

**Teenage sexuality in the media**  
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***The opinions expressed in this publication are of the researchers and not necessarily of the Health Education Board for Scotland***

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Aim**

The aim of the research was to begin to map out the main media messages available in Scotland relating to teenage sexuality, and the implications these might have for teen sexual health and sexual health promotion. It addressed questions such as: how is teenage sexuality represented in the newspapers and in media aimed at young people such as youth magazines and TV 'teen soaps'? What 'type' of teenagers are represented? What sort of sexual negotiation is demonstrated? How are male and female roles represented? What examples are shown, if any, of discussions between young people about sexual health and of safer sex?

### **Method**

We examined coverage of teenage sexuality across television, newspapers and magazines in Scotland during one, randomly selected, week: 19th April - 25th April, 1999. We monitored:

- Eighteen newspapers (national and regional Scottish),
- Nine top-selling youth magazines
- Eighty eight and a half hours of television (selected to include peak viewing times for youth audiences and specially targeted 'teen' programmes).

This monitoring identified 26 newspaper articles, 196 magazine items and 69 television scenes or episodes which addressed/represented teenage sexuality. The sample for analysis therefore consisted of a total of 291 individual items.

### **A note on 'representativeness'**

The week selected for monitoring was an 'average' week in the sense that there were no major news events during that time to precipitate coverage of teenage sexuality. The sample is, however, a limited 'snapshot' sample that does not address ongoing story lines and shifts in coverage over time. The report should therefore be read as cross-section of coverage rather than a comment on individual programmes or print media outlets.

### **Findings**

In order to place the findings in context it is first necessary to outline the obvious differences between representations in diverse media.

#### **Newspaper representations**

Most newspaper reporting around teenage sexuality in our sample concerned the risk of assault, exploitation or unintended pregnancy. Most of the newspaper articles focused on:

- Sex crimes (with teenagers as perpetrators or victims)
- Concerns about teenage sexual health (especially teenage pregnancy).

Newspapers, however, also include different types of format such as 'advice pages'. These were found to address readers' dilemmas, particularly around age differences (teenagers attracted to older individuals or vice versa).

### **Television representations**

By contrast to the newspapers, the television programmes aimed at teenagers (predominantly in the form of drama and entertainment programmes) gave more emphasis to the pleasures and attractions of sexual relationships. The scenes around teenage sexuality in our television sample mainly involved conversations between teenagers about sex (from sexual teasing, bravado and flirting to explicit discussions about sexual attraction or intentions). The outcome of such sexual negotiation was not always to have intercourse however, and the television sample showed young women in particular successfully resisting pressure to have sex.

### **Youth magazines**

Magazines aimed at young people combined elements of newspaper representation (including 'news items') with short stories portraying relationships, readers' letters, advice sections and health information. The content varied dramatically between magazines aimed at a male and female readership and between those targeted at younger and older girls/women. The predominant themes around sex and sexuality across the nine magazines examined were:

- Sexual suggestiveness/titillation (particularly a feature of the 'lad's mag' *Front* and the computer magazine *Playstation*)
- Discussions of sexual acts/behaviour (ranging from advice on how to kiss to how to perform fellatio)
- Discussion of sexual health issues (particularly evident in magazines aimed at older female teenagers)

Other issues addressed in our magazine sample included: sexual violence, romantic relationships and concerns about sexual identity.

### **Media differences**

Attention to the diversity of form and focus within the different media outlined above is crucial to understanding how teenage sexuality was represented and this is explored in more depth in the body of this report. In brief we would highlight the following:

- Adults/ parents reading about teenage sexuality in the newspapers had their attention focused on danger. This was quite different from emphasis of the 'youth media', which was on the pleasure and thrills of relationships and their heartache (rather than physical consequences).
- Newspapers were not only driven by 'news values', which prioritised coverage of sex crimes or 'epidemics' in teenage pregnancies. They also had advice pages within which issues such as relationships between people of different ages were explored.
- While magazines aimed at young women offered finely age-graded representations, the material we examined which targeted young men was much more one-dimensional.
- Magazines aimed at young women and those aimed at young men promoted completely different agendas and often explicitly illustrated a 'gender divide'. However, they 'fudged' rather than examine the supposed differences between sexual attitudes among girls/women and boys/men.

### Common themes, assumptions and absences

In spite of important differences across the media in our sample, there were also striking similarities which ran through the media and which are summarised here.

- Media representations of young people over the age of 16 tended to assume that these young people were either already heterosexually active or that they soon would be.
- Gay teenagers were rarely represented in the sample, and what references there were usually focused on problems or anxieties such as in 'agony' letters from teenagers concerned about their own or their friends' sexual identity (e.g. 'She touched me', *J-17*). There were also several veiled references to male homosexuality as a threat to heterosexual identity. In fact, there were more instances of boys/men asserting that they were *not* gay than vice versa. Three different programmes within the television sample, for example, included episodes which played with the 'humour' of a male inadvertently appearing to be gay.
- Lesbianism did not seem to be seen as such a threat. This is in part due to the fact that it was presented with a male focus. Lesbian-style images were used as titillation (in the boy's/men's magazine, *Front*) and lesbianism was explicitly discussed as a 'personal' and shifting identity in one of the soap operas as characters engaged in a broadly 'tolerant' and accepting discussion of a female-female-male 'triangle'.
- Representations of teenage sexuality focused on young white people. There were only three non-white teenagers in our television sample. All three of these characters were Afro-Caribbean (two boys, one girl). One of these portrayals depicted the boy as an object of humour, with very stereotyped masculine behaviour (interested only in football or sex, not interested in talking with his girlfriend).
- The teenagers in our television sample were usually thin, conventionally attractive and had no visible disability. The media (press, magazines and television) ignored the sexuality of teenagers with disabilities. There was only one reference to a disability in the entire sample and this was a very brief, half 'humorous' 'news' item about a case in which a rapist claimed he did not understand his victim's protests because she was deaf and made them in sign language. (*Front*, April 1999)
- Throughout the media sample, young women were represented as being more interested in emotions and relationships, whereas young men were portrayed as being focused on sex.
- Girls/women were often represented as being able/encouraged to resist unwanted sexual activity, particularly if they were virgins. Magazines oriented toward a young female market included advice letters and short stories which encouraged girls/women to determine when they were 'ready' for sex for the first time. There was no such representation or support for boys/men in our sample. Teenage boys were portrayed as always 'up for it' and it is they, rather than girls, who were portrayed as initiating sexual contact.
- Advice and 'agony' pages in both the young men's and the young women's magazines included sexual health information, but this information was much more detailed and explicit in publications aimed at a female audience. A

wide range of help-line telephone numbers were also displayed in these pages.

- Contraception, safer sexual practices and 'consent' were often represented as the responsibility of girls/women across different media outlets.
- In newspapers reports which problematised teenage pregnancy, conception seemed to be presented as something that girls did on their own. The boys or men involved in teenage conceptions were invisible and the focus on teenage mothers was not matched by concern about teenage fathers. Within our press sample only one male involved in a teenage pregnancy was subject to scrutiny, and this was because he had previously murdered a child (e.g. 'Child killer to be a Dad', *Press and Journal* 20 April 1999).
- Although the media show the potential consequences of unprotected heterosexual intercourse (e.g. unwanted pregnancy), there was little integrated discussion or representation of how young people might negotiate safer sex. For example, in the television portrayals of teenage sexual relationships we examined there was not a single conversation between young people about such issues. While young people were shown talking about sexual attraction and whether or not they wanted sex, contraception was never mentioned. The only reference to contraceptive use within the 88<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> hours of television we viewed consisted of a 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> second shot of an open condom packet lying on a bedside table. The only account of 'conversation' about contraception presented in the newspapers was in an article about rape in which the victim 'pleaded with him to stop, or at least use a condom' (*The Herald* 23 April 1999). This lack of media portrayals or 'scripts' for discussing the use of condoms (or other safer sex techniques) is important given research which shows that prior discussion of condom use is the most important predictor of their use (see Henderson, *et al.* submitted).

### **Concluding remarks**

The mass media are an important source of information about teenage sexuality both for parents and for teenagers (Todd et al, 1999). In our sample, there were strong differences in the way in which the media addressed different audiences (teenager/adult, male/female) and important differences in the ways in which teenage sexuality was portrayed in different outlets. The media included a great deal of useful information and some youth magazines may be invaluable in the extent and explicitness of the advice they give and the problems they raise. Teen dramas also often dealt sensitively with the dilemmas facing young people and newspaper reporting highlighted problems and threats. However, much of the media representation perpetuated gender/sexual stereotypes, failed to represent teenage diversity and offered particularly limited representations to/for/of young men. There was very little discussion or acknowledgement of male responsibility for contraception/safer sex practices. There were also gaps in the representations of teenage lesbians and gay men and in presenting young people with scripts for talking about safer sex.

In the context of sexual health issues such as sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, and the high attempted suicide rate among young gay men and lesbians there are further potential contributions that the media could make to providing thought-provoking and positive images for young people.

Further research would be needed to clarify the generalisability of our sample and to explore the evolving story lines of teen drama. It would also be useful to know how the producers of teen dramas or magazines perceive their role and judge their own products. Further research would also be needed to examine how teenagers relate to these images and negotiate their actions and understandings within the context of the patterns and absences in representation outlined above.

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## 1. Introduction

When young people leave childhood and enter adolescence, they experience numerous physical, emotional, intellectual and emotional changes. As sexuality becomes increasingly important, they look to many sources for advice and information. While teenagers might learn about sex from their parents and/or the classroom, they often cite friends and the mass media as their main sources of information and influence (Currie *et al.*, 1997; Gunn & Balme, in press; Balme & Gunn, submitted; Wellings, 1996). Popular media can play a powerful role in shaping the knowledge and attitudes of young people (see Strasburger, 1995) and can facilitate (or inhibit) discussion about issues of sex and sexual health.

There has been a perceived proliferation of images of teenage sex and sexuality in the mass media in recent years. This has been accompanied by much debate concerning the sexual explicitness of the images portrayed. Much of this concern is centred on the belief that the media encourage young people to think that they should have active sex lives and should experiment with a wide range of sexual practices. Previous research in the US has suggested that the media not only perpetuate sexual stereotypes and glamorise unhealthy behaviours, but they fail to portray the consequences of sexual behaviour (Lowry & Shidler, 1993; Green, 1990). This research notes that sexual activity on television in particular rarely refers to contraception or protection, yet the incidence of pregnancy and STIs is low.

Given Scotland's high teenage pregnancy rate<sup>i</sup> (and what this implies about sexual activity and the practice of 'safer sex') it is important that health promoters are aware of how, where and whether young people come into contact with sound, reliable information about sex. More broadly it is important to look at the types of images, behaviours and conversations represented in the press and on television. (There has been very little research around this issue, and what studies there are have mainly been carried out in North America see, for example, Sapolsky & Tabarlet, 1991; Garner, Sterk & Adams, 1998)

### 1.1 Aim

The aim of the research was to begin to map out the main media messages (particularly media aimed at teenagers) in Scotland relating to teenage sexuality, and the implications these might have for sexual health and sexual health promotion. It addressed questions such as: how is teenage sexuality represented in the newspapers and in media aimed at teenagers such as youth magazines and TV 'teen soaps'? What sorts of teenagers are represented? What sort of sexual negotiation is shown? How are male and female roles portrayed? What examples are shown, if any, of discussions between young people about sexual health or safer sex?

## **1.2 Method**

This study covered newspaper, magazines and television, for one week: Monday 19th April to Sunday 25th April 1999. The focus was on media outlets consumed a) in Scotland and b) by young people. From this sample we collected all representations of teenage sexuality (sex acts, relationships, sexual interactions or sexualised representations) and teenage sexual health issues (contraception, pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), AIDS, etc.). We coded each item for the way in which teenagers were represented, who was represented, the nature of sexual interaction or comment and specific reference to contraception, pregnancy/ abortion, STIs, male homosexuality/ lesbianism (including in helpline lists), violence/ abuse and prior negotiation/consent.

## **1.3 A note on 'representativeness'**

The week selected for analysis was an 'average' week in the sense that there were no major news events during that time to precipitate coverage of teenage sexuality. The sample is, however, a limited 'snapshot' sample that does not address ongoing story lines and shifts in coverage over time. The report should therefore be read as an analysis of a cross-section of coverage rather than a comment on individual programmes.

