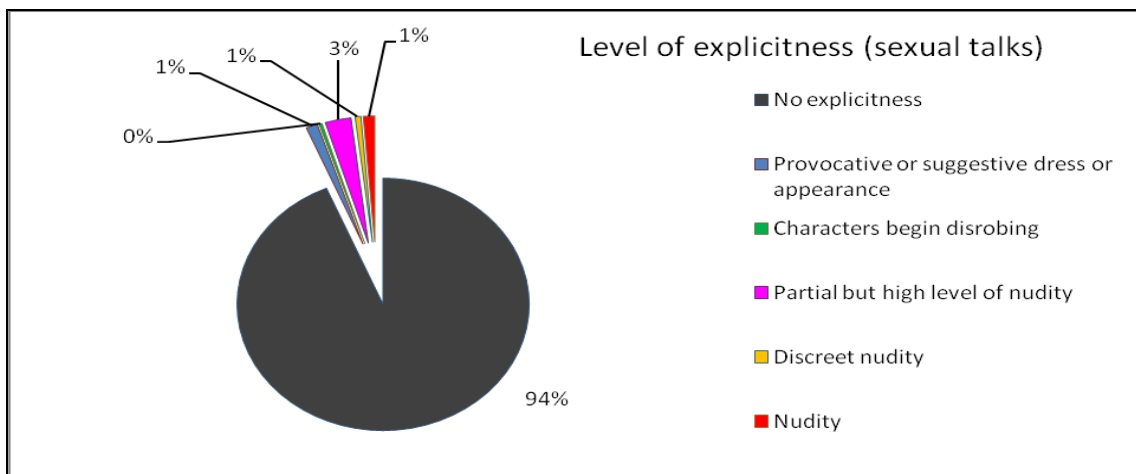


Figure 4-6 Levels of explicitness in scenes featuring Sexual Talk only.

4.1.6 Sexual Activity: Degree of Focus

To assess and establish how central sexual content was to a scene or a storyline, a degree of focus measure was used to differentiate minor or inconsequential references and portrayals from those that were placing considerable emphasis and weight upon the sexual activity within the scene and/or storyline. Four categories were employed for this purpose, inconsequential, minor, substantial and primary. Portrayals were considered to be ‘**inconsequential**’ only when references to or depictions of sexual activity occurred as an isolated remark or comment; throw-away comments and witty innuendoes were at times classified as ‘inconsequential’.

Sexual talk and behaviour were classified as ‘**minor**’ when they consisted of multiple and/or extended comments, references and behaviours of sexual nature

within the scene, but were not the primary focus of the scene—other ongoing actions and conversations were more important and central to the scene. By contrast, sexual *talk* and *behaviour* were deemed ‘**substantial**’ when actions and conversations were central to the scene but not necessarily important to the overall development of plot and storyline within the episode.

On the other hand, sexual talk and behaviour were considered to be of **primary** focus when talk and behaviour portrayed were (a) important and central to the scene in which they were embedded, and (b) contributed substantially to the storyline within the episode and the overall development of the plot.

This study found that more than three-quarters of the sexual talk and behaviour were of substantial and primary importance to the scenes and overall plots within which they were embedded, with more than half of the 506 portrayals (263 portrayals) considered to be of primary importance to the scene and plot, representing 52% of the overall sexual content found across the seven soap operas. Moreover, 145 portrayals (nearly 28%) were central to the scenes within which they were located, while 88 were of minor importance. Interestingly, only 10 portrayals were classified as inconsequential, representing just 2% of all behaviours and talks (Figure 4-7). However, differences in the frequencies of the four categories of focus were statistically significant ($X^2=269.004$, $df=3$, $p<.001$).

There were some significant disparities between sexual talk and behaviour in terms of the degree of focus, which were also found to be statistically significant ($X^2=16.105$, $df=3$, $p<.001$). In comparability terms, sexual talk portrayals in general tended to be much more embedded within the scenes and of greater importance to the storylines and overall plots than sexual behaviours. The percentages of sexual talk portrayals which were of primary and substantial focus were considerably greater than those of their counterparts in sexual behaviours: 59% (185 portrayals) of sexual talk were of primary focus and 26% (81 portrayals) of substantial focus, compared with 41% (78 portrayals) of primary focus and nearly 34% of substantial focus for the sexual behaviours. As for the two remaining degrees of focus, minor and inconsequential, portrayals of both talk and behaviour were evenly distributed

between them (44 portrayals each), however they represented different percentages of the overall sexual behaviours and talk due to the fact that portrayals of talk outnumbered those of behaviours by over 124 portrayals: 44 portrayals of minor focus constituting 14% of talk, as opposed to 23% of behaviour, while five portrayals of inconsequential focus represented 1.6% of all sexual talk, as opposed to 2.6% of sexual behaviour (Figure 4-8).

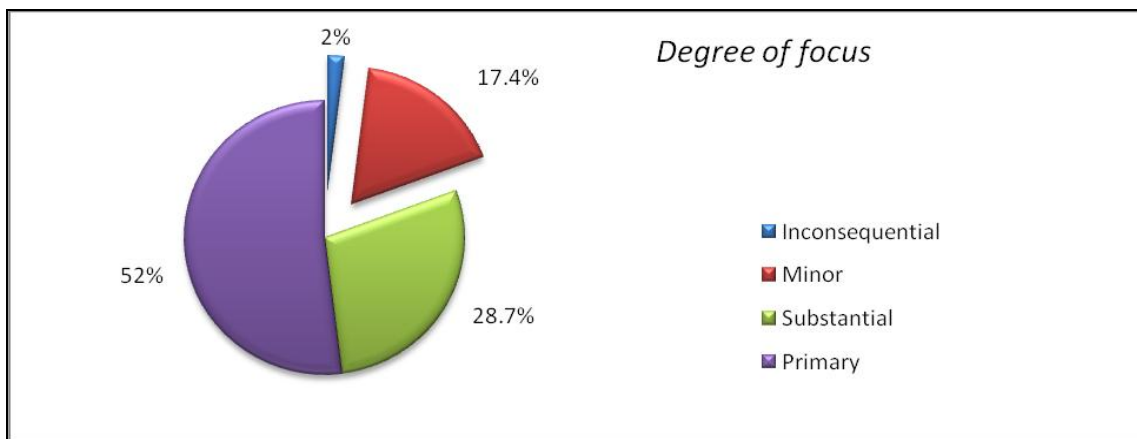


Figure 4-7 Degrees of focus across all sexual portrayals.

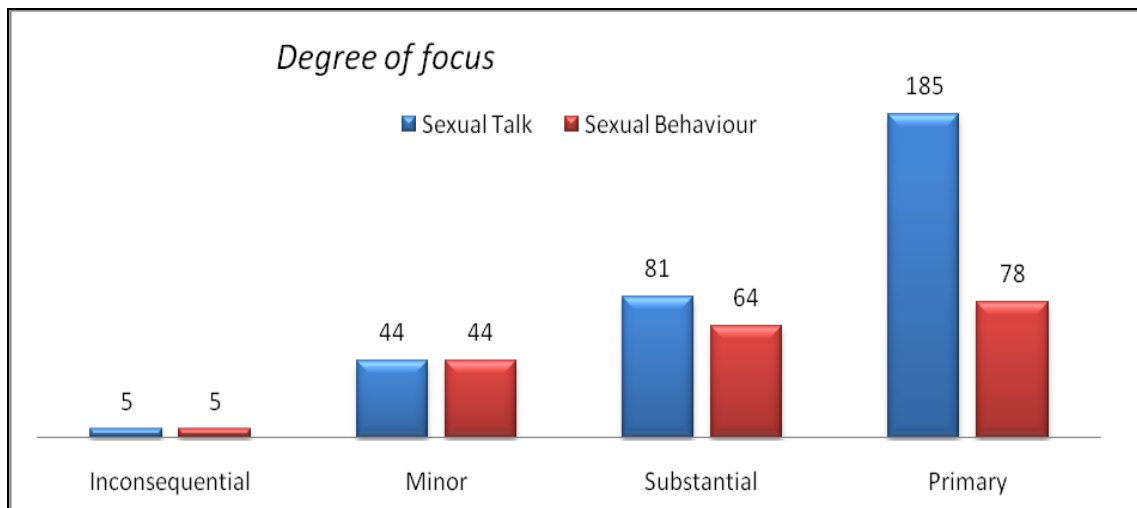


Figure 4-8 Frequencies of degree of focus found across both sexual behaviours and sexual talk.

There were some noticeable differences with regard to each soap opera's share of sexual portrayals (talk and behaviour) that were either of substantial or primary importance to the scenes and plots, and these differences were statistically significant ($X^2=52.283$, $df=18$, $p<.001$). Some soap operas' own percentages of the degree of focus varied considerably from the overall percentages mentioned above.

For instance, the majority of sexual portrayals in *Coronation Street* (75%), *EastEnders* (61%), *Home and Away* (65%), and *Hollyoaks* (60%) contributed substantially to the storylines with primary focus on sexual topics, compared to 41% in *Hollyoaks in the City*, and 44% in *Neighbours*; while, on the other hand, portrayals central to the scenes but not necessarily important to the plot were found to be more prevalent in *Hollyoaks* (25%), *Hollyoaks in the City* (almost 40%), *Neighbours* (32%) and *Emmerdale* (31%) than in the other four soaps (see Table 4-7).

Soap Operas		Degree of Focus				
		Inconsequential	Minor	Substantial	Primary	Total
Coronation Street	Count	0	6	7	40	53
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	11.3%	13.2%	75.5%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	1	12	3	25	41
	% within Soap Operas	2.4%	29.3%	7.3%	61.0%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	1	3	9	16	29
	% within Soap Operas	3.4%	10.3%	31.0%	55.2%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	2	10	20	47	79
	% within Soap Operas	2.5%	12.7%	25.3%	59.5%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	6	41	95	100	242
	% within Soap Operas	2.5%	16.9%	39.3%	41.3%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	0	10	3	24	37
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	27.0%	8.1%	64.9%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	0	6	8	11	25
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	24.0%	32.0%	44.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	10	88	145	263	506
	% within Soap Operas	2.0%	17.4%	28.7%	52.0%	100.0%

Table 4-7 Degree of focus on sexual activity across sexual portrayals in each of the seven soap operas.

In general, the degree of focus findings indicate that portrayals of sexual talk and behaviour across the seven soap operas were, in the main, central to the scenes within which they were embedded, and substantially more important to the storylines and overall plots. However, the findings indicated that differences between portrayals of sexual talk and those of sexual behaviour in terms of their emphasis on sexual content were statistically significant across both types of portrayals in general, but more significant across those of sexual behaviour ($X^2=49.801$, $df=18$, $p<.001$) than sexual talk ($X^2=36.181$, $df=18$, $p<.01$). The three most popular soap operas, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, and *Emmerdale*, were in

particular more likely to portray sexual activities that contributed significantly to the storylines and development of plots. Additionally, the four soaps aimed at younger viewers tended to include more sexual portrayals that were of significance to the scenes only (see Appendix: Tables 1.3 and 1.4 for degree of focus for each of portrayals of talk and behaviour, respectively, across all seven soap operas).

4.2 General Sexual Activity and Sexual Intercourse: Special Content Measures

Televised portrayals of sexual behaviours in general and sexual intercourse in particular, it has been argued, play a role in shaping young viewers' perception of, and attitudes towards, the patterns of sexual behaviours that are deemed as normative in a given culture, as well as providing a significant repertoire of behavioural cues from which young people, primarily teenagers, learn and which they use in their socialising processes (Brown et al. 2002; Kunkel et al., 1999, 2001 and 2003).

Furthermore, previous studies (Buckingham and Bragg, 2002 and 2003) make clear that sexual portrayals on television can be an important source of information with regard to the patterns of acceptable sexual behaviours. For instance, television viewers (soap operas viewers) who watched positive portrayals of gay characters and homosexuality tended to have positive attitudes towards gay people and the issue of homosexuality; and young people who watched storylines tackling in a positive manner the theme of sexual confusion, and were themselves sexually confused, felt encouraged to come out as the storylines indicated to them homosexuality was socially and culturally acceptable (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992 and 1999; Hobson, 2003; *Sex, Lies and Soaps*, 2006)

Similarly, aspects of sexual intercourse behaviours, such as the age of those engaged in this behaviour, the relationship contexts, when portrayed and with what frequency, could signal the social and cultural acceptability, or otherwise, of such patterns. Therefore, this section looks first into the orientation of sexual activity, whether behaviours or talks, the themes of sexual behaviours in general and sexual intercourse in particular, and finally assesses whether or not existing dialogues in all

sexual scenes made any reference, discriminatory or endorsing, to homosexuality as a distinct theme.

4.2.1 Orientation of Sexual Activity

The importance of examining the orientation of sexual activity in this research stems directly from the often repeated premise and/or criticism that soap operas thrive upon controversial and shocking storylines and themes of sexuality that have the potential to cause offence to a great many people. Homosexual and bisexual portrayals have, alongside sexual violence and illegal sex, often been singled out as the most likely to offend viewers. Soap operas have indeed incorporated numerous storylines dealing with homosexuality and sexual confusion over recent years, in part because of the recognition of changing sexuality; but nevertheless, both the inclusion and exclusion of such storylines and portrayals remains a sensitive issue for the public at large and for media producers and regulators. (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992; Gunter, 2002)

In this study, the orientation of sexual activity was classified in one of three categories, heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual. Both sexual talk and behaviour were coded. For sexual talk scenes, the story or discussion determined the orientation of the sexual activity, not the sexual orientation, of characters, although in most cases both were synonymous and inseparable. For sexual behaviour scenes, the overt behaviours and gender of characters determined the orientation of the sexual activity.

Of the total 506 scenes catalogued as containing sexual content, 483 scenes (95.5%) were codable under the three categories of sexual orientation, whilst 23 scenes were not codable either because the orientation was not clear, or they did not fit the three categories. Scenes involving direct talk about R & R themes, and pregnancy/abortion were among those 23 cases.

Scenes portraying only heterosexual themes were the most commonly occurring portrayals across all seven soap operas, representing 83% (N=402) of the 483 codable scenes. The remainder 17% (N=81) of those scenes depicted homosexual or bisexual themes: the former accounted for 12% (N=56) and the latter for 5% (N=25)

of all codable scenes. Although most soap operas featured homosexual, bisexual, and potentially sexually-confused characters as will be shown in the characters' sexual orientation (Chapter Six), only three soap operas portrayed homosexual and bisexual themes and activities, which also were disproportionately concentrated in *Hollyoaks in the City*. Featuring two storylines on sexual confusion and societal/peer pressure and disapproval of homosexuality, *Hollyoaks in the City* contained markedly more homosexual and bisexual scenes, in terms of the number of scenes as well as the percentage of its overall portrayals, than any of the other two soaps.

As Table 4-8 shows, the distribution of sexual portrayals according the orientation of sexual activity varied across the three soap operas which depicted non-heterosexual themes, and the differences reported here were statistically significant ($X^2=72.008$, $df=12$, $p<.001$). Out of the total 81 non-heterosexual scenes, 70 were found in *Hollyoaks in the City*, eight in *Emmerdale* and just two in *Hollyoaks*. However, in comparability terms *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Emmerdale* had almost similar percentages of non-heterosexual portrayals of their own overall sexual content (29% and 28% respectively), which means that almost three in 10 scenes of those two soaps were homosexual and bisexual portrayals.

Soap Operas		Orientation of Sexual Activity			
		Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Total
Coronation Street	Count	44	0	0	44
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	30	0	0	30
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	21	4	4	29
	% within Soap Operas	72.4%	13.8%	13.8%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	77	0	2	79
	% within Soap Operas	97.5%	.0%	2.5%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	171	52	19	242
	% within Soap Operas	70.7%	21.5%	7.9%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	37	0	0	37
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	22	0	0	22
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	402	56	25	483
	% within Soap Operas	83.2%	11.6%	5.2%	100.0%

Table 4-8 Orientation of sexual activity across each of the seven soap operas

Although very significant, these percentages hardly reflected the weight of such portrayals when it comes to the nature, explicitness and the context in which those portrayals occurred. *Emmerdale*'s lone homosexual and bisexual storyline was very conservative in comparison to those of *Hollyoaks in the City* [Box 4-3 provides a few examples of how the orientation of sexual activity was judged in this study: scenes 1 and 2 were taken from *Emmerdale*, while scenes 3, 4 and 5 were taken from *Hollyoaks in the City*]

BOX (4-3)

Scene [1]

As he comes out of a gay bar in the middle of the night Paul, a twenty-something barman, finds one of his village customers, Grayson, lying on the street injured, with a bleeding nose. Grayson, a respected solicitor and married man, has been trying to seduce a man to have sex with him at Bar's car park; the man turns out to be heterosexual and reacts badly to Grayson's attempt and beats him up. Paul takes Grayson to his home and tries to look after him and cleans his wound. Grayson, whose sexual orientation is not yet known by everybody, asks Paul not to tell his wife and the village about the details of what has happened to him. Paul tries to be considerate to him and gives him some advice on how to deal with his homosexuality and how to come out:

Paul: 'I understand that things can be difficult and I am the last person who'll preach to you about being true to yourself.'

Grayson [angrily]: 'I am true to myself...I am gay when I am with boys...I am also deeply in love with my wife...she is my world and accepts who I am...some things remain unsaid but that's all part of our understanding.'

Scene [2]

Paul, being gay himself, is wondering how it is possible for Grayson to have sex with a woman while claiming to be interested in men.

Paul [implicitly asking]: 'Is it because you want children? I mean, it is possible without being married...well even without being in the same room with a woman.'

Grayson: ‘I love children but I prefer to have them in the conventional manner.’

Paul [disgusted by the whole concept]: ‘Can you manage it?! Sorry, that’s so personal.’

Grayson: ‘I can...we do...it’s actually very special.’

Paul: ‘How does she cope?’

Grayson: ‘I don’t tell her what she doesn’t need to know or want to hear, and I expect you to do the same.’

Paul [annoyed by Grayson’s insistence on keeping what happened secret]: ‘Well, like I am gonna tell her that I rescued her hubby from a kicking because he was getting a cheap thrill in the local pub’s car park.’

Grayson (hands up): ‘Okay, I asked for that but I still had to be certain.’

Scene [3]

Josh and Debbie, fifteen-year old school friends, have just got back from school. Debbie is trying to cheer up the downcast Josh, who is always being harassed and bullied by his classmates simply because he is gay. Josh has had a crush on his teacher, Mr. Adam Taylor, who is ambivalent about his own sexuality. Josh, being gay himself, has detected that ambivalence and is chasing his teacher. In the following scene Debbie quizzes Josh about his relationships, sexuality and sexual experiences:

Debbie: ‘... Anyway, you won’t have to put up with it (the bullying). Teachers will be onto it soon.’

Josh: ‘Most of them don’t give a crap except for a few good ones; Mr. Taylor is cool. He was there last night you know’ [referring to the bar where Josh and a date had met the night before.]

Debbie: ‘What do you mean? You mean you went to Attraction’ [Nightclub]. ‘Oh my God!... Did he freak when he saw you?’

Josh: ‘No, he was cool.’

Debbie: ‘I wish I had gone; I never get to do anything... how come you were there?’

Josh: ‘Just was.’

Debbie: ‘Were you on your own?’

Josh: 'No!'

Debbie: 'With a boyfriend?'

Josh: 'I would not call him that; just a shag really.'

Debbie: 'A regular shag?'

Josh: 'A few times!'

Debbie: 'Is he good?'

Josh: 'What is this, Mastermind?...He's alright.'

Debbie: 'What's it like?'

Josh: 'What? Sex?'

Debbie [shy and embarrassed]: 'Well with a boy; what is the difference?'

Josh [smiling]: 'Plenty of lubrication.'

Debbie [impatient and curious]: 'Go on...'

Josh: 'This is what I need [Vodka] if we are gonna talk about sex... have you got any?'

Scene [4]

In this scene Josh acts on Debbie how he actually has sex with a boy in an effort to show and explain to her what gay sex looks and feels like as she requested at the beginning of the episode. This scene is a continuation to a previous scene in which Debbie curiously quizzed Josh about gay sex. Josh here is completely drunk, having drunk a lot of vodka earlier on.

Josh [giggling and acting sexual intercourse movements]: 'Or I can do you from the hip like this, or [grabbing Debbie from behind while both giggling] from behind like this....'

Debbie [giggling and excited]: 'Oh my God! This is really fun.'

Josh [having turned Debbie and positioned himself on top of her on the sofa]: 'Or like this [grabbing and squeezing her waist]... This is when you really like someone.'

Debbie: 'This might be slightly hard.'

Josh: 'Very unlikely' [he reaches the vodka bottle and has a drink.]

Debbie: 'Not even a little bit? This doesn't sound that bad. You like that sort of stuff; better being a lesbian.'

Josh [so excited and bemused]: ‘...And what’s wrong with being a lesbian?’

Debbie [giggling]: Well, and what do they do?

Josh [wrestling with Debbie while on top of her]: ‘Well, let’s see...’

As Josh is about to start acting as a lesbian, Polly, Debbie’s eldest sister, enters the room and finds Josh on top of her sister. Josh tries to hide his Vodka bottle behind his back.

Polly: ‘Too late I already saw that.’

Josh: ‘I was just err [muttering]’

Polly [interrupting]: ‘This whole being gay thing, is that what you tell all the girls to get them to bed?’

Polly leaves the scene and the camera zooms into the childish smiley faces of both Debbie and Josh—end of scene.

Scene [5]

At school Josh has been bullied and punched in the face by his classmate, Lenox. Now with a bleeding nose, Josh is receiving some help from his teacher Mr. Taylor, who in turn is struggling with sexual confusion as a consequence of coming out. Also Josh, infatuated with his teacher, is aware of what Adam Taylor is going through:

Adam: ‘So what is it with you and Lenox then?’

Josh: ‘It’s personal. We used to be mates back at primary school, and he was the first person I experimented with...if you know what I mean.’

Adam [mesmerized at the revelation, as he delicately wipes Josh’s bleeding nose]: ‘Oh!’

Josh: ‘Now it’s a question of life that he eradicates the memory and eradicates me. I’ll have to live without it.’

Adam: ‘No you don’t.’

Josh: ‘Yes, I do. Lenox is nothing; what bothers me is if I said anything I’ll get expelled from school, ruin my future, Six Form, Uni; I’m not gonna spend the next five years in track-suits.’

Adam: ‘You seem very...’

Josh [interrupting]: ‘Resigned?’

Adam: ‘I was gonna say mature... who was that guy you were with the other night?’

Josh: ‘Paul.’

Adam: ‘Have you been with him long?’

Josh: ‘No, just a shag.’

Adam [feeling very uncomfortable]: ‘Okay, that’s you sorted then.’

Adam quickly wraps up all the bandages and tools he used to clean the blood—End of scene.

It is important to establish whether non-heterosexual portrayals are just narratives (sexual talk) as has often been suggested, or visual depictions (sexual behaviour). Generally speaking, prevailing assumptions indicate that very rarely do behavioural portrayals of a non-heterosexual nature appear on television in general and in genres such as soap operas in particular (Gunter 2002); and this study found this to be broadly true of the soap operas analysed.

Of the 81 non-heterosexual portrayals, only 22 scenes (39.5%) depicted sexual behaviours, while 59 scenes (60.5%) featured only sexual talk, thus reflecting the soap operas’ overall tendency of portraying more sexual talks than behaviours. Those 22 scenes comprised just less than 12% of the study’s overall behaviours which, in other words, meant just over one out of every ten scenes depicting sexual behaviours revolved around either homosexual or bisexual themes; similarly, the 59 scenes portraying only sexual talk comprised around 20%, or just one in five, of the study’s overall codable sexual talks²⁵ (Table 4-9). Further, the difference in the distribution of the three sexual orientations across the two types of portrayals (talk and behaviour) was found to be statistically significant ($X^2=6.254$, $df=2$, $p<.04$).

²⁵ Note the mentioned percentage is that of the 292 scenes that were codable in the sexual orientation category.

It is worth noting that *Hollyoaks in the City*, the late night drama, was found, once again, to contain almost all of the non-heterosexual behaviours (21 out of 22 portrayals), which were quite explicit in nature and somewhat controversial. *Emmerdale*, on the other hand, accounted for the other lone scene which featured intimate touching between two gay men on their first date (see Appendix: Table 1 5).

Orientation of Sexual Activity		Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		
		Sexual Talk	Sexual Behaviour	Total
<i>Heterosexual</i>	Count	233	169	402
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	79.8%	88.5%	83.2%
<i>Homosexual</i>	Count	41	15	56
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	14.0%	7.9%	11.6%
<i>Bisexual</i>	Count	18	7	25
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	6.2%	3.7%	5.2%
<i>Total</i>	Count	292	191	483
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4-9 Orientation of sexual activity across sexual talk and sexual behaviour

4.2.2 Themes of Sexual Behaviour (General)

As this study is concerned with identifying not only types of sexual behaviours and their distribution but also contexts and themes, the following measure was designed to capture the overall theme within which sexual behaviours occurred. To do so, four categories were used: (1) ‘general’ indicated that behaviours occurred within a normal and generic sexual relationship, (2) ‘incest’ indicated sexual behaviours between closely related persons that is illegal by law, and socially and culturally considered a taboo, (3) ‘prostitution’ indicated sexual behaviours occurring within trading-sex-for-money contexts, and (4) ‘other’ for all sexual behaviours that did not fit the previous categories, examples could include paedophilia and other contexts.

The findings revealed that while the majority (90%) of all 191 portrayals of sexual behaviours involved general themes (generic sexual/romantic relationships), one in ten (10%, N=20) of all portrayals of sexual behaviour featured either

prostitution (8%, N=16) or an incestuous sexual behaviour (2%, N=4)²⁶. The latter two themes were found only in three soap operas, with *Hollyoaks* and its later spin-off accounting for the prostitution themes and portrayals, and *Coronation Street* for the four incest portrayals. However, the types of sexual behaviours portrayed in those 20 scenes varied across the two themes, as well as across the three soap operas. For instance, while portrayals of ‘incest’ in *Coronation Street* were confined to mild sexual behaviours (three depicted passionate kissing and one sexual intercourse implied), the portrayals of prostitution cases, primarily those (14 portrayals) found in *Hollyoaks in the City*, were of a very advanced intimate nature, as 10 portrayals featured sexual intercourse behaviours (depicted and implied) and oral sex depicted (see Appendix: Table 1.6 and 1.7).

4.2.3 Themes of Sexual Intercourse

The following three categories were employed to capture the overall themes of sexual intercourse: (1) general, (2) first-time sexual intercourse (loss of virginity), and (3) sexual intercourse involving cheating/infidelity.

It is worth mentioning that the findings of the two types of portrayals (behaviours and talks) presented earlier showed that just over one in five (21%, N=105) of all 506 sexual portrayals found across all seven soap operas depicted or discussed sexual intercourse cases. Further, as just under one in five (19%, N= 61) of all 315 sexual talks discussed sexual intercourse, 24% (N=44) of all 191 sexual behaviours were sexual intercourse cases (depicted and implied). And in terms of soap opera differences, there was a clear gap between soap operas with high percentages of sexual intercourse portrayals (*EastEnders* 24%, *Hollyoaks* 19% and *Hollyoaks in the City* 26%) and those with well below the overall average percentage (*Coronation Street* 9%, *Emmerdale* 14%, *Home and Away* 11% and *Neighbours* 12%).

²⁶ All the 191 portrayals of sexual behaviours were codable in only three categories (general, prostitution and incest), and no portrayals were coded in the fourth ‘other’ category.

Here the findings of the themes of sexual intercourse indicated that over half (52%, N=55) of all sexual intercourse portrayals (or over one in ten of all sexual portrayals in this study) depicted or discussed first-time sexual intercourse/loss of virginity (N=25) and cheating/infidelity themes (N=30), whereas the rest (48%, N=50) of the intercourse portrayals featured sexual intercourse occurring within wider established or non-established sexual and romantic relationships.

The distribution of the sexual intercourse themes varied significantly from one soap opera to another ($X^2=26.778$, $df=12$, $p<.001$). As Table (4-10) clearly shows, *Hollyoaks* and its late night spin-off, both aimed at younger audiences, were more likely than any other soap opera to portray and discuss first-time sexual intercourse/loss of virginity. Combined, they accounted for 24 out of the 25 of the first-time sexual intercourse portrayals, with five portrayals in *Hollyoaks* (representing over 6% of its overall portrayals) and 19 in *Hollyoaks in the City* (representing around 8% of its overall portrayals). In both soap operas the theme of first-time experience of sexual intercourse or loss of virginity was portrayed in three key storylines in *Hollyoaks in the City* and one major storyline in *Hollyoaks*, all of which revolved around young teenage characters coming to terms with their own sexuality and romantic and sexual relationships.

Interestingly, the first-time sexual experience theme was not confined to heterosexual relationships and storylines as *Hollyoaks in the City* included two gay male characters, one of whom had his first 'gay' sexual intercourse experience while the other discussed his experience with friends. However, the first-time sexual experience was often presented as the highest point in the dramatic trajectory of the storylines, which ultimately resulted in dealing and coping with its 'negative consequences', although the *Hollyoaks* storyline incorporated numerous references to sexual risks and responsibilities (R & R) which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Although all seven soap operas included some depictions and/or discussions of sexual intercourse behaviours involving cheating or infidelity (see Table 4-10), only two soap operas, *EastEnders* and, once again, *Hollyoaks in the City*, were more

likely than any other soap opera to include substantial numbers of portrayals revolving around such a theme: all *EastEnders*' sexual intercourse portrayals (N=10), which represented 24% of all sexual portrayals within the soap, occurred within the contexts of cheating on a partner or having an affair, whereas just 5% (N=12) out of the 26% (N=64) of portrayals of sexual intercourse in *Hollyoaks in the City* featured cheating or infidelity.

Soap Opera		Themes of Sexual Intercourse			Total number of sexual intercourse portrayals	Overall number sexual portrayals
		First-time	Cheating /Infidelity	General		
<i>Coronation Street</i>	Number of portrayals	0	2	3	5	53
	% in soap operas	0%	3.7%	5.6%	9.4%	100%
<i>EastEnders</i>	Number of portrayals	0	10	0	10	41
	% of soap operas	0%	24%	0%	24%	100%
<i>Emmerdale</i>	Number of portrayals	1	2	1	4	29
	% in soap operas	3.5%	7%	3.5%	14%	100%
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	Number of portrayals	5	2	8	15	79
	% in soap operas	6.5%	2.5%	10%	19%	100%
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	Number of portrayals	19	12	33	64	242
	% in soap operas	7.8%	4.9%	17.7%	26.5%	100%
<i>Home Away and</i>	Number of portrayals	0	1	3	4	37
	% in soap operas	0%	3%	8%	11%	100%
<i>Neighbours</i>	Number of portrayals	0	1	3	3	25
	% in soap operas	0%	4%	8%	12%	100%
Total	Number of portrayals	25	30	50	105	506
	%	24%	28%	48%	100%	100%

Table 4-10 Overall frequency, and themes of sexual intercourse by soap opera.

During the coding process it was noted that in the six mainstream soap operas the overwhelming majority of sexual intercourse cases, regardless of the themes involved, occurred as part of clear and coherent storylines which dealt with sexual relationships rather than as isolated incidents. *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*, for instance, very rarely, if at all, portrayed sexual intercourse behaviours or any other general sexual activity (talk or behaviour) outside their key storylines which dealt almost entirely with sex and sexuality. The cheating or infidelity themes in both soap operas were integral to the development of their storylines and constituted heightened and intense forms of drama and controversies (see Box 4-4: scenes 1, 3 and 4).

By contrast, *Hollyoaks in the City* portrayed numerous sexual intercourse behaviours, as well as other types of sexual behaviours, that were not only outside distinct storylines but also were gratuitous and explicit in nature; *Hollyoaks in the City* offered a few patterns of sexual portrayals in which ‘casual sex’ was unproblematic and accepted as the norm (see, Box 4-4: scene 2).

Box (4-4)

Scene [1]

Kevin’s wife is shocked by the news that her husband’s father, a sixty-something- year old, is having an affair with their neighbour, Audrey. Kevin’s wife goes, with Audrey’s daughter, to her husband’s workplace, a garage, to ask him to do something about the affair. Kevin, however, refuses to do anything about it—outside the garage this conversation takes place:

Kevin [nonchalantly]: ‘Look, he’s my Dad, he does what he wants.’

Wife: ‘Kevin! Is it any wonder that our daughter started sleeping with her boyfriend at fourteen?!’

Kevin: ‘That’s totally a different situation.’

Wife: ‘Yeah, this is adultery.’

Kevin: ‘Who cares!’

Wife: ‘Kevin, I’m surprised at you.’

Scene [2]

After having had a drunken night at a nightclub which culminated in having sex with Tank Top, a nightclub bouncer, Debbie, who is a fifteen-year-old school girl, shares her excitement at her first-time experience of sexual intercourse with her classmate, Josh, a gay boy, as they both walk in the school’s sports field.

Debbie [excited]: ‘It was like those sex films, it was mad for me and he couldn’t get enough. We worked all night, you know, doing it. It was fantastic, and really, really good, just like I thought it would be; all lovely and romantic, but like sexy as well.... I can’t wait to do it again, with like all different positions and handcuffs and stuff [giggling].’

Scene [3]

Ian comes to his aunt, Pauline, to tell about Jane's affair with Grant Mitchell, and his elaborate plan to humiliate her at their wedding party, as they are getting married the following day. Ian knew about his wife-to-be's affair earlier, but kept it from Jane. He intends to walk out of the wedding ceremony in front of everybody as a punishment and reveal her infidelity and affair to family and friends. Pauline is supporting his plan and hardening his heart which seems to soften towards Jane. She also gives him further advice on how best to humiliate her. In this scene Pauline and Ian are sitting in the living room around the dinner table, with the lights very dim; Ian tells his aunt that he is not so sure that he should humiliate Jane, fearing that his children, who have become very attached to Jane, might hold some grudge against him for his actions in the future:

Pauline: 'Was she thinking about your children when she jumped into bed with Grant Mitchell? Ian, she came straight to you from him, his smell on her flesh and you're talking about talking things through!'

Ian: 'Maybe you're right.'

Pauline: 'Ian, she has lied to you; she's cheated on you; she has betrayed you with the Mitchells', and she comes home, smiles at you and kisses you!'

Ian [nodding]: 'Yeah...'

Pauline: 'Oh, all she likes to make out she is so friendly and nice and butter wouldn't melt; [grinding her teeth] right little jolly ray of sunshine she is, but she is the same as the rest of the Mitchells, rotten to the core.'

Ian [approving]: 'Yeah...'

Scene [4]

Jane becomes aware of Ian's plan to humiliate her at the registrar office in front of family and friends. In an effort to forestall Ian's move, Jane does not show up and Ian is infuriated that his elaborate plan is in ruins now. In the following dramatic scene, Ian goes out looking for Jane. Crying and broken-hearted, Jane goes out and wanders around the neighbourhood and shops aimlessly in her white wedding dress. It is pouring with rain, Ian finds her. And Jane sees him and speeds up her pace. Only two yards separate the couple now:

Ian [sobbing and angrily shouting at her]: 'Did you do Phil as well?'

Jane [soaked through with rain and crying]: 'What?'

Ian: ‘The Mitchells like to share their women... How many times? How many times did you do it? Once? Twice? Ten times? A hundred times? How many times?’

Jane [crying, pleading]: ‘Please....’

Ian: ‘Did you come home smelling of him?’

Jane: ‘Please...’

Ian: ‘Did you have to get in the shower before you could go near me?’

Ian [taunting her]: ‘Where did you do it?’

Jane [cries and screams]: ‘Enough...’

Ian: ‘In my house? In our bed?... I guess he couldn’t wait to get home to say, guess what Brav [brother]? Guess who I’ve just had?... do you know? I thought you were different... I thought you had won.... I thought after all those years of looking, I finally found you... but I should have done better, shouldn’t I?... I should have seen this coming; after all I’ve had plenty of practice when it comes to picking up a tart.’

Jane [cries and shouts back at him]: ‘You have no idea what this is all about.’

Ian [shouting louder]: ‘I got a pretty good idea, I mean, how does it start? bunch of flowers? A few whispers sweet nothing? Quick wam bam, thank you mam!’

Jane [furiously shouts back]: ‘You want details? I will tell you exactly what we did, where we did it, when we did it and, and even better, I will tell you exactly how he made me feel. [shaking her head] eh, eh...’

Ian, [face frozen, eyes dilated and stunned], walks away from Jane, who stays in the rain in the middle of the road—end of scene.

4.2.4 References to Homosexuality

All scenes with sexual content were assessed for whether or not existing dialogues made or incorporated any references to homosexuality. Dialogues were judged to contain references to homosexuality only if and when explicit or implicit

references, whether endorsing (positive) or discriminatory (negative), were made to various aspects of homosexuality, regardless of the sexual orientation of characters or the overall sexual activity. For example, a general dialogue/discussion between two gay characters or one heterosexual and another homosexual in a portrayal of either talk or behaviour was not coded as containing reference to homosexuality unless a clear reference to 'gayness' or homosexuality was made.

This measure was applicable to a total of 483 (95.5%) out of all 506 portrayals found across all seven soap operas. Meanwhile, the remainder (23 portrayals) were excluded as they either depicted primarily sexual risks and responsibilities (R & R), or included no dialogues at all. Of those 483 codable portrayals, just over 15% (N=74) included references to homosexuality, as opposed to nearly 85% (N=409) of portrayals which contained no references whatsoever. Further, the findings showed that there were major disparities between the two types of portrayals, talks and behaviours, in terms of the prevalence of references to homosexuality across their portrayals ($X^2=22.264$, $df=1$, $p<.001$). The majority (N=63) of these references occurred in portrayals of sexual talk rather than behaviour (N=11), which, put differently, meant that over two out of every ten (22%) portrayals of sexual talk made references to homosexuality, compared to around 6% of portrayals of sexual behaviours.

Similarly, soap opera comparisons revealed that the distribution of these references varied significantly from one soap opera to another ($X^2=46.877$, $df=6$, $p<.001$). The findings showed that, while three soap operas (*EastEnders*, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*) did not include any references to homosexuality (Table 4-11), *Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks in the City* included substantial percentages of portrayals with references to homosexuality, with around two in ten (21%, N=6) of the former's portrayals referring to homosexuality and one-quarter (25%, N=62) of the latter's, compared to just 5% of *Hollyoaks*' and 4% of *Coronation Street*'s.

It is worth noting that of all the references made across the four soap operas, only those of *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Emmerdale* were part of storylines that dealt with homosexuality, sexual confusion and homosexual relationships. Furthermore,

both soap operas touched upon the societal rejection of homosexuality, or bullying of and discrimination against gay characters (see Box 4-5: scenes 1 and 2).

Soap Operas		Dialogue Containing References to Homosexuality		
		Yes	No	Total
Coronation Street	Count	2	42	44
	% within Soap Operas	4.5%	95.5%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	0	30	30
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	6	23	29
	% within Soap Operas	20.7%	79.3%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	4	75	79
	% within Soap Operas	5.1%	94.9%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	62	180	242
	% within Soap Operas	25.6%	74.4%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	0	37	37
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	0	22	22
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	74	409	483
	% within Soap Operas	15.3%	84.7%	100.0%

Table 4-11 References to homosexuality by soap opera.

Box (4-5)

Scene [1]

Jamie tells Violet he is seeing Frankie; she is shocked and in tears, suspecting that he has been having the affair even when they were closer. Sean, a gay barman and friend, enters the house; Violet rushes to tell him about Jamie's revelation:

Violet [crying]: 'You won't believe this; do you know all that time when me and you were wondering if he might be gay? He was actually fancying his step-mum!

[Sean, a gay character, keeps silent and drops his head down]

Violet [angry and furious at Sean's reaction]: 'You knew? What when...then? When you came back and told me that he didn't fancy anyone?'

Eileen, a neighbour, enters the house and asks what is going on.

Violet: ‘What? You mean Frankie hasn’t told you that she has been sleeping with her step-son...that will give you something to talk about when she comes back.’

Scene [2]

Troy enters Precious’s office to show her that he is feeling much better after having been rejected by a film director for his bad audition. Precious, who is infatuated with Troy, has paid a girl, Miranda, to keep him company and boost his morale.

Precious: ‘Hi!’

Troy [holding two cans of soft drink as he enters the office]: ‘Hi! Did you pay Miranda to shag me?’

Precious: ‘I paid Miranda to boost your ego, she wasn’t meant to have sex with you.’

Troy: ‘It wasn’t her fault! I wouldn’t be able to resist me either, but the point is, Presh [Precious], you pay for me to have sex.’

Precious [feeling guilty for what she has done]: ‘I’m sorry!’

Troy: ‘Why? I’m not!’

Precious [astonished]: ‘Sorry?’

Troy: ‘Presh, you have got to be the best mate I have ever had. You knew exactly what I needed, and it worked. And Miranda thought I was so shit hot she is bringing her mate, Felicity, tonight for more of the same and they’re not gonna charge me.’

Precious [disappointed with the outcomes]: ‘Really!’

Troy: ‘I am fighting fit and ready to tackle birds.’

Precious: ‘Yeah, but...’

Troy: ‘And no but Presh, unless you’re naked and covered with cream. Look you’ve got no idea how great I feel. Burton has got to be told that I’m not a piece of meat....well not a gay piece of meat anyway.’

4.3 Summary and Discussion

Sexual content: soap operas vs. other TV genres

The overall amount of sexual content on soap operas and the patterns of depictions are, to a large extent, consistent with some previous studies reviewed in this research, particularly those of the Kaiser Family studies (US) conducted by Kunkel and his colleagues (2005, 2003, 2001 and 1999²⁷), Heinz-Knowles (1996), Greenberg and Busselle (1994), the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (Ireland), MacKeogh (2005)²⁸, and Millwood-Hargrave (1992).

Before comparing the findings of this study with the findings of the above studies, it is essential to reiterate and clarify two issues. First, the unit of analysis used in this study was the scene. An individual scene constituted a single portrayal which was either a 'behaviour' or 'talk'. When a scene was identified as containing sexual behaviour, it was considered as a single case of sexual behaviour, regardless of whether it also contained a dialogue of sexual nature, to avoid double coding.

A single scene can be thought of as a single case of sexual portrayal, either talk or behaviour. As mentioned earlier, very rarely did a soap opera scene contain multiple sexual themes or, for that matter, behaviours that deviated from the core individual theme tackled within the scene. Of course, certain sexual behaviours²⁹ overlapped, particularly in the sexual intercourse cases, but were not multi-coded.

Second, the inclusion of the late night drama spin-off series, *Hollyoaks in the City*, in the analysis is made for comparability purposes. One of the objectives of this study is to establish whether or not there are similarities or differences in the patterns of portraying sexual activities and themes across day-time and prime-time

²⁷ Kunkel et al.'s composite week sample for the 2004-05 TV season included 46 episodes [over 37 hours] of soap operas, the 2001-02 season 50 episodes [around 43 hours], the 1999-00 season 51 episodes [around 45 hours], and the 1997-98 season 55 episodes [just over 45 hours].

²⁸ MacKeogh's composite weeks sample for the 2003 TV season [4 Irish terrestrial channels, 4 British terrestrial channels, and 4 British satellite channels] included 62 episodes of soap operas, amounting to around 46 hours.

