Middlesex University London

Middlesex University Research Repository:
an open access repository of
Middlesex University research

http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk

An investigation into the notion of "parental responsibility" as it features in the home-based regulation of children's video viewing habits.

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Alexander James Bligh Barratt BA (Hons), MA.

Middlesex University

April 1998

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the notion of "parental responsibility" which characterises contemporary concerns over the regulation of children's video viewing in the UK. Previous studies of home-based regulation have tended to concentrate on television at the expense of video viewing, and most studies employ quantitative methods. This thesis expands the research agenda, challenging the findings of previous research, through the employment of qualitative methods to examine family relationships at the heart of the home-based regulation of video viewing. The work is based upon interviews with ten families from North London.

This analysis is accompanied by an examination of the demands made of parents by agencies outside of the family home who are concerned with video regulation (Parliament, the print news media, the British Board of Film Classification and the video software industry). These expectations have remained unexplored by previous authors. This inquiry is located within an account of teenagers' video viewing habits, derived from a questionnaire survey of approximately five hundred year nine pupils.

Central to the theoretical project of the thesis is a distinction between the *concept* and *conceptions* of "parental responsibility". It is argued that there is a broad consensus around the concept of "parental responsibility" (the notion that parents ought to have ultimate authority over their children's video viewing habits in the home). However, there is much less agreement about what constitutes responsible action in this regard. There are a variety of conceptions of parental responsibility across the accounts examined. Thus, it is impossible to draw clear distinctions between "responsible" and "irresponsible" parents, although participants in public debates frequently make such judgements. In an attempt to move beyond this impasse, the thesis provides a reconceptualisation of the "problem" of "under-age" video viewing, one which takes into account the ways in which parents currently approach the regulation of their children's video viewing habits in the home.

Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

BARB	Broadcasters Audience Research Board.
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation.
BBFC	British Board of Film Classification.
BFI	British Film Institute.
BREMA	British Radio and Electronic Equipment Manufacturers' Association.
BSC	Broadcsating Standards Commission.
BVA	British Video Association.
CARE	Christian Action Research Education.
CAVIAR	Cinema and Video Industry Advertising Research.
FACT	Federation Against Copyright Theft.
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority.
ITC	Independent Television Commission.
IVF	International Video Federation.
MCD	Movement for Christian Democracy.
MVR	Media Vision Research.
NVALA	National Viewers and Listeners Association.
VARC	Video Advertising Review Committee.
VCC	Video Consultative Council.
VCR	Video Cassette Recorder.
VPRC	Video Packaging Review Committee.
VSC	Video Standards Council.

Chapter One
Introduction

This thesis takes as its object of study the issue of "parental responsibility" which features in public debates about the ways in which families regulate the viewing of pre-recorded videos by children in the home (referred to throughout as the home-based regulation of children's video viewing habits).

The study proceeds from the assumption that notions of "parental responsibility" are central to these debates, as indicated by Buckingham's assertion that '[v]ideo changed the site of regulation from the broadcasting institutions to the family itself: rather than relying on the paternalistic good intentions of the broadcasters, we now had to rely on parents to protect children from harm' (1993a; p.103). Despite the centrality of this issue there has been very little critical reflection on the meaning of "parental responsibility".

A number of inter-related questions are posed in order to account for the ways in which the term is used and understood by participants in the public debate (who include the news media, Parliament, the video software industry, and the British Board of Film Classification). The first area to be addressed is the way in which these institutions define "parental responsibility". Once established, the analysis shifts towards an examination of the attitudes and practices parents are expected to demonstrate when regulating their children's video viewing in the home. These topics are also pursued from parents' own perspectives; the ways in which parents define their responsibilities are explored and compared with the conceptions of "parental responsibility" identified above. The central task of the thesis is to provide answers to three fundamental questions about home-based regulation: How do institutions with an interest in video regulation define "parental responsibility"? How do parents define their own responsibilities? How do parents reconcile their own practices with the expectations placed on them by agencies outside of the family home, when these differ?

Before moving on to elaborate the structure of the thesis and show how these questions have been approached, a certain amount of scene-setting is necessary in order to establish the context of these developments. The question 'why study video?' is partly resolved by addressing this context, which affords insights into the place of video in the daily lives of families, and the importance accorded to issues of regulation by policy-makers.

1.1 Taking video seriously

In a piece entitled 'Taking Video Seriously', Baroness Wharton, in her capacity as vice-chair of the All Party Media Group, describes the significance of the video industry (hardware and software) in the United Kingdom. Writing in the British Video Association (BVA) Yearbook for 1997 (BVA, 1997), she describes the video industry as 'enormous', comparing the 690 million people who watched videos in 1996 with the 123 million who attended a cinema in the same year (p. 19).[1] She also notes that the combined revenue generated by the commercial rental and retail of pre-recorded video cassettes exceeds those for 'cinema and pay-TV combined' (ibid.; p.19). This, she argues, is sufficient evidence that the industry 'deserves to be taken seriously by politicians and policy makers' (ibid.; p. 19).

The 1997 Yearbook and its predecessors (the first was published in 1994) provide ample evidence of the sizeable growth of the video industry since the first commercial Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) was made available to the British public in 1978 (Alvarado, 1988; Armes, 1989). Hardware is currently estimated to be present in 82% of British households (source: BREMA, quoted in BVA, 1997; p.82).[2] This compares with only 3% in 1980, and 33% in 1986 (IBA, 1980; IBA, 1986). Furthermore, around one quarter of

---

[1] Alvarado and Davis (1988) counsel wisely against taking industry figures like these at face value, based as they are upon estimates and used to promote an encouraging view of the contemporary market (p. 15). Although possibly inaccurate, the figures represent the most comprehensive data available about the UK video market and they can be assumed to be (at least) indicative of possible trends.

[2] Hardware here refers to the VCR, which when connected to a standard television set allows viewers to playback pre-recorded videos and/or record television transmissions for future play-back (known as 'time-shifting') (Cubitt, 1991).

the households who currently have a VCR have two or more machines (source: CAVIAR, quoted in BVA, 1997; p.82).

The value of pre-recorded video sales has recently overtaken the value of rental transactions, making it the most lucrative sector of the software market (BVA, 1994a). Both the volume and value of retail transactions has consistently risen year-on-year since the introduction of the VCR. In 1986, the value of the market was estimated to be a mere 55 million pounds. By 1996 this figure had risen to an estimated 803 million pounds, which represents approximately 79 million pre-recorded videos sold in that year alone (source: BVA estimates, quoted in BVA, 1997; p.29). The UK is currently Europe's largest market for the retail sale of pre-recorded videos (BVA, 1997) and industry research suggests that around half of all UK residents aged seven and over purchased at least one pre-recorded video in 1996 (source: CAVIAR, quoted in BVA, 1997; p.57). According to this research, there is little to distinguish the purchasing patterns of socio-economic groups ABC1 and C2DE (BVA, 1997). Age is a more significant variable, with the 25-34 age group accounting for nearly 30% of the total market share, compared with 9% for the 7-19 age group (source: CAVIAR, quoted in BVA, 1997; p.59).

The volume and value of rental transactions, however, have experienced more uneven growth. In 1986, the value of the rental market was estimated to be 330 million pounds (over six times the size of the nascent retail market). By 1990 the market value reached a peak of 485 million pounds (it was eclipsed by the value of the retail market in 1992) whereupon growth began to falter; in 1996 the value of rental transactions was estimated as 442 million pounds (source: BVA estimates, quoted in BVA, 1997; p.63). This period of decline has been linked with the rise of subscription television (satellite and cable) which offers viewers a selection of feature films previously only available on video some time after their initial theatrical release (BVA, 1994a).

Industry sponsored audience research suggests that over 60% of the UK population with a VCR rent videos for playback at home, with an average of 3.6 rentals per month (source: CAVIAR, quoted in BVA, 1997; p.75). Age appears to be significant: 89% of the 15-19 age group have 'ever rented' a video compared with only 31% of the over 55s (source: CAVIAR, quoted in BVA, 1997; p.76).

These figures all testify to the current buoyancy and size of the video software and hardware markets in the UK. Industry commentators talk, with some justification, about the 'maturity' of the video market (BVA, 1994a), and its wide-scale acceptance into the popular consciousness. The use of pre-recorded videos, for entertainment or otherwise, is common-place in the majority of British homes, a fact which has attracted the attentions of policy-makers as described by Baroness Wharton. Yet politicians and the video industry are not alone in recognising the impact of video on daily life. Academic commentators have begun to take account of video, with authors like Sean Cubitt dedicating a whole book to the analysis of what he calls 'video culture' (1991; p.1). Despite this, however, video still frequently features in the field of media research as an adjunct of television, rather than as an object of inquiry in its own right.

As the present thesis will show, at every level of analysis (whether concerned with audience reception, the production and distribution of pre-recorded videos, the statutory regulation of video and so on) it is quite apparent that television and video are demonstrably different in many important respects, and ought to be investigated as such. While not wishing to build too strong a case for the dogged pursuit of differences between television and video (few users of these technologies draw hard and fast distinctions between television and video when discussing their viewing habits [Levy, 1989]), this thesis does draw attention to the features of video viewing and regulation which are specific to it.

1.2 The political context

There is a political context to the brute economic features of the growth of video. Through unconnected processes, the period when the VCR first became available to the British public, in the late 1970s, also witnessed a transition in the political and economic climate of the country, provoked by the election of Margaret Thatcher as head of a Conservative government in 1979. The political and economic doctrines pursued by this Conservative administration, which became known by the rubric of 'Thatcherism' (Letwin, 1992; Evans, 1997), did much to foster the conditions by which the nascent video hardware and software industries could flourish. The administration, pursuing the monetarist economic policies associated with Milton Friedman (1980) and Frederick von Hayek (1978) in the US and championed by Keith Joseph in the UK (see Evans, 1997; Brake and Hale, 1992), facilitated the growth of the various consumer electronic markets by encouraging easy access to consumer credit and liberalising business law. Private ownership (of housing, pensions, health-care provisions, cars and consumer electronics like the VCR) was championed, and the British economy, like others in the Western world, experienced a consumer "boom" from the mid- to late 1980s. In this connection, Evans (1997) notes that 'consumption levels increased sharply during the decade 1978-88. The proportion of families with telephones increased from 62 per cent to 85 per cent' (p.117). It was precisely during this period that the video software and hardware industries began to make significant inroads into household spending.

In addition to economic liberalisation and reform, 'Thatcherism' can also be described in terms of 'a series of interconnected political attitudes' (Evans, 1997; p.3) towards social phenomena like personal rights and the family. Indelibly linked to economic reform was the encouragement of individual endeavour and freedoms, both in the public sphere (entrepreneurialism) and private sphere (consumerism). During the mid- to late-1980s individual freedom of choice was promoted, and treated as not just a means to an end but as an end in itself. "Consumption" and "choice" became by-words for a form of consumer empowerment during this period (Evans, 1997). Furthermore, the economic reforms

associated with monetarist policies developed in tandem with the pursuit of certain social mores. Thus Brake and Hale describe the first 'Thatcherite' budget, in 1980, as a reaffirmation of 'the virtues of self-reliance, individualism, family and personal responsibility' (1992; p.7).

Video, as a medium and as a technology, is singularly well placed to fulfil many of the demands of private consumption and consumer choice. Unlike television, which still retains vestiges of a public broadcasting ethos in which choice is limited to the scheduling protocols of broadcasters and consumption is a matter of tuning in to a pre-paid service (via the BBC license fee), video allows consumers to choose what, when, where, and how they want to watch a pre-recorded production. They have almost complete control over the consumption process, from the decision about what to watch, to the conditions under which viewing will occur. At another level, they can even decide which sections of a pre-recorded video to watch (the "fast-forward" and "rewind" facilities of the VCR allow viewers to "skip" through video texts). In this limited respect, it is tempting to see the concurrent rise of video and consumerism as emblematic of the Thatcherite project to empower individual consumers. The VCR is a technology whose very modes of use so neatly intersect with the values of a consumer-driven economy guided by freedom of choice. This is a point made by Alvarado at the height of the consumer "boom" in the late 1980s, when he observed that video is 'a new medium of communication, which is fundamentally individualistic, anarchic even, almost beyond institutional organisation, save by entrepreneurs who feed the demand' (1988; p.i).

It may be fanciful to pursue these observations at any length, but there is no doubting the relationship between the growth of video and the economic reforms fostered under Thatcherism. It is important to recognise, however, that at the heart of the 'non-negotiable precepts' which constitute Thatcherism (Evans, 1997; p.2) lies a contradiction between the desire to liberate the economy under the principles of a "free market", and the penchant of conservative policy-makers for centralised control over (or interference in) social

institutions (like the family and schools). De-regulation in the economy has occurred alongside an increase in the regulation of these institutions from the centre (witness, for example, the establishment of the National Curriculum in education). Despite rhetoric to the contrary (Evans, 1997; p.123), at the heart of Thatcherite (and its derivatives) efforts has been a tension between de-centralisation/de-regulation in the economic sphere, and increased centralisation/regulation in the social sphere. Brake and Hale describe the development of a 'control culture' as a 'necessary corollary of the enterprise culture' (1992; p.10).

This tension also finds expression in public debates about video regulation. Central to these have been questions about the extent to which statutory instruments ought to intervene in the workings of the video market in order to control the access of children to material deemed unsuitable for them. As Chapter Four demonstrates, the Video Recordings Act 1984 provides the framework for the regulation of video supply but, most significantly, it does not extend statutory control over the exhibition of videos. Thus the Act draws clear distinctions between the responsibilities of the state designated classification body and video suppliers on the one hand, and adult consumers on the other. The commercial supply of pre-recorded videos is subject to controls according to the age-graded classification system operated by the designated body (currently the British Board of Film Classification). Once a video enters the home, however, the burden of responsibility for preventing "under-age" viewing falls to parents. Unlike the responsibility placed upon video suppliers, parents are not culpable for their children's viewing habits under the law. In this limited sense, parental responsibility is a moral duty of care, not a legal one.

This principle was enshrined in the original Video Recordings Act 1984, after the incumbent Conservative government, prompted into action by a 'moral panic' in the news media (Barker, 1984b), decided to refrain from direct interference in home-based video viewing. Perhaps it is because video bears such a close relationship to individualistic free market choices favoured by Thatcherite sympathisers that this decision was taken. Thus the

government was able to meet the popular demands for some form of regulation of video supply, without constructing an impractical (and possibly unworkable) regulatory framework which violated the sacred space of the family home, the idealised crucible of a responsible, self interested citizenry favoured by exponents of Thatcherism (Evans, 1997).

It was during the campaign in support of the Video Recordings Bill in 1983 that the issue of "parental responsibility" assumed centre stage in public debates about home-based regulation. Yet the notion that parents ought to be responsible for their children's welfare and behaviour has a long pedigree, and finds expression in many areas of social and economic policy. In recent years, the news media and policy makers have been pre-occupied with putative social problems linked with "juvenile criminality". Concern over the perceived decline in moral standards in the young, and the increase in levels of juvenile crime, became focused in early 1993 with the murder of a two year old boy, James Bulger, at the hands of two ten year old boys, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson (Smith, 1994; Buckingham, 1996; King, 1997). The subsequent media 'hysteria' (Fowler, 1992; King, 1997) which continued for many months after the crime had been committed (Barratt, 1993) dealt with a number of factors which were assumed to have contributed to the murder, and to the putative increase in juvenile criminality in general. These included the influence of what became known as 'violent videos' (Barratt, 1993; Barker and Petley, 1997; King, 1997) and, significantly, 'family breakdown' and 'irresponsible parenting'.[1] Both of these factors are held to be the result of a crisis of parenthood, finding either direct expression in 'family breakdown', or indirectly in the alleged ease with which many children are thought to gain access to 'violent videos' in the family home.

So pervasive are images of irresponsible parenting, as it is understood in these terms, that it is possible to discern a consensus of opinion in this area which spans both left and right

---

[1] See, for example: "Teach Kids What's Right...Then Get Tough if They go Wrong: Tony Blair MP", The Sun, 3/3/93; "LAMBS CHOP!", The Daily Mirror, 5/3/93; "A Nineties Adolescence- Drinking at 11, Drugs at 14 and Precious Little Guidance at Home: Generation of Lost Innocents", The Daily Mail, 1/3/93; "Time to go Back to the Great Sweet Mother", The Times, 20/3/93.

political inclinations. As recently as September 1997, the news media reported the plans of the Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw MP to change 'the culture in which children are brought up' by introducing a framework for the compulsory enforcement of the responsible parenting of "young offenders" in the forth-coming Crime and Disorder Bill ('Parents ordered back to class in youth crime war', The Daily Telegraph, 24/9/97). He is quoted as saying '[n]one of us should evade our responsibilities for our children. You have got to get parents to accept their responsibilities. They have got to stop walking away' (ibid.).

The murder of James Bulger, and subsequent media coverage, also provoked a campaign to reform the Video Recordings Act 1984, widely seen by its detractors as failing to prevent young audiences from gaining access to material deemed unsuitable for them. This campaign, in 1994, rallied around New Clause 42, an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill tabled by David Alton (then a Liberal Democrat MP) (the so-called "Alton amendment"). The amendment sought to extend the statutory control of pre-recorded videos to exhibition, thereby making it an offence to allow an under-age child to watch a video certified as 'unsuitable for home viewing'. This contravenes the spirit of previous legislation which only applies to supply and not exhibition. The amendment caused a great deal of controversy in the news media, during the course of which the issue of "parental responsibility" was again at the forefront of consideration. All of the themes prevalent during debates over the original Video Recordings Bill a decade earlier made a re-appearance, although this time there appeared to be less opposition to the idea of making "parental responsibility" a legal and not just a moral requirement. Ultimately, however, the amendment was withdrawn, although only after the Home Secretary pledged to make some changes to the Video Recordings Act 1984. The principle that video regulation ought only apply to supply and not to exhibition was preserved.

This period of public controversy is worthy of detailed attention for the very reason that the issue of "parental responsibility" is such a visible feature of the debate. The terms which

apply to "parental responsibility" are accessible at the foreground of this episode, and thus it provides the focal point of the analytical project of this thesis.

There is one further feature of the debates over "parental responsibility" and video regulation which merits attention. The question of what constitutes "good parenting" cannot be divorced from assumptions about who "good" parents are. Much of the rhetoric of the media controversies described above allies "irresponsible" parenting with groups variously descibed as 'working-class', 'urban', 'unemployed' and 'feckless'- representatives of what has become known (rather nebulously) as the 'under-class' (Petley, 1997). Parents from these groups are identified as those most likely to allow their children access to material deemed unsuitable for them, and in turn these neglected children are felt to be most at risk from the pernicious effects of watching "violent videos", by virtue of their disaffection from "mainstream" society.

The debate about video regulation has thus become a cipher for wider struggles over the nature of "good parenting" in society, and it has provided a forum for various political interests (on the left and right) to engage in ideological confrontations concerning public morality and contemporary welfare provisions. In addition to providing an examination of the ways in which "parental responsibility" is defined by various agencies engaged in public debates, it is important, given this wider political context, to determine the means by which notions of "good parenting" are applied to different social groups and to account for the functions served by such definitional activities.

1.3 Structure

This thesis follows a multi-method approach because the research questions outlined above cover such a broad area of inquiry. Previous research into the home-based regulation of children's (television) viewing habits often relies on quantitative survey methods as a way of gauging opinion and patterns of behaviour in this area. This body of research is subject to a critical review in Chapter Two, and its shortfalls are highlighted in an effort to

demonstrate the strengths of the present study which combines both quantitative and qualitative methods (Wimmer and Dominick, 1994) with traditional forms of document analysis common to historical research.

Chapter Three presents the findings of a questionnaire survey of teenagers' video viewing habits, designed to discover the extent to which thirteen and fourteen year olds gain access to pre-recorded videos deemed unsuitable for them by the BBFC. The survey also yields insights into the place of video viewing in the day-to-day lives of this age group, and the role played by factors external to the viewing process in viewing behaviour. This account provides a suitable context for locating the patterns of home-based regulation described in subsequent chapters.

Having gained some purchase on the video viewing habits of young audiences, Chapter Four explores the ways in which the term "parental responsibility" is defined and employed by the main institutional protagonists in public debates about video regulation. The chapter provides an historical account of the development of the Video Recordings Act 1984, and the various amendments it has received subsequent to its enactment. These events are examined from various perspectives represented by the print news media, Parliament, the British Video Association, and the British Board of Film Classification. The analysis pursues a number of inter-related questions: What do these institutions mean when they refer to "parental responsibility"? What do these institutions expect of parents? How is "parental responsibility" defined in relation to different socio-economic groups? What practices do these institutions associate with "good" parenting?

Chapter Five shifts the focus of the study away from what is expected of parents to examine their own accounts of their experiences. The chapter draws upon interviews with ten families (parents and children) whose experiences are related to the broader theme of "parental responsibility" described in Chapter Four. A qualitative methodology is employed in an effort to move beyond the deficiencies of previous research into the home-based

regulation of children's viewing habits described in Chapter Two. Qualitative methods are particularly well suited to the examination of what Gilgun *et al* (1992) call the 'complex, subjective and private' nature of 'family phenomena' because these require 'methods and perspectives tailored to this complexity and subjectivity' (p.vii). Such methods as depth and group interviewing allow the imbalance in the research agenda towards the identification of 'structural or demographic trends in families' to be redressed with an emphasis on 'the processes by which families create, sustain and discuss their own family relations' (Daly, 1992b p.4).

Although only small-scale, this research presents a challenge to many of the orthodoxies identified in Chapter Two, preparing the way for a re-evaluation of the nature and extent of home-based regulation in contemporary British homes. The analysis in this chapter is guided by the question: How do parents regulate their children's video viewing habits in the home, and what factors account for such practices?

Chapter Six expands upon the findings discussed in Chapter Five by providing an analysis of the ways in which parents judge the suitability of pre-recorded videos for their children. The fact, established in Chapters Three, Four and Five, that many parents do not always heed the classification symbol supplied with pre-recorded videos suggests that the issue of "suitability" is open to interpretation, not just by the British Board of Film Classification, but also by parents and children within the family home. This chapter examines the ways in which the ten families described in Chapter Five decide upon the suitability of pre-recorded videos for young viewers.

The discussion in Chapters Four and Five is drawn together in Chapter Seven. The expectations placed upon parents by agencies outside of the family home identified in Chapter Four are compared against the actual patterns of behaviour described by the parents themselves. Underpinning this analysis is the question: How realistic are the expectations placed upon parents, and how do parents relate to these external pressures?

Finally, there is always ample scope for improvement in research, and Chapter Eight offers a critical appraisal of the methods employed in the thesis as well as providing a summary of the main arguments developed in the previous chapters. Opportunities for future research are also discussed, with a particular emphasis given to the ways in which the approach taken here can be improved upon in subsequent studies.

Chapter Two
Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Since the early 1960s researchers have examined the ways in which parents regulate their children's viewing habits in the family home (Gross and Walsh, 1980). This work has developed alongside the growth of interest in children's relationship with television, which has generated an enormous body of research since the 1950s (Reeves and Wartella, 1985; Buckingham, 1987). The research which looks specifically at issues of regulation in the home (referred to here as home-based regulation) is characterised by three features: the abundance of US work in the area, a narrow focus on television, and inconsistent results. The first two of these issues are dealt with below, before proceeding with a review of the substantive findings offered by previous researchers.

2.2 Characteristics of the research literature

There has been relatively little research conducted in Britain around the home-based regulation of children's media uses; the majority of work issues from the US. Although it is common for authors to refer to the findings from other studies with little regard for their place of origin (see the reviews presented in Buckingham, 1993a; 1996), there is a genuine danger in over-generalising from data which may be culturally-specific.

Cross-cultural work on television audiences (eg. Lull, 1988) has shown that the home viewing context varies from culture to culture. In addition to the fact that households and families are organised in different ways across cultures, programme content may also differ. Even where programmes may have been imported, scheduling procedures and forms of centralised regulation vary from country to country (and sometimes region to region). In addition, the act of television viewing itself may be given a different status across cultures. As James Lull (1988) concludes in his introduction to an edited collection

of cross-cultural studies of the television audience, 'world families...watch television distinctively within their own cultures' (p.172).

In view of these cross-cultural differences, it is important that research findings are not generalised beyond their own cultural context. It is particularly important that this point be borne in mind when considering the issue of home-based regulation. Patterns of regulation are highly dependent upon prevailing attitudes towards television viewing and practices associated with parenting (Buckingham, 1996), and these vary across cultures (as well as within them). For example, one set of issues which has had an important impact upon attitudes towards home-based regulation has been the controversy around "media effects", in particular, the hypothesis that children who watch violent material on the television may be prone to become more violent themselves.[1] Whilst these issues have been widely debated in many Western industrialised countries, including Sweden (Roe, 1983), the US (Strasburger, 1995) and Britain (Barker, 1984; Barker and Petley, 1997), the course of debate has taken different forms in each country.

In the US, there is a high degree of consensus around this issue, as Strasburger (1995) has recently noted. The American academy (which has generally embraced the traditions of laboratory testing, content analysis, attitudinal surveys and correlational studies at the heart of "effects" research) has generated a vast body of literature which explores the hypothesis described above (Newson, 1994); in this context, debate now concerns what action should be taken to minimise these "effects" (Strasburger, 1995; French, 1996).[2] In Britain, however, this degree of consensus is largely lacking (Barker, 1984; Cumberbatch and Howitt, 1986; Gauntlett, 1995; Barker and Petley, 1997), with factions within both the academy and the news media still divided over the issue, even though the first study in

---

[1] See Gauntlett (1995) for a recent summary of the "effects" tradition, and the controversy which surrounds these debates.

[2] President Clinton has recently ushered through legislation in North America that requires the inclusion of a V-chip (for censoring unsuitable material) in every new television set bought in the United States from 1998; the same proposal in Britain met with a mixed reaction (see *The Guardian*, Research urged on TV 'V-chip' 19/3/96), and has yet to be acted upon by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Britain to deal with "media effects" was published nearly forty years ago (Himmelweit *et al*, 1958).

This 'measure of uncertainty' (Cumberbatch and Howitt, 1989) is itself constitutive of attitudes towards home-based regulation (Barcus, 1969), therefore it is important that research data relating to this issue in Britain is generated from within the British context. Findings from US studies have a certain heuristic value when considering the contemporary British situation, in as much as they may draw attention to certain general characteristics of home-based regulation, but they cannot be taken to represent a universal picture of this phenomenon. Obviously, the present thesis is also bound by this logic. The arguments advanced hereafter, and their supporting data, are only valid for the specific context under scrutiny. That does not mean, however, that they are not useful for considering other situations, only that care must be taken in their wider application.

A second feature of the literature under consideration in this chapter is that very few of the studies deal with video viewing as distinct from television viewing (Atkin, Greenberg and Baldwin, 1991). There is a tendency within the research to treat the VCR as an adjunct to television, with scant consideration given to its own unique characteristics. This is unfortunate, because in many ways the VCR machine introduces a very different set of possibilities regarding the home-based regulation of children's viewing. Whilst these have been given nominal recognition by some researchers (Buckingham, 1993a; Kim *et al*, 1988; Lin and Atkin, 1989), they have yet to receive any adequate conceptual consideration.

In order to illustrate the differences between television and video which demand that they be treated separately, the specificities of video viewing are discussed below. This preliminary conceptual exercise is based upon a division of the viewing experience into six areas where the issue of home-based regulation is of relevance. The first three areas (economic, spatial, temporal) are derived from the household viewing context itself, whilst

the final three (content, technology, provision) relate to features of the media consumption process intrinsic to different media.

Economic

Unlike television, VCR use requires additional financing above and beyond direct payments like the television licence. Pre-recorded videos must be bought or rented prior to viewing (leaving aside for the moment the possibility that they may be borrowed at no cost, or received as presents). These expenses are likely to be met by the person who is using the VCR, rather than deferred to other members of the household, as is often the case with payment of the television licence (CAVIAR, 1994).

As the earning potential of school-children is much less than that of school-leavers, they are often highly dependent upon the financial assistance of adults (parents, other relations and friends), or possibly even peers. In some cases, at least for older children, they may be able to draw upon their own, albeit limited, earnings from casual labour. This places important constraints upon the amount of money they can devote to independent VCR use (as opposed to family viewing, which may well be paid for by family members in a better position to do so).

In view of this, home-based regulation may take the form of economic controls (the withdrawal/withholding or provision of money for VCR use). It also suggests that the "playground economy" (the circulation of money within child peer groups, in the form of informal transactions, and the lending/borrowing of money) may also be an important factor in patterns of VCR use, alongside the subversion of financial controls levied directly or indirectly by adults.

Spatial

The surveillance of children's television and video viewing very much depends upon the arrangement of viewing space(s) within the family home (Oswell, 1995). The majority of

households in Britain have the main family television in the communal living room; but whilst 68% of households have an additional set at another location,[1] only 20% have more than one VCR machine (ITC, 1995).

This would suggest that the surveillance of VCR use, as opposed to television-viewing, is more straightforward in the majority of British households, where VCR technology is likely to be found in the communal living room and not at other locations. These statistics also draw attention to the extent to which there may be competition between family members for control over the use of the VCR machine. For example, a pre-recorded tape cannot be viewed if one member of the family is using the VCR machine for timeshifting, or even simply watching a favourite scheduled programme on the main television set which is connected to the VCR. Viewing disputes centred on the television may be more easily settled in households with more than one set, although such conflict management is not open to the majority of homes which have only one VCR machine.[2]

Temporal

Unlike television-viewing, the choice of pre-recorded material for video-viewing is not limited to the scheduling protocols of broad/narrowcast providers. Where television schedulers in Britain operate a "family viewing policy", which includes the observance of a watershed period before which material deemed 'unsuitable' for those below the age of 16 is not broadcast, parental control over children's viewing often takes the form of enforced bed-times (Millwood-Hargrave, 1995).

This temporal control of children's television viewing is an important characteristic of home-based regulation which is not as readily applicable to video viewing. Because a video

---

[1] In those households with children aged 10-15, 52% have an additional television set in the child's bedroom (ITC, 1995).

[2] Although many households locate the VCR machine with the main television set in the communal living room, the technology is still portable (in theory). This means that one form of conflict resolution, or a useful way of assuring independent viewing, would be to move the VCR to a vacant television set located elsewhere in the home. The degree to which family members are entitled to control the technology in this way, and the process of negotiation it involves, are important areas for further investigation.

may be viewed at any time of the day or night, strict observance of bed-times may not represent a viable form of prohibitive control, although it may be useful for adults wishing to preserve a time when they can view "adult" material after the children have gone to bed. In this case, bed-time sanctions which have become habitualised in relation to television-viewing may be used by adults (or older siblings) as a demarcation point beyond which they can use the VCR independently.[1]

Content

The scheduling procedures employed by broad/narrowcast institutions are based upon assumptions about the suitability of programme content for particular age groups (ITC, 1995; Millwood Hargrave, 1995). Viewers are able to make relatively informed decisions about programme content on the basis of its transmission time, because a consistent policy is generally followed in programme scheduling across television channels (both terrestrial and satellite). There is evidence to suggest that many viewing decisions are made on this basis (Millwood-Hargrave, 1995). Indeed, it is the existence of a consistent scheduling policy which allows those responsible for children's viewing to rely on the 'logistics of bed-time' as a means of regulation (Millwood-Hargrave, p.85).[2]

Plainly, information about the content of pre-recorded videos cannot be determined simply by reference to scheduling. The home-based regulation of pre-recorded video material, based upon content, must rely upon other sources of information, the most obvious of which, it might be argued, is the video classification system operated by British Board of Film Classification (BBFC). Other important sources include video cover illustrations, synopses and content labels; reviews of film releases (whether for the cinema or video); video shop displays and posters; magazine and newspaper articles; an individual's

---

[1] Other temporal sanctions, like limitations on the *total* amount of time that a child is allowed to spend in front of the small-screen, are likely to be similar in kind for both television and video viewing in households where they are enforced. Buckingham (1993a; p.114) has suggested that parents are generally more concerned about the *amount* of television that their children watch, rather than being anxious over the *content* of what they are viewing. This theme is explored in chapter five.

[2] Millwood-Hargrave does point out, however, that many parents are suspicious of the watershed as a reliable guide to programme content, preferring instead to rely on their own judgements informed by other sources (1995; p. 85).

knowledge of film genres, or, simply, the verbal accounts of trusted associates (see Chapter Six).

Technology

The nature and degree of physical control over the 'flow' of viewing material is very different for the television set and VCR machine (Cubitt, 1991). The flow of television programming can be controlled within the home using the on/off button on the set (or remote control unit), or by switching channels. Furthermore, the audio and picture quality can be altered using volume, brightness and contrast controls. In addition to these facilities, however, the VCR machine allows viewers to preview or review pre-recorded material (by "fast-forwarding" or "rewinding" a video cassette) at high speed or in slow motion/freeze-frame. The video cassette can also be paused, allowing the user(s) to resume viewing when it is convenient or desirable to do so.[1] Some VCRs also come with a "child-lock" facility which, when enabled, will only allow those users with the correct code to operate the machine.

The differences between the functional abilities of the two technologies have important implications for the direct control of the viewing output in each case. For example, methods of home-based regulation which rely upon the pre-screening of material to check for its suitability can only be achieved with the use of a VCR machine. To take another example, material deemed unsuitable for younger viewers may be "edited" out of pre-recorded videos by other members of the household using the fast-forward facility to skip through particular episodes of the video presentation.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the additional facilities brought to the viewing experience by the VCR machine also grants the opportunity for repetitive viewing (either of

---

[1] Timeshifting is of no concern here, as this thesis deals with the home-based regulation of pre-recorded material.

the entire pre-recorded video presentation, or of specific sections of interest), thereby increasing viewers' acquaintance with the material.[1]

While the VCR offers certain useful features for controlling the viewing situation, these same facilities are a potent means by which control strategies may be subverted or mitigated. For example, a child viewing material on video which is deemed unsuitable by her/his parent may well have her/his viewing terminated on discovery of the "misdemeanour". Viewing can be resumed provided the pre-recorded video is still available, when the parent is next absent from the scene. The prohibition of broad/narrowcast television could not be so easily circumvented, as a secondary viewing opportunity may not necessarily present itself.

Provision

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the features of television and the VCR relates to the provision of material in each instance (programmes, in the case of television, and video cassettes or "tapes" in the case of the VCR).

Television programmes are transmitted directly from broad/narrowcast providers to sets in the household. The only requirement for reception is a suitable aerial (for terrestrial and satellite transmissions) or cabling (for cable television).

VCR machines, in contrast, require input directly from the end-user. Pre-recorded tapes must be loaded manually into the machine for playback; these are available to consumers via rental or retail outlets. The end-user must therefore take a proactive role in commissioning VCR use, in that video material must be brought directly into the home, rather than simply received, as is the case with television transmissions.

---

[1] This may be acknowledged with dismay or enthusiasm by parents- dismay at the idea that certain video sequences can be replayed in all their graphic detail and at varying speeds; enthusiasm for the notion that close familiarity with the "text" may foster critical "media literacy" skills in young viewers aware of the process of film production (Buckingham, 1996).

These differences in service provision are reflected in the statutory requirements which regulate each medium. Television broad/narrowcasters are required to implement a high degree of control over their own outputs, as laid down in the Broadcasting Act (1990). For the control of videos, the onus lies with the implementation of the BBFC classification system, through the rental and retail outlets who supply pre-recorded video tapes.

These latter controls are age-related, and whilst it is illegal for a person under the age of a given certificate to rent or buy a pre-recorded tape (the suppliers are criminally liable, not the consumer, under the Video Recordings Act, 1984 [VRA]), it is not an offence for a young person in these circumstances to *watch* a prohibited video. There is no legal statute forbidding a parent, or other adult, from allowing a child of 13 to watch an '18' rated pre-recorded video (see Chapter Four). For these reasons, the efficacy of the system requires the co-operation of those above the age of 12, 15 or 18 (the three age-related prohibitive classifications) - hence the importance attributed to the notion of "parental responsibility" in debates about video regulation, which is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Four.