The following three sections discuss the findings from each type of media (newspapers, magazines and television in turn).

## 2. Teenage sex and sexuality in the press

This section of the report is based on the content analysis of newspaper coverage of teenage sexuality.

### 2.1. Sample and method for the newspaper analysis

The newspaper sample covered 10 daily and 8 Sunday newspapers for the whole week (19th April to Sunday 25th April 1999). The daily papers were: *The Scotsman*, *The Herald*, *The Press & Journal* (Aberdeen), *Dundee Courier*, *Inverness Courier*, *Evening News* (Edinburgh), *Evening Times* (Glasgow), *Daily Record*, *Scottish Daily Express*, and *Scottish Daily Mail*. The Sunday papers were: *Scotland on Sunday*, *Sunday Herald*, *Sunday Express*, *Mail on Sunday*, *News of the World*, *Sunday Mirror*, *Sunday Post* (Dundee), and *Sunday Mail*. In total we examined 68 individual newspaper editions including all sections of each paper such as news reports, feature articles, letters to problem pages and comment.

### 2.2. Summary of findings from the newspaper analysis

There were 26 articles in which teen sexuality, teen sexual health, or a teenage sexual actor and/or subject was the main focus. There were an additional nine articles that made passing reference to such topics.<sup>ii</sup> A breakdown of the main issues covered in 26 of the items focused on teenage sexuality shows that, during the sample week, the majority of items relating to teenage sexuality fell into the following four categories: criminal sex acts (n=7), teen pregnancy (n=7), contraception (n=3), and age differences (n=6). A further 3 items dealt with a variety of other issues. As the qualitative analysis that follows suggests, in most of these categories teenage sexuality was depicted as vulnerable and/or dangerous.

#### *Criminal sexual acts*

There were seven news reports in the sample that depicted teenage actors and/or subjects under the broad heading of criminal sexual acts. Four items reported teenage sex offenders. There were two articles about an 18-year-old man who admitted to raping a 20-year-old female student after being confronted with DNA evidence (*The Herald* 23 April 1999; *The Scotsman* 23 April 1999). Another article reported a case where a 14-year-old boy was charged with the rape of a 49-year-old man and assault on his female partner (*Press and Journal* 19 April 1999). The fourth article reported that a youth was being hunted after a four-year-old boy was sexually assaulted in a wood (*Sunday Mail* 25 April 1999).

Three more stories in the main sample concerned teenage victims of sexual assault, two of which were reported in brief. The first of these reported that a former soap actor had been cleared of taking part in the gang rape of a 17-year-old girl (*Press and Journal* 22 April 1999). The second report related to a woman sentenced to 30 years imprisonment in the US. She had forced her 15-year-old daughter to perform sex acts with her in a prison visiting room so that

her inmate husband could watch (*The Herald* 24 April 1999). The third report concerned staff at a denominational prep school who assaulted pupils during the 1970s and 80s (*The Scotsman* 22 April 1999). (It is worth noting that most of these reported sexual assaults 4 out of 7 cases involved same-sex abuse.)

### *Teenage pregnancy*

Teenage pregnancy featured as the main focus in seven items. On 20 April, several papers reported the pregnancy of the 16-year-old girlfriend of 'Scotland's youngest child killer': CHILD KILLER TO BE A DAD (*Press and Journal* 20 April 1999); CHILD KILLER TO BE A FATHER - Exclusive: Anger over affair with girl, 16, that began behind bars (*Daily Record* 20 April 1999); CHILD KILLER KEITH SET TO BE A FATHER - Outrage: victim's family hits out over affair with teenage girl (*Daily Record* 20 April 1999).

Most of the discussion centred on the 20-year-old's conviction for 'bludgeoning' a three-year old boy to death, when he himself was 11 years old. In its lead article, the *Daily Record* reported the guardian of the victim as saying: 'It's unbelievable to think that someone who killed a toddler could be about to become a dad. No child will ever be safe in his company'. The mother, who was described as 'troubled', was reported as being under Social Work care for behavioural problems. The story was picked up again by the *Daily Record* the following day, when the girl was reported as having suffered a miscarriage: CHILD KILLER LOSES BABY - Schoolgirl lover loses baby (*Daily Record* 21 April 1999).

The second reference to teenage pregnancy was on the TV pages of the *Evening Times*. The item related to a documentary (included in the television sample, see below) to be shown on Channel 4 that evening: BABY AGONY OF GYM SLIP HAYLEY (*Evening Times* 20 April 1999). The programme, according to the newspaper, followed 15-year-old Hayley who was pregnant and wanted 'nothing to do with the father of her baby'. Hayley's mother wanted her to have an abortion. This results in her running away from home and being taken under the care of Social Services. The newspaper summary describes how 'Hayley would rather be out clubbing than settling into a responsible routine'.

The final item looking at this topic was about a high school where 'almost one in ten 13 to 15-year-old pupils is a mother' (GIRLS MUST LEARN THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN BABIES, *Mail on Sunday* 25 April 1999). The report linked the school's 'troubles' to a growing trend of 'gymslip motherhood' which, the article stated, 'continued unabated'. This trend was seen to result from general promiscuity exhibited by local girls: 'Many girls in Arbroath admit an early introduction to sex'; 'A lot of girls (are) sexually active'. What is more, 'Most of them know what they are doing' and so the problem to be addressed is 'persuading school girls not to become mothers'.

Accompanying quotes from the experts linked teenage pregnancy to the widespread availability of contraception; an 'anything goes' mentality and low expectations amongst teenage girls. There were only two passing references in the article to the fathers involved in conceiving these babies, one of whom was a

described as a 'school friend', the other a 25-year-old boyfriend. There was no discussion of the role young men played in teenage pregnancy, nor of male sexual behaviour.

There was one further reference to teenage pregnancy, in a feature entitled: DOUBLE TROUBLE - WHY NICOLE AND NATALIE ARE ANYTHING BUT ALL SAINTLY SISTERS (*Daily Mail* 20 April 1999). The article, about Nicole and Natalie Appleton (sisters from the pop group All Saints), described the sisters' teenage years as 'boy crazy':

the Appletons were members of the cheerleading squad and would sneak off to an abandoned ski lodge for booze and bonfire parties with the football team ... when other teenage girls were in bed, Natalie and Nicole, aged 15 and 14, were dressing up in slinky cocktail dresses and singing cabaret in hotel bars where their mother worked. (*Daily Mail* 20 April 1999)

The article then went on to describe Natalie's relationship with a stripper: 'She was 17, he was 23. Within months Natalie was pregnant and the couple's daughter, Rachel, was born in 1991'. The couple have since separated. 'While Rachel knows Natalie is her mother, Mrs Appleton is responsible for her upbringing'. Again the implication is that teen mums are irresponsible. In the article the teenage Natalie was described as 'deeply immature and prone to outbursts': 'she'd break the wing mirrors and try to rip the [car] doors off their hinges'.

### *Contraception*

During our sample week the 'spiralling' teenage birth rate was attributed to the lack of affordable contraception in *The Scottish Express*, who ran the headline: BABY BOOM BLAMED ON £1 CONDOM - Teenage births spark price probe (*The Scottish Express* 22 April 1999). This was followed by an editorial entitled: PRICING OUT PROTECTION (*The Scottish Express* 22 April 1999). The main article, written by the consumer affairs correspondent, reported that the Office of Fair Trading was to examine whether Durex, the condom market leader, was forcing up prices. A spokesperson from the Family Planning Association said that current prices were 'artificially high', and that 'if condoms weren't so expensive more people would use them'. This was followed by a discussion of the current level of teen pregnancy in the UK (i.e. 94,000 teenage girls giving birth each year) and increasing rates of STIs (notably Chlamydia, gonorrhoea, and HIV) among 16-19 year olds.

This link between condom pricing policy and the current rate of teen pregnancy was reiterated in the *Express's* opinion column, which commented: 'Today a packet of three Featherlite condoms costs £2.75, compared to £1.97 in 1994. What a surprise then, that Britain has the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in Europe'.

The remaining references to contraception within our sample related primarily to the Pill. There was one letter to a problem page asking about facts about the Pill

for a teenage friend: SHE NEEDS FACTS ABOUT THE PILL (*Daily Record* 21 April 1999). The writer is advised that the Pill is a means of preventing pregnancy that does not suit every woman. She is informed that there are other contraceptive methods which also guard against STIs. The remaining items on the contraceptive Pill included within our sample simply referenced teenagers in passing. Three related to the publication of a new report that questioned the safety of the Pill. Professor Kim McPherson warned that confidence in the Pill may be misplaced, since 'the effects on women who start using the Pill in their early to mid-teens have been overlooked in the numerous studies into its long term safety' (*Daily Mail* 21 April 1999). Articles also made reference to the rise in teen pregnancies and 'surge' in abortions that followed a similar scare in 1995/1996. All of the items in this section failed to make any reference to men, or male sexual activity, although the report on condom pricing policy did refer to 'youngsters' in addition to 'girls'. (There were some in passing references to contraception or protection in other items. The reporting of a rape case stated that the victim 'pleaded with him to stop, or at least use a condom', *The Herald* 23 April 1999).

### *Age difference*

Items about age differences largely consisted of a series of letters to newspaper problem pages. The first of these letters was responding to an agony aunt's previous advice to an 11 or 12-year-old girl not to go out with a 14-year-old boy. The writer says 'two years is nothing and puberty comes early in girls'. He or she claims to know a 25-year-old male in a relationship with a 13-year-old girl. The agony aunt replies:

A 25-year-old man going out with a 13-year-old girl is more like child abuse and, if there is any sex involved, paedophilia - which just in case it has missed your warped little mind is a serious offence which deserves severe punishment. (*Daily Record* 19 April 1999)

A very similar letter appeared in the Wednesday edition of the same paper - a 'reader' responding to the same agony aunt's advice: 'I know a couple where he is 25 and she is 13 and ... I can't see any harm in it.' Again the columnist describes such a relationship as 'unsavoury', 'paedophilia' and 'child abuse':

No matter how happy she might be, it's still exploitation and it is still wrong. Especially if they are in a sexual relationship. (*Daily Record* 21 April 1999)

A couple of similar letters appeared in the *News of the World's* problem pages: MY TOYBOY LUST IN WEB OF DEPRAVITY; A CRUSH TO SQUASH (both *News of the World* 25 April 1999). The first purported to be from a 23-year-old married woman in 'an embarrassing situation'. She had met a 15-year-old boy through an internet chat line, the couple had got together and then had sex. She is worried that she is 'some sort of pervert', and asks the columnist whether she should carry on with the affair. The agony aunt replies:

You're breaking the law by having sex with this lad and risk arrest. You're using him sexually and you could cause him emotional damage. He is too young to handle a sexual relationship. (*News of the World* 25 April 1999)

The second letter was from an 18-year-old woman, claiming to be in love with her next door neighbour. He was described as 44 years old, and married with a child. The agony aunt advises: 'You can and must control your feelings, because this man ... is far too old for you' (*News of the World* 25 April 1999).

The final item in the main sample that falls under this heading was a letter in the *Evening News*: 'NO STRAIGHT ANSWER ON SEX' (*Evening News* 24 April 1999). Writing about the House of Lords vote against lowering the age of consent for homosexual males, the author comments on a claim that lowering the age of consent would put vulnerable young men at risk from older predators:

Is she not forgetting that 16 to 18-year-old heterosexuals are equally vulnerable? Take the recent case of Graham Rix, the Chelsea assistant manager, who preyed on a 15-year-old girl. Older women can also take advantage of vulnerable young men. I suggest that any 16 or 17-year-old, whether gay or heterosexual, finds it difficult to take on a responsible sexual relationship. Their maturity in this area is in no doubt and must surely be borne out in the amount of young single mothers. (*Evening News* 24 April 1999)

He concludes that the age of consent should be equalised at 18 for everyone.<sup>iii</sup>

### **2.3 Commentary on the newspaper analysis**

From the examples presented above, it can be seen that the overall picture of teenage sexuality presented in our sample of the Scottish press was one of risk and danger. Adolescence was depicted as a period of latent sexual energy under siege from countless predators. Sex was both a threat, and a symptom of teenagers' dangerous precocity. Hence, where sex was the focus, the typical teenager was perceived as immature and irresponsible. Sex was portrayed as having only negative consequences for this group; teenage sex is seen as a threat to the individuals concerned and often as a threat to society (see Clarke, 1975). This threat was gendered: teenage boys were depicted as potentially threatening to others. Teenage girls, on the other hand, were presented, as at risk of unwanted pregnancy, ill effects of the Pill, predatory adults and sexual attack. It is girls, rather than boys, who were seen as responsible for contraception and preventing unwanted pregnancy.