²⁹ The Kaiser Family studies conducted by Kunkel *et al.* considered behaviours such as physical flirting, intimate touching, and passionate kissing to be 'precursory behaviours'.

soap operas on the one hand, and across post-watershed drama series or soap opera, on the other. *Hollyoaks in the City* was therefore often excluded from, and compared with, the six main soap operas.

Generally speaking, soap operas across the board tended to portray sexual activity in almost each single episode; however, the distribution of sexual content depended mostly upon the development of storylines. In this study, 78% of all the episodes analysed were found to contain sexual content,³⁰ a percentage in line with the findings of Kunkel et al. (2005) and MacKeogh (2005) which showed that distribution of sexual content by genre was uneven among various TV programmes in the US and Ireland, while also indicating that soap operas had the highest percentages of programmes with sexual content, 85% of the episodes in the US sample and 79% in the Irish sample—which is virtually the same percentage found in this study.

What is interesting about MacKeogh's study, apart from methodological similarities shared with this study, is that in its Irish and British composite weeks it content-analysed five of the main soap operas analysed in this study: *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, *Emmerdale*, *Neighbours*, and *Home and Away*. This will allow for general comparisons to be made, at least in terms of the amount of sexual content found over two different periods: 2003 vs. 2006.

There were also noticeable similarities as well as differences among the mentioned studies and this study in terms of the average number of scenes (per hour) containing sexual content. Kunkel et al. (2005) found that American soap operas in the 2004-2005 season had an average of 4.9 scenes per hour, while MacKeogh (2005) found that soap operas, mostly British and Australian, contained an average of 4.5 scenes per hour of sexual content.

Earlier US studies, despite the major differences in the content measures employed, reported slightly higher averages of *incidents*. Greenberg and Busselle

³⁰ This, among other finding that will be discussed later, suggests that sexual portrayals and themes are important and integral to the genre.

(1994) found that soap operas in 1994 had an average of 6.64 *incidents* per hour, whilst Heinz-Knowles (1996) reported virtually a similar average of 6.12 *behaviours* per hours. It is, however, not clear what constituted an ‘incident’ or ‘behaviour’ in the two studies, or whether one or more incidents of behaviours or talk occurred within one scene. But nonetheless, they gave percentages that were, it is safe to suggest, in reasonable agreement with those of more recent studies³¹.

This study found an average of 6.5 scenes per hour of soap operas, which is higher than the average scores provided by Kunkel et al, (2005) 4.9 scenes, and MacKeogh (2005) 4.5 scenes. But when the contribution of *Hollyoaks in the City*—which was quite substantial, accounting for almost half of the overall sexual content found—was excluded, the average shrunk considerably to just 4.2 scenes per hour, which is more in line with MacKeogh’s findings.

None of the studies mentioned above included programmes such as *Hollyoaks in the City*, or even classified them under the soap opera genre. They invariably considered programmes of such nature under the drama genre. Further, it is doubtful whether or not they came across any programme, regardless of genre, which featured and revolved mainly around adult themes. Perhaps *Sex and the City* would be the equivalent of *Hollyoaks in the City* in terms of the adult themes featured. Often, studies like those would flag up in their analyses the existence of programmes that frequently portray and feature strong adult themes. *Hollyoaks in the City* had a sizeable average of over 16 scenes per hour, which clearly highlights the extent to which sexual themes were central to the overall plot in the series, as well as the huge disparities between the six main soap operas and *Hollyoaks in the City* in terms of the distribution of sexual scenes.

As far as the amount of sexual content is concerned, it is self-evident from the findings presented in this chapter that both day-time and prime-time soap operas portrayed far less sexual activity than pot-watershed drama series. The average numbers of scenes containing sexual content found, say, in *Coronation Street* and

³¹ Olson (1994) found 4.8 *scenes* per hour; Lowry and Towles (1989) reported 7.4 *behaviours* per hour.

EastEnders (almost five scenes per hour) or in *Emmerdale* (2.3 scenes per hour) unequivocally show that the margins are not insignificant, and ultimately warrant further analysis of amount vs. context and why popular soap operas are often singled out for, and accused of, having ‘too much sex’.

The question arises as to how the amount of sex found on soap operas compares with the amount found in other genres. MacKeogh (2005) found that news magazines, comedy series and reality/light entertainment programmes contained the highest average numbers of scenes (9.0, 5.6 and 5.8 scenes per hour respectively), whilst the lowest were those of drama series (3 scenes per hour) and talk shows (three scenes per hour). Similarly, Kunkel et al. (2005) found comedy series to contain the highest average (8.7) followed by drama series (almost six scenes per hour); by contrast, news magazines had an average of just three scenes per hour. Interestingly, movies in the two studies were found to contain averages of just over four scenes per hour—which were relatively smaller than those of soap operas (4.9 in Kunkel et al, and 4.5 in MacKeogh).

While it is unfortunate that no recent UK content analysis study of either soap operas or general TV output exists to draw comparisons, the findings of Kunkel et al. and MacKeogh sufficiently indicate that soap operas, as a genre, tend to occupy the middle ground in terms of the amount of sexual content found across a wide range of TV genres. In this respect the same can be projected onto the amount of sexual content found in the six main soap operas in this study, which clearly is in line with MacKeogh’s (2005) findings, especially given the fact that the Irish TV landscape is largely similar to the UK’s.

Moreover, relevant to the amount of sexual content is the duration of scenes containing sexual content. Measuring the time allocated for sexual activity and themes can provide some indicators as to how prevailing and central sexual portrayals and themes are to soap operas. Studies looking into violence on television often measure the length of violent acts shown on screen and account for the time allocated to violent portrayals in the overall output analysed in order to indicate the

potential correlations that may occur between exposure and behavioural violence (Gunter and Harrison, 1998 and Gunter et al., 2003).

It is worth noting that the measurement of duration in this study was not that of the sexual interaction (behaviour) or dialogue (talk) as such, but rather it was of the length of the scenes that included such interactions. However, coupled with the degree of focus measurement, the duration of scenes with sexual content paints a clearer and more credible picture of how integral sexual portrayals are to the plot and perhaps the amount of time occupied by, or dedicated to sexual talks and behaviours.

The average duration of a single scene or portrayal was 64 seconds, which meant all the 506 portrayals, put together, amounted to just over nine hours (precisely 540 minutes), representing almost 12% of the entire 77 hours of soap operas analysed in this study.³² This average duration (64 seconds) was largely observed across all soaps. Initially, this percentage seems quite high but nevertheless indicates the centrality of sexual activities/theme to the genre. It is unfortunate, once again, that only one study is found to have measured the duration of only the actual sexual behaviours rather than the scene as a whole, which cannot allow for sound comparisons to be made.

Greenberg and Busselle (1994) measured in seconds the length of acts and found 60% of the acts were 15 seconds or less, only 12% lasted longer than a minute, and the remainder of acts fell in between. Measuring the length of sexual acts per se does not provide a comprehensive overview of how central scenes are to the plot and episode at least in time terms, besides missing a large proportion of scenes with sexual content (sexual talk) that can be more salient, in qualitative terms, and have more significance to, or bearing on, the flow of storylines than acts/portrayals of behaviours. When considering the degree of focus findings, it becomes clear that a substantial portion of time (12%) was primarily featuring

³² In fact the percentage will become slightly higher than 12% if the time occupied by commercial breaks is to be excluded. Only the BBC soap operas, *EastEnders* and *Neighbours*, did not include commercial breaks.

sexual themes. The sexual portrayals found in over three-quarters of the 506 scenes were of substantial and primary importance to the scenes and storylines: more than half were of primary focus, and over one-third were of substantial focus. This clearly suggests two things as far as generalisations go. First, sexual themes and storylines were a substantial staple and permanent feature across soap operas, not just sporadic themes. Second, the time dedicated to sexual portrayal was substantial, reflecting the great emphasis or focus on sexual topics.

On the other hand, noticeable differences in terms of duration were observed between the two types of sexual portrayals, behaviour and talk. Across the board, the duration of scenes with sexual talk was significantly higher than the duration of scenes with sexual behaviours, averaging 70 seconds for talks and 54 seconds for behaviours. This pattern was also largely true of the duration of the two sets of scenes in each one of the soaps analysed.

This finding— alongside the percentages of sexual behaviours and talks—does point towards a general trend of portraying sexual themes in soap operas using, predominantly, narrative formats, as opposed to the visual depictions of sexual behaviours, as many studies have suggested (Hobson, 2003, Millwood-Hargrave 2002). It is worth noting that not only were scenes of sexual behaviours shorter in duration on the whole, but also a sizeable portion of them contained dialogues as well as behaviours. In real terms, this would mean even smaller averages of duration for scenes with behaviours.

This study found that soap operas were more likely to portray sexual *talk* than sexual *behaviour*. It was found that 62% of the overall portrayals were sexual talks, whilst 38% were sexual behaviours. This finding is fairly consistent with the findings of most previous studies in that sexual activities in general are more talked about than visually portrayed³³ (Greenberg and Busselle, 1994; Kunkel et al. 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005; MacKeogh 2005).

³³ The only content analysis of soap operas that reported results to the contrary is that of Heintz-Knowles (1996). The study reported that visual depictions of sexual behaviours accounted for over 73% of the 595 behaviours found, compared to 27% verbal/discussions. Those findings

Despite having not provided percentages of soap operas' portrayals of the two types, both Kunkel et al. (2005) and MacKeogh (2005) presented averages of scene numbers (per hour of soap opera) which are comparable and consistent with the averages produced in this study, although their measurements of behaviour and talk slightly overlapped. Kunkel et al. (2005) reported that 3.7 scenes per hour of soap opera portrayed sexual talk and 3.1 portrayed just sexual behaviour. Meanwhile, MacKeogh (2005) found that soap operas had an average of 4.2 scenes per hour of sexual talk and 1.3 scenes per hour of sexual behaviour.

Similarly, this study found across the board an average of four scenes per hour portraying talks, as opposed to 2.5 portraying behaviour, but when *Hollyoaks in the City*'s share was excluded the averages deflated to 2.6 and 1.6 scenes per hour respectively. *Hollyoaks in the City*, although featuring vastly more sexual portrayals than any other soap opera, still conformed to the overall pattern, portraying 10 scenes of sexual talk and six of sexual behaviour per hour.

The averages of the three studies indicate clearly that, first, soap operas were in principle more likely to portray sex-related talk than behaviour, despite the discrepancies shown, and second, the six main soap operas analysed in this study were noticeably portraying, on average, fewer scenes of either type than American soap operas and those in the Irish sample. Moreover, the evidence emerging from this study, Kunkel et al. (2005) and MacKeogh (2005) is substantiated further by the findings of the three older biennial reports (1999, 2001 and 2003) also conducted by Kunkel and his colleagues, who reported in the main similar averages of behaviours and talks for all the soap operas analysed over three seasons, which clearly indicate a

and figures do not seem to add up, if one compares them with those of earlier US studies (Greenberg and Busselle 1994) and more recent ones (Kunkel et al., 2005) which clearly confirm the pattern of 'more talks than visual portrayals of behaviours' across soap operas. Perhaps one of the reasons contributing to those findings might have been the definition of sexual behaviour and interaction used which resulted in incongruent, perhaps inflated, findings. Heintz-Knowles explains the definition used as follows: 'in this study we wanted to better contextualise the sexual behaviours and make it possible to see relationships between individual behaviours that occur either simultaneously or in succession with an interaction. For this reason, this study considered a discussion or depiction of sexual behaviour within a scene to be a sexual interaction which could contain multiple individual sexual behaviours.' (p. 6)

persistent pattern of sexual portrayals in US soap operas that is largely consistent with the patterns found by this study and MacKeogh (2005) in the UK and Australian soap operas.

The four biennial studies reported significant findings, indicating that while the amount of sexual content on TV in general and in certain TV genres in particular fluctuated over four TV seasons, in most cases increasing, the amount of sexual content in soap operas remained largely the same: 4.4 scenes per hour in the 1997-98 TV season, 4.1 in the 1999-00 TV season, 5.1 in the 2001-02 TV season and 4.9 in the 2004-05 TV season. The studies showed increases of over 2 scenes per hour for some genres. For instance, sexual content in comedy and drama series increased substantially from 5.6 and 3.4 in the 1997-98 TV season to 8.7 and 5.9 in the 2004-05 TV season respectively.

In sum, what the findings of this research clearly suggest, when compared with those of Kunkel et al. and MacKeogh, is that there were noticeable similarities in terms of the amount of sexual content and the patterns of its distribution across the two types, *behaviour* and *talk*, in soap operas shown on UK and Irish TV networks, on the one hand, and US TV networks on the other. While US longitudinal studies have confirmed the existence of stable patterns of amount and type frequencies (around 4.5 scenes per hour, and more *talk* than *behaviour*) in soap operas, this research and that by MacKeogh (2005) point towards similar patterns with regard to soap operas shown on UK and Irish TV networks; and this research can further suggest, albeit hypothetically, that longitudinal content analyses of the soap operas analysed here may well show patterns of amount and type (behaviour and talk) identical to those of US soap operas—based at least on this study's findings of the 2006 UK TV season, and MacKeogh's 2003 UK and Irish TV season which included, as mentioned earlier, five of the main soap operas analysed in this study.

Types of sexual behaviour and sexual talk

Precise and detailed comparisons of the types/categories of sexual *behaviour* and *talk* between this study's findings and others' are difficult to make due to

differences in methods and approaches.³⁴ Nonetheless some comparisons are possible and can be inferred by looking at a few general trends and patterns reported in some studies. Admittedly, it is far more difficult to compare the distribution of sexual talk types with any of the previous soap opera content analyses, simply because of their main focus, which was on behaviour rather than talk, and their methodological limitations; therefore, comparisons in this respect will be made with the findings of Kunkel et al. (2005) and MacKeogh (2005).

The overall distribution of sexual talk types (13 types) across the soaps in this study was relatively balanced, with only two types, ‘comments about own or others’ sexual interests/acts and intentions’, and ‘talk about sexual intercourse’, accounting for just less than half of the total 315 scenes containing only sexual talks, and representing respectively 27% (84 scenes) and 19.5% (61 scenes). Four themes (actually seven types), talk toward sex, R & R, prostitution and sex-related crimes, accounted for around 10% each.

Kunkel et al. (2005) and MacKeogh (2005) reported, between them, almost identical results which, however, differ greatly from this study’s findings. They both found that ‘comments about own or others’ sexual interests’ was the most frequent type, accounting for around 70% of the total sexual talks found across their composite weeks samples, followed by ‘talk about sex-related crimes’ (16% in Kunkel et al., and 12% in MacKeogh), and ‘talk about sexual intercourse’ (5% and 7%); the other four categories had insignificantly small percentages.

This indicated very large disparities between the general TV output and soap operas in this respect, and yet it tells very little. However, what clearly emerged from this study’s findings was that the distribution of sexual talk types within the seven soap operas showed a consistent pattern of portrayals (talks) that can be seen as intrinsic to the genre’s narrative structures. While the results of the overall sample

³⁴ Studies, which are methodologically similar to this research and permit credible comparisons, Kunkel *et al.* (2005) and MacKeogh (2005) for instance, were concerned with sexual content on TV in general, and therefore did not present detailed findings of sexual content in soap operas; and studies that looked in detail at soap operas, Heintz-Knowles (1996), Greenberg and Busselle (1994), utilised different methods which make comparisons less straightforward.

showed that no single type of the 13 types accounted for an overwhelming majority of sexual talks as in the US and Irish cases, the results for each soap opera separately pointed towards a clear pattern of sexual talk portrayals, which follow a single theme or storyline. Certain types of sexual talk were found to be highly concentrated in one or two soap operas, indicating a pattern of single-theme portrayals. For instance, 43% of talks in *Coronation Street* were ‘talk about incest’, and 33% and 32% in *Hollyoaks* and *Home and Away* were ‘talk about sex-related crime’.

Overall, based on the distribution of sexual talk types, it can be concluded that soap operas, with the exception of the late night spin-off, were not portraying sexual talk in general/theme-less contexts, or as gossip and isolated remarks, but rather in sexual themes that were issue-led storylines which often highlighted controversial social and cultural aspects of sexuality and sexual relationships.

As for the types of sexual behaviours, comparisons between this study and others seem to suggest that while soap operas shown on US TV networks and British TV portrayed mostly low levels of intimacy in the form of passionate kissing, British and Australian soaps portrayed far more behaviours of those levels than their US counterparts. This study found that 60% of the overall behaviours comprised passionate kissing, compared with 45% in Heintz-Knowles (1996) and roughly 40% in Greenberg and Busselle (1994).

Likewise, Kunkel et al. (2005) and MacKeogh (2005) and Millwood-Hargrave (1992) found passionate kissing to be the most commonly occurring sexual behaviour on TV, accounting for 53%, 23% and 53% (respectively) of the overall behaviours.

In this study sexual intercourse portrayals, implied and depicted combined, accounted for a significant 23% of the overall behaviours, and were the second most common behaviours, compared, for instance, with 3% in Heintz-Knowles (1996). It is important to elaborate further on the intercourse cases as this comparison shows a disproportionate imbalance between the two studies.

In this research it emerged that, first, soap operas overall were almost four times more likely to portray sexual intercourse as implied than depicted, and, second, the

late night spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*, accounted for all the nine cases of intercourse depicted and the majority of the intercourse implied cases (21 out of 35 cases). Portrayals of sexual intercourse, both implied and depicted, were rare in the six main soap operas. On the other hand, even with the contribution of *Hollyoaks in the City* included, the 23% of intercourse cases was actually not exceptionally high.

Greenberg and Busselle (1994) reported a slightly higher percentage (25%) of intercourse cases in soap operas. Additionally, Millwood-Hargrave (1992) found that exactly 23% of all acts found in a prime-time sample of UK television programmes were coital acts, whilst Kunkel et al. (2005) and MacKeogh (2005) found that 15% and 28% (respectively) of the overall behaviours on US and Irish television networks were sexual intercourse portrayals.

It is evident that, given the above comparisons, soap operas shown on British TV channels were, like those shown on US television, more likely to portray sexual behaviours of low rather than high levels of intimacy. And although the sample contained a significant proportion of sexual intercourse cases, the concentration of most of those cases within one soap opera indicated that (a) very seldom did day-time and prime-time soap operas visually depict sexual intercourse, and even when they did depictions were exclusively implied—this could be seen within the context of (pre)watershed restrictions on what can and cannot be shown on screen, and (b) implied and depicted portrayals of sexual intercourse formed a substantial part of the behaviours found in the late night spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*.

Explicitness and focus

Unlike other studies, Kunkel et al. (2005) and MacKeogh (2005), this study has sought to provide detailed accounts of the levels of explicitness in scenes instead of merely providing averages of explicitness using a point-scale measurement. Nevertheless, for comparability purposes the findings of both explicitness and focus were converted into ‘means’ to allow for comparisons to be drawn. It is worth noting, however, that this study employed five levels of explicitness instead of four

as in the above two studies,³⁵ the lowest being 1 = ‘provocative or suggestive dress or appearance’ and the highest 5 = ‘full nudity’, with 0 indicating no explicitness. The additional level in this study was the level 3 = ‘partial but high level of nudity’ which was devised to capture cases that did not fall under the other four levels.

In terms of the distribution of scenes with various levels of explicitness, this study found that the overwhelming majority of scenes (80%) with either behaviours or talks had an explicitness value of zero and that the six main soap operas had virtually zero or low levels of explicitness. *Hollyoaks in the City* individually accounted for most of the scenes with the lowest and highest levels of explicitness. On a five-point scale the level of explicitness in all the scenes identified—behaviour and talk alike—was around 0.7 for all the seven soap operas together. But when the contribution of sexual talk portrayals was excluded, the level increased to 1.5 for the scenes with behaviours only, which is almost similar to the level found in MacKeogh (2005), 1.7 for *precursory behaviours* such as passionate touching and kissing; Kunkel et al. (2005), on the other hand, reported a much lower level of 0.3 for similar *precursory* behaviours—the level of explicitness for scenes with only passionate kissing (precursory behaviour) was just 0.6.

The highest level of explicitness in Kunkel et al. and MacKeogh, as in this study, was almost exclusively found in scenes portraying sexual intercourse (implied and depicted), which suggests that there was a correlation between increases in levels of intimacy and levels of explicitness. In this research the level of explicitness for the sexual intercourse scenes was 3, compared to 2.8 in MacKeogh and 2.2 in Kunkel et al.

On the whole, the level of explicitness for *all* behaviours found in this study did suggest that soap operas’ explicitness was on a par with the level of explicitness for precursory behaviours found on the Irish TV networks. The fact that the overall average level of explicitness in soap operas did not even exceed the average level of explicitness in precursory (moderate) sexual behaviours in the Irish sample clearly

³⁵ It should be borne in mind that the averages presented in Kunkel et al. (2005) and MacKeogh (2005) would be slightly higher given that they used a four-point scale measurement.

points towards a general tendency—on the part of soap operas, of course—of not portraying, or portraying far less, sexually explicit materials compared with other TV genres.

The detailed findings of the level of explicitness presented earlier established that the six main soaps had virtually no explicitness, therefore it would be misleading to suggest that soap operas had similar or comparable level of explicitness to those of general TV programmes in various countries.³⁶ Once again, the level of explicitness found across the soap operas shows that day-time and prime-time soap operas were substantially less likely to portray sexually explicit materials, compared with *Hollyoaks in the City*, which had the highest level of explicitness (2.3) and accounted for virtually the entire explicit content found in the sample.

As for the degree of focus, the findings of this study established that most sexual portrayals (over three-quarters) had substantial and primary degrees of focus, indicating clearly that sexual talks and behaviours were not merely isolated remarks, minor references or gratuitous sexual portrayals, but rather were an integral part of the scenes and storylines. A comparison of the degree of focus for sexual talks in this study with that in the Kaiser Family studies shows a much greater emphasis on sexual topics in soap operas shown on UK television channels than was found across a wide range of TV programmes shown on US networks. On the four-point-scale, the degree of focus for sexual talks in this study averaged 3.4, whereas in Kunkel et al., it consistently averaged 2.7 (in 2005), 2.8 (in 2003, 2001 and 1999).³⁷

³⁶ On a five point-scale, the six main soap operas scored low points (levels): the level of explicitness in *EastEnders* and *Neighbours* was zero, *Coronation Street* 0.3, *Home and Away* 0.4, *Emmerdale* 0.6, and *Hollyoaks* 1.40.

³⁷ Unfortunately, comparison here is restricted to only the Kaiser studies and only to sexual talks, since MacKeogh 2005 did not present the focus findings and the Kaiser studies did not measure the degree of focus for sexual behaviours; however, due to the fact that sexual talks comprised almost two-thirds (3736 sexual talks vs. 1091 behaviours in the 2005 study) of the sexual content found by the Kaiser studies, it is perhaps appropriate to assume that comparisons, though restricted, would provide some sense of perspective.

Moreover, not only did scenes of sexual talk have a higher average than those found in the Kaiser studies, but also scenes depicting sexual behaviour and the overall sexual content for each soap opera individually were, using the four-point scale measurement, found to have higher averages of degree of focus. The 506 portrayals scored an average of 3.3, which was largely representative of the degree of focus on sexual topics by individual soap operas and for the overall talk and behaviour portrayals. *Coronation Street* had the highest average of focus at 3.6, *EastEnders*, *Emmerdale*, *Hollyoaks* and *Home and Away* 3.4, and *Neighbours* and *Hollyoaks in the City* 3.2. However, sexual behaviours scored a slightly lower average than sexual talks (3.1 vs. 3.4), which may suggest that narratives constituted a more substantial part of the scenes, and were of more significance to the treatment of sexual topics and the storylines than portrayals of sexual behaviours—which, on the other hand, substantiates the argument that soap operas' sexual storylines are often narratives rather than depictions (Buckingham, 1987; Hobson 2003)

Sexual Content: Special measures

The findings with regard to the overall orientation of sexual activity and reference to homosexuality in both talk and behaviour portrayals suggested that the portrayal of sex and sexuality in soap operas was not confined to heterosexual themes and storylines despite the dominance of heterosexuality throughout the sample. Although these findings do not provide conclusive and longitudinal evidence, they do show some clear patterns in terms of the prevailing sexual orientations and references to homosexuality. Although, the majority (83%) of all codable 483 portrayals across the seven soap operas—four of them, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*, had 100% heterosexual portrayal—involved purely heterosexual themes, there were relatively large percentages of non-heterosexual portrayals in three soap operas, *Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Hollyoaks*, most notably in the former two which had around three out of every ten of all their portrayals depicting and/or discussing either homosexual or bisexual themes. On the other hand, the study found that references, both endorsing (positive) or discriminatory (negative), to homosexuality were made

in just over 15% of all codable 483 sexual portrayals. Once again, such references were most prevalent in *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Emmerdale*, which dedicated separate storylines to sexual confusion, homosexual relationships, and discrimination against and bullying of gay characters. However, *Coronation Street* and *Hollyoaks* also included references to homosexuality, despite the fact that they did not include storylines tackling homosexuality and homosexual relationships.

Evidence also suggested that non-heterosexual portrayals were more likely to revolve around discussion or narratives of homosexual and bisexual themes and relationships (39% of all non-heterosexual cases) than visual depictions of such behaviours (61%), thus reflecting the overall pattern of sexual portrayals in the genre. However, two of the interesting findings to emerge were (a) the virtual absence of portrayals of either homosexual or bisexual behaviours in the mainstream soap operas (*Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks*), which can be attributed to the wider public's sensitivity towards, and acceptability of homosexuality and bisexuality, and (b) their prevalence (21 out of all 22 portrayals of behaviours) in the late night spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*.

Previous studies (Hobson, 2003; Millwood-Hargrave, 1992 and 1999) indicated clearly that television audiences, especially middle-aged viewers and those 55-years old and over, despite changes of attitudes and perceptions over time, still felt that the portrayal of homosexual or bisexual behaviours across prime-time television programmes was still unacceptable; and that soap opera viewers, while accepting soap operas' homosexual and heterosexual storylines (narratives), tended to react quite strongly to soap operas' visual depictions of homosexual behaviours. With the public's sensitivity towards certain types of homosexual portrayal, daytime and prime-time soap operas find themselves confined to portraying non-heterosexual topics through narratives rather than visual depictions.

As for the themes of sexual behaviours in general and that of sexual intercourse in particular, the findings showed that the majority (90%) of sexual behaviours across *all soap operas* occurred within familiar generic and common relationship contexts or themes such as established or non-established relationships and extra-

marital affairs, while just one in ten (10%) of all sexual behaviours—portrayed by only three soap operas: *Coronation Street*, *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City*—occurred within an incestuous relationship or were part of a theme featuring prostitution. Over half (52%) of all sexual intercourse portrayals (both talk and behaviour) involved the depiction or discussion of first-time sexual intercourse/loss of virginity or cheating/infidelity themes, compared to 48% of sexual intercourse portrayals involving general themes.

Comparisons indicated that while soap operas aimed at younger viewers, primarily *Hollyoaks* and its late night spin-off, accounted for most of the sexual intercourse cases which featured first-time sexual experience, all seven soap operas featured the cheating/infidelity theme in their sexual intercourse portrayals, with some (*EastEnders* and *Hollyoaks in the City*) portraying this theme with greater frequency than the other soap operas.

The portrayal of sexual intercourse cases in all the six major soap operas—unlike the portrayal of a substantial number of cases in *Hollyoaks in the City*—was integral to the development of storylines, and the themes involved indicated the genre's reliance on tackling controversies and cultural taboos. Assumptions that, for example, soap operas 'include very little explicit or visual sexual activity in their storylines,' and 'there is little evidence of the sexual activity taking place' in soap operas (Hobson, 2003: p. 129), while holding true of the nature and to some extent of the amount of sexual portrayal, tend to be overshadowed by the salience of the themes of controversial sexual activities.

Evidence emerging from this study clearly suggests that soap operas not only included substantial numbers of portrayals involving controversial sexual themes (incest, prostitution, cheating), but also included relatively large numbers of sexual intercourse portrayals, comparable in overall terms with those of the Kaiser Family studies (Kunkel et al. 2003 and 2005) and MacKeogh (2005) (see types of sexual talks and behaviours above).

Chapter 5
Sexual Activity:
Time-frame and Location Settings,
Accompanying Behaviours and Outcomes

Portrayal of sexual activity across soap operas is not uniform but rather coloured by a host of characteristics and attributes that can have different effects upon viewers' reaction to, and perception of, sexual portrayals. Some of those characteristics have often raised the public's concern. For example, portrayals of some behaviours such as violence, alcohol consumption, smoking and drug use have, in general, generated a great deal of criticism and raised concerns, on the ground that exposure to portrayals of such behaviours can potentially result in, mostly undesirable, attitudinal and behavioural changes, especially among young viewers: relaxed attitudes to, or opinions on, sexual violence and violence against women (Gunter and Harrison, 1998, Malamuth, and Donnerstein, 1984); and 'normalisation' of alcohol consumption and smoking (Hansen, 2003).

This chapter presents the study's findings on prominent contextual characteristics such as time-frame, location settings and outcomes (positive and/or negative) of sexual activity, and aims to establish whether or not behaviours such as use of violence/aggression, alcohol drinking, smoking and drug use do accompany sexual activity, and if so, with what frequency; and whether soap operas, in their sexual portrayals, couple such behaviours with sexual activity, which could lead, as some have argued, to glamorising drinking, fetishising smoking, normalising drug use and potentially changing attitudes toward violence. Further, this chapter summarises and discusses the significance of those findings and draws some comparisons with the findings of some previous studies.

5.1 Time-frame of Sexual Activity

Time-frame was coded as one of four categories: (1) 'current' encompasses all present ongoing sexual behaviours and/or references to sexual behaviours or relationships which have just occurred and have a direct and substantial impact upon current, as well as ensuing, events and the development of storylines, (2) 'past' refers to the portrayal of sexual behaviours which occurred in the past (e.g. playback of past scenes suggesting recollection of particular events) and/or references to past sexual behaviours and relationships which have had no impact on current events and development of storylines (e.g. characters discussing their past sexual experiences, past gossip stories), (3) 'future' refers to future intentions and (4) 'fantasy/dream' refers to dreams and imaginary settings (e.g. scenes depicting flashbacks, hallucinations, dreams).

The distribution of sexual portrayals across the seven soap operas indicated that the overwhelming majority of portrayals (88%) occurred in the present time or had a great and direct impact on current activities or storylines. The second most common time-frame of sexual activity was the past, representing almost 10% of the overall portrayals (50 in total). Sexual activities, however, were less likely to be portrayed in fantasy/dream or future time-frames as eight portrayals only (representing less than 2%) were found to include such time-frames. Furthermore, across the two types of portrayals, talk and behaviour, there were clear differences ($X^2 = 41.963$, $df=3$, $p<.001$) indicating that particular time-frames were more likely to feature in portrayals of sexual talk rather than behaviour.

First of all, it was found that just over 95% of the total 191 portrayals of behaviours occurred in the present (current), as opposed to 85% of the overall 315 portrayals of talk which were judged as occurring in the present or as having a direct impact upon ongoing events or storylines. Of the 50 portrayals featuring sexual activities in the past time-frame, only one portrayal (2%) was a sexual behaviour, while the rest 49 (98%) were sexual talk. The other eight portrayals (seven featured in the fantasy/dream, and one in the future) were found to be of sexual behaviours.

The distribution of time-frames also varied considerably from soap opera to soap opera ($X^2 = 32.959$, $df=18$, $p<.02$). In each of the seven soap operas, the pattern of distribution reflected, to a large extent, the overall pattern observed above, in that the overwhelming majority of portrayals were located in the present: over 85% of the portrayals in *EastEnders*, *Hollyoaks*, *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Neighbours*, over 90% in *Emmerdale* and *Home and Away*, and 100% in *Coronation Street*. Portrayals in which sexual activity was set in the past occurred most in *Hollyoaks in the City* and *EastEnders* (around 14% of their overall portrayals), and least in *Coronation Street* (0%) and *Home and Away* (3%).

Portrayals in which sexual activity was set in either the future or fantasy/dream were found only in *Hollyoaks*, *Hollyoaks in the City*, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. Not only did the three most popular soap operas, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale*, not portray sexual activity - behaviour or talk - in future or fantasy/dream time-frames, but they also did not portray sexual behaviours in the past; a style which perhaps highlights, in the case of three established British soap operas, the genre's emphasis on realism through the present and everyday-life narratives.

Unlike the other four soap operas, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale* did not resort to playbacks or dream flashbacks techniques. In sum, evidence emerging from the time-frame patterns observed across the soap operas indicates that sexual activities were largely set in the present or had a great impact on the present interactions within a scene or storylines, and that very seldom were sexual activities portrayed in future and dream/fantasy time-frames. Also, sexual activities set in the past were almost exclusively portrayed as narratives rather than behaviours.

5.2 Location of Sexual Activity

Location of sexual activity was classified into nine categories: bedroom, living room, at a public or private party, workplace/office, gym/swimming pool, outdoors, pub/bar, car and other. Across all seven soap operas, the most common location for sexual activity was the living room, with 30% of all portrayals situated in this type

of location. The third most likely location for sexual activity to take place was the bedroom (16% of all portrayals) which meant that just under half of all portrayals (46%) were located in the living room and/or bedroom. On the other hand, sexual portrayals were second most likely to occur at a pub/bar (18% of all portrayals) and outdoors (14%) rather than at workplace/office (5%) or public/private party (1.6%). The location of 13% of portrayals, a surprisingly large proportion, was coded as 'other', which included locations such as schools, public toilets, courtrooms and so forth. Sexual activities were least frequently occurring in locations such as car (less than 1% of all portrayals) and gym/swimming pool (1.6%).

The locations for sexual behaviours did not reflect the overall percentages observed above, and varied in percentage terms from the locations of sexual talk portrayals ($X^2 = 55.938$, $df=8$, $p<.001$). In general, portrayals of behaviours were more commonly located in a private setting, bedroom or living room, and were less likely to occur in public places than portrayals of sexual talk; however, there were some noticeable exceptions, as Table 5-1 shows. For instance, over 55% of all sexual behaviours took place in the bedroom or living room and 9% outdoors, compared to just 40% and 16.5% respectively of all sexual talk. And a larger percentage of all sexual behaviours (21%) was found to have taken place at a pub/bar, compared to a smaller percentage (17%) of all sexual talk—a somewhat unusual finding that runs counter to the premise that sexual behaviours very rarely occur in public places, particularly within the context of day-time and prime-time soap operas. Nevertheless, these percentages need to be qualified in terms of the types of behaviours portrayed outdoors or at public places.

Portrayals of behaviours with high levels of sexual intimacy, such as sexual intercourse and oral sex, were largely filmed either in the bedroom or living room—however, large and significant disparities were also found among the various individual types of behaviours ($X^2 = 1.573$, $df=72$, $p<.001$). The majority of sexual intercourse portrayals, 88% ($N=31$) of those implied and nearly half (45%, $N=4$) of those depicted, occurred within either the bedroom or the living room. Only 45% (four portrayals) of all nine sexual intercourse scenes depicted were shot outdoors; these four scenes, all found in *Hollyoaks in the City*, were sexually explicit,

featuring a young female model having sex with a young man in a nearby park while being filmed by a friend without their knowledge. However, some less intimate behaviours, mainly passionate kisses, were found to have taken place in public places, albeit not in large numbers. For instance, around 35% (39 portrayals) of passionate kissing took place at a pub/bar or outdoors, compared to just over 50% (58 portrayals) taking place either in the bedroom or living room; also 44% of physical suggestiveness and 43% of intimate touching portrayals were shot outdoors and at a pub/bar, while the rest were shot at private locations. In other words, the overwhelming majority of sexual behaviours which were portrayed either outdoors or at a pub/bar were made up of mild sexual behaviours rather than sexually intimate behaviours

Location of Sexual Activity		Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		
		Sexual Talk	Sexual Behaviour	Total
Bedroom	Count	25	55	80
	% within nature of scene	7.9%	28.8%	15.8%
Living room	Count	101	51	152
	% within nature of scene	32.1%	26.7%	30.0%
At public/private party	Count	3	5	8
	% within nature of scene	1.0%	2.6%	1.6%
At workplace/office	Count	22	5	27
	% within nature of scene	7.0%	2.6%	5.3%
Gym/swimming pool/beach	Count	6	2	8
	% within nature of scene	1.9%	1.0%	1.6%
Outdoors	Count	52	18	70
	% within nature of scene	16.5%	9.4%	13.8%
Pub/bar/restaurant	Count	53	40	93
	% within nature of scene	16.8%	20.9%	18.4%
Car	Count	1	2	3
	% within nature of scene	.3%	1.0%	.6%
Other	Count	52	13	65
	% within nature of scene	16.5%	6.8%	12.8%
Total	Count	315	191	506
	% within nature of scene	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5-1 Location of sexual activity by nature of sexual activity (talk and behaviour).

On the other hand, there were differences in the location of sexual activity from one soap opera to another ($X^2 = 1.760$, $df = 48$, $p < .001$). Around half of all portrayals found in *Coronation Street* (43%), *Emmerdale* (52%), *Home and Away* (46%), *Neighbours* (44%) and *EastEnders* (40%) were filmed in a living room

setting, compared to much smaller percentages of portrayals in *Hollyoaks* (10%) and *Hollyoaks in the City* (26%) filmed in a similar setting. Sexual portrayals were most likely to occur at a pub/bar in *Coronation Street* (25% of all portrayals), *EastEnders* (20%), *Emmerdale* (27%) and *Hollyoaks in the City* (19%) rather than in *Home and Away* (8%), *Neighbours* (12%) and *Hollyoaks* (15%), which indicates the centrality and importance of the pub as a locale in the three most popular soaps, not only to the overall plots but also particularly to the storylines tackling sex and sexuality. Portrayals occurring in an outdoor setting were more commonly found in *Neighbours* (32% of all portrayals), *Coronation Street* (28%) and *EastEnders* (22%) than in *Hollyoaks* (6%), *Home and Away* (8%), *Emmerdale* (10%) and *Hollyoaks in the City* (11%), (see Table 5-2).

Location of Sexual Activity											
Soap Operas		Bedroom	Living room	At public/ private party	At workplace/ office	Gym/swimmin g pool/beach	Outdoors	Pub/bar/ restaurant	Car	Other	Total
Coronation Street	Count	1	23	0	1	0	15	13	0	0	53
	% in Soap Operas	1.9%	43.4%	.0%	1.9%	.0%	28.3%	24.5%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	1	16	2	2	0	9	8	0	3	41
	% in Soap Operas	2.4%	39.0%	4.9%	4.9%	.0%	22.0%	19.5%	.0%	7.3%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	1	15	1	1	0	3	8	0	0	29
	% in Soap Operas	3.4%	51.7%	3.4%	3.4%	.0%	10.3%	27.6%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	29	8	0	0	0	5	12	1	24	79
	% in Soap Operas	36.7%	10.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	6.3%	15.2%	1.3%	30.4%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	46	62	2	22	5	27	46	2	30	242
	% in Soap Operas	19.0%	25.6%	.8%	9.1%	2.1%	11.2%	19.0%	.8%	12.4%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	1	17	3	0	3	3	3	0	7	37
	% in Soap Operas	2.7%	45.9%	8.1%	.0%	8.1%	8.1%	8.1%	.0%	18.9%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	1	11	0	1	0	8	3	0	1	25
	% in Soap Operas	4.0%	44.0%	.0%	4.0%	.0%	32.0%	12.0%	.0%	4.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	80	152	8	27	8	70	93	3	65	506
	% in Soap Operas	15.8%	30.0%	1.6%	5.3%	1.6%	13.8%	18.4%	.6%	12.8%	100.0%

Table 5-2 Location of sexual activity by soap opera.

To sum up, a significant proportion of all sexual portrayals (around 50%) occurred in either a bedroom or living room setting, with the majority of those portrayals being overt behavioural displays of sexual activity rather than talk about sex or talk of a sexual nature; and under a third (32%) of all portrayals were filmed at an outdoor setting. Portrayals of sexual behaviours occurring in an outdoor setting across all seven soaps were predominately mild, such as passionate kissing and touching. Across the daytime and prime-time soaps behaviours of high levels of

intimacy, such as intercourse, exclusively occurred in a bedroom or living room setting. Only *Hollyoaks in the City* featured intimate sexual behaviours which took place outdoors and at a bar.

5.3 Accompanying Behaviours

All sexual portrayals were further analysed to see whether or not they were accompanied by the use and presence of alcohol, drugs and smoking, and violence or aggression. The criteria for judging a sexual portrayal as containing any such behaviour were, first, the overt presence of alcohol, drugs, smoking and violence/aggression in a scene, and second their use by at least one character.

5.3.1 Alcohol

Just under a quarter (22.3% or 113 portrayals) of all the 506 sexual portrayals found across the seven soap operas were accompanied by the presence/use of alcohol, while the majority of portrayals (76.5% or 387 portrayals) had no presence or consumption of alcohol embedded in them. Just over 1% (six portrayals) were coded as 'unknown/not clear', as it was difficult to ascertain whether the drinking (or drinks) shown was of an alcoholic or non-alcoholic nature. However, alcohol was more likely to be present or used in portrayals of sexual behaviour (29% of all behaviours) than in portrayals of sexual talk (18% of all talks). As soap opera comparisons revealed significant differences ($X^2=24.339$, $df=12$, $p<.02$), the largest number of portrayals with alcohol were found in *Hollyoaks in the City*, 66 portrayals, representing 58% of all portrayals with alcohol found across all seven soap operas. In overall percentages terms, however, those portrayals represented just 27% of *Hollyoaks in the City*'s sexual portrayals and therefore indicated strong association between sex and alcohol in a drama that featured primarily young characters and was aimed at young audiences. Portrayals with alcohol were found across the other six soap operas, however, with varying percentages, which were high in *Emmerdale* and less so in *Neighbours* (38% and 20% of all portrayals respectively) and below the overall average of 22% in *Home and Away* (16%), *Hollyoaks* and *EastEnders* (15%) and *Coronation Street* (13%).

The patterns which the combination of sexual portrayals and presence/use of alcohol followed were quite distinct in that there was a strong association between location and sexual behaviour with the use of alcohol. The presence and consumption of alcohol was most likely to be found in sexual portrayals that occurred at a pub/bar (62% or 71 of the 113 portrayals featuring alcohol consumption) rather than at any other types of location (27% in bedroom or living room, 6% at a public or private party).

The most common type of sexual behaviours accompanied by use of alcohol was passionate kissing, which constituted 60% of all behaviours with alcohol, while only 16% were sexual intercourse behaviours. In most of those sexual behaviours the consumption of alcohol was either a prelude to sexual activity or an integral part of the environmental setting. The intercourse cases, as well the passionate kissing, occurred at a bar in *Hollyoaks in the City* and featured excessive alcohol consumption, even by characters who were legally considered underage. Two portrayals of sexual violence, one gang rape in *Hollyoaks in the City* and another sexual assault in *EastEnders*, also featured excessive drinking and characters committing their acts while under the heavy influence of alcohol.

5.3.2 Drugs

Almost 90% (454 portrayals) of all 506 portrayals were found not to contain any use or presence of drugs, whilst a small proportion of portrayals (3% or 15 portrayals) featured drug use, with some scenes, in fact, portraying elaborate use of drugs. The remaining 7% (37 portrayals) were made up of portrayals classified as 'unknown/not clear', since it was difficult to judge whether or not drug use occurred, despite the fact that some scenes vaguely indicated such occurrences or symptoms of the influence of drugs. Nevertheless it was felt such symptoms could easily be confused with those associated with alcohol use.