All of this means that the home-based regulation of video necessarily takes on a different character to the control of television viewing. While broad/narrowcasters have a responsibility for the circulation of their products, which are controlled using scheduling procedures familiar to end-users, the control of pre-recorded videos cannot be based upon these same constraints.

2.3 Research questions and substantive findings

Many of the studies on the home-based regulation of audio-visual media provide contradictory findings and conclusions which poses a particular problem for anyone attempting to gain an overview of the area. The field of research is necessarily diverse, and the review is structured around four themes: the research questions addressed by previous authors; the forms of guidance they have identified; the extent of home based regulation; and the predictor variables they examine.

Research questions

A number of research questions have been posed by researchers working in the field, but they tend to fall within one of the following domains:

1) What are the characteristic features of the home-based regulation of children's television viewing?

This question deals with the taxonomic description of home-based regulation. Various attempts have been made by researchers to develop typologies of home-based regulation based upon empirical surveys of parental practices. Two important efforts in this area are described in the next section (Barcus, 1969; Lin and Atkin, 1989), and taken together they form the most comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the variety of methods, tactics and strategies employed by parents when regulating children's television viewing.

Allerton (1995) is quite clear about the importance of posing and answering this question. He suggests that a knowledge of what parents are currently doing in the home will form a better basis upon which to build a supportive policy for home-based regulation, 'rather than increasing censorship further' (p.2).

2) What are the demographic variables which predict the level of the home-based regulation of children's television viewing?

This question betrays the scientistic perspective characteristic of much of the research in the area of home-based regulation. In scientific discourse, a predictor variable is one which bears a clear and demonstrable relationship to a given phenomena (x), such that its presence allows an observer to predict the likelihood of x taking a given form (Wimmer and Dominick, 1995).

Researchers have been keen to determine which social groups are more likely to regulate their children's viewing (Gross and Walsh, 1980; Kim *et al*, 1988; Lin and Atkin, 1989).

Variables examined include social class (or socio-economic status), race and gender. This area has yielded perhaps the greatest number of contradictory findings, partly as a result of problems associated with the operationalisation of such categorisations in empirical work.

It is interesting to note Gross and Walsh's (1980) argument that the identification of these predictor variables is a necessary step towards identifying "correct" parental practices, and the conditions which foster them, for the wider benefit of those not currently operating efficacious regulatory strategies. In this respect, Buckingham's (1993a) claim that much research in this area is based upon a normative model of parental practice finds support, with "middle-class" parental practices (as they are imagined *apriori*) offered as the standard by which others are judged.

This final point is important, because many of these studies are based upon assumptions about correct parenting practice, and those who engage in it. The hypotheses which determine the kinds of research questions asked in these projects clearly demonstrate this. For example, several of the studies test the view that working-class families are less restrictive of their children's viewing (Blood, 1961; Greenberg and Dominick, 1969; Gross and Walsh, 1980; Lin and Atkin, 1989; Mohr, 1979). Yet these assumptions find very little support in the eventual findings of the research reported below.

3) How is the issue of home-based regulation perceived by parents and children?
This question is rarely an explicit concern of the research literature, although it is an important concern implicit to those studies which rely upon self-report data.

Where the question has been posed, a great deal more space has tended to be given to the issue of children's perceptions of regulation, although Buckingham (1993a; 1996) and Kim *et al* (1988) have attempted to provide details of the parents' perspective. The research conducted by Kim *et al* (1988) was only concerned with the degree to which parents' and

children's accounts of home-based regulation differed. In addition, their interest lay in describing perceptions related to the extent and nature of home-based regulation, rather than to their informants' opinions towards the necessity of home-based regulation (which would shed light on their motivations in this area). Buckingham (1993a; 1996), by contrast, has attempted to describe and analyse the reasoning which underlies parental practices, and children's responses to these, based upon informants' accounts.

One of the most common observations repeated by authors in this area is that, in general, parents do perceive "effective" regulation to be important within the home. They are therefore reluctant to offer a wholly truthful account of their own activities when these are personally felt to be lacking in some way. Gunter and McAleer (1997) argue that 'although parents may often claim to take care over what they allow younger members of the family to watch, this may well be far removed from what actually happens in practice' (p.131).

This poses an obvious problem for research based upon self-report data, rather than on direct participant observation: parents' accounts cannot always be taken to reflect their actual practices. Some authors also suggest that within peer groups, children generally perceive the regulation of their viewing negatively, and consequently they are reluctant to admit the full extent to which parents influence their viewing habits (Mohr, 1979; Rossiter and Robertson, 1975).

The methodological implications of these observations are discussed in Chapter Five. For now it is important to recognise that although it may be true that parents feel obliged to present themselves favourably to researchers, little or no attention has been given to the *nature* of the pressures felt by parents to act in this way. Questions are seldom raised about the relationship between wider discourses concerning parental responsibility and the attitudes of parents themselves, except for the acknowledgement that there is a degree of pressure on parents to conform to prevailing models of "good parenting" (Buckingham, 1993a). Whereas previous research has been satisfied with simply repeating the claim that

parents are compelled to present themselves as exemplars of "good parenting", the present study seeks to understand the nature and roots of this compulsion, if, indeed, it is widely felt by parents themselves.

4) What is the impact of 'new technologies' on the home-based regulation of television viewing?

As noted above, the majority of studies have been concerned with the control of television viewing, whilst relatively little attention has been paid to the regulation of VCR use. Of those studies that do include VCR use, two (Kim *et al*, 1988; Lin and Atkin, 1989) sought to determine the extent to which the introduction of the VCR into family homes had altered pre-existing patterns of parental control.

Kim *et al* (1988) recognise that the additional features offered by the VCR present a challenge to previously established patterns of home-based regulation of the television, whilst at the same time offering the opportunity for greater control and the potential for further parental mediation in the viewing process.[1] Unfortunately, they do not present a convincing typology of VCR control, at least in the way that previous authors, like Barcus (1969), have attempted for television. They fail to distinguish the very features of VCR technology which make it different to television, and therefore of interest in its own right. The authors draw few distinctions between the two primary functions of the VCR (the play-back of pre-recorded video tapes, and timeshifting television programmes for unscheduled viewing). This is particularly unfortunate because the character of viewing control will differ according to the uses being made of the VCR at any given time.

Lin and Atkin (1989) also acknowledge that the VCR offers viewers (both parents and children) additional control over the viewing process. However, they simply draw a conceptual distinction between strategies which are television oriented and those which are

---

[1] The features of the VCR they include here are: the ability to record programming for unscheduled viewing, to fast-forward, rewind and pause material, as well as the greater degree of control over the choice of pre-recorded viewing material available for rental or purchase, as opposed to the reception of transmitted programming.

specific to the VCR, without any due consideration of the variety of uses made of VCR technology. Their stated aim was to provide information on the demographic 'predictor' variables which explain patterns of viewing control, rather than to develop a thorough taxonomy of VCR control strategies.

It is clear from the above account that there exist certain significant gaps in the research literature: an adequate taxonomy of VCR control strategies, a deeper understanding of the putative pressures which parents face to present themselves as exemplars of "good parenting" and an awareness of the ways in which the home-based regulation of television and video viewing intersect with wider familial relations in the household.

Forms of Guidance

Previous research suggests that guidance over viewing within the home can take two forms, referred to as 'rule-making' and 'mediation' (Lin and Atkin, 1989). More often than not, as Lin and Atkin (1989) rightly acknowledge, researchers have failed to distinguish clearly between these two forms. This has resulted in the conflation of quite separate sets of associated behaviour and attitudes.[1] Each form of guidance is described below, beginning with rule-making.

The most visible form of home-based regulation is the deployment and enforcement of a set of rules concerning the commission and conduct of viewing. These rules may take many forms, as they relate to the amount of viewing, the timing of viewing acts, or the prohibition of certain viewing material. Researchers have attempted to chart and analyse these different types of rule-making activity, with varying degrees of success.

In an early US study of the home-based regulation of children's television use, Barcus (1969) offers a taxonomy of regulatory strategies (see figure 1.1). He suggests that home-based regulation can be usefully conceptualised as either positive (those practices which

---

[1] Gunter and McAleer (1990) make just such a conflation. They refer to direct and indirect methods of control, both of which might include forms of mediation (p.136).

encourage the viewing of "desirable" programming) or negative (those that prohibit the viewing of "unsuitable" programming). Furthermore, these practices may be said to be either 'formal' or 'informal'. Formal practices are akin to rule-making as the term is used here; that is, they involve the setting and enforcement of viewing rules within the household (what Barcus calls 'de jure control'). Barcus' specification of informal practices (those which involve de facto control of the television) closely resembles the concept of mediation as it is used by other authors, discussed below.

Figure 1.1: Television viewing controls

		Control prior to viewing	*Control during viewing*	*Control after viewing*
Positive forms of control	Formal	Screening Selecting Suggesting program for child	Discussion Interpretations Changing channel to another program	Answering questions Discussion of things viewed
	Informal	*De facto:* adult selection & viewing	Viewing with children, explaining	Praising things learned
Negative or restrictive forms of control	Formal	Restrictions on: 1. content, programs 2. time a) no. hours permitted b) certain hours 3. until completion of other activities	Shutting off set Switching channels	Forbidding future viewing
	Informal	*De facto:* adult selection & viewing	Scolding child while viewing	Scolding child for things learned

Reproduced from Barcus (1969 p.99)

The distinction drawn by Barcus between positive and negative strategies of control has been used elsewhere, and it does serve a useful conceptual purpose. Mohr (1979) makes this point in his specification of positive control (must watch, should watch) and negative control (must not watch, should not watch). The distinction reminds us that control of children's viewing (whether as a result of rule-making, mediation or both) is not simply a matter of prohibition: parents also recognise that 'television is good for your kids' (Davies, 1989) and that certain programming may be beneficial for the child's developing understanding of the world.

The distinction between positive and negative control strategies is concerned with the *tone* of particular strategies. What is also important to take into account is the heterogeneous *character* of rule-making activities.

Millwood Hargrave (1995) has suggested that the control of television viewing generally focuses on two aspects of the viewing situation. Firstly, restrictions are levied according to rules associated with viewing times. These include the stipulation of a fixed number of hours allowed to view per day or week, in addition to the possible enforcement of bed-times which set a ceiling limit on how late television viewing may proceed (what she calls the 'logistics of bedtime').

Another form of rule-making is concerned with programme content, whereby children's viewing is restricted according to the nature of the programme in question, irrespective of its scheduling.

Millwood Hargrave (1995) reports that the majority of her respondents employed restrictions according to viewing times, with only a minority of regulatory decisions taken about programme content when this could be divorced from scheduling considerations. Temporal-based restrictions which reflect scheduling policies connected with programme content are clearly important strategies for the regulation of television-viewing.

The conflation of temporal- and content-based strategies can lead to misunderstandings about the nature of regulation. For example, Gross and Walsh (1980) draw incorrect conclusions from earlier research as a result of such confusion. They suggest that two previous studies had presented contradictory data about the role of socio-economic status in patterns of home-based regulation. However, each study, as their own accounts of the research testify, was measuring a different aspect of parental control. One was concerned with the *level of rule-making* (which may reflect temporal- or, just as likely, content-based controls) apparent in a household, and the other with the *amount of television* (temporal-

based control) actually viewed. But because it is not clear whether a high level of rule-making necessarily means a lower level of television viewing, the apparent contradiction in the findings reported by Gross and Walsh (1980) may simply be due to the incompatibility of the two studies for purposes of comparison.

The existence of differences between television and video regulation in this area is unclear because so little research exists which examines rule-making activities associated with video viewing. Lin and Atkin (1989) have attempted to distinguish between television and video regulation in their efforts to operationalise the terms "rule-making" and "mediation" for each medium. They assessed television viewing rules in terms of three indicators:

1) the amount of time the child is allowed to watch television.

2) what kinds of shows the child is allowed to watch.

3) how late the child is allowed to watch.

The assessment of rules governing VCR-use was based on four indicators:

1) frequencies with which the child could rent a video.

2) what kinds of videos they could rent.

3) how often the child could view videos at a friend's house.

4) how often the child could rent a video with a friends.

What is interesting about this approach is that temporal-based viewing rules are not taken as relevant to video regulation by the authors, unlike their treatment of television controls. This difference of approach shows a recognition of the fact that video viewing is less constrained by temporal considerations, by virtue of its freedom from structured scheduling.

Other family rules which are not specifically associated with video-viewing, like the habitualised enforcement of children's bed-times based upon concerns for their physiological well-being, may well exert control over viewing behaviour. These have yet to receive adequate attention in the research literature.

A more common form of parental rule-making regarding videos (as opposed to television) requires the imposition of controls regarding the content of video material (content-based regulation).[1] It is a credit to Lin and Atkin (1989) that they recognise the importance of content-based decision-making, rather than temporal-based, for the home-based regulation of videos, even though they do not go far enough in exploring the relationship between these two forms.

The foregoing discussion does not preclude the operation of temporal-based rule-making associated with VCR use. The fact that parents or older family members may wish to view 'adult' material on video suggests that in certain households the imposition of children's bed-time rulings allows them to do so in the same way that they might for late-night television viewing. Similarly, limiting the number of hours spent viewing videos may be a valuable form of regulation in certain households, as it is for television viewing. Concern (and possibly guilt) over a child's video viewing may be ameliorated if a parent feels that they exert some degree of control, at least over the *amount* of viewing that takes place. In this case, the need to complete household chores, or finish homework, may be used to restrict the amount of time available for video viewing.

In addition to these considerations, it is worth noting here that rule-making activities associated with the financial demands of video viewing are not considered in the literature. Just as parents may restrict the level of time spent viewing videos, they may also use

---

[1] Examples of such content-based rules include: restrictions on the type of video (No horrors; No Kung-fu movies), on its classification (No '15' or '18' rated features), or on plot elements (No films with swearing/nudity/sword fighting/drug use etc.).

restrictions on pocket money, or other financial sanctions, as a way of limiting viewing behaviour.

Whereas rule-making activities are often treated in the literature as overt forms of home-based control, with distinct characteristics, mediation, as a separate collection of strategies, is less clearly specified. Lin and Atkin (1989), who have attempted to demonstrate the relationship between rule-making and mediation, have noted that '[f]ew researchers have considered mediation...apart from the notion of rule-making' (p.57).

Mediation involves the participation in children's viewing routines of those who take responsibility for viewing control. Rather than (or in addition to) enforcing a set of viewing rules, those who accept responsibility engage with their children prior to, during and after viewing has occurred, in order to ameliorate the putative impact of the viewing experience, or facilitate a greater understanding of the programme content (Corder-Bolz, 1980; Lin and Atkin, 1989; Austin, 1993). To this end, mediation can entail co-viewing and/or discussion of the issues raised as a result of media use, between older and younger participants.

Barcus' (1969) taxonomy of home-based regulation (see figure 1.1) does not make explicit reference to mediation, although his specification of informal controls closely resembles it. However, his distinction between formal and informal controls, cross-cut by the time factor which relates to the moment at which control is exercised (prior to, during or after viewing) fails to clearly distinguish between rule-making and mediation. For example, according to Barcus (1969), one form of formal control exercised during viewing is given as 'discussion and interpretations', whilst an informal control exercised at the same time involves 'viewing with children, explaining'. These appear to be the same activity, just differently worded. Moreover, they both appear to be actions which subsequent authors, like Lin and Atkin (1989) would associate with mediation.

The extent to which parental mediation is reputed to aid children in their understanding of viewing experiences is not of interest to the present study.[1] What is of concern is the degree to which it is possible to distinguish between processes of mediation and rule-making, and the extent to which both are related to the conceptualisation of parental responsibility. In many important respects the two are necessarily related: the enforcement of viewing rules necessarily entails some degree of parental *intervention* in the viewing process, which is itself a key characteristic of mediation. Lin and Atkin (1989) suggest that there is indeed a relationship between rule-making activities and mediation, although it is not always straightforward. They argue that whilst the two concepts 'may appear as indicators of the same general process' they should remain 'theoretically distinguished' as '[a]ctual mediation isn't necessarily contingent upon established rules. Clearly one can have mediation without making explicit rules (and vice-versa)' (p.57). Their findings suggest that households which claimed to impose viewing rules were also more likely to engage in parental mediation. Unfortunately, the extent to which these activities were part of the same general strategies employed by parents, or were utilised on separate occasions depending upon contingent factors, is not apparent from these findings.

It should not be forgotten that VCR technology itself offers many opportunities for mediation. For example, one strategy described in the research literature involves the pre-screening of material to check its suitability for particular individuals. This is only possible using a VCR (except where a programme is repeated on television, and a parent is able to view it first time around to check for suitability). In addition, as Allerton (1995) recounts, parents may use the fast-forward functions of the VCR to 'skip' through episodes of a video presentation which are deemed to be unsuitable for younger viewers. This form of direct intervention by parents is *only* possible using VCR technology.

---

[1] A number of authors have addressed this important area, including: Brown and Linné, 1976; Atkin & Greenberg, 1977; O'Bryant & Corder-Bolz, 1978; Mohr, 1979; Corder-Bolz, 1980; Collins, Sobol, & Westby, 1981; Singer and Singer, 1981; Desmond et al, 1985; Austin, 1993.

Before concluding this section one final point remains to be made. With few exceptions little attention is given in the literature to the concept of self-regulation, which may be defined as self-imposed implementation or observance of viewing rules by children. The research literature, almost without exception, deals with the ability of parents to enable or constrain the viewing habits of their children. The idea that children themselves may operate forms of self-regulation is not considered, even in those studies where children appear as research subjects.

Allerton (1995) has discussed this issue, although in a very particular way. His collaborative work with Buckingham (reported in Buckingham, 1996) is concerned with the issue of children's emotional responses to television and video material. However, he describes self-regulation only in terms of the coping strategies which children employ when viewing distressing material. Allerton is referring to what might more accurately be called "auto-mediation", whereby various strategies, including talking with others and averting one's eyes, are employed to mitigate the impact of the offending stimuli.

This does not accord with the wider definition advanced above, which concerns the possible internalisation of parental rule-making by children or, indeed, to their own decisions to avoid certain material based on their knowledge of its content or to self-imposed temporal constraints. These issues have been ignored in the research literature, which takes a very narrow view of viewing control imposed from above, and thereby fails to acknowledge the possible role played by self-control in home-based regulation.

The neglect of children's self-imposed viewing controls (or voluntary compliance with tacit viewing rules) reflects a wider failure within the literature to adequately account for their active participation in patterns of home-based regulation. This is due to the over-emphasis upon *parental* involvement in home-based regulation, resulting from the assumption that parents are ultimately responsible for such matters in their households. The idea that

children might (or should) take responsibility for their own activities is not even considered within the research literature.

The extent of home-based regulation

A consensual opinion has formed within the research literature on home-based regulation: that levels of viewing-control (both rule-making and mediation) are generally low across the majority of households (Greenberg and Dominick, 1969; Gross and Walsh, 1980; Kim *et al*, 1988; Mohr, 1979).

Even in recent British research there is little evidence of either consistent or high levels of home-based regulation. Millwood Hargrave (1995) reports that only 52% of households claimed to have any television viewing rules (the majority of these rules were related to viewing times, and not necessarily programme content), in spite of the fact that nearly all of the adult respondents felt it their responsibility as parents to control their children's viewing, and that nearly half said they were concerned about their children's viewing.

Quite why there should exist such an apparent discrepancy between the level of home-based regulation and that of parental concern over children's viewing is a moot point, and one which is explored in later chapters. Previous authors have suggested a range of possible explanations.

For example, Barcus (1969) argues that the amount of regulation exercised within the home is related to parents' beliefs about the "effects" of television on children's physical, psychological and cultural development. He suggests that these attitudes are often confused by competing information from opinion formers. In addition, he argues that many parents do not view television as a menace in *their* children's lives, although it may pose problems for *other people's* children. In the light of this uncertainty parents are reluctant to take potentially unpopular, prohibitive action which is likely to provoke inter-familial strife, preferring instead to avoid confrontations of this nature.

This does not, however, explain why parents who do have definite concerns about their children's viewing still fail to act upon their fears, and introduce some form of regulation. Explanations of this order require a more sympathetic account of parental action, which takes into consideration the numerous pressures faced by parents in the day-to-day flux of life at home. Buckingham (1993a) has suggested that the general lack of home-based regulation may simply be down to external pressures and distractions faced by parents who are too pre-occupied with 'the realities of family life' to concern themselves with what their children are watching on television or video (p.108), even though they may express concerns in this area when pressed by researchers.

The account of home-based regulation offered by Barcus (1969), which is described above, relies upon the idea that negative control strategies ("must not/should not watch") are founded on adult fears about the adverse "effects" of the media on children. However, as his own research amply demonstrates, regulation may occur for a variety of other reasons, including parents' embarrassment at the prospect of viewing scenes of a sexual nature in the presence of their children. This reminds us that individual acts of home-based regulation may not necessarily form part of an overarching, or consistent strategy. The exercise of viewing control may be contingent on other factors which vary across viewing situations. For example, an older sister may invoke a viewing rule around the prohibition of sexual material in order to allow her to change channels to watch a programme that she prefers. Under other circumstances the younger sibling may have been allowed to watch the sexual material without fear of restriction. This would suggest that the level of home-based regulation within any given household may fluctuate across different contexts, making any attempt at 'scientific' measurement highly problematical.

Allerton (1995) offers a more detailed picture of the motivations behind home-based regulation, and suggests that parents often control their children's viewing because they are worried about the immediate distress it may cause (not necessarily because they feel it will

36

result in behavioural changes, as suggested by traditional "media effects" research [Gauntlett, 1995]). He argues that parents face a dilemma regarding their children's viewing habits: if they are too protective of their children they risk sheltering them from potentially valuable experiences; if they are too liberal, however, the result may cause their children unnecessary distress. At the heart of this dilemma lie two anti-protectionist hypotheses: that children need to be exposed to the unpleasantness of life via the media as a preparation for their entry into adulthood, and that children will be at a disadvantage within their peer-groups if they are prohibited from watching programmes or videos to which their associates have access.

It may be the case, therefore, that these anti-protectionist beliefs hold greater currency for the majority of parents, and this explains the relatively low level of viewing control which is reported in the research literature. The extent to which this is the case is discussed in Chapter Five, when the findings are presented from the family case-studies.

Predictor Variables

One very popular area of concern within the research literature has been with the relationship between certain socio-demographic variables and particular patterns of control within the household. One explanation for this tendency is suggested by Blood (1961) who recognises the debt to socialisation theory borne by many early studies of home-based regulation, including his own: 'Since the American literature on socialization processes has been much concerned with social class differences in child-rearing methods, one objective of the present study is to examine class differences in the control of TV' (p.206).

Various quantitative methods and statistical data analyses have been employed to provide illumination in this area, with mixed results. Forewarned by the failure of previous authors to draw firm conclusions in this area, the present study is less concerned than most with this macro-sociological focus. Nevertheless, the results of previous studies do provide a

context within which to situate the findings from the small-scale qualitative research, presented in Chapter Five.

The first problem facing researchers interested in macro-sociological concepts like social class is that they require operationalisation. In the absence of a convincing theory of class relations within contemporary post-Marxist social thought, this task is made even more difficult, as little consensus exists as to the constitution of class (Evans, 1996; Prandy, 1997; Devine, 1998). This putative "failure" of social theory to provide a consensus position on class relations has resulted in, as well as being a result of, a profusion of different ways of measuring class (Devine, 1998), and this heterogeneity is reflected in the research described below. This issue is further complicated by the fact that class relations are made meaningful in different ways across cultures, and findings therefore have limited application outside of the culture they refer to.

In a US study, Mohr (1979) takes the level of parents' education as an indicator of class, and finds that those with higher levels of education are more likely to offer negative guidance over their children's television viewing, whilst offering much less positive guidance than those parents with lower levels of education. The assessment of 'education level' is based rather simplistically on whether the parents (whose positions were aggregated in dual-parent families) have 'no college' or 'some college'. Furthermore, no effort is made to explain why education level should be a significant factor.

In contrast to Mohr's findings, Gross and Walsh (1980) find no relationship between parents' level of education and patterns of home-based regulation in the US. Unfortunately, no details are given in the report as to how the level of education was measured.

Greenberg and Dominick (1969) review the literature on home-based regulation produced from 1961 onwards and find that the majority of studies suggest that "middle-class" families tend to exercise more control over their children's viewing than those of the

"working-class". However, when they conducted their own survey of television viewing habits in the homes of teenagers, they found very little evidence of home-based regulation, and this did not vary according to the *income levels* of the families involved, which were taken as indicators of social class. Furthermore, one of the authors they cite in their review- Blood (1961)- admits that '[i]t is possible...that the class differences reported in this study...reflect only greater willingness on lower-class [sic] people to be honest about their troubles' (p.209). However, Blood fails to recognise the very clear diversity evident within his class groups, which appears at least as great as differences between the groups (1961; p. 220).

Gross and Walsh (1980), who measure families' income levels, also find no association between higher incomes and greater levels of control. Similarly, Atkin *et al* (1991) report that income is only of limited use as a predictor of patterns of mediation in the home. Hess and Goldman (1962) conclude that their own research offers 'little evidence for differentiated viewing patterns by socio-economic status' (p. 423) which they measure with reference to male occupations, income and educational attainment.

Lin and Atkin (1989) use a number of indicators to measure 'socio-economic status' in order to test the hypothesis that 'social status is a weak but positive predictor of mediation and rule-making' (p.56). Their findings suggest, however, that parents' income and education levels are 'entirely unrelated' to patterns of mediation (ibid). They even report that rule-making activities associated with VCR use are actually *less* frequent in households where parents are in full-time employment. The authors suggest that working parents have less time to implement viewing controls than those who spend more time at home through unemployment.

The role of gender in home-based regulation can be examined from two possible perspectives: the child's, and the parent's. That said, very few studies have actually made

such a distinction, preferring instead to focus on one or the other without considering their possible inter-relationship.

Barcus (1969) makes it clear from the start of his research that his interest lies only with mothers. This group, he suggests, are more likely to be responsible for home-based regulation, and his findings, based on self-report data, support this contention. He does suggest, however, that fathers may play a greater role in the informal control of children's television viewing, through *de facto* means, like programme selection. The extent to which these observations are valid is open to question given their reliance on mothers' accounts of behaviour within the family home. The fact that this research was conducted in the mid-1960s also suggests that contemporary patterns of home-based regulation may be different, given the shift in the division of labour within many households (Ferri and Smith, 1996). All too many studies focus on mothers (Barcus, 1960; Blood, 1961; Hess and Goldman, 1962; Holman and Braithwaite, 1982) even though more recent research suggests that fathers play some role in viewing decisions within the home (Gunter and McAleer, 1990; Gray, 1992)- a finding confirmed in Chapter Five.

Mohr (1979) gave a questionnaire to both parents in dual-parent homes, and found that their accounts of home-based regulation were highly correlated, suggesting that mothers and fathers are united in their perception of viewing controls. He does not seem to recognise, however, that the respondents may have filled in both forms at the same time, comparing answers for convenience or with the deliberate intention of presenting a consistent picture of their household routines. In either case, the similarity between the accounts of mothers and fathers may not necessarily reflect genuine consistency in the home.

Like Barcus (1969) before him, Mohr (1979) found that mothers were more likely than fathers, in dual parent families, to offer both positive and negative forms of guidance regarding children's viewing habits.

Buckingham's (1993a) qualitative research suggests that mothers do indeed assume more responsibility for the regulation of children's viewing. In a later, more detailed, treatment of home-based regulation, (Buckingham, 1996) the family case studies described contain many examples of traditional assumptions about gendered roles, and accounts which challenge them. Family 1 exhibits traditional gender stereotypes: the younger son is believed by his parents to be able to 'handle' horror films, and they are less concerned that he sees them, whilst his older sister is seen to be less able to cope, and therefore has her viewing curtailed (Buckingham, 1996; pp 263-270). In contrast the account of Family 2 provides details of a female 'horror merchant', and her young, horror loving daughters (Buckingham, 1996; pp 270-274). This directly challenges the popular wisdom that boys like horror, and girls do not (Clover, 1990; Roe, 1983).

Mohr (1979) introduces the idea that 'parental guidance may differ for boys and girls' (p.219) although he offers no explanation for this assumption, nor any evidence to support it. Gross and Walsh (1980), however, set out to test the hypothesis that parents exert more control over girls' viewing, based on the assumption that parents are generally more protective towards girls. They did find support for this hypothesis, although this research deals with the quantitative measurement of the *amount* of control, and reveals nothing of its qualitative nature. The possibility that parental control over boys' viewing is infrequently invoked, but that it is of a qualitatively different kind to that levied against girls, is never given consideration.

The findings reported by Gross and Walsh are not supported elsewhere in the research literature. Lin and Atkin (1989) actually found that boys *claim* to be more heavily regulated than girls, whilst Kim *et al* (1988) found no evidence of any differences in the level of home-based regulation for boys and girls. Atkin *et al* (1991) found that levels of mediation tended to be higher in households with girls than those with boys. Again, however, these studies measured the amount of regulation, rather than investigate its nature. There may

well be important gender differences in operation at this level of analysis, as the case studies reported by Buckingham (1996) suggest.

One area which has not received any detailed attention concerns the apparent gender differences in the provision of television sets and VCRs in young people's bedrooms. Several studies have found that a far greater proportion of boys than girls have access to televisions and VCRs in their bedrooms (Hagell and Newburn, 1994; SMRC, 1995; BSC, 1996). This raises significant questions about attitudes towards home-based regulation, gender and technology, a theme dealt with in later chapters.

The issue of ethnic or racial differences in patterns of home-based regulation has been given relatively minor attention in the research literature. Where the issue is raised, it is invariably done so in profoundly unsatisfactory ways. In the few studies which attempt to measure "race", the categories which are used to distinguish between groups are simply defined as 'white' (or 'Caucasian') and 'black' (Mohr, 1979; Greenberg and Dominick, 1969; Gross and Walsh, 1980). No attention is given to other forms of categorisation which may have currency with the research subjects themselves (place of birth, religious affiliations, cultural identification, languages spoken and so on). Nor is there any attempt to provide a theoretical grounding for assumptions about racial differences. More often than not, hypotheses are offered on the basis of dubious presuppositions about the inadequacy of "black" parenting practices, suggesting that racial groups identified by skin colour are homogeneous in this regard.

Gross and Walsh (1980) even manage to misread the data provided on this issue by Greenberg and Dominick (1969), who concluded that no statistically significant racial differences were associated with patterns of home-based regulation in the US. Gross and Walsh, however, suggest that these authors found to the contrary; they then express surprise when their own data does not support this "finding". This confusion arises because Gross and Walsh ignore the original authors' own admission that the differences

reported are not *statistically significant*, and therefore cannot be taken as evidence of racial differences.

Mohr (1979) found that 'blacks' (sic) tend to offer more positive guidance to their children (that is, they are more likely to encourage them to watch certain types of programme), but that 'whites' (sic) are more likely to offer negative guidance. But he also reports this pattern for those on low income, and who have not attended college. Given the structural inequalities felt by many African Americans, these patterns may well have stronger associations than are given credence by Mohr. In the absence of any coherent theory to explain any putative 'racial' differences in parenting, the relationship between these variables (skin colour, levels of income and education) and their relative influence on patterns of home-based regulation will remain uncertain.

The limited focus of these studies on "race", indicated by skin colour, fails to account for other features of ethnic identity which may have a greater relevance for patterns of home-based regulation. For example, Buckingham (1996) has suggested that a parent's religious convictions may well have considerably more influence on their attitudes towards what their children are watching on the television than other factors like social class (although the relationship between religious affiliation and ethnic identity is not always a straightforward one). The evidence on which this suggestion is based is relatively sparse (as the author acknowledges) and this issue still requires further investigation.

One final point is of importance here. Generational differences within families are often not borne in mind when measuring ethnicity and race. In the research described above (with the possible exception of Buckingham, 1996), a family is either black or white on the basis of the parents' skin colour. However, there is good reason to believe that, at least for recent migrant populations, first generation immigrants may well have a quite different relationship with the present home culture to those of subsequent generations. Alvarado (1988) reports on the fruits of a cross-cultural study of VCR uses, and suggests that '[f]or

[migrant populations]...video is a way of helping...to maintain close links with their home culture' (p.5).

Across the research literature the most consistent findings which relate a demographic variable to patterns of home-based regulation concerns the ages of the children present at home. The general picture which emerges is that younger children receive more parental guidance than older ones. Mohr (1979) found that the younger members of his sample of 7-13 year olds reported higher levels of positive and negative guidance from parents. This finding is supported by Gross and Walsh (1980) (sample: 3-12 years old) and Lin and Atkin (1989) (sample: 11-17 years old); similarly, Kim *et al* (1988) report that younger members of their sample (aged 6-16) had less of a say in the choice of videos they were allowed to watch by their parents.

Blood (1961) provides data which suggest that the age composition of a family may well be important in determining patterns of home-based regulation. He reports that 'the more complex the age composition of the family, the more frequent the conflict [over viewing decisions]' (p.215).

In the British context, Allerton (1995) has suggested that prior to the age of 8 and 9 regulation is relatively high, after which it begins to diminish. He qualifies this by suggesting that such a rigid periodisation is often not followed in families where factors other than a child's age impinge on patterns of home-based regulation. Buckingham (1993a) argues that the level of control which a particular child of any age is likely to experience is dependent on the number of televisions within the home, and the presence and age of *other* children in the household. Both of these factors are dealt with below.

Gross and Walsh (1980) hypothesised that the level of control in single-parent households will be less than in those with dual-parenting arrangements. This was based on the assumption that two parents are more capable of exercising control because the work-load

is halved (this assumes, of course, that both parents take an active role, which has already been shown not to be the case). Their findings in this area are ambiguous; the only firm conclusion they are able to draw is that single-parents are less likely to report that their children watch too much television. The authors are unable to suggest an explanation for this. Buckingham (1996) has also reported that there is very little difference between the amount and nature of control exercised by single-parents compared with dual-parent households.

Gross and Walsh also tested the hypothesis that the level of control over each child's viewing will decrease the more children that are present in the household. They found that in households with more children there was a greater likelihood that the parents were unaware of what they were watching. In addition, there was a greater likelihood that the parents reported that their children watched too much television.

What they did not take account of, however, were the ages of the children present in the households. Buckingham (1996) suggests that the presence of older and younger siblings has a considerable influence on patterns of home-based regulation. For example, parents often reported that they were more lenient on younger children (but not necessarily *young* children) as a result of compromises afforded by the presence of older siblings in the household, whose viewing was less stringently regulated.

Buckingham (1996) has also suggested that parents evaluate the need for regulation of their children's viewing on an individual basis, taking account of each child's personality. These decisions may well run counter to standard age-related rulings, especially if a child is believed to be capable of coping with material which would otherwise be deemed unsuitable for their age-group. This theme is developed in Chapter Six.

Gross and Walsh (1980) have reported that the most significant 'family variable' which is able to predict the level of control exercised by parents is the number of television sets

present in the household. In their conclusion they even recommend that 'parents who wish to exhibit more control over the TV habits of their offspring [should neglect]...to fix the TV set the next time one breaks down' (p.417).

Their findings suggest that the greater the number of television sets in a home, the less control that is exerted by parents over their children's viewing. They propose that this might be due to the fact that parents watch less television with their children where there is more than one set available in the home for private viewing.

2.4 Concluding discussion

The research reviewed in this chapter has examined the question of the home-based regulation of children's viewing in a variety of ways, and by a number of different means. This thesis will address the lacunae identified in the research literature, which are summarised below:

1. Previous authors have tended to prioritise the examination of socio-demographic predictor variables which "determine" patterns of home-based regulation, but have largely failed to provide consistent findings in this area. Gunter and McAleer (1990) suggest that '[t]he evidence on who controls the television set and how viewing decisions are made does not offer a consistent picture of what goes on' (p.130). In addition to the poor operationalisation of these variables in much of the research, certain areas have attracted surprisingly little attention. For example, these variables are often examined in relation to the amount of home-based regulation exercised within the home, but are seldom used to explore qualitative differences in patterns of control. This thesis argues that such enquiries require a qualitative research methodology, and necessitates a move away from concern with socio-demographic variables as predictors of generalisable patterns, towards an empirically rich exploration of context-specific arrangements.

