



Language and Sexual Imagery in Broadcasting: A Contextual Investigation

Research Study conducted by The Fuse Group
on behalf of Ofcom

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Foreword

Section 319 (1) of the Communications Act 2003 (“the Act”) requires Ofcom to set a Code which contains standards for the content of television and radio services. The Ofcom Broadcasting Code was published on 25 May 2005 and came into effect on 25 July 2005. The Code applies to all broadcasters regulated by Ofcom, with certain exceptions in the case of the BBC (Sections Five, Six, Nine and Ten) and S4C (part of Section Six).

The Act requires that generally accepted standards are applied to the contents of television and radio services so as to provide adequate protection of members of the public from the inclusion in such services of harmful and/or offensive material.

The independent research detailed in this report was commissioned by Ofcom from The Fuse Group. It was to assist in the consideration of points raised by the public consultation on the Ofcom Broadcasting Code which began in July 2004 and help broadcasters and the regulator understand changing public attitudes.

The research was qualitative in nature. This means it explored in some depth the views of respondents in order to give broadcasters and Ofcom directional steers. It was not a quantitative study and so the results cannot be extrapolated to represent the views of the wider population. As such it contributes to Ofcom’s understanding but is not in itself conclusive about how any individual issue should be treated. Nor can it be used to create hard and fast rules about when and how content can be broadcast. What the research can do is indicate issues that broadcasters may need to consider in scheduling content and in deciding whether to broadcast information about content. It may also indicate issues Ofcom may need to take account of in considering cases and complaints.

In particular, it is worth pointing out that the participants who took part in this research were not necessarily the likely viewers or listeners for the extracts used in the research and so their expectations were not necessarily those of the actual viewers and listeners for the programmes in which the material was originally used. Nor could the material be viewed or listened to as it would be in a home environment, so participants did not have the benefit of any information that was provided before a programme, as they may have had before the actual broadcast. Some of the clips had also received some media coverage so that views may have been formed before the clips were heard or seen.

It should be noted that respondents’ comments do not reflect the opinions of Ofcom and are not always factually accurate.

Section 1

Executive Summary

Attitudes to Swearing and Offensive Language

Attitudes to language vary widely within any population. Previous research has found that factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and UK region all had an effect on views of what constitutes offensive language and the relative strength of those words. For that reason it is impossible to create a definitive list of words that all would agree are “offensive”. However in order to research the subject, we explored words that have traditionally caused offence to a greater or lesser number of viewers/listeners.

Participants in the research felt that swearing and offensive language has increased and become more widespread over time. It is seen as a symptom of a decline in public standards, for which few participants could determine the cause, although some felt that the media played a part.

Participants’ views were occasionally divided about which words were more or less offensive but what united almost all the groups, whatever their personal use of swearing or strong language, was a high level of concern about the type and use of language with regard to young people. This concern was two fold; firstly a dislike of hearing young people using such language as this was seen by most participants as denoting a lack of respect. Secondly, a dislike of hearing offensive language used in front of young people/children because of the bad example it sets.

The Context

There was a strong degree of consensus among all participants about the contexts which make words more or less offensive. According to the participants the manner in which words are used can help to define how offensive they are. At the bottom of the ‘scale of offence’ are words which are used within peer groups. Further up the scale are words which are used as a result of a momentary loss of control which are not specifically directed at anyone, for example, stubbing your toe. Words spoken in aggression and directed at someone with the intention to insult are considered the most offensive overall. Casual repetitive swearing can also be offensive to some. When words are used in a humorous context, this is thought by some participants to mitigate the offence.

The second layer of context which participants felt was important in defining how offensive words are perceived to be is the ‘listening context’. Participants’ response to the words that they use themselves, or that others use, varies depending on who is being spoken to and who is listening. Words spoken to oneself with no children present or within a peer group environment are considered less offensive than words used in front of children or racially offensive words used towards an ethnic group.

Offensive Language on TV

Most of the participants in the research believed that the use of offensive language on television had increased over time and that the language used has become stronger. Even those participants who claimed not to be personally offended by anything they had heard noted this apparent trend. Respondents felt: that swearing and offensive language occurred across a range of programming types and channels; that it started earlier in the evening; and that soaps and reality

programmes had contributed to this decline more than other genres. However when asked to give specific examples, most participants found it hard to recall details.

Respondents recognised that the broadcast media did not operate in isolation from society, but many felt that broadcasters had a responsibility to set and maintain standards as well as reflect societal changes.

Besides the general view that language on television has worsened over the years, there were a small minority of respondents who said there was little or no language on television that offended them or was inappropriately timed. Some participants suggested that television had improved with regard to the use of some language, particularly with regard to racial terms.

The reasons for concern among those participants who felt that the use of bad language on television had increased included setting a poor example to children, being simply unnecessary and making people feel uncomfortable in a family viewing environment.

A contextual overview of offensive language

In order to investigate 'context', a show reel was produced that contained ten programme clips containing examples of strong or offensive language. The show reel was shown to respondents in order to gauge their reactions to the individual clips and to provide stimulus for discussion in the focus groups. The clips were from a collection of programmes (pre and post watershed) broadcast during 2004 that Ofcom had received complaints about.

In general, all groups found the same clips offensive. Overall, the use of offensive language in the reality and the documentary examples were found to be the most offensive.

Observations from the participants' reactions and discussions of the clips are summarised below:

- Sensitivities to words can change over time as illustrated by words such as 'mong' and 'retard'. Many parent participants did not want words such as 'mong' and 'retard' to be used, especially in children's programmes, as they can be picked up and imitated by children. These words were also disliked and considered inappropriate by the younger participants in particular, but were felt to be acceptable by some of the older respondents.
- There was a general tendency among the respondents to dislike strong language in soap operas due to the early evening transmission time and large family viewing profile. However participants were prepared to accept the occasional use of offensive language e.g. 'bitch' at moments of high drama and tension. More casual or frequent use of offensive language would however be unacceptable to these participants.
- Participants felt that swearing by an individual as a reaction to an extreme event or accident was more acceptable in both real life and within television dramas or documentaries as long as words were not used repeatedly and unnecessarily. Appropriate scheduling is however still important.
- Unexpected swearing or offensive language was generally felt to be less acceptable, especially when the programme format, tone or genre doesn't suggest this type of behaviour will occur.
- Multiple use of any swear word was disliked by the participants and might be considered unacceptable depending on the context, programme type and

transmission time. The word itself was also a key determinant of the level of offence (e.g. 'shit' is more acceptable than 'fuck').

- Participants considered that bleeping may, but does not always, reduce the level of offence (particularly if the words are used in a programme that targets a young audience or are broadcast in family viewing time).
- It was felt that immediate apologies can mitigate the use of swear words, as can humour.
- Authentic swearing within reality programmes and documentaries was considered more acceptable by some of the participants than swearing 'for the camera'. Although authenticity in itself is not necessarily a sufficiently strong context to justify including repeated swearing. Certain environments such as the Army, football changing rooms or prisons were more likely to be viewed with tolerance.

Offensive Language on Radio

For most of the radio listeners in the research, content on radio did simply not present a problem. Most said they were not offended by what they heard or chose to listen to. There was also a sense by many that radio was more strictly regulated or monitored than television - although this perception appeared to stem from the fact that few people were offended by radio.

The minority of participants who did discuss experiences of offensive language on radio were almost entirely parents with school aged children who have been offended by something on the radio during the school run. As such, some believed that radio should have a watershed so that school run times are safe listening zones. (NOTE: school runs are explicitly set out as times at which the most offensive language must not be used in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code)

Despite the lack of widespread experience of being offended by radio, many participants expressed a fairly widespread concern about song lyrics and a worry that lyrics (and music videos – see separate section) are using stronger and more frequent swearing and offensive language.

The parents within the groups were most likely to want song lyrics to be edited, while teenagers were less keen – their preference was for unedited lyrics played later.

It was also felt that repeated and persistent slippages by radio stations or DJ's/presenters should be dealt with severely – this was driven by the expectation of high standards – particularly for national and local BBC radio. Digital and niche stations could be more relaxed overall.

Sexual imagery on television

Discussion from the focus groups indicated that sexual imagery is less of a concern than offensive language. Many participants thought there was more sexual imagery on television nowadays and that it started earlier in the evening. Parent respondents in particular expressed concerns about the degree of sexual imagery in life generally, and were concerned about the possible premature sexualisation of their children. Other participants were less concerned and more positive – and felt that the growth in sexual imagery in all walks of life indicated a more tolerant and liberal society.

Regardless of people's concerns about sexual imagery, most participants felt that companies, advertisers and broadcasters used sexual imagery because 'sex sells'.

Certain channels were thought to be more likely to broadcast programmes containing scenes of a sexual nature than others. Channel 4 and Five were mentioned in particular.

As with the swearing and offensive language section of the research, a sexual imagery show reel was produced that contained programme clips containing examples of sexual imagery on television. The show reel was shown to respondents in order to gauge their reactions to the individual clips and to provide stimulus for discussion in the focus groups. The clips were from a collection of programmes (pre and post watershed) broadcast during 2004 that Ofcom had received complaints about.

As with the language clips, in general, all groups found the same clips offensive. Overall, the use of sexual imagery in the reality and the documentary examples were judged to be the most offensive of all the clips.

Observations from the participants' reactions and discussions of the clips are summarised below:

- Scenes of heavy petting that allude to a forthcoming sexual encounter within soap operas were acceptable (albeit near the boundaries) for the majority of the participants. However, for a minority of participants, even this could make them uncomfortable.
- Sexual innuendo within programmes targeting a young audience could be considered inappropriate by the participants.
- Participants felt that humour does not always dilute the offensiveness of sexual innuendo.
- Participants had certain expectations surrounding reality shows - including the likelihood of more extreme displays of sexual behaviour. However a minority of (older) respondents felt the way that these programmes are set up to encourage this type of activity is inappropriate.
- Participants were willing to accept scenes of a sexual nature within dramas – particularly if their expectations of these programmes were clearly set up by the programme title, channel, transmission time etc.
- Sexual imagery is much better received outside of the family viewing zone, and for many respondents this meant after 2200.
- The majority view of participants on channel promotions for adult subscription channels (e.g. Xplicit XXX channel promotion), was that these should only be accessible on adult subscription channels and even then there was concern. There was concern that children might come across this 'adult' promotional material, and they should therefore not be available until much later in the evening¹.

¹ Many participants in this research had never seen channel promotions to adult subscription channels as they did not view much outside of the mainstream and were surprised and shocked to find this material can be accessed without paying a subscription – most did not endorse the availability of this in the mainstream. Ofcom imposed a financial statutory sanction against the licensee, in this case, for transmitting this material at 2030.

Music Videos

Many of the parents interviewed in this research expressed concern about music videos. However, the concern was not just focused on sexual imagery, but included a wider discussion of language, extreme images and lifestyle issues. Music videos by artistes who appealed to younger (pre-teen audience) were seen as often giving most cause for offence. Sexually provocative poses, in particular, are found offensive.

Rap and hip hop videos were mentioned as a genre of concern to some participants because of the lifestyle and moral code which they appeared to endorse. This included sexually provocative dancing and scenes of groups of people involved in sexually provocative behaviour. For some participants this was offensive as it was felt to engender an attitude of disrespect towards women.

The teenagers interviewed in this research did not express concern or offence about music videos and had different expectations as to what they might find on different channels/programmes.

Informed viewing choices

As part of the focus group discussion, respondents discussed viewing decision-making and responsibilities. There was a broad consensus among these participants that responsibility for viewing choices is – and should be – largely an individual one. There was also a strong sense that parents should have the responsibility for ensuring that their children view appropriate material.

It was however, also acknowledged by some that not all parents would act responsibly at all times and so there was a need for the broadcasters also to be responsible for providing a framework for viewing. The watershed was considered to be the single most useful tool in giving parents a clear indication of when programming is suitable or not.

Newspaper listings were also considered to be a useful guide to whether programme content is suitable for children to watch. Pre-warnings on television were also noted and thought useful. However they were considered to be inconsistent by some participants who felt that they did not differentiate clearly between degrees of language or sexual imagery. Some of the participants felt that programme titles also helped to formulate expectations and should therefore be chosen accordingly by programme-makers.

The participants' personal response to viewing offensive or inappropriate material is simply to switch off or turn over; however participants said that this response is only likely to happen if they are viewing with company.

Complaint procedures were not well known or understood among the research participants and were felt to be under-publicised. Participants also felt that there appeared to be fewer forums for viewer opinion on television than previously.

Issues for the regulation of television

For most participants in the research, regulation is still considered relevant in a multi-channel world and is there to curb broadcasters and to provide a zone of 'safe' viewing for both children and parents. Given the choice, many of the participants claimed they would opt to keep the watershed – the best known aspect of regulatory codes for broadcast, though some said that they would like it later, particularly at weekends. They felt the watershed should apply equally across all main channels,

but many thought that Channel 4 and Five should be allowed a more relaxed post-watershed regime.

BBC1 was expected by the majority to be the 'gold standard'. Participants said they expected BBC1 to deliver a high level of quality with regard to content and standards.

Most thought that general entertainment satellite, cable and DTT channels should adhere to a similar regulatory code as the five terrestrial channels. Premium rate subscription channels should have more freedom to broadcast a range of content at all times of the day/night.

Section 2

Background and Research Objectives

The legacy regulators (Independent Television Commission, Broadcasting Standards Commission and The Radio Authority) had previously carried out a number of studies into the areas of language and sexual imagery, and much information has been previously gathered about viewer and listener attitudes to these issues. However, what was less explored and, indeed, more difficult to research and provide guidance upon, was an understanding of contextual issues surrounding broadcasts of this nature.

A qualitative research study would establish whether public attitudes in these areas had changed, and would provide further exploration of different contextual elements (different times of day, different platforms, different programme genres, different characters/actors etc.). The reason for selecting a qualitative methodology was because of the difficulties in reflecting context in a quantitative study and the need for a more unstructured discussion and therefore the findings of this research are by their nature indicative as opposed to conclusive.

This report details the findings of the qualitative research which was carried out in October 2004.

The overall research objectives were defined as follows:

- to build upon the previous research about levels of offence and tolerance towards swearing and offensive language on television and radio and attitudes towards sexual imagery/content on television;
- to understand how reactions/levels of acceptability and tolerance differ pre-watershed and post-watershed, by channel, by context (e.g. programme genre) and by platform;
- to establish to what extent levels of concern about swearing and sexual content on television and radio are specific to those media, and to what extent they are present in daily life more generally;
- to provide guidance about how sensitivities regarding such material differ among different groups within society, including young people aged 15 to 17 years old;
- to learn more about what viewers and listeners consider the appropriate regulatory or broadcaster response (if any) to these issues.

Methodology

The methodology used for this study consisted of two core components:

Component 1: Five Context Response sessions

- 3 sessions of 40 participants each (in Bristol, Leicester and Glasgow) and 2 sessions of 25 participants each (in London) undertaking a self-completion exercise to evaluate swearing and offensive language on television and on radio, and sexual imagery on television in context.
- Participants recruited to reflect the core range of sub-group variables, including life stage, age, ethnicity (British Asian and African-Caribbean) television ownership and socio-economic grade.

Component 2: Thirteen follow up focus groups

- 13 one and a half hour focus groups following immediately on from the Context Response sessions. The focus groups contained predominantly the same participants from the Context Response sessions and took place in the same locations.
- The majority of groups were mixed gender, to encourage dialogue and replicate a home viewing environment. A few key groups were run as single gender groups (African-Caribbean younger males, British Asian females).

In addition to the thirteen focus groups, two 'young person' focus groups were recruited (one male group, one female group), who each attended 2 hour sessions. During these sessions they watched the same viewing material as that shown in the larger context sessions, and took part in a short follow-up discussion afterwards.

The rationale for selecting the above methodological approach was largely due to the acknowledged difficulties in discussing context – the clips therefore provided useful stimuli to initiate debate of the issues. The clips also enabled a range of responses regarding offence and context to be collected from a large number of individuals in a relatively short period of time, and therefore represented a useful additional component to the focus groups.

A standard focus group contained between 8-10 respondents.

Fieldwork took place between the 7th and 17th October 2004.

A total of 173 respondents participated in the context response sessions and 118 in the follow up focus groups.

Full details of the sample profile and the structure of the focus groups are in Appendix II.

Research note:

A key consideration was to canvass opinion from a variety of groups and sub-sectors. However, whilst it is important to understand how offence/tolerance differs by different sub-sectors of society (whether defined by life stage, ethnicity, or simple socio-economic status), it is just as important to synthesise these findings in order to establish where there is consensus. There is now a single Code for broadcasters, so the different sensitivities of multiple groups needed to be embraced within one framework and the research needed to take this into consideration. The research therefore limited the number of sub-sectors to the ones considered core.

Section 3

Offensive Language and Swearing

Attitudes to swearing and offensive language

Attitudes to language vary widely within any population. Previous research has found that factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and UK region all had an effect on views of what constitutes offensive language and the relative strength of those words. For that reason it is impossible to create a definitive list of words that all would agree are “offensive”. However in order to research the subject, we explored words that have traditionally caused offence to a greater or lesser number of viewers/listeners.