Drug use predominately occurred in portrayals featuring sexual behaviours (80% or 12 portrayals) rather than sexual talks (20% or 3 portrayals). None of the daytime and prime-time soap operas showed drug use accompanying sexual portrayals. All 15 portrayals were exclusively found in *Hollyoaks in the City*. Again,

drug use occurred mainly at an exclusive and raunchy bar and was largely a prelude to sexual activity in three portrayals of physical flirting, five portrayals of passionate kissing, two of implied sexual intercourse; and in one portrayal of sexual violence, a young female model was deliberately drugged and then gang raped at an adult-themed party by four male characters. Additionally, around two-thirds (68%) of the doubtful drug use cases coded as ‘unknown/not clear’ were found in *Hollyoaks in the City*.

5.3.3 Smoking

In almost all sexual portrayals (99%), there was no use/presence of tobacco smoking. Only in three sexual portrayals (0.6% of all portrayals) were characters shown smoking cigarettes; and three more portrayals (0.6%) were coded as ‘unknown/not clear’. The former three portrayals were found in *Coronation Street* (one portrayal = sexual talk) and *Hollyoaks in the City* (two portrayals = behaviours). In both *Hollyoaks in the City*’s portrayals, which depicted sexual intercourse, two young female characters lit a cigarette and started smoking straight after having finished having sex with their partners, one a boyfriend and the other a male prostitute. The *Coronation Street* portrayal featured an old man smoking in a pub while talking with a barmaid about an incest case in the neighbourhood.

5.3.4 Aggression or violence

Across all seven soap operas around one in ten sexual portrayals (9%) was found to contain aggression or violence of some sort, while the great majority of portrayals (91%) did not contain any form of violence or aggression. Forty-four portrayals were coded as containing the ‘use/presence of violence and aggression’, of which 11 were sexual behaviour, representing 6% of overall observed sexual behaviour, and 33 sexual talk portrayals, representing just over 10% of overall sexual talk.

Just under half of those 44 portrayals (45.5% or 20 portrayals) were found in *Hollyoaks in the City*, however, accounting for a little over 8% of its overall sexual portrayals. *EastEnders*, which accounted for 20.5% of the 44 portrayals, was found

to have the highest percentage (22%) of its overall portrayals containing aggression or violence, which means just over one in five of all its sexual portrayals. *Neighbours* and *Coronation Street* had around 12% of their overall portrayals containing aggression or violence, whereas *Home and Away*, *Hollyoaks* and *Emmerdale* had the smallest percentages (3%, 4% and 7% respectively)—the differences in the amount of aggression/and violence found in each of the seven soap operas were, however, statistically significant ($X^2 = 24.339$, $df=12$, $p<.03$).

Most of the aggression or violence that accompanied portrayals of sexual talk was in the form of physical altercations and fighting, and occurred within contexts of very dramatic portrayals that dealt with cheating, prostitution or incest—all sexual talks with aggression or violence in *EastEnders* and most of those in *Hollyoaks in the City* were particularly of a very violent nature. For instance, around one-third of the 33 sexual talk portrayals with violence occurred in portrayals depicting sexual intercourse and cases of cheating in which characters, discovering that their partners had been unfaithful to them, engaged in physical fighting and aggressive behaviours; and the same was true also of over half of portrayals that dealt with controversies such as incest, sex-related crimes and prostitution. And in such portrayals of sexual talk, violence and aggression was exerted by as many female characters as male characters.

The aggression or violence exhibited in the 11 portrayals of sexual behaviours was accompanying or secondary, except for the two portrayals of sexual assault found in *Neighbours* and *EastEnders*, and one attempted rape found in *Hollyoaks in the City*, which featured proper *sexual violence*, or rather sexually motivated violence. The sexual assault portrayal in *Neighbours* showed a male character, in his mid-forties with underlying psychiatric conditions, forcing himself quite violently on to what seemed to be his new girlfriend or date to solicit a kiss.

In *EastEnders*, at a company's party, a young male character, under the heavy influence of alcohol, followed his colleague's girlfriend to the ladies' toilets and started his sexual assault by kissing and touching the woman against her will as she was trying to calm him down to extract herself from his grip.

The attempted rape portrayal in *Hollyoaks in the City* showed some graphic violence and sexual explicitness. In the portrayal a young female model was taken to a garage outside Liverpool to appear in a snuff film—without her knowing what awaited her—which would be shot in the presence of a group of wealthy men who would watch and participate in the sexual assault, torture, rape and death of the young model. The scene showed the young model, semi-naked and screaming, as she was tied and gagged on the bed. A middle-aged man stood by the bed, naked, and prepared himself for the assault and rape. The scene ended before showing more details of the planned violent rape.

The accompanying or secondary violence was shown in two identical portrayals of sexual intercourse (both in *Hollyoaks in the City*) in which a young female character caught her best friend having sex with her boyfriend where a fight ensued, and in six other portrayals of passionate kissing and intimate touching where fights broke out for reasons related to the sexual storylines but not directly related to the sexual behaviours in question.

5.4 Outcomes of Sexual Activity

All sexual portrayals were measured for outcomes of sexual activity which were divided into two types, negative and positive. Positive outcomes comprised eight categories: (1) neutral: no outcomes exhibited or impossible to tell, (2) gaining status, prestige or popularity, (3) gaining peer approval, (4) furthering a career, (5) establishing or enhancing a romantic or sexual relationship, (6) material gain, (7) achieving pregnancy and (8) other. Negative outcomes included nine categories: (1) neutral, (2) experiencing personal guilt or remorse, (3) damaging or ending a relationship, (4) diminishing status, prestige or popularity, (5) peer rejection, (6) causing worry about unwanted pregnancy, (7) causing worry about abortion, (8) causing worry about STDs/AIDS, and (9) other.

Within a single portrayal a sexual activity could have two different outcomes, positive and negative, for those involved. All portrayals were judged to have positive and/or negative outcomes taking into consideration the theme and context of sexual activity and the overall storylines. For instance, a portrayal of sexual

intercourse might convey an overall positive outcome (establishing or enhancing a relationship) for the two characters involved, and a negative outcome (cause worry about STDs) for either partner or both as safe sex was not practised; or ‘achieving pregnancy’, a positive outcome, for the female character and ‘damaging or ending a relationship’, a negative outcome, for the male partner.

5.4.1 Positive Outcomes

Of all 506 portrayals around 39% (196 portrayals) were found to have shown positive outcomes of some sort, whilst just over 61% (310 portrayals) did not show any positive outcomes and were therefore classified as neutral. The most likely positive outcome of sexual activity to be portrayed was ‘establishing or enhancing a romantic or sexual relationship’ which was found in 109 portrayals, representing over 21% of all portrayals found. The second most likely positive outcome was ‘material gain’ with 7% (35 portrayals), followed by ‘furthering a career’ at almost 6% or 29 portrayals. Least frequently occurring outcomes, below 2% or 9 portrayals, were ‘achieving pregnancy’ (0.2%), ‘gaining peer approval’ (1.2%), ‘gaining status, prestige or popularity’ (1.4%) and ‘other’ (1.8%). Outcomes that were coded in the latter category included gaining confidence, self-esteem and discovering and exploring one’s own sexuality.

There were major differences in the distribution of positive outcomes between portrayals of sexual talk and those of sexual behaviour, with the latter more likely to show such outcomes than the former ($X^2 = 86.317$, $df=7$, $p<.001$). It was found that a little over 60% of all behaviours showed positive outcomes, compared to a quarter (25.7%) of all sexual talk portrayals. Reflecting the overall percentages observed above, ‘establishing or enhancing romantic or sexual relationship’ was still the most frequent positive outcome to occur in either type of portrayals, however, with a much greater frequency in sexual behaviours (41% or 79 portrayals of all behaviours) than in sexual talks (9.5% or 30 portrayals of all talks). Similarly, ‘material gain’ was the second most common occurring outcome in sexual behaviour portrayals (8.4% of all behaviours) and sexual talk portrayals (6% of all

sexual talk portrayals), and followed, again, by ‘furthering a career’ (7% and 5% respectively), (see Table 5-3).

There were noticeable disparities among some soap operas in terms of the occurrence of positive outcomes ($X^2 = 1.201$, $df=42$, $p<.001$). Of all seven soaps operas the three most popular were least likely to show any positive outcome, with 83% of *EastEnders*’ sexual portrayals showing no such outcomes, 76% of *Coronation Street*’s and 66% of *Emmerdale*’s. By contrast, soaps aimed at younger audiences showed a greater number of sexual portrayals with positive outcomes, with over half of *Neighbours*’ portrayals (56%) showing a positive outcome of some sort, 43%, 42% and 41% of *Hollyoaks in the City*’s, *Hollyoaks*’ and *Home and Away*’s, respectively. However, the most common positive outcome shown in each one of the seven soaps operas was ‘establishing or enhancing a romantic or sexual relationship’, which was shown in 44% of all portrayals found in *Neighbours*, 38% in *Home and Away*, 31% in *Emmerdale*, 29% in *Hollyoaks*, 24.5% in *Coronation Street*, 15% in *EastEnders* and just under 14% in *Hollyoaks in the City*.

Positive Outcomes of Sexual Activity		Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		
		Sexual Talk	Sexual Behaviour	Total
Neutral	Count	234	76	310
	% within nature of scene	74.3%	39.8%	61.3%
Gaining status/prestige/popularity	Count	5	2	7
	% within nature of scene	1.6%	1.0%	1.4%
Gaining peer approval	Count	2	4	6
	% within nature of scene	.6%	2.1%	1.2%
Furthering a career	Count	16	13	29
	% within nature of scene	5.1%	6.8%	5.7%
Establishing or enhancing romantic/sexual relationship	Count	30	79	109
	% within nature of scene	9.5%	41.4%	21.5%
Material gain	Count	19	16	35
	% within nature of scene	6.0%	8.4%	6.9%
Achieving pregnancy	Count	1	0	1
	% within nature of scene	.3%	.0%	.2%
Other	Count	8	1	9
	% within nature of scene	2.5%	.5%	1.8%
Total	Count	315	191	506
	% within nature of scene	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5-3 The distribution of positive outcomes across scenes with sexual talk and behaviour.

Put differently, the three most popular British and two Australian soaps operas, when portraying positive outcomes, were predominantly showing the ‘establishing or enhancing a romantic or sexual relationship’ outcome: 100% of all portrayals with positive outcome in *Coronation Street*, and over 90% in *EastEnders*, *Emmerdale*, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*.

The other two most occurring outcomes, ‘material gain’ and ‘furthering a career’, were largely (indeed almost exclusively) concentrated in *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Hollyoaks*, which featured storylines revolving around prostitution and escorting, and ambitious young people embarking on sexual as well as romantic relationships to further their own careers. Just under a quarter (23%) of all portrayals in *Hollyoaks in the City* showed ‘material gain’ and ‘furthering a career’ outcomes, which, combined, were twice as likely to be shown as ‘establishing or enhancing a sexual or romantic relationship’. Also, one in ten (9%) of portrayals in *Hollyoaks* was found to have a ‘material gain’ outcome. Similarly, gaining peer approval and popularity outcomes were, once again, found in *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City* in portrayals that dealt primarily with teenage sexual and romantic topics. Ten of the thirteen portrayals (3% of overall portrayals) showing such outcomes were found in these two soaps (for more details see Appendix: Table 2.1).

5.4.2 Negative Outcomes

Over half (52%) of all 506 portrayals presented sexual activities as having negative outcomes of some sort, while 48% showed no negative outcomes and were classified as ‘neutral’. The most frequent negative outcome of sexual activity to be portrayed was ‘damaging or ending a relationship’, found in almost 17% of all portrayals across all seven soap operas, followed by ‘experiencing personal guilt or remorse’, which was portrayed in 8% of all portrayals. However, portrayals of sexual activity resulting in ‘peer rejection’ and ‘diminishing status, prestige or popularity’ constituted, combined, around 11% of all portrayals (7% for the latter and 4% for the former), whilst consequences of sexual activities causing worry about ‘unwanted pregnancy’ and ‘abortion’ were depicted in just over 5% of all portrayals; and a sizeable proportion of portrayals (11%) were found to contain other

negative outcomes that could not be classified in the mentioned categories and were coded as 'other'. These included damaging or ending a career, causing loss of confidence and lack self-esteem, damaging reputation, psychological damage, arrest and imprisonment.

Unlike positive outcomes, negative outcomes were most likely to be depicted in portrayals of sexual talk rather than sexual behaviour ($X^2 = 76.738$, $df=7$, $p<.001$), with a little under two-thirds of all sexual talk (65%) found to convey negative consequences, compared to almost one-third (31%) of all sexual behaviour, a pattern which indicated that verbal rather than visual narratives were relied upon in soap operas to communicate the negative consequences of sexual activities and storylines. Around one in five of all sexual talk portrayals (20%) discussed sexual activities that potentially resulted in damaging or ending a relationship, whereas 12% of all sexual behaviour portrayals potentially yielded such an outcome. However, portrayals of behaviours (11%) were more likely to show personal guilt or remorse as a consequence of engaging in sexual activity than portrayals of sexual talk (6.3%), but conversely the latter portrayals (16%) conveyed peer rejection and diminishing popularity as negative consequences more than the former (3%). Similarly, worries about unwanted pregnancies and abortions were handled primarily in sexual talk portrayals (8%) rather than in behaviours portrayals (0.5%). Consequences categorised as 'other' were also largely discussed in sexual talk portrayals (15%) rather than in behaviours (6%), (Table 5-4).

The percentages of portrayals conveying negative consequences varied considerably from one soap opera to another and were statistically significant ($X^2 = 2.237$, $df=42$, $p<.001$), with the majority of sexual portrayals found in *EastEnders* (68%) and *Coronation Street* (64%), and a little over half of portrayals in *Hollyoaks in the City* (56%) and *Home and Away* (51%) depicting negative outcomes. Such outcomes, however, occurred least in *Neighbours* (in 28% of its portrayals), *Hollyoaks* (35%) and *Emmerdale* (41%).

Engaging in sexual activities that resulted in 'damaging or ending a relationship' was most common in *EastEnders* (in almost 40% of its portrayals), *Emmerdale*

(24%) and *Coronation Street* (19%) which featured a few storylines tackling cheating and infidelity, and least common in *Hollyoaks* (6%) and *Home and Away* (11%); both *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Neighbours* had 16% of their portrayals showing the same outcome, reflecting the overall percentage.

Negative Outcomes of Sexual Activity		Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		
		<i>Sexual Talk</i>	<i>Sexual Behaviour</i>	Total
Neutral	Count	111	132	243
	% within nature of scene	35.2%	69.1%	48.0%
Experiencing personal guilt or remorse	Count	20	20	40
	% within nature of scene	6.3%	10.5%	7.9%
Damaging/ending a relationship	Count	63	22	85
	% within nature of scene	20.0%	11.5%	16.8%
Diminishing status, prestige or popularity	Count	32	2	34
	% within nature of scene	10.2%	1.0%	6.7%
Peer rejection	Count	18	3	21
	% within nature of scene	5.7%	1.6%	4.2%
Causing worry about unwanted pregnancy	Count	15	1	16
	% within nature of scene	4.8%	.5%	3.2%
Causing worry about abortion	Count	10	0	10
	% within nature of scene	3.2%	.0%	2.0%
Other	Count	46	11	57
	% within nature of scene	14.6%	5.8%	11.3%
Total	Count	315	191	506
	% within nature of scene	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5-4 The distribution of negative outcomes across scenes with sexual talk and behaviour

‘Experiencing personal guilt or remorse’ as a result of engaging in sexual activities was mainly portrayed in *Hollyoaks in the City* (15% its portrayals) and *Hollyoaks* (5%) and particularly in storylines and portrayals of prostitution and ‘escorting’; and ‘diminishing status, prestige or popularity’ was found in *Coronation Street* (21%) largely in the portrayals of an incestuous relationship, in *Hollyoaks in the City* (7%) and in *Emmerdale* (17%). The ‘peer rejection’ outcome occurred in *Coronation Street* (4%) and also largely in *Hollyoaks in the City* (7%) in the portrayals of a homosexual storyline in which a teenager and a teacher suffered from rejection by their peers because of their sexual orientation.

Portrayals of sexual activity ‘causing worry about pregnancy’ comprised almost 10% of *Coronation Street*’s portrayals, 15% of *EastEnders*’, 8% of *Neighbours*’ and 2.5% of *Hollyoaks*’, while ‘causing worry about abortion’ was found only in

Coronation Street (almost 10%) and *EastEnders* (12%) (For further details see Appendix: Table 2.2).

5.5 Summary and Discussion

In this part of the study clear evidence emerged that sexual activities portrayed in soap operas are most likely to occur in particular time-frames and locations. The majority of sexual activities, nearly nine in ten, were portrayed in a present time-frame, compared to just one in ten portrayed in a past time-frame. This pattern was, to a large extent, the same across all the soap operas with the exception of *EastEnders* and *Hollyoaks in the City*, which had almost 15% of their sexual activities set in the past. This clearly indicates that sexual activities or sexual storylines are part of the everyday-life narratives, the present, and the instantaneous realism that soap operas, as a TV genre, try to capture in their snapshots of what is supposedly ordinary life.

The location settings showed that just under half of all sexual portrayals (46%) took place either in a living room or bedroom, and around one in five (18%) at a pub/bar. In general, portrayals of sexual behaviour were most likely to occur in the privacy of either a living room or bedroom rather than in any other locations, and portrayals of sexual talk rather than behaviour were more likely to occur in a public setting. While there were hardly any portrayals of sexual intercourse taking place in public locations (only four portrayals were found, all in *Hollyoaks in the City*), a large proportion of sexual behaviours (one in five or 20% of all sexual behaviour portrayals) were portrayed at a pub/bar. Those portrayals were largely made up of less intimate behaviours, mainly passionate kisses.

The location patterns found across all seven soap operas indicated the following. First, sexual portrayals in general, and overt depictions of sexual behaviour in particular, were confined to the private sphere rather than the public, and soap operas did not seem to overstep the boundaries in this regard, with the exception of *Hollyoaks in the City*, which featured some intimate sexual behaviours taking place outdoors and in public settings. Second, the pub/bar as a locale in soap operas emerged as one of the most common locations at which sexual portrayals occur or

are filmed. The five British soaps, which included the three most popular soaps, *Hollyoaks* and its spin-off, portrayed on average over one in five of their sexual portrayals (behaviour and talk) at a pub/bar, which suggests the cultural importance of such a locale to British soap operas overall, and some acceptance for showing sexual intimacy, although mild in nature, in such a public location.

In just over one in five (22%) of all sexual portrayals alcohol was found to be either present or consumed by at least one of the characters involved. Although alcohol use or presence was a prominent feature in all sexual portrayals found across all seven soaps, it was more likely to occur in *Emmerdale* (38%), *Hollyoaks in the City* (27%) and *Neighbours* (20%) than in the other soaps operas, which had around 13% to 16% of their portrayals containing alcohol. The presence or use of drugs, on the other hand, was found in only 15 portrayals, representing 3% of the overall portrayals. All 15 portrayals (12 sexual behaviour and three sexual talk portrayals) were found exclusively in *Hollyoaks in the City*. Interestingly, smoking was the least common of all accompanying behaviours, as it was depicted in only three sexual portrayals, accounting for less than 1% (0.6%) of the overall sexual portrayals.

What emerged from the findings above was (a) the prevalence of alcohol and alcohol use in sexual portrayals found across the board (day-time as well as prime-time soaps), and the coupling of alcohol with sexual portrayals, where the former was often a prelude to either sexual behaviours (three in ten of all sexual behaviour portrayals featured alcohol consumption) or sexual talks (two in ten of all sexual talks featured alcohol consumption), (b) the total absence of drug use in sexual portrayals in day-time and prime-time soaps, and its prominent existence in portrayals of the late-night spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*, and (c) the virtual absence of smoking as an accompanying behaviour to sexual activity across all seven soap operas.

There are some suggestions, as well as arguments, that the coupling of presence or use of alcohol, drugs or smoking with sexual portrayals or sexual imagery in the media is done to glamorise (predominantly in the case of advertising), or can lead to glamorising alcohol, drugs and smoking and their consumption, particularly by

young audiences. Ultimately such coupling, through capitalising upon the appeal of sexuality and sexual imagery, has the power to potentially impact upon viewers' attitudes and behaviours (Durant et al, 1997; Gunter, 2002a; Reichert and Lambiase, 2003 and 2006).

In this regard, portrayals of the use of alcohol, drugs and smoking in soap operas have often been considered as a reason for concern, since soap operas—being a pervasive TV genre, watched with a great frequency and continuity over years by a large number of low-income audiences, and of women, teens and the elderly—have the potential to act as information conduits, influencing substantially large sections of viewers and bringing about behavioural and attitudinal changes.

It has been suggested that if television in general and soap operas in particular are believed to be persuasive in forming cultural values, then they might possibly create a world in which drinking or smoking looks attractive and viewers can equate alcohol with success; and furthermore, if drinkers are portrayed as glamorous or wealthy, this might lead viewers to form attitudes and perceptions that equate successful life-styles with certain behaviours, which could contribute to the normalisation of unfavourable behaviours (e.g. drinking and smoking) in the real world; and such possibilities would be amplified if smoking or drinking were tied to sexuality and sexual imagery (Diener, 2007; Wallack et al. 1987). In fact, some studies (Cooper, 2002; Dermen et al. 1998) have suggested that there is strong evidence linking alcohol drinking to the decision of having sex and to indiscriminate forms of risky sex among college students in the US.

Furthermore, it has been found that alcohol use is strongly associated with decreases in protective sexual behaviours (safe-sex and use of contraception and condom) among young people whose behaviours are likely to be informed by, among other things, prevalent competing cues (favouring action vs. inhibiting action) portrayed by the media. Similarly, it has been found, as far as young viewers are concerned, that there is a strong and direct association between exposure to tobacco use in the media in general and TV dramas and films in particular and trying

cigarettes, and that smoking in films has a role in the initiation of the habit of smoking among adolescents. (Sargent et al. 2001; Wakefield et al. 2003)

In general, content analysis studies indicate that the portrayal of alcohol consumption is a prominent feature in the genre, and that soaps are more likely to portray alcohol and drinking than smoking and drug use. Analysing health-related behaviours in a four-week sample of four UK soap operas,³⁸ Adams and White (2007) found that the most common health behaviours were those related to alcohol consumption, occurring with a frequency of just under 20 instances per programming hour of soap opera (a total of 619 instances). Smoking was reported to have occurred in only 0.5 instances per programming hour (a total of 17 instances).

Furthermore Hansen (2003) has found that soap operas were far more likely than any other TV genres or programmes to portray alcohol and drinking, and that drinking (alcohol or non-alcoholic) was featured more prominently in soaps than other dramas and was a central narrative device in soap operas. He reported that the hourly rate of visual references to alcohol was considerably higher in soaps (10.6 references)³⁹ than in drama (4.3) or News (1.9), while the hourly rate of alcohol drinking scenes was equally higher in soaps (7 scenes) compared to Drama (3.1 scenes) and News (1.3 scenes). By contrast, smoking and drug use references were insignificant in comparison to those of alcohol. The hourly rate of smoking/tobacco references in soap operas was 0.9 and 0.4 for illegal drugs.

In addition, Hansen (2003) found a considerable increase over a twenty-year period (from 1983 to 2003) in the hourly rate of visual references to alcohol, from 5.8 to 9.3 to 10.6, and in the rate of alcohol scenes, from 3.9 to 6.4 to 7.0 alcohol drinking scenes per hour of soap opera programming. The previous findings in Adams and White (2007) do seem to suggest, despite the slight differences in the

³⁸ *Coronation Street, EastEnders, Emmerdale and Hollyoaks.*

³⁹ Similarly, in a content analysis study of soap operas shown on Dutch TV channels, Van Hoof et al. (2009) found more or less similar rates of references to alcohol of around 4.4 drinks (references) per 25-minute episode—the hourly rate will be just around 11 references.

methodologies used, a continuing increase in the portrayals of alcohol, and a decrease in those of smoking in soap operas.

Interestingly, similar trends have been observed in US soap operas. In a longitudinal study, while hypothesising a decrease in the portrayals of alcohol and smoking to reflect the high levels of societal concerns over alcohol consumption and smoking, Diener (2007) found that portrayals of alcohol and drinking in US soap operas substantially increased over a 15-year period, from 144 scenes in the 1986 TV season, to 208 scenes in 1991 and to 243 scenes in 2001. By contrast, portrayals of tobacco/smoking, already insignificant in the first place, decreased from 11 scenes in 1991 to just 5 scenes in 2001.

Certainly the findings in this research indicate that a large number of sexual portrayals (over one in five) featured alcohol and alcohol consumption. The coupling of alcohol and its use with sexual activity - whether talks or behaviours - was often unproblematic, even in the most controversial portrayals of underage sex and drinking in *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Hollyoaks*. In the portrayal of sexual behaviours in particular, alcohol consumption was portrayed as a prelude to sexual behaviours, as a confidence booster and a precondition to 'having fun and a good time' or 'enjoying ourselves first'.

The frequency with which alcohol consumption accompanied sexual activities, the unproblematic depiction of its consumption, and the lack of negative and risky consequences when engaging in both activities (sex and drinking) presented the coupling of sexual behaviours with drinking alcohol as the norm or the natural thing to do, especially in the five British soap operas.

Likewise, in the portrayal of sexual talk, alcohol consumption was presented as an important component of the environmental settings in which debating and discussing sexual and romantic relationships took place, and as a way of dealing with the joy and heartbreak of romantic and sexual relationships.

What also emerged in this study with regard to both sexual activity and alcohol consumption is the significance of the pub/bar as a locale in soap opera narratives, as a substantial number of sexual portrayals featuring alcohol consumption were

located in a pub or bar—once again more in the case of the five British soaps, a cultural perspective all reflecting a British reality which often celebrates ‘drinking’ as a feature of ‘Britishness’ or ‘the British way of life’ (Hansen, 2003: p 30).

The current content analysis findings indicate that smoking tobacco no longer accompanied sexual portrayals—as White (2007) also has indicated, smoking is now generally absent from these programmes—and that there is no evidence that soap operas were ‘fetishising’ and glamorising smoking by the positive paring of sex and smoking/tobacco, where previously mainstream media (films and advertising in particular) resorted to such techniques.

Likewise, drug use was absent in the portrayals of the main six soap operas (daytime and prime-time), but present in the sexual portrayals of the late night spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*, which often highlighted the negative consequences and risky behaviours associated with drug use and sexual behaviours.

Aggression and violence were found in roughly one out of ten sexual portrayals across all seven soap operas (9% of all portrayals). However, much of the violence and aggression was not sexually motivated violence. Only three portrayals of sexual behaviours (0.6% of all portrayals) included sexual violence, while the rest (8% or 41 portrayals) featured accompanying or secondary violence in the form of altercations and physical fighting, which apparently characterise soap opera violence. As in the current study, Gunter et al. (2003) found that the worst violent acts in soaps shown on UK television were punching and pushing, and the causes were often sexual possessiveness or protectiveness, also that female aggression tended to be verbal, often dealing with male sexual overtures or female sexual competition and jealousy.

Although violence or aggression was found in what may be considered as a substantial 9% of sexual portrayals, the detailed findings indicate that the forms or nature of violence and aggression prevalent in those sexual portrayals were at a very low level, in that sexually-motivated behavioural violence—about which there is a considerable degree of public sensitivity—was very rare. Explicit violent sexual

imagery was virtually nonexistent in the daytime and prime-time soap operas, but occurred once in a rape portrayal in *Hollyoaks in the City*.

Such violent sexual imagery, it has been suggested, can potentially lead to male aggression against women, particularly under circumstances where the male viewer has been angered and has perceived certain similarities between the female victim in a movie or drama series and a real life female target (Malamuth, 1988). Other studies, mainly in the US, have found that exposure to heavy doses of media sexual violence and erotic films can result in attitudinal changes among young male college students, who potentially become more relaxed about the seriousness of rape and less sympathetic towards rape victims. Others such as Zillmann and Bryant (1984) have even suggested that exposure to erotic violence in films can lead to changes in opinion among female viewers (see also Gunter, 1998; Malamuth and Donnerstein, 1984).

Given the concerns expressed, by the public and media regulators alike, over violence portrayed in soap operas in general and sexual violence in particular, the current findings indicate that the possibility for exposure to sexually motivated violence in daytime and prime-time soap operas is virtually nonexistent. However, violence or aggression that manifests itself in the form of altercations and physical fighting is clearly present and remains a cause for concern, as viewers, journalists and regulatory bodies often highlight (BSC 2002, 2003; Ofcom 2005a and 2005b).

With regard to outcomes of sexual activities, the study's findings indicate that soap operas' sexual portrayals were more likely to show negative than positive consequences for those involved in sexual activities, with over five in ten of all portrayals (52%) identified as depicting negative consequences, compared to just four in ten (39%) showing positive consequences. The most frequently portrayed outcomes of sexual activity were: 'establishing or enhancing a romantic or sexual relationship' (21% of all portrayals) and 'damaging or ending a relationship' (17%). Further, evidence emerged that portrayal of engaging in sexual behaviour was less likely to convey negative consequences and more likely to depict positive consequences (over 60% of all behaviours showed positive outcomes). But by

contrast, the majority of sexual talk portrayals (just under two-thirds) showed negative rather than positive consequences.

Almost all these soaps, especially those aimed at young viewers, initially depicted engaging in sexual *behaviours* as unproblematic, glamorous and with little or no negative consequences, and then moved onto flagging up potential negative consequences. *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*, in particular, highlighted more negative consequences in their sexual portrayals than any other soap opera, while *Neighbours*, *Hollyoaks* and *Emmerdale* showed considerably fewer of such outcomes. It can be concluded that younger viewers are unlikely to be exposed to risky and irresponsible sexual behaviours portrayed across soap operas without being informed of the negative consequences of such behaviours.

The overall picture does suggest a pattern in which sex and sexual relationships in soap operas are more likely to be portrayed as resulting in negative consequences for those involved than as having positive outcomes, which has often been seen as intrinsic to the genre's success in incorporating controversial storylines while maintaining a balance between production values (drama and entertainment) and responsibility (educating and informing) (Hobson, 2003; Millwood-Hargrave and, 2002)

In fact, soap opera producers, as well as fans, often mention the 'consequences' factor to defend soap operas' portrayal of controversial sexual storylines from criticisms. They have always argued that the rationale for screening controversial sexual storylines dealing with topics such as underage sex, teenage pregnancy, STDs, rape, incest and paedophilia, is to show their audiences, especially young viewers, the grave consequences that might follow.

Commenting on and defending the inclusion of one of the storylines dealing with teenage sexual relationships, Steve Frost, executive producer of *Coronation Street*, stated: 'we have to acknowledge that yes teenagers do have sex, they do find it enjoyable, they do sleep with more than one person at some time; this is all very real. What we have to do then is be responsible and say yes you can do this, it might

be fun, there might be a lot of pleasure in it in the moment, but consider the consequences.’ [In *Sex, Lies and Soaps*]⁴⁰

Similarly, defending a controversial storyline in which a teenage girl was pressurised by her peers and boyfriend to lose her virginity, Brian Kirkwood, executive producer of *Hollyoaks*, argued that ‘we have to be really careful not to glamorize underage sex... in the Amy Barns story for instance, we have had a moral responsibility to show that this girl has been pressurized into having it against her will, and ultimately would live to regret it; you know the consequences were far-reaching and pretty harsh.’ [In *Sex, Lies and Soaps*]

On current evidence, the negative consequences found across all seven soaps, especially those revolving around guilt/remorse, peer pressure, pregnancy, abortion and STDs, and the frequencies of their occurrence do corroborate the producers’ remarks. However, in many cases involving underage sex found here, particularly in *Hollyoaks* and its spin-off, no consequences of any sort were identified. Furthermore engaging in sex (behaviours) was portrayed as glamorous, unproblematic and the normal thing for young people to do.

⁴⁰ *Sex, Lies, and Soaps* is a TV documentary screened on Channel 4 at 10am on 27th November 2006.

Chapter 6

Sexual Activity: Participants' Profile

While the two preceding chapters presented the findings about, and discussed, the nature, amount, and types of sexual portrayals alongside the various contextual elements embedded within those portrayals, this chapter focuses primarily on the profile of all characters involved in sexual scenes, whether depicting sexual behaviours or talks. In this study two clusters of variables were identified and then analysed. The first cluster encompassed four generic variables: gender, ethnic origin, age and occupation; whilst the second involved six contextual variables: character's sexual orientation, instigator of sexual behaviour, motivation for engaging in a sexual behaviour, relationship status and influence of drugs or alcohol. This chapter presents the overall findings for each of the above ten variables, identifies emerging major patterns across all or groups of soap operas, and compares individual soap opera profiles against each other. Further, the chapter summarises and discusses those findings and their significance, and compares them, where possible, with the findings of previous studies.

6.1 Characters' Distribution across Sexual Scenes and Soap Operas

There were 1,148 characters catalogued across all seven soap operas' 506 sexual portrayals, around half of which (554 characters, or just over 48% of all characters) were found in *Hollyoaks in the City*'s 242 sexual portrayals alone, and just over 15% (175 characters) in *Hollyoaks*' portrayals. Over one in ten (10.5%, N=121) of all characters were from *Coronation Street*, and just over 8% (94 characters) were in *EastEnders*. The proportion of characters found across *Home and Away*'s, *Emmerdale*'s and *Neighbours*' sexual portrayals was much smaller, representing respectively 7.6% (87 characters), 5.6% (64 characters) and 4.5% (52 characters) of

the overall catalogued characters. Further, in terms of the nature of sexual portrayals, 64% (735) of all characters were found across portrayals of sexual talk, whereas just 36% (413 characters) were found across portrayals of sexual behaviour—the distribution of characters across the two types reflected, to a large extent, the overall percentages reported earlier (Chapter Four) for the portrayals of both talk and behaviour, with 62% of all characters found across the former type and (38%) across the latter.

The distribution of characters across sexual portrayals varied from one portrayal to another, in that some portrayals contained one or two participants, while others contained three or more participants. In addition, the distribution of those portrayals (according to the number of characters they contained) varied across the two main types of portrayals (talk and behaviour), as well as across all seven soap operas.

Of the 506 portrayals, around 81% (409 portrayals) were found to contain only two characters, which, in other words, meant that sexual activities (whether behaviours or talks) depicted in those 81% of portrayals were found to have taken place *exclusively* between two characters. Further, over one in ten (10.3%; N=52) of all portrayals featured sexual activities involving three characters, while 8.5% (N=43) featured four or more characters. On the other hand, only two portrayals, one that depicted masturbation and the other striptease, featured one character, which represented 0.4% of the overall number of portrayals.

Across the two types of portrayals, it was found that just over 76% of all *sexual talk* portrayals involved only two characters, 14% three characters and almost 10% four or more characters, compared to just over 88% of all *sexual behaviour* portrayals involving two characters, 4% three characters, 7% four or more characters and 1% one character. These differences, however, were found to be statistically significant ($X^2=19.605$, $df=3$, $p<.001$). Furthermore, the majority of sexual talk portrayals that involved three or more characters were portrayals of sexual intercourse (affairs and cheating), comments about other people's sexual relationships and sex life, and controversial topics such as incest and sex-related crimes (see Appendix: Table 3.1).

Although it was fairly commonplace to see more than two characters ‘talk about sex’ in a few numbers of portrayals of sexual talk, the presence of 20 portrayals of sexual behaviours (representing 11% of all behaviours) featuring three or more characters engaged in a sexual behaviour of some sort is unexpected, and perhaps concerning, given the nature of the genre; but nevertheless those portrayals and their nature need to be looked at further, as will be discussed below.

Across the seven soap operas, however, there were some noticeable differences in terms of the number of characters involved in their portrayals. Such differences, nonetheless, were found to be statistically non-significant ($X^2 = 22.390$, $df=18$, $p<.215$). Soap comparisons indicated clearly that the overwhelming majority of sexual portrayals in each of the seven soap operas depicted sexual activities that involved only two characters: just over 75% of all portrayals in *Coronation Street*, 83% in *EastEnders*, 90% in *Emmerdale*, 84% in *Hollyoaks*, 79% in *Hollyoaks in the City*, 73% in *Home and Away* and 96% in *Neighbours*.

As Table 6-1 shows, around one in ten of all sexual portrayals in *Hollyoaks* (9%; 7 portrayals) and *Hollyoaks in the City* (10%; 24 portrayals) and around one in five portrayals in *Coronation Street* (21%; 11 portrayals) and *Home and Away* (19%; 7 portrayals) depicted sexual activities that involved three characters. Also around one in ten of all portrayals found in *EastEnders* (12%; 5 portrayals), *Emmerdale* (10%; 3 portrayals), *Hollyoaks* (8%; 6 portrayals), *Hollyoaks in the City* (10%; 24 portrayals) and *Home and Away* (8%; 3 portrayals) depicted sexual activities involving four or more characters.

The majority of portrayals featuring three or more characters found across all soaps, excluding *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City*, were portrayals of sexual talk. As mentioned earlier, in total only 20 portrayals of sexual behaviour had three or more characters, compared to 75 portrayals of sexual talk with three or more characters.

Of those 20 portrayals eight depicted ‘passionate kissing’, six ‘physical flirting or suggestiveness’, three ‘sexual intercourse implied’, and one for each of ‘intimate touching’, ‘intercourse depicted’ and ‘rape/attempted rape’. Additionally,

the majority (17) of those portrayals were found in *Hollyoaks* (five portrayals) and *Hollyoaks in the City* (12 portrayals). The involvement of three or more characters in those sexual behaviours was of a particular nature. Strictly speaking, sexual behaviour in most of the above portrayals, with the exception of four portrayals of physical suggestiveness and one rape portrayal, occurred between two characters only; the third or fourth characters were merely part of the overall portrayals and narratives. For instance, in the intercourse portrayals, the extra characters just witnessed or caught those involved in the act; and the same is true of some of the passionate kissing cases.

Soap Operas		Number of Characters Involved in Sexual Activity/Scene				
		One characters	Two characters	Three characters	Four characters or more	Total
<i>Coronation Street</i>	Count	0	40	11	2	53
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	75.5%	20.8%	3.8%	100.0%
<i>EastEnders</i>	Count	0	34	2	5	41
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	82.9%	4.9%	12.2%	100.0%
<i>Emmerdale</i>	Count	0	26	0	3	29
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	89.7%	.0%	10.3%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	Count	0	66	7	6	79
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	83.5%	8.9%	7.6%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	Count	2	192	24	24	242
	% within Soap Operas	.8%	79.3%	9.9%	9.9%	100.0%
<i>Home & Away</i>	Count	0	27	7	3	37
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	73.0%	18.9%	8.1%	100.0%
<i>Neighbours</i>	Count	0	24	1	0	25
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	96.0%	4.0%	.0%	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	Count	2	409	52	43	506
	% within Soap Operas	.4%	80.8%	10.3%	8.5%	100.0%

Table 6-1 Number of characters involved in sexual activity by soap opera

The physical flirting and suggestiveness cases, all found in *Hollyoaks in the City*, were sexually very explicit, featuring small groups of young, semi-naked male and female models posing provocatively for photo shoots. The rape portrayals, also in *Hollyoaks in the City*, featured a young female model being drugged and then raped by three young men at an adult-themed underwear party. It can therefore be concluded that almost all sexual behaviours found across all seven soap operas occurred exclusively between two characters, including the 20 portrayals of sexual behaviour which featured three or more characters, and there were no portrayals of

controversial behaviours featuring group sex or a sex orgy, except for the lone rape case.

In sum, although just 11% (N=20) of portrayals of sexual behaviours included three or more characters, of which only a small minority were involved in group-sex and/or advanced intimate sexual behaviours, the overwhelming majority (88%) of all scenes portraying sexual behaviours involved only two characters, the majority of whom engaged in mild sexual behaviours such as passionate kissing, intimate touching and physical flirting and suggestiveness (see Appendix: Table 3.2)—it is worth noting that differences in the distribution of scenes across the two types of portrayals (talk and behaviour) according to the number of characters involved were found to be statistically significant, with X^2 value of 44.197, $df=22$, $p<.001$ for portrayals of sexual talk, and 1.064, $df=27$, $p<.001$ for those of sexual behaviours.

6.2 Characters' Profile: Generic Attributes

6.2.1 Gender

The overall percentages of the characters' gender distribution indicated that there were more males than females across soap operas' portrayals of sex and sexuality. Of the total 1,148 characters catalogued, almost 53% (605 characters) were males and 47% (543 characters) females. Similarly, the same pattern was replicated across the two types of portrayals, where it was found that there were more males (52%; 383 characters) than females (48%; 352 characters) across portrayals of sexual talk, and more males (54%; 222 characters) than females (46%; 191 characters) across portrayals of sexual behaviour. However, the gender differences across the two types of portrayals were found to be statistically *insignificant*, ($X^2 = .287$, $df=1$, $p<.318$).

There were major disparities in the distribution of characters according to gender among some soap operas, which were statistically very significant ($X^2=20.772$, $df=6$, $p<.002$), with only three soap operas reflecting the overall pattern of male overrepresentation, however, with much higher percentages for male characters than those of the overall sample observed above.

Table 6-2 shows that male characters were more likely than female characters to appear in sexual portrayals and/or engage in sexual activities of some sort in each of *Emmerdale* (56% males vs. 44% females), *Hollyoaks* (54% vs. 46%) and *Hollyoaks in the City* (58% vs. 42%). By contrast, female rather than male characters were more likely to appear in the sexual portrayals of the two Australian soap operas, *Neighbours* (52% females vs. 48% males) and *Home and Away* (56% females vs. 44% males), and most noticeably in those of the two British rivals, *Coronation Street* (55% females vs. 45% males) and *EastEnders* (62% females vs. 38% males).

Soap Operas		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
<i>Coronation Street</i>	Count	54	67	121
	% within Soap Operas	44.6%	55.4%	100.0%
<i>EastEnders</i>	Count	36	58	94
	% within Soap Operas	38.3%	61.7%	100.0%
<i>Emmerdale</i>	Count	36	28	64
	% within Soap Operas	56.2%	43.8%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	Count	94	81	175
	% within Soap Operas	53.7%	46.3%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	Count	321	233	554
	% within Soap Operas	57.9%	42.1%	100.0%
<i>Home & Away</i>	Count	38	49	87
	% within Soap Operas	43.7%	56.3%	100.0%
<i>Neighbours</i>	Count	25	27	52
	% within Soap Operas	48.1%	51.9%	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	Count	604	543	1147
	% within Soap Operas	52.7%	47.3%	100.0%

Table 6-2 Characters' gender by soap opera

However, these significant differences in the distribution of characters' gender need to be qualified. Given that the preceding section established that there were only a few (N=20) sexual behaviours involving three or more characters, this could be explained by the fact that certain soap operas may have featured in their portrayals of sexual talk far more females than males or vice-versa, and/or that some soaps included portrayals and storylines dealing with homosexuality which may have contributed to the imbalance in gender representation across their sexual portrayals.