2. The family, as a unit of analysis, is rather narrowly portrayed in the research literature as a set of dyadic relations between one group (parents), and another (children). Very often the accounts of their actions offered by each group are contrasted, in order to determine the extent to which parents' and children's attitudes towards regulation differ. The presumption underlying such analyses is that the two groups are largely homogeneous, and that the crucial site of difference is inter-generational, rather than intra-generational. And yet this misses an important aspect of familial relations: the extent to which parents may be divided in their attitudes, and, indeed, their loyalties (to partner or child). A similar argument can be made for children, who may exhibit sibling rivalry, and compete for parental approval or actively seek disapproval. The complexity of familial relations cannot simply be inferred from, or captured by, the type of reductive role theory which underpins much of the research to date on home-based regulation.

3. As Buckingham (1993a) has pointed out, the notion of "power" at the heart of much of the research into home-based regulation has been unnecessarily reified. Within the dyadic relations described above, parents are seen to possess and wield regulatory control over children, who are simply the focus of parental guidance. Whilst this model is certainly one which accords with "commonsense" views of parent-child relations, it belies the complexity of such arrangements. Children are active negotiants within their families, as are all other members of the household (Pilcher, 1995). There are certain role constraints which dictate the limits of acceptable behaviour, but these are often widely drawn, and are themselves the site of much struggle, allowing younger members of the household a degree of latitude (even self-determination) which is generally not accounted for in the research literature.

4. The concept of "self regulation" has yet to be given adequate treatment within the research literature. Other than a concern with "coping strategies", the ways in which children themselves regulate their own viewing behaviour (through the internalisation of

parental rules, or through the establishment of their own personal codes of conduct) have yet to be considered.

5. The home-based regulation of viewing is often examined in isolation from other examples of family interaction. There has been little effort to examine the ways in which viewing regulation may be related to other forms of parental control. Control over children's viewing forms only part of an ongoing, daily struggle within families around authority and identity, and it cannot easily be abstracted from this wider set of relations. The desire of the research community to isolate the elements of home-based regulation for close analysis, and their reliance upon methodologies based around the survey technique, have served only to dislocate patterns of behaviour which are best understood as forming part of a nexus of relationships. To take a mundane example: a child may not be allowed to watch a particular video because s/he has recently neglected her/his household chores. In other circumstances, this viewing regulation would not necessarily have occurred, and it occurs independently of the content of the particular video in question. Indeed, its incidence cannot be easily attributed to rule-making activities associated with video viewing.

6. Much of the research into home-based regulation is concerned with the issue of parental attitudes, and how these affect the ways in which parents talk about their own regulatory track-record. There is a widespread acceptance of the belief that parents feel compelled to present themselves as exemplars of "good parenting practice", and that their accounts of home-based regulation may not actually match their behaviour. Beyond the reinforcement of this line of reasoning with repetition, however, there is very little attention given to the characteristics of either the notion of "good parenting" which so inspires parents, nor the relationship between such discourses and parents' attitudes. Rather than reproducing this convenient logic this thesis makes central the task of analysing contemporary notions of "parental responsibility", in an effort to tease out the relationship between what parents are generally expected to do, and what they actually manage, or are prepared to do.

Chapter Three
Teenagers' video viewing habits

3.1 Introduction

The research literature reviewed in the previous chapter conveys the impression that many children have regular access to viewing material at home which is deemed unsuitable by television schedulers and video regulation bodies. This feature of children's viewing habits is frequently recalled in public debates about video regulation. For example, Professor Elizabeth Newson has argued that '[w]hat we didn't foresee...was the video shop on every corner, and the highly violent videos within these shops. And the fact that children would have access to these- very easy access...Sometimes by simply asking for them' (BBC2, The Late Show, 1994). In a discussion paper prepared for David Alton MP (Newson, 1994) she argues that 'the "different" factor that has entered the lives of countless children and adolescents in recent years...[is] the easy availability to children of gross images of violence on video' (1994; p.3). A report by the Professional Association of Teachers, which was published at the same time, lends further credence to this idea (PAT, 1994). It concludes that 'teachers believe that large numbers of children...have easy access to adult-rated material' (PAT, 1994; p.12).

A number of research projects exist which support the idea that "under-age" viewing is common-place (Hartshorn, 1983; Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry [PGVE], 1984; Hagell and Newburn, 1994; BSC, 1996; Buckingham, 1996). The two earliest studies sought to determine the extent to which children were watching "video nasties", while avoiding other questions of interest (Hartshorn, 1983; PGVE, 1984). Both studies suffer limitations which restrict the relevance and usefulness of their findings. The research conducted under the aegis of the Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry (PGVE, 1984), referred to by Cubitt (1991) as 'risible', is based on a flawed methodology (Barker, 1984) and there is doubt over the partiality of its interpretation of the data (Barratt, 1995). The questionnaire survey by Hartshorn (1983) is based upon a small sample of 252 school

children aged 9-13 years, and was conducted as a preliminary exercise. The author concludes by noting that 'it would be preferable to be in a position to follow up this preliminary enquiry with personal interviews of children and parents' (1983; p.149). However, the research was never followed up, and the results therefore remain only of limited historical value.

The crucial limitation of these studies is their determination to prove the popularity of "video nasties" with children. Both studies pre-suppose that children are drawn to this type of video, although the category remains ill defined (Barker, 1984). The authors share an implicit dislike of such videos, which is made explicit during the discussion of their findings. A circular argument ensues, whereby "video nasties" are identified as those which are self-evidently harmful to children, and then evidence that children watch the videos included in this category is sought in order to substantiate the claim that children are being harmed by what they see on video. Both studies operate with an agenda which precludes any meaningful engagement with children's varied video viewing habits outside the frame of reference of "harmful viewing".[1]

More recent studies avoid dwelling on this aspect of young people's video viewing (Hagell and Newburn, 1994; BSC 1996; Buckingham 1996). They have attempted to gain an understanding of young people's viewing habits in the context of their day-to-day lives at home, without imposing value-judgements during the interpretation of the research data. While these studies find that "under-age" viewing is a relatively common occurrence, particularly for young teenagers, they differ from previous studies in their interpretation of this finding. Rather than view the issue of "under-age" viewing as inherently problematic, these authors highlight the uncontroversial nature of children's video viewing at home.

---

[1] Both studies were produced before video supply was subject to statutory regulation, and they were conducted as a prelude to campaigns seeking prohibition of "video nasties", which accounts for their value-laden and polemical style (for more details of these campaigns, see chapter 4 and Barker, 1984; Barratt, 1995).

While these studies have done much to counter the partial interpretations placed upon children's viewing experiences, they have done little to differentiate between television and video viewing. It was with this lack of video-specific research in mind that a small-scale questionnaire survey was designed to over-come the short-falls of previous survey research, and explore in detail children's video viewing habits in the context of their daily lives. Originally the survey was intended to cover the age range of 7-14, but pilot work revealed this to be impractical given the limited resources available. Difficulties were also encountered in designing a single questionnaire suitable for the least able seven year old and most able fourteen year old.

It was decided to concentrate on year nine pupils (13/14 year olds), who are better able to complete a long questionnaire survey in one school period. There are also good theoretical reasons for selecting this age group. It sits at the cusp between what has been defined as late childhood and adolescence, a period characterised as the transition between childhood and adulthood (Coleman and Hendry, 1990). The tensions between these two categories are most clearly felt at this age, as individuals confront and negotiate the arbitrary age restrictions placed upon 'adult' experiences like purchasing alcohol (18) and tobacco (16), engaging in heterosexual sex (16), learning to drive (17), voting (18) and so on (Archard, 1993).

Buckingham (1996) argues that 'the notion that childhood continues until the age of eighteen simply does not square with most parents' perceptions, let alone children's. Most parents seem to agree that by the time they reach thirteen...children should be free to make their own decisions about what they watch' (p.315). Arguably, therefore, it is this age group who are most likely to provide insights into the operation of home-based regulation at its most vulnerable moments, when the assumptions that underpin its functioning are brought to the fore and open to scrutiny.

A questionnaire survey of 484 13/14 year old school pupils was undertaken, based on a non-probability sample drawn from ten North London State-funded secondary schools. The design of the questionnaire, its administration, data analysis and findings are discussed below.

3.2 Methods

Development of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed over a period of ten months, following successive rounds of pilot testing and revision. This extended process was an essential step towards developing a survey tool sensitive to the abilities and interests of the 13 and 14 year olds participating in the research.

A pilot questionnaire was developed which included a number of open-format questions thereby allowing the respondents a certain degree of freedom in setting their own categories, for inclusion in the final closed-format questionnaire (Oppenheim, 1992). Table 3.1 contains a list of those areas addressed in the questionnaire.

Table 3.1: Questionnaire design

Areas examined in the questionnaire	*Examples*
Socio-demographic variables	*gender; ethnicity; religion.*
Home life	*routines; presence of siblings.*
Resources	*pocket money/earnings; access to technology.*
Leisure activities	*non-media related activities.*
VCR use	*what is watched? where? when? how? and with whom?*

At this stage the issue of home-based regulation was addressed by a number of related questions, including those which ask whether respondents have watched '15' and '18' rated videos. Other issues not dealt with by previous research also have a bearing on our understanding of home-based regulation, and were included in the present survey. For example, respondents were asked about the extent to which they view videos alone, with friends and/or in the company of parents and other adults.

The pilot questionnaire was administered in two South London schools selected through personal contacts of the researcher. One class in each school took part in the pilot study (a total of fifty-five year nine pupils participated).

The sessions followed a standard format, which was later incorporated into the final survey procedure. The researcher was introduced to the class, and the aims of the study were given. Then guidelines were given about completion of the questionnaire, and questions about the research project were answered. Each session took up one school period (between forty and sixty minutes). The questionnaires were completed individually, although respondents were allowed to confer. The survey was conducted anonymously, and the confidentiality of the results was guaranteed.

The respondents were also asked, where they had time, to supply written comments about the questionnaire. They were asked to note down and explain what they liked and disliked about it. These comments proved an invaluable guide to the reception of the survey tool, and led to several changes in the final draft.

The final results from this pilot survey were of secondary importance to the actual reception of the survey tool by those who participated. The responses given to the open-format questions were coded, and these were eventually incorporated into the final questionnaire as closed-format questions (Oppenheim, 1992).

The format of the questionnaire was kept as simple as possible to facilitate quick responses, although this was balanced against the need to make the survey stimulating and enjoyable. A copy of the final questionnaire is included in Appendix I.

The sample

Generally speaking, to be statistically representative any sample must first of all be drawn randomly from a population (Irvine *et al*, 1981). However, it is more practical to recruit a whole class rather than randomly select individuals from a school (which can prove a burden on staff and pupils with restrictive timetables). It may not be feasible to make random selections from classrooms where there are late-comers or absentees. In short, random selections, whilst ultimately desirable, are not always practical in a small-scale school-based project. Therefore a non-probability purposive sample was drawn for the present study (de Vaus, 1986). Whole classes were selected for inclusion if they:

- were year nine;
- of mixed ability;
- contained boys and girls;
- had at least one school period of 35 minutes or more available for the research;
- were drawn from a school in either Enfield, Barnet or Haringey, and were willing to participate.
- had a class teacher willing to be present during the research.

The sampling frame was limited to schools in the north London boroughs of Enfield, Barnet and Haringey, as these are the areas local to Middlesex University where the researcher is based. It was assumed that there would be a greater chance of recruiting schools for a project being sponsored by a local institution.

A list of all co-educational secondary schools (LEA controlled as well as grant maintained, but not independent schools) in these three boroughs was drawn up from information supplied by the local authorities. Fifteen schools were randomly drawn from the list, and approached about the research. Head teachers were initially contacted by letter, and after two weeks these were followed up with a telephone call. As a result eleven schools were recruited.

Each school was asked to provide two year nine classes, to be selected by the head of year nine against the criteria listed above.

Ten schools were eventually visited after one withdrew from the survey for administrative reasons. Four hundred and eighty-four year nine pupils participated in the final survey (202 girls and 282 boys). The majority of the sample (83%) were born in Britain. Table 3.2 gives a summary of the ethnicity of the sample, in order of frequency.

Table 3.2: Ethnicity

	n	%
White English	171	38
Indian	56	12.4
White (other European)*	49	10.8
Black Caribbean	37	8.2
White (other)	27	6
Black African	21	4.6
Black (other)	16	3.5
Bangladeshi	15	3.3
White Irish (Eire)	8	1.7
Pakistani	7	1.5
White Scottish	5	1.1
Chinese	3	0.6
White Welsh	3	0.6
White Irish (Northern)	2	0.4
None of the above	31	7
N	451	

*mainly Turkish and Greek

Half of the sample belong to religious families. Table 3.3 gives details of the religions followed, in order of frequency.

Table 3.3: Religion

	n	%
Christianity	113	50.9
Islam	62	28
Hinduism	37	16.7
Judaism	5	2.2
Other	5	2.2
N	222	

Forty-three per cent of the sample speak a language other than English at home. The languages spoken are given in Table 3.4, in order of frequency.

Table 3.4: Additional languages spoken at home

	n	%
Gujerati	40	21.3
Turkish	36	19
Greek	27	14.7
Urdu	11	6
Hindi	7	3.7
Arabic	6	3.1
Cantonese	1	0.5
Other	60	32
N	188	

No data are available concerning the socio-economic stratification of the sample. Social class is a theoretical construct which is difficult to measure under any circumstances, and traditional methods rely upon quantifying parents' (usually fathers') occupation, education and income (Evans, 1996; Prandy and Blackburn, 1997). The pilot questionnaire attempted to gauge social class with reference to parental occupation and housing type, but this proved almost impossible to measure with any validity, given the inability and reluctance of many young respondents to divulge these details. An unsatisfactory but practical solution was employed. The sampling strategy was designed to reflect as wide a socio-economic spectrum as exists in the North London boroughs visited. The heads of year nine were asked about the socio-economic make-up of their classes, and those which reflected a broad socio-economic range, in their opinion, were included.

In the classroom

The school visits took place during the summer term, a time most convenient for teachers. A standardised presentation was given at the start of each session, details of which are given below:

After going through the aims of the research, the instructions on the front cover of the questionnaire were repeated and elaborated:

'We want to know how important videos are to you.
500 young people from a number of schools are taking part.
What you write is completely confidential.
This is not a test, but you should try to answer each question as truthfully as possible.
To answer the questions please tick the appropriate box or boxes with a pen, or write the answers in the spaces provided.

If you have any difficulties, please ask the researcher or a teacher to help you. You may not see the immediate relevance of some questions (like those which ask about your family and background), but these help us to get some idea of the bigger picture'.

Each class was given an entire lesson (or a double period where this was available) to complete the exercise. In addition, respondents were asked to write on the back cover any comments they had about doing the questionnaire if they finished before the lesson ended. In particular they were asked to list those things which they liked or disliked about the exercise, and to give reasons for their comments.

Once the survey was underway, the class teacher(s) and the researcher were available to answer any queries arising from the exercise. Often the respondents made specific requests for the researcher, thereby protecting their answers from the class teacher, evidence that the issue of confidentiality was indeed important to them. The respondents were not required to remain silent during the survey which was intended to be an informal exercise, not akin to school-work.

Assessment

The traditional methodological procedure for assessing questionnaire research is based upon two concepts: validity and reliability (Shipman, 1988). According to Oppenheim, reliability 'refers to the purity and consistency of a measure, to repeatability, to the probability of obtaining the same results again if the measure were to be duplicated' (Oppenheim, 1992; p.144), whilst de Vaus (1986) describes a valid measure as 'one which measures what it is intended to measure' (de Vaus, 1986; p.47).

It is not always appropriate to apply standard measures of these criteria to every research project. In the case of the present survey it was simply not practical to do so. For example, one way in which reliability is tested is by administering a survey to the same sample on two different occasions, and comparing the responses in each case (de Vaus, 1986). If responses have changed over time, the survey is said to be unreliable. In the case of the

present survey, it was impossible to arrange a second administration during school time, and the respondents would most likely have been bored by the same questionnaire a second time around. Furthermore, many of the questions were time-based (they asked about behaviour in the two week period prior to the survey), and a second administration would have been meaningless in this context.

Validity can be gauged with reference to the findings of other studies into young people's video viewing habits. Four recent studies have been consulted in this respect (Caughie, 1992; CAVIAR, 1994; SMRC, 1995; BSC, 1996). This survey compares favourably with the data from these studies, where findings are directly comparable. Details of these comparisons are given in the discussion of the findings.

Additional means of judging the efficacy of the survey were built into the research design. "Random error" is the term used to describe the pollution of survey research by unforeseen factors beyond the control of the researcher (Wimmer and Dominick, 1994). Although the elimination of random error from research practice is an impossibility, measures can be taken to minimise the risk of invalidity and unreliability as a result of poor research design and administration. Two such measures were included in the present survey, based upon (i) the researcher's presence in the classrooms where the research was undertaken; and (ii) the respondents' written appraisal of the survey.

(i) Researcher Presence

Previous studies into children's viewing habits have often relied upon teachers to administer the questionnaire (Hagell and Newburn, 1994), trained helpers (Himmelweit et al, 1958) or a combination of both of these methods, with occasional visits from the researchers (Barlow and Hill, 1986).

My presence during administration of the survey provided a number of advantages over these methods. It enabled me to witness and record the interactions between all those

present in the classroom (teacher(s), pupils and researcher), which is useful if one accepts that the research situation may have an impact on the completion of a survey (Shipman, 1988). For example, there are occasions when teachers' good intentions go against the researcher's own intentions, thereby influencing the course of a survey. In an effort to maintain decorum in the classroom, one teacher was forced to police the class heavily, causing a considerable distraction. Another teacher, in an effort to help the pupils, defined a 'restricted 18' film for the class as 'rude pornography', thereby unnecessarily alerting those pupils who might otherwise have been unaware of the category. In order to check whether these observed disruptions affected the administration of the questionnaire, the data has been broken down and analysed by school class. The results suggest that those classes where there was a great deal of disruption from both pupils and teachers had more non-responses to questions. Where the category 'R18' was defined by the teacher, more pupils claimed to have seen one. These results are only suggestive, because they are based upon very small numbers of respondents.

My presence also allowed me to deal with problems as they arose for the respondents. Those studies which rely upon teachers to administer questionnaires may suffer as a consequence because teachers may not be able to deal appropriately with difficulties, having only a cursory knowledge of the research design.

On two separate occasions, teachers were unaware of the term "pre-recorded", and described it erroneously as 'videos taped from the TV' when asked by pupils for clarification. I was on hand to rectify this crucial error, and in future sessions the term was defined at the beginning of the survey for the benefit of the respondents.

These insights offer a more authoritative picture of the ways in which the respondents performed in the research situation than is possible when the researcher is absent from the site of the survey. Such information is useful for the details it supplies about those unforeseen factors which encroach into any uncontrolled situation. The degree of control

that a researcher (or proxy) has over the administration of a survey is often over-estimated, and the untidy details of research in classrooms are often ignored. The account above demonstrates that such details provide a valuable source of supplementary information which can be profitably used when interpreting the data yielded by the questionnaire itself.

(ii) Written appraisal

One of the instructions issued to each class at the start of the survey was directed at those individuals who completed the questionnaire before the lesson had ended. They were asked to spend the time remaining writing any comments they had about the questionnaire on the back page. As the questionnaire was anonymous they were urged to be open and honest in their assessment of the survey tool, and to supply reasons for their comments. A total of one hundred and ninety-two respondents managed to record at least one comment, which represents approximately 40% of the sample.

Evidence suggests that this is not only the articulate, opinionated or better able respondents who offered comments. A number of respondents had nothing to say about the questionnaire, even when prompted by the researcher. An absence of comments is indicative of a neutral attitude towards the survey. Furthermore, the diversity of the comments offered indicates that respondents with a wide range of abilities and opinions felt motivated to record their thoughts.

The comments were coded into five main categories: "positive" (general praise for the questionnaire), "negative" (general criticism of the questionnaire), "memory" (concerned with the problem of remembering answers), "specific problems" and "miscellaneous".

Examples of the comments from each category are given in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Examples of written comments

Main category	Sub-categories	Verbatim comments
Positive	Anonymity	I felt that questionaire was good as it made me answer truthfully and honestly as you don't have to write down your name. I feel this is a good questionaire and can be kept the way it is.
	Easy	This questionnaire was good because it had simple and easy question to answer. it was laid out good and easy to understand what to do.
	Fun and interesting	I think that the questionaire was interesting. I thought it was going to be really personal, like most questionaires are but I thought it was a topic I've never really discussed in school before.
	General	I liked filling in this questionaire because it means teenagers opinions do count.
Negative	Boring	THIS WAS A BIT BOARING. IT WENT ON A LOT.
	Stupid	<u>DUMB</u> DID Forest Gump WRITE QUESTION 46 <u>Can you operate a video recorder</u> DUMB RATING ******
	Too hard	I found some questions hard BUT most of them were fine.
	General	This questionaire was so pushy and anoiying I felt like riping it up.
Memory		There was nothing that I particularly disliked but some of the questions were hard for example 48: because I could not remember what I recorded and some of the quotations which asked what videos you had watched because I dont really take much notice and if I do I cant remember.
Specific problems	Too personal	This is way to nosey Dude
	Pocket money	Comment: Most people earn more than £2.50. There should be a £5.00/£10.00 column on question 49. Also, there should be a weekly/monthly option in it.
	Ethnicity	It pointless asking what group you belong to and calling it a group sound racist.
	Insufficient categories	I enjoyed this questionaire the only thing that I didn't like was the questions that you could only tick one question or box.

The largest group of comments were positive (41%), whilst less than ten per-cent (8%) were negative. 10% were concerned with memory, 35% with specific problems and the remaining 6% were coded as miscellaneous. Many respondents offered comments which included both positive and negative elements. Only those comments which were *wholly* positive were categorised accordingly.

The positive comments indicate that the questionnaire was well received, and that the respondents felt comfortable knowing that their replies were anonymous and confidential. This undoubtedly made the respondents more comfortable when offering details of illicit activities, like buying pirated videos.

They also suggest that the attempt at making the tool stimulating and engaging was successful. It is arguable that a happy and engaged subject is more likely to answer competently and to co-operate in the research than one who is bored or fed-up. This point is reflected in the very small number of non-responses that were recorded (the majority of questions had between 4 and 10 non responses, rising to around 40 for some of the questions towards the end of the questionnaire).

The small number of negative comments is reassuring. Only a few respondents felt the questionnaire to be boring, stupid, or too hard. But it is worth remembering that although this number is small it is still evidence of tension between the intentions of the researcher and the experience of the research subjects. The interpretation of the results has proceeded more cautiously where questions were regularly cited as "dumb" by some respondents.

The comments on memory are particularly important for the assessment of reliability and validity. If, as it would appear from the comments, certain respondents had trouble remembering events and behaviour for the two weeks preceding the survey then their answers may not be considered reliable. In their eagerness to respond to every question

some respondents may have felt compelled to put down the most likely answer, rather than the correct answer to questions which demand a recollection of previous events.

The comments regarding specific problems are perhaps the most useful in that they offer direct evidence of problems that respondents had with the questionnaire. Many of these comments support the insights gained as a result of observations made within the classroom. For example, the recurrent confusion over the terms "restricted 18" and "pre-recorded" was frequently referred to here.

Other problems not raised during the classroom sessions also became apparent from the respondents' comments. For example, many respondents commented on the categories available for the question on pocket money. It was generally felt that the bands were too small, and the upper limit of '£2.50 or more' was not high enough. This is borne out by the fact that 78% of the respondents claimed to receive 'more than £2.50' per week- the scale was obviously not very sensitive despite pilot work.

More generally, there was evidence from the comments that the categories available for certain questions were not always exhaustive. One of the problems often attributed to closed-format questions is that they limit respondents' replies to categories imposed by the researcher (de Vaus, 1986; Oppenheim, 1992). In the present survey, steps were taken to construct categories from previously piloted open- format questions.

However, there will always be a number of respondents who feel that the categories on offer do not adequately summarise their answers. This should be recognised, and the potential problem minimised with careful pilot work and the inclusion of "other" categories. In addition, data from questions whose categories are cited as inadequate by a high proportion of respondents have been interpreted with caution.

These points remind us that research is reliant on the participation of a heterogeneous group, who, although sharing the same chronological age in years, display diverse patterns of behaviour, attitudes and levels of understanding. Any attempt to capture this diversity in a questionnaire survey is a formidable task. This point is illustrated by the candid comments of one disgruntled respondent:

'I do not see the point of asking us what videos we have seen- they do not really represent what we watch a lot or what we enjoy. I found it difficult to list my 3 favourite movies- I don't have any specific favourites as I like a wide variety. I don't see the point of what time I watch videos- it depends on what and where I'm watching'

The comments provided by the respondents offer evidence of their perception of the research process. As such they are a valuable, if approximate, guide to the way in which they approached the task of completing the questionnaire.

3.3 Data analysis

The majority of the questions were pre-coded (de vaus, 1986; Oppenheim, 1992), and the data from these were entered directly into the computer running SPSS. Open-format questions were coded separately by hand. All data entry was done by the same person, thereby ensuring the standardisation of coding strategies (de Vaus, 1986; Oppenheim, 1992).

Having entered the data into the computer, a random sample of 50 questionnaires was double-checked against the data entries for errors. No errors in data entry were encountered at this stage. In addition, frequency tests were run for each variable, and erroneous entries were detected and altered accordingly.

Once the data set was validated, various primary analyses were run (based on frequency distributions and cross-tabulations). Data analysis was primarily inductive, as this was not a hypothesis-led survey. Where patterns of particular interest emerged further tests were run to check for statistical significance. Because the data is mainly nominal (category) the chi-squared test of independence was employed to test for significant relationships. These are only reported as statistically significant when $p \leq 0.05$. However, such tests are only authoritative if the statistical operation is conducted on data from random samples (Atkins and Jarret, 1981). The present survey did not draw on a truly random sample, and so these tests are only indicative of the strength of possible relationships between variables.

3.4 Results

One of the primary aims of the questionnaire survey was to determine the place of video viewing in the daily lives of teenagers. A number of questions were included to this end, and these findings are discussed first. Discussion of the remaining survey results is presented according to the categories described in Chapter Two, which drew attention to six dimensions of the viewing context: economic, spatial, temporal, content, technology and provision.

The status of video viewing

The survey suggests that video viewing is a common leisure activity for young teenagers. This is demonstrated by the finding that 89% of sample had seen at least one video in the two week period prior to the survey (see Table 3.6). It is also apparent from these findings that boys are more likely than girls to watch more than one video a week.

Table 3.6: How many times have you watched a movie on video *in the last two weeks?*

%	none at all	once	twice	three times	more than three times
Girls	13.5	21.5	26	12	27
Boys	8	12	23	17	40
p=0.0013					

Sixty percent of the sample wanted to watch more videos in this period, but were prevented from doing so by constraints of time (71%) and money (10%). Nearly one in five (19%) claimed that other factors prevented them from watching more, which might include parental prohibition.

Despite the frequency of video viewing, only 14% of the sample included it as one of their three favourite leisure activities. "Listening to music", "going out with friends" and "watching television" were all more highly favoured activities. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the sample preferred to see feature films ("movies") at the cinema, compared with 30% who preferred to watch them on video. In contrast, only 6% of the sample watch most movies at the cinema, while nearly half (46%) watch most on video.

The economic dimension of video viewing

Over three-quarters (78.5%) of the sample receive more than £2.50 pocket money per week. Comments accompanying responses to this question would suggest that average pocket money is closer to £5.00 per week. This is supported by a national survey of 11-15 year olds which that found that this group have an average spending power of £6.00 per week (HMSO, 1994). In addition, forty per-cent of the sample under-take paid work, and half of these receive between £10.00 and £20.00 per week.

This is more than sufficient money to rent at least one video a week (video rentals cost as little as 50p per night, and are seldom more than £2.50 per night). With the addition of savings and income from paid work, many respondents would be able to purchase pre-recorded videos without necessarily seeking financial assistance from parents. Over half of the sample have bought a video for themselves, although a far greater proportion of boys than girls claimed to have done so (boys=70%; girls=55%. p=0.0008). CAVIAR (1994) reports that 30% of its sample of thirteen and fourteen year olds have bought a video for themselves *with their own money*, whilst 40% have bought one for themselves *with someone else's money*.

These findings suggest that many members of this age-group would have little difficulty in financing their own video viewing habits without the assistance of parents. Indeed, forty per-cent of the sample are members of a video club, and have their own rental card which allows them to hire videos independently of their parents. Far more boys (53%) than girls (28%) have access to their own card (p≤0.001).

The spatial dimension of video viewing

Nearly all of the respondents had access to a VCR at home (94%). Two thirds (66%) of the sample have a television set in their bedroom.[1]

There appears to be a significant difference between the genders in terms of access to television sets in the bedroom. This is probably due to the more frequent occurrence of video game consoles and home computers in boys' bedrooms, as these appliances require television sets to act as monitors. The present survey found that 68% of the boys had a games console in their bedroom compared with 40% of the girls (p<0.0001), a finding supported by the Broadcasting Standards Council (1996).

Just under a third of the sample (30.5%) possess a VCR machine in their bedroom, and this compares with 29.5% of the BSC sample (BSC, 1996), and 29% of the SMRC sample of 13/14 year olds (SMRC, 1995). Again there was evidence of a difference between the genders, with more boys claiming to have a VCR in their bedroom than girls (boys=35%; girls=23.5%; p=0.0077). This discrepancy cannot be explained by the presence of video game consoles in the bedroom, although it is related to the higher incidence of televisions in their rooms.

Hagell and Newburn (1994) reported that their sample of school-children were more likely to have recently viewed a video with friends, than they were to have on their own or in the

---

[1] This compares very closely with findings from a survey conducted for the Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC) which found that 67% of its sample of 14/15 year olds have a television in their bedroom (BSC, 1996).

company of their parents. Over half (54%) of the most recent viewings for their sample were made with friends (1994; p.59). It is also interesting to note that more viewings were said to have occurred alone than with parents. This is in contrast to the findings of research conducted for the Broadcasting Standards Council (Caughie, 1992). Caughie found that when asked to say with whom they were most likely to watch a rented video, the majority of respondents claimed 'with a group of friends of both genders'. The second most popular category was 'with parent(s) as family', followed by 'with a group of friends of your own gender'. The least frequently cited category was 'alone'.

The difference between these two sets of findings may be related to the nature of the questions asked in each case. Hagell and Newburn admit that some members of their sample may have conflated 'television' and 'video' when answering the question (it is more likely that viewing will occur 'alone' if the material is taken from the television) whereas Caughie clearly states that the question is related to video rentals.

The present survey found that the largest proportion of respondents watch videos with friends 'most times' (girls=44%; boys=37%), and there is little difference between the genders for this category (see Table 3.7). The second largest proportion, again for both genders, for the category 'most times' was 'with a brother/sister' (girls=40%; boys=32%).

Evidence of gender difference was found with regards to viewing 'alone'. Although at the extremes ('never' and 'every time') there is little real difference between the genders, a greater proportion of boys are likely to view alone 'most times' (boys=26%; girls=12%) whereas a larger proportion of girls claim to do so only 'sometimes' (girls=77%; boys=63%). It may well be that the higher frequency of television sets and VCRs in boys' bedrooms is significant here, allowing them more opportunity for lone viewing.

Table 3.7: Do you ever watch videos

%	Never	Sometimes	Most times	Every time
alone?				
boys	8	63	26	2
girls	9	77	12	2
p=0.0017				
with friends?				
boys	7	52	37	4
girls	6	45	44	4
p=0.4531				
with parent(s)?				
boys	18	57	23	2
girls	9	58	29	4
p=0.0279				
with other adult(s)?				
boys	24	62	13	1
girls	22	64	11	3
p=0.2850				
with a brother/sister?				
boys	16	43	32	9
girls	13	39	40	8
p=0.4074				

Further gender difference is evident when considering video viewing 'with parent(s)'. This difference is most profound at the extremes ('never' and 'every time'); a larger proportion of girls claimed to watch videos 'every time' with parent(s) (girls=4%; boys=2%) whereas more boys claimed 'never' to view videos with parent(s) (boys=18%; girls=9%).

Nearly all (97%) of the respondents had watched a video at one time or another 'at home'. A smaller but nonetheless sizeable proportion (88%) had seen a video 'at a friend's house', and a smaller proportion again at a relative's house (83%). There was little evidence of gender differences in each case.

Having established where video viewing has *tended* to occur, the respondents were asked to state where they watched *most* videos. By far the largest proportion of respondents watch most videos 'at home' (87%). However, nearly ten per-cent of the sample claimed to watch most videos 'at a friend's house'. One third of this latter group did not have a VCR at home, which would explain why viewing at a friend's house might be necessary,

although it still remains that two-thirds of those claiming to watch most videos at a friend's house had access to a VCR at home.

The temporal dimension of video viewing

The majority of respondents (82%) go to bed on a school day after 9.00pm. 15.5% claimed to go at anytime, and this increases to 36.5% at the weekend, and 51.4% during school holidays (there are no gender differences in evidence). This trend towards post-watershed bed-times is supported by the BSC survey (1996), which found that the average bed-time for its sample of 10-16 year olds was 10.30pm.

Over one third (35%) of the sample watch videos at 'anytime' on school-days, although viewing is most likely to occur after 7.00pm (see Table 3.8).

Table 3.8: At what time do you *usually* watch videos on a school day?

	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
before 5.00pm	3	4
between 5.00pm and 7.00pm	13	9
between 7.00pm and 9.00pm	26	39
after 9pm	21	15
anytime	37	33
p=0.0394		
N	249	192

The category 'anytime' may not necessarily have been interpreted literally by the respondents. It is interesting to note that only 15.5% of the sample claimed to go to bed 'anytime' on a school-day, significantly fewer than claimed to watch videos 'anytime' on a school-day. In this instance, it may be that 'anytime' means 'no particular time', rather than literally 'at any time', which suggests that there are no constraints on viewing.

Table 3.9: At what time do you *usually* watch videos at the weekend?

(%)	Boys	Girls
before 9.00am	0.5	2
between 9.00am and 12.00pm	7	11
between 12.00pm and 3.00pm	2	1
between 3.00pm and 6.00pm	2	2
between 6.00pm and 9.00pm	6	14
after 9.00pm	22	17
anytime	60	52.5
p=0.0171		
N	251	196

Although there is the opportunity for young people to watch videos during the day at the weekend, unlike on a school-day, the figures presented above show that video viewing generally tends to occur in the evening and at night (after 6.00pm). Despite this, a sizeable minority (nearly 10%) of the sample claim to watch videos most usually 'between 9.00am and 12.00pm' at the weekend.

More than fifty-percent of the sample as a whole claimed to watch videos 'anytime' at the weekend, a significantly larger proportion than made a similar claim for video viewing on a school-day, which supports the idea that the timing of VCR use may vary according to the type of day on which it occurs.

Table 3.10: At what time do you *usually* watch videos during the school-holidays?

(%)	Boys	Girls
before 9.00am	0	0.5
between 9.00am and 12.00pm	5	10
between 12.00pm and 3.00pm	2.5	2.5
between 3.00pm and 6.00pm	2	2
between 6.00pm and 9.00pm	3	6
after 9.00pm	11.5	10
anytime	76.5	69
p=0.2254		
N	251	198

The figures presented above give an overwhelming impression that leisure time during the school holidays regarding video viewing is less constrained, or subject to routine, than on a school day, or even at the weekend during school term time. Over seventy per-cent of the

sample as a whole claimed to watch videos most usually at 'anytime'. It is still the case, from the other findings in this table, that video viewing tends to take place most usually in the evening (after 6.00pm), when many parents are likely to have returned from employment outside the home.

Nearly half of the sample claimed to have watched a video 'after 2.00am', whilst only five per-cent said that the latest time for them was 'before 10.00pm' (see Table 3.11).