All participants in the research believed swearing and, in particular, the use of offensive or strong language has become endemic in society. It has become more widespread in public places, schools, on the street and in some workplaces. While this expansion is acknowledged, few were sure why this should be so, although the media is thought to have played a part in the trend.

“There’s more of it, we’ve become more accepting from media, gangsta rap, music videos, multiple TV channels...also a lot of deprived estates, the parents use the language a lot.” (Male, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

“You always hear it everywhere...on the bus. And reality TV.” (Male teen)

Attitudes to the use of swearing and strong language appeared to divide along gender lines among the older participants. The male participants talked about finding swearing acceptable in certain predominantly male environments (playing football, on building sites etc), but did not bring such language home. For some of the (older) men it was considered inappropriate to swear in front of women.

“Like at work, for instance, obviously with the boys and stuff, they are always going to have a bit of a swearing session.” (Male, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

Older respondents were more likely to express regret and occasional horror at the language they heard on the street or workplace, seeing it as evidence of a general lowering of standards. It was also thought by some participants to be more widely used by those who are ‘less-educated’ or ‘less well-off’, and some felt that frequent use of swearing indicated someone who was ‘stupid’, or at the very least, lacking in imagination or vocabulary. Others went further, seeing frequent swearing as a gauge of general behaviour patterns, indicating someone who is out of control and possibly engaging in other unacceptable behaviours as well.

“Symptomatic of the whole thing, isn’t it - the teenager who is using very bad language - he probably smokes, he drinks a lot, he gets into drugs, etc. It starts somewhere, doesn’t it?” (Male, non-parent, 55+, BC1, terrestrial)

It was not just the older participants who felt strongly about the increase in swearing and strong language in public life. Some of those in their teens and early twenties also felt that too many people resorted too readily to frequent swearing and cited the

increasing use of offensive language among children who swear among themselves on the bus, in the street, and to their seniors.

Those with religious affiliations or from ethnic minorities were also particularly offended by the use of frequent swearing, particularly in the workplace, and disliked its prevalence.

“I don’t think it’s all about children, I am personally affected.” (Male, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

Attitudes to offensive language were not however uniform or only related to age. Some participants, particularly those in their twenties and thirties, expressed a more relaxed attitude to the use of offensive language and said they were rarely offended by anything that they heard.

However, what united almost all the groups, whatever their personal use of swearing or strong language, was a high level of concern about the type and use of language with regard to young people. This concern was twofold; firstly a dislike of hearing young people using such language, and secondly a dislike of hearing offensive language used in front of young people because young people were likely to copy and adopt the language themselves.

For many parents, this meant that they took care not to swear at home in front of children, especially younger children, or to limit the swear words used by their children even when they are teenagers. While some parents accepted that children will start to swear as they get older, even these parents did not wish to hear their children swearing at home or in other situations, for example, in front of grandparents or other adults. Hearing children and early teens use strong language, especially within the family situation, was seen as denoting a lack of respect by almost everyone, even those who admit to using such language themselves:

“It is a matter of respect and respecting each other and that is one of my biggest concerns, trying to be able to teach my child how to respect others, but if everyone is using these words it is conflicting ideas in my child’s head, so it is a grave concern for me.” (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

“If you’re exposing kids to a lot of swear words then they’re going to use them in the wrong context and it results in trouble or it results in hurting someone you don’t mean to...” (Female, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

Research note: In research, the process of investigating subject matter often has an effect on what people are saying. Once people start talking, their awareness of the subject matter is heightened, and to some extent, fears which might be latent, become more overt. This is not to say that they are exaggerated. Rather that there is an element within all such discussions which speaks to real fears which people have about society ‘breaking down’. Swearing can be seen as a symptom, and as such it is something which people are concerned about even if, on an everyday level, it is not something which people really give a great deal of thought to.

Swearing habits and behaviours

The research indicated that there appears to be a relationship between age and likelihood of swearing. The teenager and younger groups were more likely to say that they swore regularly within their peer groups with this being a form of bonding which

reinforces friendship groups. They were not shocked by particular words in their own right, but were sensitive to how words are used. Aggressive swearing or racial insults topped their list of dislikes.

"I see it as an attack, because it just expresses anger." (Female, non-parent, 18-25, BC1, multi-channel)

However, the teenagers in the research were less likely to swear at home or in front of parents, as this showed a lack of respect. This was expressed more strongly among those from ethnic minority groups or with religious affiliations.

Older groups admitted to swearing, though for many this was simply an occasional 'slippage' - the 'stubbed toe' syndrome. There was an acknowledgement that swearing of this type relieves stress and is therefore acceptable - even, for some parents, if used by children.

"It's more effective to say 'fuck' if you hurt your ankle rather than say, 'oh dear goodness, I've hurt my ankle'." (Female, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

Summary points

- Swearing and offensive language is considered to be widespread and to have increased over time by all groups
- It was seen as a symptom of decline in public life, for which participants believed the media was partly responsible
- All groups considered that the worst aspect of the increase in swearing was because of the example it sets to younger people/children
- The use of offensive language by young people is most offensive overall as it is seen as indicating a lack of respect
- Through the process of detailed discussion, swearing becomes a benchmark for underlying fears about society 'breaking down', or standards 'slipping'.
- Younger people were more likely to swear among their peer groups, and saw it as inoffensive in this context. However, there was a wide range of behaviours in relation to swearing across all groups.

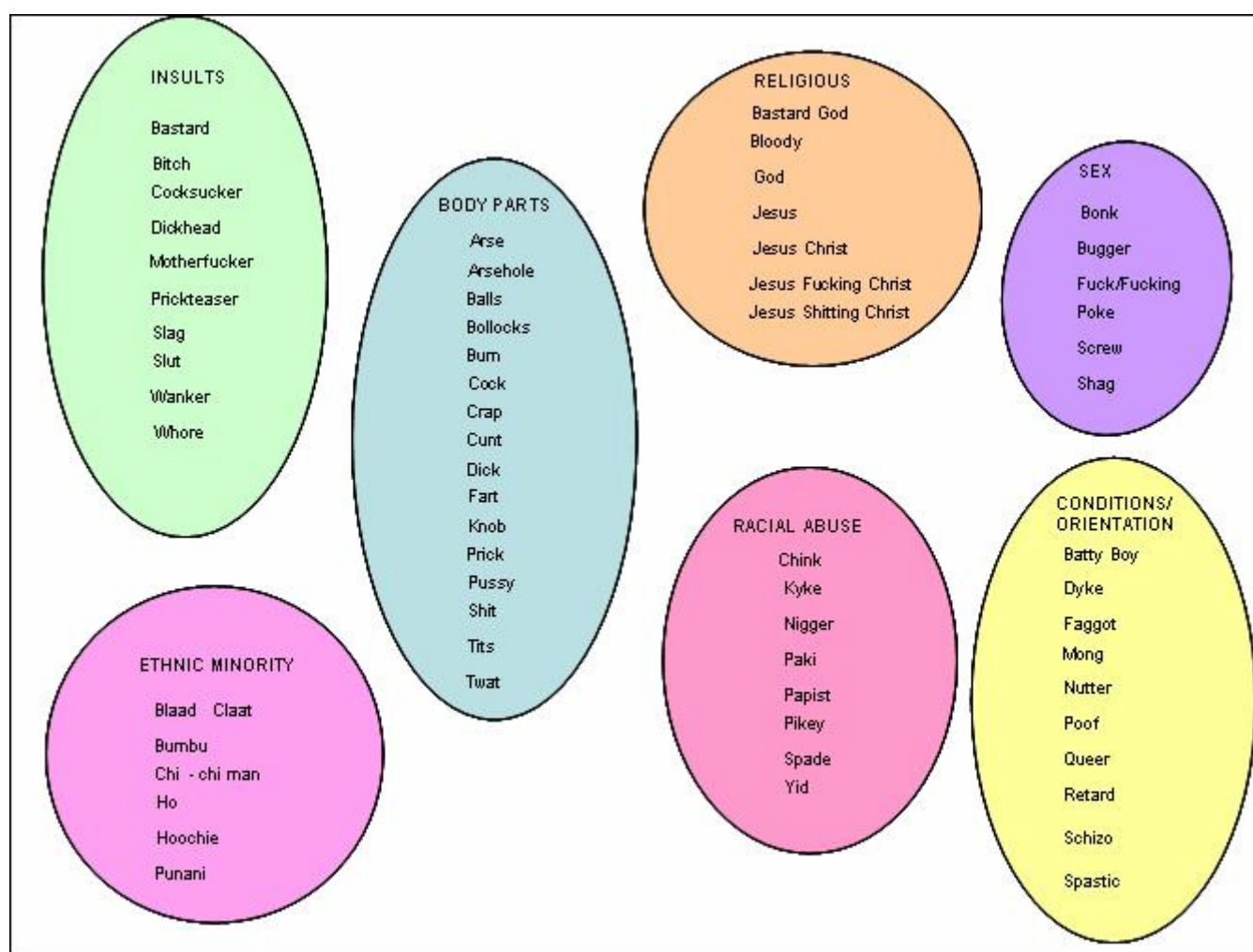
Offensive words and language

The words which participants thought of as most offensive appeared to be universal. Most likely to be mentioned were 'cunt' and 'fuck'. Among those from ethnic minorities, however, some terms of racial abuse were also put forward as being the most offensive words or insults; these included 'nigger', 'paki', and in one case, 'coloured'. Moreover, in nearly every group discussion there was at least one person who felt strongly, because of background or religious affiliation, about profanity, including 'Jesus Christ'. In one of the Scottish groups the most insulting/offensive terms included the terms 'Fenian', and 'Fenian bastard' as well as 'Proddy'.

"To be discriminatory, like to race or disabled, that is wrong." (Female teen)

All focus groups, except the two teenage sessions, carried out a word sort using cards with swear words written on them. The purpose of this sort was to understand how people categorised different words in order to gain more insight into the levels of offence given by words in these categories.

Word sort by category



The key findings of this exercise were:

- When asked to sort words into categories it was clear that the majority of respondents thought of 'swear' words in terms of ascending levels of offensiveness, rather than by groupings or categories. There were two exceptions to this - blasphemous words and terms of racial abuse – which are more likely to be thought of as a 'category'.
- Terms of racial abuse such as 'paki' and 'nigger' were thought to be among the most insulting words by some. However, several participants from ethnic minority groups talked about having 'taken ownership' of these words. They said they used them within their own ethnic group/peer group and can do so affectionately and without any insult being given or intended. However, it was pointed out that this does not usually work across racial groups.
- Words denoting sexual orientation e.g. 'poof', 'queer' and 'faggot' were also thought by some respondents to have been taken into 'ownership' by their own communities in the same way as some of the words of racial abuse described above. These observations were drawn regardless of sexual orientation and appeared to have been picked up through films and popular

programmes. There was some disagreement as to whether these were insulting or offensive if used by a heterosexual to describe someone who was known to be homosexual. However, heterosexual men said they found these words offensive if directed at them.

- Words referring to women's sexual mores such as 'slut', 'whore', and 'prickteaser' were considered highly offensive to women, particularly when used by men. The term 'bitch' was seen as particularly insulting by African-Caribbean women.
- The women in the groups found words referring to women's genitalia, including 'cunt' (though this is considered offensive by men as well) and 'twat' as the most offensive. The men were more likely to consider these words less offensive than women.
- Some terms of racial/religious affiliation abuse had greater awareness by participants in certain regions such as 'kyke' and 'yid' in London and 'papist' in Scotland.
- Many ethnic minority terms such as 'bumbu' and 'punani'² were not understood by the white participants and the majority had never come across them.
- Words which referred to mental or physical disabilities were in a category which appeared to divide people. 'Retard', 'schizo', 'spastic' and 'mong' all fell into this group. Many participants, especially from the older groups, considered these words 'jokey' and completely inoffensive (with the possible exception of 'mong' which is not well understood among older groups). Others, in particular the younger groups, were more sensitive to these words and understood that using these words could insult some people, however humorously used.
- There was a general agreement that many words have become tolerated and almost 'every day'. These words discussed were wide ranging and included 'toilet words', words for sexual body parts and profanity. The list included words such as 'arse', 'crap', 'bum', 'shit', 'tits', 'dick', 'God' and 'screw'. However, while there was consensus that these words are commonplace, there were participants in every group who did not want to hear these words used by their families or on television.
- There were a small, but vocal number of participants who found the use of holy names unacceptable. 'Jesus' and 'Jesus Christ' appeared to be commonplace and even mild terms for the majority, but for these people, the abuse of these names is every bit as offensive as the use of racial terms is for others. Multiples for example, 'Jesus fucking Christ', were considered even more offensive.

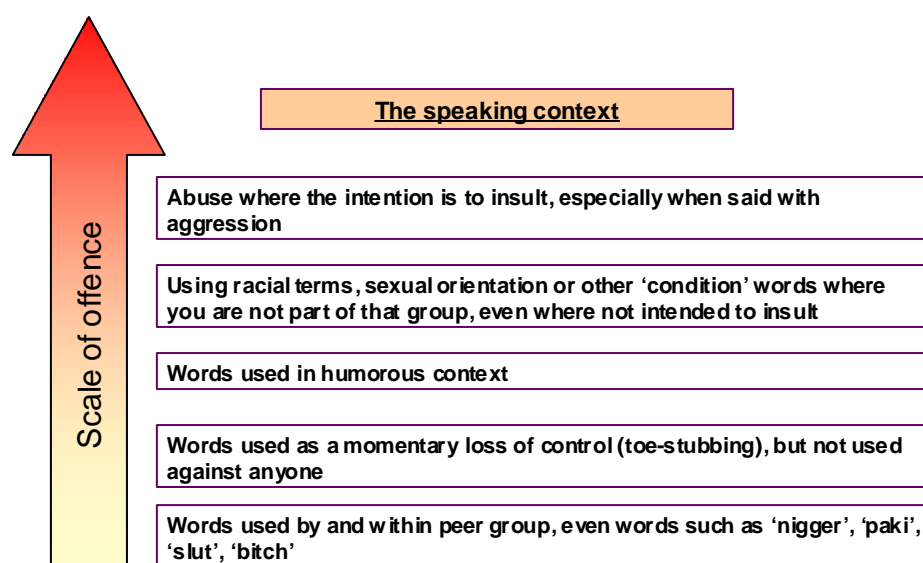
² 'Bumbu'/'Punani' – female genitalia.

Words in their context

While there were diverging views about which words were acceptable or tolerated, there was a degree of consensus about the contexts which make words more or less offensive.

In general, there are two key points of consideration:

- The intent or 'speaking context' behind the use of language
- The 'listening context'



The speaking context can be illustrated as a scale of offence - shown in the above diagram. At the bottom of the scale of offence are words which are used by and within the peer group. Further up the scale are words which are used as a result of a momentary loss of control e.g. stubbing the toe or shutting a finger in the door. At the top of the scale are words used aggressively or in anger against another person, and those words which are used deliberately to insult or cause offence to another. These include terms of racial abuse and words which are suggestive of a type of sexual behaviour, for example, calling a woman a 'slag' or a 'prickteaser'. Somewhere in between is the casual or repetitive use of swearing which is used by some people, for example in the workplace, which many claimed to find offensive, ironically because it is often done thoughtlessly. Finally, humour or affection is thought to take a lot of the sting out of a word which might otherwise be thought to be offensive or insulting.

"It's more offensive when it's used as a weapon towards another person. That's when it becomes unacceptable." (Female, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

"If my eldest said, 'Oh Dad, you are an arse!' if they were joking about it wouldn't bother me. If he was being told off and then got mad and said, 'You arsehole', that would be different." (Male, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

An issue already mentioned on which many groups commented was that of 'taking ownership of words back'. Words which have previously been used as a form of abuse - particularly terms referring to race or sexual orientation - are said to have been 'taken back' by groups who were at one time the target of the words in question. So young British Asians talk about calling each other 'paki's or 'stans', and African-Caribbeans and Africans talk about using the word 'nigger' or 'nig brother' within their peer group. However, it was not acceptable for people to use the word across racial groups.