### 3. Teenage sex and sexuality on television

This section of the report discusses the television treatment of issues relating to teenage sex and sexuality.

#### 3.1 *Sample and method for the television analysis*

In total we recorded 88½ hours of television during the sample week. This included all programmes between 4-6pm on each of the terrestrial channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5). We also recorded a series of programmes that fell outside this time slot but which were targeted at teenagers or have a large teenage audience. These included 'teen dramas' such as *Dawson's Creek* and *Hollyoaks*, as well as a range of soap operas, including: *Eastenders*, *Brookside*, *Emmerdale*, *Coronation Street* and *High Road*. From this sample we collected all representations of teenage sexuality (sex acts, sexual relationships, sexual interactions, sexualised representations and sexual health).

#### 3.2 *Summary of findings from the television analysis*

The sample included five main types of format: chat shows and dating shows, children's magazine programmes, music programmes, and fictional TV such as soaps and teen dramas.

*Chat shows and dating shows:* Although including extensive use of innuendo and discussion of dating/ sexuality (e.g. 'I go for treat 'em mean, keep 'em keen kind of guys'), the examples in our sample were not about teenagers.

*Children's magazine programmes:* Again, these did not portray teenage sexuality. However, there were some examples of innuendo by/ among the presenters.

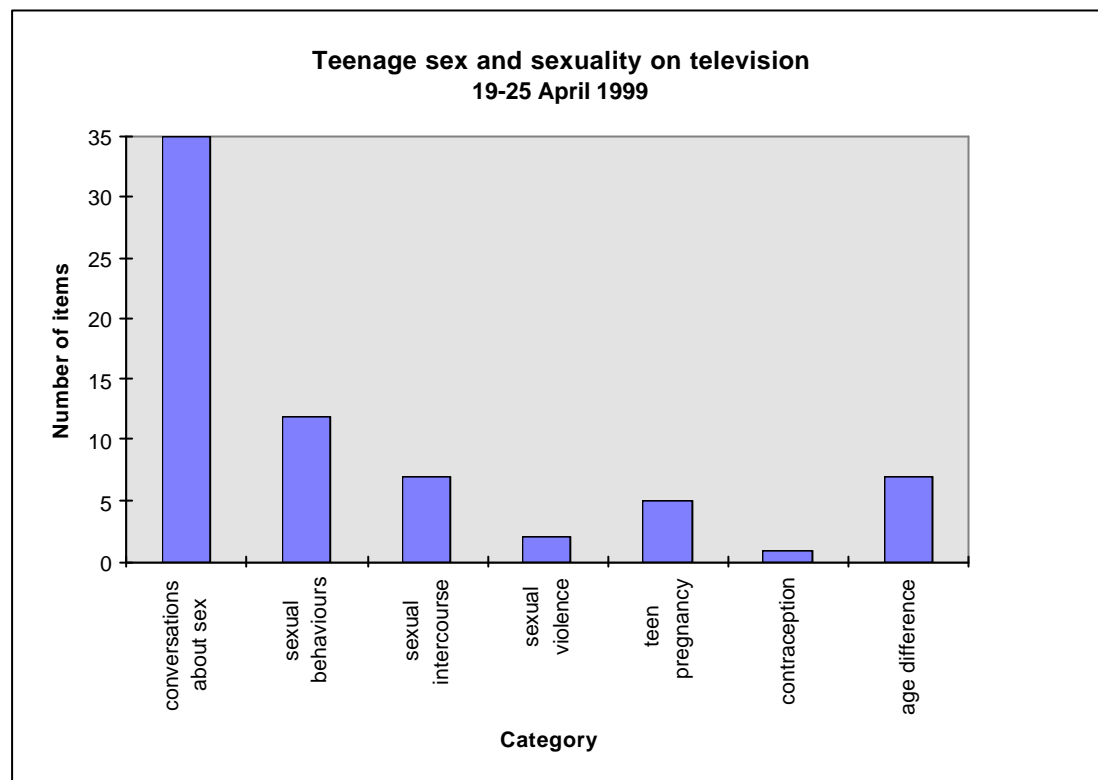
*Music programmes:* Whilst the music programmes included in our sample did not make explicit reference to sexuality (and/or teenage sexuality), there were numerous seductive displays of the body during dance routines and music videos.

*Documentaries:* There were two relevant documentaries: *The Decision* and *Trading Places* (a children's programme in the 4-6pm slot that follows a group of teenagers on a school French exchange). *The Decision* portrayed a pregnant teenager in a mixed but broadly 'sympathetic' light.

*Fictional TV programmes:* These programmes included the most extensive and explicit portrayals of teenage sexuality. Young people in sexual relationships/ situations, and sometimes explicit sexual negotiation, were portrayed in story lines such as: abortion (*Coronation Street*), rape (*Brookside*), flirting, wooing or making passes (*Neighbours*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Coronation Street*).

We located 69 items in the sample that expressly related to *teenage* sexuality. Coding was done according to each scene. A single scene may contain a number of items (e.g. implied intercourse *and* implied contraception).<sup>iv</sup> The content of the main sample fell into eight main categories, summarised in the following bar chart (Figure 1):

**Figure 1: Main focus of items about teenage sex and sexuality on television**



#### *Conversations about sex*

The predominant portrayal of teenage sexuality on television during our sample week involved conversations about sex, with 35 items falling under this heading. This category included sexual negotiation (n=5), flirting or dating (n=9), discussions about the 'opposite sex' (n=14), and male bravado and/or teasing (e.g. about sexual prowess or sexual identity) (n=7).

In interactions between the sexes, the general picture was of boys/ men as pursuers and girls/women as the pursued.<sup>v</sup> Male characters were found to initiate most sexual behaviour and conversation, whereas females were depicted as responsible for managing male wants and limiting their access. For example, in one teen drama (*Sweet Valley High*) a group of holidaying high school students were assigned a chaperone whose policy was: 'No men!'. Policing the students involved the chaperone running after them with a whistle and intervening when any of the young couples were involved in a clinch. This intervention was always aimed at the young women and not the young men, and accompanied by the repeated maxim: 'No men!' The sexual behaviour of the

male students was not seen as a problem by the chaperone (i.e. there are no cries directed at them of 'No women').

The television sample showed girls able to resist pressure to have sex, particularly when they were virgins. As an example of this category, *Sweet Valley High* offered a representation of a steady teenage couple considering whether they were ready to have sex. Todd was hoping 'tonight will be the night' he and girlfriend Liz would sleep together, but Liz did not think that she was ready. She approached her best friend, Enid, to seek her advice.

Liz: Have you and [boyfriend's name] every discussed spending the night together? ... I mean, you know, sleeping together.

Enid: Oh, wow, Liz. That's a big step. Are you sure you're ready?

Liz: Well Todd is.

Enid: Yeah but - are you?

[Cut to Todd, who is preparing in front of the bathroom mirror]

Todd: I'm so ready for this. At least I think I am. I love her; she loves me.

[Looks into the mirror] Besides, I am a man now. Hey, is that a zit?!

This humorous portrayal continued as Todd sneaked into Liz's room dressed as a maid to evade the chaperone (complete with curly wig, black and white uniform, and knee high stockings). Todd took Liz by the shoulders and kissed her:

Liz: Todd, wait.

Todd: Oh, right. [Takes off the wig, assuming she is put off by his female attire].

Liz: No, it's not that. I've been thinking a lot about this and I'm just not sure. It's a big step for us. It would change everything.

Todd: Liz, I don't want you to do anything you don't want to do.

Liz: It's not just me - it's us. Do you really think we're ready for this?

Todd: Well, I don't know.

Liz: Don't you think it would be better if we had no doubts at all?

Todd: Maybe you're right.

[They embrace]

Girls were portrayed as being more interested in emotions, boys in sex. This was particularly evident when they discuss the opposite sex. In *Trading Places*, for example, the girls explain that French boys are better than English boys because they are more willing to express their emotions. In *Eastenders* schoolgirl Sonia Jackson declared that she fancies Jamie Mitchell: 'He's so shy. I love him'. By contrast, the boys represented in our sample usually discussed girls in terms of their physical appearance and sexiness. The most vivid dramatisation of this 'gender divide' was presented in *Family Affairs* when 16-year-old Donna tells 15-year-old Benji that they should be past the groping stage. He thought she was referring to sex, but she actually meant that they should be talking to each other more:

[Couple sitting together watching football on TV. Benji is leaning forward, engrossed in the match]  
Donna: Can't you switch that off for once?  
Benji: Why?  
Donna: Because we are meant to be spending time together.  
Benji: We are.  
Donna: I might as well not be here for all the attention you pay me. [Benji turns sound down on the television, but keeps watching] Only, we've been seeing each other for a week now. We should be past the stage of groping each other.  
Benji: Yeah? [Turns his attention away from TV] Well, I'm game if you are!  
Donna: [Slaps Benji's hand off her knee] No! I don't mean that! I mean talking to each other - like proper couples do! Getting to know each other.  
Benji: Oh, that. [Returns his attention to the screen]  
Donna: I mean, what do you want to do when you leave school?  
Benji: That's the kind of conversation my mum has with me.  
Donna: Oh, I dunno. Ask me something then.  
Benji: [Thinks for a minute] Did you watch the match the other night?  
Donna: No! Not football! We could talk about us, and how we feel about each other.  
Benji: Uhh. [Attention is on the match]  
Donna: I think I really like you Benji. I might even - love you.  
Benji: Yes, yes! [Jumps from his seat] Did you see that goal!!

(While this was the only black couple portrayed in the television sample, one of the boys caught dancing in *Hang Time* was also black - see under 'Homosexuality', below)

Other examples of teenage boys pursuing young women included Tad's persistent flirting with Sarah in *Neighbours* ('You can't blame a bloke for trying'), and Tyrone pursuing Toyah in *Coronation Street*

Tyrone: Come on Toyah, bridesmaids always cop off at the wedding. It's traditional.  
Toyah: Is it? I've never been a bridesmaid before.  
Tyrone: It's your first time, is it? Oh, well don't worry, I've copped off wi' loads.  
Toyah: Oh, have you.  
Tyrone: Yeah, hundreds. Hey listen. I'm hanging out at Curly's at the minute. And I just happen to know it's empty. So why don't you come back with me? It'll be easy.  
Toyah: Not with me it won't, bonehead. [Pushes him onto a plate of cake]

As this last excerpt shows, another theme of teenage conversations was male bravado and/or teasing. One episode of the UK teen drama *Hollyoaks* began with two teenage brothers (one who was still at school) bumping into each other in a flat. It was early morning and they were both in their underwear, having just spent the night with different flat mates. The younger boy has slept with an 'older woman' (Ruth Benson), in her late teens/early 20s.

Adam: My baby brother and an older woman!  
Brother: She's hardly middle aged.  
Adam: How did you manage it?  
Brother: It's called boyish charm.  
Adam: More like she couldn't run off 'cos she had a broken leg!  
Brother: You're just jealous.  
Adam: It's just beginner's luck, mate.  
Brother: Watch this space.  
Adam: I've gotta hand it to you mate, it's a fairly impressive conquest.  
Brother: Would I bother otherwise?

The scene ended with the younger brother returning to bed with Ruth (it is implied to have sex again).

There was another dialogue featuring male bravado and/or conquest in the teen drama *Dawson's Creek*. *Dawson's Creek* tells the stories of four 16-year-olds growing up in Capeside, a small coastal town near Boston, USA. In the episode within our sample, the gang participated in an all-night cram session at Chris's house on the eve of the English midterm. Chris has set up the study session in anticipation of seducing Jen. As the evening progresses he asked her ex-boyfriend, Dawson, how he was doing:

Chris: Jen's different. She's, eh, too with it. Closing the deal requires a *completely* different strategy ...  
Dawson: It's not gonna happen.  
Chris: We'll see.  
Dawson: You know, Chris, Jen is in this really weird, kind of vulnerable state, all right. Don't take advantage of that.  
Chris: Just relax! We won't do anything she's not looking forward to.  
Dawson: We'll see.  
Chris: Ah! It's proof you need! You see that light up there in the guest house? When that light's off it means I'm inside. With Jen. Lowering both our purity levels. And you? Ah, you'll be out here. Alone.