Table 3.11: What is the *latest time* that you stayed up to watch a video?

	n	%
before 10.00pm	26	5
between 10.00pm and 11.00pm	29	6
between 11.00pm and 12.00am	38	8
between 12.00am and 1.00am	55	12
between 1.00am and 2.00am	89	19
after 2.00am	223	49
N	460	

As might be expected, given the greater likelihood of video viewing occurring in the family home, the largest proportion of respondents watched a video late at night whilst 'at home' (70%). However, one in five of the respondents claimed to have seen a video late at night whilst 'at a friend's house' (see Table 3.12).

Table 3.12: Where did you watch this video?

	n	%
at home	314	70
at a friend's house	92	20
at a relative's house	37	8
somewhere else	8	2
N	451	

This raises interesting questions about the extension of parental authority into friends' households. Nearly 70% of those respondents who saw a video late at night 'at a friend's house' claimed that this video was viewed 'after 2.00am' compared with 42% of those watching such a video 'at home', suggesting that for certain young people, very late

viewing was more likely to occur in the home of friends than within their own family home.

Content and video viewing

Of the fifty 'movie' titles viewed on video by the largest proportion of the sample in the two week period prior to the survey, nearly half (48%) possessed a '15' certificate, whilst a quarter (23%) were rated '18'. The ten most regularly cited were, in descending order of frequency: *Speed* (15), *Pulp Fiction* (18), *The Mask* (PG), *Universal Soldier* (18), *Demolition Man* (15), *Bad Boys* (18), *True Lies* (15), *Ace Ventura* (12), *Jurassic Park* (PG), and *Boyz 'n' the Hood* (15). However, relatively small numbers of respondents saw each of these during this two week period. For example, *Speed* was only cited by 36 respondents (less than 10% of the sample). A total of three hundred and ninety-six titles were mentioned by respondents, which is indicative of the diversity of viewing habits and tastes of this age range.

The favourite videos of the sample are also most likely to be '15' and '18' rated (only four of the ten most commonly favoured are rated '12' and below). Table 3.13 contains a list of the favourite titles by gender.

Nearly all of the respondents claimed to have seen at least one '15' rated movie (97%), whilst 91% have seen one with an '18' certificate.

Table 3.13: What are the names of your three favourite movies on video?

Girls Title	n	Boys Title	n
Speed (15)	35	The Mask (PG)	29
The Mask (PG)	16	Speed (15)	27
Forrest Gump (12)	15	Demolition Man (15)	26
Four Weddings and a Funeral (15)	14	Pulp Fiction (18)	21
Ace Ventura (12)	12	Terminator 2 (15)	19
True Lies (15)	12	Jurassic Park (PG)	18
Dirty Dancing (15)	10	Ace Ventura (12)	15
Boyz 'N' the Hood (15)	9	Universal Soldier (18)	15
Pretty Woman (15)	9	Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story (15)	15
The Hand that Rocks		The Fugitive (12)	15
the Cradle (15)	9	True Lies (15)	12
Ghost (15)	8	Streetfighter (12)	11
Demolition Man (15)	7	Bad Boys (18)	10
Mrs Doubtfire (PG)	7	Bloodsport (18)	10
Philadelphia (15)	7	Boyz 'N' the Hood (15)	9
Pulp Fiction (18)	7	Forrest Gump (12)	9
Sister Act (PG)	7	Menace II Society (18)	9
Universal Soldier (18)	7	Cool Runnings (PG)	8
Grease (PG)	6	Hard Target (18)	8
Boomerang (15)	5	Sliver (18)	8
Nightmare on Elm Street (18)	5	Basic Instinct (18)	7
Sister Act 2 (PG)	5	Batman Forever (PG)	6
Sleepless in Seattle (PG)	5	Dumb and Dumber (12)	6
		Mrs Doubtfire (PG)	5
		Alien^3 (18)	5
		Back to the Future (PG)	5
		Cliffhanger (15)	5
		Goodfellas (18)	5
		Nowhere to Run (15)	5
		Reservoir Dogs (18)	5
NONE	**4**	**NONE**	**5**

Table 3.14: What is your favourite type of movie?

Girls Type	n	%	Boys Type	n	%
Comedy	91	45.5	Action	159	61.6
Horror	68	34	Comedy	69	27
Action	53	26.5	Horror	37	14.3
Romance	40	20	Thriller	24	9.3
Thriller	27	13.5	Fighting	20	7.7
Miscellaneous*	14	7	Science Fiction	16	6
Adventure	4	2	Sex	16	6
Drama	4	2	Gangster	12	4.6
Fighting	4	2	Adventure	11	4.2
Sad	4	2	Miscellaneous*	10	4
Murder/detective	3	1.5	Murder/detective	5	2
Gangster	1	0.5	Cartoon	4	1.5
Musical	1	0.5	Romance	3	1
Sex	1	0.5	War	2	0.7
			Drama	1	0.35
			Musical	1	0.35
			Sad	1	0.35
			Westerns	1	0.35
NONE	**9**	**4.5**	**NONE**	**1**	**0.35**

*Miscellaneous: 'animal ones'; 'fiction'; 'adult'; 'dance'; 'Japanese films'; 'Sport'; 'good acting'; and specific titles.

The three most popular genres mentioned by respondents were 'action', 'comedy' and 'horror' (see Table 3.14). There are striking gender differences here. Action is by far the most popular for boys (61.6% mentioned it, as opposed to 26.5% of the girls), while comedy is most popular with girls (45.5% mentioned it as opposed to 27% of the boys). Perhaps the most interesting finding concerns the relative status of 'horror' for both groups. As a proportion more girls mentioned 'horror' as a favourite type of movie compared with the boys (girls=34%; boys=14.3%). This finding is surprising given the popular view that the typical fan of horror movies is 'a male, working-class adolescent' (Buckingham, 1996;p.98), a point reinforced by many observers (Clover, 1992). Roe (1989) has suggested that 'horror' films are amongst the most frequently viewed amongst Swedish youths, and that 'there are large differences here according to gender' (p.169), although he does not go on to describe these. Elsewhere, however, he has linked the viewing of 'horror' titles to a process by which male adolescents 'test' their masculinity (Roe, 1981; Roe, 1983). Such accounts obviously neglect the female audience of 'horror'-resulting in a situation which, as Buckingham points out, 'raises significant questions about the experience of a genre which is all too easily identified as inherently "male"' (p.99). The evidence presented here suggests that far from being an inherently male category, 'horror' has a significant female following.[1]

The results reported above are supported by Halloran and Gray's finding that comedies are most likely to be rented on video by 14/15 year olds, followed by horror/sci-fi and action titles (Halloran and Gray, 1996). They note in passing that '[i]nterestingly, nearly twice as many girls as boys mentioned "Horror"' (Halloran and Gray, 1996; p.133).

'Horror' also has a larger proportion of female than male detractors. 11.5% of the female respondents mentioned 'horror' as a category they disliked, nearly twice as large as the proportion of boys (6.2%) expressing the same sentiment. This would suggest that there is a polarisation (which is greater in the female sample) between 'horror fans' and others in

---

[1] Female preference for horror narratives has also been noted in the field of popular literature (Sarland, 1994).

each group, evidence of the wide diversity of tastes and preferences *within* as well as *between* gender groups.

Technology and video viewing

The pilot questionnaire asked about the use made of the rewind, pause and fast-forward facilities of the VCR. Many respondents felt the questions were inappropriate and difficult to answer because the use of these facilities is dependent upon a variety of contingent factors not covered by the questions. This area does not lend itself to easy quantification, and so the final questionnaire avoided it completely. The topic was broached during the qualitative family case-study interviews reported in Chapter Five, which provide a more appropriate opportunity for dealing with this topic.

Provision and video viewing

Industry figures show that the pre-recorded video rental market has been in decline in recent years. Since 1989 the number of rental transactions has steadily decreased from 396 million to 194 million in 1994 (source: BVA quoted in Dyja, 1995). This is in contrast to the growth seen in the retail market, which overtook the rental market in terms of sales value in 1993. The growth of cable and satellite ownership is suggested as one reason for the decline in the number of video rentals (Dyja, 1995).

Over half of the sample (58%) own six or more pre-recorded videos, while 11% own none. Seventy percent of the sample have been given a pre-recorded video as a present. Girls are more likely to have been given one by parents (girls=88%; boys=78%), while boys are most likely to have been given one by a friend (boys=55%; girls=36%).

In addition to commercial sale and rental transactions, pre-recorded videos are circulated informally among peers: over three-quarters of the sample have borrowed videos from their friends (79%). Table 3.15 contains a list of those video titles most recently borrowed from friends.

Table 3.15: If you do, what was the last video you borrowed?

Boys Title	n	Girls Title	n
'Sport'	14	'Music'	15
Streetfighter*(12)	8	Four Weddings and a	
'Music'	6	Funeral(15)	7
Natural Born Killers*(18)	6	Speed(15)	5
Jurassic Park(PG)	5	Batman Forever*(PG)	3
Speed(15)	4	Free Willy(PG)	3
Bad Boys*(18)	4	Ghost(15)	3
The Last Action Hero(15)	4	The Hand that Rocks	
Pulp Fiction(18)	4	the Cradle(15)	3
Ace Ventura(12)	3		
Dragon‡(15)	3		
Hard Target‡(18)	3		
Judge Dredd*(15)	3		
The Mask(PG)	3		
Can't remember	9	Can't Remember	12

*Movies not legally available on video at the time of the survey.
‡Movies appeared on terrestrial or satellite TV in the four months prior to the survey.
Titles are included here if they were named by three or more respondents.

Five of the titles listed were not officially available at the time of the survey, and this is evidence that circulation within the peer group is likely to involve a high proportion of material not available through legitimate commercial outlets. Pre-recorded videos are often available for purchase before they are officially released, and at a discount, from illegal sources. The practice of video piracy is estimated to cost legitimate distributors £250 million annually (BVA, 1994). The majority of the sample claimed to have watched a pirated video at one time or another (82.5%), whilst over one third have bought one (34%). In each case a higher proportion of boys made these claims.

Respondents are more likely to be accompanied on a trip to rent a pre-recorded video (see Table 3.16).

Table 3.16: Who *normally* goes with you?

(%)	Girls	Boys
no-one	16.1	23.1
parent(s)	29.2	33.5
friend(s)	24.4	19.4
brother/sister	24.4	21.2
other relative	5.9	2.8

p=0.1597; N=380

Small variations between the genders are in evidence here (a larger proportion of the girls claimed to be accompanied by their friends and siblings, whilst a larger proportion of the boys claimed to go alone, or to be accompanied by their parents) although these are not statistically significant.

The sample as a whole, therefore, are most likely to go to the video shop with their parent(s), although going 'alone', 'with friends' and 'with siblings' are also common to around a quarter of the sample respectively.

When considering video consumption relatively little attention has been paid to the sources which are drawn upon to inform viewing choices. As consumers, teenagers can rely on a variety of sources for information about new releases, casting, production, distribution and so on, which may directly inform the choice of material to be rented or bought on video. These include magazines, newspapers, video trailers, cinema trailers, television commercials and review programmes and fanzines, in addition to the testimony of friends and relatives.

Table 3.17: How do you find out about which movies to see *on video*?

	Girls (% yes)	Boys (% yes)
from newspapers	32	45.8***
from magazines	67.4	53.2***
from TV programmes	74.7	85.1***
from film posters	57.3	64.7
from the radio	33.1	26.2
from trailers at the cinema	53.2	53.7
from trailers on video	75.3	83.4
from friends	88.7	90
from relatives	60.1	58
from video shop displays	82.6	86.5

***$p \leq 0.001$

The highest proportions of both genders reported 'friends' as a common source of information (boys=90%; girls=88.7), with 'relatives' being less popular in this regard.

3.5 Concluding discussion

Video viewing is undoubtedly a common pastime for many young teenagers. The majority of the sample examined here regularly watch at least one video a week, which may have been rented, but is more likely to be owned by the viewer or borrowed from a friend. Despite its prevalence, video viewing is not especially valued as a leisure activity. As Halloran and Gray (1996) argue, '[i]t is not unimportant but, at least as this age, it is not as central and predominant as many would have us believe' (p. 116).

The overall impression conveyed by the survey supports the view that video viewing is essentially a mundane and uncontroversial activity in many family homes. A large proportion of young teenagers have access to VCR technology in the home, and a sizeable minority even have VCRs in their bedrooms. Ownership of pre-recorded video cassettes is widespread, and these are often lent to friends within the peer group. Video viewing tends to occur from the early evening onwards, although this depends on whether the day in question is during school term-time or not.

The relative influence of parents and the peer group on patterns of video viewing is disproportionate for this age-group. Coleman and Hendry (1990) suggest that young teenagers are more influenced by their peer group, and have a greater voluntary involvement with them than with their parents. The findings of the present survey tend to support this view. In many instances, parents play a marginal role in teenagers' video viewing habits. They are only likely to be present in a minority of viewing situations, even though viewing tends to take place after 6.00pm in the evening. In addition, viewing choices are more likely to be informed by friends than parents. Chapter Five confirms that by the time many children reach the age of twelve or thirteen (after making the transition into secondary education) they are regarded by their parents as more-or-less able to make their own viewing decisions (Buckingham, 1996).

The survey also reveals the differences between male and female video viewing patterns. The existence of such differences cautions against making generalisations about teenager's viewing habits. Boys are more likely to be frequent video viewers, are more likely to have television and VCR technology in the bedroom, and more likely to view alone than girls. They are less likely to visit the video shop alone, even though they are more likely to have a video rental card of their own. Girls are more likely to visit the video shop with friends, but are less likely than boys to visit with their parents. The group as a whole prefer 'comedy', 'action' and 'horror' titles, although boys are more likely to favour 'action' over 'comedy', while girls are more likely to favour 'horror' over 'action'.

In relation to this last point, it is also worth noting that there is often as much variation within gender groups as between them. For example, although proportionately more girls than boys claim to prefer 'horror' titles, there is still a sizeable minority of girls who actively dislike the genre. Thus, it is important not to over-play the significance of any observed differences between the genders until there is a greater understanding of the role of gender in patterns of viewing.

Finally, to return to the issue of "under-age" viewing which prompted this investigation. The survey supports the finding reported elsewhere (BBFC, 1993; Halloran and Gray, 1996; Buckingham, 1996) that many young teenagers watch videos which are judged to be unsuitable for their age-group by the British Board of Film Classification. Given the findings reported in Chapter Five, there is little reason to suspect that this self-report data is unrepresentative of real viewing patterns in the home. The extent of "under-age" viewing in this age-group is evidence of its normality in the majority of family homes, and ought not to be treated as evidence of pathological family relations (see Chapter Four).

The findings reported in this survey do not exhaustively cover the five dimensions of the viewing context identified in Chapter Two. Several important questions concerning home-based regulation remain to be addressed. For example, how does the organisation of living

space, and the place of technology within it, impact upon patterns of video viewing in the home? To what extent are household routines (meal-times, bed-times) implicated in patterns of video viewing at home? How do parents adjust to the increasing dependence of their children on peer relations, and how is this related to patterns of home-based regulation and video viewing? These questions are broached in chapters Five, Six and Seven, which discuss the qualitative case-study findings and offer a more detailed account of patterns of video usage in the family home.

In order to contextualise the above, the next chapter will deal with the ways in which public institutions and private organisations with an interest in video regulation conceive the responsibility of parents in relation to their children's video viewing habits.

Chapter Four
Document analysis

4.1 Introduction

In 1994 the issue of video regulation became the focus of intense public debate following concerns expressed about the availability of "violent videos" at the time of the murder of James Bulger in 1993 (Barratt, 1993; Buckingham, 1996). The period from March to November 1994 witnessed a challenge to the principles under-pinning the original Video Recordings Act 1984 (VRA), most notably the idea that video software ought to be regulated at the point of supply, rather than exhibition. The challenge came in the form of New Clause 42, an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, proposed by David Alton MP. As a result of extensive campaigning, the VRA was eventually amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (CJPOA), although the principle that video software must be regulated at the point of sale and not exhibition was preserved.

This chapter will provide an historical account of the events which led to the amendment of the VRA, as they serve as a useful case-study of public debates on the issue of video regulation. However, the main purpose of the chapter is to provide a conceptual purchase on the notions of "parental responsibility" which characterise the public utterances of certain key institutions with a vested or self-stated interest in the issue of video regulation. The events surrounding the amendment to the CJPOA are examined from this perspective, thereby providing a background against which to locate parents' perceptions described in Chapter Five.

The chapter demonstrates that although there is a clearly articulated concept of "parental responsibility" at the heart of debates over the regulation of pre-recorded videos, which is widely accepted across the documents examined here, the expectations associated with good parental practice in this area vary widely. Parallels can be found in another area of jurisprudence. A concept of "parental responsibility" is accepted in the Children Act 1989,

and is central to its provisions (Eekelaar, 1991), even though it 'is not defined in detail' (Masson and Morris, 1992p. 9).

Two questions guide the analysis presented below: what expectations are placed upon parents in the regulation of their children's video viewing habits? How are these expectations articulated in documents available to parents through the news media and other public sources?

4.2 Terminology and methodology

This chapter examines documentary material issued by a number of public and private institutions drawn from four areas most conspicuously associated with the issue of video regulation. Parliament (the legislature and executive) and the print news media (represented by a selection of national newspapers) have a self-stated interest in video regulation.[1] That is, as bodies with a self-proclaimed concern for public welfare they have taken an interest in the regulation of pre-recorded video supply constituted as a social problem. The video software industry (represented here by the British Video Association [BVA] and the Video Standards Council [VSC]) and the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) have a commercial interest in and/or a statutory responsibility towards the supply of pre-recorded videos.[2]

Each institution has produced documentary sources which contribute to debates over the regulation of videos. These sources, by virtue of their existence in the public domain, allow for an analysis of the various arguments which underpin this debate. Every written source produced by these institutions which was concerned with this issue during the period described above has been included in the analysis. Of necessity, the analysis of press

---

[1] The newspapers included for analysis are as follows:
a) Tabloids: The Sun, Daily Mirror.
b) Middle-brow: Daily Express, Daily Mail, Mail on Sunday.
c) Broadsheet: Times, Sunday Times, Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Observer, Independent.
[2] The BBFC is the body currently designated by the Home Secretary to administer the classification system laid down under the Video Recordings Act 1984. It is also a privately funded body which derives income from its role as the classification authority (Matthews, 1995; BBFC, 1992).

reports is limited to a selection of newspapers, chosen to reflect the different editorial and production styles which characterise UK print news production.

Although each institution is dealt with separately, an attempt has been made to highlight the ways in which they relate to one another. It should be remembered that the documents analysed here are not produced in isolation: they often refer to one another, and draw upon the same sources of information. The arena of public debate, which ranges across the news media, Parliament and elsewhere, is characterised by such inter-textual references (Fowler, 1991). For example, David Alton MP has made speeches in Parliament which are analysed here. They have been reported, often by direct quotation, in the press coverage examined separately. In turn, these speeches contain reference to press reports and editorials, public opinion surveys and other commentaries. Strenuous efforts have been made to ensure that this inter-textuality is identified in pursuit of a holistic approach to understanding the nature of public debates.

A second concern of the approach taken here has been to show how discourses of parental responsibility might be communicated to parents. Kress' (1985) model of discourse is drawn upon in this regard, which is viewed as 'systematically-organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that, they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say...with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally' (p.6-7). Thus, the discourses of parental responsibility described in this chapter are best viewed as resources which may be drawn upon by parents when formulating their 'ideas' (Goodnow and Collins, 1994) about home-based regulation. These resources are available to them through, *interalia*, the print news media, or public education campaigns, and they frame the issue of what constitutes responsible parenting. It is important to recognise that there is no determinant relationship between publicly circulated discourses and parental "ideas". Certainly it would be impossible to determine the exact sources of attitudes towards a topic like home-based regulation, as they are likely to be varied and not necessarily recognisable

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This section of the discussion is limited to the range of possible ways in which parental responsibility is defined in *publicly accessible* documents as a first step towards understanding the development of parental ideas.

Parental responsibility: concept and conceptions

In his examination of childhood and rights, Archard (1993) has drawn a useful distinction between the *concept* of childhood and *conceptions* of childhood.[1] He argues that 'to have a concept of "childhood" is to recognise that children differ interestingly from adults; to have a conception of childhood is to have a view of what those interesting differences are' (1993; p.22). This distinction is a valuable one when thinking about the issue of parental responsibility. The present chapter demonstrates that there is a widely supported concept of "parental responsibility" which holds that parents have a responsibility towards, and therefore ought to perform a responsible role in, their children's viewing habits. In addition, there exist various conceptions of parental responsibility which specify what form this role ought to take.

Archard's (1993) insights in this area are doubly useful because the concept of "parental responsibility" is intimately linked to the modern conception of childhood he identifies. The notion that parents are responsible for their children's viewing habits, in the same way that they are responsible for many other aspects of children's lives, is tied to the conception of childhood as a period of dependency. This idea is itself parasitic on the notion of childhood as 'a stage or state of incompetence relative to adulthood' (Archard, 1993; p.30). Archard (1993) describes how it is that adults are assumed to be capable of responsible action, whilst children are not:

'[t]he ideal adult is equipped with certain cognitive capacities, rational, physically independent, autonomous, has a sense of identity and is conscious of its beliefs and desires, and thus able to make informed free choices for

---

[1] In turn, Archard (1993) is drawing upon the distinction outlined by Rawls between the concept of 'justice' and conceptions of justice (p.21/22).

which it can be held personally responsible...It is because the child lacks these adult dispositions that it may not participate in this adult world' (p.30).

In the present context it is important to recognise that conceptions of parental responsibility are historically variable, unlike the concept of "parental responsibility", which appears to have been constant since (at least) the beginning of the cinema age in the early part of this century (Staples, 1997). Technological and social changes have given conceptions of parental responsibility different inflections during successive periods. As new audio-visual media technologies have emerged (first cinema, then television, video and onwards), so the mode and site of control over children's viewing has changed. Buckingham has acknowledged this tendency, arguing that '[t]he site of regulation has begun to shift in recent years, primarily as a response to the advent of the domestic video recorder' (1996; p.253). The implications of the VCR for conceptions of parental responsibility have been profound; as Buckingham noted in an earlier publication:

> '[v]ideo changed the site of regulation from the broadcasting institutions to the family itself: rather than relying on the paternalistic good intentions of the broadcasters, we now had to rely on parents to protect children from harm' (1993; p.103).

The pace of technological change has been matched by that of social change over this period. As conceptions of the family have changed, so too have conceptions of parental responsibility (Moore *et al*, 1996). The gendered division of labour within family homes has begun to be transformed alongside changes in the labour market and employment practices (Moore *et al*, 1996; Smith and Ferri, 1997; Brannen and O'Brien, 1996; Brannen *et al* 1994), and these may well have implications for conceptions of parental responsibility. For example, traditional assumptions about the roles of motherhood and fatherhood must be revised in the light of changing employment practices which have seen the likelihood of mothers staying at home to care for children diminish in recent years. As the presence of

mothers in the home has traditionally been given as the reason for their dominant role in the care of children, including control over the television set (eg Hess and Goldman, 1962), this change prompts a rethink about the gendered division of labour in the home where mothers are (almost) as likely to be absent from the home as fathers in dual-parent households.

The document analysis presented below, which will elaborate on these points, are guided by two inter-related questions concerning the nature of the parenting role at the heart of conceptions of parental responsibility:

a) What constitutes responsible/irresponsible parenting?

b) Which groups are associated with responsible/irresponsible parenting?

4.3 The national Press

The social construction of news

News, according to Fowler (1991), is a social construction. Or, as Philo (1983) argues, '"[n]ews" on television and in the Press is not self-defining. News is not "found" or even "gathered" so much as made. It is a creation of a journalistic process, an artefact, a commodity even' (p.135). As such, we might distinguish between events which happen in reality and news events, which are the reported representation of real events. Not all events are newsworthy (that is, capable of becoming news events). Fowler (1991) argues that 'real events are subject to conventional processes of selection: they are not intrinsically newsworthy, but only become "news" when selected for inclusion in news reports' (p.11). Galtung and Ruge (1973) have provided a useful insight into the process by which events are evaluated for newsworthiness, through the operation of 'news values'. They have identified twelve criteria by which events are judged, within newsrooms, to be newsworthy or not (these are described later in this section).

The news theme of "video violence", with which the issue of video regulation has become indelibly linked, is eminently newsworthy when considered alongside these criteria. This

point is illustrated when we consider the newspaper coverage accorded to the amendment of the CJPOA (1994) and subsequent amendment of the VRA (1984), which began with the publication of a report produced by Professor Elizabeth Newson (1994).

Outline of news events 31/3/94-26/5/94

On 31 March 1994 the London Evening Standard broke the story of Professor Newson's report with a front page article headlined 'U-TURN OVER VIDEO NASTIES', as the result of a press release issued by Christopher Graffius, General-Secretary of the Movement for Christian Democracy (MCD) and David Alton's Parliamentary secretary.[1] The article re-stated the "problem" of "video violence" which had been a recent feature of reports following the trial of the murderers of James Bulger in November 1993 (Buckingham, 1996). Much of this previous coverage had concerned itself with the putative link between youth violence and specific video titles, most notably *Child's Play 3* (Buckingham, 1996; Gauntlett, 1995; Petley and Barker, 1997). This title had been implicated in the abduction and murder of Suzanne Capper in Manchester, and a further title, *Juice*, was believed to have contributed to the killing of Les Read in Cardiff (Manchester, 1995).

The murders of James Bulger and Suzanne Capper were referred to in Professor Newson's report (1994; pp.1/2). These events provided the focus for concern over "video violence" which was used by David Alton MP in the promotion of his campaign against "gratuitously violent videos". In February 1994 he had introduced an amendment (New Clause 42) to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, which was immediately rejected by the Home Office.[2]

---

[1] Professor Newson suggests that she had nothing to do with the press release. In the June 1994 issue of The Psychologist, she claims to have been unaware that a 'press information sheet' was released to newspapers. The details of MCD involvement in these events has been supplied by personal correspondence with Christopher Graffius.

[2] A full timetable of the actions taken by David Alton MP with the support of the Movement for Christian Democracy can be found in the June 1994 issue of The Christian Democrat newspaper.

The report in the London Evening Standard effectively set the tone for the coverage of Professor Newson's report in subsequent newspaper articles. The article described how 'Britain's top psychologists today confessed they had got it wrong in denying a link between video nasties and real life violence' (London Evening Standard, 31/3/94). The news theme of "video violence" was given renewed impetus with this apparent "u-turn" by experts.

On the following day the national Press carried the story to a wider audience. Articles supplying details of Professor Newson's report and New Clause 42 (better known as the "Alton amendment") were accompanied by editorials and opinion columns offering commentaries on the implications of these events.[1] These reports included comments by Michael Howard MP, the then Home Secretary, who re-stated his objections to New Clause 42.[2]

During the next nine days the coverage of "video violence" continued, although no further news events associated with the news theme were reported. The coverage for this period consists almost entirely of commentaries offered by staff- and guest writers. For example, politicians (Roy Hattersley MP in the Daily Mail [2/4/94], psychologists (Dr Raj Persaud in the Independent [5/4/94]), and members of the film industry (Michael Winner in The Times [1/4/94]).[3]

On 10 April 1994 The Observer reported the findings of a national opinion poll it had commissioned from ICM. The publication of the poll results became a news event in itself, as the findings reported on public perceptions of censorship and video regulation. The following day the poll was reported by national daily newspapers.[4] According to the poll,

---

[1] For example, the Daily Mail article "Video nasties do cause violence" was accompanied by an editorial entitled "The experts confess" (1/4/94). Coverage in the Daily Telegraph included two articles headlined "'Naive' experts admit threat of violent videos" and "MPs want a ban on horror for hire" and an editorial entitled "Violent Connection" (1/4/94).

[2] For example, see the Daily Telegraph "MPs want a ban on horror for hire" (1/4/94).

[3] Barker and Petley (1997) have claimed that during this period of coverage their opposition to Professor Newson's report and New Clause 42 was effectively ignored by the majority of the national press.

[4] For example, The Times editorial "Screening the videos" (11/4/94) makes reference to the ICM poll.

89

national public opinion appeared to be in favour of stricter censorship, and the poll was assumed to be supportive of the measures outlined in New Clause 42.[1]

The Observer also trailed the publication of a study by researchers at the Policy Studies Institute on behalf of the BBFC, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC) and the Independent Television Commission (ITC) (Hagell and Newburn, 1994).[2] This study purported to show that there was very little difference between the viewing habits of young offenders and school-children, thereby discrediting the link between "video violence" and criminality.

Another national Sunday newspaper, the Mail on Sunday, carried an article written by James Ferman, director of the BBFC ('Protect our children but don't nanny their parents', 10/4/94). The article outlined his objections to New Clause 42 and offered some proposals for future policy. Most importantly for the subsequent news coverage he argued that *Schindler's List* and *Dances With Wolves* would be prohibited under the measures advanced by David Alton MP. Like the publication of the Observer/ICM poll, this article became a news event in itself, and was widely reported by national daily newspapers on the following day.[3] These news stories contained details of Ferman's article as well as reports of the PSI research, both of which were positioned in opposition to New Clause 42.[4]

The level of coverage of "video violence" reached a peak between 11-13 April, as reports clustered around the Parliamentary debate on New Clause 42 which occurred on 12 April.[5]

---

[1] Empire magazine also published a readers' survey on censorship in its May issue. It was reported by the Independent "Moves to ban film violence backed by survey" (8/4/94). The survey was taken as further evidence that public opinion supported the measures contained in New Clause 42, despite the fact that Empire offered a different interpretation of the findings.

[2] "Young criminals prefer soaps to video nasties" (The Observer, 10/4/94).

[3] See, for example, The Guardian "MPs censorship amendment 'would ban videos of Schindler's List'" (11/4/94).

[4] "Censor criticises plan to ban violent videos", Independent (11/4/94); "Chief Censor says video ban will hit film classics", Daily Telegraph (11/4/94); "Alton's crackdown 'would ban Schindler'", Daily Mail (11/4/94); "'Video Nasty' ban may hit classics", The Times (11/4/94);

[5] Fishman (1978) has described the phenomenon of 'media waves' whereby coverage of a news theme assumes the form of a wave when measured quantitatively. The coverage of "video violence" from 31 March to 14 April closely follows this pattern of coverage. In this context it is appropriate to talk about a peak in the level of coverage.

Press reports on the morning of 12 April contained speculation about the counter proposals offered by the Home Office to supporters of New Clause 42.[1] As a result of assurances by the Home Office, David Alton MP withdrew New Clause 42 on the understanding that suitable measures would be taken to address the public concerns raised by his campaign. Press reports on 13 April focused on the measures proposed by the Home Office, and several articles featured David Alton MP proclaiming the success of his campaign.[2] Following the apparent demise of New Clause 42, the level of coverage began to subside as other news themes occupied the attention of news gatherers.

The next news event to re-invigorate coverage of "video violence" during this period was the publication of an opinion survey conducted by the Professional Association of Teachers (PAT, 1994). The Sunday Times trailed the publication of the report with an article by Jackie Miller, the deputy general secretary of PAT.[3] National daily newspapers followed the next day with details of the report, which dealt with the opinions of PAT members on a variety of issues including 'video violence'.[4]

The frequency of news events associated with "video violence" diminished towards the end of April 1994. However, two significant news events did occur in May and June. The first was the release of the Home Office amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill promised to supporters of New Clause 42. Reports on 27 May 1994 covered this news event, although Press interest in the substantive detail of the proposals was minimal as the

---

[1] For example: "Howard gets tough on video access", The Times (12/4/94); "Howard purges horror videos with 'not in front of children' rating" Daily Express (12/4/94); "VIDEO NASTY BLITZ", Daily Mirror (12/4/94); "VIDEO VILLAINS MAY FACE JAIL", Daily Mail (12/4/94); "Video shops face under-age rentals curb" The Guardian (12/4/94).

[2] For example: "BANNED Thanks to your Daily Mirror" (Daily Mirror, 13/4/94); "New war on video horrors" (Daily Express, 13/4/94); "Parents get right to ban video nasties" (The Sun, 13/4/94); "Video nasties to be curbed for children" (Daily Telegraph, 13/4/94); "Deal to ban video nasties", (Daily Mail, 13/4/94); "Tory rebels force crackdown" (Independent, 13/4/94); "Howard in video ban retreat" (Guardian, 13/4/94).

[3] "Parents who employ video nasties as their baby-sitter" (Sunday Times, 17/4/94).

[4] For example: "Video viewing 'bad for pupils'" (The Guardian, 18/4/94); "Children drawn to video violence" (Daily Mail, 18/4/94); "Video age kids think violence is 'the norm'" (The Sun, 18/4/94); "Sexual harassment by 5-year olds blamed on playground video swaps" (Daily Telegraph, 18/4/94); "Teachers claim computer games damage children" (Independent, 18/4/94).

news theme of "video violence" had already lost its immediacy.[1] The second and final

news event within this period of coverage was the publication in June of the proceedings of

the Home Affairs Committee which was established to examine the issue of young

offenders and video violence (HMSO, 1994).[2]

Table 4.1 offers a retrospective reading of this period of coverage in order to illustrate how

the "video violence" news theme was sustained as a series of newsworthy events. The

newsworthiness of "video violence" is described in terms of the news values identified by

Galtung and Ruge (1973).

Table 4.1: News values and "video violence"

News value	Newsworthiness
Frequency	Every day from 31/3/94 to 18/4/94 fresh claims and counter claims were issued concerning the nature of media effects, the efficacy of New Clause 42 and Home Office responses to it.
Threshold	The issue of "video violence" was seen to be one affecting the whole country, and therefore of national importance.
Unambiguity	The lines of debate were clearly drawn between those for and against the possibility of "media effects". The argument was represented in stark terms: either children are affected by what they see, or not.
Meaningfulness	The majority of readers are aware of the issue of "video violence", and have a view as to its likely "effects", largely as a result of previous Press coverage. In addition, video is a popular entertainment medium for most people (BVA, 1996).
Consonance	The news items fulfilled many expectations of the readership, by confirming widely held ('commonsense') beliefs about 'media effects'.
Unexpectedness	The initial publication of Professor Newson's report was unexpected- an organised opposition was reactive, late coming, and largely ignored (Barker and Petley, 1997).
Continuity	The news items fitted into previous news themes around the James Bulger case, the implication of *Child's Play 3* in these events and the putative rise in levels of juvenile crime (Barratt, 1993).

---

[1] For example: "Howard lays down censorship hurdles to halt violent videos" (The Guardian, 27/5/94); "Howard brings in jail terms to tame the video menace" (Daily Telegraph, 27/5/94).

[2] For example: "Child ID card plan against video nasties" (The Times, 22/6/94); "Censors say jail will deter illegal traders" (Independent, 23/6/94).

Publication of the fourth report of the Home Affairs Committee was also reported in July (see "Let Parents help root out evil videos" (Daily Mail, 14/7/94) and "MPs call for new curbs on 'nasty videos'" (Independent, 14/7/94).

Table 4.1: *continued*

Composition	"Video violence" was sufficiently differentiated from other news items to avoid being over-represented, while at the same time appearing to resonate with wider concerns being voiced about the rise of an "under-class", and the growth of 'yob culture'.
Reference to elite nations	The news items were primarily concerned with the effect of US cultural products on British audiences.
Reference to elite persons	The news items readily drew upon the contributions of senior politicians, film-makers, actors, critics, members of the clergy and prominent campaigners.
Reference to persons	The news items made repeated reference to the murders of James Bulger in Liverpool, Suzanne Capper in Manchester and Les Read in Cardiff.
Reference to something negative	The news items were primarily concerned with a reported increase in levels of violence in society, and the putative corruption of children.

