

## FREQUENCY OF SEXUAL CONTENT

This study examines portrayals involving sex that hold important implications for sexual socialization effects on the audience, particularly adolescent viewers. Observations of these portrayals are classified into two distinct categories: talk about sex and physical behavior. Because both types of portrayals hold the potential to influence viewers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors regarding sexual issues, our initial assessment of the presence of sexual messages will group together both of these types of messages. Starting at the most basic level of analysis, we address the question: How frequently are sexual themes and topics found throughout the television landscape?

Across the composite week sample of 959 general audiences programs, more than two of every three shows (70%) contained some sexual content in the form of talk about sex and/or sexual behavior (see Table 5). Few

of these programs presented just a single, isolated scene involving sexual material; more than four of every five shows that presented sexual messages (83%) included two or more scenes with sexual themes or topics. Across all 675 programs with sexual content, there was an average of 5.0 scenes per hour involving sex. Thus, the data make clear that not only are sexual talk and behavior a common element across most television programming, but also that most shows including sexual messages devote substantial attention to the topic.

The lower portion of Table 5 differentiates the two primary types of sexual content examined in the study: talk about sex and sexual behavior. These data show clearly that talk about sex is much more common on television than depictions of sexual behavior. This pattern holds true for both the percentage of programs that present such portrayals as well as the number of scenes in which each occurs. Across all programs examined, 68% included some talk about sex, whereas 35% presented some type of sexually-related physical behavior. In addition, programs containing talk about sex averaged 4.6 scenes per hour with such material; in comparison, programs that included overt sexual behaviors averaged 2.0 scenes per hour with any such physical actions by characters.

It is important to note that the same scene could contain both talk about sex as well as overt sexual behavior; thus, the average of 4.5 scenes per hour of talk and 2.0 scenes per hour for behavior cannot be summed together to yield the overall number of scenes per hour involving any sexual messages. Due to some overlap between these two types of portrayals, the actual average, as noted above, is 5.0 scenes per hour that contain any sexual content.

A final point of comparison between these two distinct types of sexual messages involves the average level of talk and behavior that is portrayed within each scene. Across all of the 3283 scenes involving talk about sex, the exchanges averaged 2.7 on the 4-point scale assessing degree of emphasis on sexual topics in the scene. This indicates that most scenes involving talk do not consist of isolated or minor references to sexual matters, but rather are moderate in terms of their focus on sexual themes and topics.

### *Introduction to the Analyses*

*Most of the analyses reported here are based upon our examination of the 959 general-audience programs included in the composite week sample. As indicated in the method section, all types of shows are included except daily newscasts, sports, and children's programming. In addition, we gathered two over-samples of television programming of particular interest: one comprised of prime-time broadcast network shows, which tend to attract the largest number of viewers for any television programming; and another comprised of the programs most heavily viewed by teenagers as measured by Nielsen audience research data. Each of these two over-samples is analyzed and reported separately from that of the larger composite week sample of shows, beginning on page 46.*

*In each of the sections that follow, the presentation of findings focuses initially upon the data obtained from the 2004-05 television season. At the end of each major section of results, we also review the comparable findings produced by our previous studies of the 1997-98 and 2001-02 television seasons, assessing the nature and extent of changes that have occurred in the portrayal of sexual content since this ongoing series of studies began. Where applicable, we have compared the percentage findings from the data sets using the Fisher-Irwin binomial distribution test (Glass & Hopkins, 1996). Comparisons that examine average levels of scenes per hour are based upon independent samples t-tests. Changes over time that proved statistically significant are indicated by superscripts attached to the relevant data points in the tables below.*

Table 5: Summary of Sexual Content: Composite Week

ANY SEXUAL CONTENT				
	1998	2002	2005	
	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Content	56% <sub>a</sub>	64% <sub>b**</sub>	70% <sub>c**</sub>
Of Programs With Any Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Sex	3.2 <sub>a</sub>	4.4 <sub>b**</sub>	5.0 <sub>c**</sub>
	N of Shows	528	595	675
	N of Hours	594.5	679	757
	N of Scenes	1930	2992	3783
TALK ABOUT SEX				
	Percentage of Programs With Any Talk About Sex	54% <sub>a</sub>	61% <sub>b**</sub>	68% <sub>c**</sub>
Of Programs With Any Talk About Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Talk	3.0 <sub>a</sub>	3.8 <sub>b**</sub>	4.6 <sub>c**</sub>
	Average Level of Talk in Scenes	2.8	2.8	2.7
	N of Shows	504	571	651
	N of Hours	564.5	642.5	721
	N of Scenes With Talk About Sex	1719	2453	3283
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR				
	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior	23% <sub>a</sub>	32% <sub>b**</sub>	35% <sub>b**</sub>
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	1.4 <sub>a</sub>	2.1 <sub>b**</sub>	2.0 <sub>b**</sub>
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.0	2.1	2.0
	N of Shows	221	299	338
	N of Hours	294.5	411	441
	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	420	870	878
	<b>TOTAL N OF SHOWS</b>	<b>942</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>959</b>

Note: Any given scene may contain talk about sex as well as sexual behavior. Due to the occurrence of such overlap within scenes, the data for talk about sex cannot be summed with the data for sexual behavior to yield the findings for any sexual content overall.

Findings with different subscripts that have one asterisk attached [e.g., a/b\*] are significantly different at p<.05.

Findings with different subscripts that have two asterisks attached [e.g., a/b\*\*] are significantly different at p<.01.

Across all of the 878 scenes involving sexual behavior, the portrayals averaged 2.0 on the 4-point scale assessing the highest level of behavior in the scene. This means that the average level of behavior depicted fell in the moderate range of sexual behavior overall, involving such actions as passionate kissing and intimate touching. To gain a clearer understanding of the sexual behaviors portrayed on television, however, one must consider more than simply the average level of behavior.

Averages by definition balance out the extreme cases on one end of a scale with the extreme cases at the other end. This balancing could mask the extent of cases ranking high on the behavior scale, which would be of particular interest here because they represent scenes involving sexual intercourse. To obtain a clearer picture of the cases involving intercourse presented on television, which arguably hold the greatest potential for socializing effects on young viewers, we have analyzed our data by separating programs into two distinct groups according to the level of sexual behavior depicted within them. More specifically, we have isolated those shows that present scenes with sexual intercourse depicted or strongly implied from the remaining shows that portray other sexual behaviors but which do not present any scenes in which intercourse occurs. This latter group, which contains portrayals of such actions as physical flirting, passionate kissing, and intimate touching, is labeled “Programs with Precursory Behaviors Only” (see Table 6).

The analysis presented in Table 6 indicates that programs which present precursory behaviors only are more than twice as common (24% of programs overall) as programs which present sexual intercourse depicted or strongly implied (11% of programs overall). In simple terms, this means that behaviors such as passionate kissing and intimate touching are shown much more often on television than scenes in which sexual intercourse occurs. Nonetheless, portrayals of sexual intercourse are found in roughly one of every nine programs. Given the substantial number of programs that most people watch each week, it is apparent that most viewers are likely to encounter televised portrayals of sexual intercourse on a regular basis.

Across all of the sexual behaviors shown on television, most depictions have very low levels of explicitness. Explicitness was measured on a four-point scale encompassing provocative dress, some disrobing, discreet nudity (characters are known to be nude but no private parts of the body are shown, such as strategically placed sheets partially cover a character in bed), and nudity (baring of normally private parts of the body, such as the buttocks or a woman’s breasts). In programs that include precursory behaviors only, the average level of explicitness was very low at 0.3 on the scale. In practical terms, this means that many such scenes presented characters that were fully clothed, which would yield an explicitness value of zero. For portrayals of sexual intercourse, explicitness averaged 2.2 on the four-point scale. The majority of programs that presented sexual intercourse (54%) employed discreet nudity in the portrayals, with only 5% of such shows including full nudity, all of which appeared on cable channels.

To summarize the basic findings, it is clear that sexual content is a prominent aspect of the television environment. Across a sample of nearly 1000 programs, 7 out of every 10 shows include at least some messages involving sex. Scenes that feature talk about sex are more common as compared to the portrayal of sexual behavior. Precursory behaviors, such as passionate kissing or intimate touching, account for the majority of sexual behavior depicted on television. Although shown less frequently, sexual intercourse was found in roughly 1 of every 9 programs on television (excluding news, sports, and children’s programming) in 2004-05.

## **CHANGE OVER TIME SINCE THE 1997-98 TELEVISION SEASON**

When this ongoing series of studies began in 1997-98, sexual themes and messages were already quite common on television, appearing in a majority (56%) of all programs sampled. Since then, each of our replications of this research has identified significant increases in the presence of sexual content on TV, and our data once again demonstrate that this pattern continues.

The percentage of programs that include sexual content has increased significantly from 56% in 1997-98 to 64% in 2001-02 to 70% in 2004-05. Similarly, the number of scenes within each program that involve sex has increased significantly from 3.2/hour in 1997-98 to 4.4/hour in 2001-02 to 5.0/hour in 2004-05.

Table 6: Summary of Sexual Behavior: Composite Week

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OVERALL				
	1998	2002	2005	
	23% <sub>a</sub>	32% <sub>b**</sub>	35% <sub>b**</sub>	
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	1.4 <sub>a</sub>	2.1 <sub>b**</sub>	2.0 <sub>b**</sub>
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.0	2.1	2.0
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	0.9	1.1	0.9
	N of Shows	221	299	338
	N of Hours	294.5	411	441
	N of Scenes with Sexual Behavior	420	870	878
PROGRAMS WITH PRECURSORY BEHAVIOR ONLY				
	16% <sub>a</sub>	18% <sub>a</sub>	24% <sub>b**</sub>	
Of Programs With Precursory Behaviors Only:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Precursory Behavior	1.4 <sub>a</sub>	1.9 <sub>b**</sub>	1.6 <sub>c**</sub>
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	1.7	1.8	1.8
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	0.4	0.4	0.3
	N of Shows	151	164	229
	N of Hours	176.5	192.5	283
	N of Scenes With Precursory Behavior	244	357	451
PROGRAMS WITH SEXUAL INTERCOURSE				
	7% <sub>a</sub>	14% <sub>b**</sub>	11% <sub>‡</sub>	
Of Programs With Intercourse Behaviors:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Intercourse Behavior	0.7	0.9	0.9
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.5	2.4	2.3
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	2.0	2.0	2.2
	N of Shows	70	135	109
	N of Hours	118	218.5	158
	N of Scenes With Intercourse	88	200	147
	N of All Sexual Behavior Scenes	176	513	427
<b>TOTAL N OF SHOWS</b>	<b>942</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>959</b>	

Findings with different subscripts that have one asterisk attached [e.g., a/b\*] are significantly different at p<.05.

Findings with different subscripts that have two asterisks attached [e.g., a/b\*\*] are significantly different at p<.01.

‡ 1998-2005 p<.01, 2002-2005 p<.05.

The proportion of programs that present talk about sex in 2004-05 is significantly higher, at 68%, than the levels in 1997-98 or 2001-02, as is the number of scenes of talk. Indeed, since 1997-98, the average number of scenes per hour with talk about sex has increased over 50% from 3.0 in 1997-98 to 4.6 in 2004-05. One element that has held relatively stable is the degree of emphasis on sex within the dialogue presented. This is measured by the variable known as “level of talk within scene,” which has remained essentially unchanged over time (2.8 on a 4-point scale in 1997-98 as compared to 2.7 in 2004-05). Taken together, these findings show that while the emphasis on sex within scenes has remained stable, significant increases in the frequency and amount of talk about sex makes clear that sexual messages on television are far more pervasive today than in previous years.

Although sexual behavior does not appear on television as often as talk about sex, its presence has experienced similar increases over time in frequency and amount. The percentage of programs that include portrayals of sexual behavior in 2004-05 (35%) is significantly higher than in 1997-98 (23%), though most of this increase occurred several years ago. Sexual behavior was observed in 32% of all programs in 2001-02, and the current level is not significantly different from that figure, although it continues to inch higher nonetheless. While both the number of scenes that include sexual behavior and the average level of behavior depicted remain essentially unchanged since our last study in 2001-02, the number of scenes/hour of behavior is significantly higher in 2004-05 (2.0/hour) as compared to 1997-98 (1.4/hour). As with the finding regarding talk about sex, the ratio of the increase in sexual behavior on television is nearly 50% from 1997-98 to 2004-05, as measured by the proportion of programs including such content as well as by the number of scenes per hour in which it appears.

Focusing more closely on the types of sexual behavior presented, we see that the overall increase identified above is largely comprised of more frequent portrayals of precursory behavior. The proportion of programs including such scenes 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. A more complex pattern was observed in the over-time comparisons of sexual intercourse portrayals in programs. In 1997-98, 7% of programs included intercourse, and that figure doubled to 14% by 2001-02. Since then, the percentage of programs including scenes of sexual intercourse has dipped significantly to 11%, though this current level remains significantly higher than the baseline of 7% observed in 1997-98. In other words, sexual intercourse is found in significantly more programs on television today as compared to 1997-98, although the current level of 11% is down somewhat from the pattern observed three years ago.

In sum, most of the key measures in the study reflect a consistent and ongoing increase in the amount of sexual messages on television over the past seven years since this research was instigated in 1997-98. The scope of that increase is underscored by simply comparing the total number of scenes of sexual content observed in 1997-98 versus 2004-05. While examining virtually the identical number of shows (N = 942 in 1997-98, N = 959 in 2004-05) each year, the more recent sample identified 3783 scenes with sexual content, compared to 1930 scenes in 1997-98, representing a 96% increase over time since this study began. The overall rise encompasses both talk about sex as well as the portrayal of sexual behaviors. Importantly, programs that present portrayals of sexual intercourse in the storyline are significantly more common in 2004-05 than in 1997-98, although their frequency is down from a peak reached in 2001-02. Sexual intercourse is now found in roughly one of every nine programs examined by this research.