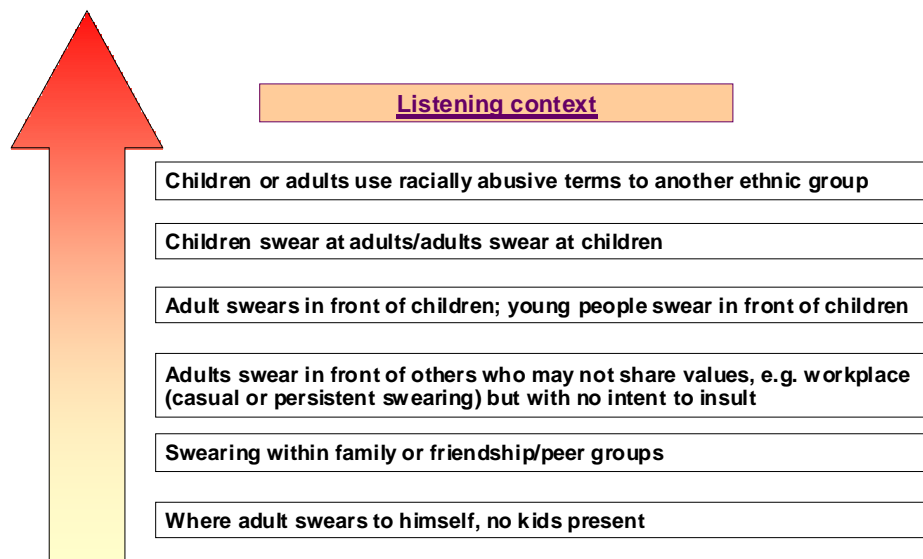
"If I go and call someone a Paki, there is no offensive value I don't think, whereas if I were white or black and I go and call them a nigger or a honky it becomes offensive because I am not of the same racial background." (Male, non-parent, 18-25, BC1, multi-channel)

"If I am in a group of black people, for me to say 'nigger' is fine" (Female, non-parent, 18-25, BC1, multi-channel)

"We've taken that word back now. Yid is no longer an insult in N17 - fans used to come to Tottenham and sing 'Yiddos', 'Yiddos', and now Tottenham fans sing 'Yid Army'. We are the Yids, and they can't insult us with it any more." (Male, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

In just the same way, there was a suggestion from respondents that homosexuals have taken back/or taken ownership of some of the terms which were originally used to insult them. For some this trend is a positive indication that the sting has been taken out of these words, but this is only when used in certain contexts. For the rest of the time, the words remain as powerful - and offensive - as before.

The listening context can also be illustrated by using a scale of offence, as shown in the diagram below. At the bottom of the scale are more innocuous occasions discussed by respondents, for example, when adults swear to themselves with no one else present as a curse. Swearing within peer groups or friendship groups also falls lower down the offence scale. Swearing or use of offensive language when children are present increases the level of offence. The most offensive situations, according to participants, tend to be those where adults swear in front of children or use racially charged terms of abuse across ethnic groups.



The use of casual and repetitive swearing in the workplace is more likely to be a problem where people of differing beliefs and standards are together.

Many parents said that they felt uneasy if their children swore 'inappropriately', for example in front of a grandparent.

Many of the teenagers said that they would swear when they were with their friends but attempt not to when with parents or younger siblings.

"I could be swearing in front of my friends but if my mum was in the room it is disrespectful towards her." (Male, non-parent, 18-25, African-Caribbean, C2DE, multi-channel)

"My young son who is 15 now, perhaps using 'bugger off' or 'F off' and my Mum's sitting there. I might think, 'Ach well, it's just his age, he's going through that', but my mother may not accept that - she might say, 'Hang on, I didn't allow my children to do that, why do you allow him to do that'." (Female, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

"I wouldn't allow anybody in my company to swear in front of my daughter." (Female, parent of younger children, C2DE, terrestrial)

Summary points

- The participants felt that the manner in which words are used helps to define how offensive they are, with words spoken in aggression being the most offensive overall. However, casual repetitive swearing can also be offensive.
- Some types of words - specifically racial terms and words describing a person's sexual orientation – were thought by some participants to have, to some degree, been 'taken back into ownership' by some who were previously the subject of these words.
- The second layer of context which was important to participants in defining how offensive words are perceived to be is to do with the 'listening context'. People's response to the words that they use themselves - or that others use - varies depending on who is being spoken to and who is listening to them.

Language on Television

Most participants in the groups believed that there was more offensive language used on television today than a few years ago and that the language used has become stronger. Even those who claimed not to be personally offended by anything that they heard noted this trend. This issue was also raised by participants in our Safe Environment research.

There was thought to be more strong language across many programme types and across all channels. Many participants felt that Channel 4 (and possibly Five) had led the way in this increase. Some also cited music channels as being a concern, particularly in relation to the lyrics of pop videos.

The use of strong language was thought to be occurring earlier in the evening. Some participants associated this with soap operas.³

"I have to say on EastEnders about three or four years ago they weren't even allowing the terms 'bitch', 'slag', 'cow'; you weren't allowed to say anything like that, whereas now it is coming out." (Female, non-parent, 18-25, BC1, multi-channel)

Apart from soap operas, reality programmes were mentioned more frequently than any other programming type when discussing strong language.

"It has got worse, especially on reality shows, for example, Big Brother." (Female, non-parent, 18-25, British Asian, BC1, multi-channel)

As part of the broader discussion that took place, participants recognised that television and radio did not operate in isolation from society, where the growth of swearing and strong language can be said to be endemic. Nevertheless, the majority of participants retained a strong sense that broadcasters have a responsibility to set

³ It should be noted that audience perceptions of the presence and use of swearing and offensive language can sometimes be driven by aggressive behaviour/ tone within storylines and are not always factually accurate regarding the actual presence of swearing and offensive language.

standards rather than simply reflect society. It was also felt by some that broadcasters and programme makers were resorting to incorporating or allowing such language as part of their attempt to chase ratings.

"It's not young people who are making these programmes - its older people who are making them and they're making them for exploitative reasons." (Male, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

Amid the general sense that language on television has worsened in recent years, there were a few who voiced the opinion that they had seen or heard very little which was offensive on television of late with regard to language.

"I don't have kids, but I don't have a view that I would be overly concerned about them seeing anything that I see on the telly at a young age - I think that it's all pretty much as it should be -there is nothing on before 9 o'clock that I think is that ghastly" (Male, C2DE, terrestrial)

"I think the broadcast companies have got it pretty much down to a tee; I think they do put things on TV at the right times -every now and again they might slip up, but it is nature." (Male, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

A few participants went further than this 'less concerned' opinion. For them, television has actually 'progressed' in its use of language. These viewers, who represented a range of different social groups, but in particular young African-Caribbean males, put forward the view that television has evolved (in line with society) to become more sensitive about the use of offensive language. Programmes such as 'Love thy Neighbour' and 'Only Fools and Horses' were cited as historical programming where casual uses of racist language were habitual, and this would not be tolerated now.

"In the Only Fools and Horses video Uncle Albert uses the word paki three times in the opening five minutes." (Male, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, terrestrial)

"It's different, it's evolved. For example, we wouldn't use terms like nig-nog and snowdrop like you heard in Love Thy Neighbour in the 60s and 70s, but other words we would use." (Male, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

Possible reasons for concern

Those who believed that there was more offensive language on our screens nowadays tended to say that this was a concern for three key reasons:

Firstly, it sets a poor example to children. Parents, grandparents and those with younger siblings all expressed this view. They were most concerned about the inappropriate scheduling of programmes containing strong language.

"Yes they (children) are going to hear bad language, but I don't think it should be reinforced everywhere they turn." (Female, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

"Even though we don't like the bad language, I think it's more important that the impressionable kids don't hear it; if I don't hear it, why should they hear it from somewhere else." (Female, non-parent, 55+, BC1, terrestrial)

Secondly, the use of offensive language was thought to be offensive and 'unnecessary' in its own right. The older groups and some of the younger participants put forward this view.

Some parents and those in their twenties and thirties, however, claimed not to have been personally offended by anything which they had seen or heard.

Finally, even if not personally offensive, the use of strong language was considered uncomfortable for those viewing in a family situation. This was true for parents, empty nesters with grandchildren and younger people, all of whom view from time to time in the family context.

"It's awfully embarrassing getting up and turning a programme off in the middle - if someone else is there - just because you don't like it."
(Female, non-parent, 55+, BC1, terrestrial)

It was particularly true in the groups of British Asian women, where family viewing was the norm. The viewing context here was the key. And not only was it embarrassing for viewers in these circumstances - it could also reflect badly on the person who had chosen to view the programme. This argument was put forward by some young female and British Asian female groups. For these participants, the fact that they had chosen a programme containing offensive language might be interpreted as a tacit approval of the language and the mores which its use appeared to convey.

"It is like you sit there watching telly and then your parents don't like it - you don't want your parents to lay into you about it, especially if you have chosen the programme." (Female, 15-17, BC1)

Summary points

- For the majority, strong language on television was an issue; they believed there was more of it across a range of programming types and channels (though especially on Channel 4), that it started earlier in the evening and that soaps and reality programmes had contributed to this decline more than other genres.
- Broadcasters were thought to have a duty to set standards, rather than just reflect society. Some respondents also thought that broadcasters can be too concerned with rating-chasing
- A small minority said that there was little or no language on television which offended them or was inappropriately timed
- Some put forward the view that television had improved with regard to the use of language, particularly with regard to racial terms
- The strongest reason given for concern over strong or offensive language was the influence it was believed to have on children and the potential for them to imitate it
- There was also a concern, expressed by all ages (but especially among British Asian women) about offensive language in programmes watched in a family context

How television offends

When asked to give examples of specific programmes which had offended them by using strong language or swearing, most participants found it hard to recall details. Many participants did not easily recall instances where they had been offended but did have a perception that language on television has 'got worse'. The instances that were put forward are listed below.

- A programme described as a documentary which featured a football manager swearing at the players in the changing room, and repeatedly using the word 'fuck'. The context itself (football, a very highly charged situation, an all-male environment) was felt to justify the occasional use of the word 'fuck'. But the constant repetition of the word was thought to be 'over the top'.
- Trisha show - increasing amounts of strong language.
- The Osbournes - "but it's funny" and "*you expect it*".
- EastEnders - thought to have featured more swearing recently, but no one can cite specific examples.
- Fly-on-the-wall documentary about police which revealed a lot of inherent racism. One person found this shocking, but more because of what it revealed about police attitudes than anything else.
- Grumpy Old Men - too much strong language, which "*spoils the programme*".
- Hell's Kitchen, with Gordon Ramsay - it's the repeated use of the swearing which makes this unacceptable for some.

Two points emerged from these top-of-mind examples put forward in the research groups: First, that there were certain contexts which might make strong and offensive

language more acceptable. Authenticity was recognised (by some) as being a legitimate reason for including strong language, although this does not necessarily mean that viewers will tolerate a programme featuring such language at an earlier time because of this. And, as will become clear in the next section, authenticity was not considered a justification in every situation by these participants.

The second issue which emerged was that viewers make a distinction between swearing where they feel it is 'part of the context' - for example, on *The Osbournes*, and swearing where it is thought to add nothing to the programme and could easily have been edited out (e.g. *Hell's Kitchen*). Expectations concerning what a programme is about are key to how well strong language is tolerated.

Section 4

A Contextual Understanding of Response to Language on TV

Overview

As part of this piece of research a 'show reel' was produced, made up of a total of ten clips containing examples of strong or offensive language. These clips were shown in the Context Response Groups. The clips came from a variety of programme types which fell into two main categories: drama and entertainment programmes and reality and documentaries. They represented a collection of programmes pre and post watershed broadcast during 2004 that Ofcom had received complaints about. The clips are detailed in the list below. Due to the nature of the research it should be noted that we were unable to show respondents entire programmes and therefore they did not hear any pre-transmission presentation information which may have been provided. Also the time stated is that of the programme start time, not necessarily the time the actual clip was broadcast.

Only Fools and Horses: BBC1, 2130

Two characters are in a pub looking at some photos and one of them refers to a person in the photo as being a 'mong'.

Emmerdale: ITV1, 1900

The clip involves two central characters (husband and wife) talking about why she has not fallen pregnant. The woman replies that she has secretly been taking contraceptive injections and never wanted to get pregnant. The man is shocked and responds by calling her a bitch.

My Parents are Aliens: CiTV, 1630

A children's programme. The father is talking with his daughter in the clip and he gives her a birthday present which is a mug with the phrase 'worlds best son'. The girl then says but 'I'm your daughter' to which her father replies 'I know that I may be an alien but I'm not a retard.'

Footballers' Wives: ITV1, 2100

A drama series. The clip involves Tanya, one of the main characters, whose skin breaks out in a rash as she is eating oysters in a restaurant. (She had actually had her sun cream lotion tampered with by her adversary Amber). She runs to the bathroom and exclaims 'Jesus shitting Christ' when she sees her face in the mirror.

Union Jack: C4, 1310

This programme is part of the T4 series. Sharon Osborne pretends to be an agony aunt and starts reading out a letter. The advice she starts to give in response to the letter, at the start, sounds genuine. However as she continues to talk she becomes progressively ruder until the end of her response culminated in the use of the word 'arse wipe' and a bleeped (and masked) use of the word 'fuck'.

No Going Back: C4, 2000

Documentary series of families going abroad to start businesses. This clip involved a couple trying to cook a meal for their guests and it all goes wrong. The clip ends with the wife in the kitchen saying “shit, shit, shit”.

Bad Lads’ Army: ITV1, 2100

Reality series following young men who have been in trouble doing ‘National Service’. In this clip, recruits are in the wood discussing bayonet practice. During the discussion, one recruit starts using the F-word repeatedly and ends by saying ‘fucking mad man’.

I’m a Celebrity...ITV1, 2100

A reality game show where celebrities are voted out of the jungle. In this clip Ant and Dec tell one of the celebrities that he hasn’t been voted out and that he has to stay in the jungle. He responds by saying ‘fucking cunts’.

Rude Girls: BBC2, 2100

A documentary about three London-based girl gangs. In the clip used they were at the Luton carnival and started behaving aggressively with other people and using offensive language. The words ‘Paki’ and ‘Nigger’ were used.

Trouble at the Top: BBC2, 2150

Reality programme following people trying to set up new businesses. This clip involved a chef who set up and was trying to run a restaurant. In a heated scene the chef calls out ‘where’s the fucking mullet?’ a number of times to no reply and then says ‘Jesus fucking Christ’.

Respondents were shown each clip in turn and asked to respond to a number of questions contained within a self completion booklet. Questions within the response booklet included:

- Overall level of offence (on a scale of 1-10 where 1=not at all offensive and 10=extremely offensive)
- What time the clip should have aired on key channels
- How appropriate the actual transmission time was

In total 173 respondents rated each clip in the context response sessions, providing a sufficient base on which to report the findings. It should however be noted that the research was predominantly qualitative in nature. The quantitative element of the context response sessions was incorporated to provide useful backdrop to the qualitative findings in obtaining top-of-mind ‘offence responses’ to a large number of clips, as well as initiating more in depth discussion about offensive language and broadcasting context.

In general, all groups found the same clips most offensive, with some small variations:

- Women were more offended than men (but the sample included a large proportion of British Asian women).

- There were no real differences between parents and non-parents.
- Teens are similar to other age groups overall, but registering more offence to 'Rude Girls' and considerably more offence to 'Only Fools and Horses', than other age groups.
- British Asians were more offended than other ethnic groups for most clips. 'Rude Girls' offended them the most.
- Overall African-Caribbeans were most offended by the clip from 'Rude Girls'.

Overall, from the clips selected, the reality and documentary examples were found to be the most offensive examples of offensive language and swearing on television. These two genres are reported on separately in this report.

A. LANGUAGE: DRAMA & ENTERTAINMENT

Only Fools & Horses: “Mong”: BBC1 2130

Two characters are in a pub looking at some photos and one of them refers to a person in the photo as being a ‘mong’.

Context response session

This clip caused the lowest level of offence of all the clips shown, with the majority scoring it either 1, 2 or 3 on the ten point offence scale.

It was more offensive to younger people (under 25’s) and parents of younger children than it was to older people (many of whom were not familiar with the word).

Most felt that the earliest time the programme, containing this type of language, should be shown on the terrestrial channels was 1900, although one in five thought it could be shown at anytime.

Almost all thought that the transmission time on BBC1 was suitable.

Focus group response

This raised some of the same issues discussed later in the ‘My Parents are Aliens’ clip. It used a term ‘mong’ which some consider inappropriate in its mocking reference to people with Downs Syndrome in particular and those with learning difficulties in general. However, as the word sort exercise in the focus groups demonstrated, ‘mong’ or ‘mongs’ was not widely understood, particularly among older people - and the level of offence was therefore fairly low. Even for those who did know what the word meant, the shortened term, ‘mong’ was felt to be less offensive than the term ‘mongol’. However, as this was not a children’s programme it was considered less offensive than the ‘My Parents are Aliens’ clip.

“That is going to be offensive to people with disabilities who will still be up at 9.30pm.” (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

For some, not only was this inoffensive, but it would smack of political correctness if this programme had to be scheduled at 2200 because it contained this word.

“If they are going to put Only Fools & Horses on after 10 o’clock because they used the word ‘mong’ because it might upset somebody, it’s just not realistic, is it?” (Male, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

However, younger groups - and in particular, teens - did feel that this word was offensive, and disliked its use.

Summary points

- ‘Mong’ is one of the words which younger people feel differently about now compared to five or ten years ago, according to these respondents, illustrating how sensitivities towards words can change over time.
- However, it is - for most - still acceptable in a drama/comedy broadcast at this time of day. Many feel it could have been broadcast even earlier than it was.

Emmerdale: “You bitch”: ITV 1900

The clip involves two central characters (husband and wife) talking about why she has not fallen pregnant. The woman replies that she has secretly been taking contraceptive injections and never wanted to get pregnant. The man is shocked and responds by calling her a bitch.

Context response session

This clip was not considered to be particularly offensive, with two-thirds of respondents scoring it either 1, 2 or 3 on the ten point offence scale.

It was slightly more offensive to African-Caribbeans, British Asians and parents of younger children than other groups. It is noted earlier in the report that the term ‘bitch’ was more offensive to African-Caribbean female participants than it was to other groups.