As Chris prepared the hot tub for Jen, Dawson intercepted her on the way outside. He told her that he was worried about Chris's motives.

Dawson: I'm worried Chris doesn't exactly have the best of intentions here.  
Jen: Tell me something I don't know!  
Dawson: You're aware that his goal is to sleep with you tonight?  
Jen: He's a guy! He's 16 and he seems to find me attractive. So, yes, I would assume he's got some sort of agenda.  
Dawson: And you're okay with that?  
Jen: Just because he has some sort of master plan doesn't mean that I've gotta go along with it.  
Dawson: Oh, okay.  
Jen: And for that matter, why do you assume that I've not got a plan of my own? [She walks out to the hot tub]

Jen and Chris shared a hot tub and Chris kissed Jen, who did not resist. They have been drinking wine.

Jen: And what if I don't wanna mess around?

Chris: Then we won't. I'm not a bad guy. I just want to have some fun.

Jen: So tell me Christopher Robin, what is you're kind of fun?

Chris: This. [They kiss again] So Jen, are we on the same page?

Jen: Same page.

They continued kissing as Dawson looked on from the living room. Later, Dawson noticed that the hot tub was empty and the guest room light off. He sat down on the stairs, his head in his hands. Next morning Jen woke up in Chris's bed. Chris was getting dressed.

Chris: Morning.

Jen: Hey.

Chris: They're getting up. We should get down there. [Jen looks over at him coyly. Chris walks over to bed, leans down and kisses her, then pulls away] Thank you. For a very fun night. [Leans over and picks up his watch. There is an opened condom packet on the bedside table.]

Jen: Hang on a sec, I'll get dressed and come down with you. [She looks upset]

Chris: No, no. That's cool. Just take your time. I'll meet you down there. [Jen looks away, closes her eyes]

What was noticeable in all these scenes was that talk about sex may (to a greater or lesser extent) address emotional needs, consent and 'readiness', but contraception or protection against STIs was never raised. The only (in passing) reference to contraception in any of these scenes was the shot of the opened condom packet in the last example. This shot lasted for one and a half seconds.

As has been the case in US studies of the characters in prime time television (e.g. Sapolsky & Tabarlet, 1991), males were portrayed as the initiators of sexual encounters. Overall, boys were characterised as vigorously pursuing sexual intercourse and as 'having some sort of agenda'. Girls, on the other hand, were portrayed as responding to/ resisting male sex needs. Male characters in teen dramas attempted to push girls beyond their level of sexual 'readiness' (e.g. Todd in *Sweet Valley High*) or used special techniques to seduce them (e.g. Chris in *Dawson's Creek*). Female characters were depicted as being able to resist this pressure, particularly where they were virgins. Whereas female characters were able to talk to their friends about the decision to have sex, male conversations tended to centre on boasting about sexual prowess. Hence young male sexuality was portrayed as physical and self centred, whilst teenage female sexuality revolved around issues of emotionality and relational context.

### *Sexual violence*

Sexual violence was explored in two rape storylines in *Brookside*, one of which featured young people. A passing reference within our sample related to Nikki Shadwick's drug rape case. This is an ongoing plot in which another young Brookside resident (Luke Musgrove) was charged with raping Nikki (female) at a party some months ago. Nikki, a university student, had had a lot to drink that evening and during the party followed Luke into the bedroom where they kissed. She told him that she did not want to have sex with him and the couple returned downstairs. Nikki was subsequently carried back up to the bedroom after somebody slipped tranquillisers into her drink. While she lay on the bed, she was raped. It was only after a series of flashbacks that she recalled the incident. During our sample week, Nikki is informed that Luke's trial date has been set. She comments that: 'It just feels weird, you know, knowing I am going to stand up in court and go through it all over again in front of a bunch of strangers'. She told her family that: 'I've decided to get a life'.

#### *Teenage pregnancy*

Teenage pregnancy provided a major focus in one of the documentaries (*The Decision*) and was mentioned in passing in one soap where the (married) teenager recently had a termination. There is an unmarried teenage mum in *Hollyoaks*, but she did not figure in any of the major storylines during the sample week.

*The Decision* was a Channel 4 documentary shown at 9pm in the evening. It was the first programme in a series following children coming to terms with being looked after by Social Services. The sample episode followed Haley, a 15-year-old teenager who has run away from home. Haley was pregnant, but her mother wanted her to have an abortion. She has considered a termination, but decided against it:

Haley: [Crying] I always think what it would be like if I terminate my pregnancy, but I always come back to what it'd be like with. It will be the first thing that I've ever had that will be mine.

Haley's mother insisted that she can only return home if she has an abortion. The programme followed Haley's progress from when she first approaches Social Services for help (four months pregnant) until after the baby is born and she is living independently.

A main concern of Social Services (and therefore the programme) was the incompatibility between Haley's current teenage lifestyle and being a mother. Up until 21 weeks Haley enjoyed going out clubbing with her mates, driving around in their cars, and staying out until 4am. She was portrayed as extremely independent and wanting to move out from the children's home into her own flat.

Social worker [to Haley]: One of the things I am worried about, Haley, is that you've never lived independently. You don't know what it is going to be like when the baby comes. To me, your lifestyle that you were leading before you became pregnant doesn't work with a baby I'm afraid. You're going to have lots of changes to your lifestyle.

Mother [to camera]: If she can't look after herself then she's not going to be able to look after a baby. If you can't look after a baby then they take that baby off you. And once they take the baby off her she won't get the bugger back. So therefore she might as well get the baby adopted. And then she's still going to have a lifestyle of her own. The way she wants it to be.

Letter to Social Services from children's home: Up to the present time, Haley has shown a lack of commitment and an unwillingness to commit herself to what we have to offer and, because of that, there is concern over what impact her social life will have on the baby.

These concerns remained after the baby, Joshua, was born.

Social worker [to camera]: We are looking at the potential risk areas in her parenting of the baby and she knows that. Can she manage this small bundle that needs feeding, changing and everything - is totally dependent on her potentially? Or is she going to flip in the middle of the night and harm him? That's an unknown.

Practically, Haley came across as a good mother and she did obviously care for Josh very much. However, there was an incident while she was still in the children's home where she came home drunk (with the baby) after an evening out with friends. According to the workers, Joshua has to be looked after by one of the members of staff whilst Haley recovered in bed. Her social worker was worried about her ability to contend with difficulties when there are no adults to step in when and where necessary.

That said, the documentary ends on a positive note, after Haley finally secured a flat for her and the baby. A year later, the credits report, Haley and the baby were both doing well. Haley has hopes to become a social worker.

The other two items reported in this category related to teenage abortion. In the week preceding our sample Leanne from *Coronation Street* discovered that she was pregnant. After much persuading from her husband Nick, who was scared of parenthood, she agreed to have a termination. However their differing attitudes forced them apart and during our week's sample Nick left for Canada alone.

Leanne: You don't face up to anything! You look the other way and then you run.

Nick: I didn't run from the abortion.

Leanne: You mean the miscarriage. Because that's what you told people it was.

Nick: [Upset] Don't blame that on me! You didn't want the baby!

Leanne: No I didn't. Because we would have been terrible parents. I can see that now.

Nick: Well, we can have a baby later.

Leanne: No we can't.

Nick: Yes we can! In a year or two.

Leanne: I'll never have a child with you.

Nick: [Upset] Why not?

Leanne: Because I don't want anything more to do with you. I don't love you. I don't think I ever really did.

There was one more reference to teenage abortion in *Brookside* when Jason's Nan voiced reservations about his girlfriend: 'There's something going on. She's been a bit distracted ... Last time they went skulking around she had an abortion'.

### *Age difference*

Another issue that was raised in passing was age difference. In *Clueless* Cher wanted a mature boyfriend and develops a crush on her male teacher. In the previous series of *Dawson's Creek*, one of the show's main characters, Pacey, lost his virginity to his female high school teacher. During the group's study session (see above) Jen found a 'purity test' in a magazine. The group adjourned to the living room to take the test, and after reading numerous sexual questions aloud, Pacey's girlfriend Andie collated the scores. Pacey's answer sheet was conspicuously missing, and when Andie asked him about it, he refused to give it to her. Chris asked him if his reticence has anything to do with question sixteen: 'Have you ever had sex with someone twice your age?'. Pacey was visibly upset 'So it's true,' Chris said, 'You laid pipe with Miss Jacobs.' Andie, shocked, and left the room in tears.

Later, Andie was on a swing in the backyard. Pacey stood before her. Andie asked him why he never told her about Miss Jacobs, and Pacey told her that it's not the kind of thing you can just come out and say. Andie was not satisfied. 'It's not fair,' Pacey said, 'You're judging me and you don't even know the circumstances.' 'Why would you do it Pacey,' Andie asks, 'Why?' Pacey explained that it basically came down to sex, that whether she likes it or not, he is a sexual being and so is she.

There is a similar story-line in *Family Affairs*. In our sample week Benji's mother was worried that his current girlfriend, Donna, is too old for him. Whilst she is only one year older, Ben's mum was worried that 'girls mature faster'. Later in the programme Ben told his sister's boyfriend that he is in love with someone else. As the story-line develops, Benji has an affair with a female school teacher in later weeks.

### *Homosexuality*

There were no gay male teenagers represented in our television sample. However, there were three references to male homosexuality. All three presented homosexuality in a humorous format and as a subject for male anxiety. In *Hang Time*, a US teen comedy, Mike was 'caught' practicing his dancing in the locker room with a (black) male team mate. On being caught in the act, both jumped apart and were keen to show that they are not gay. A similar scenario occurs in ITV's Saturday morning programme, *SM:tv LIVE*, where Royston commented that Leonardo DeCaprio is a 'stud muffin'. Fellow presenters Dec (male) and Cat (female) respond as follows:

Dec: What?

Cat: Sorry?

Royston: No, no! I mean for a woman he's a stud muffin.

Dec: You find him attractive? Ooh, ooh! (Cat joins in chant, as do children's audience. All shout:) Stud muffin! Stud muffin! Stud muffin! Stud muffin!

Royston: (Slaps himself twice on buttocks) Naughty, naughty Royston. (Turns to other presenters who are still chanting) You heinous dweebs! (Runs off set embarrassed)

Dec: (Laughing) I never knew our Royston was a bit like that.

The final reference to male homosexuality occurred in the adult comedy series *Men Behaving Badly* (shown at 9.35pm) in which Gary was worried that his new flatmate, Tony, is gay. Workmates suggested that perhaps he chose a male flatmate because he has 'secret urges'. This leads to a number of comic scenarios where Gary attempted to reaffirm his heterosexuality, for example by hiring out pornographic films with his girlfriend.

Lesbian characters featured in two soap representations in the contextual sample: Zoë in *Emmerdale* and Kitty and Tina in *High Road*. These portrayals did not problematise lesbianism in the same way, although the humorous incident in which Todd takes off the wig before kissing Liz in *Sweet Valley High* (see above) was similar to the anxieties expressed above. One of the main story-lines in *High Road* involved a 'love triangle' between three young (early twenties) characters: Kitty, Tina and Andy. Two of the other characters discussed the situation:

Female character: I can't believe you can just dismiss it like that ... She's gay. She's gay and she's moving in with Andy.

Tony: Okay, so she had a thing once with Kitty. People go through phases.

Female character: Look we're not talking about a notion for ice cream, Tony. We're talking about a person's sexuality ...

Tony: A person's sexual preference is their own business

### *Suggestiveness*

There were numerous examples of verbal and physical suggestiveness in the contextual sample. These included sexual innuendoes, double entendres, sexually suggestive actions and sexually suggestive exposure of the actor/actress's own body. For example, the reviewer of a new lollipop on Channel 4's *T4orce* recommended 'sucking on your pleasure stick' to viewers. In *SM:tv* there is a game called 'All Hands on Dec' in which the viewers are told they will be shown part of the presenter's body and guess how many hands are covering it. Seductive displays of the body were depicted in many of the music programmes, in dance routines and videos. In *The Ozone*, for example, the new Busta Rhymes/ Janet Jackson video featured two singers' bodies merging together using computer-generated graphics.