In fact, the distribution of characters' gender in terms of the type of portrayals (talk or behaviour) for each of the seven soap operas revealed that the overrepresentation of *female characters* in the two British rivals and two Australian soaps—which did not include portrayals or storylines of homosexuality—occurred by and large in portrayals of sexual talk rather than behaviour: of all the characters involved in sexual talk portrayals in *Coronation Street* 57% were females and 43% males, in *EastEnders* 65% females and 35% males, in *Home and Away* 58% females and 42% males and in *Neighbours* 52% female and 48% males; meanwhile the percentages of male and female characters involved in sexual behaviours were more or less equally distributed in the four soap operas—once again the gender differences across the two types of portrayals (talk and behaviour) in each of the seven soap operas were statistically non-significant, (see further details on percentages and Chi-square values in Appendix: Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 3.8, and 3.9).

The overrepresentation of *male characters* in *Emmerdale*, *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City*, was prevalent across the two types of sexual portrayal, *talk* and *behaviour*. Of all characters involved in sexual talk portrayals in *Emmerdale* 57% were males and 43% females, in *Hollyoaks* 55% males and 45% females, in *Hollyoaks in the City* 58.5% males and 41.5% males. Likewise, of all the characters involved in sexual behaviours males outnumbered females, 54.5% males vs. 45.5% females in *Emmerdale*, 52% vs. 48% in *Hollyoaks* and 58% vs. 42% in *Hollyoaks in the City*. Furthermore, one of the most apparent factors contributing to the overrepresentation of male characters was the fact that those three soap operas, in particular *Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks in the City*, depicted homosexual portrayals, as well as running storylines that dealt with sexual confusion, homosexuality and bisexuality. In fact the orientation of sexual activity findings revealed that three in ten of *Emmerdale's* and *Hollyoaks in the City's* sexual portrayals revolved around non-heterosexual themes, (see Chapter Four).

6.2.2 Ethnicity

The ethnicity of all catalogued characters was profiled in one of six generic categories: ‘white’ (Caucasian), ‘black’, ‘Asian’, ‘Chinese’, ‘mixed’ and ‘other’. Of the 1,148 characters found across the seven soap operas’ sexual portrayals, the overwhelming majority (90%, N=1032) of characters were identified as being ethnically white, while just over 7% (N=84) were identified as ethnically black. Further, only six characters, representing a non-significant percentage of 0.5%, were identified as Chinese, and just 26 characters (just over 2%) as ‘mixed’. And differences in the frequencies of characters belonging to various ethnicities were statistically highly significant ($X^2=2.590$, $df=3$, $p<.001$).

The findings of characters’ ethnic distribution in terms of type of portrayal revealed that there were no characters of Asian ethnic background found across all sexual portrayals. However, characters of black ethnic background were more likely to feature in sexual talks (over 71% of all blacks) than behaviours (29% of all blacks), compared to their counterparts from white ethnic backgrounds (63.5% for sexual talks; and 36.5% for sexual behaviours). However, those differences did not appear to be statistically significant ($X^2=4.897$, $df=3$, $p<.179$).

Additionally, a cross-tabulation of gender and ethnicity revealed some noticeable disparities ($X^2=38.260$, $df=3$, $p<.001$). Unlike white characters ethnic characters were more likely to be females than males, as all characters (100%) of ‘mixed race’ and Chinese ethnic backgrounds, and 52% of all blacks were females—only white males (55%) outnumbered their female counterparts (45%) (Table 6-3).

Gender		Ethnicity				
		White	Black	Chinese	Mixed	Total
Male	Count	565	40	0	0	605
	% within Gender	93.4%	6.6%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	% within Ethnicity	54.7%	47.6%	.0%	.0%	52.7%
Female	Count	467	44	6	26	543
	% within Gender	86.0%	8.1%	1.1%	4.8%	100.0%
	% within Ethnicity	45.3%	52.4%	100.0%	100.0%	47.3%
Total	Count	1032	84	6	26	1148
	% within Gender	89.9%	7.3%	.5%	2.3%	100.0%
	% within Ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6-3 Characters’ ethnicity by gender.

Soap opera comparisons yielded a number of significant differences in terms of the distribution of characters' ethnic backgrounds ($X^2=70.083$, $df=18$, $p<.001$). Most significant of all was the complete absence of any ethnic characters in certain soap operas' sexual portrayals, and the portrayal of just one ethnic minority in those featuring ethnic characters.

As Table 6-4 shows, characters of non-white ethnic backgrounds were predominantly concentrated in *Hollyoaks in the City*, *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale*. The former had the highest percentage (just over 15%) of non-white characters of any soap opera involved in its sexual portrayals, with one in ten (10%) of all its characters being blacks and 5% either Chinese or from other ethnic backgrounds. Meanwhile, well over one in ten (around 13%) of *EastEnders*' and *Emmerdale*'s characters were blacks—the only non-white ethnic characters found across their sexual portrayals. *Hollyoaks* and *Neighbours*, on the other hand, had considerably smaller percentages, with less than 5% of ethnic characters (blacks only) found in the former, and almost 8% in the latter. Interestingly, across all sexual portrayals (talk and behaviour) found in *Coronation Street* and *Home and Away*—a total number of 173 characters—there was not even a single character from non-white ethnic backgrounds.

Soap Operas		Ethnicity				
		White	Black	Chinese	Mixed	Total
<i>Coronation Street</i>	Count	121	0	0	0	121
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
<i>EastEnders</i>	Count	82	12	0	0	94
	% within Soap Operas	87.2%	12.8%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
<i>Emmerdale</i>	Count	56	8	0	0	64
	% within Soap Operas	87.5%	12.5%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	Count	167	8	0	0	175
	% within Soap Operas	95.4%	4.6%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	Count	470	56	6	22	554
	% within Soap Operas	84.8%	10.1%	1.1%	4.0%	100.0%
<i>Home & Away</i>	Count	87	0	0	0	87
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
<i>Neighbours</i>	Count	48	0	0	4	52
	% within Soap Operas	92.3%	.0%	.0%	7.7%	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	Count	1031	84	6	26	1147
	% within Soap Operas	89.9%	7.3%	.5%	2.3%	100.0%

Table 6-4 Character's ethnicity by soap opera.

6.2.3 Age

The age of each of the characters catalogued was coded as one of the following six categories: (1) child: up to 12 years, (2) teenager: 13 to 19 years, (3) young adult: 20 to 35 years, (4) middle aged adult: 36 to 65, (5) over sixty-five years old, and (5) unknown/cannot tell.

The findings of characters' age in this research indicated clearly that soap operas relied predominantly on young characters in their portrayals of sex and sexuality, as just under nine out of ten (86%) of all characters were found to be either teenagers or young adults. However, characters classified as 'young adults' were, by far, more likely than any other age groups to engage in sexual activities or appear in sexual portrayals, with around 63% of all characters being young adults, compared to 23% teenagers, and 13% middle-aged adults. Further, characters of an age of sixty-five years and/or over were depicted in sexual portrayals but comprised a tiny percentage of 1% only (13 characters) of the overall number of characters. Likewise, there were only four characters classified as children (up to 12 years old), representing just 0.3%. The obvious disparities in the distribution of characters by age were also found to be statistically significant ($X^2=1.513$, $df=4$, $p<.001$).

Generally reflecting the overall percentages of the frequencies of sexual talk and behaviour portrayals presented in Chapter Four, 64% of all characters were found across sexual talk portrayals and 36% across sexual behaviour portrayals. Nevertheless, the findings also indicated that there were noticeable disparities across the two types of portrayals, talk and behaviour, in terms of the age of characters involved ($X^2=17.701$, $df=4$, $p<.001$).

In general, characters belonging to older age categories were more likely to feature in portrayals of sexual talk rather than behaviour; while characters belonging to younger age categories were more likely than those belonging to older age categories to engage in sexual activities and feature in portrayals of sexual behaviours. As Table 6-5 shows, larger percentages of characters belonging to both categories of 'young adult' (42% of all young characters) and 'teenager' (36% of all teenage characters) were involved in portrayals of *sexual behaviours*, compared to

smaller percentages of those belonging to ‘middle-aged adult’ (23% of all middle-aged) and ‘over sixty-five years old’ (15% of all over sixty-five years) involved in the same type of portrayals. By contrast, 85% of all characters classified as ‘over sixty-five years’ and 77% of all ‘middle-aged’ characters were involved in portrayals of *sexual talks*, as opposed to just 63% of all ‘young adults’ and 58% of all ‘teenagers’.

The age of those characters involved in sexual behaviours is known to be of some concern to viewers, parents in particular, and media regulators, in terms of whether or not soap operas depict or use teenage or younger characters in certain portrayals of sexual behaviours (see *The Ofcom Broadcasting Code*, Ofcom, 2009). The distribution of characters across the ten types of sexual behaviours according to their age categories varied from one type of behaviour to another, however the variations were statistically non-significant ($X^2=34.800$, $df=36$, $p<.526$). The findings indicated that characters classified as teenagers were largely depicted in portrayals of *mild* sexual behaviours.

As mentioned above, 36% (N=415) of all characters were found across portrayals of sexual behaviours only, with just under three out of ten (27%; or 112 characters) of all characters involved in sexual behaviours classified as teenagers, of which 85% were involved in mild sexual behaviours such as passionate kissing (70%), physical flirting or suggestiveness (10%) and intimate touching (4%), while only 16% of those characters engaged in intimate sexual behaviours (sexual intercourse implied).

Characters classified as ‘young adults’, on the other hand, comprised the bulk (64%; 266 characters) of all characters found across portrayals of sexual behaviours: of which just over 52% engaged in passionate kissing, 26% sexual intercourse (implied and depicted) and 11% physical flirting and intimate touching. Further, under one in ten (9%; 36 characters) of all characters involved in sexual behaviours was either middle-aged (8%) or over sixty-five years old (less than 1%) (See Appendix: Table 3.10).

Age		Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		
		Sexual Talk	Sexual Behaviour	Total
Child (Up to 12 years)	Count	3	1	4
	% within Age	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Teenager (13-19)	Count	152	112	264
	% within Age	57.6%	42.4%	100.0%
Young adult (20-35)	Count	457	264	721
	% within Age	63.4%	36.6%	100.0%
Middle-aged adult (36-65)	Count	112	34	146
	% within Age	76.7%	23.3%	100.0%
Over 65	Count	11	2	13
	% within Age	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	735	413	1148
	% within Age	64.0%	36.0%	100.0%

Table 6-5 The distribution of characters by age across portrayals of talk and behaviour.

Additionally, soap opera comparisons yielded significant differences in the distribution of characters according to age categories among individual soap operas, with some either over-representing or under-representing certain age categories in a way that did not reflect the overall percentages of age distribution observed above. The differences among soap operas, however, were found to be statistically significant ($X^2=4.506$, $df=24$, $p<.001$).

First, all seven soap operas depicted in their sexual portrayals a substantial number of characters classified as ‘young adults’,⁴¹ which accounted for almost 80% (eight in ten) of *Hollyoaks in the City*’s characters, 66% of *Coronation Street*’s, 58% of *Emmerdale*’s, 52% of *Home and Away*’s, 40% of both *EastEnders*’ and *Neighbours*’ and just 36% of *Hollyoaks*’.

Second, soap operas targeting younger (teenage) audiences were found to account for the majority (around 92%) of the teenage characters found across all sexual portrayals; those characters represented 58% (almost six in ten) of *Hollyoaks*’ characters, 45% of *Home and Away*’s, 31% of *Neighbours*’ and just 16% of *Hollyoaks in the City*’s.

⁴¹ It is worth noting that, although the ‘young adult’ age category was designed to capture an age range of 20 to 35 years, most of the characters coded as ‘young adults’ across all soap opera were in their early 20s, with the exception of a few characters of the three most popular British soap operas.

Conversely, the three British soap operas, popular with older viewers, were portraying more characters of both middle-age and over sixty-five than any other soap opera. For instance, half of all characters in *EastEnders* were found to be middle-aged, 33% in *EastEnders*, and almost 20% in *Coronation Street*. Interestingly, three out of ten (29%) of *Neighbours*' characters were either middle-aged or older (see Table 6-6).

Soap Operas		Age					
		Child (Up to 12 years)	Teenager (13-19 years)	Young adult (20-35)	Middle-aged adult (36-65)	Over 65	Total
Coronation Street	Count	1	15	80	23	2	121
	% within Soap Operas	.8%	12.4%	66.1%	19.0%	1.7%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	3	1	38	47	5	94
	% within Soap Operas	3.2%	1.1%	40.4%	50.0%	5.3%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	0	4	37	21	2	64
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	6.2%	57.8%	32.8%	3.1%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	0	101	63	11	0	175
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	57.7%	36.0%	6.3%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	0	87	437	30	0	554
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	15.7%	78.9%	5.4%	.0%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	0	39	45	3	0	87
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	44.8%	51.7%	3.4%	.0%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	0	16	21	11	4	52
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	30.8%	40.4%	21.2%	7.7%	100.0%
Total	Count	4	263	721	146	13	1147
	% within Soap Operas	.3%	22.9%	62.9%	12.7%	1.1%	100.0%

Table 6-6 Characters' age by soap opera.

As for the four characters classified as children, none of these characters was involved in a sexual behaviour of any sort. In fact the two portrayals in which those characters appeared were largely innocuous, even though they presented the four children as fully capable of understanding sexual relationships and affairs. The first portrayal, in *Coronation Street*, depicted an 11-years old boy interrogating his father straight after catching him having an affair with his wife's friend (sexual intercourse implied); while the second portrayal, in *EastEnders*, depicted three children (siblings) as part of a scene in which they quizzed a relative, perhaps a cousin, about his sexual affair with a neighbour.

6.2.4 Occupation

The occupation of each of the 1,148 characters was coded as one of the following sixteen categories: student, teacher, lawyer, doctor, nurse,

policeman/policewoman, barmaid/barman, publican, farmer, worker, shopkeeper, businessman/woman, model/fashion related profession, housewife, unemployed, and 'other/cannot tell'. The distribution of characters' occupation across sexual portrayals may give some indication as to whether soap operas, indeed, reflect a version of reality—or 'gritty realism' as some prefer to dub soap operas' representations (Hobson, 2003; McCarthy, 2001)—in which a vast array of professions are represented in portrayals of sex and sexuality, or whether sex and sexuality are more likely to be depicted by, or revolve around, a specific few rather than many professions, which may ultimately suggest certain stereotypes or patterns of involvement in sex and sexuality along certain socio-economic lines.

As Table 6-7 shows, all sixteen categories (occupations) were represented, with varying frequencies, across the overall sample—differences were statistically very significant ($X^2=1529.157$, $df=15$, $p<.001$). However, only a few occupations were found to consistently feature in sexual portrayals, with around two-thirds of all characters distributed across just five occupations. Characters coded as 'students' and 'models' were more likely than any other characters with different occupation to be involved in sexual portrayals, as over two out of ten (23%) of all characters were students, and under two in ten (17%) were working as models or in fashion-related jobs. On the other hand, around one in ten (11%) of all characters involved in sexual portrayals was found to be a barmaid/barman, followed by businessman/woman and teacher, each representing around 8%. Much smaller percentages of characters were doctors and lawyers (both combined accounted for less than 4%), workers (4%), shopkeepers (3%) and policemen/policewomen. (See Table 6-7 for percentages of other occupations).

In comparability terms, the distribution of characters' occupation varied considerably from one soap opera to another ($X^2=1.469$, $df=90$, $p<.001$). While *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City* primarily portrayed students, teachers, and models in their sexual activities, the other five soap operas depicted a wider range of characters with diverse professions, projecting more realistic and inclusive representations of sex and sexuality. With storylines revolving around college life and the surrounding community, *Hollyoaks* depicted mainly students (73% of its

overall characters) and teachers (5%) in its portrayals of sex and sexuality. Likewise, the late night spin-off mainly portrayed models (35%), students (14%) and teachers (15%).

Occupation	Frequency	% Percent
Student	266	23.2
Lawyer	19	1.7
Doctor	19	1.7
Nurse	4	.3
Model/fashion related profession	195	17.0
Barmaid/man	128	11.1
Publican	4	.3
Policeman/woman	31	2.7
Farmer	2	.2
Worker	42	3.7
Shopkeeper	32	2.8
Teacher	90	7.8
Businessman/woman	87	7.6
Housewife	8	.7
Unemployed	5	.4
Other/Cannot tell	216	18.8
Total	1148	100.0

Table 6-7 Frequency and percentage of characters by occupation

By contrast, and although targeting similar young audiences and running storylines dealing with student life, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* were more inclusive of (young) characters from various professional backgrounds. Over four in ten (45%) of *Home and Away* characters and two in ten (19%) of *Neighbours* characters were students, while the rest were doctors, nurses, mechanics, workers, bankers and so forth. The three British soap operas, however, were more likely than the rest to include a large spectrum of characters representative of wider communities, despite the fact that *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* revolve around working-class communities and neighbourhoods. The three soap operas touched upon the sexual and romantic relationships of students, workers, shopkeepers, bartenders, unemployed, as well as lawyers, bankers, doctors, businessmen/women and many others (see Appendix: Table 3.11).

6.3 Characters' Profile: Sexual Activity-related Attributes

6.3.1 Sexual Orientation

Characters' sexual orientation was coded as one of three main categories, heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. Also, a fourth category, 'unknown/cannot tell', was added for characters whose sexual orientation was either unclear or unknown. Unlike the 'orientation of sexual activity' measurement, which was used to merely capture the overall sexual orientation of topics/discussions and behaviours found across all relevant sexual portrayals (see Chapter Four), all 1,148 characters found across *all* portrayals were coded for their sexual orientation. It emerged that just over three-quarters (78%) of all characters were identified as heterosexuals, 7% as homosexuals and just over 9% as bisexuals. Also, the sexual orientation of a further 6% of all characters was either not clear or unknown. These percentages were by and large in line with those of the orientation of sexual activities discussed in Chapter Four, where, like the characters' sexual orientation, the overwhelming majority (83%) of the 483 codable scenes or portrayals⁴² depicted heterosexual themes or activities, and around 17% (81 portrayals) depicted non-heterosexual themes or activities (12% homosexual and 5% bisexual). However, the distribution of characters in terms of their sexual orientations varied substantially across the two types of portrayals, behaviour and talk, ($X^2=12.093$, $df=3$, $p<.01$), but nonetheless reflected the overall percentages of the distribution of the two types themselves across all seven soap operas, as well as the distribution of the orientations of sexual activities across the two types of portrayals (also see Chapter Four for the percentages of the two types of sexual activity). Between 60% and 65% of all characters with identifiable sexual orientations were found across portrayals of sexual talk, as opposed to percentages between 30% and 35% found across portrayals of sexual behaviour (see Appendix: Table 3.12).

⁴² It is worth noting that scenes portraying R & R themes were not coded for the orientation of sexual activity; therefore the slight differences in percentage terms between characters' sexual orientation and orientation of sexual activity is insignificant given that only 483 scenes out of 506 were codable under this category (see Chapter Four for more details).

Sexual orientation by gender (Table 6-8) revealed that homosexual and bisexual characters were predominately males rather than females, and the differences across all three sexual orientations were statistically significant ($X^2=1,691$, $df=3$, $p<.001$). Of the 81 homosexual characters found across the sample, 94% (78 characters) were males and only 4% (3 characters) were females (lesbians). Similarly, of the 106 bisexual characters, 94% (100 characters) were males, while 6% (6 characters) were females (lesbians). Further, the presence of lesbians and bisexual female characters was solely confined to the sexual portrayals of the late night spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*.

Character's Sexual Orientation		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Heterosexual/Straight	Count	382	501	883
	% within Character's Sexual Orientation	43.3%	56.7%	100.0%
Homosexual/Gay	Count	78	3	81
	% within Character's Sexual Orientation	96.3%	3.7%	100.0%
Bisexual	Count	100	6	106
	% within Character's Sexual Orientation	94.3%	5.7%	100.0%
Unknown/Cannot tell	Count	45	29	74
	% within Character's Sexual Orientation	60.8%	39.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	605	539	1144
	% within Character's Sexual Orientation	52.9%	47.1%	100.0%

Table 6-8 The distribution of characters by sexual orientation and gender.

Soap opera comparisons revealed that, once again, although heterosexual characters comprised the overwhelming majority of all profiled characters in each of the seven soap operas, noticeable disparities in terms of the inclusion and distribution of characters of certain homosexual orientations were still found ($X^2=1.713$, $df=18$, $p<.001$). Despite the fact that all portrayals depicting non-heterosexual themes or activities were found in only three soap operas,⁴³ *Hollyoaks*, *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Emmerdale*, the presence of gay/lesbian or bisexual characters extended to other soap operas and did not necessarily hinge upon homosexual or bisexual portrayals or storylines.

In *Coronation Street*, for instance, a gay character was involved in a few portrayals of sexual talk, in which he was discussing a sexual relationship between

⁴³ Out of the total 81 non-heterosexual scenes which comprised 17% of all 483 codable scenes, seventy were found in *Hollyoaks in the City*, eight in *Emmerdale* and just two in *Hollyoaks*.

two close friends which resulted in an unwanted pregnancy—*Coronation Street* accounted for 6% of all homosexual characters, which represented 4% of its overall characters. However, once again *Hollyoaks in the City* accounted for the majority (almost four out of five or 79%) of all homosexuals and 95% of all bisexuals, whereas *Hollyoaks* accounted for 10% of all homosexuals only; and as a result the former had the lowest percentage (63%) of heterosexual characters compared to the rest of the soap operas, while the latter had just under 87%. Further, *Emmerdale* accounted for 5% (4 characters) of all homosexuals and also 5% (5 characters) of all bisexuals, which represented, respectively, 6% and 8% of its overall characters (Table 6-9).

Soap Operas		Character's Sexual Orientation				
		Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Unknown	Total
Coronation Street	Count	110	5	0	6	121
	% within Soap Operas	90.9%	4.1%	.0%	5.0%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	91	0	0	3	94
	% within Soap Operas	96.8%	.0%	.0%	3.2%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	55	4	5	0	64
	% within Soap Operas	85.9%	6.2%	7.8%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	150	8	0	15	173
	% within Soap Operas	86.7%	4.6%	.0%	8.7%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	351	64	101	38	554
	% within Soap Operas	63.4%	11.6%	18.2%	6.9%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	75	0	0	10	85
	% within Soap Operas	88.2%	.0%	.0%	11.8%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	50	0	0	2	52
	% within Soap Operas	96.2%	.0%	.0%	3.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	882	81	106	74	1143
	% within Soap Operas	77.2%	7.1%	9.3%	6.5%	100.0%

Table 6-9 The distribution of characters by sexual orientation across soap operas.

The two Australian soap operas and *EastEnders* did not include any homosexual or bisexual characters, at least in the four-week sample in question; however, a few characters in those soap operas may well have been homosexual or bisexual characters, but it was difficult to ascertain their sexual orientation. In fact, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* showed some signs and cues that two teenage characters could well potentially be experiencing some sort of sexual confusion, but the narratives did not provide enough information as those storylines were just being developed. On current evidence it is clear that soap operas, although not all in this

four-week snapshot of soaps, do include homosexual and bisexual characters (under two in ten (17%) of all characters) who not only were involved in sexual activities of similar orientation to their own but also were engaged in dialogues and narratives revolving around other characters' sexual relationships.

6.3.2 Instigator of Sexual Behaviour

This measure was designed to capture the instigator of any sexual behaviour; therefore only characters involved in portrayals of sexual behaviours were assessed here. Instigation of a particular sexual behaviour was either (a) negative (No): the character in question did not instigate the behaviour, (b) positive (Yes): the character did instigate the behaviour (c) mutual or equal: characters involved in a sexual behaviour were equally responsible for instigation of sexual activity and (d) unknown/cannot tell. The main rationale for using this measure was to assess the gender of the instigator of any sexual behaviour shown across all seven soap operas, and see whether or not portrayals of sex and sexuality yielded certain 'gender' patterns that conform to prevalent media stereotypes or sex roles which tend to position or construct women as 'passive' and lacking agency, and men as 'active' and 'aggressive' when it comes to sexual relations between the two genders. (Glacock, 2001 and 2003; Gunter, 1995, 2002; Oswald, 2008; Oswald and Lindstedt, 2006; Ward, 2003)

The data analysed here indicated that there were 362 characters codable under the instigator of sexual behaviour measure, all of whom were involved in the sexual behaviours found across the study's 191 identified portrayals of sexual behaviours.⁴⁴ Around a quarter (25%) of those characters instigated sexual behaviours, 21% did not instigate behaviours, 29% were judged to be mutually instigating sexual behaviours; and finally for the remaining 25% it was not clear or known whether or not those characters instigated any of the sexual behaviours in which they were

⁴⁴ Around ten portrayals were not codable for the instigator of sexual behaviour. Those portrayals were mainly physical flirting and suggestive behaviours (photo shoots of groups of glamour male and female models), voyeurism, and masturbation (mainly in *Hollyoaks* in the City—also see Chapter One)

involved. In gender terms, however, the overall findings indicate that of all those characters *identified* as instigators of sexual behaviours, male characters (62%) were more likely than female characters (38%) to be instigating sexual behaviours. However, put differently, around three in ten (29%) of all *male* characters instigated sexual behaviours of some sort, compared to just two in ten (20%) of all *female* characters. Further, around three out of ten (29%) for each of female and male characters were judged to be mutually instigating sexual behaviours, as Table 6-10 clearly shows⁴⁵. Differences in the frequencies of instigators of sexual behaviours according to their gender were, however, found to be statistically *insignificant* ($X^2=6.256$, $df=3$, $p<.1$).

Gender		Instigator of Sexual Behaviour				
		Yes	No	Equal	Unknown/Cannot tell	Total
Male	Count	56	33	55	48	192
	% within Gender	29.2%	17.2%	28.6%	25.0%	100.0%
	% within Instigator of Sexual Behaviour	62.2%	42.9%	52.9%	52.7%	53.0%
Female	Count	34	44	49	43	170
	% within Gender	20.0%	25.9%	28.8%	25.3%	100.0%
	% within Instigator of Sexual Behaviour	37.8%	57.1%	47.1%	47.3%	47.0%
Total	Count	90	77	104	91	362
	% within Gender	24.9%	21.3%	28.7%	25.1%	100.0%
	% within Instigator of Sexual Behaviour	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6-10 Instigator of sexual behaviour by gender.

These percentages are somewhat misleading and therefore need to be qualified. Gender stereotypes of female passivity and/or male activity or aggression with regard to sexual relations are often referred to within the context of heterosexual rather than homosexual relationships (Ward, 1995) Thus, it would be appropriate to exclude homosexual characters that were involved in homosexual behaviours. As discussed in Chapter Four, there were 22 portrayals of sexual behaviours⁴⁶ which depicted non-heterosexual engagement (fifteen homosexual and seven bisexual) and

⁴⁵ Note that there were more male characters (192) than female characters (170) due to the fact that some soap operas included homosexual (gay) storylines and portrayals.

⁴⁶ Portrayals involving homosexual (all male) behaviours were the following: eight portrayals of passionate kissing, two intercourse cases (implied), one for each of physical flirting, intimate touching, oral sex depicted, and two portrayals categorised as 'other'. Portrayals of bisexual behaviours were four physical flirting, one passionate kissing and two categorised as 'other'

involved 44 characters. Around 19 non-heterosexual characters, accounting for around one in ten (10%) of all male characters involved in *sexual behaviours*, were found to instigate a sexual behaviour of some kind. Clearly, this exclusion resulted in balancing out the ratio of male to female instigators: two out of ten (20%) of female characters, and a similar number of male characters, were eventually found to play the role of instigator.

The findings of instigator of sexual behaviour according to individual types of behaviours indicate that male characters (32%) were more likely than female characters (16%) to instigate passionate kissing, while around 40% of both male and female characters were found to mutually initiate passionate kissing.⁴⁷ By contrast, it was found that intimate sexual behaviours such as sexual intercourse, both depicted and implied, were more likely to be instigated by female characters (over 21% of all females involved in sexual intercourse cases) than by male characters (11% of all males involved in sexual intercourse cases). However, it is essential to mention that in most of the implied intercourse portrayals it was impossible to identify those who instigated sexual intercourse; consequently, the involvement of 73% of all male characters and 70% of all female characters in initiating this type of behaviour was unknown.

In sum, the findings indicated that in overall terms, and after having excluded all characters that were involved in homosexual and bisexual portrayals, the ratio of male to female characters instigating sexual behaviours was to a large extent equal, with around two out of ten of female, as well as male, characters found to have played the role of instigator. However, while there were significant gender differences or imbalances (in favour of male characters) in instigating certain types of sexual behaviours, notably passionate kissing portrayals in which male rather than female characters were more likely to play the role of instigator, the overall ratio of

⁴⁷ There were eight portrayals of passionate kissing that occurred between homosexual (gay) characters. Even with the exclusion of those gay characters (eight characters in total) that instigated passionate kissing, male characters or rather heterosexual male characters (26%) were still more likely than female characters (16%) to instigate passionate kissing.

male to female was balanced out, particularly by higher percentages of female instigators found across rather more intimate sexual behaviours.

6.3.3 Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviours

The motives for engaging in sexual behaviours, as well as the nature of their consequences for those involved, when shown within certain TV genres such as films, drama series and soap operas, can affect audiences' attitudes and responses towards the inclusion and screening of sexual scenes and storylines. Often film and soap opera producers justify the screening of explicit sexual materials and controversial sexual storylines on the basis that the nature of motives and consequences merit their inclusion, and argue that such materials and storylines are integral to the overall plot. Viewers, on the other hand, tend to have more relaxed attitudes towards scenes of sexual nature and find them more acceptable when they are necessary to the flow of plot rather than mere gratuitous portrayals (Hill and Thomson, 2000; Millwood-Hargrave, 1992, 2002, 2003; Ward, 2003).

In this study fifteen categories (motives) were used to capture characters' motivation for engaging in sexual behaviours. The categories included (1) personal satisfaction, (2) provide satisfaction for a partner, (3) gain status, prestige or popularity, (4) gain peer approval, (5) further own career, (6) further partner's career, (7) establish or enhance relationship with partner, (8) achieve material gain, (9) achieve pregnancy, (10) escape or forget problems, (11) revenge, (12) trap a partner/honey trap, (13) sexual assault, (14) other, and finally (15) unknown/cannot tell. Further, as in the outcomes of sexual activity discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter Five), two characters involved in the same sexual behaviour could have two conflicting motives; therefore all characters involved in sexual behaviours (portrayals of sexual behaviours only) were assessed for their motives in engaging in those behaviours.

Of all 413 characters found across the 191 portrayals of sexual behaviours, only 90% or 370 characters were coded for the motivation for engaging in sexual behaviours, whilst the remaining 10% were excluded as this measure was not

applicable to them.⁴⁸ The findings indicate that just under two-thirds (around 64%) of all coded characters had only two motives for engaging in sexual behaviours, with over five out of ten (52.4%) of characters engaged in sexual behaviours to ‘establish or enhance relationship with partner’, and one out of ten (11%) to gain ‘personal satisfaction’. Much smaller percentages of characters engaged in sexual behaviours to ‘further own careers’ (4.3%), ‘achieve material gain’ (5%), ‘escape or forget problems’ (3%), ‘take revenge’ (1%) and commit a ‘sexual assault’ (1.5%). Motives such as ‘gaining prestige and popularity’, ‘peer approval’ and ‘trap a partner’ were also portrayed, however, infrequently (less than 1% of all coded characters held those motives). On the other hand, the motives of a substantial number of characters (19%) were not identifiable and were, therefore, coded as ‘unknown’ (Table 6-11). Furthermore, the distribution of characters across all categorised motives was statistically very significant ($X^2=1092.638$, $df=11$, $p<.001$)⁴⁹.

The data also indicated that, across the board, the majority of those motives (86%) were heavily distributed across mild sexual behaviours (61% across passionate kissing portrayals alone) than across intimate or controversial sexual behaviours (combined, sexual intercourse and oral sex accounted for 25% of all characters’ motives; while rape and sexual assault accounted for less than 2%). For instance, around three quarters (74%) of characters whose motivation was to ‘establish or enhance relationship with partner’ were involved in passionate kissing portrayals, compared to just 20% of those involved in sexual intercourse (implied and depicted)—differences reported here were found to be statistically significant ($X^2=3.814$, $df=99$, $p<.001$).

When the soap operas were compared against each other with regard to the motives for engaging in sexual behaviours, major differences were found ($X^2=1.803$, $df=66$, $p<.001$). Most interesting of all were (a) the overall percentages (within each

⁴⁸ The overwhelming majority of this 10% was made up of characters that were integral to the scenes and portrayals but were not part of the depicted sexual behaviours (scenes containing three or more characters)

⁴⁹ Three out of the fifteen categorised motives never occurred: (1) provide satisfaction for a partner, (2) further partner’s career, and (3) achieve pregnancy.

of the seven soap operas) of characters whose motives were to ‘establish or enhance relationship with partner’, which were particularly high in four soap operas, and (b) the complete absence of what is considered as ‘controversial’ or ‘sensational’ motives in some soap operas.

Motivation for engaging in sexual behaviours	Frequency	(%) Percent
Personal satisfaction	40	10.8
Gain status/prestige/popularity	1	.3
Peer approval	2	.5
Further own career	16	4.3
Establish or benefit relationship with partner	194	52.4
Material gain	19	5.1
To forget problems/escape	11	3.0
Revenge	4	1.1
Trap partner/‘Honey Trap’	1	.3
Sexual assault	5	1.4
Unknown/Cannot tell	71	19.2
Other	6	1.6
Total	370	100.0

Table 6-11 The distribution of characters by motivation for engaging in sexual behaviour.

In the Australian soap operas the motives of just over 96% of *Home and Away*’s characters and around 88% of *Neighbours*’ were to ‘establish or enhance relationship with partner’; while in the two most popular British soaps 67% of *Coronation Street*’s characters and 70% of *EastEnders*’ had the same motive. By contrast, *Hollyoaks in the City*, *Hollyoaks* and *Emmerdale* had much lower percentages of characters with a similar motive, 37%, 52% and 55% respectively.

Motives often associated with controversial sexual portrayals and storylines were largely *portrayed* by *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Hollyoaks*. For instance, all the characters involved in sexual behaviours to ‘achieve material gain’ and ‘escape or forget problems’ were found in *Hollyoaks in the City* (84% and 82% of those characters with two motives respectively) and *Hollyoaks* (15%, 18% respectively). Likewise, the overwhelming majority of characters engaged in sexual behaviours to gain ‘personal satisfaction’, a motive often linked to gratuitous sexual behaviours and portrayals, were found in *Hollyoaks in the City* (83%) and *Hollyoaks* (10%); the former soap opera alone accounted for all the characters (100%) whose motives

were to ‘further their own careers’, and 60% of those whose motives were ‘sexual assault’ (see Appendix: Table 3.13).

Additionally, the distribution of characters’ motives in terms of gender yielded some interesting patterns. Of all characters whose motives were to gain ‘personal satisfaction’ and ‘establish or enhance relationship’, males (75% and 54% for the two motives respectively) were more likely than females (25% and 46%) to engage in sexual behaviours having such motives. Conversely, characters whose motives for engaging in sexual behaviours were to ‘further own careers’ and ‘achieve material gain’ were notably more likely to be females (56% and 68% respectively) than males (44% and 32%). On the other hand, female characters accounted for all (100%) of three motives, ‘gain peer approval’, ‘revenge’ and ‘escape or forget problems’, and male characters, similarly, accounted for (100%) of three more motives, ‘gain prestige and popularity’, ‘trap a partner’ and ‘sexual assault’. The gender differences across all identified motivations were statistically significant ($X^2=37.767$, $df=11$, $p<.001$) (see Appendix: Table 3.14).

6.3.4 Characters’ Relationship Status

This measure was used to capture the relationship status of all characters *engaged* in sexual behaviours, and some of those involved in sexual talks that were directly related to their own sexuality and sexual relationships. For this purpose, the following six categories of relationship status were employed in this study: (1) character involved *has* an established sexual/romantic relationship, (2) character involved has *no* established sexual/romantic relationship, (3) character involved just met or is on first date, (4) characters involved are *married to each other*, (5) character involved is having *an extra-marital* affair, and finally (6) relationship status is impossible to determine ‘unknown/cannot tell’.

A character’s relationship status was coded as one of the above six categories only if he or she was (a) involved in a portrayed sexual behaviour; for example, characters that were part of the scene but not part of the actual ongoing sexual behaviour were not coded here; or (b) involved in sexual talks concerning their own sexual relationship or life; thus characters discussing other people’s sexual

relationships and interests were not coded for their 'relationship status' since the topics discussed, however important to those characters, were those of others' sexual relationships. For instance, if two characters were talking about their 'first-time love making experience', then they were coded; but if they were discussing their neighbour's extra-marital affair, they were not.

Of the 1,148 characters, the relationship status of around 62% (709 characters) was codable, with over half (53%) of the 709 characters engaged in sexual behaviours, while 47% were involved in sexual talks. The overall findings, however, indicate that just under one in two (48%) of all characters had *no* established sexual/romantic relationship, as opposed to a little under three out of ten (27.6%) of all characters that *had* an established sexual/romantic relationship. Further, around one in ten (9%) was found to have just met or been on a first date; 7% were married; and less than 5% were having an extra-marital affair. Additionally, the relationship status of 4% of those characters (the 709 coded characters) was impossible to determine or unknown—the apparent differences in the distribution of characters in terms of relationship status across the entire sample were found to be statistically very significant ($X^2=664.661$, $df=5$, $p<.001$).

In terms of the differences between characters involved in behaviours and those involved in talks, the percentages of the two most common relationship status categories, unlike those of the other three categories, reflected to a large extent the overall percentages presented above, as Table 6-12 shows. Characters that just met or were on a first date comprised over 13% of all codable characters involved in sexual behaviours, compared to 4% of those involved in sexual talks, indicating that characters in the former categories were more likely to engage in sexual behaviours than appear in portrayals of sexual talk. On the other hand, married characters were more likely to talk about sex (less than 10% of codable characters involved in talks) than engage in sexual behaviours (just under 5% of codable characters involved in behaviours); and the same was also true of characters involved in extra-marital affairs (7% vs. just over 2% of all codable characters in talks and behaviours respectively).

Relationship Status	Sexual Talks		Sexual Behaviours	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Character involved has an established sexual/romantic relationship	93	27.8	103	27.5
Character involved has no established sexual/romantic relationship	172	51.3	168	44.9
Characters involved just met or on first date	14	4.2	50	13.4
Characters involved are married to each other	31	9.3	18	4.8
Character involved is having an extra-marital affair	23	6.9	9	2.4
Unknown/Cannot tell	2	.6	26	7.0
Total	335	100.0	374	100.0

Table 6-12 The distribution of characters by relationship status across portrayals of sexual talk and behaviour.

The relationship status of characters involved only in sexual behaviours varied considerably from one type of behaviour to another ($X^2=89.145$, $df=45$, $p<.001$), most notably across advanced intimate sexual behaviours such sexual intercourse, both implied and depicted (see Appendix: Table 3.16). The findings revealed that intimate sexual behaviours (intercourse and oral sex) were more likely to occur between characters with no established romantic/sexual relationships (50%, $N=47$ of all 94 characters engaged in sexual intercourse or oral sex) than between characters with established romantic/sexual relationships (33%, $N=31$). Further, while 8% ($N=8$) of those characters either just met or were on a first date, only 2% ($N=2$) were having extra-marital affairs. Interestingly, however, not a single character of those involved in either sexual intercourse or oral sex behaviours was found to be of the ‘married’ category, which clearly indicated that not a single portrayal of an advanced intimate sexual behaviour occurred within the context of marriage across the seven soap operas.

Further, between soap opera comparisons yielded highly significant differences—from the overall percentages presented above—in relation to the relationship patterns in some soap operas ($X^2=2.458$, $df=4$, $p<.001$). The comparison findings, first of all, indicate clearly that the two categories, ‘character *has*’ and ‘character *has no*’ established relationship, while still remaining the two most common of relationship status categories across each of the seven soap operas individually, did not reflect the overall percentages, as the large number of characters with ‘no established sexual/romantic relationship’ in *Hollyoaks in the*

City and, to a lesser extent, in *Hollyoaks* and *Neighbours* skewed the overall percentage (see Appendix: Table 3.15). For instance, six out of ten (60%=204 characters⁵⁰) and under five out of ten (47%=53 characters) of all codable characters in *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Hollyoaks* respectively had no established sexual/romantic relationship, compared to around a quarter (25%) of all codable characters in *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and *Home and Away*, and 35% in *Emmerdale*.

Of the seven soap operas *Home and Away* and *Coronation Street* were found to have the highest percentage of characters that had an established sexual/romantic relationship (64% and 42% of all codable characters in the two soaps respectively), followed by *EastEnders* (36%) and *Neighbours* (28%); while the lowest percentages were found in *Hollyoaks* (16%), *Emmerdale* (19%) and *Hollyoaks in the City* (23%). Further, *Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks* were more likely than the other five soap operas to portray characters that either just met or were on a first date, with just over three in ten (31%) of *Emmerdale*'s characters and two in ten (21%) of *Hollyoaks*' belonging to this category, compared to just 7% of *Neighbours*' and *EastEnders*'.

The comparison findings also indicated that only *EastEnders* and *Hollyoaks in the City* had a substantial percentage of characters that were identified as 'married' (around 16% in the former, and 10% in the latter), while the rest had very modest percentages. Additionally, characters having extra-marital affairs were found *only* in the three most popular British soap operas, as well as *Hollyoaks*: those characters accounted for over two out of ten (23%) of all codable characters in *Coronation Street*, 16% in *EastEnders*, 8% in *Emmerdale* and 6% in *Hollyoaks*.

6.3.5 Characters under Influence of Alcohol and Drugs

In this study characters were also assessed for whether or not they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs as they appeared across all sexual portrayals. Here the mere presence of either alcohol or drugs did not necessarily mean characters

⁵⁰ The total number of characters that had no established sexual/romantic relationship across all seven soap was 340.

were under the influence of drugs or alcohol; therefore, in order for a character to be coded as being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, clear symptoms associated with drunkenness, drug ecstasy, loss of faculties and disorientation had to be portrayed within the scene in question (elaborate use of drugs was considered a sign of being under the influence of drugs). Characters that were part of scenes featuring alcohol consumption and drug use but did not show clear signs or symptoms of drunkenness/tipsiness or disorientation were, initially, coded as ‘unknown/not clear’.⁵¹

Of the 1,148 characters found across the 506 sexual portrayals, only 16% or 184 characters were found to be under the influence of alcohol. Of all seven soap operas *Hollyoaks in the City*, while accounting for just over 72% (133 characters) of the 16% characters under the influence of alcohol, had the highest average of such characters, with nearly a quarter (24%) of all its characters found to be under the influence of alcohol, compared to 16% in *Emmerdale*, 13% in *Neighbours*, 11% in *Hollyoaks*, less than 7% in *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, and only 1% in *Home and Away*.

Interestingly, in terms of gender and age the overall findings indicate that male characters (60%) were more likely than female characters (40%) to be depicted in sexual scenes as being under the influence of alcohol, and that just under two out of ten (18%) of all characters under the influence of alcohol were found to be teenagers; in fact, while the ‘teenager’ category used in this study was designed to capture characters of an age between 13-19 years, it was noted during the coding process that a substantial number of those teenagers, perhaps over 60%, were well under the age of 18 years, which ultimately suggests that those characters were under the legal age of drinking—*Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City*, in particular, included a substantial number of sexual scenes featuring elaborate underage drinking, and drinking as introductory tools or a prelude to sexual behaviours.