We turn next to a more detailed examination of the different kinds of portrayals that comprise each of the two primary types of sexual content: talk about sex and sexual behavior. In the following two sections, we first examine the relative frequency with which various categories of talk occur, as well as present representative examples we have identified that illustrate the type of content that falls within each category. We then repeat the same process for the sub-types categorized within the realm of sexual behavior.

## TALK ABOUT SEX

As noted above, talk about sex is found much more frequently on television than actual sexual behavior. Yet there is a range of different types of talk about sex. Table 7 reports the frequency with which different categories of talk about sex were observed at the scene level. As we present the findings for each of the categories, we also offer examples that illustrate the various types of talk about sex identified by the study.

Table 7: Distribution of Types of Talk About Sex: Composite Week

TALK ABOUT SEX		
Types of Talk About Sex	N	Percent of Cases of Talk About Sex
Comments About Own/Other's Interests	2627	70%
Talk About Sex-Related Crimes	591	16%
Talk About Sexual Intercourse Already Occurred	178	5%
Talk Toward Sex	76	2%
Expert Advice/Technical Information	24	1%
Other	240	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3736</b>	<b>100%</b>

### COMMENTS ABOUT OWN/OTHERS' SEXUAL INTERESTS

By far, the most common type of talk about sex involved comments about one's own or others' interest in sexual topics or activities. Conversation in this category may involve more general statements about one's views on sexual topics or issues, or may address specific "targets" of sexual interest, often spoken to a third party, such as "He's hot, I'd like to get him in bed." This category accounted for 70% of all cases of talk about sex.

*Lorelai and Rory Gilmore, a mother and her college-aged daughter, are out together shopping. Walking by an outdoor café, Rory spots Logan, a guy she is currently dating, at a table with another girl. Lorelai and Rory watch from afar as Logan flirts with the girl and kisses her on the neck. Lorelai is outraged, but Rory explains, in a somewhat resigned fashion, "Mom, stop, it's fine ... we're keeping things casual. We see each other, we see other people, and that's him over there seeing other people, so it's fine. We both agreed." Perplexed by Rory's explanation, Lorelai continues, "But aren't you guys sleeping together?" Rory replies, "Mom, it's college ... we are both busy, you know, we have classes, we have friends, it's good to just keep things casual." Clearly displeased with her daughter's stance, Lorelai responds sarcastically, "Fun, sure, I get it. Friends with benefits. No problem, I watch Oprah. ... Are you sure you're cool with this?" Rory provides a final assurance, quickly changes the subject, and starts to walk in the opposite direction. (Gilmore Girls, WB)*

*Michael and Janet Kyle, a married couple, are in the middle of an extended argument. A few days before, Michael was buying a present for Janet for a special occasion. When he called her to ask a question to help him with his choice, she treated him rudely on the phone and hurt his feelings. This led him to buy an inferior gift, which hurt Janet's feelings, and the tiff has continued to escalate. In a comedic twist, the couple continually rates one another's actions on a scale of 1 to 10 throughout the whole escapade. Because of her rudeness on the phone, which Michael rated as level 3 treatment, he chose a "3" gift of cheap jewelry when Janet was expecting diamonds. The following morning, Michael tries to apologize, telling Janet, "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Can we stop this already?" Janet crosses her arms firmly and replies, "Two. I give your apology a 2." Though he should have learned by now, Michael responds sarcastically, "And what can I get for a 2?" Taunting him, Janet answers while pointing to her body and thrusting her hips provocatively back and forward, "Oh, well for a 10, you could've gotten all of this Michael, all night long in the outfit of your choice!" Michael asks, "And for the two?" Janet answers angrily, "For the 2 you get five minutes, alone, in the bathroom ..." Again, suggestively thrusting her hips, she teases, "And none of this. None of this, Michael. None, none of this!" (My Wife and Kids, ABC)*

## TALK ABOUT SEX-RELATED CRIMES

Another distinct category of talk about sex involved mention or description of sex-related crimes, which accounts for 16% of all talk about sex. This includes talk about such acts as prostitution, rape, incest, and sexually-related hate crimes (e.g., “gay-bashing”), among others. Such talk could occur in a fiction or non-fiction setting. In fact, however, most of it is found in fictional programs, with cases occurring primarily in drama series (49% of cases) or movies (24% of cases).

*Jesse Stone, the police chief of Paradise, MA, is investigating the rape of sixteen year-old Candace Pennington. Afraid of scandal in this small town, Candace's mother does not want her daughter to tell anyone who raped her. Persisting in his investigation, Chief Stone drives up alongside of Candace as she's walking home from school and offers her a ride. Hesitantly, Candace accepts. Once she is inside the car, Chief Stone looks Candace straight in the eye and reels off the names of the suspected rapists, “Beau Marino, Kevin Feeney, and Troy Drake,” three classmates from her high school. Candace looks disturbed but doesn't say a word. Chief Stone continues, “We both know they raped you, and we both know they threatened you about telling. If you tell me about it, I can give you your life back.” Candace, her eyes welling up with tears, begins to speak of her mother's concerns, but Chief Stone cuts her off, asserting “I will help you with your mom.” The Chief reassures her and tells her “we're in this together” before Candace gets out of the vehicle and walks away. (Stone Cold, CBS)*

*Mary Kay Letourneau, a 34-year-old schoolteacher, has pled guilty to the statutory rape of one of her 13-year-old students, Vili Fualaau. In addition to being incarcerated, Mary Kay is required to participate in a prison group therapy session where all of the participants are also female convicted child molesters. At these sessions each of the orange-clad women are required to admit their crime in turn. This scene begins as a fellow attendee bluntly addresses Mary Kay, “C'mon ... what did you do? Girls or boys?” Before Mary Kay can respond, another woman blurts out, “She raped a sixth grader!” Looking down and nervously stroking her chin, Mary Kay quietly replies, “It was not rape.” The session leader asks soberly, “What would you call it? What did you do to your victim?” The conversation turns sour as other members of the group start to taunt her. One says, “Did you tell your kids yet that their mommy is a child molester ... and that she may do them?” Angry and flustered, Mary Kay stands up and storms out of the room. (“The Mary Kay Letourneau Story,” Lifetime)*

## TALK ABOUT SEXUAL INTERCOURSE ALREADY OCCURRED

While most talk involves people's interest in sex now or in the future, some comments address sexual encounters that have already been experienced in the past. Talk about actual, specific instances of intercourse that have already occurred accounts for 5% of all talk about sex.

*Chris Turk, a young resident, and Carla, a nurse, are a newlywed couple who both work at Sacred Heart Hospital. In order to gain more privacy, the couple has recently asked their roommate, J.D., to move out of their apartment. Enjoying their newly found freedom, this scene opens with Chris in his boxer shorts, and Carla in hot pink lingerie rising from behind the kitchen counter where it appears some sort of romance may just have occurred. Carla asks, “How great is it not having J.D. around, huh?” “So great, so great!” responds Chris, as he spanks Carla teasingly with a spatula. “Now what?” he continues. Ever so organized, Carla consults her list. “Did it on the couch, did it in the kitchen, wanna do it on JD's bed?” “I think it's about time someone did,” Chris exclaims, and the two giggle wildly. Losing some of his enthusiasm, Chris asks Carla, “You don't really want to have more sex, do you?” Carla responds sheepishly, “God no, I didn't even want to do it in the kitchen.” (Scrubs, NBC)*

*Two adult brothers, Charlie and Alan, are discussing the fact that Charlie found a sexy black bra in the back of his car. It didn't take him long to figure out it belonged to his mother, Evelyn, a real estate agent, who had just borrowed the car. While the brothers are talking, their mother walks through the door, pretending to have innocently stopped by for a visit. Curious to see what she will say, Charlie hides her bra in his pants pocket, and the brothers engage in mock-polite conversation as if they know nothing. After an uncomfortable attempt at small talk, Evelyn sighs, “Oh, the hell with it.” Turning to Charlie, she demands back the bra, admitting to having misplaced it in the car. Feigning surprise, Charlie asks “Oh my, how in heaven's name did that happen, Mother?” Evelyn then divulges, “Well, if you must know ... I sold a \$12 million dollar house and I wanted to celebrate ... I was with the seller's realtor. Splitting that juicy commission made us both so hot we barely made it off the front lawn.” (Two and a Half Men, CBS)*

## TALK TOWARD SEX

Talk toward sex is the category that reflects intimate or seductive comments meant to encourage or solicit subsequent sexual activities between two potential partners. Such comments were coded as talk about sex only in situations when they were not accompanied by any overt sexual behavior, such as passionate kissing or intimate touching within the same scene. This category accounts for only 2% of all talk about sex.

*Jim and his wife Cheryl have been arguing over his recent decision to grow a mustache. Cheryl desperately wants him to shave it off. She asks her friend Dana for advice on how to convince Jim to comply. Dana suggests that Cheryl should “fight fire with fire” and change the color of her blonde hair, which she knows Jim adores. Just after dying her hair to a shade of dark brunette, Cheryl enters the bedroom in her bathrobe, and Jim’s jaw drops in disbelief at her new look. But surprisingly, he loves her new look. He exclaims sincerely, “I love it,” and then commands, “Lose the robe!” Unable to control himself, Jim continues, “Cheryl, you are hot! You’re dark and mysterious. Gimme some of that brunette sugar, baby.” Cheryl fends him off, as this was hardly the reaction she wanted. But Jim is insistent and begins to offer some fantasy-game suggestions. “Let’s play a wounded GI soldier and lonely Italian housewife. Alright? I say, Can you help me find my unit? And you say ...” Cheryl responds disgustedly, “I know what I say.” (According to Jim, ABC)*

*Jack, the son of a reverend, and his girlfriend Missy are two high school students with a budding romance. Missy’s father has elicited a promise from Jack that he will not have sex with his daughter, but Missy seems to have other plans. As the two teenagers sit in the car on a date, Missy begins to make physical advances. Jack pulls her hand away as it slides up his leg. Missy rolls her eyes and asks, “Is this about that stupid virginity pledge oath again? Jack, the beautiful thing about Jesus is that he’s really flexible.” Jack questions the flexibility of Missy’s father, but she counters, “If it’s an act of love, how could it possibly be disrespectful?” Missy continues to push the situation, asking Jack if he loves her. He responds, “Yeah, sure, yeah, yeah, of course I love you.” Then Missy states firmly, “Good, because I want you to be my first.” Jack seems puzzled as Missy continues to outline her plan. “Tuesday,” she says. “He [my dad] and my mom will be in St. Louis until Wednesday. We’ll have the entire house to ourselves.” (Jack & Bobby, WB)*

## EXPERT ADVICE/TECHNICAL INFORMATION

This category encompasses two different types of exchanges. The first involves the delivery of advice from someone who has received formal training in human sexuality, such as a clinical psychologist who might address behavioral issues, or a medical doctor who might deal with reproductive concerns or sexually-transmitted diseases. The second involves the delivery of technical information regarding sex and/or sexual health issues from an authoritative source. Again, such talk could occur in a fiction or non-fiction setting. Of all the types of talk about sex examined for the study, expert advice accounted for the fewest number of cases, just 24 or roughly 1% overall.

*While investigating the murder of a 15-year-old schoolgirl name Lisa, detectives Stabler and Benson discover that Lisa led a very sexually active life that few knew about. The detectives unearth information that Lisa “hooked up” with numerous boys from her school and men she met over the Internet. When the coroner, Dr. Warner, informs Stabler and Benson that Lisa was HIV positive, a serious conversation ensues. Dr. Warner advises the detectives that “a third of sexually active teens in this country have a sexually transmitted infection.” Thinking out loud, detective Stabler observes that any of Lisa’s hook-ups could have theoretically infected her as well as “every other girl they had sex with.” Detective Benson asserts, “That’s a lot of kids at risk!” “More than you can imagine,” Dr. Warner replies, as she shows the detectives how quickly HIV can spread with the help of a computer-aided model that tracks cases city-wide. “Once there are a certain number of carriers, which we call a critical mass, the disease begins to spread exponentially among those who don’t use condoms,” she explains. The computer screen fills with blinking red dots, each of which represents a newly infected victim. Detective Stabler observes with dismay, “You’re talking about an epidemic.” Motivated by the disturbing information, the detectives and Dr. Warner outline a plan to ascertain who originally infected Lisa. (Law & Order: Special Victims Unit, NBC)*

*Rachel, an attractive young woman about age 18, lost her parents at a young age and in her words has had to literally "raise herself." This has not always led to good outcomes, particularly in her relationships with boyfriends. At the "Starting Over" house, a place where troubled women receive help to put their lives back on track, Rachel is assisted by a counselor named Iyanla, who serves as her "life coach." Rachel has recently invited her new boyfriend to visit the house, and Iyanla is concerned about their relationship. In this scene, Iyanla discusses her "rules of romance questionnaire" with Rachel. First, Iyanla asks Rachel, "How long should a lady, a woman, date before getting intimate?" Rachel answers confidently, "Three months." Iyanla agrees, and explains, "My 90-day rule is that you spend the first 90 days getting to know one another. You want to know his likes and dislikes." Iyanla further advises, "The one thing you really want to know is how he treats his mother ... Because how a man treats his mother is a clear indication of how he is going to treat you." (Starting Over, NBC)*

Finally, an additional 6% of all cases that clearly met the criteria for talk about sex but which could not be classified into one of the above groups were categorized as "other."

## SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

It was established earlier in our findings that sexual behaviors occur in roughly one of every three shows (35%) throughout the composite week sample. As with talk, there is a range of different types of sexual behaviors identified by the study. Table 8 reports the frequency with which each of the most common categories of behavior occurs at the scene level. As we present the findings for each of the categories, we also offer examples that illustrate the various types of sexual behavior observed in the study.

**Table 8: Distribution of Types of Sexual Behavior: Composite Week**

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR		
Types of Sexual Behavior	N	Percent of Cases of Sexual Behavior
Physical Flirting	206	19%
Passionate Kiss	583	53%
Intimate Touch	144	13%
Sexual Intercourse Implied	117	11%
Sexual Intercourse Depicted	30	3%
Other	11	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1091</b>	<b>100%</b>

### PHYSICAL FLIRTING

Behaviors were categorized on a four-point scale, with the first level comprised of physical flirting. This category is coded when a character uses his/her own body in a way that is meant to physically arouse or promote sexual interest in another. This type of action accounts for 19% of all the sexual behavior observed in the study.

*Faith has just begun her first day as a receptionist for her brother-in-law Charlie, an orthodontist. In an attempt to add some spice to the office, Faith comes dressed in a nurse's costume complete with white hot pants, stiletto heels, sheer stockings, and a low-cut fitted top. While staffing the front desk, Faith attempts to seduce a handsome divorcee father of one of Charlie's young patients. Suggestively leaning over the reception desk, Faith's black bra is exposed. Speaking in a breathy tone, Faith says, "Your divorce must have been so painful." She then leaps onto the desktop, crosses her legs, and leans toward the man saying, "Sometimes it's best just to jump into the arms of another woman, speaking as a medical professional." Surprised, the man leans back slightly, but then follows her legs with his eyes, and gives a sheepish grin. A little nervously, he asks, "So, how long do you think my son's going to be in there?" Ignoring the real focus of his question, Faith locks eyes with the man, rubs her abdomen suggestively, and says, "Nine months starting from tonight." (Hope and Faith, ABC)*

### PASSIONATE KISSING

The majority of sexual behavior (53%) portrayed on television consists of passionate kissing. This type of act was coded only in cases where the kiss conveyed a sense of sexual intimacy between two partners. Kissing is one of two behaviors that represent the second step or level in the four-point scale of sexual behavior.

*Joey is excited about meeting an old crush, Donna, a close friend of his older sister, Gina. Donna is in the midst of a divorce, and Gina told Joey to stay away from her. Donna shows up at Joey's apartment and starts to talk to him suggestively. She backs him up against the door, rubbing her hand on his chest. Joey panics and says, "You're touching me, don't touch me, you can't touch me, you can't." Finally Joey reveals that he made a promise to his sister that he wouldn't get involved with Donna. This seems to calm the situation, and Donna collects her purse and heads for the door. At the last moment, Joey stops her, sweeps her into his arms, and they kiss passionately. They break briefly for air, and Joey admits, "Oh my god, I've wanted to do that for so long." Donna adds, "Me too. Actually it's only been since this morning, but it's been tough." They resume kissing passionately. (Joey, NBC)*

*Anne Marie, a native of Oahu, is a surfer who pays the bills by working as a maid at Hotel Lanikai. While working at the hotel, Anne Marie meets Matt, a quarterback staying at the hotel with his professional football team. After some coaxing, Anne Marie and her girlfriends agree to give Matt and some of his teammates surfing lessons. In this scene, Anne Marie and Matt have just returned to the hotel after a full day of surfing lessons. Matt asks Anne Marie up to his room under the pretense of paying her for the lessons. But once inside, the two quickly move into each other's arms and start kissing deeply. Matt pulls her shirt over her head, but just as he unties her bikini top, the phone rings and interrupts them. Matt answers and refers to his caller several times as "Sweetheart," which leads Anne Marie to put her bikini and shirt back on as he continues to talk on the phone. Matt ends the call quickly and swears he was only talking to his young niece, but Anne Marie decides to leave anyway. ("Blue Crush," USA)*

## INTIMATE TOUCHING

Also at the second level on the four-point scale of sexual behavior is intimate touching of another's body in a way that is meant to be sexually arousing. Intimate touching accounted for 13% of all observed cases of sexual behavior.

*Detectives Stella Bonasera and Danny Messner are investigating the suspicious death of Deborah Gayle, a sexy fashion designer. Ms. Gayle was killed in bizarre circumstances, from ingesting nail polish spiked with blowfish toxin. In their investigation, the detectives learn about a cult restaurant in New York City, the Fuqua Sushi, at which patrons eat directly off of a human who serves as their "table." The detectives identify as their suspect a woman named Michiko who was recently fired by Ms. Gayle before beginning to perform "table service" at the restaurant. The detectives interview Michiko, who explains that she was fired for refusing to sleep with Ms. Gayle, and that her former boss was still trying to seduce her at the restaurant. In the midst of her interview with the detectives, an extended flashback scene occurs in which Michiko recalls Ms. Gayle eating sushi dinner off of her mostly naked body, which is the custom at the Fuqua Sushi. The scene shows extended close-up views of Ms. Gayle caressing Michiko's body and sucking on her toes. (Crime Scene Investigation: New York, CBS)*

*This scene opens in a darkened high school storage room. Ben Conner and his high school English teacher Ms. Monica Young are kissing each other feverishly and stumbling around in the room. Ben guides Ms. Young onto a table, knocking over some files in the process and smothers her with kisses, moving down to the lowest part of her v-neck sweater. His face is nestled between her breasts, when he hears a noise, lifts his head and says, "What was that?" "Nothing," says Ms. Young as she pulls him back down by his shirt. Once again Ben begins to kiss her chest while she moans in pleasure. The camera pans to their intertwined legs, Ms. Young's black heels rubbing up and down against Ben. As Ben strokes her thigh, Ms. Young moans quietly, "Yeah, that feels so good." Suddenly, the janitor turns the lights on, and the couple scramble to hide their secret relationship. (Life As We Know It, ABC)*

## SEXUAL INTERCOURSE STRONGLY IMPLIED

The third level on the behavior scale involves sexual intercourse that is not shown directly as it is occurring, but rather is strongly implied. In order for a portrayal to be considered an instance of intercourse strongly implied, a scene must depict a couple's actions immediately before or after an act of intercourse that is clearly inferred by narrative device. For example, a couple might be shown passionately kissing and caressing one another as they undress in a darkened bedroom, followed by a fade-to-black that then leads to a scene with the two awakening in each other's arms the next morning.

Scenes in which sexual intercourse is strongly implied represent the most common approach for television stories to convey that love-making has occurred. This approach was observed in 117 scenes throughout the composite week of programming, accounting for 11% of all sexual behavior identified by the study.

*Set on a yacht, this scene begins with Julie Cooper and her ex-husband Jimmy already naked under the bed's covers. Breathless, the two are kissing passionately with Julie directly on top of Jimmy. Julie mumbles between kisses, "It's been so long since we've done this," to which Jimmy replies "It's like ... it's like riding a bike." The couple roll over to reverse places with Jimmy on top while the kissing continues. Having some second thoughts, Julie makes Jimmy stop and asks him, "It's just that, uh, does this count as adultery?" Kissing her chin, Jimmy replies "What? Cheating on your husband with your ex-husband? Technically I think it does, yeah." Julie still seems undecided as she tries to justify her behavior, saying she hasn't been getting along with her husband. "He hasn't touched me in months. He's probably going to jail," she says. Jimmy asks, "What, do you want to stop?" After briefly contemplating the question, Julie responds firmly, "No." The couple reengage their kissing, the background music grows louder, and the camera view shifts to the outside of the boat to end the scene. (The OC, Fox)*

*Doctors Dana Stowe and Nick Biancavilla are conducting a clandestine affair at their workplace, the Rittenhouse Hospital. In this scene, Nick receives a note telling him to meet Dana in an unused physical therapy room. He arrives to find a darkened room filled with a row of candles that lead to a whirlpool tub used in patient therapy. Nick sees Dana in the tub, her body glistening in the candlelight, she says, "Come join me, won't you?" Nick exclaims, "You*

*are naughty!" She responds, "Come on ... get naked!" Nick quickly sheds his clothes and joins her in the tub. The two begin to embrace, kiss, and fondle one another. Then Dana reaches down under the water, causing Nick to exclaim, "Oooh." Dana smiles as the camera pans away. (Strong Medicine, Lifetime)*

*Carlos and Holly, two paramedics who have established a tentative relationship, are together in bed. Holly has just returned from a few days away with little explanation. Candles light up the foreground and romantic music fills the air as they lie under the sheets, sighing deeply. "That was amazing," Carlos declares. "It sure was," Holly agrees. Holding her close with her head on his chest, Carlos says softly, "God, I missed you." Lifting her head up, she probes, "Did you?" "Of course," he replies with certainty. She continues, saying, "I don't mean the sex. Did you miss me, the person?" "You have no idea. I'm glad you're home," he says contentedly. Holly then remarks that she wants Carlos to meet her family. Carlos' face reveals that he is caught off guard, and looks frightened as the scene comes to a close. (Third Watch, NBC)*

## **SEXUAL INTERCOURSE DEPICTED**

Finally, the highest level of sexual behavior on the four-point scale is sexual intercourse depicted. Scenes are classified as intercourse depicted if any portion of the body of those engaged in sexual intercourse is shown while the act is occurring. Such depictions need not be explicit in terms of showing any nudity, as explicitness is measured independently from the type of behavior portrayed. Scenes involving sexual intercourse depicted account for 3% of all sexual behavior identified by the study.

*Sonny and Carly have recently reconciled their estranged marriage. They are drinking wine and embracing on the couch with a romantic fire burning in front of them. Sonny suspects a problem and wants to probe it with Carly, asking "What's happening here now?" Carly responds physically rather than verbally, as she begins to kiss and fondle him as her way of changing the subject. "Sonny, I don't want to think," she whispers. "We're no good when we think." The couple stop talking as the background music takes over and accompanies an extended visual montage of discreetly photographed shots of the couple undressing, embracing, and making love at her initiative. Without a word, close-up views of the couple's intertwined bodies continue for over 90 seconds as they are shown from a wide range of angles while making love. (General Hospital, ABC)*

*Reuben and Polly are dating, and have just enjoyed a night out at a club. The couple return to Polly's apartment, and are kissing fervently as they walk in the door. Polly excuses herself to go to the bathroom, where she takes a brief shower and emerges having changed into a pair of shorts and a tank top. Polly pushes Reuben onto her bed and lies on top of him as they begin to kiss. A brief jump-cut moves the action forward a few minutes, at which point Polly is sitting astride Reuben. Adding humor to the segment, Reuben is concerned about his time to ejaculation, and is silently counting to himself how long the action has been ongoing in an effort to prolong their activity. When he finally reaches orgasm, he lets slip out a verbal "fifty" from his count, and Polly celebrates with him, waving her arms and shouting "Yeah, fifty!" ("Along Came Polly," HBO)*

## **SPECIAL TOPICS OF TALK AND BEHAVIOR**

In an effort to add more precision to our ongoing study, we continue to explore special topics of potential importance for audience effects within some of our more broad-based measures. In this report, we have isolated all examples of talk about sex and sexual intercourse behavior that involve either of two topics of particular interest: first-time sex for either or both partners, and oral sex.

In the sections below, we address each of these special topics in turn. To be clear, the data represented by these cases is included in the frequency counts in the broader sections reported above on talk and behavior. Here we are in essence highlighting two common themes not previously identified in our analysis of those cases. These categories have not been examined in our past studies, so it is not possible to provide over-time comparisons.

## First-time Sex

By first-time sex we mean an individual's initial coital experience with any partner during his or her lifetime. In popular terms, this is often labeled as "losing one's virginity." From a sexual socialization perspective, this is clearly a meaningful type of portrayal, particularly for adolescents.

Talk about first-time sex is a special case within the category labeled talk about intercourse already occurred. The topic of first-time sex may also surface as a special case of sexual intercourse either depicted or strongly implied. A review of our observations in all these categories reveals that first-time sex is rather infrequently addressed as a topic on television. Across the entire composite week sample, there was a total of 20 scenes distributed across 15 programs in which the topic of first-time sex was involved. That represents roughly one-half of one percent of all scenes of sexual content (N=3783) in the composite week sample.

Of those 20 scenes, 15 of them involved characters talking about the topic of first-time sex. As noted above in the summary for talk about sex, the composite week sample included 178 scenes that presented talk about intercourse that had already occurred. Thus, the 15 cases of talk about first-time sex represent 8% of the composite week's total of all talk about intercourse already occurred. From a program perspective, the 15 cases were distributed across 12 programs, which represents 1% of the shows in the composite week sample.

The portrayal of sexual intercourse behavior, either depicted or strongly implied, in which one or both partners is experiencing first-time sex is also quite rare. In the composite week sample, only five such instances were observed across four programs. Those cases represent 3% of the total of 147 scenes in which intercourse was depicted or strongly implied, or less than one-half of one percent of all sexual behavior shown on television. From a program perspective, they appeared in less than 1% of the shows with sex in the composite week sample.

Across all 20 of the scenes that involved the topic of first-time sex in either talk or behavior, only one case included any mention of sexual risks or responsibilities within the same scene. That example, which presented sexual intercourse strongly implied in the motion picture *"Real Women Have Curves"* on HBO, included use of a condom. However, a total of six of the 20 scenes (30%) involving first-time sex appeared in programs that included risk or responsibility messages somewhere within the same show, which represents a relatively high frequency of safer sex messages, as will become clear after reviewing the subsequent section addressing this topic. That same pattern is reflected in the finding that four of the 15 shows (27%) that presented scenes involving first-time sex also included risk or responsibility messages somewhere within the program.