### **3.3. Commentary on the television analysis**

Teenage sex and sexuality were generally portrayed on television in a humorous format and were most often featured in fictional teen drama. The most common representation was in conversations about sex, predominantly flirting with, or talking about, members of the 'opposite sex'. There were three representations of teenagers actually engaging in sexual intercourse, in each of which sex was implied rather than physically depicted. There were approximately ten teenage couples portrayed as sexually active. There were no representations of gay male couples. Male homosexuality, where it did appear, featured as a focus of male heterosexual anxiety. In the total 88½ hours of viewing STIs were notable for their absence and the use of contraception was inferred (for one and a half seconds), but never subject to comment, discussion or planning. This point is particularly worth noting given that a major study of over 7500 teenagers found that the most important predictor of condom use was prior discussion about their use (Henderson *et al.*, submitted).<sup>vi</sup>

We should, however, note the limitations associated with such a small sample, particularly when much of the data originated from fictional series. Running story-lines mean that many topics absent from the present sample may be developed (or have already been developed) in other episodes. To give an example, the British teen drama *Hollyoaks* covered following issues between the sample week and report write-up: age difference, unprotected sex, STIs (HIV), virginity, and contraception. In a previous story-line one of the central characters had unprotected sex on holiday and caught a sexually transmitted disease. In a comic portrayal, it took several weeks before he was eventually persuaded to visit a genitourinary medicine clinic.

## 4. Sex and sexuality in magazines aimed at young people

### 4.1. Sample and method for the analysis of youth magazines

The sample consisted of nine top selling magazines for different types of youth audiences (by gender and age) which were available in newsagents in Glasgow during our sample week. These included some April and some May issues of the magazines in question. We selected a 'lad's mag': *Front* which targets older teenagers and young men in their early to mid twenties and a computer magazine, *PlayStation Plus*. We also selected five girls'/ women's magazines: *Mizz*, *Sugar*, *Bliss*, *J-17* and *19*; and two magazines aimed at a mixed audience, *M8* and *Top of the Pops*. Figure 2 offers a description of each magazine and its circulation. The readership is also broken down according to age and class where this information was available in the YTGI 1998 in Media Pack and Emap Elan Youth Teen Fact Pack 1999 (see Figure 3.).

The sample included various formats: editorials, feature articles, fashion articles, true stories, letters pages, cover headlines, fiction, entertainment news, interviews, reviews and horoscopes. However, it was the problem pages centering on health, sex and relationships that provided the most explicit information on sex and sexual relationships, supported with advice from 'experts'.

**Figure 2: Profile of the magazines and their monthly circulation (UK)**

Title	Description	Circulation* *
Mizz	'Life, lads and laughs'	130,254
Sugar	'Britain's best-selling girls' magazine'	451,696
Bliss	'The smart girl's guide to life'	337,188
J-17	'For the coolest fashion and hottest gossip, stylish babes read J-17'	242,516
TOTP	Teen pop music magazine	437,090
Front	'For men with plenty of it!'	
PlayStation Plus	Computer console/games magazine	
19	Girl's magazine	
M8	Scottish-based clubbing/dance music magazine	

**Figure 3: Magazine readership demographics (%)\*\***

	Age						Class* **	
	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18-19		ABC1	C2D E
<b>Mizz</b>	15	35	24	14	11		48	52
<b>Sugar</b>	9	29	32	23	9		47	53
<b>Bliss</b>	7	30	34	21	8		48	52
<b>J-17</b>	6	26	35	24	9		46	54

<b>TOTP</b>	24	25	18	9	4		40	60
<b>Front*</b>	*	*	*	*	*			
<b>PlayStation Plus</b>								
<b>19</b>								
<b>M8</b>								

\*\* Source: YtGI 1998 in Media Pack and Emap Elan Youth Teen Fact Pack 1999; Base: All youths

\*\*\*Based on occupation of head of household

\*Information provided by *Front* states that the magazine is aimed at 18 to 24 years olds and that 'A recent reader survey which was independently analysed stated that the average age of the *Front* reader is 21.' (letter from PR manager of *Front*, December 1999)

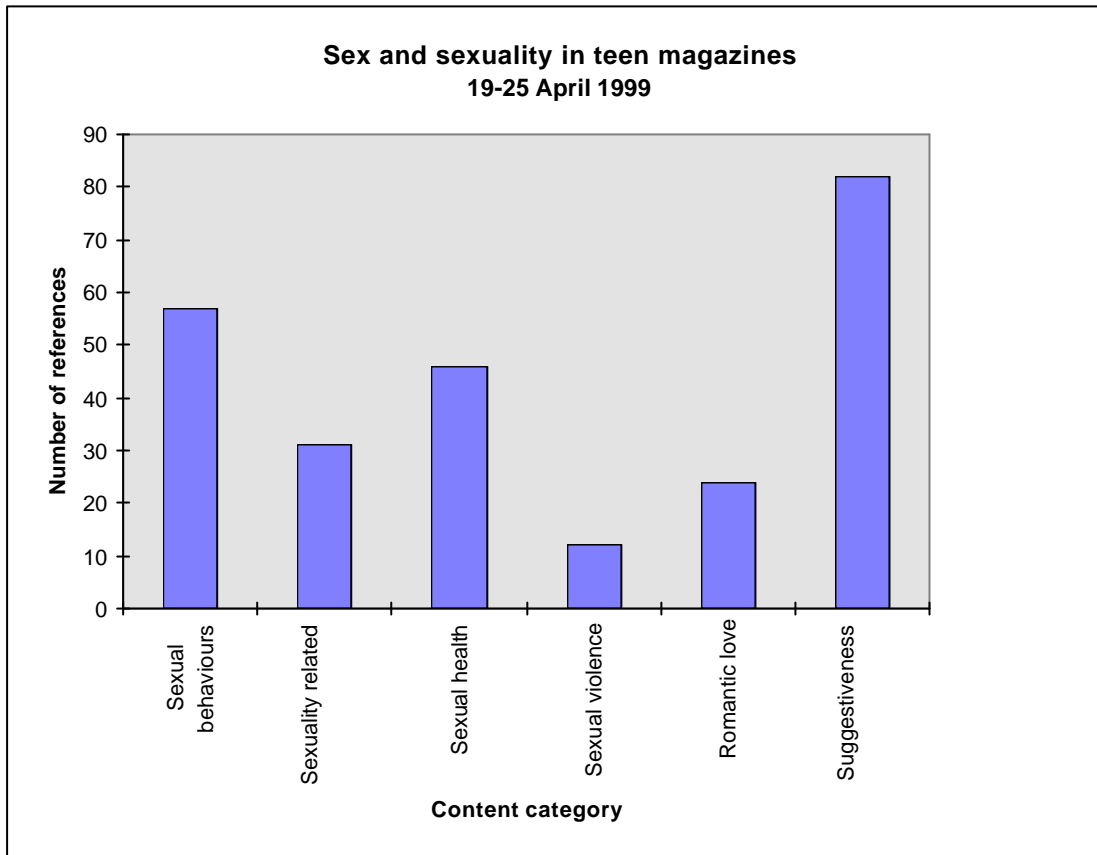
The content of these magazines was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and according to their distinct genre (i.e. according to whether they were aimed at a female, male or mixed audience). From this sample every item that mentioned sexuality (however briefly) was collected.<sup>vii</sup> Each item was coded according to the type of discussion/ reference as well as the format and page of the item.<sup>viii</sup> The magazine content categories covered sexual behaviours (e.g. masturbation, kissing, sexual intercourse); sexuality related issues (e.g. sexual orientation, virginity); sexual health issues (e.g. pregnancy, contraception, STIs); sexual violence (e.g. rape, abuse, harassment) and romance<sup>ix</sup> (e.g. flirting, dating, romantic friendships). We also coded textual/ visual suggestiveness (e.g. sexual innuendoes, double entendres and sexually suggestive presentations/ exposure of the body).<sup>x</sup>

Along side this basic quantitative analysis each magazine was examined in more depth. The portrayal of different types of teenagers was considered, including those with disabilities and those from ethnic minorities. In doing so attention was given to what was *not* said as well as what was.

#### **4.2. Summary of findings from the analysis of magazines**

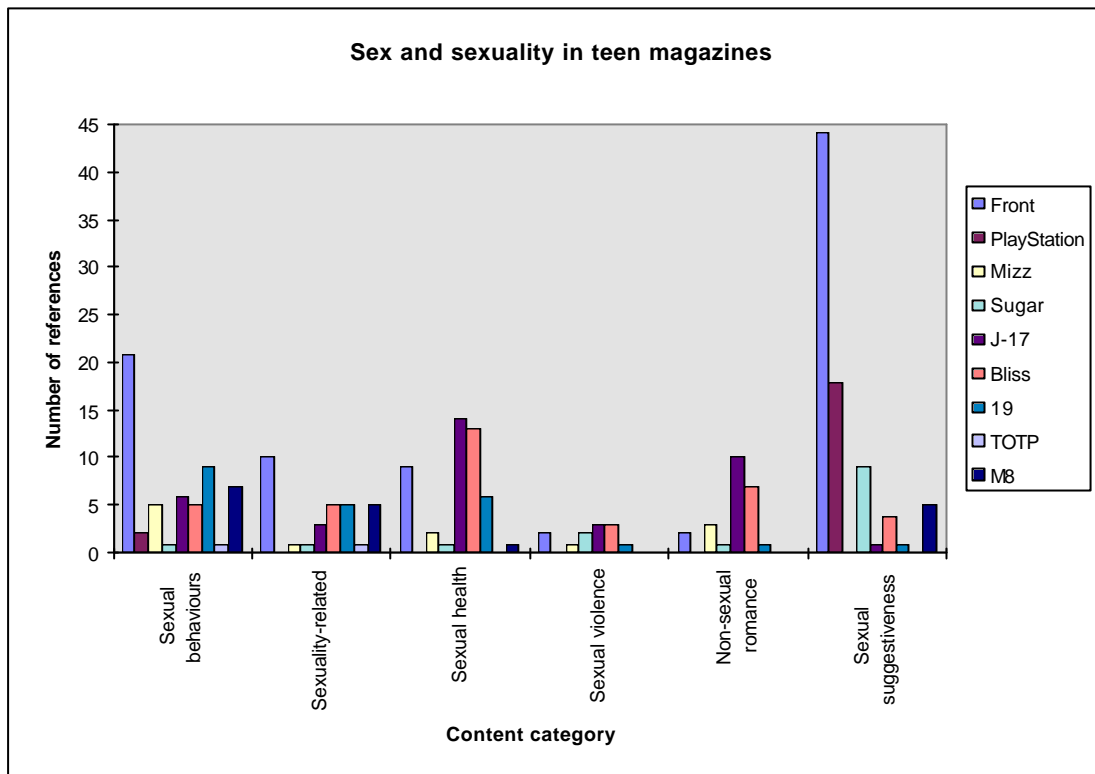
The magazine sample included 196 items in total. The main emphases of these items are shown in the following bar chart (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Themes about sex and sexuality in magazines aimed at young people**



This bar chart, however, obscures the differences between the diverse magazines. It is important to note the way in which the magazines varied depending on the gender of their main target audience and how the magazines for girls/ women were tightly graded by age. For example *Sugar* contained a very different type of information than *19*. Magazines that are aimed at a younger market tended to focus on non-sexual romance and implicit references to sex and/or sexuality ('Can boys and girls be just good friends?'). However, those aimed at an older age-group had more explicit features on sexual behaviours and related topics such as male porn stars, anal sex, and bisexuality. Figure 5 shows the main emphasis of the different magazines.

**Figure 5: Themes about sex and sexuality in the different magazines**



### *Sexual behaviours*

There were 57 references in the magazine sample relating to sexual behaviours. This included 16 references to intercourse, nine to kissing, four to masturbation, three to oral sex, one to anal sex, as well as 11 references to pornography, four to sex aids and four to other sexual practices (passing references to masochism, domination, spanking and food fetishists).