Political affiliations and "video violence"

Press discourse is far from unified: there are a variety of ideological positions favoured by differing editorial policies of news selection, which match the broad ideological affiliations of newspapers. In Britain it is possible to talk about left- and right-wing newspapers, although even this common dichotomy is an over-simplification. In recent years there have been challenges to the view that proprietors with a particular political inclination will influence the news production of their newspapers. For example, the Labour peer Lord Hollick has recently become the proprietor of the traditionally right-wing Express newspaper group, with little change in editorial direction. At the time of the 1997 General Election, The Sun newspaper famously offered support to the Labour party, a reversal of the position it had taken during the previous election.

During the coverage of New Clause 42 and the amendments to the CJPOA, the complexities of right- and left-wing affiliations were pronounced. Within the grouping of newspapers with a traditional right-wing leaning (The Times, the Daily Telegraph, the Daily Mail, the Express, The Sun and their Sunday derivatives) there were variations in the editorial positions taken. For example, the Daily Telegraph, the Daily Mail and The Sun were broadly in favour of New Clause 42, while the Express supported the Home Office counter-proposals, favouring an emphasis on parental responsibility rather than state

intervention in the home.[1] This position was also taken by the London Evening Standard, owned by Associated Newspapers (proprietors of the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday).[2] Similar variation was found in the centre/left-leaning newspapers (the Mirror, The Guardian and the Independent). The Mirror was a vocal supporter of New Clause 42 and the Home Office counter proposals (it made little distinction between the two measures). The Independent also backed the measures proposed by David Alton MP in principle (including the idea that parents should be held legally responsible for their children's viewing), while the Guardian was the only newspaper to take a consistently sceptical line of both sets of proposals.

The identification of "right-" and "left-wing" bias within newspaper discourse is further complicated by the fact that during this period of coverage several newspapers enlisted the services of politicians whose political inclination is at odds with the newspapers'. Roy Hattersley MP (Labour) wrote a column on New Clause 42 in the Daily Mail (2/494); Gerald Kaufman MP (Labour) contributed a similar piece in the Daily Telegraph (12/4/94), and David Mellor MP (Conservative) devoted one of his columns in The Guardian to the issue of censorship (15/4/94). The issue of "video violence" would appear to be one which cuts across the traditional division between left and right, a point previously noted by Buckingham (1996).

The Press and "parental responsibility"

The concept of "parental responsibility" was reproduced on numerous occasions within the Press coverage as a whole. The coverage began with the publication of Professor Newson's (1994) report which draws attention to the obligation of parents to regulate their children's video viewing. The report derives much of its impetus from the claim that many parents have failed to exercise this responsibility, and therefore the State must intervene on

---

[1] The Daily Mail's sister paper, the Mail on Sunday, printed the influential article by James Ferman which argued strongly against New Clause 42.

[2] One editorial for the newspaper argued: 'Looking after children's morals is the parents prerogative and responsibility. We do not want the state setting itself up as some overbearing- and ineffective- moral policeman' (the London Evening Standard, 11/4/94).

their behalf. Newspapers across the political spectrum reported these sentiments, thereby establishing this theme at the heart of the debate over New Clause 42.[1]

Some newspapers went further than reporting the concerns of Professor Newson and David Alton MP, and published editorials endorsing the measures outlined in New Clause 42. For example, one Daily Telegraph editorial (12/4/94) argues: 'It is always best in a free society to let individuals and parents make up their own minds on such matters, but it has increasingly become clear that some parents are so feckless and irresponsible that the law has to intervene for the sake of others'. The concept of "parental responsibility" finds support in this assertion, but legislative action is deemed necessary because "some parents" are not properly discharging their responsibilities.

Not every newspaper endorsed the extension of State interventions in the home. A Daily Express editorial welcomed the Home Secretary's counter proposals to New Clause 42, while reasserting the importance of parental responsibility:

> 'In the end, parents must take the lead in censoring what their offspring get to see. Saying no may lead to tiresome rows, sulks and even tears, but no responsible parent can avoid it. In responding to parental pleas for help over video nasties, MPs and Ministers have done their job. Parents must now ensure they do theirs' (13/4/94).

While responsible parenting is advocated across the press coverage, there is a degree of confusion over what this entails. Observance and enforcement of the classification system is implicitly associated with responsible parenting, although most newspapers specifically

---

[1] For example, the Daily Express misquoted a key passage from Professor Newson's report: 'They had believed that parents should be responsible for children's viewing. But the psychologists now say "It is unhappily evident that many children cannot rely on this respect"' (1/4/94). Both the Guardian and the Daily Mirror also reported on this aspect of the report (1/4/94).

targeted "video nasties" as the proper concern of parents.[1] There is some ambiguity as to which video titles parents are expected to prohibit: all age-restricted titles, those specifically identified as "video nasties" or both.

Responsible action also extends to parents' own viewing habits (Gunter and McAleer, 1990). In the Daily Telegraph (2/4/94) Professor Newson is quoted as saying that 'some parents not only do not discuss the extreme violence on television with their children, but even condone it by sitting down next to them to watch these videos'. In this instance parents are expected to limit their own viewing at the same time as exercising control over their children's.

Strategies of co-viewing and mediation were discussed in the press in association with responsible parenting. For example, Dr Raj Persaud, writing in the Independent (5/4/94) argued that 'It is important for parents who feel they are fighting an unequal battle with Hollywood to realise that their own comments and conversations with their children about what they are watching can help to reduce aggression in their offspring'.

In addition to supervision, responsible parenting also entails surveillance. For example, a Daily Telegraph editorial states that:

> 'No adult in their right mind would want a child to see John McNaughton's
>
> highly disturbing film *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*. Yet you can be sure

---

[1] The following titles were identified by staff writers as "video nasties": The Daily Mirror (1/4/94)- *Child's Play 3*; *BrainDead*; *Falling Down*; *Man Bites Dog*; *Return of the Living Dead 3*; *HardBoiled*; *Henry Portrait of a Serial Killer*; *The Last Boy Scout*; *Romper Stomper*; *Silence of the Lambs*.
The Daily Mail (2/4/94)- *Nightbreed*; *Massacre Mansion*; *Tales From the Crypt*; *The Slayer*; *Zombie Flesh Eaters*; *The Bogeyman*; *Blood Rage*; *Child's Play 3*; *BrainDead*; *Society*; *Re-Animator 1 and 2*; *Dr. Giggles*; *Prom Night 2*; *Contamination*; *Scream Maker*.
The Sunday Telegraph (3/4/94)- *Fright Night*; *Zombies*; *Scanners*; *Friday 13th*; *Halloween*; *Nightmare on Elm Street*.
The Guardian (15/4/94)- *Henry Portrait of a Serial Killer*; *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday*; *Evil Dead*; *BrainDead*.

that some child somewhere in Britain has seen it after popping the video into the VCR while a parents back was turned' (9/4/94).[1]

The press coverage makes frequent reference to the need for parents to act responsibly via strategies of supervision, surveillance, mediation and observance of the classification system. Yet the criteria by which to judge the adequacy of these strategies are left unstated. One editorial in The Times (11/4/94) states that 'Adequate parental supervision can immunise children against most forms of corrupting influence', while failing to state what "adequate parental supervision" actually entails. Readers are able to infer a range of actions from these commentaries, as the adequacy of parental supervision is a highly subjective topic. However, irresponsible action is identified with less ambiguity within the press coverage. Parents are irresponsible if they allow their children to watch "video nasties". As previously mentioned, the attendant problem with such an argument concerns the definition of "video nasties" (Barker, 1984).

The press coverage contains a number of references to groups identified as irresponsible and at risk from harmful videos. One editorial in The Sunday Times (3/4/94) is unequivocal: 'The irony is that the children most likely to be damaged are those being brought up in sink estates where family values no longer hold sway- the products of the "anything-goes" society'. Peter Mackay's column in the same issue elaborates the wider problems facing this group: 'If half-witted young men and women breed they will continue to maladjust their children in a wide variety of ways without recourse to video nasties'. Lynda-Lee Potter, in her column in the Daily Mail (6/4/94) makes a similar point:

'there are thousands of children who are unloved and unprotected, living in homes where nobody cares what the hell they do. In common with the two

---

[1] Writing in The Sunday Times (17/4/94), Jackie Miller, Deputy General of the Professional Association of Teachers suggests that 'Sometimes parents simply don't know what their children are up to. Sometimes parents use the technology as an electronic baby-sitter. Sometimes, frighteningly, thoughtless parents appear to see little or no harm in exposing their children to adult entertainment'.

97

young boys who tortured and murdered James Bulger, they roam the streets like wild animals and gloat over vile material in seedy homes'.

In another context, Lynda Lee Potter offers an uncompromising description of this group:

'There are thousands of children in this country with fathers they never see and mothers who are lazy sluts. They are allowed to do what they want, when they want. They sniff glue on building sites, scavenge for food and until now, they were free to watch increasingly horrific videos. By 16 they are disturbed and dangerous' (DailyMail, 13/4/94).

These commentaries position the "video violence" news theme in relation to others concerning the breakdown of family values and the rise of an urban underclass.[1] In this context, an editorial appearing in The Times (11/4/94) argues that:

'European countries where family bonds are stronger and home life is more cohesive, can afford to be more lax in their policies on film and video censorship. But their experience is quite irrelevant to Britain, where horror video addiction is part of a socially disadvantaged sink culture in which lack of parental supervision is endemic'.

This linkage is not simply the preserve of the right-wing press. Edward Pearce, writing in The Guardian (16/4/97), asks: 'In an underclass family where books are unknown, where dynastic unemployment has brought all restraints to a base level, who do we suppose buys the nasty- uncontrolled kids or indifferent father?'. Nor is the "under-class" the only group identified at risk. Libby Purves (The Times 13/4/94) broadens the discussion:

---

[1] Libby Purves, writing in The Times (13/4/94), has broadened the problem facing a 'decadent' society: 'Violent videos are not just a problem for the underclass- we all pay a price when a decadent society looks the other way'.

'The watching of extreme violence, some of it sexual, by small children is not an underclass problem: I can introduce you to any number of nicely-reared, privately educated children who have been allowed by stupid parents or idle minders to watch material I would hesitate to let the cat see'.

Thus the "video violence" news theme is emblematic of other, broader concerns 'about changes in childhood and the family, and about the apparent demise of "morality" in contemporary society' (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1997; p.28). Writing in the Sunday Times (24/4/94), William Oddie makes this connection, and admits that '[t]his is not fundamentally a question about video nasties...at all: it is about whether we are any longer in control of our culture or our values'.

4.4 Parliament

The commercial supply of pre-recorded videos has been subject to statutory regulation since the passage of the VRA. Since 1985, when the provisions of the Act came into force, a number of additional regulations and amendments have been introduced by Parliament. Details of this legislation and its bearing on the issue of parental responsibility are discussed below, prior to an account of the CJPOA and the events surrounding its passage through Parliament.

Statutory regulation of the commercial supply of pre-recorded videos

In 1983 Graham Bright MP brought the Video Recordings Bill (a Private Members Bill) before Parliament which sought to introduce statutory controls over the commercial supply of pre-recorded videos tapes and disks (Barker, 1984). A previous attempt by Gareth Wardell MP to introduce similar measures with a Ten Minute Rule Bill had failed in 1982. Prior to this action the BVA had implemented a voluntary system of video classification for its members (BVA, 1994), following the recommendations of the Video Working Party (BBFC, 1985b).

The VRA gained Royal assent in 1984, although its provisions came into force in 1985. Under the regulations the Home Secretary has the power to designate an authority to implement a system of video classification. Since 1985, the BBFC has been the designated body.[1] The Bill's sponsors refused to sanction the establishment of a statutory body, preferring instead to keep the functions of censorship and State separate.

Under the VRA, all pre-recorded videos produced for sale or rental in Britain must be classified by this designated body. Every video is required to display a classification symbol according to the system described in Section 7 of the Act. Three types of classification are given: available to all ('Uc', 'U' and 'PG'), age-restricted ('12', '15' and '18') and Restricted 18 (the supply of which is limited to licensed premises under the Local Government [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act 1982).

The VRA has created six offences relating to the supply of videos for commercial gain, including '[s]upplying or offering to supply a video...to a person below the age specified in its classification.' (VSC, 1995). These offences are subject to the criminal law, and carry penalties comprising of fines and/or imprisonment (VSC, 1995).

Prior to subsequent amendments, under section 4 of the Act the designated body was obliged to take into account the likelihood that a video would be viewed in the home. At the time it was felt that the criteria for judging the suitability of material on video ought to be stricter than that applied to the cinema because it could be viewed out of context, allowing audiences to dwell upon potentially unsuitable elements (BBFC, 1985; VSC, 1995).

The Video Recordings (Labelling) Regulations 1985 became law under section 8 of the VRA which empowers the Home Secretary to determine the ways in which pre-recorded videos are labelled. These regulations include the exact specification of the classification symbols and the wording that accompanies them. The age-restricted categories laid out

---

[1] To mark this role the BBFC changed its name from the British Board of Film *Censors* to the British Board of Film *Classification* (BBFC, 1992).

under section 7 of the VRA may be accompanied by the words: 'Suitable only for persons of n [12, 15 or 18] years and over. Not to be supplied to any person below that age'. In other words, the judgement of suitability encoded in the classification system is unequivocal: suitability is age-dependent. Although the age-gradings employed are arbitrary (Archard, 1993), based as they are upon the recommendations of the Williams Committee into Obscenity and Film Censorship (1979), the system relies upon a unilinear model of developmental stages.[1] That is, as children age they develop the ability to cope with material deemed "unsuitable" for them at earlier ages. Thus structured, the system does not recognise the possibility that individual children may be better equipped to cope with "unsuitable" material at different ages. The system makes no distinction between a person's chronological age and their competency as a viewer: the two are conflated.[2] Everyone below the ages of 12, 15 and 18 are positioned in their respective categories along a continuum which runs from childhood incompetency to full adult competency.

The VRA has been subject to amendments on three occasions (in 1988, 1993 and 1994), although it is the most recent revisions which are of concern here. Briefly, the Criminal Justice Act 1988 gave Local Trading Standards Authorities powers of enforcement where previously the police were responsible for ensuring compliance with the law, while the Video Recordings Act 1993 introduced the defence of 'due diligence' for suppliers of videos who could prove to have acted in ignorance of the age of a customer while taking every precaution to avoid supplying videos to under-age customers (VSC, 1995).

The most recent changes to the VRA were instituted with the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (CJPOA) which brought revisions in several key areas.

---

[1] The arbitrary nature of the classification system is illustrated when we consider that the original recommendation of the William's Committee was for a restricted certificate for age 16. However, the Video Working Party and Cinema Consultative Committee both recommended lowering the age to 15, following lobbying from video suppliers and cinema exhibitors who felt they would have difficulty distinguishing between 16 and 18 year olds. This argument was accepted, and incorporated into the present system.

[2] The Video Working party, whose report formed the basis of the voluntary system of classification which in turn became the basis of that required by law under the VRA, argued for age-graded classifications on the basis that 'gradations of maturity were recognised by most teenagers and by all parents, and we looked for a category system which would give as much information about age suitability as possible' (Video Working Party, 1983).

It extended the definition of works covered by the VRA, to include moving images stored by electronic means (including computer and video games). It also increased the penalties faced by those convicted of the offences given in sections 9-15 of the VRA, and empowered the designated body to retrospectively revise previous classification decisions. Finally, section 90 of the CJPOA added sub-section 4A to the VRA:

> 4A (1) The designated authority shall, in making any determination as to the suitability of a video work, have special regard (among other relevant factors) to any harm that may be caused to potential viewers or, through their behaviour, to society by the manner in which the work deals with-
> (a) criminal behaviour;
> (b) illegal drugs;
> (c) violent behaviour or incidents;
> (d) horrific behaviour or incidents; or
> (e) human sexual activity.
>
> (2) For the purposes of this section-
> 'potential viewer' means any person (including a child or young person) who is likely to view the video work in question if a classification certificate or a classification certificate of a particular description were issued;
> 'suitability' means suitability for the issue of a classification certificate or suitability for the issue of a certificate of a particular description;
> 'violent behaviour' includes any act inflicting or likely to result in the infliction of injury;
>
> and any behaviour or activity referred to in subsection (1)(a) to (e) above shall be taken to include behaviour or activity likely to stimulate or encourage it.
> (© Crown Copyright)

This requirement allows the designated body to retain a degree of discretion in its determinations. In addition, the authority is obliged to assess the degree to which a video is likely to be seen by under-age viewers. The designated body may therefore assume that certain parents are not acting responsibly in controlling their children's access to unsuitable videos, and make their determinations accordingly. As the Video Standards Council (VSC) trade guide to the VRA suggests, '[i]f a significant proportion of under-aged viewers are likely to view, then the work must be classified in a form suitable for these potential viewers, which may well mean more cuts' (1995; p.6). It is difficult to determine the extent to which these new requirements have affected the process of video classification. In the President's introduction to the BBFC annual report for 1994, Lord Harewood notes that 'Board policy has become more cautious since this test was introduced' (BBFC, 1995;

p.1). However, there is evidence to suggest that the new requirements merely gave legislative weight to operations already undertaken during the process of film classification (VSC, 1995). Neither *Child's Play 3* nor *Juice* were re-classified or withdrawn as a result of the amendments contained in the CJPOA: 'Having reviewed these two decisions with great care in 1993, the Board concluded that there was no need to re-open the cases when retrospective powers were granted two years later' (BBFC, 1996; p.4). Both films retained their original classifications, even though the campaign to reform the VRA was largely motivated by a desire to see these films banned outright.

Parliament and "parental responsibility"

During the debate for a second reading of the Video Recordings Bill, in November 1983, concerns were raised about the extent to which the proposals would be effective given that no protection was offered 'to young people once those videos have been bought or rented by those above the permitted age limit' (Dr Brian Mawhinney MP [Hansard, 11/11/83; p.528]). The widespread support enjoyed by the Bill in Parliament was tempered by concerns that the law would only apply to the supply of videos, and not to their exhibition within the home. The problem, as it was posed, was that parents would be at liberty to ignore the classification system and allow their children to view unsuitable videos. Dr Ian Twinn MP argued that once videos are rented 'they are freely available to anyone, and it is not enough for us to rely upon the responsible behaviour of adults in preventing circulation to young and impressionable minds' (Hansard, 11/11/83; p.533). Sir Bernard Braine, a supporter of the Bill, called for amendments to address this putative problem: 'If it is illegal for a ten year old to see a restricted film, should it be legal for such material to be shown in the privacy of his home where no age limit can be enforced? But the Bill in its present form will not stop that material entering private homes' (Hansard, 11/11/83; p.548).[1]

---

[1] These concerns were also raised during the Committee Stage of the Bill in the House of Commons, where particular attention was given to the desirability of allowing videos classified as Restricted 18 to be viewed in the home. However 'the overwhelming view [expressed in Committee] was that parents must be expected to assume some responsibility, as they do for cigarettes, alcohol and medicinal drugs' (BBFC, 1985b; p.16).

Such moves to restrict the *exhibition* of videos, in addition to commercial supply, were resisted as both impractical and undesirable. David Mellor MP, representing the Home Office, argued that 'no legislation can remove from parents and other adults their primary authority to protect children from corruption. In a free society, the burden cannot be cast on the Government, Parliament and the law alone' (Hansard, 11/11/83; p.563). This sentiment was echoed by Simon Hughes MP, a sponsor of the Bill, who argued that:

> 'Our prime objective should be to leave to adults the responsibility that they wish to exercise and that society seeks to give them while assisting parents who cannot always take responsibility on a practical, hour-by-hour basis for bringing up their children to respect the standards that they wish them to have' (Hansard, 11/11/83; p.570).

The VRA, as it was eventually passed, draws clear boundaries between the responsibilities of the designated body (to cut and classify material), of video suppliers (to enforce the classification system at the point of sale/rental) and of adult consumers, particularly parents (to ensure that under-age viewing does not occur in the home). Importantly, the first two sets of responsibilities are bound by law, while the third is not.

The principle that parents have a responsibility to control their children's viewing habits in the home (the concept of parental responsibility) was widely accepted in Parliamentary circles even before the reading of this Bill. The Committee on Broadcasting 1960 noted that in relation to television: '[p]arents have a responsibility: this was freely accepted by those who were concerned about the effects on small children of violence in television. This did not, however, relieve the broadcasting authorities of their responsibilities' (1962;p.30). The Annan Committee Report (1977) also recognises that parents assumed 'primary responsibility for their children after 9.00pm' (p.253). In light of this, it is important to qualify Buckingham's (1993; 1996) assertion that video marked a shift in responsibilities from central authorities to parents with the growth of VCR use. Parents have always been

recognised as bearing the ultimate responsibility for their children's viewing. This is as true for early cinema as for television and video (Staples, 1997). The principle that parents are primarily responsible for their children's viewing is balanced by the argument that other agencies (cinema attendants, broadcasters and video suppliers) also have an obligation to regulate the exhibition, scheduling or supply of audio-visual material. In this capacity, these agencies can be said to be acting *in loco parentis* at those times when a parent may not be available to make viewing decisions.

New Clause 42 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill proposed the extension of restrictions over exhibition within the home as well as commercial supply:

New Clause 42
SUPPLY AND VIEWING OF VIDEOS LIKELY TO HARM CHILDREN
(1) In subsection (2) of section 7 of the Video Recordings Act 1984 ("the 1984 Act") (Classification certificates), at the end, there shall be inserted the following words-

";or
(d) a statement that, either because it presents an inappropriate model for children, or because it is likely to cause psychological harm to a child, no video recording containing that work is to be supplied for private use, *or viewed in any place to which children under the age of 18 are admitted.*"

(2) After section 12 of the 1984 Act there shall be inserted the following section-

"12A. Where a classification certificate issued in respect of a video work states that no video recording containing that work is to be supplied for private use, *or viewed in any place to which children under the age of 18 are admitted,* a person who
(a) supplies a video recording containing the work for private use,
(b) offers to do so, or
(c) *permits the video work to be viewed in a place to which children under the age of 18 are admitted*
is guilty of an offence, unless the supply or viewing is made for the purpose of arrangements made by the designated authority."

(*emphasis mine*)

The relevant passages which indicate this extension are highlighted. David Alton MP proposed the introduction of a new certificate ("Unsuitable for home viewing"), which would apply to all videos thought to contain inappropriate models for children and/or likely to cause psychological harm to a child. The exhibition of videos classified in this category

in private homes where children below the age of 18 were admitted would be an offence under the law. This measure marked a departure from the spirit of the VRA which was deliberately designed to apply to commercial supply rather then exhibition.[1]

Justification for the clause was derived from a petition presented to Parliament by David Alton MP on 16 March 1994. The petition, with 100,000 signatories, stated 'that children are particularly at risk and that current systems of "watersheds", parental oversight and legislative regulation are inadequate'[2]. Further justification came from comments made in Professor Newson's report (1994). In the debate on the clause, David Alton MP referred to a passage from the report which states that: '[m]ost of us would prefer to rely on the discretion and responsibility of parents...however, it is unhappily evident that many children cannot rely on their parents in this respect' (Newson, 1994 quoted in Hansard, 1994; p.131). Professor Newson has subsequently stated her opinion that the criminal law ought to be used against parents who wilfully ignore the classification system. In an interview for a special edition of the Late Show (BBC, June 1994) Professor Newson argues:

> 'The fact is that in this world, we know that we can't always leave all of that to the parents. Sometimes we have to find ways of parenting parents [sic] being irresponsible. Sometimes we have to find ways of showing parents that if they are irresponsible, in various ways, then, erm, the law will be used against them'.

David Alton MP proposed that the measures contained in New Clause 42 would seek to prevent young people under eighteen coming into contact with unsuitable material in the home, by holding parents (and other adults) culpable. The measure would also address the

---

[1] In the debate for the second reading of the original Video Recordings Bill, Matthew Parris MP, a supporter of the Bill, expressed satisfaction that '[the Bill] acknowledges the primacy of parental responsibility by declining to extend its writ into the family home, and that is right' (Hansard, 11/11/83; p.577).

[2] The petition was organised by the Movement for Christian Democracy (MCD), and it was headed by Dr Robert Song, the Chair of the MCD (Hansard, 16/3/94).

"problem" of viewing in friends' houses: '[h]owever good a parent may be, children go into other peoples homes where they are exposed to material which their parents would not wish them to see' (David Alton MP, Hansard 12/4/94; p.132).

In summing up the opposition to New Clause 42, Tony Blair MP (then Labour shadow Home Secretary) reiterated the principles underpinning the VRA:

'The House has a duty to protect children. Society has a duty to act through Parliament to protect children. Of course parents have the primary responsibility, and of course in legislating we do not in any sense attempt to diminish the responsibility of parents. But we also have a duty to act to protect children in circumstances in which they would not otherwise be protected' (Hansard, 12/4/94; p.140).

This is the position taken by the Home Office during previous deliberations. In December 1993, David Maclean MP, in response to a written question, stated that: 'the final responsibility for what children watch inevitably rests in the home, and it is important that all parents and guardians should ensure that their children are not exposed to unsuitable material' (Hansard, 7/12/93; p.161).

Following the withdrawal of New Clause 42 in April 1994, the Home Affairs Committee was convened to consider the issue of 'Video Violence and Young Offenders' (HMSO, 1994).[1] The committee were keen 'to provide additional evidence which will...shed some light on the debate [over amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill], both within the House of Commons and beyond' (HMSO, 1994; p.vi). The proceedings were hurried, as it was felt necessary to produce a report before Parliament considered the government's amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill (HMSO, 1994; p.21). As a consequence, oral evidence was heard during only one day (22 June 1994),

---

[1] The committee was chaired by Sir Ivan Lawrence MP, and consisted of David Ashby MP, Gerald Bermingham MP, Peter Butler MP, Stephen Byers MP, Edward Garnier MP, John Greenaway MP, Dame Jill Knight MP, Chris Mullin MP and Barbara Roche MP.

when James Ferman and Margaret Ford (Director and Deputy Director of the BBFC) were questioned in the morning, and Dr Guy Cumberbatch (Department of Applied Psychology, Aston University), Professor Elizabeth Newson (Child Development Unit, Nottingham University) and Kevin Barrett (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) made contributions in the afternoon.[1]

The committee considered six issues, of which "parental responsibility" was one.[2] The issue was raised in the morning session by Stephen Byers MP:

'I think there may be a concern that as the government amendment on the House of Lords is drafted, there will be videos which get an 18 category as classified by [the BBFC] but will be available to younger viewers in their own homes because their parents may not be responsible...How do you police the viewing of classified videos at 18?' (HMSO, 1994; p. 5).

James Ferman's reply re-stated the argument that the restrictive authority of video classifications is lost once the video enters the home- '[a]ll it does is it reminds parents' (HMSO, 1994; p. 5). However, he rejected the need to hold parents legally culpable for their children's viewing, preferring instead that parents be made to understand 'that they must pay heed to the category system' (HMSO, 1994; p.5). As a result the committee proposed that the government 'consider the feasibility of requiring a warning notice to be given to adult purchasers or hirers of high classification videos at the point of sale or hire' (HMSO, 1994; p.xi).

---

[1] Written submissions were obtained from the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, the Metropolitan Police Service, the Police Federation of England and Wales, the Christian Action Research and Education (CARE) Trust, the Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, the Video Standards Council, Dr Guy Cumberbatch, Professor Elizabth Newson, Dr Tim Newburn and Dr Ann Hagell, Ian Vine, Dr Catherine Itzin, and James Ferman (HMSO, 1994).

[2] The other five were: 'Links between videos and crime'; 'Research'; 'The government's amendment'; 'retrospection' and 'identity cards' (HMSO, 1994; p.vi-x).

In the afternoon session, Barbara Roche MP again raised the issue of parental responsibility. She asked Kevin Barrett '[i]s the logic of what you are saying that parents should be culpable for failing to supervise their children's viewing adequately?', to which he replied,

'...I do not think it is for parents to be made culpable for their children's behaviour. I think what the NSPCC would argue is that there is an onus on us to help educate parents in how to help their children understand the moral and social context of what they are seeing' (HMSO, 1994; p.17).

The committee concurred with this view, and agreed in conclusion that 'the enforcement of any law making parents culpable would be well-nigh impossible' (HMSO, 1994;p.ix).

The Home Affairs Committee report (HMSO, 1994) endorsed the government's own proposals, which were successfully incorporated into the CJPOA. Whilst the issue of parental culpability remained unchanged from the original VRA, one important shift of emphasis was instituted by the CJPOA. Where the designated body has grounds to suspect that under-aged viewing may occur, irrespective of a work's classification, it must apply stricter criteria in making its determinations if the work contains elements outlined in subsection 4A (1) of the amended VRA (see Table 4.1). Under these circumstances the designated body is effectively operating by delegated function from the State, as *parens patriae*, "parent of the nation". That is, the designated body is obliged to predict the likelihood of under-age viewing, which, by extension, requires it to assess the degree of parental responsibility exercised in applying classifications within the home. If it is satisfied that there is sufficient likelihood of under-age viewing (whether this is sanctioned by parents or not) the body is further obliged to ensure the work is cut and classified in accordance with the law. The result is that adult discretion within the home is subordinated to the discretion of the designated body, guided by law.

The image of irresponsible parents which is conveyed in Parliamentary discourses resembles that presented in the Press. Irresponsible parenting is more likely to be associated with "working-class", "dysfunctional", "urban", "unemployed", "de-skilled", "disaffected" and "broken" families. For example, Edward Garnier MP, member of the Home Affairs Committee refers (in a question to James Ferman) to 'the highly protected child from some leafy suburb' and the unprotected 'inner city child' (HMSO, 1994; p.7). In his speech on the merits of New Clause 42, David Alton MP draws attention to

> 'the sick culture that exists in so many parts of urban society...[where] youngsters have so little of value or quality to fill their lives that violent videos, drugs and pornography become substitutes' (Hansard, 12/4/94; p.134).

It is this section of the population, he argues, who must be protected by the law.

The concern for disaffected and deprived families is shared by Professor Newson, who suggests in evidence to the Home Affairs Committee on Violent Videos and Young Offenders that this population is not only more likely to contain irresponsible parents, but is also more vulnerable to the harms assumed to result from under-age viewing. She argues:

> '[t]he effects of videos are likely to be greater, though, if you have a disaffected population...if you have children who are made more vulnerable by family break-downs and so on. They are likely to be greater on people who are reduced to enforced leisure by unemployment and in a population where skills have been lost' (HMSO, 1994; p.16).[1]

---

[1] A report by the then Department of National Heritage on the merits of 'V-chip' technology, repeats the assertion that working-class parents are more likely to be irresponsible. It notes that '[t]he v-chip, it was argued, seems primarily a tool for "responsible", middle-class parents, who are already concerned about, and exercise control over, their children's viewing habits. Those parents who routinely leave their children to watch television unsupervised are less likely to make use of the technology' (1996; p4).

The strength of feeling demonstrated in both Press and Parliamentary discourse around the notion of a vulnerable "under-class" is striking, and made more so by the relative lack of contrary voices. What is also significant about these views is the confidence of their espousal in the absence of any empirical evidence in their support (Petley in Barker and Petley, 1997). Respectable fears (Pearson, 1983) about contemporary bogey-men ("lone mothers", "the feckless unemployed", "welfare dependents" and so on) find expression in these discourses. Video viewing is yet another area where these groups ("them") demonstrate their irresponsibility, compared with responsible parents ("us").

4.5 British Board of Film Classification

The BBFC is a self-financing, non-profit making organisation responsible for theatrical film and video censorship and classification (Matthews, 1995; BBFC, 1992; BBFC, 1985b).[1] The Board operates theatrical film censorship as a delegated function on behalf of Local Authorities, and is currently designated under the VRA as the body responsible for video censorship and classification (BBFC, 1992).[2] Prior to designation in 1985, the Board operated a system of voluntary classifications for members of the BVA (BBFC, 1983; 1992).

Under the VRA, the designated body is directly accountable to Parliament, and is required to keep complete records of each classification decision taken. The Board is also required to publish an annual report which contains an overview and statistical digest of its determinations, although details of specific decisions are rarely given.[3] In 1985 the Video Consultative Council (VCC) was established by the Board 'to monitor BBFC policy and

---

[1] The impartiality of the Board has been placed into question in recent years, in the belief that it is an industry-friendly body. A recent Daily Mail editorial argues that the Board is an: 'increasingly permissive and perverse industry-financed body' (18/8/97), while Geoffrey Robertson QC, has suggested that 'film censorship is a comfortable business organised by the industry for the greater profits of the industry' (Moral Maze, Radio 4, 21/8/97). However, these accounts make no distinction between industry-financed (by levy) and industry-friendly.

[2] As a condition of its designation, the Board must be non-profit making (fees for classification are recommended by the Home Office) and self-financing (it operates a system of pre-payment, so as not to favour credit-worthy clients (BBFC, 1985b)).

[3] This has led to the charge that the BBFC is relatively unaccountable to the public, as insufficient information is supplied about specific cuts made to video works. For a cogent example of this criticism see Matthews (1995).

practice from a nation-wide perspective' (BBFC, 1996), and details of VCC business are included in the Annual Report.[1]

In implementing the provisions of the VRA the Board consults widely on sensitive issues, through public screenings and contact with relevant expert authorities.[2] In addition, the Board has commissioned research into various aspects of its work, although, unlike the BSC, it is not obliged to conduct research under the terms of its designation.[3]

In addition, public concern on matters relating to BBFC business is assessed through the fortnightly publication of a staff newsletter containing relevant newspaper cuttings. The newsletter offers 'the widest range of Press opinions on subjects related to the board's work'.[4] The Board attempts to maintain a favourable public profile, and the current Director, James Ferman, has often appeared in the print and broadcast media outlining BBFC policy.[5]

The Board maintains a close relationship with the BVA, which represents video software distributors (see below). The Director contributes an annual report to the BVA Yearbook, and the two organisations have co-operated in implementing a scheme of consumer advice labels for videos (BVA, 1996).

---

[1] The VCC is made up of groups representing 'the Local Authority Associations of Great Britain and Northern Ireland...the screen entertainment industry and individuals of personal distinction with relevant expertise. It is chaired by the President or one of the two Vice Presidents of the BBFC' (BBFC, 1996; p.26).

[2] Details of such consultation exercises have been supplied by private correspondence with the Principal Examiner.

[3] Two pieces of BBFC sponsored research have been of use to the present study: a survey of young offenders' viewing habits (Hagell and Newburn, 1994) and a survey of public attitudes towards the video classification system (BBFC, 1993).

[4] Private correspondence. In the letter it was revealed that the first newsletter was published on 11 February 1991. It is published fortnightly and distributed to the examiners and Board members. Cuttings are included from local, national and international newspapers, collected by examiners and a news clippings service.

[5] Despite this, as BBFC research has shown, many members of the public remain unaware of the Board and its role in film and video censorship, prompting the conclusion: 'There is undoubtedly room for improved communication about the Board itself, as well as the work that it does' (BBFC, 1993; p.18).

Implementation of the Video Recordings Act 1984

The BBFC is not required under the VRA to implement video classification according to a set of written guidelines. Consequently the Board's decisions are based on precedent rather than written rules (BBFC, 1992; p.2). The Act is open to a degree of interpretation by the designated body, although not without constraints. Prior to the amendments contained in the CJPOA, the BBFC was obliged to certificate videos "suitable for home viewing". This provision is based upon the assumption that the home environment differs from the cinema in two important respects: firstly videos can be rewound and excerpts played back repeatedly and/or in slow motion out of their original context; secondly there is no guarantee of a gate-keeper monitoring children's access to videos, as there is in the cinema. Consequently, as noted at the time of designation '[w]ith video, the Board's policy is...to limit the extent to which inadvertent viewing by children or young persons might lead to highly disturbing imagery being implanted in vulnerable minds' (BBFC, 1985a; p.9).

Since the amendments to the VRA this requirement has been made more explicit, while remaining central to the certification process. The assumption that the BBFC now operate under is that certain children are *more than likely* to watch 'unsuitable' videos, with or without parental consent. The BBFC are required to classify videos as suitable for their *potential* audience, which may include under-age viewers. Videos are now certificated in light of this assumption if it is felt that such a video has the potential to cause harm to a child viewer and/or the wider community through the child's subsequent actions. The question of what constitutes "harm" is left to the discretion of the Board, who attempt to take expert advice wherever the matter arises (Bragg and Grahame, 1997; p.34). One further condition of their designation is that the Board 'continue to seek to avoid classifying works which are obscene within the meaning of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 and 1964 or which infringe other provisions of the criminal law' (BBFC, 1985a; p.2). As a consequence, examiners apply the "deprave and corrupt" test of Obscene Publications Act 1958 and 1964 when making their classification decisions (Bragg and Grahame, 1997; p.32).