In sum, first-time sex is a topic that is rarely included in television programming. When it is presented, however, there is a relatively high probability that it will appear in a program that includes sexual risk or responsibility content somewhere within the show. Due to the small amount of cases involved, the patterns identified here should be viewed with some caution. The following examples illustrate some ways in which the topic has been approached:

*Jonathan and Deborah are high school students who have a monogamous dating relationship. They have talked about having sex and have decided to go ahead and "do it." Having just returned from buying condoms, Jonathan and Deborah are sprawled out on the bed, kissing each other. As they begin to get undressed, Deborah asks shyly, "Can we please turn out the light?" Jonathan turns the light off, endorsing her request by saying, "I mean, it is our first time you know?" With an air of awkwardness, Deborah says hesitantly, "Well, not exactly ... I mean, it's our first time together, so it will feel like it's our first time, but it's not my first time." Hearing this, Jonathan turns the light back on, and asks, "Okay, I mean it's no big deal, I don't care, but seriously, who was it?" As Deborah divulges who it was, and how it happened, Jonathan becomes visibly upset. He puts his shirt back on and storms off in a huff, leaving Deborah distraught. (Life As We Know It, ABC)*

*Lynette Shaw recently won a full-body makeover in a TV contest. With the help of plastic surgery, breast-augmentation and the like, Lynette has been transformed from an overweight and under-confident young woman into a gorgeous blonde bombshell. In this episode, detectives Taylor and Fitzgerald are investigating Lynette's suspicious disappearance. The detectives question Hal, who explains how they spent the night together just before*

her disappearance. Hal's story then shifts to a flashback that replays the morning-after scene they had shared. As they are both getting dressed, Lynette looks distressed as she asks, "You don't want to see me again?" Hal responds coldly, "Look, it was one night, all right? Let's not make it a big deal." Lynette sighs heavily, and asks Hal, "It wasn't good? I thought you had a nice time." He replies coldly again, "Yeah, it was fine ... look I gotta go." Lynette pleads, "This is my first time. I gave myself to you." She pulls her robe open to display her newly improved body, and tells Hal, "I did this for you." Hal stares at her, then walks out of the room as Lynette sobs uncontrollably. (*Without a Trace*, CBS)

### **Oral Sex**

A second topic that warrants special consideration is oral sex. Recent evidence indicates that oral sex is common among adolescents (Halpern-Flesher, Cornell, Kropp, & Tschann, 2005; Remez, 2004), and that many young people are not aware that STDs can be transferred through oral sex (Hoff, Greene, & Davis, 2003). One study has reported that perceptions of peer behavior are more strongly associated with oral sex than with vaginal intercourse (Prinstein, Meade, & Cohen, 2003), and thus it seems important to begin to examine the treatment of this topic on television. Long considered taboo, it appears that television is beginning to engage the topic on occasion, and our analysis this year has identified all instances in the composite week sample in which oral sex was mentioned or depicted.

As with first-time sex, the topic of oral sex could be raised in scenes presenting either talk or behavior. Talk about oral sex would be a special case within the category of "other talk." Portrayals in which oral sex is either depicted or strongly implied would be considered a sexual behavior and would be a special case within the category of "other behavior." Portrayals of oral sex were classified as depicted if the characters are shown while the act is occurring (not necessarily with any explicitness), such as a distant view of a woman with her head in the lap of a man whose pants are dropped to his ankles. Portrayals of oral sex were classified as implied if they are clearly inferred by narrative device within a scene, but remain discreetly unshown to the viewer, such as a scene fading to black just as such an act is about to commence.

A review of our observations across all of these categories reveals that the topic of oral sex is rarely addressed in either scenes of talk or behavior. More specifically, 15 scenes distributed across 11 programs were identified in which oral sex was either the topic of discussion or was actually portrayed in some form across the entire composite week sample. That represents less than one-half of one percent of all scenes of sexual content (N=3783) throughout the composite week.

Of that 15 scene total, nine scenes of talk about oral sex appeared across eight programs. In terms of behavior, six scenes distributed across six programs were identified in which oral sex was portrayed, with three of these cases classified as depicted and three as implied.

Across all 15 of the scenes that involved the topic of oral sex in either talk or behavior, no case included mention of sexual risks or responsibilities within that same scene. However, three of the 15 scenes involving oral sex (20%) appeared in programs that included risk or responsibility messages somewhere within the same show, which represents a relatively high frequency of safer sex messages. That same pattern is reflected in the finding that three of the 11 shows (27%) that presented scenes involving oral sex also included risk or responsibility messages somewhere within the program.

Here too our conclusion is the same as in the prior section. Oral sex is a topic that is rarely included in television programming. When it is presented, however, there is a relatively high probability that it will appear in a program that includes sexual risk or responsibility content somewhere within the show. Due to the small amount of cases involved, the patterns identified should be viewed with some caution. The following examples illustrate some ways in which the topic has been approached:

*In this talk show episode, the hosts are discussing Billy Crystal's new one-man show, 700 Sundays. Meredith Viera describes the show in which Crystal "is talking about Eleanor Roosevelt and her relationship with FDR, and at one point refers to her, umm, servicing him with oral sex." Co-host Star Jones Reynolds makes fun of Meredith's discomfort at addressing the issue of oral sex, laughing "Isn't it funny how your voice went way low?" The audience erupts in laughter, and Star adds, "But that was his wife ... If your wife can't pleasure you, who's supposed to?" (The View, ABC)*

*As detectives Stabler and Benson seek to find the murderer of a 15-year-old female, they uncover a world where adolescent girls are performing sexual favors for men in return for expensive clothes and accessories. The detectives speak repeatedly with the victim's best friend, Angela. By coincidence, they encounter Angela as she is performing oral sex on a middle-aged manager of an expensive clothing store in a back room. Back at the station, detective Benson confronts Angela, saying, "You're selling yourself for clothes." "No I'm not, Brian [the manager] just likes to buy me pretty things," she replies. She continues, "I do not have sex with him!" Detective Benson looks her directly in the eye and asks, "Then what do you call what you did to Brian?" Angela scoffs and retorts, "It's only oral." Detective Benson emphasizes, "Oral sex, Angela!" (Law & Order: Special Victims Unit, NBC)*

## SAFER SEX MESSAGES AT THE SCENE LEVEL

One of the most important factors likely to shape the socializing effects of sexual portrayals is the extent to which risk and responsibility concerns associated with sexual activity are included. In this study, we measured the presence of three types of themes involving the risks or responsibilities of sexual behavior: (1) *sexual patience*: waiting until a relationship matures and both people are equally ready to engage in sex; (2) *sexual precaution*: pursuing efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS, STDs, and/or unwanted pregnancy when sexually active; and (3) *depiction of risks and/or negative consequences* of irresponsible sexual behavior. Sexual encounters that are presented without any of these elements certainly convey a much different message to the audience, and in particular to young viewers, than portrayals that include them.

The sample of television content was analyzed for the presence of these safer sex messages using two distinct types of measures. First, analysis was conducted at the scene level, where any mention or depiction would be counted; and second, assessment was conducted at the program level as a whole to identify shows that placed primary emphasis on sexual risk or responsibility themes throughout the entire episode. At the scene level, contextual information about each portrayal was also gathered, including the degree of emphasis placed on the sexual risk topic; the valence, or orientation, of the scene toward the risk topic (i.e., positive, negative); and the source of any risk information provided.

Our analysis in this section begins with the scene level findings. Table 9 indicates that the treatment of sexual risk or responsibility issues within individual scenes is quite limited overall. Only 4% of all scenes that include sexual content incorporate any message about the risks or responsibilities of sexual activity. Another way of framing this finding is to observe that only about one in every 25 times that the topic of sex arises on television is there any mention of a sexual risk or responsibility concern, even including all cases with only a minor emphasis on safer sex topics. From this perspective, it is clear that the overall pattern of sexual content on television devotes little attention to these three types of sexual health concerns.

Table 9: Distribution of Risk/Responsibility Topics Included in Scenes: Composite Week

Types of Risk/Responsibility	1998		2002		2005	
	N Of Scenes	Percentage of Sexual Scenes that Contain R/R	N Of Scenes	Percentage of Sexual Scenes that Contain R/R	N Of Scenes	Percentage of Sexual Scenes that Contain R/R
Depiction of Risks/Negative Consequences	45	2%	75	2%	94	2%
Sexual Precaution	35	2% <sub>b*</sub>	90	3% <sub>a</sub>	76	2% <sub>b**</sub>
Sexual Patience	13	1%	25	1%	28	1%
N Of Scenes With Any R/R	78 <sub>‡</sub>	4% <sub>b**</sub>	170 <sub>‡‡</sub>	6% <sub>a</sub>	169 <sub>‡‡‡</sub>	4% <sub>b**</sub>
<b>Total N of Scenes With Sexual Content</b>	<b>1930</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2992</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3783</b>	<b>-</b>

Findings with different subscripts that have one asterisk attached [e.g., a/b\*] are significantly different at p<.05.

Findings with different subscripts that have two asterisks attached [e.g., a/b\*\*] are significantly different at p<.01.

‡ 15 cases contained two aspects of risk/responsibility within a single scene.

Thus, a total of only 78 independent scenes were found to include any risk/responsibility.

‡‡ 20 cases contained two aspects of risk/responsibility within a single scene.

Thus, a total of only 170 independent scenes were found to include any risk/responsibility.

‡‡‡ 29 cases contained two aspects of risk/responsibility within a single scene.

Thus, a total of only 169 independent scenes were found to include any risk/responsibility.

## DEPICTION OF RISKS/NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Of the three key elements of risk and responsibility, the depiction of risks and/or negative consequences from sexual activity was the topic that appeared most frequently. Examples in this category present such serious, life-altering outcomes as unwanted pregnancy and abortion, as well as characters who contract HIV/AIDS from unprotected sexual intercourse. Although this category was the most common of all types of risk and responsibility portrayals, it was observed in only 94 scenes across the composite week, representing roughly 2% of the total of 3783 scenes with sexual content overall.

*Lori Colson is the lawyer for Richard Kirkland. Richard has cancer and his treatment would benefit from a transfusion from the umbilical cord blood of his young son, Zach. Zach is now a pre-schooler, but when he was born his umbilical cord blood was stored at his doctor's recommendation. Marcy, Richard's wife, is meeting with Ms. Colson, and is forced to explain why she won't allow Richard to have the blood. It turns out Zach is not Richard's son. Marcy tells Ms. Colson that Zack was conceived from a one-night stand she shared with another man. "It was only one time," Marcy recalls slowly, explaining that she had left the house for the weekend after a huge fight with Richard. "There was a guy there ... We were all drinking wine and suddenly he and I were alone, and it just happened." Ms. Colson insists that Richard deserves to know the truth about the one-night stand and about Zack's biological father. But Marcy pleads with the attorney to keep the secret, saying, "I promised myself that Richard would never ever find out." (Boston Legal, ABC)*

*In this talk show episode, Michelle and Paul are one of the featured couples dealing with issues of infidelity. The two have been together for eight years, and have three children. Paul has had trouble with drug and alcohol abuse, and recently spent time in a rehabilitation house. He admits during the discussion that he had sexual intercourse with other patients in the program while residing there. Michelle asks Paul, "Did you use a protection?" Looking away from her while shrugging his shoulders, he responds, "A couple times I didn't." Host Larry Elder adds, "Well, she [one of his partners] said she was pregnant, so I suspect you didn't." Larry continues, "Paul, did you think about possibly getting an STD and giving it to Michelle? Did you think about that?" Before Paul can respond to Larry, Michelle interjects, "I did make him go to the clinic before we even were together again to go get checked to see if he had anything." At that, the audience reacts exuberantly in approval. Paul vows not to cheat on Michelle again and asserts, "I need to grow up and I don't want my children to be without a father like I was." (Larry Elder, NBC/syndicated)*

## SEXUAL PRECAUTION

The category of sexual precaution includes mention or use of a condom, birth control to avoid unplanned pregnancy, or talk about the need for "protection" when engaging in sex. Some aspect of sexual precaution was found in 76 scenes, or 2% of all scenes with sexual content. More than half of all scenes involving precaution topics either mentioned or depicted the use of a condom (N=41).

*Peter, a college president, is talking with his friend Grace, one of the professors at his school. Peter confides in Grace about an incident involving his high school daughter, Courtney. "She's seeing someone," explains Peter, "a freshman here, two years older. And up until this morning I was totally supportive of the whole thing. He seems like a nice, responsible kid ... Well, he seemed." But that morning the Campus Health Center notified him that Courtney had been in to request emergency contraceptives. Peter exclaimed, "The morning after pill! I don't even know where to start with her. And I want to kill him ... how could she be so irresponsible? ... Why is my daughter having unprotected sex? She's 16 years old!" Trying to calm him down, Grace tells Peter "You should thank your lucky stars she had the sense enough to get that pill, right?" (Jack & Bobby, WB)*

*Susan, a single mother, is busy preparing for her first date with Mike, a new resident in the neighborhood. Her teenage daughter Julie is hanging around, examining the skimpy red dress that Susan intends to wear that night because, as she says, she wants "to look really sexy." Julie tells her mother that Mike should be expected to return her back home by 11 p.m., explaining jokingly that, "You know how I worry." Still assuming a motherly role, Julie asks Susan, "So, you got protection?" Chuckling, Susan replied, "Oh my gosh, we are so not having this conversation." But Julie persists, saying, "We are, because I enjoy being an only child." After a little more banter, Susan ushers Julie out of the room, closing the door behind her. (Desperate Housewives, ABC)*

## SEXUAL PATIENCE

Finally, portrayals that incorporate a theme of sexual patience were found in just 28 scenes, accounting for 1% of all scenes with sexual content throughout the composite week. Examples in this category emphasized the virtues of sexual abstinence, virginity, or simply waiting until one is certain s/he is ready to assume the responsibilities associated with a sexual relationship.