Over a third (37%) of these references were from the 'lad's mag' *Front* (aimed at older teenagers and those in their early to mid twenties). *Front* contained the highest number of references in almost every category. The magazine mixes fashion, food and entertainment news/ reviews, with celebrity interviews (for example, with great train robber, Ronnie Biggs, and actress, Barbara Windsor), articles on war wounds and soccer hooliganism, features such as 'Tested inflatables' (a review of inflatable dolls and animals 'tested by Ed's love pump' in which the sheep was awarded a higher score than 'Erotic Eve' or 'Chinese Sex Girl'), competitions to 'Win a £3000 boob job' (for your girlfriend) and the invitation to 'send in a snap of your 'bird' in return for a vibrator'.

Sexual intercourse was mentioned in every publication except for *Sugar*, *PlayStation* and *TOTP*. Most of these references were either short news or factual items, or made in passing. For example, 'Man rushed to hospital with exhaustion after making love to his 17-year-old wife six times a day in the week after they were married' (*Front* April 1999). The remaining references to sexual behaviour occurred in letters to problem pages and feature articles. In the first format, for example, a reply to a reader's query about fellatio was contained the most explicit description of sexual behaviour in the entire sample.

Letter to problem page: My boyfriend says the biggest turn on for him is having a blow job, which is fine by me. The trouble is, now that I know how much he likes them I'm worried that I may not be doing it right. What's the best way?

Agony aunt: Don't worry about technique - my male sources assure me it's enthusiasm that counts when it comes to oral sex. But here are a few pointers. Try holding the shaft of his penis at the base, that way you can guide his movements. Explore different variations - run your tongue up and down the outside, tense your tongue and vibrate it around the head and base. Work on the sensitive area just below the tip. Ask him what he wants and let him know you're enjoying it, too. (19 April 1999)

In a feature article format *Mizz* ran a similarly detailed discussion on 'Your first kiss'. This included answers to the questions: Why do we do it? (because it is so nice) What types of smooches are there? (peck on the cheek, smacker on the lips, or French kiss) How do I know if I am doing it properly? (no set rules) as well as a list of the top five kissing worries (bad breath, clashing teeth, being unable to breathe, dry lips and braces).

When you are really comfortable with someone, you can get a bit more intimate and open your mouth a little bit. If you like the lad a lot and feel relaxed with him, you may want to go a little further and French kiss. French kissing is when you open your mouth and caress the other person's lips and tongue with yours. While you do this you may feel the inside of their mouth too. It may sound a bit gross now, but it can leave you all floaty and happy after you have done it! Remember, you should only do it if really want to, though. (*Mizz* March 24-April 6 1999)

This message, that readers should go only as far as they feel comfortable, was reiterated in all of the girls' magazines, including those aimed at older teenagers such *J-17* and *19*. The former magazine, for example published a story that included explicit dialogue about determining 'how far' one went.

'Calm down,' he said softly. 'I'm not going to seduce you or anything'.  
'It's the 'anything' I'm worried about,' I mumbled. 'Dylan? You don't mind about, like, me not wanting to, y'know, do it?'  
Dylan paused mid nibble. 'Well, I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to,' he confessed. 'But I want to make you happy and if you're not comfortable having sex, then it's cool with me.'  
'I'm just not ready yet,' I told him. 'You know, it's a really big thing. It's like the biggest thing in the whole world and there's all these things I still don't know about you. And I haven't even been round to you house and we haven't even been on a proper date yet or anything. And I'm not saying that once we've done those things, I'll have sex with you, I'm just saying...'  
'Shush,' breathed Dylan. 'It's alright. If you want to have sex some time in the future, that's fine with me and if you don't, that's fine with me too.'  
(*'Diary of a crush - French Kiss'* free with *J-17*)<sup>xi</sup>

Editorial or expert advice reiterated girls'/womens' right to determine what they did or did not want to do sexually.

Letter to editor: After reading your fab article about anal sex (*Bum deal*, February) I had to write and let you know that I've been there. My boyfriend was obsessed with getting his wicked way with my rear end. After months of pestering me I finally agreed. Only trouble was that halfway through I felt, how can I put it, a build up of wind! I had no choice but to let rip, much to his disgust! He's never bothered me about it since!

Editor: What a blow out Clare! Serves him right for forcing you to do something you didn't want to do. (19 April 1999)

The message in the boy's/men's magazine *Front* was somewhat different:

Letter to problem page: I find the thought of putting my mouth anywhere near her nether regions disgusting and she asks me to try it every time we're together. What should I do to avoid this fate worse than death?

Agony aunt: Do you think your nuts and bolts are so irresistible that she is drawn to them against her will? Or does she swallow her gagging instincts and pleasure your pendulum out of lurve and a sense of duty perchance? If you find women's organs so frightening then perhaps you too should call the above number [for the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard]. Otherwise get on your knees and do what she says.

### *Sexuality-related issues*

There were 30 references to sexuality-related issues in the sample. This included 10 references to male homosexuality and seven to lesbianism (plus three references to homosexuality generally). Other references in this category were to sexual virginity, fantasies, and cross-dressing or transvestism.

Homosexuality was discussed as a source of anxiety. This was the case for both girls and boys. Lesbianism was referred to in the problem pages of two of the girls' magazines: *J-17* ('She touched me') and *Bliss* ('Is she gay?' and 'Crush hush'). The first two of these letters were from readers (13 and 15 years respectively). Both were afraid that their friends might be gay because 'We were dancing together and she started to rub my legs, then moved her hands up 'til I had to stop her' (*J-17* April 1999) or 'She puts her arm around me when we're walking and hugs me a lot ... and walked naked around my room before getting changed' (*Bliss* May 1999). The first letter asked: 'what can I do to make her stop?' and readers were invited to write in with advice, presumably to be printed in a future issue. The second problem (which was located in the 'life troubles' section, rather than the 'sex questions' or 'body worries' pages) was accompanied by the following reply:

It sounds like your mate is very comfortable with her body. Think about why she makes you feel uneasy and acknowledge any prejudices you might have against those who think or act differently from you. If you want to be her mate explain that you don't like being touched so much. She

may or may not be a lesbian - don't jump to conclusions. The best thing to do is talk to her. (*Bliss* May 1999)

The third letter was from a 16-year-old reader who has fallen for her best friend's older sister: 'I'm scared to admit it because I don't think either of them will understand. I feel frustrated, lonely and confused'. The male 'love doctor' advised: 'You can never predict who might become the focus of such strong feelings ... but be realistic about her feeling the same way as you'. Instead of approaching her love interest, the reader is told to contact the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard to talk to a trained counselor: 'it'll remove the pressure to come out about your sexuality before you understand it yourself'. The contact number for the Switchboard was listed in both *J-17* and *Bliss*. The only other portrayal of lesbianism in the magazine sample was an image of two topless women embracing each other (but looking provocatively into the camera) in *Front*.

In *Front* there was also a letter from a reader concerned that he might be gay:

I need your help. I am a 17-year-old boy and I have a serious problem. Even though I have a female partner I find myself attracted to other men. I am a student and keep having fantasies about my male teachers. I also work part-time in a pub and when it gets crowded I get aroused by brushing up against other men. I don't like homosexuals and am terrified I might be one. Please help me! (*Front* April 1999)

This was dealt with by the female agony aunt using humour (e.g. making reference to the magazine editor's sexual fantasies). Nevertheless she advised:

there's nothing to fear in unexpected or unusual sexual daydreams ... Confusion over sexuality is common at 17 and talking to others who have had similar feelings will help you clear out your mind and convince you that there is no reason at all to dislike homosexuals or fear your sexual instincts. Try calling Manchester Gay and Lesbian Switchboard for a chat (*Front* April 1999)

This advice was accompanied by the warning:

However you may be putting yourself in danger by brushing up against burly men with alcohol in their bellies...so avoid a broken nose and unemployment by staying behind the bar as much as possible for the time being. (*Front* April 1999)

Homosexuality was also referenced in a cartoon in *Front* that showed a man looking alarmed as he embraced a figure in a pink dress and high-heels. Both figures had visible erections.

The dance music magazine *M-8* had the most liberal attitude towards sexual orientation, and included a positive review of the film *Bedrooms and Hallways* which, it was claimed, 'prove[d] human sexuality is never tidily cut and dried'. There was also an article on the transvestite entertainers Trannies With Altitude.

This was accompanied by pictures of the lads putting on their make up and dancing in club, but again was accompanied by a proviso that effeminate men put themselves in danger as potential victims of abuse:

When we dress up as Trannies With Altitude we sometimes come across homophobics who shout stuff like: 'You fucking queer.' It's not offensive to me personally because I'm not gay but as an entertainer it's offensive in general. (*M-8* April 1999)

### *Sexual health issues*

There were 46 references to sexual health issues in the magazine sample. This included 16 references to contraception, 12 to STIs, nine to pregnancy and/or abortion, six to body worries (e.g. 'My vagina looks weird'; 'Should I have hair here?'), two to fertility and one to parenthood.

(a) *Contraception*: Contraception was mentioned in each of the three magazine genres. In its club guide section, *M-8* reported on a DJ tour giving 'free condoms to anyone who wanted them. Yipee!' It went on to comment:

The Durex Pleasure Principle Tour has the right idea, promoting a fun, safe sex message in a clubby environment without ramming the issue down anybody's throat. Subtle and successful. And just think of the hours of fun you can have trying out the huge variety, textures and flavours. Check out the strawberry flavour. I've heard it's very good! (*M-8* April 1999)

In *Front*, the majority of references were made in passing or as short news items. For example: '15 March 1937: America's first state contraceptive clinic opened in Raleigh, North Carolina'. These short items appeared in the girls' magazine sample also: 'For every £100 spent on contraception by the government, at least £1,100 is saved on the cost of dealing with unwanted pregnancies' (*J-17* April 1999).

On the whole, however, girls'/women's magazines contained much more extensive and detailed coverage, the most detailed of which was presented in *J-17*. The problem pages in *J-17* included an item titled: 'Sexplanation - What every girl should know about sex and the law'. Written by a nurse practitioner who works in sexual health and family planning services for young people, this is worth quoting in full:

Sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of 16 is illegal in Britain. This means that any boy or man is at risk of being prosecuted if there is enough evidence to prove he had sex with a girl under 16 years old - whether the girl wanted to have sex with him or not. And there have also been cases where older women have been sent to prison for having sex with boys aged under 16.

You can go to a clinic or GP surgery for help on any aspect of your health, regardless of your age. If you want advice on any aspect of sex, staff have to make sure that you are not a victim of child abuse. To do this, the

doctor or nurse may ask you some questions about your health and then specific questions to make sure you understand the various issues around sex. These may include questions on contraception, the risks and benefits of any treatment they might give you, and whether or not you are able to discuss sex or contraception with your parents. The doctor then needs to consider whether your physical or mental health might suffer if you *don't* get advice, help or contraception and finally, what would be in your best interests. This doesn't mean that a doctor will automatically give you contraception or an abortion if you ask for it, but they won't turn you away just because you are under 16 years old.

All patients have the same right to confidentiality, whatever their age. This means that doctors have to keep your personal information private unless there are exceptional circumstances. Only if something really awful were about to happen - like you were dying - would your doctor have to let your parents or other people know confidential details about you and your health. (*J-17* April 1999, emphasis in the original)

The pages listed contact numbers for Brook Advisory Centres, Careline, ChildLine, the National AIDS Helpline, the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, the Rape Crisis Centre, The Samaritans and the Family Planning Association's contraception helpline amongst others. There was also a series of helplines on issues relating to menstruation sponsored by Tampax, along with the following advice lines from Brook Advisory:

- Missed a period?
- Emergency (after sex) contraception
- Information on abortion
- Contraception - your questions answered
- Are you ready for sex?
- The condom line
- Visiting a Brook Centre

The magazine also included an agony uncle, along with a section 'Let's hear it from the boys', where young men could write in with their problems (this month entitled: 'She won't let go of me').

*Bliss* featured a quiz, 'Are you a sexpert' that asked readers to identify a series of photographed mystery objects, four of which were female contraceptive devices (a Femidon, an intrauterine system, Norplant and intrauterine device). Sexduds (those scoring less than four points out of a possible ten) were warned: 'Your ignorance of sexual stuff is a little bit worrying, but you'll probably pick things up eventually'. Four to seven points meant that 'you've probably got enough sexual knowledge for now' (whereas over seven means 'You're so clued up on all things sexual, you could be a top TV doc').