When determining whether a video is likely to attract under-age viewers, examiners take into account two factors: who the film is addressing, and who it will appeal to irrespective of this address (Bragg and Grahame, 1997; p.33). In practice, this means taking note of several properties of a video. For example, a film containing violence which merits a '15' or '18' rated certificate in the cinema but which features a lead actor who is popular with under-age audiences will be subject to additional cuts for video. The 1995/6 Annual report reveals one recent example of this. The film *Judge Dredd* (US, 1995) starring Sylvester Stalone was subject to additional cuts for video '[b]ecause of the star's appeal for young teenage boys...Four cuts were made...three to remove head butts' (BBFC, 1996; p.4).

In this capacity, James Ferman describes the BBFC acting '*in loco parentis* to help parents who don't have time to be proper parents for older kids' (Bragg and Grahame, 1997; p.34). Yet, as suggested earlier, this role is more akin to that of *parenspatriae*, "parent of the nation". This term usually refers to State paternalism, but it is useful when thinking about the operations of the designated body.[1] The BBFC are not simply acting *in loco parentis*, literally in place of the parent, when extra cuts are made to films during video classification because such practices affect the availability of material for both under-age viewers *and* adults. Furthermore, the principle that parents possess the right to make viewing choices for themselves and their children within the family home is subtly undermined by this policy, because the acceptability of parental discretion is conditional: it depends upon whether or not a parent's judgement accords with that of the Board. The following example illustrates this point: *True Lies*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, was subject to additional cuts on video because of its putative appeal to under-age boys given licence to watch the film by their fathers. As James Ferman explains:

> 'This was 18 violence on video, yet we knew we couldn't stop boys of 10 or
>
> 11 wanting to see it- and we knew that in a lot of families with boys the father

---

[1] James Ferman has also made reference to the State-like functioning of the BBFC. In a magazine interview he suggested that '[t]here's no doubt, I suppose, I do act like a Big Brother' (Calcutt, 1995; p.24).

would collude in showing it to the younger ones because it was a "man's film"- so we trimmed the violence down for video' (Bragg and Grahame, 1997; p.36).

In effect, colluding fathers and pre-adolescent boys are treated as similarly incapable of making their own viewing decisions, and as a result material is rendered unavailable to the entire audience.

What is more, the survey reported in Chapter Three found that *True Lies* was as popular, if not more so, with girls as with boys. It was the sixth most popular film on video mentioned by girls, and only the eleventh for boys. If this pattern is repeated in the population as a whole, it raises questions about the ability of the Board to predict with any accuracy the likely audience of action titles.

Although the legal specification of the classifications employed by the designated body is unequivocal in the determination of suitability (for example, an '18' is described as 'Suitable only for persons of 18 years and over') the Board recognises that age-graded categories are arbitrary. Examiners are aware that:

'[t]he categories are broadbrush- they mean 'this is more 15 than 18' and so on...There's no doubt that many 17-year olds can cope perfectly well with an 18-certificate film; it's an 18 because we don't think 15- or 16-year olds can cope with it' (James Ferman, quoted in Bragg and Grahame; p.33).

In this regard classification is symbolic:

'I think to some extent when we classify we are sending out a signal. We're not saying "you can't handle this", we're saying "we don't think this is appropriate for your age range, it's about adult things. If you do encounter it underage, remember that you're

watching what grown ups do, not what children of your age ought to be doing'" (James Ferman, quoted in Bragg and Grahame, 1997; p.34).

The BBFC and "parental responsibility"

The BBFC subscribes to the concept of "parental responsibility". Lord Harewood, in his introduction to the BBFC Annual Report for 1993, makes this point clear: 'respect for classification begins and ends in the home. It is up to parents to recognise the problem of violence and lay down rules for the children in their care' (BBFC, 1993; p.i). Responsible action in this regard requires parents to take heed of the classification system and enforce it in the home. Underlining this point, James Ferman asserts: 'Classification exists to protect children. It is up to parents to take it seriously' (BVA, 1994a; p.13).[1]

The classification system is seen as a means of providing responsible parents with guidelines about the suitability of videos for particular ages, and as a means of ensuring that potentially harmful material is not available to under-age viewers from

'dysfunctional families...[who] will include negligent parents who let their kids see things because they do not know what they are seeing and do not have time, irresponsible parents who leave things lying around without caring what their children see, and actually corrupt parents who invite their children to see things very violent or indeed pornographic...' (James Ferman, quoted in HMSO, 1994; p.7).

James Ferman even links such negligence to child abuse, a theme returned to by Professor Newson who describes "violent video viewing" as a form of 'emotional abuse' (HMSO, 1994; p.19). The connection between the apparent absence of viewing controls and child abuse is also identified by the NSPCC. Dr Alan Gilmour, representing the NSPCC on the

---

[1] The existence of the 'PG' certificate has always indicated that the BBFC are aware of the role to be played by parents in determining the suitability of material for their children. Ironically, this certificate is the one which many parents and children feel to be redundant and of little value (BBFC, 1993; Barratt, 1997).

VCC, suggested that the NSPCC might use evidence of the viewing of "video nasties" as indicative of other 'child abuse or neglect' in the home (BBFC, 1985a; Appendix p.xlvii).

In his identification of "dysfunctional families", James Ferman is careful not to restrict the definition to any one particular socio-economic group. Echoing the sentiments expressed in 1983 by Jerry Hayes MP, Ferman expands the definition of irresponsible families to include 'the homes of media people where kids of 8, 9, 10 are all upstairs watching Robocop' (Calcutt, 1995; p.26). The difference between Hayes and Ferman is one of political expediency. Hayes was making a party political point at the expense of "trendy-lefties", a popular target for ideologically motivated attack in the early nineteen-eighties. In contrast, Ferman is using the image of an irresponsible middle-class to justify the Board's very existence as a gate-keeper for the whole of society, not just for the "working-classes".

He has suggested that "dysfunctional families" are a sizeable minority of households in Britain:

'I think too many children are seeing '18' videos as a matter of course. They live in dysfunctional homes where their parents don't care what they watch. That is worrying and it must affect general standards. If '18' doesn't really mean '18' in a significant minority of homes, then maybe some adults will have to give some things up' (Calcutt, 1995; p.26).

In another context he has given a figure to this "significant minority": 'I think most parents are responsible, but if, of the thirty per-cent of households who have dependent children, ten per-cent of these are irresponsible, that is three per cent of all households in Britain' (HMSO, 1994; p.7). Elsewhere he has fallen back on generalisation: 'one of the great problems is that quite a lot of parents do not take the categories seriously' (Malcolm, 1989). The intention behind these assertions is to reaffirm the necessity of centralised (statutory) censorship, while at the same time to draw attention away from the efforts of the Board and shift the focus onto parents. The implicit assumption is that there is a problem to

117

be dealt with, although the problem not only concerns under-age viewing and its "effects", but also encompasses wider aspects of irresponsible parenting.

As well as observing and enforcing the classification system in the home, responsible parents are expected to mediate children's video viewing. When asked 'What do you think parents should be doing?', James Ferman replied:

'One of the things we can do, if we can't any longer control the contents of films is to enable parents to talk to their children about them. So many parents *don't* talk to their kids about media experiences, they don't think they're significant.' (Bragg and Grahame, 1997; p.36).

There is no indication of the form that this talk ought to take, nor how it might be beneficial.

4.6 The video software industry

The British Video Association (BVA) had its inaugural council meeting in November 1980 (BVA, 1994). The founding trade members 'were committed to pursue a common range of goals in order to promote and protect their property and interests and create a healthy environment for growth' (BVA, 1994; p.6). The Association was brought into being in order to counter the threat of illegal software piracy, although the interests of the BVA also encompass the areas of industrial and public relations for software distributors and suppliers. It aims to 'see the best economic, political and social environment in which its members can flourish' (BVA, 1995; p.6). Current membership comprises thirty-two video software distributors operating in the British market (including BBC Video, Channel Four Video, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Polygram Filmed Entertainment, Sony Music UK, Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment and Warner Home Video).[1]

---

[1] For full membership details see BVA (1996). In a private correspondence the Director General of the BVA states that BVA membership covers approximately 90% of the video software distributors operating in the British market.

Since 1994, the BVA has produced an annual digest of industry data regarding the British video software and hardware markets, in the form of an industry yearbook. Each report provides a commentary on the year's events which have affected the video software industry. In addition, the yearbook includes statements from a variety of bodies associated with the video software market (the Video Standards Council [VSC], the Federation Against Copyright Theft [FACT], the International Video Federation [IVF] and the BBFC).

In this respect, the BVA operates as the public mouthpiece for the video software industry. As such, it is keen to present the industry as a mature and responsible one, and it has been instrumental in establishing a number of bodies which operate to ensure the correct implementation of statutory instruments affecting the supply of video software. In 1982 the BVA established the Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT) in order to co-ordinate a response to organised software piracy. In the same year the BVA approached the BBFC in order to establish a working party to draw up recommendations for a voluntary code of classification for video software (BVA, 1994; BBFC, 1983).

In 1987 the BVA contributed to the establishment of the Video Advertising Review Committee (VARC) and the Video Packaging Review Committee (VPRC) to ensure good practice in the advertisement and packaging of video software. This was followed in 1989 with the establishment of the Video Standards Council (VSC) 'to provide guidance to retail outlets and establish a code of conduct over and above the requirements of the Video Recordings Act' (BVA, 1994; p.7). The VSC offers staff training advice to its retail members, and provides consumer information about the operation of video classification in the form of trailers on pre-recorded video software, and posters displayed in video retail outlets.[1]

---

[1] The VSC has produced a 'Retailer's Guide' to the operation of the amended Video Recordings Act, and a staff training video to accompany this.
Where I make reference in the text to retailers or retail outlets, I include within this term all legitimate commercial operations which supply video software for sale and rental purposes. Within the industry these two operations are referred to collectively as 'rentailers' (BVA, 1995).

The video software industry and "parental responsibility"

The video software industry subscribes to the concept of "parental responsibility". This is illustrated by the fact that in 1994 the BVA and VSC produced a guide to the video classification system for parents (BVA, 1994b). This initiative was undertaken in response to public concerns raised by the campaign in support of New Clause 42. It was accompanied by the introduction of consumer advice labels on video software produced and distributed by BVA members, designed to 'further encourage parents' participation in this popular leisure pursuit' (BVA, 1995; p.7).[1]

The 1995 BVA Yearbook contains details of the leaflet's introduction, and describes the leaflet offering 'simple advice to decision-makers in the home' (BVA, 1995; p.7). The front cover of the leaflet presents a picture of a male child asking 'Mum, can I watch a video?', implying that mothers are likely to make viewing decisions in the household.[2] Although this may accord with traditional assumptions about the role of women in the home as primary care-givers (Gray, 1992; Moore, Sixsmith and Knowles, 1996; Ferri and Smith, 1996), it does not find support from recent research into the control of video viewing in the home. Gray (1992) reports that although women may accompany their children to the video shop to hire videos, they are less likely than their male partners to be familiar with current film titles. As a result adult males in dual parent families are more likely to make viewing decisions.[3] Moreover, research also suggests that fathers and children are more likely than mothers to make decisions about what is watched on television (Gunter and McAleer, 1990). This is despite the fact that it is largely mothers, and not their male partners, who express concern about their children's viewing habits (Gunter and McAleer, 1990).

---

[1] Polygram Video was the first BVA member to introduce consumer advice labels on their video releases. The first title to include the label was *Malice*, released in May 1994.

[2] The 1994 BVA Yearbook reveals that one of the groups who expressed an interest in the leaflet campaign was the Mother's Union.

[3] Gray argues that 'the consequence of this is that women often find themselves watching movies which they do not like in order to avoid conflict and the disapproval of husband and children' (1992; p.237).

Advice for parents is organised into six sections, each dealing with a separate topic. The first of these, entitled 'RULES OF THUMB', prepares the ground for understanding the role that the BVA believes parents ought to play in the control of children's video viewing. Parents are urged to think about three issues when a child asks to watch a video: 'How old is your child? What do they want to watch? Is it suitable?'. Parents are not told that they ought to adhere rigidly to the classification decisions of the BBFC. Instead, they are reminded that '[i]n the end it is your responsibility to make sure that your child doesn't watch anything unsuitable. And who knows your child better than you do?'. In the section describing the classification system ('THE CLASSIFICATIONS'), this point is given added emphasis: 'Video classifications allow you to make an informed choice for your child's video viewing...You may disagree with a classification but, if you do, then the responsibility is yours'.

This marks a departure from conceptions of parental responsibility which suggest that parents are irresponsible if they fail to enforce the classification system within the home. In other words, the expectations placed upon parents to act responsibly are by no means uniform across the industry, Parliament and the BBFC.

'RULES OF THUMB' outlines the areas where parents ought to play a role in supervising their children's viewing habits. The first area is within the home, and relates to children gaining access to unsuitable videos inadvertently. Parents are reminded that 'Children love to do what they're not supposed to, so don't make it easy for them. Don't leave videos out which are unsuitable for your child'. Parents are also advised that 'Older brothers and sisters can [...] be a problem. There are videos which are perfectly suitable for them to see, but not when their five year old sister or brother is in the room'. Finally, parents are warned that children may be viewing unsuitable videos at the homes of friends: 'The fact that some parents are irresponsible doesn't mean you should be'. According to the leaflet, a responsible parent is one who is aware of their child's activities in- and outside of the home.

In addition to providing parents with advice about the correct approach to responsible decision-making, the leaflet also serves as a means by which the BVA can position video as a benign entertainment medium, no more sinister than cigarettes, alcohol or aspirin, and supported by a responsible industry. To this end the leaflet suggests that '[a]fter all, we have become more accustomed to checking the contents of food we buy, by looking at the packet, so why should videos be any different?'. This is accompanied by a reassurance that '[the] UK video industry is proud of the standards that it maintains. It is the most restricted video industry in the free world and is subject to more legal and voluntary controls than broadcast television, cable or satellite in this country'. Thus reassured about the responsibility exercised by the industry, parents are reminded that 'once a video title goes through the front door parental responsibility must play its part'.

The significance of the BVA leaflet is that in contrast with the other texts examined in this chapter it does not urge parents to apply the classification system rigidly- it is their responsibility to interpret the system according to the knowledge they possess of their children's competencies. In other words it accords parents a right (corresponding with their responsibility in this area) to make their own judgements about the suitability of material for their children.

4.7 Concluding discussion

Statutory regulation of video supply and the concept of "parental responsibility"

In seeking to extend the statutory regulation of pre-recorded videos to include exhibition in the home, New Clause 42 presented a challenge to the principle that regulation should be confined to supply. This attempt to make parents legally culpable for their children's video viewing failed, although the designated body for video classification was granted stricter criteria to apply when making its determinations.

During the public debates which surrounded these reforms, the role of parents in controlling their children's video viewing habits became a central focus of concern. A broad based consensus emerged around the concept of "parental responsibility": the principle that parents are ultimately responsible for their children's viewing. This was widely accepted by parents and non-parents, press commentators, representatives of the video industry and regulatory bodies and politicians across the political spectrum.

However, there is less clarity of thought over what constitutes good parenting practice in this regard. Conceptions of parental responsibility make reference to a variety of strategies which parents are expected to follow in the regulation of their children's video viewing. Implicit within many texts examined here is the argument that responsible parents strictly adhere to the system of classification operated by the BBFC. Yet this is not universally acknowledged; the leaflet produced by the BVA affords parents a degree of discretion in their observance of the classification system. Furthermore, the tendency of press commentators to concentrate on "video nasties" serves to confuse matters because of the problems associated with their identification.

Other strategies identified with responsible parenting include the supervision and surveillance of children's viewing habits in- and outside of the home. Mediation is also advocated, although there is some confusion over what these strategies entail, and what specific purposes they serve. There is also evidence that parents are expected to moderate their own viewing habits, whether children are present at the time of viewing or not.

Children as responsible agents

One obvious omission in public debates is any meaningful consideration of self regulation by children, a point previously discussed in Chapter Two. The concept of "parental responsibility" is so pervasive in public discourses that it precludes any thought of children as responsible agents in their own right. The language of rights and responsibilities is deployed to defend this oversight: the Video Working Party, whose recommendations form

the basis of the system of classification inscribed in the VRA, argued that 'society has the right to restrict the freedom of children for their own protection' (BBFC, 1983). In a recent letter from the President of the BBFC, Lord Harewood, to the Department of National Heritage, this point is reaffirmed: '*Since only responsible adults can control what children view in the home*, the Board made a formal proposal to the video industry in late 1993 that consumer advice about the contents of particular tapes should be added to video labels and packaging' (*emphasis added*) (BBFC, 1994).

The centrality of the concept of "parental responsibility" to public debates over video regulation has repercussions for the range of solutions proposed to address the putative problem of under-age viewing. The debate is configured in such a way that the natural solution is to further restrict the availability of material deemed unsuitable. The lines of debate are drawn between those for and against censorship. Alternative strategies, like programmes of media education for children, are dismissed as an irrelevance. Dr Guy Cumberbatch has stated that '[w]e know literacy is an important factor in children being able to protect themselves against this harmful media, so it seems to me we should be teaching media literacy skills' (HMSO, 1994; p.16). However, Sir Ivan Lawrence refused to sanction further consideration of the issue during the deliberations of the Home Affairs Committee, dismissing it by saying '[w]e are moving away slightly from the area of the inquiry' (HMSO, 1994; p.16). Meanwhile, public education programmes are recognised as important for adults; the Home Affairs Committee concluded that 'the Government [ought] to consider the feasibility of requiring a warning notice to be given to adult purchasers or hirers of high classification videos at the point of sale or hire' (HMSO, 1994; p.xi).

"Video violence" and "the underclass"

The news theme of "video violence" has become a cipher for advancing debates about the rise of an "under-class" and ideological crusades against single parenthood and the welfare state (Alexander, 1994; Calcutt, 1995; Barker and Petley, 1997). These views extend beyond the press and are to be found in many of the texts examined in this chapter.

It is important to recognise that the case for identifying groups of "irresponsible" parents and "children-at-risk" is currently unsupported by empirical evidence. Julian Petley points out that 'to lay bare the lengthy history of a particular claim or belief is not sufficient to expose it as a myth, but it does begin to look dangerously threadbare when no reliable evidence can be adduced with which to back it up' (Barker and Petley, 1997; p.100). Professor Newson's report (1994) contains no reference to evidence that socio-economic factors are related to an increased vulnerability to media effects. Furthermore, in Chapter Two it was demonstrated that research into patterns of home-based regulation provides inconclusive (and contradictory) evidence of variations related to socio-economic indicators. One study (Lin and Atkin, 1989) actually found that unemployed parents tend to offer more guidance and control over their children's viewing habits- which the authors assume to be as a result of the 'enforced leisure' to which Professor Newson has referred (HMSO, 1994).

One final remark: The specification of an identifiable group of "irresponsible" parents implies that there is an equally visible group of "responsible" parents. As the following chapters testify, families with adults in professional occupations appear just as likely to sanction "under-age" viewing at home as those in semi- or unskilled employment. The distinction between responsible and irresponsible parental practice becomes blurred in this context and demands a reconceptualisation of parental responsibility identified in this chapter. The next chapter will begin an account (continued in later chapters) of the patterns of home-based regulation from the perspective of family members.

Chapter Five
Family case studies

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented an analysis of texts which convey and inform public discussion of the issue of video regulation. The present chapter marks a shift of focus, and examines patterns of home-based regulation from the perspective of parents. The aim here is to provide a detailed analysis of patterns of home-based regulation in ten family homes, in an effort to move beyond the very general accounts of previous quantitative research in this area.

Proceeding from the perspective of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Gilgun *et al*, 1992) this work is designed to interrogate those claims which have been made about home-based regulation in past research and public debate. The aim is to open up an area which has suffered premature closure around a very narrow range of factors, notably crude demographic indicators.

Although a form of grounded theory was followed during data analysis, the research was initially structured around a number of research questions. These were derived from a review of the research literature, and enhance the 'theoretical sensitivity' of the programme of study (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The case study work operates on two levels-furnishing descriptive data about the households visited and the behaviour accounted for by the interviewees, whilst at the same time providing an analysis of these observations with reference to theoretical themes derived from previous work in this field, and which emerged from the data themselves. The present chapter describes the patterns of home-based regulation found in the homes examined, while Chapters Six and Seven offer a clearer conceptual framework for understanding the issue of parental responsibility and the decision-making process at the heart of home-based regulation.

The family case-studies fit within a tradition of qualitative and interpretative research which challenges previous orthodoxies based upon an oversimplification of complex social reality (Moore *et al*, 1996; Gilgun *et al*, 1992). The previous chapter demonstrated that public debates over video regulation are dominated by perceptions of an irresponsible "under-class", in contra-distinction to responsible "middle-class" parenting practice. The research reported here presents evidence which undermines this view. While it is important to recognise, as Shipman (1988) does, that such an approach can 'increase the chance that the researcher is pressing a case, not just describing it' (p. 63), this chapter unreservedly contributes to a tradition which 'challenges stereotypical assumptions often made about children in different family contexts' (Moore *et al*, 1996).

5.2 Methods

Overview

Ten households containing one or more young people between the ages of three and eighteen years were recruited to the study. In each case the parent(s)/guardian(s) were interviewed at home, following a semi-structured format. On a number of occasions the children were included in these sessions. Each household was visited once, and the tape-recorded interviews lasted approximately ninety minutes. Follow-up telephone calls were undertaken where additional information was required, or issues needed clarification. Several close readings of the transcript material were undertaken, and interpretation was guided by a small number of themes suggested by previous research. The data analysis was grounded in the sense that within this framework, categories and theoretical concepts were derived from the data themselves, and the theoretical project was under constant re-appraisal as the process of interpretation proceeded (Gilgun, 1992). This has the benefit of ensuring that wayward interpretations are not imposed upon the data as a result of the dogmatic and unreflexive application of extant theory.

Recruitment

The recruitment strategy was based around the selection of families who differed from one another according to a limited set of variables (see Table 5.1). These were suggested by previous work in the field (reported in Chapter Two).

Table 5.1: Selection variables

Material	*Social*
Occupation(s) of parent(s)	Number and gender of parents/guardians
Level of technology at home (number of TVs, VCRs and satellite/cable TV)	Number, age and gender of children
	Presence of other household members

Other factors, including languages spoken at home, religious affiliations and other possible indicators of "ethnicity" were not factors in the recruitment process. This does not mean, however, that such factors are of no relevance to the family-case study work. While there is certainly no compelling reason to suggest that physical "racial" characteristics should play a role in structuring patterns of home-based regulation, other factors which are related to "ethnicity", crudely understood as a cultural rather than a physical phenomenon (O'Donnell, 1991), may well play some limited role in structuring patterns of home-based regulation.[1] For example, previous research has shown that the size of a family (the number of parents, children and other adults present at home) has some bearing on home-based regulation (Gross and Walsh, 1980). Certain ethnic groups which conform to traditional extended family relations, or which contain large numbers of children, may well differ from others in their operation of home-based regulation. The issue of inter-personal communication may also prove important in families which have generational differences in the languages spoken at home. In a household where older generations speak little or no English, younger generations may be given more or less license in their viewing habits, as a result of differences in cultural understandings. For example, during one school-based interview (described below) with a group of British Asian girls, one of the interviewees

---

[1] Skin-colour as an indicator of racial origin has been examined as a variable in previous research in this area, and the findings have been contradictory and of little explanatory value (see for example: Mohr, 1979; Greenberg and Dominick, 1969; Gross and Walsh, 1980).

mentioned that her aunt, who speaks little English and is a recent arrival in Britain, tries very hard to stop her nieces watching Australian soap operas on television, for fear of their exposure to teenage kissing. Another such example emerged from an interview with the son of Turkish immigrants who claimed that his parents (who spoke little English) often stopped him watching mainstream Hollywood films on video because they preferred to watch Turkish-language films, which they only had the opportunity to watch on video.

Although these cultural factors were not employed in the selection process, the question of "ethnic" variations in patterns of home-based regulation has been posed as it relates to the families recruited. As with other socio-demographic variables, every effort has been made to resist any mechanistic employment of these categorisations in the interpretation of the interview data.

Prior knowledge of these details was furnished as a result of a series of school-based interviews with young people aged 13/14 years drawn from three of the schools who had participated in the questionnaire survey described in Chapter Three.

Thirty-nine year nine pupils (organised into groups of three or four) were interviewed at school. Each interview was tape-recorded, and lasted for one or two class periods (approximately 45 to 90 minutes).

Each session followed a standardised, semi-structured format, and the questions covered are listed below:

- What kinds of movie do you like watching on video?
- How often do you watch videos?
- Do you rent them from a video club? Are you personally a member?
- How many video tapes do you own personally?
- Do you watch videos alone? Who do you watch them with? Who do you prefer to watch them with?
- What do you think about the video classification system? Do you think it is useful? Would you change it at all?
- Do your parents ever stop you watching or renting a video? Are you allowed to watch what you want?
- What aren't you allowed to watch? Why?
- Do you ever disobey your parents, and watch things you know they don't want you to?

- Would you say your parents are strict?
- Do your parents always know what you are watching on video?
- Do they mind what you watch on video?
- Do you think that watching violent videos can make someone violent? What do your parents think?

Other prompts:
- How do your parents stop you watching particular videos?
- Do you watch videos at friends houses?
- Do your brothers/sisters ever stop you watching videos?
- Do you worry about what you watch on video, or what your friends are watching?

In addition to being asked a number of questions directly related to their video viewing habits and home-based regulation, each member of the group was required to complete a profile form, thereby supplying background information about the composition of their households and the level of technology found at home. An example of the profile form is given in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Pupil profile form

These interviews served two purposes. They provided information about the socio-economic circumstances of households which was then used in the selection of families for recruitment to the next stage of family interviews. In addition they provided an insight into

the topic of home-based regulation from a young person's perspective, which informed the design of the family case study interview agenda.

A list of fifteen families was drawn up according to the criteria listed in Table 5.1. It was hoped that at least ten would agree to participate in the research. However, only four of the families on the list agreed, and they were then asked to supply the names of friends or family who would be willing to take part in the research, and who satisfied the sampling criteria. In addition, one of the teachers who had helped to organise the school-based interviews supplied the name of a colleague who had expressed an interest in the study, and who met the criteria for selection. This colleague also supplied the names of two families who eventually took part in the research.

Through this method of snow-ball sampling (Burgess, 1984) the selection process yielded a diverse range of families according to the selection criteria. One advantage of snow-ball sampling, as Burgess (1984) suggests, is that it 'follows the pattern of social relations in a particular setting and therefore the population in the sample involves individuals *and* relations among individuals' (p.55). As Figure 5.2 shows, within the sample there are two sets of families who are known to each other through friendship ties, and one set of families who are related through kinship ties. This feature of the sample provides a unique opportunity for exploring the nature of home-based regulation *across* households where children are likely to be viewing videos.

A profile of each of the ten families is given in Table 5.2. The sample is narrowly-drawn in two respects. Firstly, nine of the ten households contain at least one young person in their early teens. This is because the selection process proceeded from a base of families drawn from the school-based interviews with year nine pupils (13 and 14 year olds). Because patterns of home-based regulation have been found to vary with the ages of children present in a household (Gross and Walsh, 1980; Kim *et al*, 1988; Lin and Atkin, 1989; Mohr, 1979) we can assume that this characteristic of the sample may limit its relevance to

a consideration of other 'younger' families (those that only contain children of a younger age).

Secondly, not one of the households visited contained an unemployed parent. In addition, only two parents were engaged in part-time work. As previous research has suggested, the employment status of parents can often impinge upon patterns of home-based regulation (Lin and Atkin, 1989).[1] A survey by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has highlighted the fact that recent changes in the British labour market have had a profound impact on family life, not least in the amount of time that fathers are able to spend in the home (Ferri and Smith, 1996). Although the sample covers a relatively narrow employment sector, the inductive data analysis has remained sensitive to these issues where they emerge from the family accounts.

---

[1] For example, Lin and Atkin (1989) report that working parents are often unable to devote as much time to the control of their children's viewing as parents who are out of work and at home during the daytime.

Figure 5.2: Friendship and family relationships within the case-study selection

| No relationship | Friends | Relatives |

Key
* Recruited from school interviews.
P/C Parent(s) and child(ren)
      interviewed.
P Parent(s) only interviewed.

Family 1
*   P/C

Family 2
*   P/C

Family 3
*   P/C

Family 4
           P/C

Family 5
           P/C

Family 6
*   P/C

Family 7
           P

Family 8
           P

Family 9
           P/C
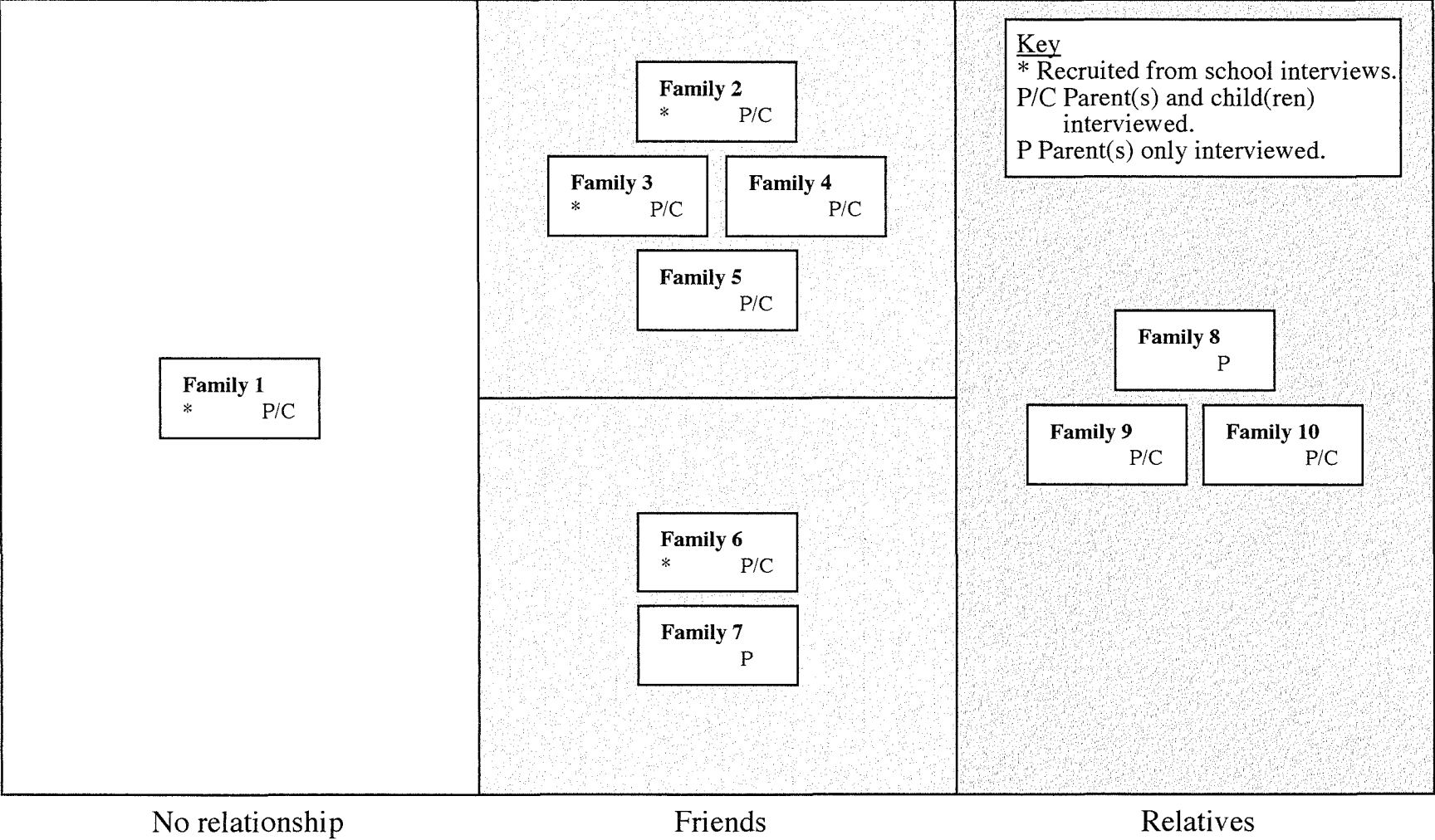
Family 10
           P/C

Table 5.2: Family profiles

Code	Parents at home (age and occupation*)	Newspaper	Children at home	TV	VCR	Satellite TV?
1	Mother (36-45) *School cleaner* Father (36-45) *Dustman*	The Sun	Son (18) Daughter (14)	3	1	Yes
2	Mother (25-35) *School cleaner/ cook*	No papers taken	Daughter (14)	3	2	No
3	Mother (36-45) *Secretary*	No papers taken	Daughter (14)	3	1	No
4	Mother (46-55) *Librarian* Father (36-45) *Local government officer*	The Guardian The Independent The Observer	Daughter (15)	2	1	No
5	Mother (36-45) *Nursery teacher* Father (36-45) *Electrician*	The Times The Sun	Son (18) Daughter (15)	3	3	No
6	Mother (36-45) *Office manager* Father (46-55) *Structural engineer*	The Independent	Two sons (12, 14)	1	0	No
7	Mother (46-55) *Primary school teacher* Father (46-55) *Office Manager*	The Guardian The Mirror The Observer	Son (14) Daughter (11)	2	1	No
8	Mother (25-35) *Primary school teacher* Father (36-45) *Secondary school teacher*	The Guardian The Times	Son (13) Daughter (9)	3	1	No
9	Mother (36-45) *Local government officer* Father (36-45) *Local government officer*	The Independent The Times The Guardian The Observer	Son (11) Daughter (5)	2	1	Yes
10	Mother (36-45) *Artist* Father (25-35) *Despatch rider*	The Mirror	Three sons (3,7,14) Daughter (15)	2	1	No

* All are full-time, except for the school cleaners.

Family case study interview format

An important dimension in qualitative research is the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee(s) (Gilgun, 1992; Buckingham, 1993b). For this reason Daly (1992a) suggests that '[r]esearchers must decide how to present their motives, how much to participate...and how intensively they will become involved in participant families' lives' (p.7). From the outset of each interview the researcher was presented as someone with little direct experience of parenting in the 1990s. This allows parents the opportunity to position

themselves as 'experts' (Harre and Secord, 1972) whilst controlling the way the researcher was perceived as an interlocutor. It also allowed the researcher to ask more basic questions about parenting behaviour without appearing disingenuous. In addition, interviewees were prompted to explain themselves in greater detail when presented with questions from a non-parent, as they had no recourse to a shared, taken-for-granted knowledge.

Parents in dual-parent households were interviewed together (in the case of family 4, the father was unable to participate due to work commitments). Where possible the children were included in the discussions. In three cases children were absent from the interviews (families 6, 7 and 8; the eldest child from family 6 had already been interviewed at school).

The participation of the children was encouraged wherever possible in order that familial relationships might be observed *in situ*. It was recognised that co-present parents and children might say quite different things than if they had been interviewed separately. However, a comparison of accounts across the school-based and family interviews revealed little evidence of this disparity. Co-presence allowed differences of opinion to be brought to the surface, and provided a valuable test of the validity of the accounts given by the interviewees (Daly, 1992b).

Each interview was tape-recorded, and followed the agenda given below:

START
I'm not a parent myself, so I'm really looking for as much information about what it's like to bring up a child in the 1990s as possible. How do you find being a parent?
• what kinds of pressures do you feel most as a parent?
• do you get much help from other people?
• probe for discipline in the home.

ENTERTAINMENT
• what things do you like doing with your child(ren) for entertainment?
• what other things do you enjoy doing?