⁵¹ The percentages of those coded as ‘unknown/not clear’ was later on merged with those of characters coded as ‘no’ =not being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

As for characters under the influence of drugs, only 23 were found, representing just 2% of all 1,148 characters; and as in the presence/use of drugs measure discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter Five), all characters under the influence of drugs were present across the 3% of sexual portrayals that featured drugs and drug use and were found only in *Hollyoaks in the City* (also see the Accompanying Behaviours in Chapter Five).

6.4 Summary and Discussion

The characters' profile findings, as well as the contextual elements findings such as characters' sexual orientation, motivation for engaging in sexual behaviours, and relationship status, provided some insight, albeit in quantitative terms, into the nature of sexual portrayals across soap operas. First of all, the findings of the number of characters involved in sexual portrayals indicate that, in general, soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexuality consistently occurred between two characters, as the overwhelming majority (81%) of all portrayals featured sexual talks and behaviours that occurred exclusively between two characters.

These soap operas, with exception of the late night spin-off, *did not* portray any controversial sexual behaviour such as sex orgies or group-sex. In fact almost all sexual behaviours took place between two characters, despite the fact that just over one out of ten (11%) of all portrayals of sexual behaviours included three or more characters. Those characters, however, were just part of the scene narratives rather than the ongoing sexual behaviours featured in those scenes.

Once again, *Hollyoaks in the City* stood out for the number and nature of sexual behaviour portrayals that featured three or more characters—twelve out of the twenty sexual portrayals of behaviours that involved three or more characters were found in *Hollyoaks in the City*. The rape scene, sexual intercourse and physical suggestiveness portrayals were very explicit and hence quite controversial. Those scenes were more or less akin to sexual scenes taken out of a soft porn film, as they depicted a large number of virtually naked and very attractive young characters of both sexes engaged in various sexual behaviours at an adult-themed party, a gang rape incident, sexual photo-shoots, and underage-sex incidents.

Further, the findings also indicate that even ‘talk about sex and sexuality’ predominantly occurred between two characters (mostly couples), with just over three-quarters (76%) of all *sexual talks* featuring dialogues between two characters, compared to only 24% featuring three or more characters. Perhaps the latter percentage might seem relatively small given the assumption that soap operas’ treatment of controversial sex and sexuality storylines is done through narratives that are channelled via characters whose roles are to convey such controversies to their immediate communities.

In fact, the data showed that the majority of sexual talk portrayals involving three or more characters revolved around topics that dealt with sexual intercourse cases (affairs, cheating, and infidelity), talk about people’s sexual relationships, and socially and culturally taboo topics such as incest and underage-sex; such topics were often discussed by clusters of characters at the local pub and were carried forward to cover many episodes, especially in the three main British soap operas.

With regard to the characters’ generic profile, it emerged that male characters outnumbered female characters across the overall sample by a small margin (53% males vs. 47% females). This finding is in line with the results of previous studies that looked into gender representations and gender roles across general TV outputs, whether in the UK or the US, and reported various ratios and percentages of male overrepresentation and female underrepresentation (see Durkin, 1985; Glascock, 2001 and 2003; Gunter 1995).

It contradicts, however, the old prevailing premises or rather old assumptions that soap operas are ‘female-orientated’, ‘drawn from a feminine aesthetic’ and ‘a women’s genre’ that talks directly to women through, mainly, female characters—until comparatively recently soap opera was not seen as a genre that majored on male characters and their concerns (see Geraghty, 1991; Hobson, 1982 and 2003; Modleski, 1982).

Clearly, the fact that over half (53%) of all characters involved in sexual portrayals were men suggests that not only did soap operas feature male characters in their storylines, but also conveyed the message that sexual and romantic

relationships were as central to men's lives as they were to women's. Observing the 'massive expansion' in the inclusion of male characters in soap operas storylines since the mid 1980s, Hobson argues that 'the genre can no longer be seen as solely foregrounding women's issues, women's characters and a feminine perspective on emotions and events...Men have not only become major players; they are now portrayed as complete characters whose storylines can be as personal as those of the women characters.' (2003: pp 98-9)

In addition to this finding, the mere presence of such a high portion of male characters in soap operas in general and in portrayals and storylines dealing with mundane sexual and romantic relationships, runs counter to prevalent media stereotypes of gender and sex roles. A large body of literature on gender representations and sex roles has suggested that women's portrayal in the media in general and on television in particular is very often stereotypical, with women predominantly portrayed as young, physically attractive, submissive, sensitive, emotional and domesticated, and often portrayed in 'feminine' TV programmes and genres, soap operas, sitcoms, romantic and drama series, dealing with the domestic, familial and emotional; while men are portrayed (traditionally in masculine genres, political drama, action movies, adventures, and thrillers) as strong, assertive, aggressive, competitive, authoritative, rational and so forth, (See Durkin, 1985; Furnham et al., 1997; Glascock, 2001 and 2003; Gunter 1995).

Hobson (2003) has strongly argued, perhaps not entirely right in doing so, that the whole idea of soap operas being full of stereotypes is *not* correct and that 'soap characters cannot be stereotypes because we know the characters too well. They have to contain aspects of ourselves, or of those we know, in order to connect with the audience. Stereotypical traits may be included as the first clue when a character is introduced, but as the audience learns more about the character, the stereotypical cipher disappears and the individual character emerges.' (pp: 83-4). Nevertheless, soap opera comparisons of characters' gender revealed that, despite the presence of significant numbers of male characters, the most popular British soap operas (*Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*) and Australian soaps (*Neighbours* and *Home and Away*) contained far more female than male characters in their portrayals, which

suggests that those soap operas still remain more concerned with, or embody the feminine narratives of the various aspects of sex and sexuality.

The overrepresentation of male characters in soap portrayals of sex and sexuality was found to occur only when storylines dealing with male homosexuality were included—only *Hollyoaks*, *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Emmerdale* ran homosexual storylines in the four-week sample. Further, despite the limitation of content analysis in shedding light on contexts, the fact that this study's findings showed that women were more likely than men to talk about sex and sexual relationships in the two British rivals (*Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*) and the two Australian soaps (*Neighbours* and *Home and Away*) points toward an overall stereotyping of women: emotional, sensitive, their lives revolving around finding love and relationships, and dealing with consequences. Furthermore, it was noted during the coding process that it was mostly women—young women—rather than men who were central to the sex and sexuality storylines, and portrayed as seeking love, experiencing heartbreak, suffering from ensuing negative consequences and discussing them with friends.

The ethnic make-up of all characters involved in sexual portrayals indicated that ethnic minorities were represented, but not in a way that often reflects the overall soap opera and general TV ethnic representations, and more importantly in the case of the four British soap operas, the UK's ethnic population. Nine out of ten (90%) of all characters across all seven soap operas were found to be white, while one out of ten (10%) were from ethnic minorities, mainly blacks. Interestingly, not a single character of Asian background was found throughout all 1,148 catalogued characters.

Soap operas have often been criticised for the lack ethnic characters in their storylines, despite, paradoxically, the many repeated claims that they reflect and represent everyday life and the reality of the country they are produced in, Britain and Australia in the case of this study's sample. *Coronation Street*, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* have been particularly singled out for the lack of ethnic representations (Hobson 2003; Chandler 1994); and on current evidence their

portrayals of sex and sexual relationships storylines confirm such a lack: both *Coronation Street* and *Home and Away* featured no ethnic characters whatsoever, while *Neighbours* had fewer than 8% characters of only mixed race. *EastEnders*—the only soap opera renowned for incorporating ethnically diverse characters—and *Emmerdale* were the only mainstream soaps to have included a substantial percentage (13%) of ethnic characters in their sexual portrayals. However, *Hollyoaks* and its late night spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*, provided a contrasting picture of ethnic representation, with the former featuring less than 5% ethnic characters and the latter a little over 15%.

In the light of previous studies on television ethnic representations and real-world statistics, the current findings provide a somewhat different insight into soap opera's ethnic representations as far as the four British soap operas and general portrayals of sex and sexuality were concerned. Cumberbatch et al. (2001) found that ethnic minority representation on television was 8.4% of all people counted in a four-week sample of programmes shown on the five UK terrestrial channels;⁵² however, when US produced programmes and ethnic minority visitors were excluded, the representation of UK ethnic minority residents *in the world of television* shrank to 5.2%, which was a much smaller percentage than that of the actual UK ethnic minorities (6.7%) *in the real world* according to the 2001 census reported by the ONS (Office for National Statistics).

Further, characters of ethnic minorities represented across the sample's seven soap operas⁵³ accounted for 8% of all characters, equating to a difference of 2% less than that of the current study's overall percentage (10%) of ethnic characters found

⁵² This study examined the representation and portrayal of ethnic minorities in the top ten most viewed television programmes each week over a period of four weeks on the five terrestrial channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5). The sample was drawn from 20th November to 17th December 2000. The study interestingly indicated that US programmes, mainly films, boosted the overall figures, and showed that US produced programmes included 11.8% ethnic participants, compared with just 6.9% ethnic participants in the UK produced programmes.

⁵³ The soap opera sample included *EastEnders* BBC1, *Neighbours* BBC1, *Coronation Street* ITV1, *Emmerdale* ITV1, *Hollyoaks* Channel 4, *Brookside* Channel 4 and *Family Affairs* Channel 5.

across sexual portrayals only. It is evident from those findings that while general UK television output under-represented ethnic minorities in *real world* terms, soap operas tended to over-represent ethnic minorities by absolute percentages of 1.3% in Cumberbatch et al. (2001) and 3.3% in the current study; however, this ‘ethnic representation’ was anything but representative of the ethnic groups or minorities in the real world. In this study a little over seven out of ten of all ethnic characters were black, just over two out of ten of mixed race and under one in ten Chinese; and in four soap operas (*EastEnders*, *Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks*) only blacks were portrayed in their sexual portrayals as ethnic characters.

Hollyoaks in the City was the only soap opera to have included three ethnic groups (black, Chinese and mixed race) however, with one in ten (10%) of its characters being black, and one in twenty either Chinese or of mixed race. The overrepresentation of black characters in soap opera sexual portrayals is somewhat concerning, especially when thought of in tandem with prevalent cultural and social stereotypes of ‘*black sexuality*’ and the negative consequences depicted by soap operas’ sexual portrayals and sexual storylines.

Although this study did not attempt to capture those aspects, the mere presence of black characters, and the complete absence of other ethnic minorities such as Asian, may point toward a pattern of implicit stereotyping. However, evidence from Cumberbatch et al. indicated that black people were also found to be overrepresented across UK produced television programmes, as they occurred more frequently in UK programmes (3.7% of all participants) than in the real world (2.1%); and in addition, Asian people—while nonexistent in soap operas’ sexual portrayals in this study—were the most underrepresented (0.9% of all participants), compared with the real world (Asian people comprised 3.7% of the total UK population according to the 2001 census: Office of National Statistics).

The age profile of characters in this study revealed a clear-cut trend of an over-representation of young characters across all sexual portrayals, and in each of the seven soap operas. In overall terms the findings showed that a little over six out of ten (63%) of all characters were ‘young adults’ (20 to 35 years olds) and over two

out of ten (23%) were teenagers (13 to 19 years olds); while only 13% of characters were middle-aged (36 to 65 years olds) and a mere 1% sixty-five years old and over. Further, in terms of the nature of sexual portrayals, the patterns captured across the board showed that young people were far more likely than old people to engage in sexual behaviours, but by contrast old people were more likely than young people to be depicted in portrayals of sexual talk.

In general these patterns clearly indicate the genre's heavy reliance on young people and marginalisation of old people with regard to storylines dealing with sex and sexuality; and this further raises the question of whether or not soap operas, despite their reputation for including strong and pivotal old characters, contribute to an age-divide or stereotypes when it comes to sex and sexuality. Many previous US and UK studies have looked into patterns and nature of media portrayals of old people, and flagged up the consistent trends of under-representing and stereotyping older people, particularly across television programmes, (see Cumberbatch 1999; Harwood and Anderson, 2002; Weber and Gunter 1988; Robinson and Skill; 1995; Robinson, 1998)

Cumberbatch et al., for instance, have observed that 'the world of television is a particularly young one' (2001, p. 45) after having found in an earlier study that only 6% to 8% of all participants across prime-time programmes of the five UK terrestrial channels were older people (sixty-years old or over), compared to an actual 21% of the UK's elderly population (Cumberbatch et al., 1999). Additionally, among other findings, Cumberbatch et al. (1999) also found that older people were more likely to be portrayed as eccentric and sexually inactive—the latter stereotype/portrayal was also found to be prevalent in US television programmes (Bell, 1992) and German prime-time television programmes (Kessler et al. 2004).

Similarly, the virtual nonexistence of older people in soap operas' sexual portrayals, and the paucity of storylines dealing with older people's sexuality and sexual relationships, suggest that soap operas could well be reinforcing an image of older people as being sexually inactive, as across all seven soap operas (a) only one scene out of a total of 506 scenes was found to portray a man and woman in their

early fifties engaging in a sexual behaviour (an implied sexual intercourse) as part of what could be considered a very short storyline (in comparison with other storylines dealing with young people's sexual relationships) that revolved around an extra-marital sexual affair which ran for only four episodes in *Coronation Street*; and (b) older people were predominantly depicted in portrayals of sexual talk, debating and discussing, almost always, their young relatives' (sons, daughters, grandchildren, etc..) romantic and sexual relationships rather than their own, and this was most obvious in the case of the three most popular British soap operas, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale*.

Stereotyping as far as age is concerned in soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexuality was both evident and problematic on many levels. Not only did soap operas marginalise older people in their portrayal of sex and sexuality by not running storylines encompassing their sexual life and relationships and further restricting them to well-defined roles of being *only* supportive of young people, but also created a repertoire of stereotypical 'young people' whose romantic and sexual relationships (often problematic, dramatic and sensational) were the life-blood of soap operas and the only rationale for their inclusion.

Almost all young characters found across all sexual portrayals in all seven soap operas were very young and physically very attractive. The majority of young characters in the two Australian soaps and *Hollyoaks* and its late night spin-off were or still are working as models in the real world. And indeed some female characters who featured in a few sexual portrayals, notably in *Hollyoaks* and *Home and Away*, were played by actresses whose actual age, let alone appearance, did not remotely correspond to those of the characters they were portraying.

Generally speaking, there was hardly any 'average' looking character across all sexual portrayals of the four soap operas aimed at young people. Both the youthfulness and appearance of soap operas' casts, which have often been criticised (Chandler, 1994), were major features of soap operas' portrayals of sex and sexuality, which ultimately and undoubtedly contribute to the all too familiar sex stereotypes. However, coupled with the negative consequences of sexual activity

(see Chapters Five and Seven), the over-representation of young people on the whole indicated that soap operas were veering towards negative stereotyping of teenagers and young people on the one hand, and sex and sexual relationships on the other.

Similarly, in terms of the characters' occupation, the overall findings also indicated that soap operas over-represented certain occupations, which resulted in some soap operas not being inclusive of a wider range of professions. Again, with all that the characters' occupation may denote on the socio-economic level, this suggests that soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexuality tended to be limited and stereotypical.

Here the findings revealed that only five out of the sixteen listed professions accounted for nearly two-thirds of all characters' professions: students (23%), teachers (8%), bartenders (11%) and models (17%) and businessmen/women (8%). Understandably, storylines of soap operas aimed at younger audiences (*Hollyoaks* and its spin-off, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*) were more likely than those aimed at older audiences to revolve around young people's romantic and sexual relationships, school and university life; but once again the overrepresentation of young people as students, teacher, models and young professionals within controversial storylines of sex and sexuality and within negative contexts may contribute to a negative stereotyping of young people and their romantic and sexual relationships which, in turn, can alienate the very audiences, teenagers and young people, soap operas are trying to target or attract in the first place (see Outcomes of sexual behaviours, Chapter Five, and Sexual Risks and Responsibilities, Chapter Seven). However, the sexual portrayals of *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale* encompassed a wide range of characters representative of the types of communities the three soaps are known to portray. They included characters of working-class backgrounds and occupations (workers, farmers, shopkeepers, bartenders), of middle-class backgrounds (lawyers, doctors, teachers, bankers), and a few wealthy businessmen/women and entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, like the other soap operas aimed at young people, they overrepresented young people (bartenders, students and young professionals) in controversial and negative storylines.

As for the sexual orientations of all characters involved in sexual portrayals, the overall findings revealed that soap operas included a relatively substantial number of homosexuals (7% of all characters) and bisexuals (9%), and that their presence or inclusion in sexual portrayals was not contingent upon the portrayal of homosexual or bisexual behaviours and/or storylines. For instance, homosexual characters in *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale* (the former did not portray any homosexual behaviours or storylines) were part of two storylines (heterosexual relationship in *Coronation Street*, and bisexual in *Emmerdale*) in which they were helping those involved to cope and deal with the consequences of sexual behaviours.

Soap opera comparisons showed that daytime and prime-time soap operas portrayed considerably fewer homosexual and bisexual characters than the late-night spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*, which on its own accounted for almost 80% of all homosexuals and 95% of all bisexuals. This, alongside the comparatively very modest numbers of non-heterosexual portrayals, especially those of homosexual behaviours, found in *Hollyoaks* and *Emmerdale* (see Chapter Four), seems to suggest a very cautious approach on the part of daytime and prime-time (pre-watershed) soap operas when it comes to homosexual sex and portrayals of homosexual characters.

Previous studies (Gunter, 2002; Millwood-Hargrave, 1992, 1999) had shown that large sections of the TV audience in general and those of soap operas in particular tended to react quite strongly to the portrayal of homosexuality, especially homosexual acts, with men professing to have found any portrayal of homosexual behaviours between men unacceptable at any time on television. While women were reported to have been more tolerant, but nevertheless the majority of them still felt that portrayals of homosexual behaviours between men should not be shown until after 9pm. However, TV viewers, Millwood-Hargrave (2003) has reported, felt that the inclusion of homosexual storylines by soap operas was acceptable but portrayal of homosexual acts was not, especially before the watershed.

Clearly, as homosexuality is still not fully accepted in today's society (Duncan and Philips, 2008; Evans, 2002) programme makers of daytime and prime-time soap

operas that are targeting a large number of audiences seem to take notice of the public's sensitivity towards the type and nature of homosexual portrayals that can be shown, despite the fact that TV viewers' attitudes towards homosexuality or non-heterosexual relationships are changing over time and becoming more tolerant (see Gunter 2002; Hill and Thomson, 2000; Millwood-Hargrave 1999). However, some soap operas, *Hollyoaks*, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* for instance, have at times tried to push the boundaries and test the public's tolerance with regard to non-heterosexual portrayals (Hobson, 2003).

Interestingly, in this study most homosexual characters (96%), as well as most bisexual characters (94%) were males, compared to 4% homosexual females and 6% bisexual females, which clearly indicated the prevalence of male homosexuality and absence of female homosexuality. Further, none of the six daytime and prime-time mainstream soap operas portrayed any homosexual or bisexual females, as *Hollyoaks in the City* was the only soap opera to portray a brief scene of two lesbians kissing, and include bisexual and homosexual characters in a few of its portrayals of sexual talk.

One of the interesting findings to emerge from this study was the gender of the instigator of sexual behaviours, which considerably differed from similar reported findings of previous studies as comparisons clearly indicate. In overall terms, and after excluding characters (mostly gay characters) involved in non-heterosexual portrayal of behaviours, the ratio of male to female characters who initiated sexual behaviours was equally balanced, as two out of ten (20%) of each of female and male characters were found to play the role of instigator. Interestingly, in this research males (32%) were more likely than females (16%) to instigate milder sexual behaviours such as passionate kissing, unlike previous research which, for instance, found that instigators of milder sexual behaviours such as kissing and intimate touching were predominantly females: 26% of females instigated passionate kissing and intimate touching compared to just 14% of males, and the same was true of physical flirting, 69% females vs. 9% males (MacKeogh, 2005).

Similarly, Kunkel et al. found in the 2001 study that 50% of scenes showed female characters initiating flirting compared to 31% of males, and 30% of females initiating passionate kissing and intimate touching compared to just 25% of males. However, in the 2003 study Kunkel et al. reported an increase in the patterns of females playing the role of instigators in scenes of physical flirting (55% females to 30% males), and inconsistency in the passionate kissing and intimate touching categories, where it was most common for the two behaviours to be instigated mutually by both participants (69% of both behaviours were mutually instigated).

As for the more intimate sexual behaviours, such as sexual intercourse, once again the findings of this study marked a departure from the findings of the above two studies. While MacKeogh (2005), like Kunkel et al. (2001 and 2003), found the majority (59%) of sexual intercourse scenes to be mutually instigated, and an almost equal ratio of male to female to instigate sexual intercourse (14% males to 15% females), this study found that the involvement of the overwhelming majority of males (73%) and females (70%) in sexual intercourse portrayals to be unclear due to many implied portrayals of this type. When clear and identifiable, females (21%) were more likely than males (11%) to initiate sexual intercourse behaviours. In fact, in the course of coding, this pattern of female characters seducing men and initiating the more intimate sexual behaviours was noted very often and found across all seven soap operas, particularly *Hollyoaks*, *Hollyoaks in the City*, *Home and Away*, *Neighbours* and *EastEnders*.

This pattern was not a rare incident across a few isolated sexual portrayals, but rather was characteristic of many storylines, especially those dealing with teenage relationships. All of *Hollyoaks*, its spin-off, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* ran storylines in which female teenagers, rather than their male counterparts, were the ones who were seducing, pursuing and instigating sexual behaviours, in particular sexual intercourse; and almost all sexual and romantic storylines across all seven soaps were centred on the female characters' handling of and approach to the relationships in question.

This pattern has also been highlighted and criticised by studies looking into the UK teen programmes and TV series most popular among teenagers (Batchelor and Kitzinger, 1999 and 2004; MacKeogh 2004), as well as by female teenage viewers themselves, who thought there were too many portrayals and scripts, mostly unrealistic, of young females as experts in sexual relationships and as sophisticated lovers (see MacKeogh 2005; *Sex, Lies and Soap Operas*). Further, Batchelor and Kitzinger (1999) and Batchelor et al. (2004) have also noted that while there are scripts in the media for young women to play some role in determining and negotiating their sexual relations, this is not the case for young men who are often offered ‘limited’ scripts or portrayals that deal with sexual prowess. In summary, on current evidence the study’s findings, when compared with previous studies, portray some sort of inconsistency with regard to the gender of the instigator.

Analysis of the characters’ motivations revealed that the majority of characters engaged in *sexual behaviours* were motivated by certain ‘motives’ that clearly gave prominence to the contexts and storylines within which individual behaviours or portrayals occurred, and indicated that soap operas’ *portrayals of sexual behaviours* were, by and large, not gratuitous. While the motives of almost two out of ten (19%) of characters were not identifiable, the primary motive of over five out of ten (52%) of all characters engaged in sexual behaviours was to ‘establish or enhance relationship with partner’, followed by ‘personal satisfaction’, which was held by 11% of all characters.

One of the most noticeable findings involved the disparities among all seven soap operas in the distribution of motives, in particular the two aforementioned motives, which showed that the overwhelming majority (70% to 95%) of all characters in *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* engaged in sexual behaviours to ‘establish or enhance relationship with partner’, compared to much smaller percentages (40% to 55%) of characters in *Hollyoaks*, *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Emmerdale*.

Further, motives often linked to controversial and sensational behaviours and storylines very rarely occurred in the daytime and prime-time soap operas, with the

exception of *Hollyoaks*—mainstream soap operas tend to tackle controversial behaviours through narrative devices rather than visual portrayals of behaviours. But *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Hollyoaks* were the only soaps to portray substantial numbers of characters engaged in sexual behaviours motivated by controversial motives such as material gain, furthering career, revenge, sexual assault and escapism. Interestingly, some of the gender differences—females, for instance, were more likely than males to engage in sexual behaviours motivated by furthering career, material gain, peer approval, and revenge; and males more likely than females to engage in sexual behaviours motivated by gaining prestige and popularity, trap a partner and sexual assault—suggested, contrary to some claims (see Hobson, 2003), that soap operas were potentially displaying patterns of gender stereotypes and predetermined sex roles. Again this could be seen within the framework of offering a limited and already defined media ‘script’ or portrayal of sex and sexuality to young people along gendered lines (Batchelor et al. 2004; Batchelor and Kitzinger, 1999).

The relationship status findings indicated, on the other hand, that in overall terms almost five in ten (48%) of all characters whose relationship status was profiled had *no* established sexual /romantic relationship, compared to little under three in ten (28%) of characters with an established relationship. Furthermore, 7% of characters were found to be ‘married to each other’, 5% having extra-marital affairs and 9% having just met. Despite the methodological differences and inconsistencies comparisons with previous studies seem to suggest that soap operas were more likely to portray sexual activities (talks and behaviours) between characters with no established relationships than general TV output.

The BSC Annual Monitoring Report No.7 (1999) found that most scenes of sexual activity occurred within the context of established relationships, especially before the watershed hours,⁵⁴ with over half (52%) the scenes of sexual activity

⁵⁴ The BCS Report No.7 content analysed all programmes broadcast between 17.30 and midnight on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 during two seven-day composite weeks, which ran from 30 March to 17 May 1998 and from 8 September to 26 October 1998.

occurring within married or established non-married relationships, 7% in extra-marital contexts and a further 7% in first-time meeting/date contexts. Likewise Millwood-Hargrave (1992) reported similar findings to the current research with regard to the prevalence of characters with established relationships. She found that across a sample of pre- and post-watershed TV programmes shown on four UK terrestrial channels,⁵⁵ over one-third (35%) of the relationships in which some sexual activity occurred were established relationships—but few (9%) were marital—and just under one-quarter of the relationships were extra-marital affairs.

While capturing the relationship status in sexual intercourse scenes only, Kunkel et al (1999, 2001, 2003, 2005) and MacKeogh (2005) reported that the majority of sexual intercourse scenes (50% to 60% in the four studies; 40% in MacKeogh) occurred between couples who had established relationships, compared to an average of 25% in the four studies and 11% in MacKeogh of sexual intercourse scenes that occurred between couples who knew each other but had *no* established relationship. Further, scenes depicting sexual intercourse between characters who had *just met* accounted for 7% to 16% in Kunkel et al. (1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005) and 14% in MacKeogh (2005).

In contrast, current findings revealed that 51% of all 88 characters involved in sexual intercourse behaviours (implied and depicted) were found to have no established relationship, 33% had an established relationship, 7% just met and 2% extra-marital affair.

In general terms, these comparisons do suggest that soap operas portrayed sexual activities in no established relationships contexts more than did general TV programmes in the UK, Ireland, and the US, but the variations reported in the above studies, as well as those found among the seven soap operas in this study, seem to indicate that it is difficult to account for any broader and clearer patterns of relationships contexts. However, what emerged from the current findings as far as soap operas were concerned was, first, a clear divide between clusters of soaps

⁵⁵ The sample covered the TV output of seven days starting on 13th Jan 1992 for four terrestrial TV channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4) between 18.00 hrs to 24.00 hrs.

operas (soaps aimed at young audiences vs. soaps aimed at more general audiences) in terms of the number of characters who had no established relationships, and, second, noticeable disparities among the seven soap operas in the portrayal of married characters, characters involved in extra-marital affairs and those who had just met, which can largely be attributed to differences in storylines rather than clear-cut patterns.

Hollyoaks and its late night spin-off, *Hollyoaks in the City*, and *Neighbours*, all aimed at young viewers, for instance, showed a pattern of portraying more sexual behaviours and talks that occurred between characters that had no established sexual/romantic relationships than any other soap opera. This, and the fact that nearly half (48%; N=340) of all 709 profiled characters had no established relationship, could be seen as a clear indicator of the prevalence of casual sexual activities across soap operas, and there is a large body of literature—mainly stemming from the cultivation theory tradition—that suggests the frequent depiction of unmarried couples engaged in sexual intercourse would ultimately lead young viewers who watch a lot of television to see unmarried intercourse as a cultural norm (Brown et. al. 2002; Buerkel-Rothfuss and Strouse, 1993; Courtright and Baran, 1980).

The three most popular British soap operas (*Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, and *Emmerdale*), aimed at more general and older audiences, were more likely than the other four soap operas to portray sexual activities between characters with established relationships or those who were married to each other, as well as those having extra marital affairs. In sum, the differences in the relationship contexts shown through the relationship status of characters across all soap operas seem to indicate that, while the most popular British soap operas presented to some extent a more balanced mix of sexual activities occurring within different relationship contexts, soap operas aimed at younger viewers offered a much clearer pattern of portraying sexual activities occurring between characters who had no established relationships.

Chapter 7

Safe-sex Messages

It has been argued that one of the most important and crucial contextual factors likely to influence and therefore shape the socialising effects of media sexual portrayals is the extent to which risks and responsibilities associated with human sexuality are included in those portrayals (The Kaiser Family Studies: Kunkel et al. 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005). In order to find whether or not soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexuality incorporated reference to, or themes of, Risks and Responsibilities (R & R) associated with human sexuality, as well as evaluate soap operas' treatment of such references and themes, a number of measures were employed to thoroughly analyse soap operas' sexual content.

This chapter presents the study's findings of soap operas' Risks and Responsibilities references and topics. It first presents the overall findings of sexual scenes with R & R references and then shows how soap operas fared against each other. It also accounts for the prevalent types of R & R references across the overall sample as well as in each of the seven soap operas. In addition, the chapter briefly touches upon the treatment of R & R references within each of the seven soaps, and provides concise descriptions of all the storylines that tackled R & R topics either as a distinct and major theme or as a minor part. It also presents the findings of a number of significant contextual elements such as the degree of focus placed on R & R references, source of information, valence towards R & R, and the overall message of R & R. Finally, the chapter summarises some of the major findings and discusses their significance.

7.1 Sexual Activity: Risk & Responsibility (R & R)

In this study, every scene involving any sexual content was evaluated for any mention or depiction of Risk & Responsibility (R & R) themes. As explained in the methodology section, the definition of sex was expanded to include R & R themes that were not embedded in sexual scenes or were not, strictly speaking, part of an *ongoing* sexual behaviour or sexual narratives (see Chapter Three). In fact, mentions of R & R might not necessarily occur within scenes depicting sexual behaviours or featuring explicit sexual narratives. For instance, issues such as ‘an actual crisis pregnancy’, ‘abortion’ and ‘STDs’ could well be depicted or touched upon in the immediate or relatively distant aftermath of scenes containing or portraying sexual behaviours or narratives.

In this study, three main categories/types (Expert advice or technical information, talk about pregnancy/abortion, and direct talk about R & R) were added to the types of sexual talks to capture safe-sex and R & R themes that occurred within scenes containing no explicit sexual narratives but nevertheless were part or consequences of sexual behaviours portrayed throughout the development of relevant storylines. It is worth noting that all the cases captured under those three categories⁵⁶ were direct consequences of sexual behaviours/relationships already portrayed by soap operas.

Of all 506 scenes with sexual content found across all seven soap operas, only 12% (59 scenes) were found to contain some mention of or reference to risks and responsibilities of sexual behaviours and relationships, while the rest of the scenes (88%, 447 scenes) contained no reference to, or mention of, R & R at all. Such references to R & R were, by far, more likely to occur in scenes portraying sexual talks (88% or 52 scenes of the 59 scenes with R & R) than in scenes portraying sexual behaviours (12% or 7 scenes), which also meant that, in overall terms, portrayals of sexual talk included more references to R & R (over 16% of all 315 sexual talks) compared to portrayals of sexual behaviours (just under 4% of all 191

⁵⁶ In fact the ‘expert advice or technical information’ did not occur throughout the four-week sample.

sexual behaviours)—the reported differences between the two types of portrayals, *talks* and *behaviours*, were found to be statistically significant ($X^2 = 19.040$, $df=1$, $p<.001$).

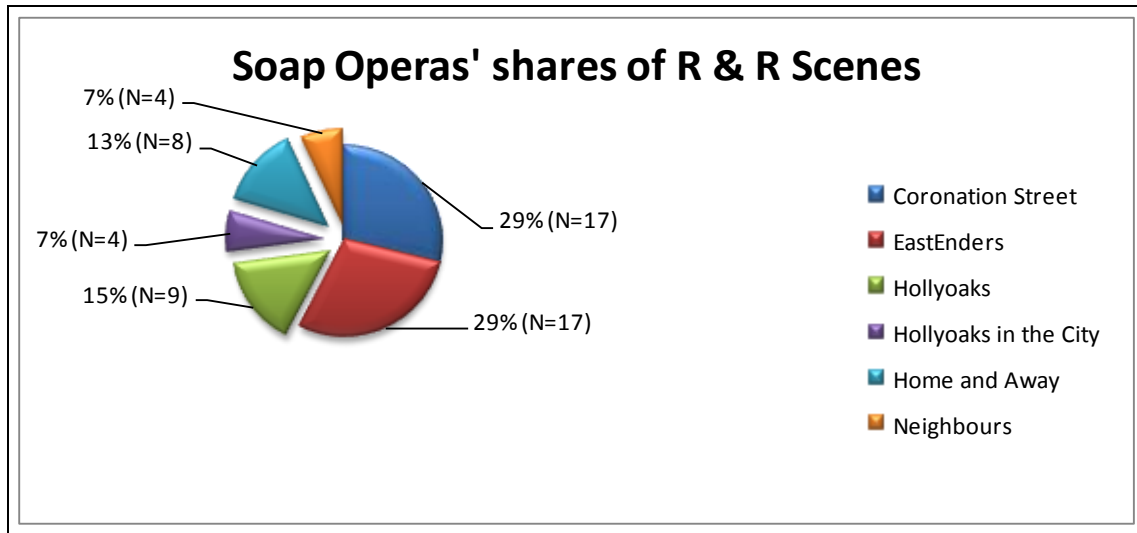


Figure 7-1 Soap operas' share of scenes depicting R & R topics.

However, soap opera comparisons revealed that there were considerable disparities in the numbers of scenes with R & R references among all seven soap operas ($X^2 = 88.183$, $df=6$, $p<.001$). While only one soap opera, *Hollyoaks*, reflected the overall percentage mentioned above by including over 11% of scenes with R & R, four soap operas, the two most popular British and two Australian, contained substantially larger percentages of scenes with R & R as part of their overall sexual scenes: *EastEnders* 41.5%, *Coronation Street* 32%, *Home and Away* 22% and *Neighbours* (16%). *Emmerdale* was the only mainstream soap opera that did not contain any mention of, or reference to, R & R in the four-week sample. Interestingly, however, *Hollyoaks in the City*, which accounted for almost half (48% $N=242$) of the overall 506 sexual scenes in this study, was found to contain only *four* scenes with R & R references, representing less than 2% of its overall sexual scenes (Table 7-1) (also see Figure 7-1 for soap operas' shares of the 59 scenes with R & R).

Soap Operas		Scene/Sexual Activity Refers to Risk & Responsibility		
		Yes	No	Total
Coronation Street	Count	17	36	53
	% within Soap Operas	32.1%	67.9%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	17	24	41
	% within Soap Operas	41.5%	58.5%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	0	29	29
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	9	70	79
	% within Soap Operas	11.4%	88.6%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	4	238	242
	% within Soap Operas	1.7%	98.3%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	8	29	37
	% within Soap Operas	21.6%	78.4%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	4	21	25
	% within Soap Operas	16.0%	84.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	59	447	506
	% within Soap Operas	11.7%	88.3%	100.0%

Table 7-1 The distribution of R & R scenes across soap operas.

7.2 Types of R & R References

To capture the precise type of R & R themes in each individual scene, the following nine categories were used in this study: (1) mention of, or reference to, multiple R & R issues, (2) mention/presence/use of condom, (3) mention/presence/use of contraception or birth control, (4) mention of ‘safe sex’ terminology, (5) mention of concerns about HIV/AIDS, (6) mention of concerns about general STDs, (7) mention of risks of actual unwanted/unplanned pregnancy, (8) mention of /debating abortion, and (9) mention of virginity/abstinence/sexual patience.

The most frequently occurring R & R themes across all the 59 scenes found to contain R & R references were those of risks of, or actual unwanted/unplanned pregnancy (36%, N=21 of scenes with R & R), mention of virginity, abstinence or sexual patience (25%, N=15) and mention of/debating abortion (22%, N=13). Furthermore, one in ten (10%, N=6) of scenes with R & R dealt with or referred to ‘multiple R & R issues’, 5% (N=3) mentioned or featured use of condom, and less than 2% (N=1) referred to concerns about general STDs. However, there was no

mention of ‘safe sex’ terminology and concerns about HIV/AIDS, as well as no mention/presence/use of contraception or birth control.

In terms of soap opera differences, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* together accounted for nearly 60% of all the scenes with R & R themes (see Figure 1) and were more likely than the other four soap operas to touch upon more than one or two R & R themes (both tackled three or more R & R topics); but nonetheless, given the nature of the genre and the differences among individual soap operas in relation to the number of storylines a soap opera may run and follow at a time, all six soap operas in this study dealt with R & R-related consequences of sexual behaviours and relationships in mainly one or two distinct sexual storylines—as will be explained later—and therefore confined their treatment of R & R to a few themes and references. However, the differences in the distribution of the various types of R & R references across the six soap operas were also found to be statistically significant ($X^2=86.581$, $df=25$, $p<.001$)—see Appendix: Table 4.1.

Before highlighting soap operas’ treatment of safe-sex messages and the major storylines in which R & R themes occurred, it is important to look at the portrayals that *primarily* featured discussions of R & R topics *without* direct or explicit references to sexual behaviours/relationships (see Chapter Four; Types of Sexual Talk).

The overall findings showed that just under six percent (5.7%, $N=29$) of all 506 catalogued scenes in this study—or just over 9% of all 315 scenes of sexual talk—portrayed primarily discussions of pregnancy and abortion (4.7%, $N=24$) and R & R topics (1%, $N=5$). Of the 24 pregnancy and abortion portrayals, nine were found in *Coronation Street* (representing 22% of its overall sexual talks), eleven in *EastEnders* (representing 35% of its overall sexual talks), three in *Neighbours* (representing 30%) and one in *Hollyoaks in the City* (representing less than 1%). On the other hand, the other five R & R portrayals, which dealt exclusively with sexual patience themes, were found in *Home and Away* (three scenes) and *Hollyoaks* (two scenes), representing 14% and 5% of their overall sexual talks, respectively (see Table 4-5 in Chapter Four).

7.3 Soap Opera R & R Storylines

While there were sexual and non-sexual scenes with references to R & R topics in six soap operas (*Emmerdale* did not contain any of such scenes), the treatment of R & R topics varied considerably from one soap to the other, with *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* each incorporating pregnancy/abortion and sexual patience themes into two major storylines, placing substantial emphasis on tackling ‘negative’ consequences; *Neighbours* tackling teenage pregnancy in a major storyline; *Hollyoaks* referring to sexual patience themes in two storylines, one of which was a major and long storyline featuring two teenagers; and *Home and Away* portraying in a single but key storyline parents’ and guardians’ struggle with two rebellious teenagers intent on starting a sexual relationship. Interestingly, besides accounting for nearly half of all the scenes in this study, featuring numerous sexual storylines with adult themes, and including the least number of scenes with R & R of all other five soap operas, *Hollyoaks in the City* did not portray R & R themes as a consistent part of a storyline, but rather references to R & R themes were isolated cases, as will be explained below.

Coronation Street: Over three in ten (32%, N=17) of all sexual behaviours found in *Coronation Street* contained reference to R & R themes. Eleven out of those portrayals involved risks of or actual unplanned/unwanted pregnancy (seven portrayals) and discussions of abortion (four portrayals), while three scenes featured sexual patience topics, two multiple R & R issues, and one mention of STDs. The majority (13) of those portrayals were embedded in one central storyline which *primarily* tackled consequences of a one-night-stand sexual encounter (sexual intercourse), unwanted pregnancy, abortion and ensuing emotional traumas and psychological damage. The story involved a twenty-year old barmaid, Violet, who, while on holiday, had a casual sexual encounter with Jamie—who simultaneously was involved in a controversial sexual relationship with his step-mother—which resulted in her getting pregnant. The story, more than anything, highlighted the negative consequences of unprotected casual sex, emotional pain, and the dilemma of resorting to abortion as a solution (see Box 7-1: scenes 1 and 2).

The second storyline with R & R involved a developing romantic relationship between Jason, a young worker, and Sarah, a teenager. The three references (in three separate portrayals) to R & R in this storyline revolved around Sarah's attitudes (sexual patience) and handling of Jason's implicit demands for embarking on a sexual relationship (see Box 7-1: scene 3).

Box (7-1)

Scene [1]

Sitting in the kitchen, Both Violet and her best friend, Michelle, are having the following conversation:

Violet: 'Well I have not done the test yet but I've missed two periods and I keep throwing up.'

Michelle: 'All the same your body keeps playing tricks...I've had false alarms.'

Violet [relieved]: 'Yeah!...'

Michelle: 'till you see that blue line.'

Violet: 'Eh..but I feel pregnant...I know I am'

Michelle: 'You don't look like you'll be too happy about it if you are!'

Violet: 'that's why I keep putting it off till I know for sure that there is some hope.'

Michelle: 'Do you...eh...do you know who the father is?'

Violet [furious]: 'Well of course I know who the father is; it's Jamie.'

Michelle: 'Alright, you don't need to bite my head off...there're worse things in the world than being pregnant.'

The scene ends with Michelle advising Violet to go to the chemist and buy pregnancy test.

Scene [2]

In the following scene, Michelle is waiting by the bathroom door for Violet to come out and tell her about the pregnancy test's result.

Violet [opens the door, with tears streaming down her cheeks]: 'It went blue...'

Michelle: 'How far gone, you...'

Violet: 'Eeh...about eight weeks...must have been when we were on holiday...won't mind but we only did it once the whole time we were there. You know, people who want to get pregnant try it for years...'

Michelle: 'But you definitely...don't...'

Violet [quickly interrupting]: 'Do you think I'm awful?'

Michelle: 'No'

Violet [moving towards the living room]: 'Well I think I am awful.'

Michelle [comforting Violet]: 'It's your body whatever anyone else says.'

Violet: 'I have never taken any risks...I have always been dead careful and have dreaded this happening.'

Michelle: 'Hey, look you've not done anything wrong...'

Violet [crying]: 'I do wanna be a mother though, and I wanna have children.'

Michelle: 'Just not now, not with Jamie.'

Violet: 'I can't even bear the thought of telling him.' *End of scene: Jamie, the baby's father, is having an affair with his step-mother.*

Scene [3]

Talking romantically and softly to Sarah with whom Jason is trying to establish a romantic relationship. He gets closer to Sarah in an effort to kiss her. She turn her head away, steps back and says, 'Jason!'...

Jason [offended, replies back]: 'What have I done?...'

Sarah: 'It's just not right, not yet...'

Jason [impatiently]: 'Well when then?...'

Sarah [walks away and says], 'I'm gonna be late.'—End of scene.

EastEnders: Like *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* included 17 scenes with references to R & R themes, which meant that just over four out of ten (41%) of all its sexual portrayals contained R & R themes—the highest average of such scenes

found in all six soap operas. Of those scenes, seven tackled risks of or actual unwanted/unplanned pregnancy, nine debating abortion and one sexual patience. One of the soap's major sexual storylines involving an extra-marital affair highlighted, on many levels, the issues of infertility, teenage pregnancy, abortion and parental concerns over children's (teenagers') sexuality.