(*b*) *Pregnancy*: The focus on female responsibility for contraception was reiterated in references to pregnancy. For example, in a book review in *Mizz* readers were told: 'This book is really realistic and has a message for teenage girls: babies are hard work!'. There was no reference to teenage fathers (or the

fathers, whatever their age, of babies of teenage mothers) in the girls/women's magazine sample, although a passing reference did appear in *Front* within a discussion of fertility (see below). Letters to problem pages under this heading centred on girls' worries about getting pregnant ('Can I get pregnant?') and concerns about other girls who might be pregnant ('Is my sis pregnant?'). One reader asked whether it is possible to become pregnant if her boyfriend ejaculates near her vagina (19 April 1999). She is warned: 'your petting is getting carried away. Perhaps it would be wise to get contraceptive cover (see Contacts) so that you are prepared? Using condoms might be good ... if you became very passionate and decided to go for it one day, it would be a pity if that first time also meant a first pregnancy'. Many of the references relate to helpline contacts, and provisos issued by magazine editors (see above).

(c) *Sexually transmitted diseases and infections*: As the letter on homosexuality illustrated, there was a problem page for boys/men in *Front* 'Luscious Lozza's LOUNGE OF LOVE'. However this was relatively short in comparison to the girls'/women's pages, including only three letters (on sexual behaviour, sexual relationships and sexuality). Sexual health issues were dealt with in the page long 'Dr Cathy' column: 'Dr Catherine Clair BA, BMBCh (Oxon) is an expert in sexual health'. The only help-line number listed in either of these features was the Manchester Gay and Lesbian Switchboard (in response to the 17-year-old reader worried that he was homosexual, see above). Dr Cathy's column again used humour to present factual information, in this case on scabies:

More infectious than a good beat and harder to get rid of than an old girlfriend - scabies is a mite that quite literally gets under your skin. Scabies is spread by contact - you can pick it up from dogs, cats and sexual partners. The female mite borrows under your skin at a rate of 2mm a day, leaving eggs and faeces along the way. These creeping, breeding, shitting insects make you itch like hell. You may even see the burrows between your fingers or on your wrists. Nice! Treatment involves a special shampoo available at your local clinic, and calamine lotion for the itch. (*Front* April 1999)

This short item was accompanied by a equal sized photograph of a mite, along with the caption: 'He's itching to meet you'.

There was a letter from a reader with pubic lice in the problem pages of *J-17*. The advice offered here was much more detailed in comparison:

Pubic lice are easily and quickly treated, if you get the correct medicine. But first you have to make sure that you really have got pubic lice. The best way to check is to go to a Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinic. Call the FPA helpline (on the next page) to find a local one. The clinic will confirm if it is pubic lice and give you the right treatment. As the lice don't just live in the pubic area you will have to apply the lotion to your whole body.

Pubic lice can be caught in close contact with another person, but usually through sex. If you think you picked the lice up through sexual intercourse,

you may also have picked up other infections. So ask the clinic to check you for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) while you're there. (*J-17* April 1999)

Also coded under the heading of STIs was a four page report in *Bliss* on meningitis. This was framed with the somewhat sensational title: 'Christmas Eve they kissed by New Years day they were dead - Bliss investigates the teen killer meningitis. Could you be next?' (*Bliss* May 1999). The article reported on a 14 and 15-year-old couple who died from bacterial meningitis after kissing at a Christmas party: 'Adam was a fit strong lad, but within hours of being admitted to hospital he was dead'. It contained factual information on 'What is meningitis?' and 'How to spot meningitis' alongside fear provoking headlines such as: 'Dash for life', 'Silent killer', and 'Teens at risk'. There was also a section depicting 'Victims of the killer disease' - both those who had 'Died' and those who had 'Survived'. In the midst of the report was a quote from Janette Murray from the Meningitis Research Foundation: 'Don't worry unduly. Be aware of meningitis symptoms and keep them in mind. But still go out and enjoy yourself. Only one in 20,000 people contract the disease so don't change your way of life, don't stop having fun". A helpline number for MRF was listed below.

References to HIV and AIDS occurred in the girls' magazine sample only, often as helpline numbers. One letter to a problem page was from a 15-year-old who had never 'had sex' worried she has the virus after watching a programme on HIV at school. Another letter (in *J-17*) was from a girl concerned whether you could be infected through childhood games of 'doctors and nurses.' Both magazine doctors describe the main means of contracting the virus and advise the reader it is highly unlikely that they are infected. The other significant references to HIV were in an article on male porn stars in *19*. The actors commented:

I only date women in the industry - they're the ones who understand and they've been HIV tested. I have never caught a sexually transmitted disease and I've never got a girl pregnant either. (*19* April 1999)

Things are pretty well monitored in the industry and you have to produce certificates giving you the all clear against HIV and STIs before some agencies will take you on. I think an ordinary lad in a club is more at risk of catching sexual diseases, these days, than I am. People that work in porn are aware of HIV and STIs whereas other people think, 'It'll never happen to me'. (*19* April 1999)

(d) *Fertility*: In Dr Cathy's sexual health column (*Front* April 1999) there was a short feature on 'how to help your sperm score the egg on conception weekend'. Suggestions included: avoiding wearing restrictive underwear ('ban the banana hammocks'), keeping cool ('Dangle your balls in cold water'), eating lots and fruit and vegetables, abstinence from sex, and ceasing alcohol consumption. Alternatively, to 'enjoy the millennium in time honoured style' readers were advised to 'use a condom'. Again the topic was treated humorously, this time

accompanied by a photograph of squirrel with large testicles. The caption read: 'So that's where squirrels keep their nuts'.

### *Sexual violence/abuse*

The magazine sample included 12 references to sexual violence/abuse. Six of these related to rape (three of which were helpline numbers), three to other forms of sexual assault, and two to sexual harassment.

Again many of the references stemmed from letters to problem pages: 'I was raped', 'my dad used to feel me up', 'my best friend is 13 and I think she's sleeping with my dad who's 30', 'Recently I was undressing and I caught the window cleaner watching me. Now ... he makes comments and about my bottom and chest'. In all of these cases readers were advised to seek adult and/or professional help.

The sexual violence category included the only (brief) reference to disability and sexuality in the entire sample. Under the headline 'THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT' *Front* reported that a 'judge rejected the claim of a man on rape charges that he did not understand his victim's protests because she was deaf and made them in sign language' (*Front* April 1999). We assume this was meant to be entertaining because it appeared in a small 'News in brief' section illustrated with a woman in a bra captioned 'British boobs way out in front'. Other items in this section included: 'Kissed off - an attempt to break the work kissing recorded ended in farce ... when many of the participants became too enthusiastic' and a story about a woman whose silicon breast implants exploded during a car accident. A third 'news' item described the manufacture of a specially strengthened bed that will 'survive years of vigorous love-making.' (*Front* April 1999: 19)<sup>xii</sup>

### *Non-sexual romance*

Twenty three references related to non-sexual romance: flirting with or chatting up the opposite sex (n=8), dating (n=5), non-sexual male/ female friendships (n=5) and romantic love (n=4). The great majority of these came from either fiction or feature articles in the girls' magazine sample (and 44% from *J-17* alone).

In the first sub-category there were two articles making fun of boys' efforts to chat girls up: 'Animal smackers' in *J-17* and 'Perfect put-downs' in *Mizz*. The first asked 'How ridiculous are lads' pulling efforts?' and compared their behaviour to that of the animal kingdom. Boys were compared, for example to baboons: 'On spying a female he'll flash his bum ... Mooning is a tradition among sad lads who think it's hilarious and bound to make us fall at their feet with the promise of what's to come. Oh how little they know' (*J-17* April 1999). In *Mizz* readers 'fed up with cringeworthy chat-up lines from slimy boys' are offered a list of witty one-liners, such as the following: 'Q: Do you kiss with your eyes closed? A: I would if I was kissing you!' (*Mizz* 24 March - April 6). In both these items boys are portrayed as the objects of ridicule, as 'stupid' and 'sad' creatures to be pitied, but as ultimately not lacking in worth.

Boys are also portrayed as romantic love objects, particularly in pieces of short fiction. For example: 'Puppy love' ('How could Sara know that walking her neighbour's dog would lead her to the boy of her dreams?') and 'Diary of a crush' in which the female narrator writes:

It was dead romantic. We sat on a bench under the weeping willow, hidden from the rest of the world. Dylan acted like he did when we first met - a little half-smile was playing on his lips, his eyes were glinting and his voice dropped to a whisper. (*J-17* April 1999)

Romantic love was a topic covered in the older sample where young women were encouraged to teach men emotional intimacy. One 'secret sign that he loves you' is when he 'says he loves you. Especially if its unprompted, out-of-the-blue or unconnected to sex or a row. If he struggles with the words, this means they don't come lightly and he should be taken very seriously'. If, on the other hand, he is eager to have sex all the time he may just be using those three little words to trick you: 'You don't need me to tell you that lust isn't necessarily connected to love' (19 April 1999). Men are hence depicted as cunning, and as 'only after one thing' (*J-17* April 1999).

### *Sexual suggestiveness*

The largest content category was 'sexual suggestiveness' with 82 references, over half of which (54%) were drawn from *Front*. These were divided into two sub-categories. The first comprised of textual suggestiveness, the second visually suggestive presentations and/or exposure of the body.

(a) *Textual suggestiveness*: There was 38 examples of textual suggestiveness, that is sexual innuendo (indirect or subtle references to sex and/or sexuality) and double entendres (words or phrases that can be interpreted in more than way, one of which is sexual). The great majority of these references (87%) originated from *Front* and *PlayStation*, although there were two examples found in *J-17* and *Bliss*. The former involved a competition to win a sound system, where readers were encouraged to write their own song lyrics. Editorial suggestions included: 'Bite my hot-dog' and 'Taste my hot pot'.

The use of innuendo and double entendre in *Front* was prolific, and was applied to almost anything. In the food section there was a photograph of a cigar with the caption: 'This may be the closest you ever get to the thighs of a Cuban virgin'. Similarly, a competition to win a bicycle was called: 'SIT ON MY CHOPPER!' There were many allusions to masturbation, ejaculation, erections and penis size. For example, one of the pinup features was titled: 'Come on, come on let's stick together' (there was a similar reference in *PlayStation Plus* where readers were told to 'Have a box of Kleenex on standby'). A regular feature in the magazine is called 'Katie's 7" column' in which 'Front fox Katie Agnew puts us straight - and she also tells us the truth about women'. The page includes a 7 inch ruler along the paper edge, presumably so readers can measure their penises. Ewan McGregor was quoted in an interview as saying: 'In Star Wars I was just looking for the moment to drop my Jedi knickers and pull out my real light sabre!'

References in *PlayStation Plus* derived mainly from repeated allusions to the ability to 'play' with female computer characters. In an article on the PlayStation 2 (computer console) there was an item called 'Play with women'. This featured

a close up visual of a computer-generated female character. The accompanying text read: 'She's gorgeous, huh? And you can play with this Ridge Racer beauty ... No luck with the ladies? You have now.' Elsewhere there was a review of Anna Kournikova's Smash Court Tennis game: 'Fancy a bit of one-on-one with jailbait tennis ace, Anna Kournikova? Well here's your chance'.

(b) *Visual suggestiveness*: There were 44 examples of visual suggestiveness. Almost two thirds of these (66%) originated from magazines apparently aimed at a predominantly male heterosexual readership (*Front* n=21, *PlayStation* n=8). Female models in these magazines were typically young, white, slim, and blonde with large breasts.<sup>xiii</sup> One photograph showed 21 buxom models in a competition to 'Win a £3,000 boob job!' for your girlfriend. The photograph, which featured the women holding their naked breasts out for the camera, was titled: 'WINWINWINWIN WINWINWINWIN'.