TV
How about television?
• Do you watch much television? What sorts of programme do you watch most often?
• What are your current favourites?
• How about your children?

VIDEO VIEWING HABITS
- Are you a member of a video rental club? (Who has membership cards?)
- How often do you rent videos, on average?
- Do you buy them at all?
- What are your favourite types of movie? What is your current favourite? How about your children?
- What titles do you own on video? Where are they kept?
- Do you ever buy videos for your children? Can you remember the last title you bought for them?

REGULATION
- Can you ever remember being told not to watch something as a child?
- Are you happy with what your children watch on television? Any worries?
- How about videos?
- Do you ever discuss what your children watch on video with them?
- Do you ever recommend to your children that they watch a particular title?
- Do you think that parents have a responsibility to control what their children watch on TV and video? Why?
- Are you able to fulfil that responsibility yourself? How/Why?
  Do you think the "V-chip" (explain where necessary) is a good idea? Would you consider using it?
- Have you ever stopped your children from watching something on video? How and why?
- Do you have any rules about what your children are allowed to watch on video? What are they?
- Do you treat all of your children in the same way? Why?
- (DUAL PARENT) Who takes control of your children's viewing? Why?
- RELATIVES- what role do they play?
- AT FRIEND's HOUSES

In addition to the questions listed in the interview agenda, parents were also asked to participate in two pre-prepared exercises towards the end of the interview session. In the first exercise parents were provided with a hand-out containing each of the BBFC classification symbols, taken from their literature. Parents were asked to identify the symbols, and to describe in their own words what they thought each meant. This exercise was designed to test parents' working knowledge of the video classification system. In addition, parents were asked to judge the value of the system and its implementation by the BBFC.

The second exercise involved video covers taken from fourteen popular pre-recorded videos. Parents were asked whether they or their children had seen the videos, or if not, whether they would allow their children to see them. The exercise was designed to bring to the foreground the decision-making process informing parental judgements about the

suitability of videos for their children. This exercise and its findings are the subject of Chapter Six, where they are described in more detail.

At the end of each interview parents were required to complete a form similar to that used in the school-based interviews (see Figure 5.1), in order to confirm their details (occupation, newspapers read, number and location of televisions and VCRs and so on).

5.3 Transcript analysis

The transcribed interviews yielded approximately 75,000 words of text, which was hand-coded into categories according to the main themes of interest to the present study, described in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Categories

a) Social demographics
b) Family relationships
c) Approaches to parenting
d) Relationships outside of the home
e) Level of technology in the home
f) Leisure activities
g) TV viewing and cinema going
h) Video viewing habits and preferences
i) Patterns of home-based regulation
j) The judgement of suitability
k) Parental responsibility

The present study concurs with Daly's (1992b) argument that qualitative methods are well suited to the study of families because they 'give us windows on family processes through which we can observe patterns of interaction and the ongoing negotiations of family roles and relationships' (p.4). Used in conjunction with processes of data analysis associated with grounded theory, such an approach can be employed to 'construct substantive theory and the concepts that compose the theory without emphasis on causality or universality' (Gilgun, 1992; p.32). The family case study work was designed to yield the depth of qualitative data which is necessary to capture the complexities of family life, for the

purpose of placing under scrutiny the claims of the quantitative research literature examined in Chapter Two.

The notation conventions employed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) have been adapted for use in the present study: Table 5.4 contains a key.

Table 5.4: Transcription key

Notation	Meaning
[...]	Text is omitted
Daughter, 15	Child's age
...	Pause
=	Speaker interrupted
[laughs] [mother]	Square brackets contain additional or clarificatory information

5.4 The extent of home-based regulation

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, a major pre-occupation of previous research has been with measuring the extent of home-based regulation. The majority of studies invariably draw attention to the "low" level of home-based regulation within the samples examined (Greenberg and Dominick, 1969; Gross and Walsh, 1980; Kim *et al*, 1988; Millwood Hargrave, 1995; Mohr, 1979). The terminology used to describe this trend, however, pre-supposes that there is a normal and desirable level of home-based regulation, and that this exists irrespective of the viewing context within the home. As Buckingham (1996) notes,

'[a] great deal of previous research on family viewing has tended to adopt an implicitly normative approach. As in other areas of child-rearing, the discourse about parental responsibility here is one that serves to construct norms of 'healthy' family interaction and of "good parenting"' (p.262).

The case-study findings reveal that every parent was familiar with the idea that children's viewing may require certain controls at times, and all were prepared to discuss their

personal approach to home-based regulation. Control over video viewing is clearly an issue which parents feel is their responsibility, a point returned to in Chapter Seven.

The interviews highlight the variability of strategies of home-based regulation, which changes as children age, and even on a day to day basis depending upon a number of contingent factors. Evidence suggests that control over video viewing is not a major priority for two reasons. Firstly, very few children demand to see material which their parents deem unsuitable. Several parents were aware of viewing outside of the home which they found inappropriate, but they frequently felt powerless to intervene. Within the home, every parent was more or less satisfied with their own children's viewing habits.

The second reason is that parents rarely consider their children to be at risk from unsuitable material, even when they do come into contact with it. At best, most parents are ambivalent in their attitudes towards the negative effects of video viewing. A survey conducted for The Late Show (MORI, 1994) reported the following findings:

> 'Watching videos which contain violence makes children more likely to commit acts of violence'- 21% strongly agree, 46% tend to agree.
> 'Watching videos which contain violence makes children more likely to accept violence in real life'- 24% strongly agree, 52% tend to agree.

These figures were interpreted (in the television programme, but not in the written report) as offering conclusive proof that the majority of parents agree that children's behaviour is adversely affected by what they see on video (the responses for 'strongly agree' and 'tend to agree' were combined to form one 'yes' category). Yet the largest group of respondents (46% in the first case and 52% in the second) only *tend* to agree with the statements they were offered to comment on. In other words, they tend towards agreement, but not without some qualification. All of the parents interviewed in the present sample believed that some children might be influenced in this way, but none of them thought that their own child(ren) was at risk. This is illustrated in the following extract from family 9:

Father: Before you [son, 11] used to do Karate, you used to watch *Power Rangers*, you used to practice what you saw....Have you ever been influenced, I mean seen something on TV and tried to emulate that?
Son: Er, I don't think so.
Father: Not even *Power Rangers*?
Son: Probably some, most, children imitate, I don't know, *Power Rangers* when they first came out.
Father: And they used to do the kicks, do the jumps. Yeah.

This tendency to displace possible "effects" onto other people/'s children has been noted elsewhere (Wood, 1993; Buckingham, 1996; Barratt, 1997), although its significance is often overlooked. The question of whether videos cause harm to young audiences elicits ambiguous and contradictory responses from most people, which are dependent on the way in which the question is posed.

This theme was dealt with in an early study of home-based regulation. Barcus (1969) argues that the extent to which parents regulate their children's viewing is determined by the degree of concern they have over the negative effects of viewing on their children's physical, psychological and cultural development. He suggests that parents are often confused about such effects, and in these circumstances choose not to regulate viewing, in order to minimise family conflict. He makes the case that parental ambivalence is a reflection of "expert" ambivalence over the possible "effects" of the media.

This ambivalence was detected in even earlier research conducted with a sample of ninety-nine mothers (Hess and Goldman, 1962). The authors report that:

> '[t]he ambivalence and uncertainty these mothers apparently feel about the potential effect of television on children suggest that they might be expected to look to professional experts for advice...[h]owever, this is clearly not the case...[t]hese mothers believe that parents are best able to judge the potential effect of any given program' (Hess and Goldman, 1962; p.420).

140

A recent MORI poll (1994) confirms this tendency to rely on the testimony of non-experts. 48% of sample are more likely to believe 'other parents' as to whether or not 'there is a link between the types of videos that children watch and how they behave in real life'. This compares with 34% who were more likely to believe 'child psychologists'.

All of the parents interviewed in the present study were concerned (when they expressed concern at all) with the potential distress caused to children after watching certain material on video. Not one of the parents was fearful of their children imitating what they saw on video (this finding is also reported by Allerton, 1995 and Buckingham, 1996). The following extract from family 7 is indicative of these attitudes:

Interviewer: What concerns you about your children's viewing?
Father: I think it's more the worry caused than imitation=
Mother: I don't think they'd imitate.
Father: I think every parent must probably tell you this, that their kids are the
               ones..not to worry about imitating stuff. Er...not severe stuff like that.
               They might imitate fashions or lifestyles...My kids are definitely not
               violent.

Parental efforts, therefore, are to enable the child to avoid material which is likely to cause them distress, or else to minimise that distress through discussion of the issues raised. In their early study, Hess and Goldman (1962) report that mothers are more likely to agree that TV causes nightmares than behavioural changes in their children, and it is certainly the case that mothers from the present sample are more likely to admit concern in this area than their male partners. Another finding of interest is that mothers feel that such effects are often immediate and temporary, therefore 'indulgence may be easily forgiven' (Hess and Goldman, 1962; p.414). This explains why parents are rarely left guilt-stricken when their child watches something which they feel to be unsuitable, and which causes distress.

Given that the idea of chronological ageing in children as a period of progressive development has a powerful resonance for many parents (Goodnow and Collins, 1994), it is highly probable that ambivalence and uncertainty are common to much parenting experience. Parents are compelled by circumstances to re-evaluate, on a regular basis, the

status of their child as a competent and capable social agent as they age. This necessarily entails changes in attitudes and behaviour which are themselves subject to re-evaluation at a later date. This theme is developed in the next chapter which deals with the issue of "maturity" as it features in parent's judgements of suitability.

5.5 Patterns of home-based regulation

In discussion, parents rarely draw clear distinctions between television (terrestrial and satellite) and video, even when prompted to make specific reference to video. This supports Levy's (1989) claim that consumers make little distinction between household media in conversation. For example, when asked whether he had ever stopped his children from watching a video, the father from family 9 responded:

Father: No I don't think I have...Oh perhaps, I mean there was one
                occasion...There was an episode once where he couldn't sleep, so I got
                up, dazed and stupid, not fully realising what time it was, and I came
                down at four o'clock and he was watching *Candyman*...
Interviewer: Was it on Sky [satellite television]?
Father: Yes.

This suggests that issues of regulation are considered in terms of technology (the television set) rather than specific media (terrestrial television, satellite television, video, video games and so on). Some home routines, like bed-times, have equal impact on children's uses of various media in the home. Content-based rules may also apply to types of content across media (like "sex", "violence", "drug-taking" and so on), but their application will be different in each case because content differs across media. Content in videos is governed by a statutory code enforced by the BBFC, while schedule protocols determine the provision of content for television. Home-based regulation will be calibrated to these different systems.

Chapter Two drew attention to five dimensions of the viewing context (economic, spatial, temporal, content-based, technology-based) which structure patterns of home-based regulation, and these were elaborated in Chapter Three. The findings from the case-study

work relating to rule-making are organised according to these dimensions, thereby drawing a distinction between television and video regulation. To the extent that parents often avoid making such a distinction, this is an artificial exercise conducted for the sake of clarity.

Economic

There was no evidence that money was withheld from children at home in order to limit their access to videos. Wherever a reason for prohibition was forthcoming, parents made it clear that their decision was based upon a judgement of suitability, and not financial in origin. Expenditure was a factor in other related areas. For example, the mother from family 10 pointed to the fact that parents must be aware of related merchandising when thinking about viewing regulation. The refusal to buy film-related merchandise for "under-age" viewers is part of a unified strategy to dampen enthusiasm for viewing films on video judged as unsuitable:

Mother: I remember when *Batman* was around, and I remember feeling really
                  cross because [...son, 14] was drawing and writing stories about it, and
                  so on and so on. And I refused to buy a *Batman* T-shirt because I don't
                  think [son, 14] was actually old enough to see the film=
Daughter, 15:   He was, we were only, I was seven, he was six=
Mother: Yeah, something like that...Yeah, I refused to buy any of the lunch-
                  boxes or anything like that, I thought it was unfair because he wasn't
                  old enough to see it anyway.

Spatial

Most of the families interviewed had the household VCR located in a communal living room (additional machines were to be found in parent's bedrooms). Family 2's daughter was the only child with a VCR in her bedroom, although she was more likely to view videos at her grand-mother's house. There was no evidence of any struggle between family members over use of the VCR machine in communal rooms. Video viewing, when it did occur, was likely to involve several of the family members together, and parents tend to rent videos judged suitable for family viewing.

Different parents had different ways of storing pre-recorded videos that they owned and judged as unsuitable for their children. No parents felt it necessary to hide such videos, although the father in family 9 placed the most "unsuitable" titles on shelves out of reach of his 11 and 5 year old children. In other households, owned videos were on display and easily accessible to children (families 1,7, 9 and 10 had their collections on full display in the rooms where the interviews took place). In these circumstances, access was controlled by tacit agreement: in family 10, for example, the children were aware that they had to ask permission before helping themselves to a video in the father's collection. There was no evidence that such arrangements raised problems at home, and nor was there any indication that children were eager to subvert parental authority, even when such action would be relatively difficult to detect by parents in their absence.

Temporal

None of the parents talked about meal-times and video regulation, despite the finding reported elsewhere that household routines might structure patterns of home based regulation (Millwood Hargrave, 1995). Perhaps these are tacit rules, because video viewing is made difficult if meals are taken away from the communal living room where the VCR is located. Alternatively it might be that television and video viewing habits now govern meal-times rather than vice versa.

As predicted by the research literature reviewed in Chapter Two, there was evidence of parental control over the time that video viewing takes place and the amount of viewing entailed. The former set of controls, which incorporated bed-time rules (what Millwood Hargrave refers to as the 'logistics of bed-time' [1995; p.85]) are motivated by concern over the physical impact of late night viewing on younger audiences leading to tiredness and inattention at school. In addition, parents also expressed concern for what they took to be slothful behaviour in front of the television screen, making reference to their children as "couch potatoes".

This is related to concerns which motivated the latter form of controls (over the amount watched). Here parents are concerned about the possible displacement of other activities considered to be worthy and beneficial, like reading or outdoor sports. This form of control, however, was rarely as important an issue for video viewing as for television viewing. Unlike television, the flow of video output is not endless. Once a video has ended, it must be rewound, or another must be sought and loaded into the VCR machine if viewing is to continue. This acts as a natural barrier to extended viewing periods. Thus, the opportunity for casual viewing, dictated by the whims of the schedule and ceaseless flow of television programming, is not available to video viewers.

Temporal controls tend to be flexible in as much as bed-times are open to negotiation and the amount of viewing allowed is contingent on circumstances (whether the next day is a school day, for example). This extract from family 9 provides illustration:

Mother:	Yeah I like *Red Dwarf*, but I'm not committed to it.
Interviewer:	How about [daughter, 5]?
Father:	Past her bed-time.
Mother:	Have you ever seen it?
Daughter, 5:	[Affirmative nod]=
Father:	Only on video=
Daughter, 5:	And when daddy wasn't here!
Father:	When I wasn't here? What on the video tape=
Mother:	I let you watch it...Why did we stay up late? We stayed up late.
Son, 11:	I wasn't here=
Father:	Was that last Friday? Oh yeah.
Interviewer:	Was that an exception?
Mother:	Yeah. I mean there's nothing on it that would be offensive. Was there?

Viewing controls are also operated in order to allow the parents some viewing time of their own. This demonstrates a connection between the temporal and spatial dimensions of home-based regulation. Family 9 provide an illustration of this point:

Mother:	[Son, 11] thinks it's unfair...he wants to watch cartoons at eight...but it's not his TV watching time. He's had his TV watching time. He doesn't watch cartoons at half-past eight.
Interviewer:	Because it's too late?
Mother:	Because it's...our time, it's our turn and because it's adult TV, I don't want him watching cartoons. I don't want him thinking it's the norm, he can watch cartoons whenever he wants to watch cartoons.

Barcus' (1969) argument (outlined in Chapter Two) fails to take into account the fact that regulation is not always motivated by parents' concerns about their children's well-being (although they may be justified as such). As the extract above suggests, children's viewing may be subject to controls for the benefit of adults protecting their own space within the home. The following extract from family 7 adds weight to this argument:

Mother: Hhmm. They need their [sleep], I need my sleep [laughs]. But then...
Interviewer: So it's for your benefit as well?
Father: I suppose that's the thing. When they're in bed we can have a
               cup of tea and relax...

Content-based controls

Parents' discussion of home-based regulation was suffused with mention of "sex", "violence" and "bad language" as categories of concern. Other content was of concern, but featured with less regularity in discussion. Such categories include "sexism", a concern with the portrayal of women and how they are treated in the media. The mother from family 7 makes this point in connection with sexual activity on-screen:

Mother: We're very up on the way people treat women, you know=

"Racism" was also mentioned by a number of parents, including those from family 8 who expressed a general concern for "dodgy politics" in films:

Mother: ...But there are some things [I'd be concerned about], if I find them,
               like if there was something overtly racist, you know...
Father: I don't know, I think it depends what you mean by dodgy politics. I'd
               say all the films, well lots of the films that [son, 13] watches are dodgy,
               but I wouldn't see that as a reason for him not to watch them. I would
               hope that he gets, not the correct politics, but alternative views from us
               or elsewhere, so therefore in one sense it's not a major, major worry.
               So I would say that most of the things, the action films that he watches
               are extremely dodgy.

One final category, which is related to production values rather than specific content, is "quality". The mothers from families 4 and 6 both made it clear during the interview that

they prefer their children to watch "quality" productions rather than waste time with "rubbish" and "dross". In the first extract, the mother from family 4 admits that the only time she has felt moved to stop a video before it has ended is when the film is "dross":

Interviewer: Have you ever [turned a video off]?
Mother: Er, well I quite often abandon a...what was that film we were watching?
                 Yeah I mean quite often you get things out and they're dross=
Daughter, 15:   Erm, like *Waiting to Exhale*, we got that out and that was just crap=
Mother: Oh it was dreadful, wasn't it?

The second extract reveals the concerns of the mother from family 6, who attempts to "positively steer off" her sons from "cheap television":

Mother: The important things that they watch, like *The X Files*, I mean that
                 seems to be a must, erm and then there's this other thing called *Wanted*
                 which is a really dreadfully rubbish programme, but they seem to think
                 it's fun. But I say it's such cheap television, look! It's just really
                 rubbish television! [laughs] But hey, you know, that's what all the kids
                 watch it, and I don't think, if they've done their home-work and music
                 practice and things, then I can't see why not. Erm I think when I... I try
                 and positively steer them off, away from any of the "soaps".

More detailed consideration is given to the constituency of these content categories, and their significance, in the next chapter.

Technology-based controls

There was only very limited evidence that the functional features of the VCR (fast-forward, stop, pause and so on) were used during playback as a means of controlling children's viewing. Most parents agreed that they had used one or more of the features at some time or another, but few were able to give explicit examples. One exception was the mother from family 3 who felt it necessary to fast-forward through a violent scene in *Casino* (18):

Interviewer: And what about fiction? A movie on video. Has there ever been an
                 occasion when you've got one out and there have been some scenes
                 which have been a bit=
Mother: =Yeah, *Casino*. We saw that recently.
Interviewer: On video?
Mother: Yeah. When they put his head in the...it was horrible.
Daughter, 14:   No, I couldn't get into that=
Mother: We both skipped through that bit because=

Daughter, 14:   Things like that really upset me emotionally, they just make me feel sick.
Mother: We'd just eaten or something and I just didn't want to watch it.
Interviewer: So you fast-forwarded?
Mother: Yeah. That sort of thing- I don't like.

In the next extract, the father from family 7 suggests that he would watch *Pulp Fiction* with his son (14), and would resort to using the stop facility if he found it unsuitable:

Mother: And would you vet it [*Pulp Fiction*] first?
Father: I don't think I'd vet it, but if I found it hard going then I might stop it.

Many VCRs come equipped with a child-lock facility which makes the machine inoperable unless a code is entered. There was no evidence that any of the parents interviewed had felt it necessary to use this facility where it was available. This is partly explained by a lack of knowledge about the functioning of VCR technology- several of the parents only had a very rudimentary understanding of its features. Just as Gray (1992) reports, mothers in dual-parent households were least likely to know how to operate a VCR. Both of the mothers in single parent households (families 2 and 3) knew how to operate the VCR out of necessity. Gray writes of her sample, '[i]t was obvious from the interview material that these women had an incomplete knowledge of the workings of the video recorder' (1992; p.164). She reports that men, rather than women, are more likely to study instruction manuals and consequently use the VCR more regularly than women. Women, in contrast, often rely upon other members of the household (children as well as male partners) to operate the VCR. The mother from family 5 is typical in this regard:

Interviewer: Have you had a VCR for very long?
Mother: Yes, for many years we've had a video, but I can't remember how long.
Daughter, 15:   But mum's never known how to use it.
Mother: I know it's awful to admit at my age, but...
Interviewer: So [son and daughter] know how to do it?
Mother: Yeah, that's a total cop-out, but...same at work as well.
Interviewer: Why is that?
Mother: Just because I can't be bothered. I mean, that's it really...

The subject of who controls the remote control was not ever broached during the interviews, but it is worth noting in passing that both Gray (1992) and Morley (1986) found that male partners were more likely to than female adults in the household. This has obvious implications for the gendered division of labour over control of the flow of images on-screen. Unfortunately the extent to which this means that it is fathers, rather than mothers, who use the remote control to "skip" through or stop scenes deemed as unsuitable is impossible to determine from the family case study interviews.

Mediation and co-viewing

The research literature suggests that in addition to rule-making, parents can supervise viewing by alternative strategies, including co-viewing (sitting with a child while they watch something) and mediation (discussing issues raised as a result of viewing) (Lin and Atkin, 1989).

Both strategies are believed to ameliorate the potential effects of viewing, with parents providing a framework for children's critical engagement with what they are watching on-screen. Co-viewing serves two functions: it allows parents to monitor their children's reactions as viewers (whether they become scared, distressed or confused and so on) while allowing them the opportunity to intervene in the viewing process should they decide such action is necessary. The father from family 7 was unsure of the suitability of *Pulp Fiction* for his 14 year old son, but was prepared to watch it with him for these very reasons:

Father: I do think we should be watching this [*Pulp Fiction*] together. That
             would be my best control, because I'd sooner I gave him that leeway to
             watch it, rather than [him] go to a friends and watch it.

Despite this, co-viewing was seldom employed in a deliberate attempt to regulate children's video viewing. More often than not parents and children watch videos in each other's company because video viewing is perceived as a family activity, one of those leisure activities which brings family members together. Unlike television viewing, which is recognised as both a communal and individual passtime, family members make special

149

efforts to gather together to watch a rented video. Such occasions are special by virtue of the fact that renting requires additional effort and expense; it is therefore an arranged activity, one which requires preparation and co-ordination. Under these circumstances co-viewing is less a strategy of control, and more a consequence of family viewing habits common to video viewing.

Like co-viewing, mediation may be a deliberate strategy of viewing regulation, or, more commonly, it may be part of the viewing process itself. The mother from family 5 provides an example of the former:

Mother: I also think that you should, if children are watching certain things on the TV you should actually explain to children that this isn't really happening, it's on the television, and it isn't real...You know as an adult that that hasn't really happened, but you need to explain to the child that it was just on the television, and that is difficult. If you don't explain to them, they will think it's real.

The mother describes the didactic function of parental mediation- children need to be told that what they are watching is not real, and this will lessen the impact of on-screen portrayals. Note how she employs the terms "children" and "adults"- she does not say at what age children develop their own critical skills. The implication is that all children are unable to distinguish between what is real from make-believe on-screen, in contrast to all adults.

Later in the interview, the daughter complained that the mother's verbal interjections during viewing were frequently irksome and unnecessary:

Daughter,15: If I'm watching a film and she goes 'oh that's not real', it's annoying me because I just want to get on and watch it [laughs]=
Father: [laughs].
Mother: [laughs] Oh, right! So my hard work has gone to..to just shut-up mum!
Daughter: [laughs] Yes!

150

There is every possibility that the mother's comments during video viewing are verbalisations of her own unease. When she observes out loud that what is on-screen is unreal, she may be reassuring herself as much as her daughter.

Advocacy of mediation raises the question of what parents and children ought to talk about for any beneficial outcome. In the following extract from family 4, just discussing the film after co-viewing is sufficient to allay the mother's fears about her daughter's viewing experience:

Mother:	Yeah...I was a bit, I was a bit worried about you watching *Trainspotting*=
Daughter,15:	[laughs]=
Mother:	Because, no I'll tell you why, because when I started to read the book, which I just thought was foul, I couldn't get beyond the first two or three chapters, and then some friends of mine saw the film and said you must watch it, it really is excellent, and I think you even saw it before I did, didn't you?
Daughter,15:	Yeah.
Mother:	Erm, and then we watched it together, and that was quite interesting because I thought the film was very very good, and then we were sat there talking about it afterwards.

They talked about a number of issues, including casting and the production values of the film as well as more specific discussion of the film's plot and characterisation. In doing so, the mother was able to gain some understanding of her daughter's response to the film, which she felt confident to have had no negative effects.

The next extract, taken from family 8, demonstrates another feature of mediation. A number of the parents described how they felt confident that their children would turn to them, even when they were not co-present during viewing, and seek clarification of issues arising from their video viewing:

Mother:	But you also want them to feel safe, and if there is something that they see that they don't understand, or they're worried about or scares them, you want them to know that they can come and say, 'what's this all about' or=
Interviewer:	Do you have these sorts of conversations?
Mother:	Well, yeah. I have...
Interviewer:	Can you remember about what?

Mother: I can't think specifically, but, erm, I think they are quite big telly watchers and media watchers anyway, so if there's anything they don't understand, like *Philadelphia* [12]. I watched *Philadelphia* with [daughter, 9], and she was like gripped. Not only about the story but about how people were treating, erm, Tom Hanks. Cos she liked him, and she remembered him from *Big* and his other funny films, and so you know, while there were issues to be discussed, we could talk about those, and I feel that, you know, that's good.

Such discussion not only provides parents with information about their children's responses to what they see, it also contributes to knowledge of their children's development (for more detailed discussion of "maturity", see Chapter Six). Film discussions are no different, in this regard, to any other inter-personal communication between parent and child, which entails the establishment of mutual understandings about the world inside and outside of the family home. Mediation is neither something external to the process of viewing, which demands that viewers bring experience of the world to their interpretation of what is on-screen (Livingstone, 1995), nor is it detached from wider family relationships founded upon mutual understandings.

Self regulation

As previously mentioned, the families do not have to deal with conflict over video viewing because children rarely demand to see films which the parents consider to be unsuitable. This is one form of self-regulation which previous research has neglected. Children's awareness of "unsuitability" may come from knowledge and acceptance of the BBFC classification system, as the following extract from family 7 suggests:

Mother: And [daughter, 11] will say, 'oh I can't watch that, it's 12 and over'=
Father: So we've had this=
Mother: She will say, won't she?
Father: Yeah=
Mother: I can't watch that, it's 12.
Father: Well in fact [son's, 14] wanted to go and see something that's=
Mother: And [daughter, 11] is obviously with us=
Father: And she says 'oh, but I'm not 12'. She really does worry about breaking rules and regulations=
Mother: So she knows about them.

It may also emerge from children's knowledge of what particular films are about (what themes they deal with). Younger children, those in nursery and primary school, rarely appear to show any interest in watching films containing "sex" scenes. Such "grown-up" films have little or no relevance to their *present* lives. Sexual themes become increasingly attractive to teenage children, at a time when they are beginning a self-conscious exploration of their own sexuality (Jackson, 1982). It is during this period, when parents become sensitive to "precocious" sexual activity, that "sex" in videos becomes an issue of concern. Even then, teenagers often feel embarrassed about sexual content when viewing in the presence of parents, leading to voluntary exclusion from such situations. This point was made during interview with family 6:

Mother: Well, the boys [14, 12] don't like the sex anyway, they find it very
            embarrassing, so in a way they set their own limits [laughs]. Even
            James Bond.

There is also a case to be made for the idea that children's own tastes, what they consider suitable and entertaining, are in part defined by parents' attitudes. This challenges us to reconsider the logic of what's been called the 'forbidden fruit hypothesis' (Buckingham, 1996). Briefly, the hypothesis suggests that children are drawn to material which has been prohibited because the act of prohibition identifies such material as "adult" and unattainable. In addition, young people are assumed to want to rebel against authority in an effort to make themselves appear more independent and "grown-up" among their peers. While there is widespread support for this hypothesis in the research literature, it is important not to over-emphasise children's desire to test boundaries and challenge adult authority. Most of the children interviewed at school for the present thesis were keen to support the idea of adult controls over children's viewing habits (see Barratt, 1997). There was also evidence from the family case study interviews that children, particularly those below the age of 12, often complied with adult determinations of suitability, as the following extract from family 10 shows:

Interviewer: Would you like to see [*Pulp Fiction*]?
Son, 7:   No=

| Daughter,15: | Yeah, I would. I'd like to see it, yeah. |
| Son, 7: | If my mum said it was okay to see it, I would, but I'm not really sure. But I don't know if I want to go and see it because I haven't seen clips of it. |

Similarly for family 9:

Interviewer:	Have the children seen it [*Pulp Fiction*]?
Mother:	No, wouldn't be allowed.
Interviewer:	Have you heard of it before?
Son, 11:	Yeah I heard of it...I don't know about seeing it, my dad says it's quite funny...
Interviewer:	Would you like to see it?
Son, 11:	No, not really. Too young.

In light of these observations it is necessary to recognise that the explanatory value of the forbidden fruit hypothesis applies to a limited number of contexts. A key ingredient is the idea of peer relationships which are founded upon respect borne out of the degree to which a child is able to subvert adult authority. Central to the hypothesis is an assumption about the nature of children's peer relations. However, younger children, perhaps below the age of 12, appear more inclined to invest in relationships with their parents as opposed to their peer group (Coleman and Hendry, 1990). As such, they are less likely to fulfil the role expected by the 'forbidden fruit hypothesis' outlined above.

The occurrence of "under-age" viewing appears to be so extensive that this fact surely diminishes the positive social status of subversion. It moves from being a special act of defiance to being a common-place. The forbidden fruit hypothesis only applies to specific film texts which have developed a reputation above and beyond their age-restricted classification (like *Crash*, *Natural Born Killers* or *Pulp Fiction*). Watching these films conveys greater kudos to the "under-age" viewer by virtue of the controversy surrounding their release.

Film related discussion is recognised by some parents as a means by which children can be encouraged to become discriminating viewers in their own right. Parents who mentioned this aspect of mediation believe that children have the potential to be discriminating

viewers, if only after receiving guidance from adults. The father from family 9 was especially keen to make this point:

Father:	We do, sometimes we talk about=
Son, 11:	You do, dad. You say what's going to happen...
Father:	Yeah but sometimes I say...what's the plot? Tell me what's happening, who the characters are...So that he can actually understand what it is that he's watching. There are times when you know because the theme which runs through most American, murder mystery things they are exactly the same. That you know something's going to happen next. So he is able to discern good TV, or good viewing from bad viewing. And not waste his time watching rubbish.
Interviewer:	Who initiates these discussions?
Father:	Normally [laughs] it's done by me. Normally it's done by me, yeah.

The father describes how he draws attention to the genre conventions of 'American murder mystery' films, enabling his son to anticipate what will happen during play-back. It is unclear how this provides a basis for discrimination between 'good TV' and 'bad viewing', but the father believes that, at least in principle, his eleven year old son is able to make such discriminant judgements of his own accord. The potential for children to develop critical viewing skills to enlighten and enrich their viewing experiences finds support from many of the parents interviewed. The question remains: to what extent do these skills develop without explicit adult input? Buckingham's (1996) recent work on children's emotional responses to the media would suggest that many of the critical skills favoured by parents and educators may well develop independently of direct adult intervention, in the form of basic "literacy" skills forged in the process of viewing over time.

Regulation by children

The idea that children can contribute to home-based regulation as responsible agents in their own right has been neglected in the research literature, which has tended to examine parental practices alone. Not only does this idea go against the received wisdom that *only* responsible adults can properly regulate children's viewing (see Chapter Four), it also demands a concession that children can be responsible for care-giving in the home. As Pilcher (1995) makes clear in her review of recent writings on childhood in modern Britain, the category of childhood is defined by its dependency on adult care-giving. Accordingly,

any notion of childhood responsibility is oxymoronic. Yet as the previous section has begun to show, children of various ages are able to make their own decisions about the suitability of their viewing habits. It follows, therefore, that they are also able to make such judgements about the viewing habits of their siblings and peers.

Evidence of children operating controls over their sibling's viewing came out of a number of the family case study interviews. For example, on one occasion the son from family 9 (who is 11) asserted his authority over his younger sister's viewing in the presence of a baby-sitter:

Mother: And [son, 11]'s done it [switched TV over] to [daughter, 5], as
              well.
Interviewer: Can you remember particular examples?
Mother: Erm, when was it? What did you switch over...When a friend was
              baby-sitting...She told me they was up late and they were watching
              something on the TV and...it must have been a film, because [son, 11]
              switched over and said this bit's not suitable...It just got a bit sexy and
              he turned it over! [laughs].

The boy may have wanted to change channels in order to avoid his own embarrassment, but the fact is that his intervention was accepted by the baby-sitter.

The son from family 8, who enjoys 'action' films on video, often shows consideration towards his younger sister's sensibilities, as the father describes below:

Father: [Daughter, 9] would get scared by it, and [son, 13]'s quite sympathetic
              to it. For example last week he watched that *Total Recall*, and he was
              watching it when he came in at night and [daughter, 9] walked into the
              room and got all scared...He watched when she'd gone out.

One final example is included from family 10. The eldest son (14) enjoys rap music videos, but recognises that it is not always suitable viewing (and listening) for his younger brothers (7 and 5):

Son, 7:   Yeah he doesn't always [switch it off], sometimes he gets carried away,
              but if he knows I'm there, he'll either say [son,7] do you mind going
              out please, or he'll turn it off and he'll go out himself.

Interviewer: And do you listen to what he says?
Mother: Yeah, that's a good question.
Son, 7:   Well, not all the time, I'm going to be honest with you here, not all the time.

It is unlikely that children are always altruistic in their efforts to protect younger siblings in the ways described above. Just as with adults, older children may prefer to watch videos alone, without the distraction or possible embarrassment of having a younger child in the room at the same time. The point, however, is that children within the family home are not simply in receipt of adult guidance over their viewing; in many circumstances they can exercise their own authority in this regard.

5.6 Socio-demographic "predictor" variables

Aside from trying to determine the extent of home-based regulation, previous research has attempted to identify the relative importance of socio-demographic variables in structuring patterns of home-based regulation (Gross and Walsh, 1980; Kim *et al*, 1988; Lin and Atkin, 1989). The socio-demographic categories investigated in this way are discussed below as they relate to the family case study work, beginning with gender.

Gender

The previous chapter demonstrated that the prevailing model of parenting implicit (sometimes made explicit) within institutional discourse is structured around the idea of the vigilant, ever present and responsible mother in the home. Prior to the 1970s, this assumption underpinned research into home-based regulation; so much so that early studies (Hess and Goldman, 1962 and Barcus, 1969) are based on interviews with mothers and not fathers.

However, the case study work suggests that it is often the father (in dual-parent households) who makes the viewing decisions in the home, either by choosing the video to rent at the point of supply (Gray, 1992), or else by applying their knowledge of films to the decision-making process (see Chapter Six). Mothers, who tend to express greater concern

about their children's viewing habits than fathers (Gunter and McAleer, 1997), frequently defer to their male partner's judgement in these circumstances. The reason given is that mothers take less interest in video viewing than fathers. In a number of families, mothers voluntarily excluded themselves from family viewing because their tastes were not the same as their family's, and they were not as interested in watching films on video as other members of the family (this was the case in families 1, 5 and 10- see Appendix I).

This is not to suggest that mothers play a marginal role in determining viewing behaviour in the home. It was often mothers and not fathers, in dual parent households, who enforce children's bed-times and other temporal controls over children's viewing. This indicates the existence of a gendered division of labour under-pinning home-based regulation, with fathers assuming responsibility for content-based decisions, while mothers are responsible for temporal controls.