Most felt that the earliest time a programme containing this type of language should be shown on BBC channels and ITV1 was 1900, with a little more leeway on Channel 4, Five and non-youth targeted digital channels. Only a tiny minority thought that a programme containing this type of language could be shown at anytime.

Three-quarters thought that the transmission time was suitable.

Focus group response

In the group discussions few claimed to be strongly offended by the use of the word ‘bitch’ in this programme context, despite the fact that for many, ‘bitch’ is quite a strong word in its own right. The context which made this acceptable was that it occurred as part of an argument, in which the female character revealed that she had been lying to her husband for over a year. There was therefore a degree of provocation which - for many - justified the use of this term here. Most parents said they would not be unhappy for their children to hear this as words of this nature were hardly ever used in ‘Emmerdale’.

“You would say that, wouldn’t you, if you thought you were trying to knock out a baby [get pregnant] for a year and getting nowhere. I think you would call her a bitch as well.”

(Female, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

“I wouldn’t like anyone to call me one but there again that was in the right context, because of the situation that was there. Just felt that he had got every right to call her that because that is what he felt she was at that time.” (Female, non-parent, 55+, C2DE, multi-channel)

“But it was the manner in which it was being used – he was arguing, she had lied to him.” Female, parent, older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial

Summary points

- Despite the general tendency to dislike strong language in soap operas, these respondents seem prepared to accept the occasional use of offensive language at a dramatic moment.
- Identification with the characters and involvement with the long-term story make the use of a word in this way more acceptable than it might be otherwise.

My Parents are Aliens: “I’m not a retard”: ITV 1630

A children’s programme. The father is talking with his daughter in the clip and he gives her a birthday present which is a mug with the phrase ‘worlds best son’. The girl then says but ‘I’m your daughter’ to which her father replies ‘I know that I may be an alien but I’m not a retard.’

Context response session

Overall, this clip was considered to be not very offensive, with just over three-quarters of respondents scoring it either 1, 2 or 3 on the ten-point offence scale.

It was somewhat more offensive to younger people and parents of younger children than it was to other groups, particularly older people.

Most felt that the earliest time a programme containing this type of language could be shown on the five terrestrial channels was 1500 with a little more leeway on non-youth targeted digital channels. One in five thought that a programme containing this type of language could be shown at anytime on the terrestrial channels.

The vast majority thought that the transmission time was suitable.

Focus group response

This clip polarised responses more than most. The younger groups and parents of younger children were somewhat more likely to be sensitive to the use of the word ‘retard’ and to feel it was inappropriate and potentially offensive, while older groups felt that it was more acceptable and had no issues with the word.

Most thought that it would have been more appropriate to use a word like ‘idiot’ or ‘stupid’.

“This is just like saying you are a paki.” (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

“Just the effect it might have on certain people, so retard is going to affect those people who may have those disabilities, or people you know.” (Female, parent of younger children, Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

“My son said, what is a retard, do you know what I mean?” (Female, parent of younger children, C2DE, terrestrial)

“I thought that was well out of order. That was the most offensive thing I saw on the clips tonight. I was slightly less offended by ‘mong’ in ‘Only Fools and Horses’ – but I still think it was unnecessary.” (Male, non-parent, 18-25, BC1, multi-channel)

Summary points

- A proportion of respondents were sensitive to the use of terms such as 'retard' which could be offensive to people with learning difficulties, and those who care for them. Words such as 'mongol', 'spastic' and 'cretin' all fall into this category of terms.
- They do not wish such language to be used, especially during children's programmes where children might pick up and imitate the language.
- They felt that there are suitable substitute words which could be used in place of retard.
- Broadcasters need to be aware of the way in which attitudes towards these words are evolving.

Footballers' Wives: "Jesus shitting Christ": ITV 2100

A drama series. The clip involves Tanya, one of the main characters, whose skin breaks out in a rash as she is eating oysters in a restaurant. (She had actually had her sun cream lotion tampered with by her adversary Amber). She runs to the bathroom and exclaims 'Jesus shitting Christ' when she sees her face in the mirror.

Context response session

This clip was considered to be moderately offensive, with under half giving it a lower offensiveness score and around one-third scoring it between 4 and 7 on the ten-point offence scale. Almost one-in-five rated it offensive (8, 9 or 10).

It was of more offensive to African-Caribbeans and parents with older children than other groups.

Most felt that the earliest time a programme containing this type of language could be shown on BBC and ITV1 was 2100 with a little more leeway on Channel 4, Five and non-youth targeted digital channels (2000). A third thought that it should be shown later at weekends.

The vast majority thought that the transmission time was suitable.

Focus group response

Although this phrase was disliked in general, in the context of this drama it was not thought particularly offensive by most. It was made more acceptable by the fact that it was spoken by a character at a moment of high dramatic tension; it was not directed at anyone else, nor said aggressively and it was within a drama which starts after 2100. For some, however, the start time was too early, and they felt the programme should not have started until at least 2130.

"I found that quite acceptable, really - yes, that is how you would react if you saw your face - 'Jesus shitting Christ'." (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

"I don't think they use it so prevalently in the drama and it always seems as if it is in context with the storyline that is going on around." (Female, non-parent, 55+, C2DE, multi-channel)

Summary points

- To these participants swearing used by an individual as a reaction to an event was both more acceptable in real life and within television dramas, as long as it is not used repeatedly.
- The potential offence of swearing in drama (appropriately scheduled) can be mitigated by a moment of high dramatic tension and if it is not directed at anyone or said aggressively.

Union Jack: 'Various': C4, 1310

This programme is part of the T4 series. Sharon Osborne pretends to be an agony aunt and starts reading out a letter. The advice she starts to give in response to the letter, at the start, sounds genuine. However as she continues to talk she becomes progressively ruder until the end of her response culminated in the use of the word 'arse wipe' and a bleeped (and masked) use of the word 'fuck'. It should be noted, that some respondents who were not familiar with this programme did not necessarily understand the programme format – and as such – their levels of offence may have been exacerbated because they considered it to be a genuine agony aunt clip.

Context response session

This clip was voted the most offensive in the drama and entertainment genre with just under half giving it a low offensiveness score and around a quarter scoring it at the top end of the scale.

It was more offensive to older people (55+), British Asians and to parents of older children than to other groups.

Everyone thought that a programme containing this type of language should be subject to time restrictions with most opting for 2100 as the earliest time on weekdays and later at weekends.

The vast majority thought that the transmission time was not suitable.

Focus group response

The response to this clip in which Sharon Osbourne appeared to be giving 'agony aunt' advice was somewhat muddled by the fact that most participants did not understand the nature of the programme this came from, and some even spoke as if this was part of *The Osbournes*, the programme for which Sharon Osbourne is best known for.

Few saw the humour as 'ironic' and it was not clear whether this was because the clip shown did not include the wider context of the programme. What participants seemed to be saying was that the swear words and language used by Sharon Osbourne were more shocking because it initially sounded as if she was giving genuine advice. This was the case even though Sharon Osbourne has a reputation for offensive language. In other words, people felt misled by the approach and were more shocked because of that.

"I don't think she should have been that specific about it - obviously if it was my parents, I don't want her saying that if I do something bad I should 'get a hard drive up my arse'." (Male, 15-17)

"At the beginning of the clip she used that real motherly tone." (Female, non-parent, 18-25, British Asian, BC1, multi-channel)

While a few found this amusing, there was a fairly widespread agreement that Sunday lunchtime was an inappropriate time for this to be broadcast because children were likely to be watching at this time. Moreover, although some of the swearing was bleeped out, this did not help, partly because "you know what she's saying" and partly because it did not really make people feel any better about the fact that she has said these words.

"And on a Sunday!" (reference to the day of broadcast - (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

“This was one of the worst (examples) because that’s when kids would have been watching.” (Female, non-parent, 25-34, BC1, multi-channel)

Most thought that this programme should have been on much later (after 2200) than it was broadcast.

Summary points

- Participants were more offended when swearing or offensive language was unexpected. In this case, while Sharon Osbourne is expected to use offensive language, the tone and appearance of this feature led people to think she was acting as a genuine agony aunt.
- Lunchtime programmes at the weekend may be targeted at younger audiences, but the whole family is around. The viewing context was therefore considered inappropriate for this type of programme.
- Bleeped swearing does not necessarily make the language acceptable.

B. LANGUAGE: REALITY & DOCUMENTARIES

No Going Back. “shit, shit, shit”: C4 2000

Documentary series of families going abroad to start businesses. This clip involved a couple trying to cook a meal for their guests and it all goes wrong. The clip ends with the wife in the kitchen saying “shit, shit, shit”.

Context response session

The language used in this clip was voted the least offensive in the documentary and reality genre with around six-in-ten giving it a low offensiveness score and hardly anyone scoring it at the top end of the scale.

It was somewhat more offensive to older people (55+) and British Asians than it was to other groups.

Most felt that the earliest time a programme containing this type of language could be shown on BBC and ITV1 was 2100, with a little more leeway on Channel 4, Five and on non-youth targeted digital channels (2000). A little over a third thought that a programme containing this type of language should be shown later at weekends.

Six-in-ten respondents thought that the transmission time was suitable.

Focus group response

This clip provoked no spontaneous response at all, and was only mentioned in two or three groups at the prompting of the moderator. The clip was thought to be fairly inoffensive overall. Interestingly, one girl was less offended by the multiple use of the word shit and more by the phrase “do you want me to shit on that?” For this individual the word ‘shit’ is more acceptable when used as a mild form of cursing than when it is used more accurately to describe a bodily function. The fact that this was spoken by a woman increased the level of offensiveness here.

Summary points

- The word ‘shit’ was felt not to be very offensive in its own right
- The context - documentary - with people who are not overtly ‘playing to camera’ and who are under stress - made it more acceptable
- Multiple use of any swear word is disliked but this word is tolerated more than most would be
- Swearing by women is more offensive to some

Bad Lads' Army "fucking mad man": ITV 2100

Reality series following young men who have been in trouble doing 'National Service'. In this clip, recruits are in the wood discussing bayonet practice. During the discussion, one recruit starts using the F-word repeatedly and ends by saying 'fucking mad man'.

Context response session

Opinions towards this clip were mixed. Around, the same proportion, a quarter, gave it a low offensiveness score as gave it a high offensiveness score. The remaining half rated the clip more neutrally (between 4-7).

It was more offensive to older people (55+) and parents of younger children.

Everyone felt that a programme containing this type of language should be subject to time restriction with the consensus being 2100 on all channels.

Focus group response

This clip was considered to be fairly strong and one of the most offensive examples by at least one or two people in most of the groups. However, it was polarising as others in the same groups considered it quite acceptable.

The key issue that it raised was whether it was acceptable to have repeated use of such language, especially such a strong word ('fuck'), within a programme which was focused on a group of recruits. For some, this setting amounted to a context where one would expect to hear this type of language; this therefore mitigated the degree of offence they might otherwise have felt. For others, no context excused that degree of language used habitually and repeatedly.

"Every sentence was just - no respect for each other at all." (Female, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

"It's not like they're out in public and speaking to a child - they were in that army situation." (Male, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

"It wasn't just the f word - it's the fact that they were being blasphemous all the way through." (Male, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

"It's like trying to be reality - showing you another side - people that were meant to go to prison - if you're going to say you're never going to see that, you're never going to see that other side.." (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

Most thought the programme should have been on after 2100 or 2130 in the evening. A few thought it shouldn't have been on until after 2200.

Summary points

- Repeated swearing is unacceptable to a sizeable minority, according to our respondents especially if the swear words include 'fuck'
- There is also however a substantial number who think that the setting of the programme (the context) does justify to some extent the use of such language
- The consensus view is that such programming should go out nearer 2200 than 2100 in the evening

I'm a Celebrity "Fucking Cunts": ITV 2100

A reality game show where celebrities are voted out of the jungle. In this clip Ant and Dec tell one of the celebrities that he hasn't been voted out and that he has to stay in the jungle. He responds by saying 'fucking cunts'

Context response session

Responses to this clip were somewhat mixed. Around one-third gave it a low offensive score, one-third a neutral score and one-third a high offensive rating score.

It was particularly offensive to older people (55+), British Asians and parents of older children.

Everyone felt that a programme containing this type of language should be subject to a time restriction with the consensus being 2100 on all channels. However, hardly anyone said that a programme containing this type of language should never be shown on television.

Two-thirds thought that the transmission time was suitable.

Focus group response

For most, 'cunt' is one of the most unacceptable words overall, and it is not surprising that many people found the use of it on this programme offensive, although others (mainly males) said they had not been 'bothered'.

"One of the worst. It should never have been used." (Male, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

"I would say that it's at the very high end of acceptability - it's almost not..." (Male, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

"I wasn't offended by Johnny Rotten saying 'cunt' because a) it was spontaneous, b) it was Johnny Rotten and you know he's going to do that and c) kids have got to learn these words at some time so they might as well learn from the master." (Male, non-parent, 25-34, BC1, multi-channel)

However, the context in which it was used (it was a live broadcast) and the fact that the presenters Ant and Dec apologised immediately afterwards, mitigated its use for a considerable numbers of these viewers.

"It was a slip up wasn't it - they couldn't have done anything about it, it was live." (Female, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

On consideration, however, many felt that the broadcasters were to blame for this slip up. By inviting John Lydon on to the programme they were 'asking for trouble' and should have anticipated this.

"I think everyone was waiting for that." (Female, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

"He made his name with that bad language on stage." (Male, non-parent, 55+, BC1, terrestrial)

Some of those (parents and older groups) who felt most strongly about the slip-up did so because of the fact that many younger people would have been watching the programme.

“Because it was supposed to be fun, and youngsters were watching it – I thought it was a load of rubbish – but the language and the scenes were really wrong for these youngsters ...if it’s going to be on – it’s a child’s one, it’s not for grown ups really - they should watch the language – they know what they’re saying.” (Female, non-parent, 55+, BC1, terrestrial)

Summary points

- Where, possible, respondents felt that broadcasters should anticipate the use of strong or offensive language and such programmes should not be shown live at a time when children are likely to be watching.
- Immediate apologies do help to mitigate the use of swear words
- Women and parents are most likely to be offended by this type of swearing in a programme which is judged to be targeting a family audience

Rude Girls “Paki” & “Nigger”: BBC2 2100

A documentary about three London-based girl gangs. In the clip used they were at the Luton carnival and started behaving aggressively with other people and using offensive language. The words ‘Paki’ and ‘Nigger’ were used.

Context response session

This clip was highly offensive for around a third of respondents. Just under half rated it more neutrally (4-7 offence rating), and the remaining fifth were not really offended.

It was particularly offensive to African-Caribbeans, British Asians and younger respondents – especially the 15 to 17 year olds.

Everyone felt that a programme containing this type of language should be subject to a time restriction with most thinking that 2100 should be the earliest on all channels, with a minority opting for 2200.

Two-thirds thought that the transmission time was suitable.

Focus group response

Some groups, in particular some young groups, African-Caribbean groups and British Asian girls, found this extremely offensive, but their perspectives varied. The African-Caribbean groups thought that the girls’ poor behaviour reflected badly on all African-Caribbean women and were unhappy about this portrayal of a group of girls, however accurate, because it might help to reinforce a negative view of African-Caribbean women. The fact that the girls in the clip appeared to be boasting about their behaviour intensified this feeling. This was disturbing both to those who identified with the girls because of race, as well as to other viewers.

“It reflects badly on us black women.” (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

“She was making a fool of herself.” (Male, non-parent, 18-25, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

“Just the way she was, the way she was proud of it.” (Female, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

“I thought you are stupid, and you are letting us down, don’t behave in such a way because people get stereotyped.” (Female, non-parent, 18-25, BC1, multi-channel)

Both African-Caribbeans and British Asians also found the use of the word ‘paki’ deeply offensive. The discussion about this clip also produced many comments about the use of terms of racial abuse, already referred to earlier. For most, this was unacceptable because the girl herself was African-Caribbean and using the word about another racial group. She was also saying the word in an aggressive way, and with the clear intent to be insulting.

“If I was with a British Asian friend of mine, I would have got hold of her.” (Male, non-parent, 18-25, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

“If you’re calling an Indian a Pakistani, it’s kind of a common ignorance, and you’re doing it to be offensive anyway.” (Male, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, terrestrial)

“Said in a nasty, offensive, derogatory manner.” (Male, non-parent, 55+, BC1, terrestrial)

None of the groups picked up on the fact that the girl had also used the word ‘nigger’ and possibly because they had missed this, were not really able to judge what intention there was behind the use of the word and therefore how offensive this might be. However, once more they made the point that it is less offensive for an African-Caribbean to use this term, because it is not cross-racial.

“It might be all right because she was black herself - people may find it alright like black people can say to each other, ‘hello nigger, or whatever.’” (Female, non-parent, 18-25, British Asian, BC1, multi-channel)

Most agreed that because the programme was a serious documentary which was attempting to portray a particular group of people and their lifestyle, it was more acceptable to include this language than it might be within a different genre, such as a drama.

Summary points

- Broadcasters of documentaries portraying negative images of minority groups should be aware of the fact that these minorities are sensitive to negative portrayals (reinforcing stereotypes)
- To the participants terms of racial abuse can be offensive even when within a documentary - although less so than within a drama

Trouble at the Top “fucking mullet” & “Jesus fucking Christ”: BBC2 2150

Reality programme following people trying to set up new businesses. This clip involved a chef who set up and was trying to run a restaurant. In a heated scene the chef calls out ‘where’s the fucking mullet?’ a number of times to no reply and then says ‘Jesus fucking Christ’.