This particular storyline began with the discovery of a pregnancy test device (showing the positive blue-line) at the back of the holiday minibus by Libby, the fourteen-year old daughter. Alarmed by the prospect that the pregnancy test might belong to one of his three teenage daughters and that one of them might be pregnant, Kevin, the father, bought new pregnancy test devices and ordered his daughters to take the test. The few scenes in which the story panned out showed, on the one hand, parents' concerns and determination to tackle the problem head-on, and, on the other hand, highlighted the teenagers' sophisticated understanding and knowledge of pregnancy and consequences of sexual behaviours (see Box 7-2: scenes 1, 2 and 3).

Eventually, the story quickly unfolded when Dawn, a teenager and friend of one of Kevin's daughters, revealed that she was pregnant as a result of a sexual relationship with Rob, a young bank manager married to May, the local GP. Unsure of what the options available were, Dawn decided to go to her local GP, May, Rob's wife, to discuss her pregnancy. Thereafter, the story unfolded in a melodramatic fashion, with May discovering the identity of the baby's father and struggling to come to terms with her infertility, while Dawn and Rob were facing the consequences of a likely abortion (see Box 7-3: scenes 1, 2, 3,4 and 5).

Box (7-2)

Scene [1]

Earlier Libby, a teenager, discovered a pregnancy test device while cleaning the back of the minibus they used to travel to the family's holiday house in Dorset. Kevin, divorced with two teenage children and in a relationship with Denise, has been informed by Pat, his aunt, of the discovery. Angry for being kept out of the loop by his partner, Denis, Kevin barges into the kitchen to quiz the ladies about the device and find out who

is pregnant. The following conversation takes place in the kitchen, as the women are baking birthday cakes:

Kevin [interrupting everyone, asks Denis]: ‘So, when are you gonna tell me?’

Denis: ‘Tell you what?!’

Kevin: ‘Don’t you think I have the right to know?’

Denis: ‘If I had an idea what you’re talking about!’

Kevin: ‘The baby!’

Denis [surprised, looks at her tummy]: ‘What...do you think I’m pregnant?’

Kevin: ‘You should have told me.’

Denis: ‘I would have if I was... but I am not.’

Pat [embarrassed]: ‘Oh, we maybe got hold of the wrong end of the stick.’

Denis: ‘You’re right you did.’

Denis [to Kevin]: ‘Oh, I can’t believe you think I wouldn’t have told you.’

Pat [interrupting]: ‘Oh, wait, wait, it’s not Kevin’s fault. It’s mine.’

Yolenda [adding]: ‘And mine. Eh...we put one and two together and...’

Denis [interrupts and adds sarcastically]: ‘Yea, yea, and you come up with fifty-five.’

Pat: ‘The thing is if it’s not you and Kevin having a baby then it could be one of your kids.’ *The Scene ends with all looking at one another.*

Scene [2]

In this scene, parents are questioning their teenage children, Chelsea and Carly, about the pregnancy test found in the minibus.

Carly [leaning against the kitchen sink, shouts]: ‘I am not pregnant.’

Chelsea [irked by the way her parents are staring at her]: ‘Don’t look at me like that.’

Denis: ‘Because your sister found a positive pregnancy test on the bus.’

Carly [angrily shouting and protesting her innocence]: ‘It’s ridiculous; I know I’m not pregnant.’

Kevin [standing in the door way]: ‘Somebody on that mini bus is up the duff.’

Chelsea: ‘If I had done a test, do you think I would have left it on the bus?’

Carly [to Chelsea]: ‘Sounds like you have got experience.’

Chelsea [replies back]: ‘No more than you.’

Carly: ‘I haven’t got time for this rubbish...[Pause...Everybody is staring at Carly], ‘It’s not me!’

Kevin: ‘Nobody go [sic] go anywhere.’ [He closes the kitchen door and locks the girls in.]—*End of scene.*

Scene [3]

Kevin enters the kitchen and throws two small packaged items on the table. Carly and Chelsea pick them up and discover that they are two pregnancy test devices.

Carly [looks at the packages, gasps, and says to her father, Kevin]: ‘You’re having a laugh’.

Kevin [replies to Carly]: ‘If you’re not pregnant, what’s the problem?’

Chelsea [to her father]: ‘No way.’

Denis [to Kevin, her partner]: ‘Darling, I think you might be taking this a bit far... I know Chelsea and I know when she’s lying.’

Pat: ‘Denis is right Kevin.’

Kevin [to Denis]: ‘Sure are you?’

Denis [slightly agitated]: ‘They’re not stupid teenagers. They’re grown women.’

Libby, who found the test, enters the kitchen and senses the unease and tension. All stare at her; she cannot fathom why.

Libby [baffled]: ‘What?’

Denis [now suspecting Libby]: ‘Was it you... the test you found on the bus?’

Libby [dismissively]: ‘You’ve got to be joking.’

Chelsea: ‘I don’t think she’s even done it [alluding to sexual intercourse]’

Libby [getting back at Chelsea]: ‘And why not? Just because I don’t dress like I’m on offer 24/7.’ [All gasp at Libby’s comment indicating she has crossed the boundaries].

Kevin [losing his temper]: ‘This is getting us nowhere...just take the test.’

Carly: ‘No way!’

Kevin: ‘I need to know Carly.’

Carly [pleading]: ‘Dad...’

Deano, a brother, enters the kitchen while the girls dash off to have their tests done, after agreeing to prove their father wrong.

Deano: ‘What’s going on?’

Libby [answering quickly]: ‘one of them is pregnant and we’re about to find out who.’

Deano [jokingly]: ‘What? I could be an uncle!’

Kevin [hits Deano with a tissue]: ‘Shut up Dean.’—End of scene. The following scene, however, showed that the tests were negative and Kevin apologises to the girls.

Box (7-3)

Scene [1]

In this scene, Rob received a phone call from May’s nurse telling him about Dawn’s visit to May’s surgery. He dashes off to find out whether or not Dawn has divulged the secret. He opens the doors and stands still as he finds May is still sitting behind her desk

Rob [assumes that Dawn has told his wife about their affair]: ‘I have just seen Dawn, she told you, didn’t she?...May, I’m sorry!’

May [not understanding the reason for the apology, asks quietly]: ‘Sorry?’

Rob: 'I have been trying to protect you [by not telling her about the affair]...if I could have spared you this [stuttering] eh, eh...'

May [interrupts]: 'Eh..how could...she told you she was pregnant?'

Rob [completely taken by surprise]: 'Pregnant? [stutters], sh...sh...she can't be.'

May: 'Well, she came in here that' [a long pause...May starts putting the pieces together]

Rob [realizing he has exposed himself]: 'Oh that's eh, that's eh...terrible. I had no idea.'

May [smiles, then her eyes are filled with tears]: 'Oh it's you, isn't it? You're the married man.'—End of scene.

Scene [2]

Dawn and her friend Carly are walking in the neighbourhood talking about the fact that the news of her pregnancy and affair with Rob is in the open now. In this scene they are also discussing the consequences:

Dawn: 'You must think I'm a right hard faced bitch.'

Carly: 'I have never said that...it's not about the abortion...it's the way you've gone about getting one...I mean why did you have to go to May for?'

Dawn: 'I didn't plan it Car [Carly] I was angry...she's my GP...'

Carly [interrupting]: 'Yeah, and Rob is the kid's father.'

Dawn: 'What's the point, he's made his decision; and it is not a kid; it's a couple of cells.'

Carly: 'Dawn, you're playing with fire...maybe part of you wants to find out...'

Dawn [interrupting]: 'Shut up' [as Dawns turns around, May, the GP and Rob's wife, enters the scene and holds her hand up and slaps Dawn in the face—the three characters are silent and shocked by the action—End of scene.

Scene [3]

May and Rob have been bitterly arguing about the affair Rob has had with Dawn, who is now pregnant with his baby; May and Rob have been trying for years to have a baby but they have failed. After having been arguing outside in an earlier scene, the couple enter the house:

May: 'You betrayed me; you betrayed our marriage. You say you love me but you can't.'

Rob: 'I do, you've got to believe me.'

May [crying]: 'Then why did you do it? ...was it the sex or you were just bored with me?'

Rob [stuttering]: 'No, no, no, look...I don't know...it...it just happened! ...we...we were on a break...'

May [shouts angrily]: 'I do think that's some sort of excuse...[walking out of the room; Rob following her]... if that's the best you can offer.'

Rob: 'Look I'm sorry; I've been a complete idiot, I know that, but it's you that I love not her...'

May: 'And what about the baby.'

Rob [getting very emotional, tears in his eyes]: 'I'll sort it [a long pause] I don't know how yet, but...'

May: 'Actually she's already done that for you; that's why she came to me; she wants an abortion [a long pause] now...tell me you don't care.'—End of scene.

Scene [4]

Rob goes to see Dawn to arrange for her to have an abortion. Rob, yearning for a baby for long years, is very emotional and reluctant to ask her to do that, but he does manage to tell her:

Rob [getting money out of his wallet]: 'Look I don't know how much these things are exactly, but...[placing a load of cash on the kitchen table]'

Dawn [furious, interrupts]: 'What things?... we're gonna have a baby, this what you have always wanted.'

Rob: ‘Just go private...get it over and done with as soon as possible...[stutters] it’s for the best, Dawn, but it doesn’t seem like it right now.’

Dawn [now angry, violently hits Rob]: ‘Just get out, I said get out [throws the money notes back at him, and bursts into tears]

Scene [5]

May goes back home after threatening Rob with separation when seeing him coming out of Dawn’s house:

Rob: ‘How’s the surgery...I’m really glad you’re home...I was sacred you’d gone for good... where did you go?’

May [pouring water in a glass]: ‘Why does that matter?’

Rob: ‘I did break up with Dawn and you and me got back together...she wouldn’t leave me alone...she was crying and pleading and...she wouldn’t let it go... I didn’t know why...but...it’s obvious now...[Pause] when you saw us on Friday I was giving her money for an abortion.’

May [shaking her head]: ‘Even that disgusts me...to think you’ve been sleeping with the sort of stupid little air-head who plays so fast and loose with her fertility....’

Rob [interrupts]: ‘Didn’t know...’

May [continuing her sentence]: Easy come, easy go...everything that I would have given the world for...maybe that’s all she has been brought up to know...but thought you’d know better than that... [she leaves the kitchen]’

Rob: ‘May...please...where are you going?’—End of scene.

Hollyoaks: With just over one in ten (11%, N=9) of all its (79) sexual scenes containing references to R & R themes, *Hollyoaks*’ overwhelming tone in terms of safe-sex messages was that of sexual patience, as over half (5) of the scenes with R

& R tackled such a theme, while the rest included mentions of risks or actual unwanted/unplanned pregnancy (three scenes), and multiple R & R topics (only one scene). Further, the majority (6) of the R & R scenes occurred within the context of two main sexual storylines, the first involving two high-school teenagers and the second two university students. Both storylines, however, conveyed in an elaborate manner the importance of sexual patience.

The story of, and the scenes between, Hannah and Paul, both 15-year old students, portrayed the centrality of sexual behaviours as a way of establishing and sustaining a relationship at an early stage, besides the immense pressure, mostly peer pressure, teenagers underwent, and ultimately the failure to resist such pressure (see Box 7-4: scenes 1, 2, 3 and 4). The other three R & R references were not part of a clear storyline, but rather were embedded in three brief scenes which highlighted a mother's concerns over her son's sexual relationship with a teenage student, and possible negative outcomes (risks of an unplanned pregnancy).

Box (7-4)

Scene [1]

Hannah and Paul, both fifteen-year olds, have just started dating each other; Hannah is very keen to establish a sexual relationship with Paul quickly. On the many occasions he has been invited to Hannah's bedroom, Paul refuses to initiate any kind of sexual behaviour by making various excuses. In this scene, in Hannah's bedroom, both sitting on the bed with lights very dimmed, Hannah suddenly starts taking her t-shirt off [now only wearing a very short and revealing skirt and a bra] and kissing and touching Paul passionately. Paul seems to have responded this time to Hannah's initiative. Excited at the progress, and wanting to establish a better atmosphere, she stops kissing and asks Paul to wait, while she goes to the other side of the room, puts some music on, and gets back to the bed. They resume kissing passionately again, and seem to be on their way to having sexual intercourse; Paul stops and says to her 'are you sure', Hannah quickly replies, 'yeah, if you are', Paul adds, 'it feels right'; they start kissing and touching again. He undresses himself; suddenly, Hannah stands up, moves away from the bed and says, 'it's not right', Paul misunderstands and asks, 'what, the music?', realizing what she meant

afterwards, he then asks her to get back to bed. They kiss and embrace in a non-sexual way, and lie on the bed—The scene implies that no sexual intercourse has occurred.

Scene [2]

Hannah is getting impatient with Paul, as she is expecting to have a sexual relationship with him quickly. Disappointed at the slow pace at which the relationship is moving, Hannah asks: ‘do you not like me?’; Paul replies back: ‘I like you but...not sure...I’m not ready yet...’ Hannah replies back: ‘okay...I’m sorry’...

Scene [3]

Hannah puts further pressure on Paul in order to have sex with him. She’s at his place, and both are kissing passionately. However, Paul still refuses to push the relationship further; Hannah threatens to leave, and Paul pleads with her not to:

Paul: ‘I am sorry about before..’

Hannah [frustrated and angry]: ‘Eh...let’s not just go there, ey... I feel embarrassed as it is...’

Paul: ‘Why?’

Hannah: ‘Why do you think? Don’t worry because we won’t try anything like that again.’

Paul: ‘It’s not if that I didn’t want to...’

Hannah: ‘Just not with me, hey?’

Paul [as she is leaving]: ‘Look I want you to stay.’

Hannah: ‘Really?’ [They kiss passionately]

Paul: ‘I’m sorry, I’m the one who should be leaving..’

Hannah: ‘Why?’

Paul: ‘Because I’m supposed to be the bloke!...the truth is.. I want to...with you...’

Hannah: You’re not just saying that, are you?’—*Paul caves in and both go upstairs. The following scene showed both naked lying in bed as they were having sexual intercourse.*

Scene [4]

Paul is troubled by what happened between him and Hannah; he does not seem sure about his feelings towards her. In this scene, Paul is discussing his relationship with his teenage sister in his bedroom:

Sister: ‘If you don’t have those feelings for Hannah, you don’t have to punish yourself, besides you’ve not been with each other for very long...’

Paul: ‘Yeah, I know, but...things have progressed...between us.

Sister: ‘How do you mean?’

Paul: ‘Please don’t make me say it.’

Sister: ‘Say what?...O...you mean...really...you have...wow...I hope you were careful.’

Paul: ‘Of course we were careful...I mean... I didn’t even wanna do it...it got to the point she really did and....I couldn’t say no!’—End of scene.

Home and Away: an average of over two out of ten (22%, N=8) of *Home and Away*’s sexual scenes contained references to R & R topics—the third largest average, after that of *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*. All eight scenes (two dealt with multiple R & R issues, and six tackled sexual patience) were part of a lengthy and major storyline that tackled teenage rebellion, sexuality and pregnancy. The storyline revolved, on the one hand, around two newly acquainted high-school teenagers (Drew and Belle) intent upon embarking on a sexual relationship regardless of their parents’ and guardians’ disapproval, and, on the other hand, around the parents’ efforts to prevent the teenagers from ‘sleeping together’ and to explain to them the importance of ‘waiting till the relationship matures’. [See Box 7-5: scenes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5].

Box (7-5)

Scene [1]

At the café, where Irene works:

Irene: ‘What the hell do you think you’re playing at letting Belle sleep with her boyfriend under your roof?’

Amanda: ‘I am sorry! I thought it was me looking after Belle not you, remember.’

Irene: ‘Looking after her does not mean letting her run wild.’

Amanda: ‘She’s not running wild; she’s having a friend stay over.’

Irene [furious]: ‘a boyfriend Amanda for God’s sake, even you must realize how inappropriate that is...’

Amanda: ‘I don’t see what the problem is!’

Amanda makes the case that Belle has moved on and she’s not broken-hearted anymore over her ex-boyfriend. And Amanda is going to support her in every possible way; she calls this being a ‘modern parent’, Irene replies: ‘it is called negligence in my book’

Scene [2]

Dan: ‘They have been together for two days for God’s sake.’

Amanda: ‘If they’ve decided they are gonna do this, they will do it whether here or somewhere else, then I would rather it be here, and surely you can see the sense in that.’

Scene [3]

Dan: ‘Mate, you might think you’re ready for a full-on relationship with Belle but you haven’t thought it through... You ought to be taking this slowly at least till we know which way this is going to swing...’

Drew: ‘Okay, maybe you’re right. I just did not look at it that way before.’

Scene [4]

Belle angry and argues about her mother’s U-turn decision of not letting Drew sleep over. .

Amanda: ‘Do you really want me to go there? Because if I do then all I can come up with is being pregnant when I was younger than you...that’s because my mum didn’t care enough about me to set boundaries like I am trying to do for you.’

Scene [5]

Amanda returns home and catches Belle and Drew both naked after they’ve had sex. Belle does not think that is a big deal:

Belle: ‘Take a chill-pill, will you? You are making a way big deal out of this

Amanda[to Leah]: ‘Well, I got a phone call from the school telling me that Belle had gone missing after and surprise surprise Drew was missing too...so I turned up here and caught them both in with their pants down, literally’. [Belle’s reaction, sniffing and laughing, infuriates Amanda who angrily says:] ‘Wipe that smile off your face, young lady.’

Belle: ‘We are not doing anything everyone else at our age isn’t already doing; it is just the way the world is, maybe you should deal with it.’

Drew [to Amanda]: ‘Or maybe you should stop being a hypocrite...how old were you when you had her?’

Neighbours: it depicted only four scenes with R & R, which represented 16% of the soap’s sexual portrayals, and occurred within one major storyline that dealt with unplanned teenage pregnancy. The story revolved around Sky, a dropped-out teenage university student who—having cheated on her boyfriend, Dylan, by sleeping in a very short period of time with her ex-lecturer (Jean-Pierre) and Dylan’s brother (Stingray)—discovered she was pregnant. A lot of confusion with regard to the identity of the baby’s father followed, (obviously the trajectory of the current unfolding storyline, as well as scenes shown prior to the recording of the study’s four-week sample of *Neighbours*, implied strongly that safe-sex or protected sex was not practised). The story tackled the consequences of the unplanned pregnancy, the

identity of the baby's father, the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy and casual sex (see Box 7-6: scenes 1 and 2).

Box (7-6)

Scene [1]

Sky, a teenager who has had a relationship with Dylan and got herself pregnant, is determined to keep it secret from everybody including Dylan; Her friend, Izzy, discovers the secret when stumbling over some medical records. Outside their houses, they're having this conversation:

Izzy [sieving through old papers in the wheelie bins outside]: 'What have you got to hide?'

Sky [getting very defensive]: 'Nothing! I haven't! I just don't like the idea of people looking at my records.'

Izzy: 'Everybody knows you're pregnant...it's not that, obviously.'

Sky: 'Aren't I entitled to a little bit of privacy?'

Izzy: 'No, of course you are especially if what you're hiding is really important....if it has nothing to do with the pregnancy...let me see...is it the identity of the father you're trying to hide?'

Sky [losing her composure, and behaving strangely]: 'Don't be so ridiculous...'

Izzy: 'Oh my God! Well it is [a long pause] Dylan is not the father, is he?'

Sky admits it is Dylan's, and calls the pregnancy 'poetic justice'; meanwhile Izzy tells her that 'you are doing the right thing', and advises her to 'keep her mouth shut and not tell Dylan about the baby', promising her that she will not tell anyone.

Scene [2]

Dylan, Sky, Stingray and his girl friend have just had their dinner at home; Stingray, being so humorous, starts mocking Sky for being pregnant. After seeing his girlfriend, Rachel, off, he gets back to the living room to taunt the couple again:

Sky [to Stingray]: 'Just make sure you look after her [after Rachel]'

Stingray [does not like the comment]: 'What're you talking about...'

Sky: ‘You know what I’m talking about...’

Stingray [dismissively]: ‘Heee... dear God! You’re the one who got herself pregnant!’

Dylan [objecting to his answer]: ‘Oh heee...’

Stingray: ‘Oh..erm.. I’m just saying.’

Sky [being persistent]: ‘I know what you’re like...’

Stingray [getting intolerant, holds a video camera and pretends he is filming the couple sitting on the sofa while adding his commentary]: ‘Oh, let’s see....let’s have it...why is Sky so down on young lover, when she, herself is pregnant, still in her teens and already dropped out of uni once?’

Sky [furious]: ‘Go to hell...’ [The brothers end up fighting]—End of scene.

Hollyoaks in the City: it only contained four references to R & R, representing 1.7% of all sexual scenes found in this particular soap opera. All four references were depicted in four scenes that were not, unlike the majority of R & R references, part of a coherent storyline that tackled R & R themes. Three scenes featured mention/presence/use of condom, and one touched briefly upon multiple R & R issues. Interestingly enough, two of the scenes⁵⁷ belonging to the latter category, showed, also very briefly but discreetly, the actual use of a condom in a portrayal of sexual intercourse (depicted); the scene showed a young woman, sitting semi-naked on top of a young man, tear with teeth the cover of a condom as they were both about to engage in sexual intercourse. Further, the other remaining scene also showed the presence of a condom, however, in an outlandish and surreal portrayal of sexual talk involving prostitution or ‘escorting’. In this scene, a young model, Polly, handed her new boyfriend, Ben, a few condoms as he was about to set off to meet a client, after having agreed with Polly’s boss (the manager of a modelling agency)

⁵⁷ This portrayal was played or shown twice, one of which was as part of the introductory credits of a following episode.

that if he took up ‘escorting’, Polly, his new girlfriend, would not have to ‘escort’ anymore (see Box 7-7: scenes 1). The fourth scene with multiple R & R issues referred, in brief and in a caricature manner, to parents’ concerns over whether or not their daughter decided to get married because of an unplanned pregnancy, and their quick solution to that, abortion (see Box 7-7: scenes 2).

Box (7-7)

Scene [1]

In this scene, Polly is seeing Ben off as he is about to leave the house to go to his client Stella. This is Ben’s first encounter with escorting, therefore, before he leaves he asks Polly, who has all the expertise in escorting, for a few tips. The scene is set in the living room with Polly and Ben standing in the middle of the room facing each other; while putting his tie on, Ben asks Polly’s opinion about the appropriateness of the clothes he has put on for the upcoming occasion:

Ben: ‘This is too formal? It’s more like a work suit.’

Polly: ‘This is work; anyway you can take it off as soon as you get there.’

Ben: ‘How long should I stay?’

Polly: ‘Well, there’s no rule...just don’t act like you’re in a rush.’

Ben [curiously asking]: ‘Before or after?’

Polly [stroking his suit]: ‘During.’

Ben: ‘I only have to do it once, don’t I?’

Polly [with a camera following her movement--bends down, reaches a packet of condoms, and hands them to Ben]: ‘I hope so. But you think what we’ve got is worth it, right?’

Ben [while holding the condoms, a camera takes a close-up shot of the condoms, and focuses on them for a few seconds]: ‘This is totally and utterly crazy.’

Polly: ‘Then, don’t do it.’

Ben [grudgingly, putting the condoms in his jacket pocket]: ‘No, eh, eh, it’s worth it.’

Polly [very emotional, with tears in her eyes]: ‘Good, good, so think it’s worth it too.’—End of scene.

Scene [2]

Adam, in an effort to overcome his sexual ambivalence, decides to marry Millie Andrews, a teacher at the same school. Millie arranges a meeting for him with her family so that he will tell her parents the news of their decision to get engaged. At the dinner table, this conversation is taking place:

Adam [to Millie’s parents]: ‘I want to tell you that my feelings for your daughter are sincere, and...’

Millie’s father [interrupting]: ‘Adam. Don’t worry... you don’t have to be so formal with us.’

Adam [mumbling; not at ease with the formal middle class settings]: ‘No, em...em... but I do.’

Millie [trying to help Adam, interrupts]: ‘Mum...dad, the thing is... Adam and I have become very close, and...’

Millie’s young brother [interrupting]: ‘You wanna have sex?’

Millie [furiously shouts back at her brother]: ‘Why do you have to ruin everything?’

Adam: ‘What Millie is trying to say is...’

Millie’s mother [interrupts]: ‘Oh my God! What have you done?’

Millie: ‘We’re getting engaged.’

Father: ‘Oh...well that’s eh...’

Mother [interrupting]: ‘Oh my God! You’re pregnant?’

Millie [angrily]: ‘Mum.’

Mother: ‘You don’t have to keep the baby; we can work it out.’

Millie [holds her mum’s hands, and pleads]: ‘Mum, listen to me, I’m not pregnant.’

Adam [angrily]: ‘We just wanna be together; and we know it’s right. So, what’s the point hanging around?’

Mother [not approving of their relationship in the first place]: ‘Well I can think of plenty of reasons.’

Adam [pleading]: ‘We love each other Mrs. Andrews. What better reason is that?’

Father: ‘Well obviously it’s a shock, but if that is what you want...’

Millie [nodding]: ‘It is.’

Father: ‘Then congratulations!’

Mother [reluctantly]: ‘Congratulations!’—End of scene.

7.4 Degree of Focus

Like the measure used to evaluate how central sexual content was to a scene or storyline (see Chapter Four), four similar categories, (1) inconsequential, (2) minor, (3) substantial and (4) primary, were used here to capture the degree of focus placed upon R & R themes within individual scenes. The overall findings showed that nearly three-quarters (73%, N=43) of all the 59 scenes with R & R placed *primary focus* on the R & R themes they tackled, and 12% (N=7) placed substantial focus. The focus on R & R themes in the remainder 15% (N=9) of scenes was either inconsequential (N = 4) or minor (N = 5). However, on a four-point scale measurement all 59 scenes with R & R scored an overall average of 3.5, which clearly indicates that the overwhelming majority of scenes with R & R veered towards placing a primary degree of emphasis on R & R themes.

The degree of focus varied considerably from one soap opera to another ($X^2 = 46.435$, $df=15$, $p<.001$). For instance, the overwhelming majority of scenes with R & R in *EastEnders* (16; 94%), *Neighbours* (4; 100%), *Home and Away* (8; 88%) placed primary emphasis on R & R themes, compared to 67% (N=6) in *Hollyoaks* and 59% (N=10) in *Coronation Street*. However, *Hollyoaks in the City*, which

despite the sheer number of its sexual scenes in fact had far fewer scenes with R & R references than any of the other five soap operas, once again did not place any substantial or primary focus on R & R references. In fact, in three out of the four scenes with R & R, the emphasis on R & R themes was inconsequential, while the emphasis in the other remaining scene was minor (also, see Table 7-2). The following average scores for each of the individual soap operas, using a four-point scale measurement, shows clearly the strong disparities in terms of emphasis, in particular between *Hollyoaks in the City* and the other five soaps: *Coronation Street* (3.4), *EastEnders* (3.9), *Neighbours* (4), *Home and Away* (3.8), *Hollyoaks* (3.7) and *Hollyoaks in the City* (1.2)

Soap Operas		Degree of Focus (R & R)				
		Inconsequential	Minor	Substantial	Primary	Total
Coronation Street	Count	1	1	5	10	17
	% within Soap Operas	5.9%	5.9%	29.4%	58.8%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	0	1	0	16	17
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	5.9%	.0%	94.1%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	0	1	2	6	9
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	11.1%	22.2%	66.7%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	3	1	0	0	4
	% within Soap Operas	75.0%	25.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	0	1	0	7	8
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	12.5%	.0%	87.5%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	0	0	0	4	4
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	4	5	7	43	59
	% within Soap Operas	6.8%	8.5%	11.9%	72.9%	100.0%

Table 7-2 The degree of focus on R & R topics across all soap operas

7.5 Source of R & R Information

To capture the source of R & R themes and messages, the following four categories were used: (1) peer to peer, (2) partner to partner, (3) parent to child and (4) health provider to any. Further, a fifth category, ‘other’, was used for the sources that did not fit the previous four categories. The findings indicated that the source of R & R information was more likely to be ‘peer to peer’ (in just over 47%, N=28, of all scenes with R & R)) than ‘partner to partner’ (27%, N=16) or ‘parent to child’ (22%, N=13). However, while not a single scene portrayed R & R information flowing from ‘health provider to any’, two scenes, representing just over 3% of all

scenes with R & R, portrayed ‘other’ sources. Despite the slight differences in the distribution of source information, soap opera comparisons indicated that those differences were statistically not significant ($X^2=21.333$, $df=15$, $p<.127$). The source of R & R information in almost all soap operas with R & R scenes reflected to a large extent the overall averages mentioned above (also see Appendix: Table 4.2).

In terms of the characters’ profile, however, there were 137 characters across the 59 sexual scenes with R & R, of whom around 70% ($N=95$) were females and 30% ($N=42$) males. In addition, 93% ($N=127$) of those characters were ethnically white, while the rest (7%, $N=10$) were black. The age profile indicated that just over one-quarter (26%, $N=36$) of those characters were teenagers, over four in ten (43%, $N=59$) young adults, and just under three in ten (28%, $N=38$) middle-age adults. Children and over 65-years olds accounted for just 3% ($N=4$), (1.5% each).

7.6 Valence of R & R Themes

This study examined all scenes with R & R content for the valence associated with the depiction of R & R references and themes. Valence towards R & R was classified as (1) primarily positive: concerns expressed over R & R, (2) primarily negative: lack of concern for R & R, (3) mixed: both negative and positive treatment of R & R portrayed, and (4) neutral: none of the three previous categories were communicated. Additionally, a fifth category, ‘unknown/cannot tell’, was used for unclear cases.

The overall findings showed that over four in ten (42%, $N=35$) of scenes with R & R content conveyed *primarily positive* treatment of R & R, as opposed to just 15% ($N=9$) conveying *primarily negative* treatment. Further, while over three in ten (32%, $N=19$) scenes portrayed conflicting messages (positive and negative), only one in ten (10%, $N=6$) of all 59 scenes with R & R were found to display neutral treatment of R & R themes. Soap opera comparisons, however, revealed that valence towards R & R topics varied significantly from one soap opera to another ($X^2=27.563$, $df=15$, $p<.02$). For instance, scenes with primarily positive treatment of R & R were more likely to be portrayed heavily in *Hollyoaks* (68% of *Hollyoaks* R & R scenes), *EastEnders* (59%), *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Home and Away* (50% of

their R & R scenes) than in *Coronation Street* (18%) or *Neighbours* (0% no portrayals).

Scenes with mixed messages (negative and positive) were portrayed more frequently in *Coronation Street* (N=8, 47% of its R & R scenes) and *Neighbours* (N=3, 75% of its R & R scenes) than in any other soap opera [see Table 7-3 for frequency and percentages of the other two categories; also see examples of the valence towards R & R themes: **Positive:** Box (7-1) scenes 2 and 3, Box (7-2) scenes 1, 2 and 3, Box (7-4) scenes 1 and 3, and Box (7-5) scene 3; **Negative:** Box (7-3) scene 2, and Box (7-5) scene 1; **Mixed:** Box (7-4) scene 4, and Box (7-5) scenes 2, 4 and 5.].

Soap Operas		Valence of Reference to R & R				
		Primarily positive (concern about R&R)	Primarily negative (lack of concern for R&R)	Mixed	Neutral	Total
Coronation Street	Count	3	2	8	4	17
	% within Soap Operas	17.6%	11.8%	47.1%	23.5%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	10	3	4	0	17
	% within Soap Operas	58.8%	17.6%	23.5%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	6	2	1	0	9
	% within Soap Operas	66.7%	22.2%	11.1%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	2	0	0	2	4
	% within Soap Operas	50.0%	.0%	.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	4	1	3	0	8
	% within Soap Operas	50.0%	12.5%	37.5%	.0%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	0	1	3	0	4
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	25.0%	75.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	25	9	19	6	59
	% within Soap Operas	42.4%	15.3%	32.2%	10.2%	100.0%

Table 7-3 Valence of reference to R & R across all soap operas.

7.7 Overall Theme/Message of R & R

In order to capture the overall theme/message of R & R within sexual scenes with R & R content, the following four categories were used in this study: (1) sexual patience, (2) sexual precaution, (3) sexual risks and/or negative consequences, and (4) no emphasis on overall R & R themes. The overall findings revealed that when R

& R references were depicted in sexual scenes, the overall theme/message of R & R was more likely to revolve around sexual risks and/or negative consequences, which accounted for just over six in ten (61%, N=36) of all scenes with R & R, or sexual patience which accounted for just under three out of ten (29%, N=17) of all scenes with R & R. Further, R & R portrayals with an overall tone of sexual precaution comprised just 5% (N=3); while, equally, no emphasis on R & R theme/messages was found in a similar 5% of all scenes with R & R content.

Soap Operas		Overall Theme/Message of Risk & Responsibility				
		Sexual patience	Sexual precaution	Sexual risks or negative consequences	No emphasis on overall R&R themes/messages	Total
Coronation Street	Count	2	0	14	1	17
	% within Soap Operas	11.8%	.0%	82.4%	5.9%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	1	0	16	0	17
	% within Soap Operas	5.9%	.0%	94.1%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	6	1	2	0	9
	% within Soap Operas	66.7%	11.1%	22.2%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	0	2	0	2	4
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	50.0%	.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	8	0	0	0	8
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	0	0	4	0	4
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	17	3	36	3	59
	% within Soap Operas	28.8%	5.1%	61.0%	5.1%	100.0%

Table 7-4 The overall theme/message of R & R by soap opera.

Comparisons showed that there were significant differences among some soap operas in overall themes/messages of R & R conveyed in portrayals with R & R content ($X^2=77.202$, $df=15$, $p<.001$). While the overall findings indicated the dominance of just two themes, risks and negative consequences on the one hand, and sexual patience on the other, individual soap operas tended to follow up on primarily one theme. For instance, the overwhelming majority (82% in *Coronation Street*, 94% in *EastEnders* and 100% in *Neighbours*) of scenes with R & R content depicted sexual risks and/or negative consequences, compared to just 22% in *Hollyoaks* and zero percent in both *Home and Away* and *Hollyoaks in the City*. Similarly, the majority (67%) of portrayals in *Hollyoaks* and all those (100%) in *Home and Away* featured sexual patience [see Box (4) scenes 2 and 3, and Box (5)

scene 3], compared to 12% in *Coronation Street*, 6% in *EastEnders*, and zero percent in each of *Neighbours* and *Hollyoaks in the City* (Table 7-4).

7.8 Summary and Discussion

A number of patterns emerged from this study's analysis of soap operas' treatment and portrayal of R & R topics. First of all, in terms of the overall amount of R & R depiction, over one of every ten (12%) of all scenes with sexual content included references to, or revolved around, R & R themes. Although comparisons here are, once again, difficult to make, this particular finding compares favourably with that of Heintz-Knowles (1996), where one out of every ten (10% or N=58 out of total 595) of *sexual behaviours* across the five-week sample of ten US soap operas was found to contain references to R & R. however, the result is perhaps less favourable when compared with that of Greenberg and Busselle (1994), who found, across 50 hour-long episodes of five US soaps, 18% (N=61) of the 333 indentified *sexual incidents* to contain R & R references.

Comparisons with the Kaiser Family studies (Kunkel et al. 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005) and the Irish Crisis Pregnancy Agency report (MacKeogh, 2005)—both used more or less identical methodological measures to those employed in this study—clearly indicate that general television programmes on US and Irish TV networks contained much smaller percentages of scenes with R & R references than those of soap operas (see above findings), with just 4% of all scenes (N=169 out of 3783) including R & R in the Kaiser study (2005)⁵⁸ and 5.6% (N=52 out of 925) in MacKeogh (2005)—in fact, these two percentages still compare unfavourably to the overall percentage in this study of scenes that *primarily* depicted R & R topics (5.7% of all 506 scenes), let alone the 12% of all scenes with R & R.

Given these brief and limited comparisons, it can be generalised that soap operas, as a TV genre, tend to include substantially more references to risks and responsibilities and safe-sex messages than general TV output, or perhaps any other

⁵⁸ Similar results were reported in the 1999 study (4% N=78 out of 1930) , and in the 2003 study (6%, N=170 out of 2992 scenes)

TV genres whether on US or on Irish and UK TV networks. Furthermore, on current as well as on past evidence (Greenberg and Busselle, 1994; Heintz-Knowles, 1996), soap operas would have more likely been one of the main sources, if not the main source, of R & R and safe-sex messages in the Kaiser studies, as well as in MacKeogh (2005).

Despite not profiling the distribution of R & R by TV genres, the authors of those studies highlighted extensive examples (scenes and storylines) of R & R and safe-sex messages that were predominantly taken from soap operas, which further confirms the prevalence of R & R in the genre (see ‘safe-sex messages’ sections in Kunkel et al. 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005; and MacKeogh, 2005). In addition, comparisons do suggest that, not only did soap operas include more R & R themes than general TV programmes, but also placed far more emphasis on the treatment of such topics than general TV programmes, in particular those shown on US networks. The overwhelming majority (73%) of soap scenes with R & R in this study placed primary focus on R & R topics, compared to merely 24% of scenes in Kunkel et al. (2005) and 44 % in MacKeogh (2005).

Nevertheless, the findings of valence towards R & R in those two studies painted a completely different picture from the valence observed across soap operas, as just over four in ten (42%) of all scenes with R & R content in this study depicted positive treatment of R & R topics, compared to nine in ten (90%) of all scenes with R & R in MacKeogh (2005) and over five in ten (54%) in Kunkel et al. (2005).

Although this particular comparison makes worrying reading in terms of the comparatively fewer portrayals endorsing or supporting R & R messages found across soap operas, there is little or no conclusive evidence to suggest that soap operas promoted or endorsed risky or irresponsible sexual behaviours (lack of concern for R & R). It was often observed that, when valence towards R & R themes was either mixed (32% of all scenes with R & R) or primarily negative (15%), it was intended within contexts or storylines that largely highlighted the consequences of irresponsible and risky sexual behaviours. Therefore, within such contexts it would

be counterintuitive to consider those scenes as promoting or endorsing negative behaviours.

The findings indicated that there were very considerable differences between soap operas, not least in the number or percentage of scenes with R & R within each of the seven soap operas, but also in the emphasis placed on R & R themes, the types and valence of such themes, and the overall theme/message of R & R. One of the most prominent findings to emerge was the uneven distribution of scenes with R & R content across the seven soaps, which represented a clear divide between soap operas with high proportions of R & R scenes (*EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*, *Home and Away*, *Neighbours* and *Hollyoaks*) and soap operas with few or no R & R scenes (*Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks in the City*).

Furthermore, the imbalance in the distribution of scenes with R & R mostly occurred between two groups of soaps, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* on the one hand, and *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Emmerdale* on the other: the former two alone, whose combined aggregate share of sexual scenes in this study was just under 19% (N=94) of the total 506 scenes, accounted for the majority (nearly 60%, N=34) of all 59 scenes with R & R; while *Hollyoaks in the City*—*Emmerdale* did not include any scenes with R & R—accounted for less than 7% (N=4) of all 59 scenes with R & R despite the fact that it alone accounted for almost half (48%, N=242) of all sexual scenes in this study.

While the absence of R & R scenes and storylines in *Emmerdale* identified in this study does not, and is not enough to, suggest an overall pattern in the soap's treatment of sex and sexuality, especially given its well documented history of tackling social issues (see Hobson, 2003), the findings of *Hollyoaks in the City* do point towards a virtually complete lack of concerns for R & R issues. Not only did *Hollyoaks in the City* include the largest number of sexual scenes, portray strong adult themes, and contain the smallest percentage (less than 2%) of scenes with R & R of its overall sexual scenes, but also did not dedicate a single coherent storyline to R & R issue(s), nor did it place any substantial or primary emphasis on the R & R references found in its four scenes.

Even within the five mainstream soaps that featured R & R scenes the differences were very noticeable, with *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* not only including the highest percentage of scenes with R & R (over four out of every ten scenes in *EastEnders*, and three out of ten in *Coronation Street*) but also including more scenes that primarily depicted R & R themes, tackling more R & R topics, as well as dedicating more, and more central, storylines that dealt with R & R themes in an elaborate manner than any other soap opera.

The relatively high percentage of scenes with R & R (between 22% to 11%) in the other three soap operas, *Home and Away*, *Neighbours* and *Hollyoaks*, however, still indicated an overall committed approach to, and interest in, tackling R & R topics. The differences in the amount of R & R portrayals between soap operas aimed at general audiences (*EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*) and soap operas aimed at young audiences (*Neighbours*, *Home and Away* and *Hollyoaks*) further substantiate the often repeated claim of the producers of the former two soaps operas concerning their public responsibility and commitment to tackling big social issues. The fact that *EastEnders* was found to contain the highest percentage of scenes dealing with R & R topics can best be understood within the ‘public responsibility’ framework of its producer, the BBC, which is intent on producing soap operas that are not only entertainment but also issues-led programmes (McQueen, 1998; and Hobson, 2003).

Further, one of the most interesting findings to emerge in this study was the centrality and recurrence of unwanted/unplanned pregnancy (mostly teenage pregnancy) and abortion as distinct R & R themes in most soap operas (around 60% of all scenes with R & R touched upon the two issues) and the lack or absence of portrayals dealing with general STDs and HIV/AIDS. If soap operas were truly to reflect ‘the real world’, then this pattern could be attributed to the foregrounding of teenage pregnancy as a social problem in Western societies, the UK in particular, in recent years (*Health Protection Agency*, 2008, 2009; Moore and Rosenthal, 1993). The incorporation of storylines dealing with teenage pregnancy and highlighting its potentially negative consequences has become a constant theme not only in British or Australian soap operas but also in US and European soap operas. Soap operas are

increasingly relying on R & R topics as a source of drama with which an increasing number of audiences can identify (Hobson, 2003; Liebes and Livingstone, 1998). The genre's recognised ability to reach, entertain and inform large sections of a wider audience has made soap opera an ideal vehicle for information that could potentially raise the public's awareness about social issues such as teenage pregnancy and STDs.

The varying emphasis which soap operas place on the different areas of sexual behaviour is clearly a reflection of changing social concerns. Greenberg and Busselle (1994), for instance, found that while US soap operas in the 1980s and early 1990s tended to include more portrayals and storylines tackling HIV and general STDs as a result of heightened concerns with the HIV virus, the mid-1990s soap operas were more likely to incorporate storylines dealing with pregnancies (wanted and unwanted) and abortion than HIV and general STDs as teenage pregnancy emerged as another challenging social problem. They found that 20 out of the 50 episodes analysed had storylines about pregnancy, as opposed to just one mention of HIV/AIDS.

Likewise, Heintz-Knowles (1996) found that the overwhelming majority (eight out of every ten) of portrayals with R & R involved discussion about pregnancy, while the rest (two out of ten) just touched on use of contraception, safe sex and STDs. Soap operas' preoccupation with mainly pregnancy and abortion storylines has often been attributed to the fact that such themes tend to meet the needs of the genre for intense dramatic situations and lengthy plot developments which other R & R themes such as those revolving around illness (HIV) do not seem to offer. Hobson (2003), for instance, argued that the discussion of unexpected wanted or unwanted pregnancies in soap operas allows for the development and *reoccurrence* of storylines and long-term representations of how such issues might affect the characters, whereas an HIV storyline, although providing strong dramatic situations, is limited in its scope, duration and reoccurrence within individual soap operas.