*Joan Girardi and her boyfriend Adam, two high school students from the town of Arcadia, decide to attend a large music festival in the town of Huntington, 100 miles away. Because the festival will finish late, the couple take a camper truck that belongs to Adam's father so that they can spend the night in the parking lot and drive home the next morning. This scene opens with them sharing a makeshift bed in the camper, both of them fully clothed but under the covers. Adam starts to kiss Joan, and she responds tentatively at first, but then says, "Adam ... Adam ... No." Adam persists while stroking Joan's hair, "It's sort of the perfect opportunity, isn't it?" Joan pauses, and with the weight of the decision on her shoulders and a pained look on her face, she timidly asks, "I mean, do you really want to?" Adam scoffs, "You don't? You seemed like you did." Still trying to convince Joan, he adds, "I brought protection." But Joan objects, reminding Adam that they already agreed they were not ready to have sex. Adam responds defensively, "That was like a year ago. I mean, we've been going out a long time now. It's sort of the next step, don't you think?" With the outcome still unclear, the two begin to kiss more gently now, but then Joan bolts upright and exclaims, "We're in a truck. I don't want my first time to be in a truck ... I'm sorry." Adam goes along, telling her, "Fine, you don't want to we won't," and turns his body away from Joan. Upset, Joan lies back down and stares blankly at the ceiling of the camper. (Joan of Arcadia, CBS)*

*Sixteen year-old Bradin Westerly and his girlfriend Callie savor a private moment on a moonlit beach. Bathed in the light from a campfire, Bradin and Callie are kissing. As Bradin removes his vest, a condom packet accidentally falls out. Callie notices the condom and pulls away from Bradin. As they both look nervously at the condom, Bradin jokes, "Six years of Scouts wasn't for nothing ... be prepared!" Callie's face is stern, and Bradin asks, "Callie, what's wrong?" She explains, "I knew this would happen. Why do you think I was so afraid to be alone with you when the only thing in the world I wanted was to be alone with you?" Bradin looks nervous and responds, "I rush things. It's what I do. Look, I'm an idiot." Callie replies, "You didn't rush anything, you're wonderful. It's me. I'm just ... I'm not going to do that." Bradin reassures her, "And that's fine ... We're in no hurry." Callie responds, "Is it still okay if I tell you that it's not about you at all. I'm just not going to have sex, not at this point in my life." Bradin asks hesitantly, "Are you waiting 'til, 'til you get married?" This angers Callie, who now starts to yell, "Why does there have to be a reason! It's just the wrong thing for me for right now." Callie walks away while Bradin pleads for her to stay. He then picks up the condom and angrily throws it into the fire. (Summerland, WB)*

## SAFER SEX MESSAGES AT THE PROGRAM LEVEL

The findings presented immediately above, including the data reported in Table 9, evaluate the presence of risk or responsibility messages as a percentage of all scenes with sexual content on television. Many programs, however, may include risk or responsibility messages later in the program, rather than addressing such topics immediately within the same scene in which talk about sex or sexual behavior occurs. Thus, it makes sense to analyze our findings from an overall program perspective, evaluating the frequency with which shows that include sexual content present a risk or responsibility message anywhere within the same program. In the 2004-05 season, 14% of all programs with sexual content included at least one scene addressing risk or responsibility somewhere within the program (see Table 10).

**Table 10: Presence of Sexual Risk/Responsibility Topics in Different Program Contexts: Composite Week**

	ALL PROGRAMS WITH ANY SEXUAL CONTENT			ALL PROGRAMS WITH INTERCOURSE RELATED CONTENT		
	1998	2002	2005	1998	2002	2005
Percentage of Shows With Any Mention of R/R	9% <sub>a</sub>	15% <sub>b**</sub>	14% <sub>b**</sub>	14% <sub>a</sub>	26% <sub>b**</sub>	27% <sub>b**</sub>
N of Shows With Any Mention of R/R	45	92	96	28	51	42
<b>Total N of Shows</b>	<b>528</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>156</b>

Note: Programs with intercourse-related content include shows with scenes in which there is talk about intercourse that has already occurred; or in which intercourse behavior is depicted or strongly implied.

Findings with different subscripts that have one asterisk attached [e.g., a/b\*] are significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

Findings with different subscripts that have two asterisks attached [e.g., a/b\*\*] are significantly different at  $p < .01$ .

Another important perspective for evaluating the frequency with which risk or responsibility topics receive treatment on television can be gained by focusing exclusively on the programs that present portrayals of more advanced sexual content. Programs that include either talk about sexual intercourse that has already occurred, or that present portrayals with characters engaging in sexual intercourse behavior, are arguably the contexts in which risk or responsibility messages are most relevant and, from an audience effects perspective, likely to be most critical. Programs that include any of these types of portrayals are labeled as “intercourse-related content” on Table 10, which reveals that these shows have a much greater probability of including a risk or responsibility message than the 14% level observed across all programs with any sexual content. More specifically, 27% of the programs that feature intercourse-related content include at least one risk or responsibility message somewhere within the show, a rate almost twice as high as the ratio for all programs with any sexual content.

In addition, there are some contextual features associated with each sexual risk or responsibility message that can help better predict the likely impact of such content on the audience. For example, risk messages within a scene may consist of merely a brief mention, or may receive significant attention. Similarly, comments about risk topics may be supportive (e.g., “I never have sex without a condom.”) or derisive (e.g., “Condoms take the fun out of sex.”) toward risk concerns.

Table 11 presents information about several contextual variables that help to identify such distinctions. The first of these involves the degree of emphasis that is placed on sexual risk topics in those scenes that address such issues. Here we see that risk or responsibility concerns receive primary emphasis in about one out of every four scenes (24%) in which these topics are addressed, while another 7% of the cases receive substantial emphasis within a scene. Collectively, this means that slightly less than one-third of all risk or responsibility scenes (31%) devote substantial or primary attention to such topics as sexual patience, sexual precautions, or the risks of negative consequences of sexual activity. Viewed conversely, more than two-thirds of all scenes (69%) that mention risk or responsibility issues devote only minor or inconsequential emphasis to this topic.

Scenes with any sexual risk or responsibility content were also evaluated for their valence toward sexual risk topics. The majority of these scenes (54%) reflect a positive stance that supports concern about the risk topic, while only 10% employ a negative posture. Roughly one of every four cases (28%) was judged as neutral (e.g., “A box of condoms costs about \$5.”), and 9% of the cases presented a mixed perspective including both positive and negative perspectives within the same scene.

A third element examining the context of each risk or responsibility message involved identification of the source of any sexual risk information. Peers proved to be the most common of these sources, accounting for 39% of all cases, followed by health care providers (17%), actual or potential sexual partners (14%), and parents (12%). Finally, another perspective of particular relevance for young viewers can be gained by examining the extent to which programs with sexual content (either talk or behavior) that involves teenaged characters also include some sexual risk or responsibility message. In 2004-05, we found that 23% of programs with sexual content involving teens also contained a scene with sexual risk or responsibility issues somewhere within the same show. While this analysis helps to illuminate how well television conveys risk or responsibility concerns to teens, a more elaborate examination of that topic is presented below in the section *Sexual Messages in Programs Most Popular with Teenagers*.

Overall, it appears that the majority of scenes that address sexual risk or responsibility are unlikely to attract much attention from the audience because they receive such modest emphasis within the program; only about a third of these messages are more prominent in nature. The prevalent pattern across most risk messages is supportive of the importance of such concerns. Finally, it appears that sexual risk or responsibility messages are conveyed by a broad range of different types of sources, the diversity of which arguably may help to increase viewer awareness of the seriousness of these issues.

**Table 11: Contextual Elements in Scenes with Sexual Risk or Responsibility Messages: Composite Week**

<b>RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY SCENES</b>	
<b>Degree of Emphasis on R/R</b>	
Primary	24%
Substantial	7%
Minor	26%
Inconsequential	43%
<b>Valence Towards R/R</b>	
Positive	54%
Negative	10%
Neutral	28%
Mixed	9%
<b>Source of R/R Information</b>	
Peer	39%
Health Care Provider	17%
Partner	14%
Parent	12%
Reporter/Host	8%
Legal Authority	2%
Other	8%
<b>TOTAL N of Scenes</b>	<b>169</b>

### **OVERALL PROGRAM EMPHASIS ON RISKS OR RESPONSIBILITIES**

All of the data reported above are based solely upon scene-level measures, albeit with some of the analyses focused on frequencies within programs rather than just frequencies across all scenes. But the study also gathered original data at the level of the program judged as a whole. A measure evaluated whether each program, considered in its entirety, placed strong emphasis on any risk or responsibility concern. For this variable of program-level emphasis on risk or responsibility, coders evaluated whether such concerns were a central theme that ran throughout the program.

This analysis, which is reported in Table 12, indicates that programs with a primary emphasis on risk or responsibility themes were extremely rare overall, representing only 1% of all shows on television that contained sexual content. When considering just the programs that include intercourse-related content (i.e., talk about intercourse already occurred; intercourse behavior depicted or strongly implied), that frequency drops to zero. That is, out of our composite week sample of nearly 1000 programs aired during the 2004-05 television season, not one of the 156 programs that incorporated sexual intercourse in their storyline placed strong emphasis throughout the program on sexual risks or responsibilities.

The following example illustrates one of the programs that qualified as placing strong overall emphasis on sexual risk or responsibility concerns:

The episode opens with Carrie Heffernan, dressed in sexy black lingerie, heading toward her house's only bathroom late one night. Her father Arthur, who lives with Carrie and her husband, Doug, is inside enjoying a candle-lit bubble bath. Finding the bathroom door locked, Carrie remarks, "Dad, it's the middle of the night, what are you doing up? ... I just uh, I need to get something." Arthur responds, "Tell me what it is and I'll slide it under the door." Carrie mumbles, "Yeah, won't work," as she is embarrassed to tell her father she is seeking her diaphragm before having sex with her husband. The scene ends at this point, and the episode resumes several weeks later when Carrie is feeling nauseous. Trying to figure out the source of her problem, she recalls the night when she was unable to get into the bathroom. In a brief flashback sequence, Carrie and Doug are shown kissing intimately when Carrie suddenly interrupts their passion and says to Doug, "Oh, wait a minute, I forgot to put my thingy in." The flashback sequence ends when she jumps from the bed and quickly heads toward the bathroom.

Visibly disturbed at the prospect of an unplanned pregnancy, Carrie gives herself a home test and confirms that she is indeed pregnant. "Oh boy," she sighs as she sees the result. Encountering her father in the kitchen, she shares the news but fails to convey her dismay. Her father exclaims, "Well that's terrific!" Distraught, Carrie responds, "No, it's not terrific. We weren't, we weren't trying for this now, Dad. We just, we just got careless ... The point is we're not prepared for this ... Doug and I made a huge mistake and now, oh, I don't even know what now!" Late for work, Carrie rushes off but inadvertently encounters her husband there. Unable to withhold the news, she blurts out, "I'm pregnant, and I'm terrified that we're going to be broke, and I love you and we'll talk at home." Later that night, the couple discuss the situation. Carrie begins, "I'm not ready. I'm not ready. I am sooooo not ready." Doug tries to calm her and make the best of the situation, promising, "I'm going to work overtime. I'll get a job at night. We'll sock away a lot of money. And if anything comes up I'll take care of it." The episode ends with Doug working hard to overcome the distress they both feel. (King of Queens, CBS)

Table 12: Programs with Primary Emphasis on Sexual R/R Themes: Composite Week

	ALL PROGRAMS WITH ANY SEXUAL CONTENT			ALL PROGRAMS WITH INTERCOURSE RELATED CONTENT		
	1998	2002	2005	1998	2002	2005
Percentage of Shows With Primary Emphasis On R/R	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%
N of Shows With Primary Emphasis On R/R	7	8	4	5	3	0
<b>Total N of Shows</b>	<b>528</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>156</b>

Note: Programs with intercourse-related content include shows with scenes in which there is talk about intercourse that has already occurred; or in which intercourse behavior is depicted or strongly implied.

In sum, programs that place significant emphasis on sexual risk or responsibility issues are highly infrequent, regardless of the level of sexual content a program contains. The number of shows that placed overall emphasis on a risk or responsibility theme (N=4) was too small to meaningfully consider the question of which program genres devote more attention to these concerns than others. That issue can be addressed, however, by again examining the data that identifies risk or responsibility portrayals at the individual scene level, which we will pursue in a subsequent section focused on differences in sexual content across genres.

## CHANGE OVER TIME SINCE THE 1997-98 TELEVISION SEASON

Two aspects of our findings regarding the frequency with which sexual risk or responsibility messages are shown on television have remained remarkably stable over time. The first deals with the presence of such messages across the full range of television's treatment of sexual content, encompassing risk topics presented at all levels of emphasis from inconsequential to primary. From that broad perspective, only a small fraction of all scenes involving talk about sex or sexual behavior include any mention or depiction of risk or responsibility topics. When this research began in 1997-98, a scant 4% of all scenes with sex on television included some aspect of risk or responsibility. While that frequency had increased to 6% by 2001-02, it returned to the 4% level in 2004-05. On the whole, television appears to maintain a consistent pattern that leaves sexual risk or responsibility a largely invisible issue during the vast majority of scenes in which sexual situations or themes are presented.