Context response session

This clip was highly offensive for just over a third of respondents. One fifth were not offended at all. The remaining respondents held neutral opinions (4-7 offence rating).

Older respondents were highly offended, younger respondents were less offended.

Everyone felt that a programme containing this type of language should be subject to time restriction with most thinking that 2100 should be the earliest on the terrestrial channels. Some thought that it could be shown earlier on digital channels, but not those targeted at a younger audience.

Three-quarters thought that the transmission time was suitable.

Focus group response

This response to this clip was very similar to that for Bad Lads’ Army, with the exception that the setting of this programme was not thought to be a justification for the habitual use of offensive language. This was neither the all-male environment of the Army, where there is a greater acceptance of this type of language, nor was it a serious attempt to portray the lifestyle of a group of people (such as Rude Girls). These criticisms were made across all groups of viewers:

“It was just unnecessary - every second word.” (Male, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

“It was so unnecessary what he was doing - he didn’t have the excuse of being young like the young girl in Rude Girls either. Maybe in the environment he was in that was normal, but that stood out to me more than the girl, because he was just swearing away for no reason at his work.” (Female, non-parent, 18-25, British Asian, BC1, multi-channel)

“The frequency made it unacceptable. Maybe once or twice to get your point across but it becomes every other word and that’s where you went - okay, you’ve reached my limit here.” (Female, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

While most were offended by the constant repetition of one of the strongest swear words - ‘fucking’ - a minority argued that the build up of the language, and the contrast between the heated scenes in the kitchen compared with the calm of the restaurant, were what contributed to the entertainment value of the programme. However, the ‘humour’ inherent in this build-up was lost on many, and therefore the language was not mitigated at all. This man represented a minority view point:

“I personally found it quite entertaining just because it just builds up and builds up and it contrasts with the scenes of people in the restaurant sitting there all sophisticated, and I just think if it was bleeped out, the impact of that would have been lost.” (Male, non-parent, 25-34, BC1, multi-channel)

For others however, the language could have easily been edited out without harming the programme's content. Moreover, the fact that it was not indicated that the programme makers had scant regard for their audience:

"It shows a lack of respect for the audience...they could have taken that out and made it into a worthwhile programme." (Male, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

None of the groups picked up on the fact that the scene ended with the chef saying 'Jesus fucking Christ', however use of this type of language was explored later in the groups.

Summary points

- For these respondents repeated use of the word 'fucking' alienates a substantial number of people, whatever the context.
- It was felt that authenticity in the workplace in itself is not a sufficiently strong context to always justify including repeated swearing; the Army, football changing rooms or prisons were more likely to be viewed with tolerance in this respect
- Most did not find the 'humour' overt enough to lessen their response to the repeated swearing
- The timing of the programme was thought however to be about right

Section 5

A Contextual Understanding of Response to Language on the Radio

Language concerns on radio

Radio is often described as a much more personal medium than television. Many people listen to radio when they are by themselves. For most of the listeners in our research, content on radio simply does not present a problem. Most, including the teenage groups, said they were not offended by what they heard on those radio stations they choose to listen to. The key difference between radio and television appears to be that radio stations are by their nature more 'targeted' than television channels and listeners are less likely to encounter surprising or offensive material 'by chance'.

"You are not going to hear swear words on Saga are you? If it is aimed at teenagers, there is going to be more swear words or more offensive language or something." (Female, 15-17)

The minority who had been offended were nearly all parents, who have been offended by something played on the radio, usually during the school run.

"I heard this lyric 'lick me here and lick me there', and oh no, this was like running my daughter to school and I was like, 'oh my god', so yes there are certain things on the radio thatI was shocked, very shocked." (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

Despite the lack of experience of personally hearing offensive or suggestive material, there was a fairly widespread sense of concern (mainly among parents) about the lyrics of many songs and a sense that these are gradually getting stronger over time. Once again, the focus of this concern was for children and young people who were thought to be more likely to listen to this type of material, and who might be influenced by it. Moreover, this was, as one woman puts it, an issue to do with music rather than radio per se:

"It's just the way that music is going - it's not really a result of radio as a medium that that's the way it's gone - it's just the way music's gone..." (Female, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

The main issue was to do with the lyrics of music, rather than presenters' language. Few could remember being offended by the language of presenters on stations they had listened to. Once again, these views seemed to reflect the fact that most adults listen to stations which are generally targeted at their age group. On these channels, slippage seemed rare, and certainly had not registered with listeners in the way that language on television had. Despite this, most felt that presenters should not use offensive language and should be severely reprimanded if they did so. Particularly if it was delivered live and therefore could not be anticipated by listeners.

As far as the lyrics of songs were concerned, views were somewhat diverse. Parents were in general keen for lyrics to be edited; thinking of the influence it might have on children. Many were aware that this already happens and that radio stations play edited versions during the day and early part of the evening and thought that it worked satisfactorily. In addition, several cited instances of where songs have been

banned in the past (Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 'Relax', Chuck Berry's 'My Ding-a-Ling', and 'The House of the Rising Sun', for example), illustrating the point that radio broadcasters have traditionally been careful not to transmit material which was inappropriate. However, this could present a problem when parents bought the unedited version of CDs and found that their children were listening to, and picking up language, which they considered both offensive and inappropriate.

Older participants (over 55+), however, tended to take a more laissez-faire attitude towards lyrics. Their view was probably coloured by the fact that few of them had heard any strong lyrics (and recognised that they might not understand them even if they had). For these older listeners, there was a tendency to acknowledge that there was room for diversity among radio stations; as long as they were not personally subjected to offensive language, they seemed to be happier for young people (i.e. teenagers) to listen. They were more concerned about language which appeared to condone violence or drugs than specific words.

"As you say, it is a choice and the young people just tune into it - as far as the words go, I can't make half of them out anyway." (Male, non-parent, 55+, C2DE, multi-channel)

"Anything that glorifies drug taking should be banned." (Male, non-parent, 55+, BC1, terrestrial)

The teenagers in the research were also unsure about the 'radio play' version of lyrics. Some of them thought that, on balance, it is better to keep the lyrics intact and to play them later in the evenings, possibly following pre-warnings if necessary.

Expectations of radio stations

Most listeners had higher expectations of the national radio stations, such as BBC Radio One and Two, and were more easily offended by slippages on these stations. Several also listened to local BBC stations and said that their expectations were also high for these.

There was quite a strong sense that radio was regulated or at least monitored more strictly than television. This largely appeared to stem from the belief of many that radio was, for the most part, inoffensive. However, there was a certain appetite for having a watershed on radio at the same time as on television. This would ensure that school run times are kept as 'safe listening zones'.

Summary points

- Most respondents were not offended by language on radio, though parents with school aged children were more likely to have concerns, as they listen together with children
- Other groups choose programmes/stations which are targeted for them and are unlikely to hear anything they consider offensive
- There is fairly widespread concern about song lyrics, and a worry that these are getting worse
- Few had problems with presenter language/slippage, though feel strongly that it 'shouldn't happen'
- Parents are more likely to think that song lyrics should be edited, while teenagers are less keen - they would prefer unedited lyrics played later
- Some believe radio should have a watershed so that school run times are 'safe listening zones' (it should be noted that school run times are presently protected in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code).

Response to Audio clips

The audio clips prompted less discussion overall than television, and were generally found inoffensive compared with the television examples. The clips played are listed below:

Apple FM

Song lyrics 'God is a DJ' use of the word 'fuck you'

Galaxy 105-106

Presenter use of bleeped F-word

BBC Radio 1

Mark Radcliffe used the F-word and then apologised immediately

The most offensive overall was the clip from The Mark Radcliffe show on Radio 1 and the least offensive the clip from Galaxy radio.

Galaxy 105-106 bleeped “fuck”: 1850

Presenter use of bleeped F-word

Context response session

This clip was not considered especially offensive for most respondents with only one-in-ten rating it at the top end of the offence scale (8, 9, or 10). Just under half responded more neutrally (4-7 rating). The remaining respondents were not at all offended.

Women and parents were more likely to be offended by it than other groups.

Focus group response

This clip was rated the least offensive of the three radio clips played. It aroused little comment, although it raised similar issues to those raised in the Mark Radcliffe clip (discussion follows). However, while the Mark Radcliffe clip was judged to be more offensive because of the ‘broadcast context’ - i.e. the fact that he is on Radio 1 where expectations are higher, this clip was found offensive by others because it appeared to be less of a genuine slippage, and more deliberate:

“The second clip tonight was something that was scripted – the word ‘fuck’ was being used and bleeped out, but it was scripted ... Now I thought that was worse than Mark Radcliffe saying ‘fuck’ by accident, because it was scripted.” (Male, non-parent, 25-34, BC1, multi-channel)

Once again, however, young groups were less likely to be offended overall:

“I thought was quite funny” (Female, 15-17)

Apple “fuck you” lyrics: 1540

Song lyrics ‘God is a DJ’ use of the word ‘fuck you’

Context response session

This clip was polarising with younger people scoring it very low on the offensiveness scale and older people scoring it more highly.

Focus group response

The lyric of this song contained the words ‘fuck you’; this was disliked by parents particularly because they said they could potentially have heard this while driving children home from school⁴. In practice, however, most said that they tended to choose mainstream radio stations where expectations are that lyrics with strong or offensive language would not be played during these time periods.

⁴ It should be noted that Apple FM cannot be received in cars and this comment does not directly apply to this station.

BBC Radio 1 – “fuck”: broadcast between 1300 and 1500

Mark Radcliffe used the F-word and then apologised immediately

Context response session

This clip was voted moderately offensive by around half of respondents. One-in-ten considered it to be extremely offensive (8, 9, or 10 rating)

Women, British Asians and parents of younger children considered it more offensive than other groups.

Focus group response

This clip was thought the most offensive of the three, in large part because it flouted expectations which listeners have of BBC Radio 1. However, most accepted that some slippages do occur. All agreed that if this does happen, it is best for the presenter to apologise. There was some disagreement about whether an additional apology at the end of the programme improved matters or simply reminded people about the blunder that had been made.

“Most of the radio is live so you can’t really do anything about it.” (Male, non-parent, 18-25, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

“I think by that time – to bring it up again would just be to remember that – I would think that if I listen to a radio programme for 30 minutes and in the first 15 they had said ‘shit’ by accident, by the end of the programme I would have forgotten it, so to apologise again is just reminding of it.” (Male, non-parent, 25-34, BC1, multi-channel)

“I think it’s ... not going to offend most people ... not going to turn it off ... they’ll just think it’s part of life – and he apologised for it” (Male, 15-17)

Issues for radio

- Many participants did not listen to the types of stations which played the types of music which may include strong language in lyrics/ commentary and were therefore inclined to express satisfaction with status quo. Most would like to protect 'school run' times.
- For teens and some younger people, the occasional swear word in a lyric was acceptable at most times of the day.
- Many parents wanted edited versions before 2100, but younger people and teens thought that anything more than the occasional 'bleep' was irritating and harms the music. (Radio edits are already widely used in the industry.)
- Teens would prefer to wait for unedited versions (later at night) than listen to heavily edited versions earlier.
- The teenage participants did not expect to hear unedited music containing a lot of strong language early in the day and some resented songs becoming successful/notorious just because they contained strong language.
- Many thought that repeated and persistent slippages should be dealt with severely; however, teens took a somewhat more relaxed view – while they did not want it all the time, they recognised swearing 'happens'.
- The highest standards were expected for National and Local BBC radio; digital and niche stations could be more relaxed overall.

Section 6

Sexual Imagery on TV

Attitudes to sexual imagery in general

Attitudes to sexual imagery also vary within any population. In order to research the subject, we explored images that have resulted in complaints to Ofcom. Discussion in the focus groups indicated that sexual imagery was less of an issue for people than offensive language, particularly in their day-to-day lives. Previous research has demonstrated that there is a widely held belief that there is too much sexual content in public life - specifically in advertising and the print media. This view was echoed to some degree in this research. Parents in particular tended to worry about the degree of sexual imagery which surrounded their children, largely because they felt that it could lead to premature sexualisation of their children. However, many other participants in this piece of research felt that the growth in sexual imagery in public life generally indicated a more liberal and tolerant attitude towards sexual matters, and this was thought to be a good thing.

“There is a lot more in ranges of it now especially magazines I think, men’s magazines are much more common now, not the really bad stuff but the mediocre kind of stuff, FHM and there is another one that is out and it shows certain images.” (Female, parent of younger children, C2DE, terrestrial)

“I think we’re kind of prudish about it; I think there is a real prudish issue with sex on British TV and I think there always has been and you only have to go to central Europe to find that – Germany, Holland, Scandinavia, France, anywhere – it exists and it’s not frowned upon; it’s there, it’s not sleazy, it’s just a way of life – sex, making love – it’s there and I think the Brits are a mile behind” (Male, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

Whether or not participants were concerned about sexual imagery, it was certainly thought by some within this research to be used by companies as well as broadcasters, because “sex sells”.

“Yes, if they weren’t allowed to use it, they’d have to use their brains to come up with something more ingenious. It’s an easy sell – ‘if you buy it, she’ll go to bed with you’ – but when you buy it she’s never there!” (Exchange between man and woman, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

Summary points

- Sexual imagery in general was less of a concern to participants than offensive language
- While there is some concern about the prevalence of sexual imagery, particularly with regard to children, many regard it as a sign of a more open and tolerant society
- However, broadcasters and advertisers are also thought to use sexual imagery cynically, because it sells

Sexual imagery on television

While participants did not spend much time exploring sexual imagery in non-television media, they were keen to talk at length about sexual imagery on television. Nearly everyone in the research thought that there was more sexual imagery on television than before, that it was more explicit, and started earlier in the evening. Not everyone was equally offended or concerned by these images, however, and the key predictor of attitude appears to be age.

The teenage groups did not think there was too much sex on television overall, but nevertheless were embarrassed by it if watching programmes with their parents or younger siblings. This clearly affected their attitudes towards the most appropriate scheduling times for programming containing some sexual imagery. Overall, however, these images did not present a problem for this group although some girls did feel that broadcasters showed more explicit content than they would like.

“Our parents growing up had a much different experience from what we did growing up and therefore we can accept it easier on TV than they can...it’s always going to progress and progress and progress.” (Male, 15-17)

“It’s good to be more open about sex, but sometimes they just take it too far.” (Female, 15-17)

Parents held a range of views about whether there was too much sexual imagery on television, but were fairly united in a feeling that such imagery is increasingly likely to be on.

“There are quite a few programmes that are on now and...they do touch the borderline on sex before the 9 o’clock period as it is, maybe Hollyoaks or whatever.” (Female, parent of younger children, C2DE, terrestrial)

Empty nesters/older viewers thought there was too much explicit sexual imagery on television and for many, this made for uncomfortable viewing (although many say they simply switch off). While they acknowledged that things do change, explicit sexual imagery was not something they have grown up with, and many said they did not like seeing it on television.

“It’s the way we’ve been brought up...basically if it’s done, it is done behind closed doors - that is the mentality.” (Male, non-parent, 55+, C2DE, multi-channel)

For all groups, a clear distinction was made between nudity and sexual imagery. Most were keen to emphasise that nudity, where it is non-sexual, was not offensive at all. By contrast, sexual imagery was often perceived to be part of a fairly cynical attempt by broadcasters to boost ratings.

“Nudity, if it’s not of a sexual nature, doesn’t bother me one iota – they can show men, women, anybody naked on the television – perhaps not children ... but sexual nudity, that’s another thing.” (Male, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

“I think it (sexual scenes on television) is just for ratings.” (Male, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

There was a strong sense that Channel 4 and Five were most likely to show explicit sexual imagery, and for some, this meant that these channels were therefore more likely to contain offensive material.

“BBC is a mainstream channel - it is a channel you wouldn't expect to see shagging on it, whereas you know the risk when you turn on Five.”
(Male, non-parent, 18-25, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

“Channel 4 is a bit sleazy.” (Male, non-parents, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

“I expect it to be worse - or more explicit -on Five” (Female, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

Summary points

- Most participants thought there was more sexual imagery on television than before and that it started earlier in the evening.
- Attitudes towards sexual imagery on television differ by age; older groups are more concerned about sexual imagery in its own right and younger groups and parents have more concerns about others who might view with them
- All distinguish between nudity (not a concern) and sexual imagery
- Channel 4 and Five are thought more likely to show explicit sexual imagery

Section 7

A Contextual Understanding of Sexual Imagery

Overview

Similar to the swearing tape, a 'showreel' was made up of a total of eight clips containing examples of sexual imagery on television. These clips were also shown in the Context Response Groups (see chart below). The clips ranged across programme genres from continuous drama to a promotion for the Xplicit XXX channel (an adult channel).

The clips used are listed below:

Coronation Street: ITV1, 2030

This clip involved two main characters (Sarah & Jason) passionately kissing on the couch, and he begins to undress, taking off his shirt and they leave to go upstairs.