Further, the findings also showed that soap operas, in particular those aimed at younger audiences, included R & R storylines that focused not only on the outcomes

of irresponsible sexual behaviours but also on sexual responsibilities which encompassed themes such as sexual precaution, patience and abstinence, with an overall of just over three in ten (32%) of all scenes with R & R conveying those messages.

Although the emphasis on sexual responsibilities in a number of storylines involving mainly teenage characters in *Hollyoaks*, *Home and Away* and *Coronation Street* seemed to have offered an alternative and somewhat positive treatment of sex and sexual relationships which pre-empted risks and negative consequences, the overall message of R & R topics was one of constant focus on sexual risks and negative consequences of sexual behaviours and their devastating effects on the characters involved—once again mainly teenage characters. Just like the overall majority of sexual behaviours discussed in Chapter Five, the majority (over six in ten) of scenes with R & R depicted sexual risks and/or negative consequences.

Previous studies (e.g. Millwood-Hargrave, 1999, 2002; MacKeogh, 2005) have indicated that various segments of soap opera audiences tend to react strongly to, and have different attitudes towards, storylines dealing with social issues in general and storylines dealing with sex and sexuality, including those tackling pregnancies (wanted and unwanted) and other R & R topics in particular. For instant, evidence from focus-group research showed that, while some parents believed that soap operas' portrayal of sensitive topics such as teenage pregnancy and sexual relationships was very helpful in terms of raising awareness and facilitating further debates on those issues with their teenage children, others thought that raising such issues, especially in daytime soap operas, was inappropriate, as children were potentially left exposed somewhat prematurely to unsuitable adult material and topics. Further, some of those parents said that they felt quite uncomfortable watching this type of material with their own children (Millwood-Hargrave, 1999, 2002).

The same feeling was echoed by young respondents who said that viewing sexual content with their parents was very embarrassing, adding that their parents' embarrassment was probably far greater as they used obvious ploys (promptly

switching TV off, flipping channels, ask questions to break the silence) to cover their discomfort (MacKeogh, 2005).

A large number of young participants, however, were very critical of the inclusion of sexual content and R & R topics on television. The majority acknowledged that the portrayal of these topics, especially pregnancies and abortions, could play a role in educating younger people about the consequences of risky sexual behaviours, and agreed that soap operas were the best suited TV programmes to tackle such outcomes in a meaningful way and potentially engage with younger audiences through the use of dramatic ploys. But they still felt that portrayals of risks and responsibilities on television in general and in soap operas in particular that lacked dramatic and entertaining elements and showed more the 'bad side of sex-STDs or pregnancy' would make them not watch or switch off their television sets altogether. Furthermore, young participants pointed out that the depiction of the more mundane aspects of pregnancy and abortion, as they put it, would also not make very interesting television material (MacKeogh, 2005, pp 80-82). Similarly, Millwood-Hargrave (2002) concluded:

‘[F]indings showed some tension within the audience. They want soap operas to be a meld of both realism and fiction. The entertainment they seek through the characters and storylines must have a believable edge to it if they want to be fully immersed in the plot. There is a recognition, however, that a true representation of real life would be mundane and take too long; soap operas concertina time and events, while offering an insight into a world from which we could learn.’ (2002: p. 31)

In this study, however, a combination of two findings revealed a very distinct pattern that can perhaps be of major concern to soap opera producers/writers and viewers alike. This pattern involved, first, the overrepresentation of teenage characters (over one-quarter of all characters in scenes with R & R content were teenagers), and female characters (seven in ten were females) in scenes with R & R content, and, second, the overwhelming emphasis of R & R topics on the negative

consequences of irresponsible sexual behaviours (over six in ten of all scenes with R & R depicted negative consequences).

Almost all R & R storylines and portrayals seemed to have been designed to target and address, by and large, young audiences through focusing on teenage characters' romantic and sexual relationships. In those storylines it was primarily teenage girls and their friends who had to deal with the traumatic consequences of unwanted pregnancy, abortion, and uncertainty about the timing of engaging in sexual behaviours. The overall tone of R & R was one of problematic and troubled teenage sexuality and sexual relationships. It is worth noting that there was not a single portrayal depicting R & R involving middle-aged characters suffering from negative consequences. Teenagers, once again mainly females, were primarily depicted as victims of their own risky sexual behaviours, despite the fact a substantial number of portrayals depicted them as possessing substantial knowledge of safe-sex and contraception (for instance, *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* storylines: see Box (1) scene 2, Box (2) scenes 2 and 3).

There is growing evidence (MacKeogh, 2005; Millwood-Hargrave, 2002; *Sex, Lies and Soaps*, 2006) that teenage and young soap opera fans are very ambivalent about the benefits of R & R storylines, and are critical of the way soap operas tend to handle teenage sexuality and sexual relationships in their storylines. Furthermore, evidence also suggests that teenage fans are fully aware of the producers' motives for injecting such storylines. For instance, giving their opinion on the portrayal of sex and sexuality in soap opera in general, Jade (17 years old) and Vivian (18 years old), both committed fans of soap operas, thought that teenagers were by and large victims of negative stereotyping when it came to sex and sexuality. They summed up the way in which their favourite soap operas, *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*, handled teenage sexuality and sexual relationships by saying:

Jade: *'When teenagers have sex in soaps they either get pregnant or one cheats on the other, or there is a disease or someone walks in the room or someone catches them somewhere or something; but when adults have sex in the soaps nothing happens; it's just perfect, normal, no diseases, no unwanted pregnancies,*

it's just perfect marriage really; it's weird!... I believe that people that produced it they did it like ...to prevent teenagers from having sex really, like there's no good side in it...basically they are trying to say that there's more disadvantages than there's advantages; so abstinence is the best way.'

Vivian: *'They're just trying their best to make children not have sex whether they make it really unrealistic or just research a little bit and put everything they find in one piece.'*

(Sex, Lies and Soaps, Channel 4, 2006)

Clearly, the findings emerging from this study substantiate, to a great extent, the description depicted by those two teenagers. However, despite the much acknowledged benefits of soap operas in terms of highlighting serious issues, R & R included, and raising public awareness, this overall pattern of frequently tying-in teenagers' sexual relationships and behaviours with negative consequences followed by almost all soap operas, and the didactic treatment of R & R by some soap operas, particularly by *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*, perhaps risks alienating the very audiences soap operas are trying to attract.

Conclusion

This thesis has undertaken the task of content analysing the portrayal of sex and sexuality in soap operas shown on British television. The rationale for conducting this research stems from the reported public concerns over media sex in general and soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexual relationships, and the potential 'effects' and influences media sex may have on audiences, particularly young people. This chapter will look at the theoretical frameworks underpinning the importance of analysing soap operas' depiction of sex and sexuality and the contexts which have given urgency to conducting such research. It will give an overview of the study's theoretical framework and design and revisit some of the major findings such as the amount and prevalence and nature of sexual activity, focus and explicitness, consequences of sexual activity, homosexuality and risks and responsibilities associated with sex and sexual relationships depicted in soap operas. This chapter will also discuss if some of theoretical concepts and concerns over the 'effects' and influences of soap opera sex provide some insight in light of the current findings.

An Overview of the Study's Theoretical Framework and Design

As discussed in the first part of the thesis, there is increasing evidence that exposure to sexual content on television is a significant contributor to many aspects of young people's sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and, more importantly, their sexual behaviours (Brown, Steel and Walsh-Childers, 2002; Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; Kunkel et al. 2005).

There are many sources from which young people gain their understanding of sexual norms and learn about sex and sexuality in general, including parents, schools and peer groups. Nevertheless, television, as the predominant mass medium, has been identified as one of the main and most preferred sources of sexual information available to young people, whether in the UK, US or elsewhere (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; Kunkel et al. 2005 and MacKeogh, 2005). Media sex is considered to act as an instrument of sexual socialising and social learning (Ward, 2003) and as a

source of sexual information have often been referred to as a 'super peer' within the context of young people's sexual socialisation and development; and television tends to arguably play a prominent and meaningful role in young people's sexual socialisation (Brown, Halpern, and L'Engle, 2005; Gunter 2002).

Sexual socialisation consists of learning the answers to questions such as how to be sexually appealing, where and when sex is appropriate, with whom, within what relationship contexts and with what, if any, precautions and consequences—and here, as Kunkel et al. (2005) conclude, television fills the gap: 'television plays an important role in the sexual socialization of America's youth, providing stories that sometimes inspire, often inform, and consistently contribute to the sexual views and behaviors of adolescents and young adults' (p.57).

Moreover, theories and hypotheses explaining the potential effects of sexual content in the media, as well as supporting empirical evidence, make clear that there are correlations between exposures to the portrayals of sex and sexuality on television and changes in young people's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, sex and sexual relationships. However, most studies reviewed in this study admit that correlation is not evidence for causality.

Social Learning Theory, for instance, has argued that humans learn by watching others and will engage in and imitate behaviours seen as rewarding (Bandura, 2008). Thus, according to this view, adolescents who watch television portrayals of young adults gaining prestige and popularity as a result of engaging in certain sexual behaviours may feel encouraged to engage in similar behaviours themselves. Hence in the context of this research, some of the findings concerning the consequences and motivation of sexual behaviours prevalent across soap operas have provided some insights into soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality, particularly looked at from the social learning and socialization perspectives as will be discussed later.

Gunter (2002) notes the differences between the social learning and sexual socialisation approaches are fairly significant, whereas the former 'focuses on the possibility that young people may copy specific behavioural examples seen on screen, the sexual socialisation perspective examines the long term influence

potential of the media in conditioning generalised norms and values surrounding sex. This model recognises that young people can learn about sexual practices not only through witnessing sexual behaviours played out on screen but also by tuning in to talk about sex...Such talk can contribute to norms and expectations concerning how to be sexual, why and when sex is appropriate, and with whom. Television can thus provide an agenda for sex and represent sexual 'scripts' that youngsters can learn and then utilise themselves at an appropriate later date' (p.89). From this perspective, the reported findings in this thesis will shed light on the types of sexual talk (or scripts) and their prevalence, the centrality of narratives, the contexts within which portrayed sexual behaviours take place and the norms and values attached (e.g. sexual behaviours occurring in committed relationships, outside marriage). Can such portrayals be seen as tools for sexual socialisation? Do soap operas potentially provide sexual 'scripts'? And if they do what are they?

The Cultivation Model, on the other hand, argues that people who watch television more frequently than others (or *heavy* viewers) are more likely than *light* viewers to adopt the worldviews offered by television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 2002). Accordingly, exposure to a steady diet of repetitive sexual portrayals or messages over a long period of time is likely to create its own version of normative sex and sexual relationships. In this context, it is the prevalence of specific portrayals and not simply their nature per se that is important. Are viewers of soap operas more likely to encounter sex than viewers of other genres?

Research evidence in recent years has clearly pointed towards the existence of correlations between exposure to sexual content in the media and shifts and changes in the audiences' beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. For instance, observing talk about sex, whether in 'talk shows' or in soap operas, has been shown to influence teenage viewers' beliefs about normative sexual patterns and existence of certain sexual practices (Ward, 1995 and 2002; Ward, Gorfine and Cytron, 2002).

Even more significantly, a recent set of data from a longitudinal study demonstrated a correlation between adolescent exposure to sexual talk and behaviour on television and the acceleration of sexual activity, including intercourse,

among a nationally representative sample of American teenagers (Collins et al. 2004).

Furthermore, research indicates that adolescents who identified closely with their television characters and believed their TV models to be more sexually skilled than they were also reported being less satisfied with their status as virgins or with their own sexual experiences (Baran 1976a; 1976b; Courtright and Baran, 1980). Similarly, female undergraduates who identified strongly with television's portrayals of sexuality also held higher expectations of the levels of sexual activity among their peers (Ward and Rivadeneyra, 1999).

Certainly, the influence of television—with soap operas at the heart of its programming—on social beliefs, attitudes and behaviours occurs, as has been widely acknowledged, through a gradual cumulative process that is potentially likely to develop with repetitive exposure to portrayals of common patterns of behaviour (Brown and Newcomer, 1991, Carveth, and Alexander, 1985; Gerbner et al. 2002; Signorielli, 1991).

Within the context of rising teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, particularly among young people in the UK, a systematic, objective and comprehensive analysis of the sexual content of one of TV's most important genres, soap opera, can be of clear significance. It is that which this current research has endeavoured to achieve.

Soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality, rather than, say, a broad snapshot of TV programmes in general, has been the subject matter of this study, not least because of public concern over the ways in which soap operas tackle controversial sexual storylines, often prompting media regulators to revisit the codes of practice governing television content and schedules (BSC, 1998; Millwood-Hargrave, 1999, 2002 and 2003; Ofcom, 2005a). But no less important as a reason is the increasing popularity of soap operas and consequently their very considerable value to television channels as well as their survivability (Hobson, 2003; Millwood-Hargrave, 2002).

Soap operas enjoy the highest audience ratings of any television programmes (BARB, 2007); attract a significant number of teenage and young viewers (Livingston, 1991; MacKeogh, 2005; Millwood-Hargrave, 2002); and continue to increase in volume and to dominate the television schedules (Ofcom, 2004; Hobson, 2003). In addition, soap operas' ability to deal with sensitive social issues (e.g., teenage pregnancies, homosexuality) in realistic but entertaining formats, and through characters with which young viewers can identify, has made more urgent the need to examine the type and nature of sexual content which soap operas make so readily available to substantial numbers of young people, and potentially children too. A growing number of studies have paid particular attention to the 'identification' process (Gunter, 2002; Gunter, Harrison, and Wykes; Hobson, 2003; MacKeogh, 2005; Millwood-Hargrave, 2002).

The primary objective of this study was therefore to identify and account for the amount, nature, types and context of sexual activity portrayed across all soap operas broadcast on the UK's five terrestrial channels. The soap operas analysed were *Coronation Street* (ITV), *EastEnders* (BBC One), *Emmerdale* (ITV), *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City* (Channel 4), *Neighbours* (BBC One), and *Home and Away* (Channel Five). The reason for the inclusion of *Hollyoaks in the City*, a late-night spin-off drama series based on *Hollyoaks*, was two-fold: comparability and its audience. First, *Hollyoaks in the City*, as a late-night drama, would allow for comparisons to be made as to what 'day-time' and 'pre-watershed' soap operas contained in terms of sexual content. Second, it would allow for an understanding of what its primarily teenage and young audiences were likely to encounter in relation to the level, nature and type of sexual content.

It was also the aim of this study to assess the level of sexual explicitness and centrality of sexual activity in individual scenes and overall storylines, as well as many other contextual elements related to sexual activity and the characters involved. Further, a special focus was placed on whether or not soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality incorporated any safe-sex messages or highlighted risks and responsibilities associated with sexual behaviours and sexual relationships.

In attempting to capture the broader patterns of sexual behaviours and activity portrayed across soap operas and draw some comparative analysis, this research has yielded a number of interesting findings on the various aspects of soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexuality. Some of these have provided clear insight into the amount, nature and contexts of soap opera sex and have added to the understanding of their treatment of the topic, while others have confirmed previous research findings and their qualitative assessments.

The Nature and Prevalence of Sexual Activity in Soap Operas

Evidence emerging from this study, as well as comparative analysis drawn from previous research, clearly indicates that soap operas, contrary to prevailing public perceptions (Millwood-Hargrave, 1999 and 2002), do not contain higher levels of sexual content than other TV genres. The TV serials analysed in the study contained an overall average of 6.5 scenes with sexual content per hour of soap opera programming. However, excluding *Hollyoaks in the City's* share of sexual scenes, that average shrank to just 4.2 scenes per hour for all the six main soap operas—this average is comparable to those of general TV programmes in Ireland (4.5) and the US (4.9) (Kunkel et al. 2005; MacKeogh, 2005).

Comparisons with other TV genres clearly show that soap operas occupy the middle ground in terms of the amount of sexual content. Genres such as drama and comedy series, news magazines and films contain considerably more sexual content than soap operas. For instance, news magazines and comedy programmes shown on Irish and British television were found to contain substantially higher average numbers of scenes (9.0, 5.6 scenes per hour respectively) than soap operas (4.5 scenes per hour) MacKeogh (2005).⁵⁹ Therefore, in the light of these findings one can conclude that public opinion that soap operas contain 'too much sex' or include 'more sex than other TV genres' tend to be an inaccurate assessment of the amount

⁵⁹ It is worth mentioning that this study included, besides a composite-week of UK TV channels, five of the soap operas analysed in this study.

of sexual activity portrayed across soap operas, particularly day-time and prime-time soaps. (Millwood-Hargrave, 1999 and 2003).

One clear indicator of soap operas' moderate levels of sexual content to emerge in this study has been the overall number of scenes with sexual content found across the six main soap operas as opposed to those in the late night spin-off drama, *Hollyoaks in the City*: of all 506 scenes with sexual content found across the sample, the latter alone accounted for around 48% (N=248), whereas the former, the six soap operas together, accounted for just over half (52%). These figures show that the portrayal of sex is a more salient feature of post-watershed serialised drama compared to day-time and prime-time soap operas. This can be seen within the context of the Ofcom codes of practice that restrict pre-watershed programmes from broadcasting sexual material that can be seen as harmful to audiences under the age of 18 years (Ofcom, 2009). Nevertheless, what is also clear here is soap operas do offer a diet of sexual portrayals that convey a variety of sexual messages, norms and value, as will be shown later, which may, according to the cultivation model, ultimately contribute to the cultivation of those values and messages in the long term. The prevalence of sexual portrayal is a significant factor in the cultivation process. Soap opera viewers, it is safe to conclude, are likely to encounter a substantial diet of sexual messages and portrayals. This in turn raises the question of the importance of exploring the nature of those portrayals: what do they convey? What values and norms are being communicated and are likely to be cultivated.

Further, this study found that soap operas relied predominantly on narratives rather than visual depictions of behaviours in their portrayal of sex and sexuality, with just over six out of every ten (62%) sexual portrayals featuring *sexual talk*, compared to just under four out of ten (38%) portrayals depicting *sexual behaviour*. In fact, the three most popular soap operas, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale*, were the least likely of all soap operas to portray any sexual behaviours, as around three-quarters of all their portrayals were of *sexual talk*. Even when portraying sexual behaviours, soap operas, with the exception of *Hollyoaks in the City*, were unlikely to depict any advanced intimate behaviours, such as sexual intercourse.

Overall, around seven in ten (69%) of all sexual behaviours depicted across the seven soap operas were of very mild sexual behaviours, of which six in ten (60%) were of passionate kissing. Day-time and prime-time soap operas hardly portrayed any sexual behaviours other than passionate kissing, which accounted for 87% of *Neighbours*' and *Home and Away*'s portrayed sexual behaviours, around 70% of both *Coronation Street*'s and *EastEnders*' and 80% of *Emmerdale*'s. Portrayals of sexual intercourse and oral sex, both implied and depicted, were largely found in the late night spin-off *Hollyoaks in the City*, which alone accounted for all the intercourse and oral sex (depicted) portrayals and 21 out of the 35 portrayals of sexual intercourse (implied). These findings clearly show soap operas' reliance on narratives rather than on depictions of overt sexual behaviours. From a media-effects perspective, soap operas are likely to act as an instrument of sexual socialisation particularly among young viewers by providing 'scripts' and storylines about sex and sexual relationships. Indeed some qualitative studies (e.g. Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; MacKeogh 2005) have shown that young viewers have often quoted using soap opera storylines as a means of learning about the dynamics of sexual relationships, however in terms of developing relationships rather than in terms of finding out how to engage in sexual behaviours. Evidence from focus-group interviews has suggested both young female and male viewers tend to use sexual content on television as a vehicle for discussion and as an informal source of knowledge about sexual relations which has some influence on their own real-life relationships. (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; MacKeogh 2005). This latter point can be seen within the framework of social learning theory, where soap operas' portrayals of sex and sexual relationships can provide models of behaviours which young viewers learn from and emulate in real-life situations. The findings of this study show that soap operas are in fact not short of storylines and portrayals tackling sex and sexual relationships.

The overall picture emerging from this research in terms of the amount, type and nature of sexual content indicates that day-time and prime-time soap operas contained sexual content with levels considerably less than those prevalent across other TV genres such as films, drama and news magazines found on US (Kunkel et

al. 2005) and Irish and British (MacKeogh, 2005) television channels. Sex and sexuality in the six main soap operas were conveyed through narrative devices rather than through portrayals of sexual behaviours. The centrality of narratives to soap operas, primarily daytime and prime-time soaps, was manifest not only because they rarely portrayed sexual behaviours but also because the narratives of sexual relationships and sexuality occurred within wide-ranging sexual themes and storylines that were issue-led and often highlighted controversial social and cultural aspects of sexuality and sexual relationships. The mild nature of sexual behaviours portrayed across the daytime and prime-time soap operas, coupled with the dominance of sexual narratives, clearly indicated that soap operas were limited in what they could or could not show during daytime and family viewing hours as will be touched upon later.

Focus and Explicitness of Sexual Activity

Previous audience-based research, primarily opinion surveys and focus-group studies, has shown that viewers tend to be more accepting of, and tolerant towards, the portrayal of sexual behaviours—whether general sexual behaviours or controversial portrayals of homosexual behaviours and storylines, sexual affairs, underage sex, and so forth—on television in general and in soap operas in particular if they are relevant to storylines rather than simply gratuitous. And audiences tend to react adversely to the screening of advanced intimate sexual behaviours (e.g. sexual intercourse), nudity and sexually explicit scenes, particularly in the viewing hours before the watershed (Hill and Thompson, 2000; Millwood-Hargrave, 1992; 1999; and 2002). This study has attempted to find out whether soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality is integral to the storylines and whether or not soap operas explicitly portray intimate sexual behaviours that are likely to be considered as a source of offence to some viewers and/or cause embarrassment, and therefore establish whether or not there a basis for concerns over sexual explicitness and the portrayal of gratuitous sex in soap operas.

The findings in this study indicate that the overwhelming majority (80%) of portrayals, whether of sexual talk or behaviour, were of *substantial* and *primary*

importance to the scenes and overall plots. Most (over six in ten) sexual portrayals in the most popular soap operas, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, and in soap operas most popular with young viewers, *Hollyoaks* and *Home and Away*, were of primary relevance to the overall plot. No findings from previous research are comparable to those figures. For instance, only one-third of all sexual activity found across two composite-weeks of prime-time and post-watershed programmes on British television was found to be relevant to the narrative (Cumberbatch et al. 2003).

Similarly, the overwhelming majority, eight in ten (80%), of all sexual scenes either featuring talk or behaviour contained no sexual explicitness whatsoever. Further, the six main soap operas had virtually zero or low levels of explicitness, whereas by contrast *Hollyoaks in the City* individually accounted for most of the scenes with the lowest as well as the highest levels of explicitness. Once again, the findings of the levels of explicitness and degree of focus on sex and sexuality present a clear indication of soap operas' tentative approach to the treatment of sex and sexuality in contextual and visual terms: sex and sexuality in the day-time prime-time soap operas were strictly confined to, and were part of, the overall narratives; visual portrayals of overt intimate sexual behaviours were kept to a minimum; and sexually explicit scenes were virtually non-existent. Perhaps this pattern is partly due to the genre's format, and partly due to the regulatory codes of practices governing what can or cannot be shown prior to the watershed. However, in the case of *Hollyoaks in the City*, the findings suggest that the format itself was less of a factor, as the late night spin-off included gratuitous sexual scenes and explicit sexual behaviours comparable to those found in soft-porn films.

Certainly, the Ofcom Broadcasting Code (2009) restricts the broadcasting of sexually explicit material, and sexual material that may cause offence in an effort to ensure that no offence is caused and that particularly people under the age of eighteen are protected. On current evidence, soap operas seem to have observed the Ofcom regulatory codes. The Ofcom rules governing the broadcasting of sexual content and nudity which are set out to protect younger viewers, and guard against potential offence and harm state that:

‘Material equivalent to the British Board of Film Classification ("BBFC") R18-rating must not be broadcast at any time.’ (Rule: 1.17); And that ‘Adult sex material’ - material that contains images and/or language of a strong sexual nature which is broadcast for the primary purpose of sexual arousal or stimulation - must not be broadcast at any time other than between 2200 and 0530 on premium subscription services and pay per view/night services which operate with mandatory restricted access.’ (Rule: 1.18) (Ofcom, 2009:p.11)

Furthermore, broadcasters are required to ‘ensure that material broadcast after the watershed which contains images and/or language of a strong or explicit sexual nature, but is not 'adult sex material'..., is justified by the context.’ (Rule:1.19) And ‘nudity before the watershed must be justified by the context.’(Rule:1.21). Similarly, ‘representations of sexual intercourse must not occur before the watershed (in the case of television) or when children are particularly likely to be listening (in the case of radio), unless there is a serious educational purpose. Any discussion on, or portrayal of, sexual behaviour must be editorially justified if included before the watershed, or when children are particularly likely to be listening, and must be appropriately limited.’ (Rule:1.20) (Ofcom, 2009:pp12-13). Clearly, the main six soap operas relied heavily on the ‘contexts’ rules⁶⁰ to justify their treatment of sex

⁶⁰ According to Ofcom (2009:p. 16) meaning of “context” ‘includes (but is not limited to):

- the editorial content of the programme, programmes or series;
- the service on which the material is broadcast;
- the time of broadcast;
- what other programmes are scheduled before and after the programme or programmes concerned;
- the degree of harm or offence likely to be caused by the inclusion of any particular sort of material in programmes generally or programmes of a particular description;
- the likely size and composition of the potential audience and likely expectation of the audience;
- the extent to which the nature of the content can be brought to the attention of the potential audience for example by giving information; and
- the effect of the material on viewers or listeners who may come across it unawares.’

and sexuality and their very view depictions of implied sexual intercourse as the study's findings show that the overwhelming majority of portrayals were of primary and substantial importance to the storylines. The 'contexts' rules, however, can be seen as a way out of trouble for soap operas to justify the inclusion of more storylines and portrayals dealing with sex and sexuality. Perhaps this is the case with the late-night *Hollyoaks in the City*, which justified the screening of explicit intimate behaviours within the contexts of shedding light on the world and lives of male and female 'escorts'.

In short, all the above findings clearly indicate that the pre-watershed boundaries are observed, and concerns over sexual explicitness and gratuitous sex are baseless as far as the six main soap operas are concerned. And that on current evidence, any argument for tightening up the regulatory rules governing the broadcasting of sexual content would be on rather weak grounds, and would impact negatively, it could be argued, on the margin of freedom soap operas have to boldly tackle issues related to sex and sexuality in artistic and entertaining ways.

Themes, Orientations and Contexts of Sexual Activity

Analysing the contexts within which portrayals of sexual activity has been one of the primary objectives of this research. This will allow us to go beyond the prevalence of sexual content and to shed some light on the contexts and themes soap operas make available to their viewers. The context findings will be evaluated within parameters of the theoretical framework underpinning this research: what are the values and norms communicated and are likely to be cultivated in terms of sex and sex and sexuality? What messages and behaviours are soap operas viewers likely to learn? And what types of sexual 'scripts' do soap operas provide that may be used within the context of sexual socialisation? Is there a basis for the concerns expressed by the public over soap operas' portrayals of sexual and sexuality?

Soap operas are also well-known for their bold approach in tackling social taboos, including sexual ones, and they thrive on controversies. Although containing

a great deal of realism particularly in the case of the British soap operas, the portrayal of controversial sexual relationships is often decried as hyped, unnecessary, and shocking sensationalism (Hobson, 2003). The themes found across all seven soap operas suggested that there was no shortage of controversial sexual themes. The overall findings revealed that around nine in ten (90%) of all sexual behaviours occurred within generic and common contexts such as established or non-established relationships and extra-marital affairs, whereas just one in ten (10%) of all sexual behaviours—all portrayed in *Coronation Street*, *Hollyoaks* and *Hollyoaks in the City*—occurred within the context of an incestuous relationship or prostitution. Over half (52%) of all sexual intercourse portrayals, both talk and behaviour, involved depictions or discussions of themes such as first-time sexual intercourse/loss of virginity and cheating/infidelity, compared to 48% involving general and normal sexual intercourse themes—*EastEnders* and *Hollyoaks in the City* portrayed the former themes with greater frequency than any other soap opera.

In terms of the relationship contexts, the study found that just under five in ten (48%) of all characters involved in sexual activity had *no* established sexual/romantic relationship, compared to little under three in ten (28%) of characters with an established relationship, while 7% of characters were found to be ‘married to each other’, 5% having extra-marital affairs and 9% having just met for the first time or being on a date. Moreover, of those involved in sexual intercourse behaviours (implied and depicted), the findings revealed that five in ten (51%) were found to have *no* established relationship, 33% had an established relationship, 7% had just met and 2% were having an extra-marital affair. Comparisons with previous studies, on the other hand, suggest that soap operas were more likely to portray sexual activities (talks and behaviours) between characters with no established relationships than general TV output.

Furthermore, controversial sexual themes and storylines such as under-age sex and sex-related crimes were constant themes across many soap operas. More specifically, *Hollyoaks*, *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Home and Away* ran very controversial storylines dealing, exclusively through narratives, with illegal sexual

relationships between ‘teachers’ (one female and two males) and their underage-students, and the ensuing devastating legal consequences.

Soap operas, based on the study’s findings, do included a substantial number of sexual portrayals that involve controversial sexual themes (e.g., incest, prostitution, cheating, extra-marital affairs), and also contain a relatively large number of ‘talk’ portrayals that discuss sexual intercourse. British opinion surveys and focus-group studies do tell us that substantial numbers of television viewers tend to feel that the portrayal of sexual controversies on television—and soap operas being singled out—is becoming more prevalent (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992, 1999, 2003). In an early opinion survey, around four out of ten respondents (39%) felt that sex on television had *a strong* influence in terms of encouraging sexual and moral permissiveness and further 35% of the respondents felt that it had some influence in this regard. Six in ten (60%) of older viewers (aged 55 and over) believed that television had a strong and very strong influence in cultivating a culture of permissiveness (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992). Also, older viewers of soap operas are found to express similar views with regard to the portrayal of sexual relationships in soap operas (Millwood-Hargrave, 2002). By the end of 1990s, opinions over the role of television in encouraging immoral behaviour and permissiveness were equally divided, where around half of the respondents (48%) said television did encourage immoral behaviour and permissiveness and just over half (51%) said it did not (Millwood-Hargrave, 1999). Often, references to immoral behaviour and permissiveness are made to portrayals such as those found in soap operas (e.g. incest, prostitution, cheating, and extra-marital affairs). Certainly, in this study such portrayals are found to be a salient feature of the storylines dealing with sex and sexual relationships, and certainly soap operas make available to their viewers numerous controversial storylines that are often singled out as contributing to a culture of permissiveness immoral behaviour. However, while one might argue that there is a basis for the public’s perception that television in general and soap operas in particular contain a substantial amount of sexual content deemed as offensive or controversial to viewers, it is not within the scope of this study to argue that soap operas encourage

or endorse immoral and promiscuous sexual behaviours, or a culture of moral permissiveness.

We do know for instance that viewers, particularly older viewers, tend to be particularly sensitive toward the portrayal of overt physical intimacy (e.g. sexual intercourse) (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992 and 1999). But the findings here show that pre-watershed soap operas hardly include such portrayals. The depictions of overt sexual intercourse, however, were only ‘implied’ and overall very rare across the day-time and prime-time soap operas (three in *Coronation Street*, two in *Home and Away*, one in *Neighbours*, and none in *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale*). Even when portrayed, they were integral to the development of storylines and constituted heightened dramatic moments in the trajectory. Perhaps soap operas’ intrinsic over-reliance upon controversial sexual themes and storylines tends to overshadow the mild nature of sexual behaviours portrayed and the virtual non-existence of overt or explicit sexual intercourse in the genre—the latter, often a source of offence to the viewers—while making the genre prone to criticism. Further, there were clear indications, it can be said, that soap operas were—in the case of *Coronation Street*’s incest storyline and *Hollyoaks*’ underage-sex—pushing and testing the boundaries of societal acceptability, and taste and decency as far as sex and sexuality were concerned. However, that was done within the context of preserving existing social and cultural norms and through highlighting the cultural ‘unacceptability’ of controversial sexual relationships. Therefore it would be evidently counterintuitive to claim that soap operas’ portrayal of sexual controversies was tantamount to the endorsement of such controversies. Perhaps a further and more qualitative assessment of soap operas treatment of sexual and controversial storylines is needed here in order to determine whether or not the viewers’ perception of soap operas as encouraging or endorsing immoral behaviours and permissiveness is an accurate one in this respect.

Furthermore, while those findings can be interpreted from a cultivation process perspective, it is quite difficult here to make a categorical judgment as to how consistent and uniform soap operas’ sexual content is or can be over a long time, given that this study has analysed only four-week sample of soap operas, and as to

what the likelihood of potential cultivation processes, without measuring what the viewers' responses might be. We do know that some studies have provided empirical support for correlations between heavy exposure to television and changes in the viewers' perceptions and beliefs. For instance, Carveth and Alexander (1985) showed viewing soap operas produced cultivation effects among college students in relation to estimates of numbers of illegitimate children and number of divorced men and women; Olson (1994) provided evidence of the potential of soap operas to cultivate distorted perceptions of reality in relation to sexual issues (e.g. higher rates of adultery and pregnancies, less need for conception use) among college students who watched soap operas; and Buerkel-Rothfuss and Strouse (1993) showed that viewing daytime soap operas was positively correlated with the respondents' perceptions of how often people had sexual intercourse.

Certainly soap opera viewers, based on this study's findings, do encounter a diet of sexual portrayals in soap operas. It is worth noting, however, television viewers are more likely to encounter higher levels of sexual content, particularly overt physical intimate sexual behaviours, across other television genres such as films, drama series and news magazines, according to MacKeogh's (2005) findings on the general television output of British television channels. However, it is very likely that soap opera viewers are more likely than viewers of other television genres to be exposed to depictions of sex and sexual relationships (both narratives and overt behaviours) within the contexts of extra-marital affairs, cheating, loss of virginity and non-committal relationships. We do know that soap operas are often criticised by viewers and media scholars for their reliance on such controversial storylines and portrayals (Hobson, 2003); and some writers have called attention to the possibility that the depictions of sex in those contexts could cultivate values among viewers regularly exposed to such content that underpin a wider acceptance of sex outside marriage, childbirth outside marriage, and marriage as a temporary rather than permanent state, and an expectation of many sexual partners as a norm (Zillmann and Bryant, 1982 and 1984). Yes, the portrayals of sex and sexuality in such contexts are prevalent across soap operas but do soap operas actually endorse those values? Throughout the coding procedures in this study, it was noted that the

storylines did highlight the controversial nature of such sexual relationships and showed the devastating negative consequences rather than endorsing or promoting them. While this study has sought to provide a systematic analysis of the amount and nature of sexual portrayals, and shed some light on general patterns contexts, it has not endeavoured to provide a qualitative assessment of the values communicated. Therefore, it is important for future research to look into this aspect.

Furthermore, if viewing soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexuality produces cultivation effects, do soap opera viewers take such portrayals at face value? Although one might speculate about such effects—given that some studies have correlated heavy viewing to cultivation of distorted perceptions and beliefs—it is important to measure soap opera viewers' responses and perhaps revisit the cultivation approach, as recent qualitative audience research (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; Millwood-Hargrave, 2002) have shown that young people's engagement with, and understanding of media sexual content is far more complex and critical than what it has been suggested by the effects paradigm the cultivation model. Thus there is also a need to qualitatively evaluate soap opera viewers' understanding of, and interaction with soap operas' depiction of sex and sexuality in those controversial contexts, and see what are the values, if any, that are inferred, internalised or cultivated in this respect.

Consequences of Sexual Activity Portrayed

This study has shown that mainstream soap operas *very rarely* portray overt physical and gratuitous sexual behaviours (sexual controversies are portrayed primarily through narratives) or endorse irresponsible sexual behaviours and practices. This can potentially mean that, within the context of social learning theory, soap operas could be seen as presenting relatively fewer 'negative effects' as far as younger viewers are concerned. As social learning theory posits, patterns of rewards and punishments associated with specific behaviours can serve as vicarious illustrations of the best and worst behaviours to copy. In addition, the performance of behaviours of characters that are considered by members of the audience as highly attractive and whom they wish to copy or emulate can potentially serve as

influential role models (Gunter, 2002). Sexual portrayals found in all soap operas were more likely to depict and highlight negative than positive consequences for those involved in sexual activities, with over five in ten (52%) of all portrayals depicting negative consequences, as opposed to just under four in ten (39%) showing positive outcomes. Engaging in sexual behaviours was less likely to convey negative consequences and more likely to depict positive ones (over 60% of all behaviours showed positive outcomes). By contrast, the majority of sexual talk portrayals (just under two-thirds, 65%) conveyed negative rather than positive consequences. Furthermore all soap operas, particularly those aimed at young viewers, initially depicted engaging in sexual *behaviours* as unproblematic, glamorous and with little or no negative consequences, and later moved onto highlighting negative consequences associated with sexual behaviours and relationships. Most notably, *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* highlighted more negative consequences in their sexual portrayals than any other soap opera, while *Neighbours*, *Hollyoaks* and *Emmerdale* depicted considerably fewer of such outcomes. Some of the negative outcomes identified in this study included ‘damaging or ending a relationship’, ‘experiencing personal guilt or remorse’, ‘peer rejection’, ‘diminishing status, prestige or popularity’, and worries about ‘unwanted pregnancy’ and ‘abortion’. Therefore, to suggest that soap operas condone and endorse risky and irresponsible sexual behaviours in their portrayals would be an inaccurate assessment in light of this study’s findings on the types of consequences highlighted by soap operas. Very rarely did soap operas associate ‘rewards’ with risky sexual behaviours. Narratives that displayed responsible sexual practices, such as not rushing into a sexual relationship, not having unprotected sex and so on, did project more socially positive and desirable messages, as will be discussed below. In fact, the negative consequences associated with risky sexual behaviours, and the frequency of their occurrence can be seen as playing a role in raising young audiences’ awareness of the detrimental effects of engaging in risky sexual behaviours; and this has been the line adopted by soap operas producers (*Sex, Lies and Soaps*, 2005) and media scholars (Hobson, 2003; and Millwood-Hargrave, 2002).

Homosexuality

Soap operas' well established tradition of tackling big and controversial social issues such as homosexuality is well documented (e.g. Hobson, 2003), and despite the fact that homosexuality is still not fully accepted in today's British society, there is increasing evidence that the public's attitudes towards homosexuality are becoming more tolerant (Duncan and Philips, 2008; Evans, 2002). Consequently, attitudes towards the portrayal of homosexual behaviours have become more relaxed (Hill and Thompson, 2000; Millwood-Hargrave, 1999). This itself is reflected in soap operas' inclusion of more gay and lesbian characters, quite apart from the numerous storylines tackling sexual confusion, societal prejudice against homosexuality, and general homosexual relationships —themes all covered by some of the soap operas analysed in this research. We do know from audience research and opinion surveys that the portrayal of homosexual sex is still considered as an area of concern and a cause of offence for some viewers, despite the shifts towards more tolerant attitudes towards homosexuality in society. In 1992, for instance, more than one in seven of British viewers (71%) indicated that they would find embarrassing to watch homosexual scenes with some of the people they would normally watch television, and more than six in ten (62%) said they would find the screening of any physical contact between gay men offensive (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992). However, six in ten (60%) of the respondents in the same opinion survey felt that it was important to show homosexuality if it was an integral part of and necessary to the story (Millwood-Hargrave, 1992). More recently, around seven in ten (68%) of British people surveyed claimed that it was acceptable to include homosexual storylines and themes in television programmes. However, around four in ten (39%) felt it was unacceptable to portray imamate homosexual behaviours (between both gays and lesbians) on television before 9pm. The scope of this study was to find if soap operas portrayed any homosexual sex and with what frequency, and whether or not there were overt and intimate physical homosexual behaviours that are likely to be considered by some viewers as unacceptable behaviours a source of offence, as opinion surveys indicate. The findings in this study showed that over eight in ten (83%) of all portrayals across the seven soap operas depicted purely

heterosexual themes. However, non-heterosexual portrayals were primarily depicted in only three soap operas, *Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks in the City* and *Hollyoaks*, with three in ten of all portrayals in the former two depicting and/or discussing either homosexual or bisexual themes. Further, the findings also showed that those non-heterosexual portrayals were almost entirely of sexual talk rather than of overt intimate sexual behaviours, with the exception of *Hollyoaks in the City*'s portrayals—perhaps highlighting the prime-time soap operas' cautious approach to portraying intimate homosexual behaviours around which, as evidence suggests, there still remains some public sensitivity (Hill and Thompson, 2000). In addition, references, both endorsing (positive) or discriminatory (negative), to homosexuality were found in around 15% of all sexual scenes, and characters of homosexual and bisexual orientations accounted for almost 16% of all characters and (both references and characters) were more prevalent in *Hollyoaks in the City*, *Emmerdale*, *Coronation Street* and *Hollyoaks*. Interestingly, however, lesbian sex and characters were virtually non-existent.

It seems from those findings here that pre-watershed soap operas could well be sensitive and cautious not to include any intimate homosexual behaviour played out on the screen that may cause some offence to some viewers (predominately older viewers). Therefore, on current evidence, it appears that there is no basis for the 'concerns' over soap operas' portrayals of intimate homosexual behaviours. However, it is worth mentioning that there are previous incidents in both *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* where intimate homosexual behaviours were portrayed and constituted landmark moments in the history of both soap operas. Those incidents were so controversial and generated large numbers of complaints by the public—those moments are well documented in Hobson (2003).

In terms of what soap operas' portrayals of homosexuality are likely to cultivate and what those values are, it is very difficult to speculate and generalise here not least because of the limited sample analysed, which does not allow for categorical generalisation as to how consistent soap operas are in their representation of non-heterosexual themes, but also because of the need for an assessment of the audiences' understanding of and interaction with such themes, which is not within

the scope of this study. However, it can be said that soap operas do tackle prejudice against homosexuality, highlight it as a serious social issue and provide numerous scripts that raise awareness of homosexual discrimination which have implications for homosexual as well as heterosexual people. The role of soap opera scripts and storylines in tackling such issues is also widely documented and acknowledged (Hobson, 2003; and *Sex, Lies and Soaps*, 2005).

Safe-sex Messages and Sexual Risks & Responsibility

There is a growing body of evidence indicating that adolescents do make comparisons between television role models and themselves (Courtright and Baran, 1981; Durham, 1999; Gunter, 2002), and that teenagers' 'identification' with their favourite television role models is a key factor in their social learning and overall socialisation processes (Bandura, 1977 and 2008; Brown, Steel, Walsh-Childers, 2002). Further, it has been widely argued that one of the most important and crucial contextual factors likely to influence as well as shape the socialising effects of media sexual content, as far as young people are concerned, is the degree to which risks and responsibilities associated with human sexuality and safe-sex messages are included in such content, particularly at a time when young people's lives and social identities/spaces are becoming increasingly mediated (Kunkel et al. 2005).

Within the context of rising teenage pregnancies in the UK and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly among young people, the media—especially television—are looked upon as part of the problem as well the solution. Given soap operas' popularity with young audiences whose levels of involvement and identification with the genre's characters are well-documented (Gillespie, 1995; Hobson, 2003; Millwood-Hargrave, 2002), and soap operas' supposed track-record and unique ability in tackling big social issues such as teenage pregnancies, STDs and HIV cases (Hobson, 2003), this study had a particular interest in identifying whether or not soap operas did indeed highlight sexual risks and responsibilities (R & R) or incorporate safe-sex messages in their portrayal of sex and sexuality. The findings produced were highly informative as well as surprising in comparative terms.