In visual portrayals in these two magazines in our sample, women tended to be positioned on their backs in postures of sexual display or with their heads down, looking up into the camera submissively. These displays were often accompanied by sexual innuendo and double entendres, usually humorous and often explicitly coded as masturbatory (see above). A selection of examples from *Front* follows:

- Double page spread of female model lying naked on a rug, looking up at the camera. Caption reads: 'RUG ADDICT - And when you've finished polishing the floor you can start in the kitchen, love'. In a different picture the model covers her pubic area with her hands. Caption reads: 'Oi Vicks, catch!'. In another shot the names 'Phil' and 'Grant' have been placed over each of her breasts (reference to two characters from the BBC soap *Eastenders* - the implication being that they are two tits).
- Double page spread of Lena Headey lying on her front, resting on her elbows. Caption reads: 'The generous British actress is usually more than ready to give a boy valuable elbow room if something big pops up - hence the immortal phrase 'giving good Headey''.
- Photograph of Selena sitting naked on a patio chair. Her legs are crossed, her arms are covering her breasts and she is looking up at the camera smoking a cigar. Caption: 'When she's got a fat Cuban in her mouth, professional puffer Selena loves to sit starkers on her balcony in Miami. Here we see her parked in her new Homebase patio set, safe in the knowledge that her cheek will hardly be noticed - smoking!'

Women were only allowed access to the 'lad's mag' issue we examined as sexual objects or as sexual experts giving 'inside information' of women's bodies, psyches and sexuality as well as advice on men's health. Criticism is warded off with a knowing post-feminist stance, often legitimised by women themselves. The following example is from a former 'reader's bird' who won a vibrator from *Front* after sending in a photograph of herself in her sexy underwear.

Letter: As for all the girls that moan about scantily clad ladies featured in your mag, they must be jealous or insecure. Maybe if they adopted a more laid back attitude they themselves would become more attractive and their self-esteem would soar ... cheers for the vibrator - it works a treat. Here's a picture of it in action.

The letter was accompanied by a photograph of a woman lying on bed in red underwear, stockings and high heels. She appeared to be using the vibrator, but this was covered by a cartoon picture of a beaver. The caption read: 'Nice beaver!'

The visual portrayal of boys/men in magazines for girls and young women was far less explicit, but the opposite sex was still depicted as objects of desire. In *Bliss* there was an advert for a chocolate bar that featured a torso shot of a black male model looking down at his defined abdominal muscles. Underneath was the caption: 'Galaxy Ripple - for heightened pleasure'. *Bliss* also ran an article called 'What's his style? Can you judge a lad by his body? Look at these boys in pants to see if you can guess who wears what.' The feature included large photographs of four fit-looking boys (three white, one black) in their pants. The lads were quoted on how they felt about their bodies: 'I'd like to be a bit bigger', 'I don't care what people think about my body', 'I'm not unhappy with my body, but I reckon I've got bandy legs'. The readers were encouraged to look at the boys' bodies and judge for themselves.

Along with the 'Waterbabes' article picturing lads from a local swimming pool ('Once we stopped gawking at their pecs...'), *Sugar* featured eight 'Hot bods poster prints'. Four boys were fully clothed, four were showing their chest, the stance of all non-threatening. Unlike the pinups in *Front*, these pictures featured no text, apart from the first name of the male model (and the word *Sugar*). Brief details of the boys' hobbies and/or likes and dislikes were presented at the beginning of the feature, for example: 'Harvey loves scary sports. 'I can't wait to try tandem sky-diving but I need a partner.' Anybody feeling brave?' or 'Tom is an actor as well as a model and his ambition is to get the lead in a Moliere play. Then all he needs is a girl to play the lead role in his life!' The emphasis here revolved around being able to fantasise about having a relationship with the model, rather than sexual intercourse.

#### **4.3. Commentary on analysis of magazines**

As the examples above show, issues of sex and sexuality permeated the magazines in our sample, particularly those aimed at a gender specific audience. References ranged from in passing sexual health facts and statistics to explicit material on how to sexually satisfy a member of the opposite sex. The great majority of this information was presented in a humorous format, often for the purpose of titillation. However, in amongst this humour and titillation some publications' problem pages provided a useful source of information about sexual health issues.

Agony and health pages provide in the girls'/women's magazine sample offered the most detailed sexual health information, although the quality of advice offered did vary according to the different publications. The only comparable boys'/men's title in the sample did not offer the same level of advice, and tended to couch factual information in comic language and imagery. The prospect of male readers was entertained in some of the girls'/women's problem pages, especially where there was a male 'agony uncle'. Sexual health, in both the male and the female samples, was portrayed as an arena of women's expertise and responsibility. Both the sex columnists and the agony aunt in *Front* were women, implying that it is a woman's job to re-educate men. This was reiterated in girls' magazine sample where readers were warned 'Get a lad going and he could find you irresistible. Be careful though - don't be an April fool and let him go too far!' (*Mizz*).

In the magazines aimed at female readers the problem pages also provided important discussions of consent and negotiation. Girls and young women were cautioned about engaging in sex before they were ready, and magazines advocated various strategies to help them wait and keep overeager boyfriends at bay. There was an underlying assumption that while younger teenagers (i.e. readers of *Sugar* and *Mizz*) may not currently be hetero-sexually active, they soon will be (i.e. by the time they read 19). Hence, whilst men/ boys were positioned as clumsy oafs, as objects of ridicule, and as only interested in one thing, they were not depicted as ultimately without merit. They were also viewed as objects of desire, idealised 'hot bods' to placate, humour, adore and manipulate.

The portrayal of women in magazines for the consumption of boys/men was somewhat different. Women were only 'allowed' in as sexperts and sexual objects. This depiction of (young, slim, attractive) women as lust objects served to validate traditional masculinity, always using irony or humour to avoid censure.

Hence magazines on both sides of the 'gender divide' reinforced opposite gender perspectives and usually provided ways of 'fudging' the gap rather than addressing or analysing it. The girls'/women's magazines mocked traditional masculinity but also helped girls and young women to accommodate to it, whilst boy's/men's magazines reflexively acknowledged their sexism and reframed the conditions under which images deemed sexually provocative are consumed. Sample publications were gender stereotypic and age stereotypic, but both accepted the maxim that 'boys will be boys.'

## 5. Concluding comments and implications for sexual health promotion

The mass media are an important source of information about teenage sexuality both for parents and for teenagers (Todd et al, 1999). In our sample there were strong differences in the way in which the media addressed different audiences (teenager/ adult, male/ female) and important differences in the ways in which teenage sexuality was portrayed in different outlets. The media examined included a great deal of useful information and some magazines for young people may be invaluable in the extent and explicitness of the advice they give and the problems they raise. Teen dramas also often dealt sensitively with the dilemmas facing young people and newspaper reporting highlighted problems and threats. However, much of the media representation perpetuated gender/ sexual stereotypes, failed to represent teenage diversity and offered only limited and representations to/ for/ of young men. There seemed to be particular gaps in discussion of boy's/men's responsibility for contraception/ safer sex practices, the representations of gay men and lesbians and in presenting scripts for talking about safer sex.

In the context of sexual health issues such as STIs, unwanted pregnancies, and the high attempted suicide rate among young gay men and lesbians there are further potential contributions that the media could make to providing thought-provoking and positive images for young people.

Findings from this research suggest that those concerned about sexual health promotion for young people need to:

- Acknowledge and work with the expertise among media producers (e.g. magazine editors) in addressing young people.
- Channel paid-for advertising and other messages into appropriate outlets taking account of diverse formats and contexts highlighted in this report.
- Engage in debate with media personnel about the nature of existing representations and how they might be challenged, improved or developed.
- Produce materials that provide visibility to those excluded from mainstream media representation and address the issues absent from the mainstream media. (e.g. materials encouraging young people to discuss sexual negotiation and which explore ideas about male responsibility for safer sex practices.)
- Engage with existing assumptions about what is 'normal', 'masculine/ feminine', acceptable/ unacceptable and produce materials that explore male/ female roles in sexual encounters.

Further research would be needed to clarify the generalisability of our sample and to explore the evolving story lines of teen drama. It would also be useful to know how the producers of teen dramas or youth magazines perceive their role and judge their own products. Further research would also be needed to examine how young people relate to these images and negotiate their actions and understandings within the context of the patterns and gaps in representation outlined above.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Scotland has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in Western Europe. In 1998, 8.7 per 1000 girls (aged 13-15) conceived, compared to 8.4 per 1000 in 1989. 71.0 per 1000 girls (aged 16-19) conceived, compared to 69.7 per 1000 in 1989. (Scottish Health Statistics 1998). In 1993, young women under age 20 were three per cent of lone parents (Children in Scotland 1999)

<sup>ii</sup> We also collected contextual references related to sexuality/sexual health more generally (but which did not mention teenagers; articles about gender roles; and articles about teenagers generally (which did not mention sex/sexuality). Whilst these informed our analysis, they do not form a main focus of this report.

<sup>iii</sup> The only other reference to homosexuality (apart from the same-sex assaults) in the papers was a story (included in the 'other' category) was about an 18-year-old boy who suffered a broken nose after he was the victim of a homophobic attack at school. (*Press and Journal* 21 April 1999)

<sup>iv</sup> The one exception to this rule was the documentary *The Decision* (20/07/99 see main text). Because teenage pregnancy was the main focus of this programme, it was only coded as one item in the main sample.

<sup>v</sup> There were two representations where girls were portrayed as taking the initiative. In *Emmerdale* (20/07/99) Marlon's teenage ex wants to go back out with him, but he doesn't know if he can trust her after she slept with another boy. In *Sweet Valley High* (24/07/99) Jessica tried to impress her favourite Latin heart-throb by foiling the advances of another girl (who turns out to be his sister).

<sup>vi</sup> In a multivariate analysis of reported data from a representative sample of Scottish 14 year olds (N=7,630), the most important predictors of condom use were (in descending order) whether the respondent had talked with their partner about protecting her/himself before sexual intercourse, level of religiosity, whether the couple had planned for intercourse together and whether the relationship had lasted for more than a month. (Henderson *et al.*, submitted)

<sup>vii</sup> This was in contrast to the newspaper and TV sample in which we included references to teenage sexuality more specifically. The reason for the change of emphasis in the magazine sample was that this media is targeted specifically at teenagers.

<sup>viii</sup> An item could be either an article or a subsection of an article. For example, each question and answer segment in a longer advice column was treated as a separate item, as was each horoscope entry, editorial, or news article. Free gifts were excluded from the quantitative analysis, but included in the qualitative analysis. A single item may contain a number of references, and these were recorded separately unless they related to the same topic. For example, if an article referred to STIs three times and contraception once, this would be recorded as one item with one reference to STIs and one reference to contraception. Visual representations that formed part of a bigger item (e.g. interview or article) were not counted as a separate item, although they were counted as a separate reference. Where they portrayed different people, full page pin-ups were counted as individual items. Articles featuring full page pin-ups of the same model, however, were counted as one item. For example, in *Sugar* there was one article on male-female non-sexual relationships featuring small photographs of boys in their swimming trunks. This was coded as one item and one reference to visual suggestiveness. There was also a series of full page pin-ups of male models (some of whom had their tops off) which were coded as eight items and eight references to visual suggestiveness.

<sup>ix</sup> Research by Thompson (1995) discusses the link between romance and sexuality.

<sup>x</sup> An item was coded as visually suggestive if it seemed to have been designed to stimulate sexual or romantic interest. The reason for the inclusion of the romantic element was necessary to incorporate pin-ups of boys presented in the girls' magazines. This relates to the way in which female sexuality is constructed (see Ussher 1997 for a further discussion).

<sup>xi</sup> NB As a free gift, 'Diary of a Crush' was not counted in the quantitative analysis. However the fictional series from which it was an off-shoot was coded.

<sup>xii</sup> *Front* wish to point out that the item was not 'about a rapist' but was 'a five line factual piece about a court case', a factual news story which stated that "in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, a judge rejected the claim of a man on a rape charge that he did not understand his victim's protests because she was deaf and made them in sign language'. *Front* wish to make clear that this was a story 'widely reported over the Internet and US newspapers' and that *Front* was 'in no way making fun of the deaf girl who was raped'. They also emphasise that the story should not be taken out of context and that it was 'an impartial story that appeared in a regular column of weird news stories from around the world. They are reported factually and without comment'. (Letter to Jenny Kitzinger from PR manager for *Front*, 1999)

<sup>xiii</sup> There was one black model featured, wearing animal print underwear.