T4 Loch Ness toy under kilt: C4, 0800

Teenager's show, this was an interview in which the male presenter asked the (adult) interviewee to guess what he had under his kilt. Terms such as 'it's long' and other innuendoes were used. His female co-host then lifted up his kilt and pulled out a Loch Ness toy from between his legs.

Big Brother: C4, 2200

Reality show. This clip involved members of the house licking jam off Michelle's nipples as part of a game.

Babecast : Friendly TV, 2100

Interactive show. This clip involved two scantily clad women reading out text messages they were being sent and carrying out what the texts requested them to do. This included turning around and showing their bottoms to the cameras.

Xplicit XXX promotion: Multichannel platform, 2030

Channel promotion for an adult channel. The clip showed a variety of women taking off their clothes and fondling themselves.

Sex, Footballers and Videotapes: C4, 2200

A drama about the lives of footballers, based on real events. This clip involved a hotel room scene where group sex was taking place. A woman was engaging in oral sex with a man.

Stacey's Mum (music video): various transmissions pre watershed

A young boy fantasises about his friend's mother - she is shown dancing seductively around a pole in a bikini.

Nelly (music video): various post watershed

The video involved woman in bikinis gyrating, rubbing against other people and spreading their legs while having money and gold chains rubbed up against their buttocks.

Similar to the language clips, respondents were shown each clip in turn and asked to respond to a number of questions contained within a self completion booklet.

Questions within the response booklet included:

- Overall level of offence (on a scale of 1-10 where 1=not at all offensive and 10=extremely offensive)
- What time the clip should have aired on key channels
- How appropriate the actual transmission time was

As with the language clips, women were far more offended than men in general (though again, it should be pointed out that there was a high proportion of British Asian women in the session, which would have boosted the 'offensiveness' rating among women).

Teens and older people (55+) were more likely to be offended than other groups, with the 35-54 year olds being the least likely to be offended overall.

Of all ethnic groups, British Asians were most likely to be offended, with African-Caribbeans and whites having a very similar response overall.

Coronation Street: Petting on sofa (Sarah Platt and Jason Grimshaw): ITV1 2030

This clip involved two main characters (Sarah & Jason) passionately kissing on the couch, and he begins to undress, taking off his shirt and they leave to go upstairs.

Context session response

This clip caused the lowest level of offence of all the sexual imagery clips shown, with almost half scoring it either 1, 2 or 3 and a similar proportion giving it a moderate score of between 4 and 7.

It was somewhat more offensive to women, British Asians and parents of younger children than it was to other groups.

Almost everyone however, felt that this type of content should be subject to a time restriction with most voting for 2000 on all channels and a little later at weekends.

The majority thought that the transmission time was suitable.

Focus group response

The sexual imagery in this clip was at the other end of the scale of explicitness from some of the others in the reel as it showed a young couple kissing on the sofa, and with no nudity other than the young man's chest exposed. It therefore scored low in the offensiveness rating by comparison to the other clips.

"It was inside your mind what was going on, but you didn't see what was going on." (Male, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

"It did show a certain sense of modesty." (Female, non-parent, 25-34, BC1, terrestrial)

"All they were doing was kissing, there were no explicit scenes." (Female, parent of younger children, C2DE, terrestrial)

Even older viewers were comfortable with the level of sexual imagery in this scene, and felt it was realistic while staying within their comfort zone:

"It was only a little heavier kissing than they'd see Mum and Dad do." (Male, non-parent, 55+, BC1, terrestrial)

Despite this, there were some viewers, in particular teenage groups and one group of parents of younger children, who did have some difficulties with this scene in view of the time it was broadcast. A group of female teenagers in Leicester felt that the scene was becoming too "raunchy" for 'Coronation Street'.

For a group of parents of younger children (also in Leicester), this was also a step too far "for Corrie", showing that, it is when expectations are exceeded that viewers are most likely to be offended. These parents were not personally offended by the scene, but felt that it went too far for the time it was broadcast, when they would typically be watching television with their children. Indeed one parent who recalled watching this clip at home said she had turned it off.

“If my children weren’t there, I would have continued watching that, but not acceptable if children are there, no.” (Female, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

For these parents, the clip felt too explicit both in terms of the sounds the actors made, as well as the degree of touching that was going on - “kissing, fondling, tongues all over the place”, as one put it. They also objected to the fact that it was clear where the kissing was leading to.

“I suppose you wouldn’t be so offended if the kids watch just a bit of smooching instead of the full works, groping the leg and him with his shirt off.” (Female, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

It is important not to over emphasise the views of this one group, however; most other groups, including other parents of younger children, were not offended by the clip, and felt that the broadcast time was suitable.

Summary points

- For most participants this scene was within the limits of sexual imagery that they would expect from a soap such as ‘Coronation Street’, broadcast before the watershed. However, for a minority of viewers, even this degree of sexual imagery is beyond their comfort zone.
- Aspects that make the imagery/scene less acceptable include the length of the scene, the sound effects made by the actors, and (for some) the morals implicit in the scene (i.e. they were clearly going upstairs to have sex)

T4 interview: Presenter with Loch Ness monster toy under his kilt: Channel 4 at 0800

Interview in this teenage show, which the male presenter asked the (adult) interviewee to guess what he had under his kilt. Terms such as 'it's long' and other innuendoes were used. His female co-host then lifted up his kilt and pulled out a Loch Ness toy from between his legs.

Context session response

This clip caused a fairly low level of offence, with over one half (55%) scoring it either 1, 2 or 3.

It was somewhat more offensive to British Asians and parents of younger children than it was to other groups.

Most would put a time restriction on this type of content but there was no clear view as to what that might be, except that it would probably be after 1800.

The vast majority (73%) thought that the transmission time was not suitable.

Focus group response

For most, this clip was fairly innocuous and did not offend from an adult perspective. However it was considered inappropriate for the time of transmission because of the young audience the programme attracts and because breakfast time is also family viewing time for many households. The key area for concern was because the toy Loch Ness monster which the presenter revealed under his kilt initially looked like a penis.

"Just because it was a 'teddy' and whether he is actually showing it they are the same thing pretty much because you are implying the same thing." (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

"At that sort of time you are running around while the children are sitting there having breakfast watching this programme." (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

"A bit stupid and pathetic - should probably have been on later." (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

"I didn't think it was offensive, I just thought it was coarse". (Female, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

Summary point

- It was *felt that humour* can, but does not always, dilute the offensiveness of sexual innuendo

Big Brother: Jam on breasts: Channel 4 at 2200

Reality show. This clip involved members of the house licking jam off Michelle's nipples as part of a game.

Context session response

This clip caused high levels of offence, with just under half (45%) scoring it either 8, 9 or 10 out of 10.

It was considerably more offensive to women, British Asians and older people than it was to other groups – especially younger respondents.

Everyone would put a time restriction on this type of content of no earlier than 2200 on BBC and ITV1. Some would relax that slightly to between 2100 and 2200 on Channel 4 and Five.

The vast majority thought that the transmission time was suitable.

Focus group response

This example was thought to be one of the most offensive by many and also generated some of the most comment in the discussion groups. Women, especially British Asian women and older viewers found it most offensive, while younger viewers - especially those who were more familiar with 'Big Brother' - and men, found it less so.

"I am just watching Big Brother and I have got some woman sucking another woman's boob and I am not watching for this." (Female, parents of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

Younger people, by contrast, accepted that this type of allusion to a sexual encounter is characteristic of the programme. For them, 'Big Brother' is known for being risky. The sexual chemistry between the participants is part of what they watch the programme for and part of what makes it 'water cooler' television.

"Basically the set up encourages this type of activity - "it is young people in there, they are all single and I can guarantee they all have sex drives so if they can't do it with a partner then they are going to choose to do it with each other, because if they are in there from the beginning to the end..." (Female, 15-17)

"You know what you are getting." (Male, parent of younger children, C2DE, terrestrial)

Expectations were clearly at the heart of this. Regular viewers of the programme anticipate what they might see, while those with no experience of it were shocked and sometimes, as one viewer described it '*disgusted*'. An understanding of the series, or lack of one, was crucial here to the level of offence felt. Those offended by the clip might have accepted this sexual activity in a film, but in this programme it was seen as an act of pure exhibitionism which was carried out purely to get the attention of the cameras.

“It was just like a sex show, really, I mean all of those people trying to be outrageous and stuff.” (Male, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

“Yes, when it is in a film but when you have got young people who are getting paid and just put there, basically they are pathetic people that are in Big Brother and that rubbish.” (Male, parents of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

At the extreme end, several commented that a programme like this should be on a ‘sex’ channel or ‘pay per view’, while others were happy that the programme was broadcast at a sufficiently late time.

Summary points

- Although the broadcast context of this programme - a reality show with a fairly well known reputation - helps to set expectations, for some this does not in itself justify the content, in particular because the audience it attracts is young
- Nudity is not the issue here; it is the sexual nature of the encounter which appears to be ‘set up’ and condoned by the broadcaster which viewers think is inappropriate for younger viewers (e.g. teens) to watch

Friendly TV: Babecast 2100

Interactive show available on multi-channel platforms. This clip involved two scantily clad women reading out text messages they were being sent and carrying out what the texts requested them to do. This included turning around and showing their bottoms to the cameras.

Context session response

This clip caused high levels of offence, with almost a half scoring it either 8, 9 or 10.

It was considerably more offensive to women, British Asians, older people and parents of older children than it was to other groups.

A third said that this type of content should never be shown on BBC or ITV and a fifth said it should never be on either Channel 4 or Five.

The time restriction for non-youth targeted digital channels was considered as no earlier than 2200, with a later slot at weekends.

The majority thought the transmission time was not suitable.

Focus group response

While this was thought to be one of the most offensive clips it did not generate much discussion in the focus groups. Many people simply dismissed the clip out of hand as being completely unsuitable for mainstream television at any time, and the personal response findings back this up.

The clip was thought to be both graphically too explicit, and distasteful because of what was happening. For example, the sidebar screens showing women 'touching themselves' and this particularly offended some, while the women on the main screen turning round and 'shaking their arses' upset others. For many it was also the casualness of the women's discussion about the length of men's penises and women's vaginas which disturbed.

"The language and the way they were displaying and doing." (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

"I didn't like the two girls spinning round showing a little bit of arse." (Male, non-parent, 18-25, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

"Distasteful, rubbish" (Male, non-parent, 55+, C2DE, multi-channel)

There were just a few who found the clip inoffensive, but even for them, this type of material should be on after 2100 or 2200 even if on a satellite or cable channel, while the majority felt this material should be on a premium or subscription only channel. The focus of their concern, unsurprisingly perhaps, was that if it were on free-to-air satellite or digital channels that children might find it while surfing through channels.

"I would say after midnight, because that thing's X-rated." (Male, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

"Not on BBC or the five terrestrials." (Female, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

Summary points

- To these participants, imagery which suggests a casual attitude towards sex and which shows sexual display is not acceptable in this type of entertainment/interactive context
- The clear majority view of these participants is that such material should be on subscription channels only and/or confined to late night viewing (after 2200 at the earliest)

Explicit XXX promotion: Multichannel platform 2030⁵

Channel promotion for an adult channel. The clip showed various women taking off their clothes and fondling themselves.

Context session response

The response to this clip was very similar to the response to the Babecast clip and it caused similar levels of offence, with almost a half scoring it either 8, 9 or 10.

As with Babecast, it was considerably more offensive to women, British Asians, older people and parents than it was to other groups.

Again, around a third said that this type of content should never be shown on BBC or ITV and a fifth said it should never be on either Channel 4 or Five.

The time restriction for non-youth targeted digital channels was considered as no earlier than 2200, with a later slot at weekends.

The overwhelming majority thought that the transmission time of 2030 was not suitable.

Focus group response

This was unacceptable to most viewers, and was described as 'porn' - the sort of material which should never be shown on mainstream television. There was concern that young people could come across this material while surfing through digital or satellite channels and this made it entirely unsuitable in the view of many parents. It was also thought to be demeaning to women and several younger participants condemned it for this.

"Demeaning if you are a woman." (Male, 15-17)

While most think this material should remain on subscription channels only, some non-parents felt less concern about this material - they wouldn't choose to watch it, and thought that it was unlikely that you would come across it by chance:

"Yes, I don't think you'd watch it – you won't come across it unless you watch those channels" (Female, non-parent, 18-25, British Asian, BC1, multi-channel)

Many viewers were surprised that this type of material can be seen without paying a subscription, and a significant number believed that this was wrong.

Summary points

- Most participants were surprised (and shocked) to find that this material could have been accessed without paying a subscription, and do not endorse this
- Many were less concerned about this type of sexually explicit material than some of the other programme clips, simply because it is not on mainstream television or on a channel that they would choose to watch
- However, there was concern that children might come across this material, which participants felt therefore should not be available earlier than 2200

⁵ Ofcom imposed a financial statutory sanction against the licensee for transmitting this material at 2030

Sex, Footballers & Videotapes: C4 2200

A drama about the lives of footballers, based on real events. This clip involved a hotel room scene where group sex was taking place. A woman was engaging in oral sex with a man.

Context session response

This clip caused very high levels of offence, with just over half scoring it either 8,9 or 10 on the offensiveness scale

All groups expressed similar levels of offence.

A fifth thought this type of content should never be shown on BBC or ITV, around 10% thought it should never be on Channel 4 or Five. Very few people thought it should be shown before 2200 on any channel.

Two-thirds thought that the transmission time was suitable.

It should be noted that although the programme was a drama it took the style of a documentary and that may have meant that it was judged as being real rather than as a dramatic portrayal, thus affecting participants' responses to this clip.

Focus group response

For many this was the most offensive and uncomfortable viewing, and a core of viewers felt that this type of material should never be shown on mainstream television. For some, this material was evidence of the fact that mainstream broadcasters have pushed the boundaries as far as they can.

"It was the casual attitude towards sex, it was like ok, they were out having fun, but it was more explicit than necessary - not only what you saw, but also from the people talking about it and saying there's nothing wrong with it, footballers do it all." (Male, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

"What's comes next ... because nobody has said, 'stop - no more'. What are the images going to be?" (Female, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

Several, especially from the older groups, said they could not - and did not - watch the whole clip. Despite these strong reactions, there were a few who did defend the clip, and several of these had actually seen the programme when it was broadcast. For them, the context (a drama documentary which sought to shed insight into the lives of footballers, without condoning them), justified the inclusion of the scene. This was in contrast to those who had not seen the whole programme and were concerned that by showing this type of material, which was perceived as degrading to women - it seemed to be condoning this type of behaviour.

"It was a kind of documentary and a kind of drama because it showed how these girls got kind of wrapped up into this football lifestyle so the context I think was suitable for the time, and the time it was on you kind of knew what to expect, so I think that was a bit ok." (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

"Of course it goes on, but it doesn't make it right to be shown on telly." (Male, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

“It happens, but I just didn’t feel comfortable about the whole group thing of it - and they’re role models as well, footballers, so to see them doing that and condoning it I found that quite unacceptable.” (Female, non-parent, 18-25, British Asian, BC1, multi-channel)

“I think the way it was being spoken about by the guys doing the act was degrading to the females...the guys partaking in the oral sex were bragging about the act.” (Male, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

“It was very degrading for the women because it was as if footballers can do anything to their women and they’ll do as they’re told to do”. (Male, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

Summary points

- To these participants scenes of sexual activity can be highly offensive even if the imagery itself is not that explicit, where the activity itself is thought to be immoral
- The ‘documentary style’ of the drama might have meant it was judged more harshly. In a drama, sexual activity is often thought to be justified by the plot
- Those who had seen the whole programme in context were less offended.

Music and Pop Videos

Music videos were mentioned spontaneously as being a concern for a number of viewers, but in relation to a range of issues including language, lifestyle, violent or extreme images as well as sexual imagery. Some of the language issues have already been touched on in the Radio section above, where the language of lyrics was discussed and similar points were made in the groups in connection with music videos.

Music videos can be a cause of concern because they are thought to have a potentially powerful effect on the children and young adult viewers who are attracted to them. At the same time, music video producers are thought to try and produce shocking or controversial images (not always related to sexual imagery) in order to grab attention.

“Some of those videos are quite raunchy aren’t they, I personally don’t think there is any need for it.” (Female, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

It seemed that the concern here was for children from as young as six to early teens, all of whom might watch music videos, though not necessarily by the same performers.

