

## **Rape Crisis Network Ireland submission to the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, Code of Programme Standards.**

**16th May 2006**

---

The Rape Crisis Network (RCNI) is a national member-owned political and campaigning organisation committed to the elimination of all forms of sexual violence through effecting political, cultural and social change. Our analysis is directly informed by our 16 member Rape Crisis Centres and our 25 years supporting and advocating on behalf of survivors of sexual violence.

---

The RCNI welcome that the Code is structured in such a way that sexual violence is always under the heading of 'violence' and that the heading 'sex' is concerned with consensual sex acts and relationships (in particular 4 (a) and 4 (b)). The consistent separation of sexual violence and sexual conduct is important, not simply in making this vital distinction but in recognition of the different tools of assessment which are brought to bear upon either programme material. Sexual conduct is assessed by reference to culture and values, while sexual violence must be assessed in terms of its depiction, minimisation and/or promotion of a violation of Rights.

The media plays a pivotal role in reflecting and shaping Irish culture and norms. These cultures and norms in turn create the climate in which rape and sexual violence is normalised and minimised and in which perpetrators gain the confidence to cause harm, secure in the knowledge that they will be getting away with it. In fact they have complicit permission from the messages they receive from society to conduct themselves just so. Section 4 (h) covers some of these concerns.

Therefore, it is in the very broadest meaning of the term 'offence' (section 4 (a)) that sexually violent content must be assessed. The appropriate standard is whether the depictions promote, facilitate, normalise and/or minimise practices which are degrading and dehumanising to women in particular and children and men more broadly.

Depictions of degradation and violence which promote problematic attitudes should be assessed on their contribution to cultural values, be they negative or positive. The critical level of analysis which the editor and the BCI would take to such material, must be mindful of the implicit as well as the explicit messages being sent out (e.g. promoted) in a given programme. As a guideline we would refer the BCI to the list of myths and facts on our website [www.rcni.ie](http://www.rcni.ie) as the litmus test for whether or not the material is feeding the harmful myths (as identified by the Rape Crisis movement) or challenging them – unfortunately there is no neutral ground.

Regrettably, it must be borne in mind that there exists a debate and a grey area on what is sexual

violence and what is normal and acceptable sexual conduct. Therefore, an editorial, journalistic or even public assessment involves cultural and personal prejudices and preconceptions, which those whom we entrust to uphold the code must mediate.