The study found that over one in every ten (12%) of all scenes with sexual content across the overall sample included references to, or revolved around, R & R themes and safe-sex messages. Comparisons with previous studies showed clearly that soap operas contained significantly much higher percentages of R & R portrayals than general television programmes broadcast across US, Irish and UK television channels: only 4% of all scenes with sexual content found across a composite-week of US television programmes (Kunkel et al. 2005), and six per cent of all scenes found across one composite-week of Irish and another of UK TV programmes (MacKeogh, 2005) included references to R & R and safe-sex messages, compared to 12% (N=59 out of 506 scenes) found in this study.

Such an overall finding, although significant, reveals very little about soap operas' actual portrayal and treatment of R & R and safe-sex messages. A more detailed look at some of the core findings is needed. Not only were soap operas' references to R & R found in 12% of all sexual scenes, but six percent of those scenes were in fact entirely dedicated to discussions of R & R and safe sex topics, primarily unwanted (teenage and otherwise) pregnancies and abortion, and these were largely found in *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*.

Further, and even more significant, there were very considerable differences between the various soap operas, not least in the number or percentage of scenes with R & R, but also in the emphasis placed on R & R themes. The most important finding of all was the clear divide between soap operas with high proportions of R & R scenes and great emphasis on safe-sex and R & R topics (*EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*, *Home and Away*, *Neighbours* and *Hollyoaks*) and soap operas with few or no R & R scenes (*Emmerdale* and *Hollyoaks in the City*):

- *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*, whose combined sexual scenes comprised just under 19% (N=94) of the total 506 scenes, accounted for the majority (nearly 60%, N=34) of all 59 scenes with R & R found across the sample, while *Hollyoaks in the City*, the late night spin-off drama, accounted for less than 7% (N=4) of all 59 scenes with R & R, despite the fact that it alone comprised almost half (48%, N=242) of all sexual scenes in this study.

- Over four in ten (41%) and over three in ten (32%) of all sexual scenes in *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* respectively either revolved around or made references to R & R and/or safe-sex topics, compared to just 1.7% in *Hollyoaks in the City*.
- Over two out of ten (22%) of *Home and Away*'s portrayals, 16% of *Neighbours*', and over one in ten (11%) of *Hollyoaks*' contained references to R & R.

The six mainstream daytime and prime-time soap operas, with the exception of *Emmerdale*, were found not only to include reference to R & R and safe-sex topics but also to run distinct and lengthy storylines tackling teenage and unwanted pregnancies, abortion, and sexual patience and responsibility. The findings also showed that around 60% of all scenes with R & R touched on unwanted/unplanned pregnancy (mostly teenage pregnancy) and abortion, and 25% highlighted abstinence or sexual patience. As there were only few portrayals of intimate sexual behaviours and low levels of sexual explicitness depicted across the mainstream soap operas, most R & R topics were treated through narratives. However, *Hollyoaks in the City*, portraying far more intimate and explicit sexual behaviours, depicted the use of a condom in three brief incidents.

Interestingly, however, the overall message of R & R topics found in most R & R portrayals, as well as storylines, was one of constant focus on sexual risks, negative consequences of sexual behaviours, and the ensuing devastating effects on the characters involved, mainly teenage female characters: over six in ten of scenes with R & R depicted sexual risks and/or negative consequences, and over one-quarter of all characters involved in scenes with R & R content were teenagers, of whom seven in ten were females.

Evidence emerging from this study clearly indicates that soap operas, particularly prime-time British soap operas, contain significantly high levels of references to sexual risks and responsibility, and that young viewers watching soap operas are highly likely to encounter frequent safe-sex messages and elaborately highlighted sexual risks and responsibilities in soap operas' portrayals of sex and sexuality.

What is of concern, however, is the emerging consistent pattern of coupling teenage characters, primarily females, with irresponsible sexual behaviours and negative consequences and the consistent and frequent portrayals of teenage sexuality and sexual relationships as troubled and problematic, which perhaps risks alienating the very audiences, young and teenage viewers, which soap operas target and desperately want to attract. On the other hand, these current findings have clearly highlighted that not only did the late night spin-off drama, *Hollyoaks in the City*, contain the highest levels of sexual content and sexual explicitness, but it also failed to incorporate sufficient treatment of R & R topics and safe-sex messages comparable to that found across mainstream daytime and prime-time soap operas.

We now do know from focus-group studies (e.g. Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; MacKeogh, 2005) and opinion survey (e.g. Buckingham and Bragg, 2003) that exposure to media sexual content provides young people with an opportunity to learn about various aspects of sexual relationships and sexuality; and that the media are seen by young people as a valuable source of sexual information, particularly in light of the difficulties young people report when it comes to talking with their parents about sexual matters and in light of the dissatisfaction with the school sex education. However, learning about sex and relationships from the media is not straightforward, nor is it a reliable process as young people are often found to be critical of the media's treatment of various aspects of sexuality and relationships (e.g. unrealistic depictions of teenage sexual relationships and teenage pregnancies), and rejecting overt attempts on the part of the media to teach them about sexual matters through didactic and 'patronising' advice (Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; and MacKeogh, 2005). Yet, there is an increasing body of studies which clearly indicate that incorporating risk or responsibility messages into television programs with sexual themes and topics can significantly increase viewer sensitivity to critical sexual health concerns. For instance, when an episode of the US sitcom *Friends* discussed the issue of condom failure, US researchers found increases in knowledge about condoms for as much as 17% of a nationally representative sample of 12-17 year old adolescents who saw the show. A telephone survey was conducted after the show aired, so respondents were naturally exposed to the television content. The

study also found that 10% of adolescent viewers reported talking with an adult about condom efficacy as a result of watching that particular episode. (Collins et al. 2003) (Also see Kunkel et al. 2005 for reviews of further studies). Similarly, it can be said that R & R storylines may have an impact in terms of raising awareness of risks and devastating effects related to sexual behaviours and relationships. It is fairly obvious, particularly if future longitudinal studies were to find similar high percentages of portrayals focusing on R & R themes, that soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality maybe cultivating an overall message that engaging in sexual behaviours and having relationships are not risk free. And on current evidence, soap operas already seem to contain high levels of focus on sexual risks and responsibilities and to suggest that they should incorporate more of such themes and storylines could have an adverse effect in terms of drawing the attention of young viewers to such issues, particularly when qualitative audience studies, mentioned above, indicate young people's rejection and resistant to the use of drama to convey overt advice, didactic storylines and pre-defined moral messages.

Soap Operas' Sexual Content: Public Concerns, Policy Implications & Research Limitations

What do the study's overall content analysis findings tell us in terms of the public concerns voiced over television's portrayal of sex, particularly over soap operas' portrayal, and the potential 'effects' (often negative effects are being cited) soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality may have particularly on you viewers? Are those concerns justified in light of the current evidence? And consequently are there reasonable grounds on which one may argue for tightening or revisiting the regulatory codes governing television broadcasting particularly the pre-watershed television programming, or draw the attention of media regulators to certain problematic and/or beneficial areas identified in soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality?

First of all, the amount of sexual content shown on television has almost always been one of the main areas of concerns for the public, despite the fact that opinion surveys often indicate that shifts towards more tolerant and accepting attitudes

towards media sex are always observed: in a 1999 survey, just under four in ten (37%) of British respondents said that there was 'too much sex' on television and felt that what was shown was too explicit; and respondents ranked soap operas in third place, after 'talk shows' and 'dramas' as containing considerable amount of sex (Millwood-Hargrave, 1999). The study findings show fairly clearly that daytime and prime-time soap operas contain moderate amounts of sexual scenes (4.2 scenes per hour) especially when compared with other TV genres (16 scenes per hour in the late-night drama *Hollyoaks in the City* in this study; 9 and 7.8 scenes per hour in 'news magazines' and 'comedies' respectively in MacKeogh, 2005). Although it is quite difficult to deal with the concept of what constitutes 'too much', for whom too much is 'too much', and how reliable opinion surveys can be when it comes to sensitive issues such as sex and sexuality, it can be said here, especially given the further findings on the types and nature of sexual content, soap operas contain very moderate levels of sex. We also do know that sex on television has often been cited as a source of embarrassment and as source of causing offence to some viewers. However, such views tend to change over time. For instance, in a 1999 survey fewer respondents 24% (rather than 39% in the 1992 survey) claimed to have found sex scenes offensive; while just under seven in ten (68%) of respondents said they did not find watching sex embarrassing, just over seven in ten (71%) said they did not mind watching 'occasional' scenes of sexual activity on television, and just under eight in ten 78% thought that sexual activity should be depicted if it was part of a storyline (Millwood-Hargrave, 1999 and 1992). Although, the findings of those surveys are somewhat outdated (and there is a need for more recent surveys of the public views on sex on television, particularly with the changing habits of consumers and changing media landscape, in order to get a clearer picture of whether or not attitudes and perceptions have changed over time), they provide some insight into what the current study's findings may suggest. If there is a trend of more relaxed attitudes towards sexual content as time goes by, then it can be argued that soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexuality is now less likely to be a source of embarrassment and offence to great many viewers, particularly when we know that soap operas predominantly portray sexual activity as part of their

storylines (eight in ten portrayals (80%) in this study were of primary and substantial importance to the storylines).

Furthermore, opinion surveys and audience research do indicate that audiences and the general public alike tend to voice concerns over particular types of sexual portrayals and the time of transmission. For instance, 36% of the respondents felt the screening of scenes of explicit sexual nature was not acceptable before 10pm; and concerns about non-heterosexual sex are also observed, however, attitudes towards homosexual sex on television have changed over time: the percentage of respondents who thought that the portrayal of gay relations on television was acceptable had grown by 12% from 46% in 1992 to 58%; and seven in ten (70%) of the respondents thought same-sex kissing (particularly two women) or gay sex after 10pm was acceptable. Visual depictions of sexual behaviours were seen as less acceptable than sexual narratives and should be restricted by just over five in ten (54%) of respondents who nonetheless agreed that 'talk about sex' was an acceptable part of pre-watershed programming (Millwood-Hargrave, 1999 and 1992). The findings of this study clearly show that daytime and prime-time soap operas did not portray any explicit sexual behaviours, nor did they portray any intimate homosexual behaviours. In fact there were hardly any portrayals of depicted and implied sexual intercourse, gay sex, nudity and promiscuous and gratuitous sex. Most of their sexual content was conveyed through narratives; therefore it can be said that soap operas portrayal of sex and sexuality is unlikely to be an area of concerns for the overwhelming majority of viewers.

On the contrary, day-time and prime time soap operas can be seen as playing an important role in raising young viewers' awareness of very important aspects of sex and sexual relationships. The findings on sexual risks and responsibility clearly show that soap operas do highlight important sexual issues such as the risks and consequences of teenage pregnancies, sexual transmitted diseases, sexual patience and abstinence. The frequently depicted negative consequences associated with irresponsible and risky sexual behaviours and relationships also make it clear that soap operas do not endorse such irresponsible behaviours and relationships. However, one of the problematic areas found in this study has been the focus on controversial

and sensational sexual relationships (e.g. cheating, extra-marital affair, sex-crime and incest). Those themes were primarily conveyed through narrative devices rather than overt behaviours, and the contexts within which such themes were depicted clearly showed that such themes were highlighted to show the social and cultural rejection to and unacceptability of such relationships (e.g. cheating, incest and underage-sex themes). Therefore, to argue or speculate that soap operas are likely to cultivate such values or set irresponsible examples or models for young viewers or impact negatively vulnerable upon viewer would be counterintuitive. Although it is very difficult to come up with sweeping generalizations about the values conveyed and cultivated and potential effects of soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexuality—because of the scope and some of the obvious limitations of this research—it can be argued that based on the study's findings that overall there are a few or no reasons for concerns over soap operas' sexual content.

Clearly, the Ofcom code for broadcasting allows soap operas to deal with and often boldly portray sex and sexual relationships given that contexts justify such portrayals. The 'contexts' rules are somewhat ambiguous and can be used to justify the portrayal of daring sexual behaviours and sexual themes; but having said that this study has not found any breaches across the four-week sample, particularly in terms of sexual explicitness, nudity and depiction of overt intimate behaviours such as sexual intercourse. Even the sexual content of the late-night drama *Hollyoaks in the City* which included some of the most explicit and intimate sexual behaviours, occurred within the contexts of broader themes which was obviously editorially justified. Thus, arguing for a tightening up on the codes of practice governing broadcasting would be based on very weak grounds.

It is worth noting here, however, that since this study has only looked at a four-week snapshot of soap operas, it is inevitably limited in scope, and evidence based on its findings should therefore be handled cautiously. First of all there is a need for longitudinal studies to be carried out in order to know what the long-term patterns of soap operas' depiction of sex and sexuality are; also there is a need for much deeper qualitative analysis of soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality, particularly in terms of the cultural and social values and norms communicated as there was very

little room in this study to dissect and qualitatively evaluate such value and norms. Secondly and importantly, there is a greater need for new qualitative research—to complement content analysis—into how audience, particularly young viewers, interact, evaluate and make sense of soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality. Relatively recent audience research (e.g. Buckingham and Bragg, 2003; MacKeogh, 2005) have shed light on how critical younger audiences are of media sexual content and how aware they can be of the producers' ploys of injecting sexual information that has a didactic tones into dramatic storylines. We need to know now how valuable and meaningful soap operas' treatment of sex and sexuality is to young viewers especially in terms of entertainment as well as in terms of raising awareness about important sexual issues such as teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual ambivalence, and underage-sex and so on.

This study has attempted to provide a comprehensive quantitative analysis of soap operas' portrayal of sex and sexuality on mainstream UK television channels. Some of the findings, reviewed above, have been informative and unexpected, especially those relating to sexual risk and responsibility, and safe-sex messages, while others confirmed some of the prevailing qualitative assessments of mainstream soap operas' sexual content, particularly those pertinent to the nature, types of sexual activity and levels of explicitness. This study, however, can conclude that its findings have clearly demonstrated that day-time and prime-time soap operas: (1) contain moderate amounts of sexual portrayals, compared with post-watershed serialised drama programmes, (2) rarely portray overt intimate sexual behaviours, (3) rely primarily on narrative devices in their portrayal of sex and sexuality, and (4) dedicate substantial numbers of portrayals and storylines to highlight sexual risks and responsibilities and disseminate safe-sex messages.

Perhaps the public sensitivity towards soap operas' overall treatment of sex and sexuality and the perception of 'having too much sex' lies in the genre' inherent characteristics and formats which contribute to such public perception and sensitivity: (a) the reliance on, and centrality of, controversial sexual storylines to providing as heightened dramatic moments, (b) continuity: spanning decades, (c) ubiquity and volume: soap operas are broadcast by all channels with increasing

numbers of episodes and omnibus versions, and (d) audience-base: large and regular audience, with high levels of involvement with the genre's content, and identification with characters.

Interestingly and finally, if UK newspaper reports on UK government ministers' intentions to ask television chief executives to make soap operas incorporate more storylines tackling teenage pregnancy, safe and irresponsible sexual behaviours⁶¹, are true, then both soap opera producers and writers will have to strike a balance between 'entertaining' their audience and fulfilling their public service duty in raising awareness on big social issues, particularly as evidence emerging from this research clearly indicates that soap operas already include a substantial number of storylines dealing teenage pregnancy, abortion, sexual risk and responsibility and safe-sex practices.

⁶¹ Kite, M. (2010) Government monitors sex scenes on television [*Daily Telegraph*: Online. 20 February, 2010]

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Appendix: Tables

1 Chapter Four: Tables

Soap Operas		Level of Explicitness						
		No explicitness	Provocative or suggestive dress or appearance	Characters begin disrobing	Partial but high level of nudity	Discreet nudity	Nudity	Total
Coronation Street	Count	51	0	2	0	0	0	53
	% within Soap Operas	96.2%	.0%	3.8%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	41	0	0	0	0	0	41
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	26	0	3	0	0	0	29
	% within Soap Operas	89.7%	.0%	10.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	60	1	5	3	8	2	79
	% within Soap Operas	75.9%	1.3%	6.3%	3.8%	10.1%	2.5%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	165	6	7	29	25	10	242
	% within Soap Operas	68.2%	2.5%	2.9%	12.0%	10.3%	4.1%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	33	0	1	2	1	0	37
	% within Soap Operas	89.2%	.0%	2.7%	5.4%	2.7%	.0%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	25	0	0	0	0	0	25
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	401	7	18	34	34	12	506
	% within Soap Operas	79.2%	1.4%	3.6%	6.7%	6.7%	2.4%	100.0%

Table 1.1 Level of explicitness in sexual talk only by soap opera

Soap Operas		Level of Explicitness						
		No explicitness	Provocative or suggestive dress or appearance	Characters begin disrobing	Partial but high level of nudity	Discreet nudity	Nudity	Total
Coronation Street	Count	11	0	2	0	0	0	13
	% within Soap Operas	84.6%	.0%	15.4%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	10	0	0	0	0	0	10
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	7	0	3	0	0	0	10
	% within Soap Operas	70.0%	.0%	30.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	21	0	5	3	8	0	37
	% within Soap Operas	56.8%	.0%	13.5%	8.1%	21.6%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	29	3	6	22	23	8	91
	% within Soap Operas	31.9%	3.3%	6.6%	24.2%	25.3%	8.8%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	13	0	1	0	1	0	15
	% within Soap Operas	86.7%	.0%	6.7%	.0%	6.7%	.0%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	15	0	0	0	0	0	15
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	106	3	17	25	32	8	191
	% within Soap Operas	55.5%	1.6%	8.9%	13.1%	16.8%	4.2%	100.0%

Table 1.2 Level of explicitness in sexual behaviours only by soap opera

Soap Operas			Degree of Focus				
			Inconsequential	Minor	Substantial	Primary	Total
Coronation Street	Count		0	2	6	32	40
	% within Soap Operas		.0%	5.0%	15.0%	80.0%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count		1	4	2	24	31
	% within Soap Operas		3.2%	12.9%	6.5%	77.4%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count		0	2	6	11	19
	% within Soap Operas		.0%	10.5%	31.6%	57.9%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count		0	5	8	29	42
	% within Soap Operas		.0%	11.9%	19.0%	69.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count		4	26	52	69	151
	% within Soap Operas		2.6%	17.2%	34.4%	45.7%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count		0	2	3	17	22
	% within Soap Operas		.0%	9.1%	13.6%	77.3%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count		0	3	4	3	10
	% within Soap Operas		.0%	30.0%	40.0%	30.0%	100.0%
Total	Count		5	44	81	185	315
	% within Soap Operas		1.6%	14.0%	25.7%	58.7%	100.0%

Table 1.3 Degree of Focus for sexual talk only by soap opera

Soap Operas		Degree of Focus				
		Inconsequential	Minor	Substantial	Primary	Total
Coronation Street	Count	0	4	1	8	13
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	30.8%	7.7%	61.5%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	0	8	1	1	10
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	80.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	1	1	3	5	10
	% within Soap Operas	10.0%	10.0%	30.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	2	5	12	18	37
	% within Soap Operas	5.4%	13.5%	32.4%	48.6%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	2	15	43	31	91
	% within Soap Operas	2.2%	16.5%	47.3%	34.1%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	0	8	0	7	15
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	53.3%	.0%	46.7%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	0	3	4	8	15
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	20.0%	26.7%	53.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	5	44	64	78	191
	% within Soap Operas	2.6%	23.0%	33.5%	40.8%	100.0%

Table 1.4 Degree of Focus for sexual behaviour only by soap opera

Soap Operas		Orientation of Sexual Activity			
		Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Total
Coronation Street	Count	13	0	0	13
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	10	0	0	10
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	9	1	0	10
	% within Soap Operas	90.0%	10.0%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	37	0	0	37
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	70	14	7	91
	% within Soap Operas	76.9%	15.4%	7.7%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	15	0	0	15
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	15	0	0	15
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	169	15	7	191
	% within Soap Operas	88.5%	7.9%	3.7%	100.0%

Table 1.5 Orientation of sexual activity in portrayals of behaviours only by soap operas

Type of Sexual Behaviour		Theme of Sexual Behaviour		
		Prostitution	Incest	Total
Intimate touching	Count	1	0	1
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Passionate/intimate kissing	Count	5	3	8
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
Sexual intercourse depicted	Count	3	0	3
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Sexual intercourse implied	Count	6	1	7
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%
Oral sex depicted	Count	1	0	1
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	16	4	20
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%

Table 1.6 Type of Sexual Behaviour by Theme of Sexual Behaviours

Soap Operas		Theme of Sexual Behaviours		
		Prostitution	Incest	Total
<i>Coronation Street</i>	Count	0	4	4
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	Count	2	0	2
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	Count	14	0	14
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	Count	16	4	20
	% within Soap Operas	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%

Table 1.7 Themes of sexual behaviours by soap operas

2 Chapter Five: Tables

		Positive Outcomes of Sexual Activity								
		Neutral	status/prestige/ popularity	Gaining approval peer	Furthering a career	enhancing romantic/sexual relationship	Material gain	Achieving pregnancy	Other	Total
Soap Operas										
Coronation Street	Count	40	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	53
	% within Soap Operas	75.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	24.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	34	1	0	0	6	0	0	0	41
	% within Soap Operas	82.9%	2.4%	.0%	.0%	14.6%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Emmerdale	Count	19	0	0	0	9	1	0	0	29
	% within Soap Operas	65.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	31.0%	3.4%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	46	2	1	0	23	7	0	0	79
	% within Soap Operas	58.2%	2.5%	1.3%	.0%	29.1%	8.9%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	138	4	3	29	33	27	0	8	242
	% within Soap Operas	57.0%	1.7%	1.2%	12.0%	13.6%	11.2%	.0%	3.3%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	22	0	0	0	14	0	0	1	37
	% within Soap Operas	59.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	37.8%	.0%	.0%	2.7%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	11	0	2	0	11	0	1	0	25
	% within Soap Operas	44.0%	.0%	8.0%	.0%	44.0%	.0%	4.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	310	7	6	29	109	35	1	9	506
	% within Soap Operas	61.3%	1.4%	1.2%	5.7%	21.5%	6.9%	.2%	1.8%	100.0%

Table 2.1 Outcomes of sexual activity by soap opera

		Negative Outcomes of Sexual Activity								
		Neutral	Experiencing personal guilt or remorse	Damaging/ending a relationship	Diminishing status, prestige or popularity	Peer rejection	Causing worry about unwanted pregnancy	Causing worry about abortion	Other	Total
Soap Operas										
<i>Coronation Street</i>	Count	19	0	10	11	2	5	5	1	53
	% within Soap Operas	35.8%	.0%	18.9%	20.8%	3.8%	9.4%	9.4%	1.9%	100.0%
<i>EastEnders</i>	Count	13	1	16	0	0	6	5	0	41
	% within Soap Operas	31.7%	2.4%	39.0%	.0%	.0%	14.6%	12.2%	.0%	100.0%
<i>Emmerdale</i>	Count	17	0	7	5	0	0	0	0	29
	% within Soap Operas	58.6%	.0%	24.1%	17.2%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks</i>	Count	51	4	5	0	0	2	0	17	79
	% within Soap Operas	64.6%	5.1%	6.3%	.0%	.0%	2.5%	.0%	21.5%	100.0%
<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	Count	107	35	39	17	18	0	0	26	242
	% within Soap Operas	44.2%	14.5%	16.1%	7.0%	7.4%	.0%	.0%	10.7%	100.0%
<i>Home & Away</i>	Count	18	0	4	0	1	1	0	13	37
	% within Soap Operas	48.6%	.0%	10.8%	.0%	2.7%	2.7%	.0%	35.1%	100.0%
<i>Neighbours</i>	Count	18	0	4	1	0	2	0	0	25
	% within Soap Operas	72.0%	.0%	16.0%	4.0%	.0%	8.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	243	40	85	34	21	16	10	57	506
	% within Soap Operas	48.0%	7.9%	16.8%	6.7%	4.2%	3.2%	2.0%	11.3%	100.0%

Table 2.2 Outcomes of sexual activity by soap opera

3 Chapter Six: Tables

Type of Sexual Talk		Number of Characters Involved in Sexual Activity/Scene			
		Two characters	Three characters	Four characters or more	Total
Comments about own or others' sexual interests/intentions/acts	Count	67	10	7	84
	% within number of characters in scene	27.9%	22.2%	23.3%	26.7%
Talk about sexual intercourse	Count	41	13	7	61
	% within number of characters in scene	17.1%	28.9%	23.3%	19.4%
Talk toward sex (intimate/ seductive)	Count	31	0	0	31
	% within number of characters in scene	12.9%	.0%	.0%	9.8%
Talk toward sex (coercive)	Count	2	0	0	2
	% within number of characters in scene	.8%	.0%	.0%	.6%
Talk about pregnancy/abortion	Count	17	3	4	24
	% within number of characters in scene	7.1%	6.7%	13.3%	7.6%
Direct talk about Risk and Responsibility	Count	3	2	0	5
	% within number of characters in scene	1.2%	4.4%	.0%	1.6%
Talk about rape/attempted rape	Count	2	0	1	3
	% within number of characters in scene	.8%	.0%	3.3%	1.0%
Talk about incest	Count	9	7	2	18
	% within number of characters in scene	3.8%	15.6%	6.7%	5.7%
Talk about prostitution	Count	32	0	1	33
	% within number of characters in scene	13.3%	.0%	3.3%	10.5%
Sexual innuendos	Count	15	2	4	21
	% within number of characters in scene	6.2%	4.4%	13.3%	6.7%
Talk about sex-related crimes	Count	19	7	4	30
	% within number of characters in scene	7.9%	15.6%	13.3%	9.5%
Other	Count	2	1	0	3
	% within number of characters in scene	.8%	2.2%	.0%	1.0%
Total	Count	240	45	30	315
	% within number of characters in scene	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.1 Type of sexual talk by the number of characters involved in sexual activity/scene

Type of Sexual Behaviour		Number of Characters Involved in Sexual Activity/Scene				
		One characters	Two characters	Three characters	Four characters or more	Total
Physical flirting or suggestiveness	Count	0	3	0	6	9
	% within number of characters in scene	.0%	1.8%	.0%	46.2%	4.7%
Intimate touching	Count	0	6	1	0	7
	% within number of characters in scene	.0%	3.6%	14.3%	.0%	3.7%
Passionate/intimate kissing	Count	0	106	4	4	114
	% within number of characters in scene	.0%	62.7%	57.1%	30.8%	59.7%
Sexual intercourse depicted	Count	0	8	0	1	9
	% within number of characters in scene	.0%	4.7%	.0%	7.7%	4.7%
Sexual intercourse implied	Count	0	32	1	2	35
	% within number of characters in scene	.0%	18.9%	14.3%	15.4%	18.3%
Oral sex depicted	Count	0	2	0	0	2
	% within number of characters in scene	.0%	1.2%	.0%	.0%	1.0%
Oral sex implied	Count	0	1	0	0	1
	% within number of characters in scene	.0%	.6%	.0%	.0%	.5%
Rape/attempted rape	Count	0	1	1	0	2
	% within number of characters in scene	.0%	.6%	14.3%	.0%	1.0%
Sexual assault	Count	0	2	0	0	2
	% within number of characters in scene	.0%	1.2%	.0%	.0%	1.0%
Other	Count	2	8	0	0	10
	% within number of characters in scene	100.0%	4.7%	.0%	.0%	5.2%
Total	Count	2	169	7	13	191
	% within number of characters in scene	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.2 Type of sexual behaviour by the number of characters involved in sexual activity/scene

Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Sexual Talk	Count	40	54	94
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	42.6%	57.4%	100.0%
	% within Gender	74.1%	80.6%	77.7%
Sexual Behaviour	Count	14	13	27
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	51.9%	48.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender	25.9%	19.4%	22.3%
Total	Count	54	67	121
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	44.6%	55.4%	100.0%
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.3 The distribution of characters by gender across sexual talk and behaviour in Coronation Street ($X^2=.734$, $df=1$, $p<.392$)

Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Sexual Talk	Count	26	48	74
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	35.1%	64.9%	100.0%
	% within Gender	72.2%	82.8%	78.7%
Sexual Behaviour	Count	10	10	20
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender	27.8%	17.2%	21.3%
Total	Count	36	58	94
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	38.3%	61.7%	100.0%
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.4 The distribution of characters by gender across sexual talk and behaviour in East Enders ($X^2=1.472$, $df=1$, $p<.225$)

Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Sexual Talk	Count	24	18	42
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
	% within Gender	66.7%	64.3%	65.6%
Sexual Behaviour	Count	12	10	22
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%
	% within Gender	33.3%	35.7%	34.4%
Total	Count	36	28	64
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	56.2%	43.8%	100.0%
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.5 The distribution of characters by gender across sexual talk and behaviour in Emmerdale ($X^2=.040$, $df=1$, $p<.842$)

Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Sexual Talk	Count	53	43	96
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	55.2%	44.8%	100.0%
	% within Gender	56.4%	53.1%	54.9%
Sexual Behaviour	Count	41	38	79
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	51.9%	48.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender	43.6%	46.9%	45.1%
Total	Count	94	81	175
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	53.7%	46.3%	100.0%
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.6 The distribution of characters by gender across sexual talk and behaviour in Hollyoaks
($X^2=.191$, $df=1$, $p<.662$)

Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Sexual Talk	Count	206	146	352
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	58.5%	41.5%	100.0%
	% within Gender	64.2%	62.7%	63.5%
Sexual Behaviour	Count	115	87	202
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	56.9%	43.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender	35.8%	37.3%	36.5%
Total	Count	321	233	554
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	57.9%	42.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.7 The distribution of characters by gender across sexual talk and behaviour in Hollyoaks in the City ($X^2=.133$, $df=1$, $p<.715$)

Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Sexual Talk	Count	23	32	55
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	41.8%	58.2%	100.0%
	% within Gender	60.5%	65.3%	63.2%
Sexual Behaviour	Count	15	17	32
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	46.9%	53.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender	39.5%	34.7%	36.8%
Total	Count	38	49	87
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	43.7%	56.3%	100.0%
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.8 The distribution of characters by gender across sexual talk and behaviour in Home and Away ($X^2=.210$, $df=1$, $p<.647$)

Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Sexual Talk	Count	10	11	21
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	47.6%	52.4%	100.0%
	% within Gender	40.0%	40.7%	40.4%
Sexual Behaviour	Count	15	16	31
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	48.4%	51.6%	100.0%
	% within Gender	60.0%	59.3%	59.6%
Total	Count	25	27	52
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	48.1%	51.9%	100.0%
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.9 The distribution of characters by gender across sexual talk and behaviour in *Neighbours* ($X^2=.003$, $df=1$, $p<.957$)

Type of Sexual Behaviour		Age					
		Child (Up to 12 years)	Teenager (13-19)	Young adult (20-35)	Middle-aged adult (36-65)	Over 65	Total
Physical flirting or suggestiveness	Count	0	10	20	0	0	30
	% within Age	.0%	8.9%	7.5%	.0%	.0%	7.2%
Intimate touching	Count	0	5	10	2	0	17
	% within Age	.0%	4.5%	3.8%	5.9%	.0%	4.1%
Passionate/intimate kissing	Count	0	78	139	21	2	240
	% within Age	.0%	69.6%	52.3%	61.8%	100.0%	57.8%
Sexual intercourse depicted	Count	0	1	18	1	0	20
	% within Age	.0%	.9%	6.8%	2.9%	.0%	4.8%
Sexual intercourse implied	Count	1	18	50	6	0	75
	% within Age	100.0%	16.1%	18.8%	17.6%	.0%	18.1%
Oral sex depicted	Count	0	0	4	0	0	4
	% within Age	.0%	.0%	1.5%	.0%	.0%	1.0%
Oral sex implied	Count	0	0	2	0	0	2
	% within Age	.0%	.0%	.8%	.0%	.0%	.5%
Rape/attempted rape	Count	0	0	4	1	0	5
	% within Age	.0%	.0%	1.5%	2.9%	.0%	1.2%
Sexual assault	Count	0	0	3	1	0	4
	% within Age	.0%	.0%	1.1%	2.9%	.0%	1.0%
Other	Count	0	0	16	2	0	18
	% within Age	.0%	.0%	6.0%	5.9%	.0%	4.3%
Total	Count	1	112	266	34	2	415
	% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.10 The distribution of characters by age across the various types of sexual behaviours

Occupation		Soap Operas							
		Coronation Street	EastEnders	Emmerdale	Hollyoaks	Hollyoaks in the City	Home & Away	Neighbours	Total
Student	Count	2	4	4	127	79	39	10	265
	% within Soap Operas	1.7%	4.3%	6.2%	72.6%	14.3%	44.8%	19.2%	23.1%
Lawyer	Count	0	0	5	13	0	1	0	19
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	7.8%	7.4%	.0%	1.1%	.0%	1.7%
Doctor	Count	0	6	6	0	0	4	3	19
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	6.4%	9.4%	.0%	.0%	4.6%	5.8%	1.7%
Nurse	Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	7.7%	.3%
Model/fashion related profession	Count	0	0	0	0	195	0	0	195
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	35.2%	.0%	.0%	17.0%
Barmaid/man	Count	29	6	4	2	87	0	0	128
	% within Soap Operas	24.0%	6.4%	6.2%	1.1%	15.7%	.0%	.0%	11.2%
Publican	Count	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
	% within Soap Operas	1.7%	1.1%	1.6%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.3%
Policeman/woman	Count	2	0	1	0	16	12	0	31
	% within Soap Operas	1.7%	.0%	1.6%	.0%	2.9%	13.8%	.0%	2.7%
Farmer	Count	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.3%	.0%	.2%
Worker	Count	36	2	0	0	0	0	4	42
	% within Soap Operas	29.8%	2.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	7.7%	3.7%
Shopkeeper	Count	16	11	0	0	0	2	3	32
	% within Soap Operas	13.2%	11.7%	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.3%	5.8%	2.8%
Teacher	Count	0	0	1	8	79	2	0	90
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	1.6%	4.6%	14.3%	2.3%	.0%	7.8%
Businessman/woman	Count	6	21	15	0	44	1	0	87
	% within Soap Operas	5.0%	22.3%	23.4%	.0%	7.9%	1.1%	.0%	7.6%
Housewife	Count	4	2	2	0	0	0	0	8
	% within Soap Operas	3.3%	2.1%	3.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.7%
Unemployed	Count	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	5
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	3.2%	1.6%	.0%	.2%	.0%	.0%	.4%
Other/Cannot tell	Count	24	38	24	25	53	24	28	216
	% within Soap Operas	19.8%	40.4%	37.5%	14.3%	9.6%	27.6%	53.8%	18.8%
Total	Count	121	94	64	175	554	87	52	1147
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.11 The distribution of characters by occupation in each of the seven soap operas

Character's Sexual Orientation		Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene		
		Sexual Talk	Sexual Behaviour	Total
Heterosexual/Straight	Count	547	336	883
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	74.8%	81.4%	77.2%
Homosexual/Gay	Count	51	30	81
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	7.0%	7.3%	7.1%
Bisexual	Count	73	33	106
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	10.0%	8.0%	9.3%
Unknown/Cannot tell	Count	60	14	74
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	8.2%	3.4%	6.5%
Total	Count	731	413	1144
	% within Nature of Sexual Activity in Scene	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.12 The distribution of characters by sexual orientation across sexual talk and behaviour

Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour		Soap Operas							
		Coronation Street	EastEnders	Emmerdale	Hollyoaks	Hollyoaks in the City	Home & Away	Neighbours	Total
Personal satisfaction	Count	3	0	0	4	33	0	0	40
	% within Soap Operas	12.5%	.0%	.0%	5.3%	19.2%	.0%	.0%	10.8%
Gain status/prestige/popularity	Count	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.3%
Peer approval	Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	6.5%	.5%
Further own career	Count	0	0	0	0	16	0	0	16
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	9.3%	.0%	.0%	4.3%
Establish or benefit relationship with partner	Count	16	14	11	39	63	27	24	194
	% within Soap Operas	66.7%	70.0%	55.0%	52.0%	36.6%	96.4%	77.4%	52.4%
Material gain	Count	0	0	0	3	16	0	0	19
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.0%	9.3%	.0%	.0%	5.1%
To forget problems/escape	Count	0	0	0	2	9	0	0	11
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.7%	5.2%	.0%	.0%	3.0%
Revenge	Count	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	4
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	15.0%	.0%	.6%	.0%	.0%	1.1%
Trap partner/'Honey Trap'	Count	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.6%	.0%	.0%	.3%
Sexual assault	Count	0	1	0	0	3	0	1	5
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	5.0%	.0%	.0%	1.7%	.0%	3.2%	1.4%
Unknown/Cannot tell	Count	5	5	6	26	24	1	4	71
	% within Soap Operas	20.8%	25.0%	30.0%	34.7%	14.0%	3.6%	12.9%	19.2%
Other	Count	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	6
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	3.5%	.0%	.0%	1.6%
Total	Count	24	20	20	75	172	28	31	370
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.13 The distribution of characters by motivation across each of the seven soap operas

Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour		Gender		
		Male	Female	Total
Personal satisfaction	Count	30	10	40
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Gain status/prestige/popularity	Count	1	0	1
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Peer approval	Count	0	2	2
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Further own career	Count	7	9	16
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	43.8%	56.2%	100.0%
Establish or benefit relationship with partner	Count	105	89	194
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	54.1%	45.9%	100.0%
Material gain	Count	6	13	19
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	31.6%	68.4%	100.0%
To forget problems/escape	Count	0	11	11
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Revenge	Count	0	4	4
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Trap partner/'Honey Trap'	Count	1	0	1
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Sexual assault	Count	5	0	5
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Unknown/Cannot tell	Count	37	34	71
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	52.1%	47.9%	100.0%
Other	Count	4	2	6
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	196	174	370
	% within Motivation for Engaging in Sexual Behaviour	53.0%	47.0%	100.0%

Table 3.14 The distribution of characters by gender and motivation across all sexual behaviours

Character's Relationship Status		Soap Operas							
		<i>Coronation Street</i>	<i>EastEnders</i>	<i>Emmerdale</i>	<i>Hollyoaks</i>	<i>Hollyoaks in the City</i>	<i>Home & Away</i>	<i>Neighbours</i>	Total
Character involved has an established sexual/romantic relationship	Count	26	16	10	18	78	36	12	196
	% within Soap Operas	41.9%	35.6%	19.2%	16.1%	23.0%	64.3%	27.9%	27.6%
Character involved has no established sexual/romantic relationship	Count	16	11	18	53	204	14	24	340
	% within Soap Operas	25.8%	24.4%	34.6%	47.3%	60.2%	25.0%	55.8%	48.0%
Characters involved just met or on first date	Count	4	0	16	24	15	2	3	64
	% within Soap Operas	6.5%	.0%	30.8%	21.4%	4.4%	3.6%	7.0%	9.0%
Characters involved are married to each other	Count	2	7	2	0	32	4	2	49
	% within Soap Operas	3.2%	15.6%	3.8%	.0%	9.4%	7.1%	4.7%	6.9%
Character involved is having an extra-marital affair	Count	14	7	4	7	0	0	0	32
	% within Soap Operas	22.6%	15.6%	7.7%	6.2%	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.5%
Unknown/Cannot tell	Count	0	4	2	10	10	0	2	28
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	8.9%	3.8%	8.9%	2.9%	.0%	4.7%	3.9%
Total	Count	62	45	52	112	339	56	43	709
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.15 The distribution of characters by relationships status across all sexual activities found in each of the seven soap operas

Type of Sexual Behaviour		Character's Relationship Status						Total
		Character involved has an established sexual/romantic relationship	Character involved has no established sexual/romantic relationship	Characters involved just met or on first date	Characters involved are married to each other	Character involved is having an extra-marital affair	Unknown/Cannot tell	
Physical flirting or suggestiveness	Count	0	4	0	0	0	2	6
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	.0%	66.7%	.0%	.0%	.0%	33.3%	100.0%
Intimate touching	Count	5	6	2	0	1	2	16
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	31.2%	37.5%	12.5%	.0%	6.2%	12.5%	100.0%
Passionate/intimate kissing	Count	65	93	40	18	7	12	235
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	27.7%	39.6%	17.0%	7.7%	3.0%	5.1%	100.0%
Sexual intercourse depicted	Count	0	14	0	0	0	4	18
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	.0%	77.8%	.0%	.0%	.0%	22.2%	100.0%
Sexual intercourse implied	Count	29	31	6	0	2	2	70
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	41.4%	44.3%	8.6%	.0%	2.9%	2.9%	100.0%
Oral sex depicted	Count	0	2	2	0	0	0	4
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	.0%	50.0%	50.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Oral sex implied	Count	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Rape/attempted rape	Count	0	5	0	0	0	0	5
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	.0%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Sexual assault	Count	0	2	0	0	0	2	4
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	.0%	50.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Other	Count	2	11	0	0	0	2	15
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	13.3%	73.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	13.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	103	168	50	18	10	26	375
	% within Type of Sexual Behaviour	27.5%	44.8%	13.3%	4.8%	2.7%	6.9%	100.0%

Table 4.16 The distribution of characters by relationship status across portrayals of sexual behaviours only

4 Chapter Seven: Tables

Type of Reference to Risk & Responsibility		Soap Operas						
		Coronation Street	EastEnders	Hollyoaks	Hollyoaks in the City	Home & Away	Neighbours	Total
Mention of multiple R & R issues	Count	2	0	1	1	2	0	6
	% within Soap Operas	11.8%	.0%	11.1%	25.0%	25.0%	.0%	10.2%
Mention/presence/use of condom	Count	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	.0%	.0%	75.0%	.0%	.0%	5.1%
Mention of concerns about general STDs	Count	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	% within Soap Operas	5.9%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	1.7%
Mention of risks of actual unwanted/unplanned pregnancy	Count	7	7	3	0	0	4	21
	% within Soap Operas	41.2%	41.2%	33.3%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	35.6%
Mention of /debating abortion	Count	4	9	0	0	0	0	13
	% within Soap Operas	23.5%	52.9%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	22.0%
Mention of virginity/abstinence/sexual patience	Count	3	1	5	0	6	0	15
	% within Soap Operas	17.6%	5.9%	55.6%	.0%	75.0%	.0%	25.4%
Total	Count	17	17	9	4	8	4	59
	% within Soap Operas	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4.1 Types of reference to Risk & Responsibility by soap operas

Soap Operas		Source of Information (R & R)				
		Peer to peer	Partner to Partner	Parent to Child	Other	Total
Coronation Street	Count	9	5	2	1	17
	% within Soap Operas	52.9%	29.4%	11.8%	5.9%	100.0%
EastEnders	Count	8	6	3	0	17
	% within Soap Operas	47.1%	35.3%	17.6%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks	Count	5	2	2	0	9
	% within Soap Operas	55.6%	22.2%	22.2%	.0%	100.0%
Hollyoaks in the City	Count	0	2	1	1	4
	% within Soap Operas	.0%	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Home & Away	Count	3	0	5	0	8
	% within Soap Operas	37.5%	.0%	62.5%	.0%	100.0%
Neighbours	Count	3	1	0	0	4
	% within Soap Operas	75.0%	25.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	28	16	13	2	59
	% within Soap Operas	47.5%	27.1%	22.0%	3.4%	100.0%

Table 4.2 Source of Information of R & R topics across each of the seven soap operas