Few gave specific examples of music videos which had offended. Those mentioned included:

- Robbie Williams stripping his skin off (Mentioned by young teenage girl)
- 50 Cent video - *“just naked women strutting their stuff, running around.”* (young British Asian women)
- A video by Britney Spears, *“She is on the bed and she is touching herself.”* (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

This last example was of particular concern to some parents, precisely because Britney Spears is a performer with a strong fan base among pre-teens - and parents do not think it is appropriate for this type of sexual imagery to be used in videos aimed at this age group. Indeed, for parents of children up to early teens, anything much beyond kissing is felt to be inappropriate in these videos - and scenes of the performer sexually arousing themselves are certainly perceived as inappropriate. It is even worse when the artiste (like Britney Spears) appears to change her image and along with it, her morals and behaviour code, because she is a role model for so many of her fans:

“It’s worse with Britney Spears, because she was like this little angel, goody goody.” (Female, non-parent, 18-25, British Asian, BC1, multi-channel)

Older groups tend to speak more generally about their concerns about the rap genre, “because of the whole culture of violence and imitative behaviour”, as one described it. In this genre, sexual imagery is seen as just a part of a lifestyle which is disliked and even feared by some:

“I am not bothered for myself, but I am bothered when children strut in and think they’re Eminem or 50 Cent because they’ve been watching

their videos or use their words. “ (Female, non-parent, 18-25, British Asian, BC1, multi-channel)

“If your daughter said ‘I want to watch a Britney video, Mummy,’ you would go, ‘ok’. But if they said, ‘right, I am going to watch some hip hop and rap, you would go no, no, no - it is what you expect from different things.” (Female, parent of younger children, British Asian, C2DE, multi-channel)

The teenagers themselves did not seem too bothered by what they see, despite parental concerns. Nevertheless, they concede that some videos are ‘extreme’ and that they often have little to do with the lyrics of the songs. Female teens, moreover, say that they do not like the often ‘negative’ way in which women in pop videos are portrayed.

These younger groups were neither calling for a more relaxed regime nor struggling with finding what they want to watch. Most (unlike many adults) are fully aware that there are different versions of videos, and they would not expect to see full versions on BBC’s Top of the Pops for example. Likewise, a channel like “The Box” is thought to be moderate, or restricted in what it shows, while a channel like TMF is expected to have a greater freedom to show what it likes. In contrast to their concern about watching some of the explicit sexual imagery on other programming, there was little or no concern expressed by these teenagers about seeing material that their parents might disapprove of.

Summary points

- Some of the parents in this research were concerned about music videos. Their concern was not just focused on sexual imagery, but included language, extreme images and lifestyle issues
- Music videos by performers who appeal to younger (pre-teen audience) gave most cause for concern - sexually provocative poses are found offensive
- Rap/hip hop videos were also of concern - both for young children and teenagers, because of the lifestyle and moral code which they appear to endorse
- Teenagers themselves did not appear to be offended by music videos and have different expectations as to what they might find on different channels/programmes

Stacey's Mum: Fountains of Wayne (music video) various cable and satellite channels pre watershed

A young boy fantasises about his friends mother - she is shown dancing seductively around a pole in a bikini.

Context session response

This clip caused low levels of offence, with one half scoring it either 1,2 or 3.

Women and older people were somewhat more offended by this clip than other groups.

A fifth thought that this type of material could be shown at anytime, others would restrict it until after 1900.

Focus group response

Few had any real issues with this music video, although it did generate discussion about music videos in general, which are often thought to be a concern. One or two parents of younger children were somewhat concerned, but they were in the minority.

One or two did think this went a little far and referred to the pole dancing sequence as the part they felt most offended by. The issue here is in part the images shown themselves, and in part the viewing context.

Summary points

This type of sexual imagery is thought acceptable by most. It includes sexually provocative dancing, but no nudity and no inappropriate 'touching' by any of the participants.

Nelly TipDrill (music video) various cable and satellite channels post watershed

The video featured woman in bikinis gyrating, rubbing against other people and spreading their legs while having money and gold chains rubbed up against their buttocks.

Context session response

This clip caused very high levels of offence, with almost half scoring it either 8,9 or 10.

Women and older people expressed very high levels of offence.

A third thought this type of content should never be shown on television, others would restrict it until late night (post 2300).

Focus group response

Unlike the Fountains of Wayne music video, this was felt by many to be strongly offensive. It was described as looking "like soft porn", and the way the men interacted with the women was thought to be demeaning to women. This attitude was shared by both teenagers and older groups, although older groups express more disgust at the video and younger ones spoke more of the fact that it is degrading to women.

"It was objectionable because not only did they have no tops, but they were touching themselves." (Male, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

"He was sniffing them like a dog, it was coarse. It was like completely women as sex objects and that's all they're there for and the lyrics that go, it has to be your arse because it's not your face, or something." (Female, non-parent 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

"I think it's the gesticulations that they're making - they're imitating a sexual act during the songs." (Male, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

"Revolting!" (Female, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

"Ugly and rubbish!" (Male, non-parent, 55+, BC1, terrestrial)

Among this torrent of objections, there were a few isolated individuals who owned up to enjoying aspects of the video.

"It makes me feel like I want to go to the gym...because the girls they look good." (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

Even these viewers had reservations about aspects of the behaviour, however, and felt it was not suitable for early evening broadcasting because of the example it gave:

"I don't reckon the young boys of today have got much respect for the young girls...because of what they see on the television..." (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

While this clip caused considerable offence in its own right, it was not thought to be as much of a concern as some of the other clips, which might be shown on

mainstream television. People do not expect to see this type of material on any of the main channels, and most believe that even on music channels, this would have been played quite late, making it less of a concern.

Summary points

- Scenes of groups of people involved in sexual behaviour were of more concern than couples
- Material which suggests or might engender an attitude of disrespect towards women is particularly worrying to these participants , especially but not exclusively to parents
- Anything targeting a younger audience is likely to be judged on what sort of behaviour it is believed it might encourage

Section 8

Informed Viewing Choices

Parental choice

As part of the focus group discussions, respondents discussed viewing decision-making and responsibilities. There was a broad consensus among these participants that responsibility for viewing choices is - and should be - largely an individual one, and that parents should make those choices on behalf of their children:

"I think there is too much in this country of 'it's always someone else's responsibility' - it's the parent's responsibility." (Female, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

"You can't say about regulators that they should sort it and it's not down to us - everybody's got to share the responsibility." (Male, non-parent, 18-25, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

Equally, however, participants thought as citizens and not just consumers when thinking about regulation.

"It's easy for people to say it's parents' responsibility, but the reality is that there are a lot of parents who aren't doing what they should be doing, so maybe there should be watersheds and all that to help people. Because we have to deal with society as a group, so maybe we should take on the responsibility of raising the kids as well." (Female, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

"Twelve and thirteen year olds will be watching after 9 and you can't have some of the examples they showed, such as repeated swearing." (Male, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

The context of responsible decision-making, therefore, must be a framework where there are both clear expectations of what to expect, according to the participants, as well as specific times when those making such choices can rely on broadcast content to be suitable for those under 15. The watershed is seen as the most useful tool in this respect; it provides parents with clear guidelines about the times at which children might safely watch television unaccompanied or alternatively when families might watch television without being offended or embarrassed:

"If the children watch after that, it is the parents' fault." (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

"You don't always know what is going to suddenly jump onto your screen; you might be watching something and then it goes into a scene where there is a man in bed with a woman with nothing on..." (Female, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

Control mechanisms

Many use guides to viewing and some use EPGs, but newspaper listings are thought to provide a better guide to the type of content which programmes might contain.

“If you see these programmes in the newspapers and stuff it would be nice if they did say there is strong language, so the parents are wised up and say ‘ok we will watch this, I know what we can expect’.”
(Female, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

Pre-programme information is liked, and many notice presenter introductions containing content guidance. However, one group of teenagers felt that they were inconsistent and they couldn't understand the rationale behind them.

“It’s a joke - like, say an afternoon movie, they class as ‘guidance’ and it has nothing bad in it, but then there is another movie that they won’t class as guidance that has every swear word under the sun, so yeah, I think it’s a complete joke.” (Male, 15-17)

Overall though, they are appreciated. Equally, a presenter introduction about ‘scenes of sexual content’ may not prepare people enough about quite how explicit those scenes might be.

Some would like programme classifications:

“Certain programmes, like Coronation Street, should have a sort of category whereby it wouldn’t have any swearing or sex at all.” (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

Some believe programme titles can help to form expectations - for good or bad, so more information or clearer titles, would help:

“My daughter...wants to watch The Farm - she loves animals so you see that sort of thing and you turn it on and ‘okay’, but then if you try and turn it over she screams because she wants to see the animals.”
(Female, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

Summary points

- For many participants, there is a strong sense that parents have the responsibility of ensuring their children view appropriate material
- The watershed is considered to be a vital tool in enabling parents to exercise this authority
- Newspaper listings are considered to be a useful guide to whether programme content is suitable for children to watch
- Presenter introductions on television are noted and thought useful. However some participants thought that they are not always consistent and do not differentiate clearly between degrees of language or sexual imagery
- Programme titles also help to formulate expectations and should be chosen accordingly by programme-makers
- PINs are thought to be useful in theory but few appear to use them

Section 9

The Appropriate Response

While people generally agreed on the need for a regulatory framework which includes a watershed for television, few were certain what should happen when and if broadcasters infringe such a framework. To try to understand this issue, viewers were asked first what their personal response would be to hearing or seeing offensive or inappropriate material and second whether they would take any action as citizens in regard to such material.

Personal response

In relation to their personal response, it was not surprising that most people said that when they do see offensive material, they simply switched the television or radio off, or turned over to another channel. This did not seem to happen frequently and was likely to happen primarily when programmes were being watched or listened to with other people, usually of another generation.

“You either enjoy it or switch off - what else is there?” (Female, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

“At the end of the day, if you don’t want your kids to watch it, you turn over, pick up the manual, learn how to use it - that is part of democracy - doing what you want to do, seeing what you want to see..” (Male, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

Citizen response

Only one or two people within this research had ever thought about taking further action as a result of seeing or hearing offensive or inappropriate material, (and none had actually done so) although one or two had ‘heard of’ or knew someone who had. The key points made here are:

- Few know ‘how’ to complain, although most think they would phone up the broadcaster concerned to get their address and then write in. One or two would search on the Internet for the appropriate body to approach.
- One or two thought they might approach the regulators, but Ofcom was not widely known among these respondents. One or two mentioned the ITC.
- Most mentioned that the complaints procedures were not publicised, and some also felt that they are less publicised than they were a few years ago, when notices of how to complain were broadcast on television by the ITC/BSC.
- Many mentioned that there seemed to be less opinion programmes (*Points of View*, Channel 4’s *Right to Reply* with the Videobox) than there once were. These are felt to be important channels for audiences to share their opinions with broadcasters in a public forum.

“But the complaint procedures are not exactly laid out - personally I wouldn't know.” (Male, non-parent, 55+, C2DE, multi-channel)

“Even if you complain about it, it's done and dusted anyway – what are they going to do?” (Female, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

“I used to love Points of View, it was fantastic, just hearing what other people think of shows and stuff ...and I think there should be more of that sort of thing, everyone gets an ...because there is no easy way of saying ok from this time onwards we will show this and then we won't show it because some things you can just get away with. So I think it gives the government body (regulators) more options and more opinions” (Female, parent of younger children, C2DE, terrestrial)

There was an overall sense that there should be a greater number of channels of complaint and that these should be more widely publicised. However, few thought they would be motivated to make such complaints. For the most part, this is because they had little experience of seeing material which had really offended them personally. Switching off was seen as a more direct action with a greater impact on the broadcasters, and there was a reluctance to take public action unless one had a personal interest in a particular issue. The following comments sum up the two sides of this argument; the first from a public-spirited individual who believes that responding proactively to broadcasters is part of our responsibility as citizens, the second, a teenager whose belief is that the consumer response (turning off the television) is by far the more effective approach:

“If no one is going to write in or say anything then he is going to think that he has got away with it and maybe push it a bit further and a bit further and so unless the public write in or phone in, what do you do? Are people going to be bothered?” (Male, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

“The thing is, yeah, if you write in, it's better to just like switch off – because if everyone just switched off, that show wouldn't get the ratings, so they're going to take it off the air, but if everyone watches it and sees what's in there and then writes in and says...they're going to get the better ratings...complaints and they're going to throw the letter away...I mean if it was me I wouldn't care.” (Male, 15-17)

It is perhaps because of the fairly widespread reluctance to take responsibility for complaining that there were a number of references to Mary Whitehouse. While her views were thought to have been extreme, many saw her as a useful watchdog (and are unaware of her successors who continue the work) who would stand up and be counted on their behalf:

“I'm going back to Mary Whitehouse - when she was around didn't she have somebody that made sure certain content couldn't go into certain programmes - there doesn't seem to be anybody monitoring that now...” (Male, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

The regulatory response

When asked what should happen to broadcasters when they infringe broadcasting Codes or Guidelines, the top-of-mind response among some was to suggest that they should be fined, stringently.

“As with all companies, it’s financial, isn’t it? So there’s no point giving a broadcaster a thousand pound fine - it’s not going to mean anything. If you give them a 10 million pound fine it may mean something.” (Male, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

“It’s difficult to put a figure on it but it’s got to be proportionate to the advertising revenue of that particular programme.” (Male, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

Others went further and talked in terms of ‘sacking’ individuals who have offended, banning specific programmes or in extreme cases, closing down the whole channel. However, this response has to be seen in context; a persistent theme throughout the group discussions was that it is extremely hard to put in place a series of guidelines, and that a more pragmatic approach is necessary:

“I think they should do what you’re doing here and test audiences and see what is acceptable.” (Male, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

Summary points

- The personal response to viewing offensive or inappropriate material is simply to switch off or turn over – but this is only likely to happen in company and not frequently
- Within this research, none had complained and few considered doing so; there is uncertainty as to how to go about doing this
- Complaint procedures were felt to be under-publicised and there appear to be fewer forums for viewer opinion on television than previously
- There was a reluctance by many to respond as citizens by complaining; and this was felt to be ineffective by some.

Section 10

Guidelines for Television

The Context: Expectations

Participants in the research were asked to consider the guidelines as if they were in the role of the regulators. Their starting point was to maintain the status quo. And while few would claim to understand or know what the current guidelines are in any detail, most were aware of the watershed, and that it comes into play at 2100. Many thought that the current regulators were doing a good job as regards television. As one young African-Caribbean male commented:

“Television is at its best now. You’re never going to please everybody all the time.”

Guidance in a multi-channel world

When challenged as to whether regulation was relevant in a multi-channel world, respondents were adamant that it was. This finding is consistent with research which the legacy regulators had carried out previously. For most, the proliferation of channels and greater accessibility which many people now have does not diminish the need for a regulatory framework within which broadcasters can operate. Indeed, for many the reverse is the case. There were two lines of reasoning here; first, it was thought that without regulation of some kind to curb broadcasters, standards would drop sharply in the drive for ratings. Second, it was argued that because of the existence of media outlets which are harder to monitor and regulate - whether television channels or the Internet - it was even more important to have a ‘gold standard’ of acceptable broadcast content. The watershed itself may be an imperfect system - and broadcasters themselves are thought to be constantly kicking against it - but at least for the participants it prevents the worst excesses of broadcast content from appearing before 2100, providing a zone where people and their children can view in relative comfort.

“I think the broadcasters shouldn’t put anything on that’s not suitable for children anyway until the watershed. I expect that my son can come home from school and watch TV without me having to look at what he’s watching.” (Female, parent of older children, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

“It’s better than being allowed to show Footballers’ Wives at any time you want because then you could be showing it at 6 o’clock when you are all sitting down with your tea.” (Female, 15-17)

“If there are no guidelines, they (broadcasters) will put anything and everything on then.” (Male, non-parent, 55+, C2DE, multi-channel)

Unregulated television would, it was argued, inflict offensive material on people who didn’t want to see it. This was not just about protecting children, the adults too wanted to be protected from seeing offensive material, both when they were in the company of other generations who they might be uncomfortable viewing such material with, and in their own right:

"[that would be] unfair on people who are flicking channels, and might come across something that offends them – they shouldn't have to."
(Male, non-parent, 26-34, BC1, multi-channel)

"It's not just about children - children are the bigger concern, but I want to be able to sit and watch a programme that actually stimulates my brain not the rest of my body." (Male, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

While this was the majority view, there were some who argued that it was up to the individual to make viewing choices, as they said that the fact that children have television sets in their own rooms makes a mockery of the watershed, when many of them watch very late at night. Interestingly though, young people themselves, and those in families, were least likely to put forward this opinion; in part because much viewing is still done within a family environment, and in part because many parents have made a deliberate choice for their children only to have terrestrial television on their bedroom. Satellite or digital channels were perceived by many to be unregulated, or at least not to have to follow the same Codes as the five main terrestrial channels.

Many felt the watershed should remain in place, although there was some discussion that the watershed could be later than it is – perhaps starting at 2200, particularly at weekends.

Channel expectations

It is clear from this research that people's expectations about the different terrestrial channels are, based on their experience of those channels, somewhat different. These views can be summarised as follows:

- BBC1 is expected to take the lead in terms of content and standards - it is a family channel and funded by licence payers' money.
- ITV1 is also seen as a family, general entertainment channel. While the standards for ITV are not expected to be quite as high as those for BBC, (mainly because it is a commercial channel), most people do not expect a great variation in terms of the material they view on this channel.
- BBC2 is not seen as a family channel in the same way as BBC1, but nevertheless, people have almost as high expectations of it.
- Channel 4 is thought to have led the way with some of the more edgy content. Expectations are that the standards on this channel should be more relaxed than on BBC1 and ITV1.
- Five is thought to have pushed the boundaries, particularly in terms of sexual imagery. Again, most people do believe there should be some difference between what is seen on Five and on BBC1, but only during the post-watershed period.