A second and related finding involves examination of programs that place strong emphasis throughout the show on sexual risk or responsibility themes. Here too the data demonstrate a highly consistent pattern. Despite the high frequency with which sex is included in television programming, it is extraordinarily rare for any particular program to focus on sexual risk or responsibility concerns throughout an entire episode. In 1997-98, only 1% of all programs with sexual content included such emphasis, and that level remained unchanged in 2004-05. Programs 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% in 1997-98 and 2001-02), but even that modest level of treatment has diminished in 2004-05, when no such cases were observed.

A somewhat different picture is revealed when one analyzes the proportion of programs that include at least some mention or depiction of risk or responsibility messages at the scene level. Analysis of the extent to which programs with any sexual content also include some aspect of risk or responsibility concerns shows that a significant increase has occurred over time, from 9% in 1997-98 to 14% in 2004-05. That increase first surfaced in 2001-02 when we found that 15% of programs with sex included some type of risk or responsibility message, with that level holding roughly equivalent in the current findings. In sum, the frequency with which programs that include sex on television include some mention of risk or responsibility concerns has increased from about 1 in 11 shows in 1997-98 to roughly 1 in every 7 in 2004-05.

And when one considers only those programs that include intercourse-related content, where sexual risk or responsibility concerns are arguably most salient, the frequency with which sexual risk topics are included is both higher and increasing significantly over time. In 1997-98, 14% of all programs with intercourse-related content included some element of sexual risk or responsibility topics, with that figure nearly doubling to 27% in 2004-05. This increase is statistically significant. Again, this change first surfaced in 2001-02, when the rate was 26%.

Finally, we reported the finding that 23% of programs with sexual content involving teens also contained a scene with some element of risk or responsibility within the show in 2004-05. This percentage is down as compared to 2001-02 (34%) but slightly higher than the frequency observed in 1997-98 (18%).

In sum, the presence of sexual risk and responsibility messages is dwarfed by the much larger number of scenes in which sexual themes and situations omit any mention of such issues. With that said, an increasing number of programs include risk or responsibility topics somewhere within the show, and these issues clearly receive much greater attention in those programs where they are most relevant (i.e., in intercourse-related content). While they remain infrequent on the whole, sexual risk or responsibility messages are significantly more common today than they were just seven years ago, increasing the probability that viewers will be exposed to these important sexual health considerations.

## SCENES WITH SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Televised portrayals of intercourse play a role in socializing young viewers to the patterns of behavior that are normative in our culture. Questions such as the age at which one should have intercourse, or the strength of the relationship that typically exists between intercourse partners are important concerns for many young people. Previous studies make clear that portrayals on television can be an important source of information about the patterns of acceptable behavior. In this section of the report, we examine some of the contextual features associated with intercourse portrayals. Recall that 11% of all programs in the composite week sample included scenes of intercourse either depicted or strongly implied.

Table 13 presents several of the different contextual factors that help to shape the meaning of these portrayals for the audience. First of all, the age of characters involved in intercourse was examined. Across all the intercourse scenes identified by the study (N=147), we see that by far most characters involved (89%) are adults aged 25 or older. Only a small proportion of those engaged in intercourse (7%) are young adults (aged 18-24) and even fewer are teenagers (3%).

About half of all scenes with intercourse (53%) involve characters who have an established relationship with one another, a category that includes but is not limited to marriage. One of every five scenes of intercourse (20%) portrays characters having sex who know one another but have not yet established a relationship, and another 15% of scenes present characters having sex when they have just met. Very few scenes of intercourse include any use of drugs (3%), although the use of alcohol was somewhat more common, appearing in 16% of scenes.

### CHANGE OVER TIME SINCE THE 1997-98 TELEVISION SEASON

When this study began in 1997-98, young adults (aged 18-24) accounted for nearly one of every four characters (23%) shown engaging in sexual intercourse on television. Adults aged 25 and up were the predominant age group at that time, representing 73% of the characters involved. Since then, a clear and consistent shift has occurred in which young adults are less often shown engaging in intercourse, with the characters involved increasingly likely to be older. More specifically, young adults have decreased significantly from 23% of all characters who engaged in intercourse in 1997-98 to just 7% in 2004-05; while conversely, adults (age 25+) have increased their numbers significantly from 73% in 1997-98 to 89% in 2004-05. During this same time frame, the percentage of characters engaged in intercourse that are teenagers has remained stable at 3%.

Our data suggest that television is relatively cautious about depicting teens who perform sexual intercourse. In addition, there appears to be a trend toward portraying characters engaged in sexual liaisons as more mature, and less likely to fall in the demographic category now referred to as “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000). Clearly, our current findings reflect fewer examples of sexual intercourse involving characters who, by virtue of their relative youth, would be salient role models for younger viewers, as compared to years past.

A second area in which some changes have been observed involves the nature of the relationship between partners shown engaging in sexual intercourse. The percentage of characters who have just met and have sex together increased significantly from 7% to 15% of all intercourse scenes between 2001-02 and 2004-05. However, the current finding of 15% is not significantly higher than the 10% level observed in 1997-98, suggesting these variations do not necessarily reflect any broader pattern. Other shifts in frequencies across these categories are relatively modest and do not include any statistically significant differences.

Table 13: Contextual Elements in Scenes with Sexual Intercourse: Composite Week

APPARENT AGE OF CHARACTERS INVOLVED						
	1998		2002		2005	
	N	Percent Of Characters	N	Percent Of Characters	N	Percent Of Characters
Child (<12)	1	1%	0	0%	1	0%
Teen (13-17)	6	3%	12	3%	10	3%
Young Adult (18-24)	40	23% <sub>a</sub>	54	14% <sub>b**</sub>	22	7% <sub>c**</sub>
Adult (25+)	129	73% <sub>a</sub>	334	83% <sub>b**</sub>	261	89% <sub>c†</sub>
Total N of Characters	176	100%	400	100%	294	100%
PARTICIPANTS' RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER						
	N	Percent Of Scenes	N	Percent Of Scenes	N	Percent Of Scenes
Have An Established Relationship	47	53%	123	61%	78	53%
Have Met Before But No Established Relationship	25	28%	37	19%	29	20%
Have Just Met	9	10%	15	7% <sub>a</sub>	22	15% <sub>b*</sub>
Can't Tell	7	8%	25	13%	18	12%
DRUGS						
	N	Percent Of Scenes	N	Percent Of Scenes	N	Percent Of Scenes
Use Of Drugs In Scene	2	2%	3	1%	4	3%
ALCOHOL						
	N	Percent Of Scenes	N	Percent Of Scenes	N	Percent Of Scenes
Use Of Alcohol In Scene	13	15%	22	11%	24	16%
<b>TOTAL N OF SCENES</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>100%</b>

Findings with different subscripts that have one asterisk attached [e.g., a/b\*] are significantly different at p<.05.

Findings with different subscripts that have two asterisks attached [e.g., a/b\*\*] are significantly different at p<.01.

† 1998-2005 p<.01, 2002-2005 p<.05.

Table 14: Summary of Sexual Content by Genre: Composite Week

		ANY SEXUAL CONTENT										
		COMEDY SERIES	DRAMA SERIES	MOVIE	NEWS MAGAZINE	SOAP OPERA	TALK SHOW	REALITY	TOTAL			
Of Programs With Any Sex:	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Content	87%	87%	92%	70%	85%	67%	28%	70%			
	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Sex	8.7	5.9	4.3	3.1	4.9	4.4	3.6	5.0			
	N of Shows	169	163	146	57	39	34	67	675			
	N of Hours	85	162.5	301	78	37	34	59.5	757			
	N of Scenes	740	965	1291	240	183	149	215	3783			
<b>TALK ABOUT SEX</b>												
Of Programs With Any Talk About Sex:	Percentage of Programs With Any Talk About Sex	85%	83%	87%	70%	80%	67%	27%	68%			
	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Talk	8.3	5.7	3.6	3.0	3.7	4.3	3.6	4.6			
	Average Level of Talk in Scenes	2.6	2.8	2.7	2.8	2.8	3.1	2.6	2.7			
	N of Shows	166	156	137	57	37	34	64	651			
	N of Hours	83.5	155.5	279	78	35	34	56	721			
N of Scenes With Talk About Sex	692	882	995	231	130	147	206	3283				
<b>SEXUAL BEHAVIOR</b>												
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior	39%	47%	79%	10%	61%	8%	5%	35%			
	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	3.5	1.8	1.8	1.0	3.1	1.0	1.3	2.0			
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	1.9	2.0	2.0	1.5	2.1	2.3	1.9	2.0			
	N of Shows	75	88	124	8	28	4	11	338			
	N of Hours	38	88	258	15	27	4	11	441			
N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	132	156	474	15	83	4	14	878				
<b>TOTAL N OF SHOWS</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>959</b>				

## COMPARING PATTERNS OF SEXUAL CONTENT ACROSS PROGRAM GENRES

In the previous sections, we have analyzed the patterns of sexual messages found across all shows included in our sample of television programming. In this section, we examine individual program types, or genres, more closely. Our goal is to look for differences that exist in the patterns of sexual content presented within the following distinct program categories: comedies, dramas, movies, news magazines, soap operas, talk shows, and reality programs. The latter category is a relatively diverse mix that encompasses game shows, documentaries, and public affairs programming that has traditionally comprised non-fiction material on television, as well as the more recently popular serial competition mini-series that most broadcast networks air during prime-time. Table 14 reports the frequency with which these different genres present sexual material. The most compelling finding here is that with only a single exception, two-thirds or more of all shows in each program genre include some form of talk about sex or sexual behavior. Only the category of reality programs falls below this threshold, and substantially so at 28% of all programs containing some sexual content. Across every other program genre, the statistics underscore the high frequency with which sexual messages are found throughout the television landscape.

Program types with the greatest likelihood of presenting sexual material include movies (92%), comedies (87%), dramas (87%), and soap operas (85%). Situation comedies stand out for contributing an extremely high number of scenes with sexual content, at an average of 8.7/hour, followed by dramas at 5.9/hour. Comedies also contain the greatest number of scenes of sexual behavior, at 3.5/hour, followed closely by soap operas at 3.1/hour.

It was established earlier in the report that 14% of all shows with any sexual content included some mention or depiction of a risk or responsibility topic within the program. Table 15 reports the frequency with which different genres of programs devoted any attention to sexual risk and responsibility concerns. This table makes clear that there is a rather surprising degree of consistency in the frequency with which these topics are addressed on television. With only one exception, every genre falls within just a couple of percentage points of the 14% overall average. Dramas and talk shows are the most likely to include risk or responsibility concerns, which are found in 18% of their shows which include sexual content. The one exception, reality programming, is the least likely to include risk or responsibility topics, at a 7% rate.

Table 15: Distribution of Risk/Responsibility Portrayals by Genre: Composite Week

	SERIES	DRAMA SERIES	MOVIE	NEWS MAGAZINE	SOAP OPERA	TALK SHOW	REALITY	TOTAL
<b>Percentage of Shows With Any Sex That Contain R/R</b>	13%	18%	14%	12%	13%	18%	7%	14%
N of Shows with Any R/R	22	30	21	7	5	6	5	96
N of Shows with Sex	169	163	146	57	39	34	67	675
<b>Total N of Shows</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>959</b>

## SEXUAL MESSAGES IN PRIME-TIME NETWORK PROGRAMMING

Separate analyses were performed on the three-week over-sample of prime-time broadcast network programs. These analyses indicate that network prime-time shows present sexual content with somewhat greater frequency than the levels found across the television landscape overall (see Table 16). For example, 77% of prime-time network programs include some sexual material, and those shows with sexual content contain an average of 5.9 scenes per hour that involve sexual messages of some type, either talk or behavior. In contrast, the industry-wide averages are 70% of programs that include sexual content, with an average of 5.0 scenes per hour that involve sexual material (see Table 5 for comparisons).

In the realm of talk about sex, the same general pattern emerged with greater frequencies being found on the prime-time networks than for the television industry overall. A total of 76% of network prime-time programs included talk about sex, as compared to 68% across all shows in the composite week sample; and the prime-time programs averaged 5.5 scenes per hour in those shows that included talk about sex, as compared to 4.6 scenes per hour in the composite week overall. The average level of talk about sex in the prime-time portrayals is identical to the overall findings at 2.7 on the 4-point scale.

In contrast, the portrayal of sexual behavior in prime-time network programs more closely matches the levels observed across television overall. The proportion of prime-time network programs that contain some sexual behavior is 38%, compared to 35% in the overall sample. Similarly, the average number of scenes with sexual behavior per hour for the networks (2.1) is nearly the same as that founding the composite week sample as a whole (2.0), while the average level of sexual behavior in the prime-time portrayals is identical to the overall findings at 2.0 on the 4-point scale.

A more detailed breakdown of the sexual behaviors portrayed in network prime-time programming is presented in Table 17. This table indicates further similarities with industry averages (see Table 6 for comparisons).