"The BBC keeps the other channels clean." (Female, parent of younger children, C2DE, terrestrial)

"You expect more on 4 and Five, but not on BBC2..." (Female, 15-17)

“You’ve got to have a choice - what would you get if every channel showed the same type of thing?” (Male, parent of younger children, C2DE, terrestrial)

“You just expect that the BBC will have better standards than the rest.”
(Female, non-parent, 35-54, C2DE, multi-channel)

Finally, whilst it was clear from people’s views about different channels and programmes that there is an expectation that some channels might be more relaxed or tolerant than others in regard to content areas, it is important to note that people want the watershed as the bottom line of content regulation, even though they are prepared to accept some variation across channels in the post-watershed period.

“From BBC through to Five, if it’s acceptable for one of them, it’s acceptable for the others, they’re all freely available to the kids.” (Male, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

“There should be a bit of variety.” (Male, parent of older children, C2DE, multi-channel)

Films

For most, films should be subject to the same regulations as other television programming. However, it is clear that for nearly everyone, expectations of films are somewhat different from other programming. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Films are already classified by the BBFC for cinema release, and these classifications are often known and publicised in guides.
- Most viewers elect to watch films rather than simply viewing them because ‘they are on’. Having made a conscious choice, they are less likely to feel that the content has been ‘thrust at them’ and more likely to accept what they see as a consequence of their viewing choice.
- Strong language and sexual imagery are often accepted more readily in films as being justified by the plot and setting. This makes language more acceptable, where it adds to the authenticity of a film. Equally, sexual imagery is also more acceptable in this context; for example a sexual encounter may take place but it is often ‘over fairly quickly’; this is more comfortable to view than, for example, a drama series, where there may be sexual encounters on a regular basis week-in week-out.

“Those other programmes, they are thrown at you aren’t they? Films, you choose what you want to see according to the content.” (Male, non-parent, 55+, C2DE, multi-channel)

“Even afternoon movies – at 3:40 every day there is a movie on Five and they’ll even say ‘we’ve given this a guidance rating because’ and they’ll tell you why ...I think you’ve got a better idea before it starts.”
(Female, parent of older children, BC1, terrestrial)

Satellite/Cable/DTT channels

It is harder to build consensus on how satellite, cable and DTT channels should be regulated, in part because many people’s knowledge and understanding of these channels is only partial. On balance, however, most believe that the generally

available entertainment channels, ranging from Sky One to ITV2 and E4, should adhere to a similar regulatory Code as the five terrestrial channels. In other words, these channels should also conform to the 2100 watershed. Where television channels are paid for as an 'extra', however, it is thought that there should be the freedom to broadcast (and watch) a wider range of material.

"I think the packages where you have to pay for it shouldn't matter what time of day they put it on, because the people who pay for it obviously would watch it." (Male, parent of younger children, BC1, terrestrial)

"If you pay for it, however, that's different." (Female, non-parent, 18-25, African-Caribbean, C2DE, terrestrial)

Summary points

- For most participants, regulation is still relevant in a multi-channel world – to curb broadcasters and to provide a zone of 'safe' viewing both for children and parents
- Most would opt to keep the watershed – the best known aspect of regulatory codes for broadcast, though some would like it later, particularly at weekends
- Channel expectations are different across the five terrestrial channels; BBC1 is expected to be the gold standard
- The watershed should apply equally across all main channels, but many think that Channel 4 and Five should be allowed a more relaxed post-watershed regime
- Films should be subject to the same regulations as other programmes; nevertheless, expectations of films are defined by classifications and content is more likely to be considered justified by artistic merit
- Most think that general entertainment satellite, cable and DTT channels should adhere to a similar regulatory code as the five terrestrial channels
- Premium rate subscription channels should have more freedom to broadcast a range of content at all times of the day/night

Section 11

Summary of Television Points

This section draws together the key points for television which have emerged from respondents' views in the research. Because of the complexity of the issues, they have been reviewed from two standpoints. The key points are listed first by the broadcast context (points which broadcasters and programme makers might need to bear in mind) and second from the perspective of the listening/viewing context (bearing in mind the needs of the audience).

Drama/Entertainment: The Broadcast Context

- Despite the general tendency to dislike offensive language and swearing in soap operas, viewers seem prepared to accept the occasional use of strong language at a dramatic moment⁶.
- Swearing used by an individual as a reaction to an event is both more acceptable in real life and within television dramas, as long as it is not used repeatedly.
- Identification with the characters and involvement with the long-term story make the use of a word in this way more acceptable than it might be otherwise. However, it would not be more likely to be unacceptable if the language were used against a child.
- Words evolve and sensitivities towards them can change over time. 'Mong' is one of the words which people feel differently about now compared with five or ten years ago and can be offensive to people with learning difficulties, and those who care for them. Words such as 'mongol', 'spastic' and 'cretin' all fall into this category.
- Terms of racial abuse may be acceptable within a drama where the context demands it - but should only be scheduled pre-watershed with extreme care.
- People are more offended when swearing or offensive language is unexpected. This may be an issue in entertainment programmes (e.g. Union Jack), where the tone of the programme is difficult for audiences to interpret.

Documentaries/Reality: The Broadcast Context

- Repeated swearing is unacceptable to many, especially when the swear word 'fuck' is included.
- However, there are a substantial number of viewers who think that the setting of the programme could justify, to some extent, the use of such language, for example the Army or football changing rooms (where authenticity can mitigate some of the offence).

⁶ It should be noted that audience perceptions of the presence and use of swearing and offensive language can sometimes be driven by aggressive behaviour/tone within storylines and are not always factually accurate regarding the actual presence of swearing and offensive language.

- Swearing in documentaries/fly on the wall by people who are not overtly 'playing to camera' and who are under stress - is more acceptable.
- Women swearing are more offensive than men swearing for some.
- Bleeped swearing makes it more acceptable but does not in itself justify pre-watershed use.
- It was felt that broadcasters should, where possible, anticipate the use of strong or offensive language and such programmes should not be shown live at a time when children might be watching.
- Immediate apologies do help to mitigate the use of offensive language.
- Terms of racial abuse can be offensive even when within a documentary and need to be scheduled with care.

Language: Viewing/listening context

- Viewers do not wish strong language to be used during children's programmes where they are concerned that children might pick up on and imitate the language.
- Women and parents are most likely to be offended by swearing in a programme which is apparently targeting a family audience.
- Documentaries portraying negative images of minority groups need to be aware of the fact that these minorities are sensitive to negative portrayals (reinforcing stereotypes).

Sexual imagery: Broadcast context

- Sexual imagery must be very limited before the watershed (as it is mainly considered to be on the main terrestrial channels)
- The majority of people would not wish to see restrictions placed on 'close ups of men and women kissing' and would, on the whole, not wish to see too many restrictions on sex scenes where 'you don't see much'.
- However, when it comes to sexual behaviour in music videos or depictions of naked women in a sexual context, viewers were split in favour of more restrictions.
- Humour does not always dilute the offensiveness of sexual innuendo, and programme makers working on programmes targeting young people should consider this especially.
- Reality programmes targeting young viewers are of particular concern to some parents; setting expectations does not to them justify some content, especially if they seem to promote sexual attitudes or behaviour which is disapproved of by many people.
- Viewers accept scenes of sexual activity within dramas if their expectations of those dramas are clearly set up by broadcaster/ programme title and channel.

- Imagery which suggests a casual attitude towards sex and which shows sexual display is not acceptable for many. The majority view is that such material should be on subscription channels only and/or confined to late night viewing (after 10pm at the earliest).
- Scenes of sexual activity can be offensive even if the imagery itself is not that explicit, where the activity itself is thought to be immoral.

Sexual Imagery: Viewing context

- When programmes are likely to be watched by family members together, broadcasters should bear the viewing context in mind.
- Stronger sexual imagery is better tolerated by viewers if it is broadcast at times when the family is less likely to be viewing together. This means later in the evening than 2200.
- There is concern that children might come across promotions for adult material, which should therefore not be available until late at night.

Appendix I

Summary of responses in Word Sort exercise by grouping

Religious words

Bastard God	Profanity could be offensive, but no one has heard of this phrase.
Bloody	Not really offensive to any group, seen as everyday sort of language
God	Least offensive
Jesus	Only offensive to one or two with religious convictions; for others it is mild, everyday word
Jesus Christ	Only offensive to one or two with religious convictions; for others it is a mild, everyday word
Jesus Fucking Christ	Profanity, very offensive
Jesus Shitting Christ	Profanity, very offensive

Body parts/Body functions

Arse	Mild, not really offensive
Arsehole	Quite strong for some/ variation on this
Balls	Quite mild for some, stronger for African-Caribbean parents
Bollocks	Mild language to most except one 55+ group who thinks quite offensive
Bum	Body part, mild, not really offensive to any group
Cock	Seen as quite offensive for some, especially older groups and British Asian females, with its sexual connotations. For others it is seen as a middle of the road sort of word.
Crap	Mild, not really offensive, toilet word, everyday language
Cunt	Most offensive word to majority, and never really acceptable (though some might occasionally use). Very strong word and particularly disliked by women.
Dick	Most find this 'body parts' type of word only mildly offensive
Fart	Not really offensive to any group, seen as everyday sort of language
Knob	Can be used insultingly to men, but generally seen as quite inoffensive/mild/ 'playground word'
Prick	Playground word
Pussy	Some, esp. Women and older groups find this really offensive

Shit	Mild, toilet word, everyday language, not really offensive (though could be if used about a child/young person)
Tits	Playground word, mild, not offensive
Twat	Very polarising; female sexual anatomy word; offensive esp. to British Asian females and some women from other groups, but many esp. men think it is an everyday word and quite mild

People with disabilities

Mong	Several haven't heard of this word - polarising - many say is inoffensive, but after discussion see that it could be offensive in the way that 'retard' is
Nutter	Although this comes into the category of offensive to people with mental ill health or learning difficulties, it is generally seen as very light (Much more so than retard and schizo) and most think it is not offensive at all.
Retard	Quite polarising: offensive because of it effectively refers to a disability, but many do not see this as an issue. A few do, however; for one it is the new 'spastic'; others find it really objectionable
Schizo	Quite polarising: offensive because it effectively refers to a disability, but many do not see this as an issue.
Spastic	Recognised as very offensive to most people, though a few think it is okay to use the word 'spas' or spaz.

Sexual orientation

Batty Boy	Unknown by most/older groups/ seen as mild slang by African-Caribbean and British Asian groups
Dyke	A word which can be used to be offensive to people because of their sexual orientation, though some older people think it is not offensive if used accurately/descriptively of a lesbian
Faggot	A word which can be used to be offensive to people because of their sexual orientation, though some older people think it is not offensive if used accurately/descriptively of a homosexual
Poof	Playground slang, mildly offensive word in the category of being insulting because of sexual orientation
Queer	Offensive to people because of their sexual orientation, but most think it is quite mild; several talk about the fact that the gay community has 'taken back' this word and uses it, so feel it cannot be so offensive, but some men would not like to be called this.

Ethnic words

Blaad Claat	Only known by ethnic minorities and polarising; some think it's insulting, but others not really sure
Bumbu	Only known by one group - young African-Caribbean men who described it as 'playground' word
Chi-chi man	This is part of a group of words where you can insult people because of their sexual orientation; and seen as quite offensive by the African-Caribbean parent group, and potentially (if used aggressively) by the younger African-Caribbean males. Hardly anyone else knew what this word meant.
Ho	Only known by younger groups and those from ethnic minorities who are especially likely to think this is very offensive, especially women. For African-Caribbean men it can be used offensively. It is like bitch - not whore????.
Hoochie	Mild, not really offensive or playground word for those who know (younger and ethnic minority groups mainly)
Punani	Many are not sure what this word means; African-Caribbean groups and British Asians do know it and think it is offensive. Somewhat less offensive than cunt. Used in Ali G, became less offensive because he uses it.

Everyday words

Git	Most think it's everyday and not offensive/mild
Piss off	Common, everyday word, not really offensive.
Pissed	Not really offensive - just means drunk
Sod	Normal, everyday word, not really offensive

Insults with sexual connotations

Bastard	Polarising - for some fairly middling, equivalent to bitch, for others very strong and offensive
Bitch	More likely to be found quite strong/offensive by African-Caribbean and British Asian parents/ most likely to be seen as playground or common word by younger groups
Cocksucker	For most this is strong and offensive, especially when used as insult to women
Dickhead	Somewhat polarising. Some young people and older groups find this really offensive, others feel it is quite mild
Motherfucker	Most offensive and most can't see any context when it would be acceptable
Prickteaser	Strongly offensive to women, especially when used about women; implies behaviour which is thought to be insulting/ plus they don't like the word
Slag	Most women find this moderately to strongly offensive - like all words referring to sexual behaviour

Slut	Most women find this moderately to strongly offensive - like all words referring to sexual behaviour
Wanker	Quite offensive to British Asian women and older men, but for most it is quite mild - equivalent to 'tosser'
Whore	Offensive, but especially to women, describes sexual behaviour; some men think it can be used in a jokey manner

Slang words for sex

Bonk	Offensive to British Asian female parents but mild to other parental groups/young African-Caribbeans non-parents also think this could be offensive, but others think it is mild
Bugger	Least offensive
Fuck/Fucking	Strongly disliked by many, very offensive most of time, but occasional toe-stubbing use appears tolerated. 'Fuck off' is aggressive and seen as worse than 'fuck' 'Fucking' added to other words intensifies any offence
Poke	Somewhat polarising. Some, e.g. British Asian women find it very offensive, but many have not really come across this. Of those who have many find it quite mild
Screw	Mild, jokey, few find this offensive
Shag	Quite offensive, with sexual connotations for some (esp. British Asian) , middle of the road for others

Terms of racial/religious faith abuse

Chink	A term of racial offence/abuse. However, this is polarising. Older and mainly white groups tend to think this is not usually used in an abusive way - e.g. let's go to the Chinky - which is not seen as offensive; younger groups and those from ethnic minorities feel this could be as insulting as 'paki' or 'nigger'
Kyke	Very few have heard of this; for those who have it comes into the racial insults category
Nigger	Racial abuse which is generally considered very offensive. "If I was called a fucking nigger, I'd be more upset by the nigger than by the fucking." (young African-Caribbean) Not offensive to some if taken into 'ownership' by Africans/African-Caribbeans themselves and used among their peer group.
Paki	Racial abuse which is generally considered very offensive. Not offensive to some if taken into 'ownership' by British Asians/Pakistanis and used peer to peer. However, some (white) people think it is non-offensive to talk about going to the Paki.
Papist	One Scottish group considers this quite strong/ insulting, but most have no opinion. Many of the other groups don't know this word
Pikey	Most don't really have an opinion about this word and older people don't know it. Some young people (including young African-Caribbeans) jokingly call their friends pikeys and don't think it is offensive
Spade	Many do not know this word; very offensive racial abuse to those who do know (Africans/African-Caribbeans)
Yid	Many do not know this word; offensive racial abuse to some who do know (though one talks about taking back ownership of the word which has taken out the sting)

Appendix II Sample profile and focus group structure

Sample profile

Demographic group	n	%
Male	73	42%
Female	85	56%
15-17	15	9%
18-34	61	35%
35-54	64	37%
55+	33	19%
BC1	82	48%
C2DE	75	52%
White	84	49%
African-Caribbean	24	14%
British Asian	37	21%
Parents	68	44%
Non-parents	90	56%
Terrestrial only	76	45%
Multi-channel	81	55%
Glasgow	39	23%
Leicester	44	25%
Bristol	39	23%
Hounslow	23	13%
Croydon	28	16%
Total	173	100%

Focus group structure

Gp.	Location	Location type	Type	Age range	Gender	Ethnicity	Social TV Grade	Ownership
1	Glasgow	Urban	Parents	Older children	Mixed	Mixed	BC1	Terrestrial
2	Glasgow	Urban	Non parents	Age 35-54	Mixed	Mixed	C2DE	Multichannel
3	Glasgow	Urban	Parents	younger children	Mixed	Mixed	C2DE	Terrestrial
4	Leicester	Rural/Suburban	Non parents	Age 18-25	Female	British Indians	BC1	Multichannel
5	Leicester	Rural/Suburban	Parents	Younger children	Mixed	Mixed	BC1	Terrestrial
6	Leicester	Rural/Suburban	Non parents	Age 55+	Mixed	Mixed	C2DE	Multichannel
6A	Leicester	Rural/Suburban	Non parents	Age 15-17	Female	Mixed	C1C2	Multichannel
7	Bristol	Rural/Suburban	Non parents	Age 55+	Mixed	Mixed	BC1	Terrestrial
8	Bristol	Rural/Suburban	Non parents	Age 18-25	Male	African-Caribbean	C2DE	Terrestrial
9	Bristol	Rural/Suburban	Parents	Older children	Mixed	Mixed	C2DE	Multichannel
10	Hounslow	Urban	Parents	Younger children	Female	British Pakistanis	C2DE	Multichannel
11	Hounslow	Urban	Non parents	Age 18-25	Mixed	Mixed	BC1	Multichannel
12	Croydon	Urban	Non parents	Age 26-34	Mixed	Mixed	BC1	Multichannel
13	Croydon	Urban	Parents	older children	Mixed	African-Caribbean	C2DE	Terrestrial
13A	Croydon	Urban	Non parents	Age 15-17	Male	Mixed	C1C2	Multichannel