**Table 16: Summary of Sexual Content: Broadcast Network Prime-time**

		ANY SEXUAL CONTENT			
		1998	2002	2005	
		<b>Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Content</b>	67% <sub>a</sub>	71%	77% <sub>b**</sub>
<b>Of Programs With Any Sex:</b>	<b>Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Sex</b>	5.3	6.1	5.9	
	N of Shows	184	183	200	
	N of Hours	152.5	163.5	176	
	N of Scenes	810	1005	1040	
		TALK ABOUT SEX			
		<b>Percentage of Programs With Any Talk About Sex</b>	65% <sub>a</sub>	69%	76% <sub>b**</sub>
<b>Of Programs With Any Talk About Sex:</b>	<b>Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Talk</b>	5.2	5.8	5.5	
	<b>Average Level of Talk in Scenes</b>	2.9	2.9	2.7	
	N of Shows	178	177	197	
	N of Hours	147	155.5	173	
	N of Scenes With Talk About Sex	763	903	959	
		SEXUAL BEHAVIOR			
		<b>Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior</b>	24% <sub>a</sub>	33% <sub>b*</sub>	38% <sub>b**</sub>
<b>Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:</b>	<b>Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior</b>	1.8 <sub>a</sub>	2.3 <sub>b*</sub>	2.1	
	<b>Average Level of Behavior in Scenes</b>	2.0	2.0	2.0	
	N of Shows	67	85	100	
	N of Hours	64.5	76.5	93	
	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	113	179	195	
		<b>TOTAL N OF SHOWS</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>261</b>

*Note: Any given scene may contain talk about sex as well as sexual behavior. Due to the occurrence of such overlap within scenes, the data for talk about sex cannot be summed with the data for sexual behavior to yield the findings for any sexual content overall.*

Findings with different subscripts that have one asterisk attached [e.g., a/b\*] are significantly different at p<.05.

Findings with different subscripts that have two asterisks attached [e.g., a/b\*\*] are significantly different at p<.01.

Table 17: Summary of Sexual Behavior: Broadcast Network Prime-time

<b>SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OVERALL</b>				
		1998	2002	2005
Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior		24% <sub>a</sub>	33% <sub>b*</sub>	38% <sub>b**</sub>
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	1.8 <sub>a</sub>	2.3 <sub>b*</sub>	2.1
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.0	2.0	2.0
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	1.1 <sub>a</sub>	0.9 <sub>b*</sub>	0.6 <sub>b**</sub>
	N of Shows	67	85	100
	N of Hours	64.5	76.5	93
	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	113	179	195
<b>PROGRAMS WITH PRECURSORY BEHAVIOR ONLY</b>				
Percentage of Programs With Precursory Behaviors Only		16% <sub>a</sub>	20% <sub>a</sub>	28% <sub>b‡</sub>
Of Programs With Precursory Behaviors Only:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Precursory Behavior	1.7	2.2	1.7
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	1.6	1.7	1.8
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	0.7 <sub>a</sub>	0.4 <sub>b**</sub>	0.3 <sub>b**</sub>
	N of Shows	43	53	74
	N of Hours	36	48	67
	N of Scenes With Precursory	61	107	117
<b>PROGRAMS WITH SEXUAL INTERCOURSE</b>				
Percentage of Programs With Intercourse Behaviors		9%	12%	10%
Of Programs With Intercourse Behaviors:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Intercourse Behavior	1.1	1.4	1.2
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.6	2.5	2.3
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	1.9	1.7	1.6
	N of Shows	24	32	26
	N of Hours	28.5	28.5	26
	N of Scenes With Intercourse	31	40	31
	N of All Sexual Behavior Scenes	52	72	78
<b>TOTAL N OF SHOWS</b>		<b>274</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>261</b>

Findings with different subscripts that have one asterisk attached [e.g., a/b\*] are significantly different at p<.05.

Findings with different subscripts that have two asterisks attached [e.g., a/b\*\*] are significantly different at p<.01.

‡ 1998-2005 p<.01, 2002-2005 p<.05.

Table 18: Summary of Sexual Content by Genre: Broadcast Network Prime-time

		ANY SEXUAL CONTENT							
		COMEDY SERIES	DRAMA SERIES	MOVIE	NEWS MAGAZINE	SOAP OPERA	TALK SHOW	REALITY	TOTAL
Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Content		91%	87%	100%	73%	n/a	n/a	41%	<b>77%</b>
Of Programs With Any Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Sex	9.0	6.1	3.7	3.4	n/a	n/a	3.4	5.9
	N of Shows	63	94	6	11	n/a	n/a	26	200
	N of Hours	32	94	15	11	n/a	n/a	24	176
	N of Scenes	291	575	56	37	n/a	n/a	81	1040
		TALK ABOUT SEX							
Percentage of Programs With Any Talk About Sex		91%	85%	100%	73%	n/a	n/a	40%	<b>76%</b>
Of Programs With Any Talk About Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Talk	8.5	5.8	2.9	3.3	n/a	n/a	3.1	5.5
	Average Level of Talk in Scenes	2.3	2.9	2.9	2.9	n/a	n/a	2.7	2.7
	N of Shows	63	92	6	11	n/a	n/a	25	197
	N of Hours	32	92	15	11	n/a	n/a	23	173
	N of Scenes With Talk About Sex	273	534	44	36	n/a	n/a	72	959
		SEXUAL BEHAVIOR							
Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior		42%	49%	83%	7%	n/a	n/a	19%	<b>38%</b>
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	3.9	1.9	1.5	1.0	n/a	n/a	1.4	2.1
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.0	n/a	n/a	2.0	2.0
	N of Shows	29	53	5	1	n/a	n/a	12	100
	N of Hours	14.5	53	13	1	n/a	n/a	11.5	93
	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	56	102	20	1	n/a	n/a	16	195
<b>TOTAL N OF SHOWS</b>		<b>69</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>261</b>

For example, 28% of prime-time programs contain scenes with precursory sexual behavior only, as compared to 24% of programs on television overall; while 10% of prime-time programs include a portrayal of sexual intercourse, as compared to 11% overall. In addition, the level of explicitness associated with intercourse portrayals is somewhat lower on the network prime-time programs (1.6 on a four-point scale) as compared to the industry-wide average (2.2).

An analysis of sexual content across different program genres during prime-time is presented in Table 18. This table indicates that movies (100%) are the genre most likely to include sexual content in prime-time, and also have the highest frequency for both talk about sex (100%) and sexual behavior (83%). Interestingly, however, the recent evolution of network prime-time programming has increasingly marginalized motion pictures such that our three-week sample of content from the four major broadcast networks yielded a total of only 6 films in 2004-05, as compared to 18 in 1997-98 using the identical sampling methodology. Thus, while movies are highly likely to contain sex, their limited numbers during prime-time mean they do not contribute as much to viewers' accumulated exposure to sexual messages.

In contrast, dramas (N=108) and situation comedies (N=69) are much more frequently found in the prime-time schedule, and both of these genres include sexual content extensively in their programs. Sexual messages are found in 91% of prime-time comedies and 87% of dramas, with comedies averaging a rate of 9.0 scenes/hour and dramas 6.1 scenes/hour with some sexual content. Both include substantial amounts of talk and behavior that places them ahead of all genres with the exception of movies.

In terms of the treatment of risk and responsibility concerns, prime-time network shows included such topics in 11% of all programs that contain any sexual content (see Table 19). This figure is slightly below the 14% rate at which programming industry-wide engages such issues (see Table 15 for comparison). Within distinct program genres, drama series (17%) stand out as the most likely to include treatment of sexual risk or responsibility concerns in prime-time, with that rate matched by the small number of movies that appear in prime-time. Translated into practical terms, an average viewer would be likely to see one program that presents some mention of sexual risk or responsibility issues for every nine prime-time network programs that include sexual content.

**Table 19: Distribution of Risk/Responsibility Portrayals by Genre: Broadcast Network Prime-time**

	COMEDY SERIES	SERIES	MOVIE	NEWS MAGAZINE	SOAP OPERA	TALK SHOW	REALITY	TOTAL
Percentage of Shows With Any Sex That Contain R/R	5%	17%	17%	0%	n/a	n/a	8%	11%
N of Shows With Any R/R	3	16	1	0	n/a	n/a	2	22
N of Shows With Sex	63	94	6	11	n/a	n/a	26	200
<b>Total N of Shows</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>261</b>

## CHANGE OVER TIME SINCE THE 1997-98 TELEVISION SEASON

Many of our key indices of the amount of sexual content on network prime-time programming demonstrate significant increases between the 1997-98 and 2004-05 television seasons. Across that time frame, the percentage of programs that include sexual content has risen from 67% to 77%; the proportion of programs that present talk about sex has moved from 65% to 76%; and the percentage of programs that portray sexual behavior has increased from 24% to 38%, with all of these changes proving statistically significant. The average number of scenes per hour with sexual content also experienced a significant increase from 5.3 in 1997-98 to 5.9 in 2004-05. The percentage of prime-time programs that include portrayals of sexual intercourse is nearly the same in 2004-05 (10%) as in 1997-98 (9%), revealing that the increase in sexual behavior observed over time is largely a function of more frequent precursory behaviors, which were found in 28% of shows in 2004-05 as compared to 16% in 1997-98. In sum, there is clear evidence that prime-time network programming is a significant contributor to the pattern of increases over time observed in the sexual messages conveyed across the television landscape.

Finally, the frequency with which network prime-time shows with sexual material presented any risk or responsibility concerns remained at the identical level of 11% that was first observed in 1997-98. That figure has shifted only slightly in the interim (down slightly to 9% in 1999-2000 and up slightly to 13% in 2002-03), suggesting that a relatively stable pattern has set in on this front. As noted above, the frequency with which sexual risk or responsibility topics are addressed in network prime-time programming remains slightly below industry norms observed across all television programming.

## SEXUAL MESSAGES IN PROGRAMS MOST POPULAR WITH TEENAGERS

As noted in the introduction, television is a major source of information about sex for teenagers. Many teens rely heavily on it for learning about sexual behaviors and the risks associated with them. Thus, we have also examined sexual messages presented in the television programs most frequently viewed by this age group. For this section of the report, we gathered a separate over-sample of three episodes each of the 20 program titles most frequently viewed by adolescents aged 12 to 17, as determined by Nielsen ratings analysis conducted near the end of the 2004-05 season. These program titles are identified in Table 3, which was presented earlier in the method section of this report.

Our findings indicate that the programs heavily viewed by teenagers have either comparable or somewhat higher amounts of sexual content, relative to the levels found for television overall. Starting from the broadest perspective, seven out of ten programs heavily viewed by teenagers (70%) include at least one scene with sexual content (see Table 20), the identical finding produced for the composite week sample. However, the average number of scenes of sexual content in the teen programs (6.7/hour) is substantially higher than the industry-wide level (5.0/hour) for sexual content overall.

That same pattern holds in the realm of talk about sex, with the frequency of programs that contain talk in the teen sample (68%) mirroring the identical level found in the composite week sample for television overall. However, the programs that teenagers watch most include more scenes of talk about sex (average of 6.4/hour), as compared to the composite week sample (average of 4.6/hour). The following examples illustrate the talk about sex scenes presented in the teen sample programs:

*Brooke and Felix are two high school students who entertain a relationship based solely on sex. Brooke has become concerned that Felix is becoming too “clingy” and wants to remind him that sex is ok, but there are no strings attached in terms of feelings or commitments. Inspired by her friend’s experience as a night club manager signing contracts with the artists and musicians, Brooke decides to spell out her demands so Felix will know where he stands with her. Brooke approaches Felix as he is washing his car. She jumps boldly onto the hood of the car, and announces, “I just came by to give you this. Yesterday you seemed a little sketchy on the terms of our agreement so I figured I’d clear it up for you.” “With a bunch of rules?” asks Felix. With a wicked smile on her face, Brooke continues, “And you better follow them if you ever want me to perform at your venue again.” Felix starts reading the list. “No sleeping over, no sleeping late, no non-sexual bathing ... Is this necessary?” he sneers. “You’ve been getting needy,” Brooke complains. Felix retorts, “Needy? Please, I have a date tonight. You are OK with that?” Smirking, Brooke flips her hair and directs Felix to item 12 on her list, “No asking if it’s OK to date other people ... So we’re clear?” she asks. “Crystal,” replies Felix. Satisfied, Brooke jumps off of the car and walks away. (One Tree Hill, WB)*

*Charlie, a young man stranded on a deserted island following a plane crash, is having a flashback to the days when he was a member of a rock band in the U.K. Standing in a Catholic confessional booth, Charlie explains to the priest that being in a band means temptations “come with the territory.” Girls throw themselves at rock musicians, he relates. Charlie asks forgiveness as he says, “Bless me Father for I have sinned. Last night I had physical relations with a girl I didn’t even know ... Right after that I had relations with another girl. Then straight after that I watched while they had relations with each another.” The priest tells Charlie that even though temptations are rampant, giving into them is a choice. The flashback concludes with Charlie announcing, “Well, then, I’ve made my choice. I have to quit the band.” (Lost, ABC)*

Nearly one in every two programs most watched by teens (45%) includes some portrayal of sexual behavior, a rate that exceeds the level in the composite week sample (35%). The number of scenes that include sexual behavior averages 2.1/hour, a close match with the composite week (2.0/hour). The behaviors that are depicted in the teen sample of programs are most often precursory, with 37% of shows including such portrayals (see Table 21). The most common behavior portrayed in these programs is passionate kissing, which accounts for 55% of all sexual behavior shown.

Table 20: Summary of Sexual Content: Top 20 Teen Programs

ANY SEXUAL CONTENT			
		2002	2005
Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Content		83%	70%
Of Programs With Any Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Sex	6.7	6.7
	N of Shows	49	42
	N of Hours	36.5	35.5
	N of Scenes	243	237
TALK ABOUT SEX			
Percentage of Programs With Any Talk About Sex		80%	68%
Of Programs With Any Talk About Sex:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Talk	6.0	6.4
	Average Level of Talk in Scenes	3.0	2.7
	N of Shows	47	41
	N of Hours	35	34.5
	N of Scenes With Talk About Sex	209	220
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR			
Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior		49%	45%
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	3.1 <sub>a</sub>	2.1 <sub>b</sub> *
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.1	2.0
	N of Shows	29	27
	N of Hours	20	23.5
	N of Scenes With Sexual Behavior	61	49
<b>TOTAL N OF SHOWS</b>		<b>59</b>	<b>60</b>

Note: Any given scene may contain talk about sex as well as sexual behavior. Due to the occurrence of such overlap within scenes, the data for talk about sex cannot be summed with the data for sexual behavior to yield the findings for any sexual content overall.

Findings with different subscripts that have one asterisk attached [e.g., a/b\*] are significantly different at p<.05.

*Marissa, a teenager from a wealthy family, has secretly been dating her family's yard boy, D.J., throughout the summer. Now at the start of fall, Marissa's boyfriend, Ryan, is returning to town after being away for the summer, and Marissa is confused about how to handle her relationship with D.J. As Marissa sits in front of her bedroom mirror putting on her lipstick in the morning, she suddenly notices D.J. at her bedroom door. "What are you doing in here?" she asks. "I work here," he responds casually as he moves close to her, blocking her from going anywhere. Uncomfortable, Marissa says, "I have to go," but D.J. is not moving. The couple embrace and kiss repeatedly as they touch one another's face and neck. After awhile, Marissa says she has to leave for school, and D.J. tells her he will still be at the house working when she returns. (The OC, Fox)*

Of the shows most frequently watched by teenagers, fewer than one in ten (8%) include portrayals of sexual intercourse. This frequency is slightly lower than the level observed in the composite week sample (11%). Interestingly, however, the teen program sample includes roughly twice the number of scenes per hour of intercourse portrayals (average of 1.8/hour) as compared to the composite week (average of 0.9/hour) in those shows that present sexual intercourse.

Table 21: Summary of Sexual Behavior: Top 20 Teen Programs

<b>SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OVERALL</b>			
		2002	2005
Percentage of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior		49%	45%
Of Programs With Any Sexual Behavior:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Behavior	3.1 <sub>a</sub>	2.1 <sub>b*</sub>
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.1	2.0
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	1.1	0.6
	N of Shows	29	27
	N of Hours	20	23.5
	N of Scenes with Sexual Behavior	61	49
	<b>PROGRAMS WITH PRECURSORY BEHAVIOR ONLY</b>		
Percentage of Programs With Precursory Behaviors Only		29%	37%
Of Programs With Precursory Behaviors Only:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Precursory Behavior	3.1 <sub>a</sub>	1.8 <sub>b*</sub>
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	1.8	1.7
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	0.6	0.3
	N of Shows	17	22
	N of Hours	13	19
	N of Scenes With Precursory Behavior	40	35
<b>PROGRAMS WITH SEXUAL INTERCOURSE</b>			
Percentage of Programs With Intercourse Behaviors		20%	8%
Of Programs With Intercourse Behaviors:	Average Number of Scenes Per Hour Containing Intercourse Behavior	2.1	1.8
	Average Level of Behavior in Scenes	2.7	2.6
	Average Level of Explicitness in Program	1.9	2.0
	N of Shows	12	5
	N of Hours	7	4.5
	N of Scenes With Intercourse	15	8
	N of All Sexual Behavior Scenes	21	14
<b>TOTAL N OF SHOWS</b>		<b>59</b>	<b>60</b>

Findings with different subscripts that have one asterisk attached [e.g., a/b\*] are significantly different at p<.05.

Across all scenes with sexual content in the teen sample, only 5% mention any risk and responsibility topics (see Table 22), almost the identical percentage observed for television overall (4%). Of the three categories of sexual risk and responsibility messages, the most common is sexual precaution, with 3% of sexual scenes addressing this topic, followed by the depiction of risks and/or negative consequences of sex (2%), and sexual patience (1%).

**Table 22: Distribution of Risk/Responsibility Topics Included in Scenes: Top 20 Teen Programs**

Types of Risk/Responsibility	N Of Scenes	Percentage of Sexual Scenes that Contain R/R	
		2002	2005
Sexual Precaution	2	1%	3%
Depiction of Risks/Negative Consequences	4	2%	2%
Sexual Patience	3	1%	1%
N Of Scenes With Any R/R	9	4%	5%
<b>Total N of Scenes With Sexual Content</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

‡ 5 cases contained two aspects of risk/responsibility within a single scene. Thus, a total of only 11 independent scenes were found to include any risk/responsibility.

Another perspective on the treatment of risk and responsibility topics is gained by examining the extent to which programs with sexual content devote at least some attention to these issues. Of the programs teens watch most, one in ten shows with sexual content (10%) include some risk or responsibility message (see Table 23). Among programs with intercourse-related content, that level is higher at one in every four programs (25%) that include such messages. Both of these frequencies are comparable although slightly lower than the patterns found in the overall television landscape, where 14% of programs with any sexual content and 27% of programs with intercourse-related content include messages about sexual risks or responsibilities, respectively.

**Table 23: Use of Sexual Risk/Responsibility Themes: Top 20 Teen Programs**

	ALL PROGRAMS WITH ANY SEXUAL CONTENT		ALL PROGRAMS WITH INTERCOURSE RELATED CONTENT	
	2002	2005	2002	2005
Percentage Of Shows With Any Mention of R/R	12%	10%	45%	25%
N of Shows With Any Mention of R/R	6	4	5	3
Percentage Of Shows With Primary Emphasis On R/R	4%	5%	18%	17%
N of Shows With Primary Emphasis On R/R	2	2	2	2
<b>Total N of Shows</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>

Note: Programs with intercourse-related content include shows with scenes in which there is talk about intercourse that has already occurred; or in which intercourse behavior is depicted or strongly implied.

Finally, a noteworthy finding is revealed by the analysis of shows that place overall emphasis on sexual risk or responsibility concerns. Among the programs that teenagers watch most, 5% of those with sexual content incorporate a strong risk or responsibility theme, while 17% of the shows that include intercourse-related content feature that same emphasis. Both of these findings stand quite distinct from the patterns observed across television overall, where only 1% of programs with any sexual content, and no shows with intercourse-related content (0%) placed a primary emphasis on sexual risk or responsibility messages.

The following example illustrates an episode that placed strong emphasis on a risk or responsibility theme in a program that featured intercourse-related content:

*Simon Camden is the young adult son of a Protestant minister and the fourth born of seven children. Though his family has always stressed the importance of abstinence until marriage, Simon is rebellious and has chosen to live a sexually active life. In this episode, Simon faces the possibility that he may have contracted an STD from a night of casual sex. The episode begins with Simon preparing breakfast for the female companion he had recently met and just slept with for the first time. Over eggs and toast, the young woman tries to broach a sensitive subject with Simon. "You might not care about me if I told you something about me that I should have told you last night," she says. Simon doesn't quite get it at first, and asks what she means. She continues with her indirect approach, responding, "Well, surely you know when you're with a woman, you're with every man she's ever been with?" Finally sensing where the conversation is heading, Simon looks her in the eye and tells her pointedly, "Say what you want to say." The scene ends at this point, leaving the rest of the story to the viewer's imagination.*

*Visibly shaken by the turn of events, Simon tries to reach his older brother Matt, a medical doctor. Forced to leave a message on Matt's cell phone, Simon stutters awkwardly, "Uh, hey Matt, it's me, it's Simon, ah, Simon Camden. Umm, call me. Please. Whenever you get this message just, just call me. Uhh, I'm in trouble, possibly, I, I don't know." Unable to reach Matt and desperate for advice, Simon contacts his brother-in-law Kevin, and his STD scare quickly involves the entire family. Kevin informs his wife Lucy, Simon's sister, of Simon's painful situation. Lucy thinks that they should tell their parents but Kevin protests, "No, I don't think we have to tell Dad that Simon could have a sexually transmitted disease ... Believe me, he's fine." Simon had shared with Kevin that "a condom was involved." Matt finally reaches Simon and tries to reassure him that he should be okay because of the precaution he took with the condom. But Matt's frustration and anger come through as he tells his younger brother, "Now you get to go in and get tested and wait for the results and go through the miserable consequences of being involved with somebody you don't even know and having casual sex!" The episode draws to a close as Simon begins to emotionally reveal to his father, Reverend Eric Camden, the nature of the problem he now faces. (7<sup>th</sup> Heaven, WB)*

In sum, programs most frequently viewed by teens include as much or more sexual content as is found on television overall. While the frequency of sexual risk or responsibility messages at the scene level is generally comparable to the norms observed industry-wide, programs in the teen sample have a much greater likelihood of including risk or responsibility messages when more advanced sexual content is included in a given show. The programs most frequently viewed by teens are also more likely to place primary emphasis on a sexual risk or responsibility theme, as compared to other programs airing on television overall.

## **CHANGE OVER TIME SINCE THE 2001/2002 TELEVISION SEASON**

The strategy of studying the programs most frequently viewed by teenagers as a complement to the other analyses in this ongoing study was only implemented in our previous *Sex on TV 3* report. Thus, the over-time comparisons that can be drawn in this section are limited, comparing findings solely from the 2001-02 season to the current evidence regarding 2004-05 programs. One further point worth considering is that the relatively modest size of the sample of teen programs (N=60) diminishes the power of the statistical comparisons in this area. While this sample size is consistent with other stand-alone content analysis studies of sex in television programming most popular with adolescents (e.g., Aubrey, 2004, N = 84; Ward, 1995, N = 36), it nonetheless reduces the prospect that over-time comparisons that appear substantially different on their face will achieve statistical significance, as compared to the larger sample used for the overall findings in this report. Indeed, relatively few comparisons in this section attain statistical significance, so most of these findings about changes over time should be interpreted with some caution.

With that caveat, it appears that the frequency and amount of sex in programs most watched by teens has declined in several though not all areas of our measures. In terms of downward trends, the percentage of programs with sexual content moved from 83% to 70%; the proportion of programs including talk about sex shifted from 80% to 68%; and the percentage of programs presenting sexual behaviors went from 49% to 45% over the period from 2001-02 to 2004-05. Similarly, a significant decline in the average number of scenes of

sexual behavior was observed over this period, from 3.1 to 2.1 per hour. Perhaps the most noteworthy difference was that the frequency of programs that included sexual intercourse declined from one in five (20%) in 2001-02 to about one in twelve (8%) in 2004-05. This difference approached but did not attain statistical significance ( $p=.06$ ).

Some indices showed more stability. For example, while the percentage of programs with sexual content was down, the average number of scenes per hour held constant at 6.7, which is a frequency that exceeds the norms for both television overall (5.0) and prime time network programming (5.9) in 2004-05. Moreover, the average number of scenes per hour of talk about sex was slightly higher at 6.4 in 2004-05, as compared to 6.0 in 2001-02.

One possible explanation for the reduced frequency of sexual messages may be found in the shifting tides of television program genres. In 2001-02, the list of top 20 programs viewed by teenagers was dominated by comedies and dramas (75%), while only 10% of shows were in the reality genre. In 2004-05, the proportion of reality programs (e.g., *American Idol*, *America's Next Top Model*) had tripled and represented 30% of programs overall. Analysis from the composite week sample indicates that comedies and dramas have among the highest rates of sexual content (both at 87%) across all genres while reality programs (28%) have the lowest. Considering the heavier emphasis on reality programs in the current teen sample, it is not particularly surprising that the frequency of sexual content has declined. This shift in teenage viewing preferences may result in slightly less exposure to sexual messages than was common a few years ago. Nonetheless, 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.

Finally, in terms of change over time in the treatment of sexual risk or responsibility concerns, there was very little change in the proportion of scenes with sexual content that included any risk messages. In 2001-02, 4% of scenes with sexual content in the programs most watched by teens included some element of risk or responsibility, compared to 5% in 2004-05. The largest aspect of this shift was in the area of sexual precaution, where the frequency addressing this topic moved from 1% to 3% of all scenes with sexual content.

Rather modest shifts were also observed in the frequency with which risk or responsibility messages were included in programs in the teen sample. In 2001-02, 12% of programs with sexual content included some risk or responsibility message, compared to 10% in 2004-05. Similarly, the percentage of programs with sexual content that featured an overall emphasis on risk or responsibility concerns moved only from 4% in 2001-02 to 5% in 2004-05.

A more palpable change was identified in the frequency of sexual risk messages in programs that included intercourse-related content. In 2001-02, nearly half (45%) of the shows in this category included some sexual risk or responsibility messages, whereas in 2004-05 only one in four (25%) such programs reflected this approach. Due to the extremely small sample size of programs in this category, this change is not statistically significant, and one should be cautious about drawing conclusions. Programs in the teen sample that present intercourse-related content are by far the most likely to emphasize an overall risk or responsibility theme throughout the show, and this pattern has held stable across both times of measurement. In 2001-02, 18% of the programs with intercourse-related content included an overall risk or responsibility theme, with that frequency remaining roughly steady at 17% in 2004-05. By way of comparison, in the composite week sample for 2004-05, only 1% of shows with sexual content featured an overall emphasis on risk or responsibility messages, while programs with intercourse-related content (N=156) included no shows with a risk or responsibility theme.

In summary, the television programs most popular with teenagers contain a considerable amount of sexual content. By most measures, the levels of sexual content observed are slightly less than in 2001-02, but still match or exceed the norms identified in the composite week sample for television programming overall. The likelihood of encountering sexual risk or responsibility messages in the teen programs is not markedly different than the patterns for television overall, with one noteworthy exception. Programs in the teen sample have the greatest probability of including strong overall emphasis on a sexual risk or responsibility theme, a finding that is particularly pronounced in shows with intercourse-related content. Those patterns have both held consistent over time since 2001-02.