Mohr (1979) has suggested that 'parental guidance may differ for boys and girls' (p.219) although he fails to say what form such differences take, or even why this should be the case. However, there was evidence from the family case study interviews that parents perceive differences between the genders, and this affects patterns of home-based regulation. For example, the mother from family 7 suggests that girls mature earlier than boys, and so are better able to 'look after themselves' at a younger age:

Mother: Gender obviously does come into it, erm. I think sometimes boys are
            maybe less able to look after themselves at eleven than perhaps girls are.
            The girls are very, very strong. The group of girls that we have are very
            strong. Very mature, for eleven year olds.

This view is widely held, and finds endorsement in the research literature (Coleman, 1990). As the assessment of children's "maturity" is used in the determination of suitability (see Chapter Six), this may lead to different regimes being employed in the control of male and female viewing habits.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to determine from the present sample the importance of gender in this way, as other factors, like age, play a more conspicuous role in determining patterns of home-based regulation. As the sample does not contain any families with brothers and sisters of similar ages, it is impossible to assess the importance of gender separated from age.

Chapter Six highlights those areas where gender is a factor in patterns of viewing behaviour. The first concerns access to technology in the bedroom. Boys are more likely to possess a television and VCR in their bedroom than girls. As previously stated, this may mean that boys have greater opportunity for lone viewing, away from parental supervision. However, according to the family case study interviews, it appears unlikely that access to technology in the bedroom necessarily leads to more lone viewing.

These observations about gender have two provisos. First, the identification of gendered tastes may not accord with traditional assumptions about those tastes. Chapter Three shows that, as expected, a greater proportion of girls claimed to enjoy 'romance' films on video. Despite this, a larger proportion of girls than boys prefer 'horror' films- a finding which goes against the traditional view of 'horror' viewing as a male, adolescent predilection (Roe, 1981). Second, it is important to recognise that as well as differences between genders there are differences within these groups. Returning to genre preferences, the group of girls sampled were polarised between those who enjoy 'horror' films, and those who actively dislike it. This disparity of tastes was greater for girls than for boys, and suggests that gender has limitations as a useful "predictor variable" of taste if differences within gender categories are ignored in favour of examining differences between the two groups.

Employment and "class"

The literature reported in Chapter Two has provided mixed findings about the relationship between patterns of home-based regulation and "class". Many of the texts examined in Chapter Four imply that "responsible" parenting is more likely to be associated with parents in professional, white collar employment (the responsible "middle-class"), although previous research has shown that there is actually very little difference between viewing controls employed across the socio-economic spectrum (Lin and Atkin, 1989; Buckingham, 1996).

Despite this apparent conformity, certain differences in emphasis can be observed in the accounts provided by the parents interviewed in the present study. These differences can be loosely divided according to employment status, although the discussion below is only tentative given the small sample size and inductive nature of the data analysis.

There was a tendency for parents in professional and white collar occupations (from the present sample: librarian, local government officer, office manager, secretary, structural engineer, teacher) to worry more about the displacement effects of video viewing (and viewing in general). These include the concern that time spent watching television/video is not spent reading or doing school work. These parents were also more likely to admit to initiating programmes of activity away from television set. For example, the father from family 8 self-consciously ascribes this tendency to their "middle-class" status:

Father: I mean we certainly don't push them if they don't want to. I mean if
             [daughter, 9] didn't want to go to ballet, she wouldn't. She can quite
             easily say she doesn't want to go, and she doesn't have to go. But, you
             know, I guess we as middle-class parents, or whatever, you know=
Mother: Middle-class! [laughs]
Father: You know [laughs] we feel they should do things and get enrichment
             from all different things.

There was also a tendency for these parents to refer to their concerns over the "quality" of videos, with reference to both their production values and the themes explored in them. This point has already been discussed in the previous section, but the linkage between employment and attitudes in this area is worth further consideration. The parents who are

teachers by profession (the mothers from families 5 and 7, and the mother and father from family 8) all discussed the educative potential of children's viewing, stressing their concern for children (their own and those they teach) to be encouraged to become discriminating viewers. They were also more likely than other parents to identify the deleterious effects of viewing, supporting their assertions with classroom anecdotes (children who are tired in class as a result of late night viewing, who do not concentrate, who relate inappropriate stories in class, who are violent in the playground and so on). This extract from family 5 provides an example. The mother is a nursery teacher:

Mother: [Viewing can be 'bad'] because they're too young...They're too young to understand it, and to see too much violence. Even too much sex is not, none of that is really good for them. Because they get it out of context. You know, you get three year olds saying, 'oh, you're sexing that person up!' and you think, what're you talking about? But they must have heard of that on the TV, they maybe have heard of it at home. But that's not appropriate language for three year olds.

Employment based initiatives can also engender certain attitudes in the home. For example, the father from family 7, who is an office manager of the London Fire Brigade, referred to his employer's anti-sexist and anti-racist policy in the work-place. He has attempted to extend the initiative to his home, encouraging discussion with his children about sexism and racism in what they watch, with some degree of success according to his own account.

Employment status appears to bear little relationship to the level of concern over possible imitative effects of video viewing on parents' own children. As previously mentioned, none of the parents interviewed expressed any concern that their *own* children might be prompted to imitate what they see on video. In addition, "under-age" viewing appears to be as likely to occur (whether sanctioned, or not, by parents) in households with parents in professional/white collar occupations as those with parents in semi/unskilled blue collar employment.

Experience derived from employment also appeared to inform the attitudes of parents in semi/unskilled occupations. For example, the mother from family 2 is a school cleaner,

who has daily contact, like the teachers described above, with children. This contact has informed her attitude towards the potential negative effects of viewing, as she describes below:

Mother: Yeah, when they're younger- primary school age I think that's up to
            parents. Cos I work in a primary school as well, and like, even though
            it's children's programmes they're watching, like *Power Rangers*, kids
            go mad with it. They are fly-kicking each other in the head in the chest,
            and it's really quite dangerous. But, erm, they think it's good cos that's
            what they're doing on the telly. At a younger age I think they do. When
            I hear of what- cos I work in a primary school- I hear from the children
            what they've watched, and they're as young as 7 and 8. And they've
            been up later than me watching television. Yeah, at that age they
            shouldn't be up watching telly.

There is one final piece of evidence about the way in which employment impinges upon patterns of home based regulation. Parents in occupations with long working hours (whether they are professional or semi/unskilled workers) appear to have less direct participation in home-based regulation because they are either physically absent from the home for long periods of time and/or they are disinclined to intervene due to tiredness. The father from family 1, who is a dustman and works very early in the morning, complained at being unable to stay awake during videos played in the evening, while the father from family 5 (an electrician) spends long periods away which means he is often absent from the decision-making process at home:

Mother: The two [son and daughter] of them have spent much more time with me
            because [father's] not been around with working, so the two of us, well
            the three of us, have spent much more time together.

Ethnic and cultural identity

All of the families spoke English as their first language at home, so there was no means of determining how this aspect of family life might find expression in patterns of home-based regulation. Similarly, the families are all nuclear, not extended, so generational variations in cultural values cannot be examined as they might apply to home-based regulation (all of the parents and children interviewed were born in the UK).

Cultural values associated with religion were mentioned in several of the interviews, although none of the parents who professed a particular religious affiliation claimed that this had a direct impact on their attitudes towards their children's viewing habits. The father from family 9 claimed to hold Christian values from his upbringing, although he is no longer a Christian:

Father: As a child, my viewing was really restricted, but that was through religious reasons rather than...My parents were very into morality so they...used to curtail TV, because they thought it influenced the behaviour of people, and obviously didn't want us to be exposed to anything that the television may have to offer. Which is a view that I still hold, quite strongly. I believe that, not that television influences, but it gives you this pre-conception of values. I mean a lot of values that are on that are false, a lot of people assume them to be true values...

Interviewer: Do you share the same religious convictions?

Father: Oh no, I don't! [laughs]. No, I don't. But I believe in those types of values.

The families all had tastes for mainstream English language films, predominantly US and British in origin. There was, however, evidence of an underlying cultural nationalism when discussing "American" films. Certain films, notably those depicting black American gang life (examples include *Menace II Society*, *Boys 'n' the Hood* and *New Jack City*) were identified as examples of American cultural products deemed inappropriate for British audiences. This idea is suffused with qualitative judgements about the importation of American vernacular, 'respectable fears' (Pearson, 1983) about the spread of "American-style" street violence to Britain, and the denigration of "black" films.

As Barker (1984a) argues, there is a long pedigree of anti-American sentiment in British cultural discourse. Staples (1997) has also identified a protectionist stance in such discourse, made manifest in 1925 with the re-wording of inter-titles in US films because they contained too many "Americanisms". Such sentiments have taken on new forms in relation to films like *Menace II Society* , drawing sustenance from discourses of racial difference. This is illustrated in the following extract from family 4:

Daughter, 15: I think they [*Menace II Society* etc] influence a certain age-group of black...men. But, erm, at the same time I think because black men don't

	really get a chance...as much, I don't think, and...not in life, just the way society treats them, I think, that's my personal view...
Mother:	Yeah, I think it's a shame that there isn't more of a...homegrown black culture in this country, because most of the black teenage culture is imported from the States, which I think is a very different society from ours. And it would be nice to see some home-grown black culture, rather than just getting it from the States. I mean I think things are getting slightly better, and there's always a lot more black...teenagers in programmes aimed for kids. And they're much better, they're real people, unlike they were five or ten years ago- cardboard cut-outs. But I think it's a sha- I think there's a gap in the entertainment market for...British teen-agers as opposed to American. And that's one thing that I'm quite concerned about...Because I think their society is very different to ours.
Daughter, 15:	And they try and, I mean boys that I know- black boys, they try to take on that culture, which is...er...me and [black female friend] talk about it quite a lot, you know because, for instance there was a boy shot in a club that [black female friend] has been to recently, shot and killed, and that was because a man stepped on his coat or something, and that actually happend...

The daughter is tentative in her claims, singling out 'certain aged black men' as those at risk of influence from such films, whilst deflecting criticism away from this group by citing their subordinate position in society as a *reason* for such patterns of putative influence. This shows an awareness on one level of the sensitivity of the claims she is making, despite their racist overtones (as if to legitimate such a viewpoint, the daughter mentions her conversations with a close black female friend). This is an interesting example of the logic of displacement which has been found to characterise talk about media effects (Barratt 1997; Buckingham, 1996; Wood, 1993); the displacement of negative effects onto other groups, in this case 'certain aged black men'.

The black mother from family 3 expresses her concern about such films in less naive terms, although they still bear witness to an anti-American sentiment:

Interviewer:	Okay, but are there times that you wish [daughter, 14] would not watch a particular film?
Mother:	Erm...there's...that horrible one. Was it *Boyz 'n the Hood*?
Daughter, 14:	Hhmm. *Menace II Society*...Yeah.
Mother:	Yeah, that sort of thing.
Daughter, 14:	But why [laughs].
Mother:	It was rubbish! It was too violent cos it was too real. Cos apparently that sort of thing does happen.
Daughter, 14:	So you'd rather keep me away from the real stuff=

Mother: But there again, it's in America, so...but then again. But violence, that
             sort of thing, may happen here. You're going to be 30 or 40, that's how
             I see it.

Thus, issues of nation-hood (British versus American national identities), racial identity
(black versus white), cultural superiority (home-grown versus imported) and 'respectable
fears' about increases in street violence (middle- versus working/under-class) all come
together in these examples, pointing to the confluence of a number of factors in the
determination of attitudes towards films identified as problematic. The factors serve to de-
mark "them" (as by turns "vulnerable", "irresponsible" and "dangerous") and "us" ("safe",
"responsible" and "law-abiding"); this is an extension of the logic of displacement which,
as mentioned previously, characterises parents' talk about the likely effects of media.

Age and birth order

The most consistent finding from previous research is that the gross amount of regulation
decreases as children get older. The belief that children develop competencies as they age
(part of the maturation process discussed in the next chapter) is pervasive, and forms the
basis of the present classification system which accords greater freedoms to young
consumers as they age.

This trend is broadly supported by the family case study work, although it is not the case
that this decline in the amount of regulation follows an even, downward path. For one
thing, the amount of regulation increases as children move from being highly dependent
infants (who are unable to initiate their own viewing behaviour for themselves) to more
independent toddlers into middle-childhood. The demands of infants for material on video
deemed 'unsuitable' by adults is likely to be minimal, requiring little overt control by
parents.

The period of middle childhood (3-9) possesses new dilemmas for parents, who are aware
of children's increased curiosity about the world, but worry about how much information

165

to impart to them (Goodnow and Collins, 1994). This is a period of the greatest awareness and regulation of children's viewing habits (Allerton, 1995), mainly due to concerns that children below the age of ten are unable, or less able, to distinguish between reality and make-believe on-screen. This testifies to their vulnerability to distress (and/or imitative effects) caused by viewing.

After this period, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood become more blurred. Children move into secondary school and come into contact with much older pupils, opening horizons to extended peer relations. Parents begin to relinquish control over their offspring in order to accommodate their developing maturity, leading to a re-negotiation of their respective roles and responsibilities in the home (Finch and Mason, 1993). The child's peer group becomes increasingly important outside of the home (Coleman, 1990). Furthermore, the issue of modality is less of a consideration, as young teenagers are believed to be better able to judge the difference between reality and make-believe. Where parents were previously concerned with un-naturalistic portrayals of "violence", in animation for example, the target of concern becomes real, or naturalistic "violence" which can cause distress to older children better able to understand its impact and consequences (Buckingham, 1996).

Parents also face a dilemma over controlling the viewing habits of older children. For primary school children, it is accepted that the parental role is protective, and parents feel justified if they err on the side of caution in their judgements. However, as Allerton (1995) notes, parents of older children have to decide whether to maintain a protectionist stance, which is in danger of obscuring the realities of adult life from children who are expected to become adults, or to begin to relinquish control, and face the possibility of causing them undue distress. The following extract from family 3 demonstrates this dilemma, as the mother discusses her ambivalence towards *Menace II Society*:

Interviewer: So it may be a problem if things are realistic.
Mother: Yeah, but then again, they frighten her, but then again she might find it
             exciting. You don't know, do you?

166

Interviewer: Are you then concerned that [daughter, 14] might be frightened by
                some things?
Mother: For her own good...Like say drugs or, you know, let it frighten her.

On the one hand the mother is concerned that her daughter might be unduly distressed by
the realism of the violence in *Menace II Society*. On the other, she wants her daughter to be
frightened by the representation of drug-use in the film, as part of her preparation for the
future.

Thus over the period that a child is present in the family home, parents' concerns and
subsequent actions change as the child ages, not only in the amount of regulation (which
usually peaks in middle-childhood) but also in the form that it takes.

In addition to the age of a child, the presence of siblings and birth order is an important
factor in many homes. For example, the mother from family 7 recognises that she treated
her daughter (the second born child) more leniently than her first born son, because she
was better able to judge suitability as a result of her earlier experience looking after her son:

Mother: I think even maybe more so, because it's your first born. You're that
                much more protective. So therefore you hold the reins maybe just a little
                bit tighter.

[...]
Mother: But I think we are more careful with [son, 14]- we were. [Daughter's,
                11] kind of following suit. I mean we'll now let [son, 14] will sit and
                watch and [daughter, 11] is just there, because she's=
Father: So maybe we weren't harder, it's just the fact that because it's been
                controlled in that fashion, [daughter, 11] has just followed on naturally=
Mother: Slipped into it=
Father: Yeah. I don't know.
Mother: But I think , you know, you are looking out all the time. *Thomas the
                Tank Engine*'s alright, but let's not have, whatever, you know. Whereas
                with [daughter, 11] you're much easier, you know. If [son's, 14]
                watching that...go ahead and watch it.

Size of family

There is little variation in the levels of regulation witnessed in the single- and dual-parent families interviewed here, although both single-parent households had older daughters, compared with the younger dual-parent families, making any comparison difficult.

It is possible that the quality of the relationship between mother and child is different in single-parent households due to the proximity and involvement of the child in the decision-making process at home, although again it is difficult to draw firm conclusions in this area because of the limited sample.

The importance of the number of children in household is also difficult to gauge from the present sample because most households had only one or two children. In the family with more than two children (family 10), the relative ages of the siblings was of more importance than their number. The presence of older and much younger children led to difficulties in planning family viewing (video selection was invariably constrained by the requirements of the youngest children). Gross and Walsh (1980) suggest that children from larger families tend to have less regulation of their viewing than those in smaller households. However, the parents in family 10 were able to delegate regulatory duties to the older children when they themselves were absent from the viewing situation.

Access to technology

The level of technology in the home did not appear important in determining patterns of home-based regulation of videos because most of the homes examined only have one VCR in a communal room. Homes with several television sets are not subject to any higher incidence of home-based regulation, contrary to the findings reported by Gross and Walsh (1980). Although several of the children in the families interviewed had a television in their bedrooms (one had a VCR as well), there was no evidence that lone video viewing was any more common than in those homes with fewer sets.

The presence of Sky satellite television did have some impact on patterns of video viewing in the home. Families 1 and 9 both had access to Sky (with a subscription to the film channels) and both reported a significant decline in their video viewing as a result. Time-shifting had become the most important function of the VCR in these homes, and the father from family 1 was keen to dispose of his extensive video collection which he felt was now redundant having subscribed to the Sky movie channel.

5.7 Concluding discussion

The literature review in Chapter Two pointed to a number of significant gaps in the body of work undertaken in the examination of home-based regulation. The present chapter goes some way towards addressing these lacunae, by offering a re-interpretation of the collective wisdom of this previous work in light of the qualitative findings of the family case study interviews. In some cases, the present study corroborates the findings of previous authors, confirming the trends they identified quantitatively with qualitative insights (for example, the relationship between children's ages and home-based regulation). In others, the conclusions drawn in previous work have been open to direct challenge by the interview data.

One of the problems of much previous work has been its mechanistic employment of social categories (like class, gender and race/ethnicity) in examining patterns of home-based regulation. This is at odds with the approach taken here which sees the accounts given during an interview as constitutive of a person's own social identity (Buckingham and Sefton Green, 1994). This approach resists the determinism common to previous research in the area, instead seeking to uncover the meaning of social categories, which are not 'pre-determined but [are] actively constructed in social relationships themselves' (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994; p.10). This "cultural studies" approach is both 'sceptical and self-reflexive', whereby interview data are not assumed to be 'transparent evidence' of social relations, but are 'a form of social action that needs to be related to the social contexts in which it is produced' (ibid.; p.10). This chapter has attempted to maintain a sceptical and

self-reflexive approach to data collection and analysis, and that is why each of the main social categories employed in previous research has been deconstructed in an attempt to understand their meaning to the families interviewed.

As a result, the present chapter provides sufficient evidence to challenge convenient and taken-for-granted assumptions about the determinants of patterns of home-based regulation. For example, the tenacious idea that there exists an identifiable and homogeneous group of "responsible" middle-class parents is undermined by the findings presented here. Such narrow conceptualisations of responsible parenting are not supported in the cases examined, as parents in professional and skilled occupations are just as likely to permit "under-age" viewing as those in unskilled or semi-skilled employment. This theme is developed in Chapter Seven, which compares the accounts of "parental responsibility" given by the parents interviewed here with those described in Chapter Four.

In accordance with what has been said above about the social context of interviews, it is important to recognise that the family case study work serves a variety of functions for participants. When parents were interviewed in the presence of their children, it was apparent that they frequently took the opportunity to verbalise, and thereby re-assert, many of the tacit understandings common to home-based regulation. Thus the interviews cannot be simplistically understood as a mechanism by which the researcher elicits uncontaminated information from the interviewees. Rather, the research situation actually affords an opportunity for family members to be conjoined in the act of identity negotiation, albeit in the presence of an "outsider" (Finch and Mason, 1994).

For example, the members of family 9 were interviewed all together at home, and the father frequently addressed his comments to the children when answering questions put by the researcher:

| Mother: | We've got loads and loads [of pre-recorded videos]. There are a couple just at the top that are out of reach. Cos they're not suitable just yet. Although [son] wouldn't= |
| Father: | Dream of going up there to= |

Mother: Wouldn't put them on.

Here the father's interjection serves two purposes. It establishes, for the benefit of the researcher, the idea that the father maintains certain rules regarding access to videos. Secondly, for the benefit of the son, the operation of these rules is emphatically recognised: not only is the son not expected to challenge parental authority, but the thought of subversion is not even expected to cross his mind. Later, the father again addresses his response, to a question from the researcher, to his son (with whom he maintains eye contact):

Interviewer: Because there are videos within reach of the kids, does this mean that
               it's okay for them to see them?
Father: No, because they ask before they put the video on.
Mother: They wouldn't put it on without asking. They can watch their own ones
               on their own, but if they want to watch one of the others, they'd ask.
               But they would normally be films that they wouldn't want to particularly
               watch anyway.

Thus, the interviews not only illuminated family relationships and home-based regulation but they were also constitutive of those relationships, instances of the ongoing negotiation of family roles. It is precisely through such parent/child interactions that boundaries are established around what is judged to be acceptable behaviour in the home, and the interview, far from being a simple account of such phenomena, is itself part of family negotiations (Finch and Mason, 1993).

The next chapter builds upon the insights afforded here, narrowing the focus onto the ways in which parents judge the suitability of videos for their children.

Chapter Six
Suitability

6.1 Introduction

The decision over whether or not a particular video is suitable for viewing by a child forms one component of home-based regulation, as the previous chapter has shown. As suggested by the findings reported, and those in Chapter Three, it is wrong to assume that parents simply base their decisions upon the BBFC classification. As the BBFC's own research has suggested, 'categories [are] viewed as useful information and advice- but no more than that. They are used as guidelines, allowing parents and teenagers...to apply their own judgements and knowledge of themselves and their family in order to regulate family viewing' (BBFC, 1993; p.16). It is this prerogative (parental discretion) which is preserved in the amended VRA (see Chapter Four).

Knowledge of the ways in which parents reach decisions about the suitability of videos is very limited, as the subject has been neglected in the research literature. This chapter will address the issue by providing a detailed examination of the decision-making process based upon the accounts given during the family case-study work.

6.2 The video cover exercise

The case-study interviews included an exercise designed to bring judgements of suitability to the fore-ground. Parents were presented with a selection of covers taken from the boxes of fourteen pre-recorded videos (*Mrs Doubtfire* [PG]; *Pulp Fiction* [18]; *Schindler's List* [15]; *Disclosure* [18]; *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* [18]; *Child's Play 3* [18]; *Junk Boy* [18]; *The Mask* [PG]; *Clockwork Orange* [N/A]; *Evil Dead II* [18]; *Silence of the Lambs* [18]; *Akira* [15]; *Dumb and Dumber* [12]; *Interview With a Vampire* [18]). They were then asked a series of questions to determine whether the parent(s) and child(ren) had heard of and/or seen the titles on video, television or at the cinema:

- Have the parent(s) seen the title? (on video; at the cinema; on TV).
  (*if yes...*) Did they enjoy it?
  (*if no...*) Have they heard of it before?
- Would they like to see the title?
- Have any of the children seen the title? (on video; at the cinema; on TV).
  (*if yes...*) Did they enjoy it?
  (*if no...*) Would they like to see it?

By providing concrete examples in this way, the exercise allows for the accounts given by different families to be compared with one another. This feature also enables the discussion to focus on specific viewing decisions, rather than to proceed in the abstract.

The exercise was designed with specific research questions about the decision-making process in mind. These were suggested by interviews with thirty-nine year-nine pupils prior to the family case-study work (see Chapter Five), and informed by existing research in the area. In addition to guiding the research design, these questions provide a framework for the inductive analysis. They have been used to guide the interpretation of the transcript material, providing a starting point for the inquiry into judgements of suitability. The nine questions are listed below, and then discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Content

1. Do parents judge the suitability of a video according to the presence of certain elements within it?

2. Does the presence of famous actors who may be familiar to, and popular with, "under-age" audiences positively influence judgements about the suitability of a video?

3. Does the degree of "realism" in the portrayal of specific elements ("violence", "sex" and so on) in a video influence the judgement of its suitability?

4. Are parents more likely to judge as suitable those titles which are thought to serve a positive educational purpose, even though they contain elements which may be deemed unsuitable in other contexts?

Content indicators

5. Do parents refer to the classification symbol as a guide to the likely contents of a video when judging its suitability?

6. Do parents draw upon other sources of information regarding the likely content and suitability of videos, in addition to the video classification symbol?

7. Does a knowledge of film genres inform parents' judgements of the suitability of videos?

8. Does adverse publicity for specific video titles have a negative impact upon parents' judgements of their suitability?

9. Does the critical acclaim of specific video titles have a positive impact upon parents' judgements of their suitability?

6.3 Suitability, content and context

The interviews confirm that the suitability of a video is indeed judged according to a number of factors. Such decisions are not arbitrary, and they are rarely guided by a single consideration. The classification symbol does play some role in the decision-making process, but it is by no means always central to it. A range of other sources are used when assessing the likely contents of a video prior to the judgement of suitability.

The discussion in this section covers two areas: the first deals with the variables that parents take into account when judging specific content. The scope of the discussion is then broadened to examine the indicators available to parents about the likely contents of a video.

Content

Of paramount concern to parents appears to be the presence of certain elements in a video, and these are organised into commonly occurring content categories like "sex", "violence" and "bad language". This study supports recent research for the Broadcasting Standards

Commission which found that "sex", "violence" and "bad language" are common concerns of parents (Millwood Hargrave, 1995). Other categories, like "drug use", "sexism", "racism" and "horror" also feature in discussion with parents, but are less frequently mentioned than the other three categories. This does not mean that they are thought to be less important- it is impossible to equate the potential "unsuitability" of "violence" and, say, "racism". It is more likely that "sex", "violence" and "bad language" are recognised as common terms used to distinguish between texts: these are the types of content which are frequently identified in public debates as "problematic" for young audiences (see Chapter Four). There is evidence, however, that this ranking of concerns is not matched in the general population. The BBFC found that their sample was more likely to identify "drug use" than both "sex" and "violence" as most offensive when asked to rank them (BBFC, 1993; p.7).

These broad content categories serve a general, sensitising purpose, allowing parents to organise videos into more manageable groups. Pigeon-holing content in this way forms an early stage in the process of determining suitability. Implicit at this stage in the decision-making process is the question: "does this video appear to contain elements which I feel are unsuitable for my child(ren)?".

The acceptability of elements organised into these content categories is conditional on the ways in which they are portrayed in a video. None of the parents interviewed said that the portrayal of "sex" and "violence" (etc) is always "unsuitable". These elements may be judged suitable themes, but they become unacceptable if they are represented in particular ways. In other words, a distinction is drawn between themes and their representation on-screen, collectively referred to here as "content". The following extract from family 4 illustrates this point:

Mother: ...cos I don't object to sex in itself, I don't object to violence in itself, and I don't really object to swearing in itself. It's the way those things are portrayed in certain films that's objectionable.

The video cover exercise was designed to examine which of the variables suggested by previous research become important in the evaluation of content. It was assumed that these are the variables which parents take into account when moving from a consideration of content in the abstract, according to the general content categories described above, to the specific: whether a particular video dealing with particular themes represented in particular ways is suitable for a particular child viewing under particular conditions and in particular circumstances.

First there is the issue of variability within the general content categories. Parents readily acknowledge that there are different ways of portraying themes, and these may be more or less acceptable as a result. The following exchange during the interview with family 8 shows that a distinction is drawn between "violence" which is "implied", "psychological" and "long term" and that which is more overt, obvious and "momentary". The former can cause distress to the children, and is therefore unsuitable, whereas the latter is less likely to have this same impact:

Interviewer:	Would you object [to son, 13, seeing *Silence of the Lambs*]?
Mother:	Yeah. I would object=
Father:	Yeah, in terms of psychological, yeah.
Mother:	Come on, he made flipping dresses out of women's skin!
Father:	I agree! I'm saying it's one of those films where the violence was all implied and it's more psychological rather than seeing violence, and I'd object because of that.
Mother:	What do you consider to be worse?
Father:	To be worse? What do you mean?
Mother:	The implied violence=
Father:	Yeah, I think implied violence is far worse in many respects. Because you've got to think about it, whereas I think when [son] watches *Last Action Hero* (15) and *Total Recall* (15), it's there, a play act, whereas this sort of stuff you've really got to think about...My main concern for [daughter] is that she watches things she will then have nightmares about=
Mother:	Yeah, it's more long term. I think it's these sorts of things they keep in store for ages and ages. The other stuff's kind of momentary.

It is also widely recognised that "violence" can even be portrayed in such a way as to make it "laughable", and therefore more acceptable. This is a point made in discussion with family 3 talking about *Child's Play 3*:

176

Mother: When she was younger we used to watch this.
Interviewer: On video?
Daughter, 14: I got a doll that looks just like that.
Mother: It was horrible, but it was laughable, wasn't it?
Daughter, 14: Yeah.
Mother: Did you find it funny or was you scared?
Daughter, 14: I didn't like 2, it was a load of rubbish, but 1 and 3 were brilliant.

Similar distinctions can be drawn between different portrayals of "sex", some of which are more suitable than others. This point was raised in discussion with family 5, talking about *Disclosure* which is compared with *9 1/2 Weeks*. The former title is judged to be more "suitable" for the daughter to watch, even though both videos are rated '18' for their sexual content:

Interviewer: And [daughter] saw it?
Daughter, 15: Yeah. I only saw half of it, though. Didn't watch it all.
Interviewer: Was that at the same time [as parents]?
Daughter, 15: Erm, after they watched it. I fell asleep half way through.
Mother: It was probably too in depth for you, was it?
Interviewer: Did you have any qualms about [daughter] seeing it?
Father: No, not really. Erm, if you understand the film itself, it wasn't like
               a....what was that film, er? *91/2 Weeks* or something like that. It was a
               role reversal, in the work place...

The distinctions that parents draw between the portrayal of elements within the categories of "sex" and "violence" are in part informed by the degree to which they are perceived as "realistic". Buckingham (1996) suggests that 'children's emotional responses [to audio-visual texts] appear to depend upon complex judgements about the degree of realism of the text' (p.213). Given that parents are predominantly concerned about the likelihood of distress caused to their children (see Chapter Five and Buckingham, 1996) this might explain why "realism" is an issue in the determination of suitability. The exercise included two animated feature films available on video (*Akira* [15] and *Junk Boy* [18]) to assess whether "violence" (in the former) and "sex" (in the latter) are considered more acceptable if animated rather than live-action.

The degree to which certain themes are represented in a realistic manner does appear to be a consideration, although it is not correct to assume that greater representational "realism" is automatically less acceptable to parents (the more realistic a portrayal, the more likely it is to cause distress). The issue is more complicated than this simple equation allows. For example, the parents in family 10 defended their decision to allow their youngest sons to watch a(n unnamed) Manga video on the basis that its "violence" was animated, and therefore unrealistic:

Mother: Now when we put on the Manga one, I think what actually took their attention was the action and the story-line about a nice kid, turns into some super-hero, I mean he's quite fierce looking, but the...action behind him is that he's a kid and he's...and that's what...got their attention. And then you see that yes, there is a lot of blood because there's slicing off people's heads and whatever, but having said that I don't think it's...it wasn't any...You could see it but, because I can watch it now if it was=

Father: Well it's not real=

Mother: I know it's not real, but I was going to say that because it's still in cartoon form, I know it's still violent, but because it's still in cartoon form, then they don't seem too bothered by it.

In a similar fashion, the mother from family 2 was happy for her daughter to watch *Child's Play 3* because it is a 'rubbish' horror film as the action is 'all play':

Mother: My sister watched it and she said it was rubbish [laughs].
Interviewer: Would you like to see it?
Mother: No [laughs].
Interviewer: Do you know if [daughter's-14] seen it?
Mother: I don't think so.
Interviewer: Do you know if she'd like to see it?
Mother: Probably.
Interviewer: Would you mind?
Mother: I don't think so. My sister says it's rubbish, so it can't be that bad, even though it's an 18.
Interviewer: So if it's a bad film then it's not such a worry?
Mother: Yeah, it's obvious it's all play.
Interviewer: Make-believe?
Mother: Yeah [laughs].

Yet as mentioned previously, a lack of realism in the portrayal of elements like "sex" and "violence" is not always a guarantee of their acceptability to parents. Animated forms, which are more commonly associated with children's entertainment, can influence parents'

judgements if they feel that 'unsuitable' content is made more attractive and palatable to "under-age" viewers. This appears to be particularly the case for sexual material, as the mother from family 10 makes clear in her dismissal of *Junk Boy*:

Interviewer:	Does the fact that it's animated make any difference?
Mother:	Er, I don't want to contradict myself about what I said about the thingy! [laughs]. I think if anything it probably makes it worse.

This point is reinforced in the following excerpt from the interview with family 7:

Interviewer:	Would you have objections [to your children watching *Junk Boy*]?
Mother:	Yes I would have to vet it. I wouldn't want [son] to see it...I'd need to know.
Father:	Coming at it from a boy's angle, they might think it harmless=
Mother:	'Junk Boy'=
Father:	Well that's right, so it'll be a bit like the=
Mother:	But we don't know do we?
Father:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	Does the fact that it's animated play any role in your decision?
Mother:	No, but it will to the kids.
Father:	Yeah, I think it would to the kids...It seems like a cartoon version of one of these lampoon type things...So really you don't know how accurate...whether it goes further, whether it's graphic or not=
Mother:	You've no idea.
Father:	It's the subject matter that makes it 18 rather than the content.

The fact that the 'sex' in *Junk Boy* is animated was not a consideration for the parents in family 8. Their judgement of its suitability was based on the same criteria as for *Disclosure*:

Interviewer:	Would you mind if [son] watched [Junk Boy]?
Mother:	Yeah. I would.
[...]	
Father:	But we're quite happy for him to watch the other sort of Manga stuff. And has watched it=
Mother:	Yeah.
Interviewer:	Does the fact that it's a cartoon make any difference to your judgement of suitability?
Mother:	Hhmmm...no, not for me. I mean I've treated that in the same way I treated *Disclosure* really.

Clearly, the issue of "realism" can mean different things to different parents, and this is not simply related to the age of the child(ren) in question. One thing is certain- the portrayal of

"sex" in animated form does not necessarily diminish its potential "unsuitability" for young audiences.

A similar variation in opinion also emerged for the issue of "violence". According to many of the parents interviewed, animated violence is more acceptable, because it is perceived as "unrealistic". For example, the 13 year old son from family 8 enjoyed *Akira*, and was unperturbed by its "violence" because

Mother: ...he appreciated it on the animation level. So he didn't, when we were talking about it, he didn't get frightened at the same things I was scared of. He just thought oh, the graphics are really good and...
Interviewer: Is that a common response from [son]?
Mother: Yeah, he does that. Maybe he's got a really good grip on what's real and what's not real=

However, the boy's uncle (from family 9) would not allow his own 11 year old son to watch *Akira* because of the 'levels of violence in it', despite the fact that it is animated.

As with the issue of "sex" in *Junk Boy*, "bad language" in *Akira* was felt to be particularly unsuitable because it occurs in an animated film which appeals to younger audiences, a point raised in discussion with family 10:

Interviewer: Did any of the children see [*Akira*]?
Daughter, 15:   I saw it=
Father: Oh did you? I was about to say I think [son's- 14] seen it...I mean for this it's not so much the violence, it's the language I don't like...it is very...For me there is no need for it...I just think, you know...And something like that was said right at the very beginning, and I said forget it, that's it...Besides, it's a cartoon.

This raises the issue of the educative potential of videos. The father quoted above is aware that his younger children might learn to use "bad language" as a result of watching *Akira*. The recognition that video entertainment has the potential to teach was widespread, and was a factor in decisions about suitability. The above example is at one end of the spectrum, a version of social learning theory advanced by Albert Bandura (1973). Parents are also aware of the ability of videos to impart knowledge about the world. The exercise contained

180

Schindler's List (15) in order to find out whether potentially unsuitable themes ("violence") are judged more acceptable to parents if they are presented in an educational context. *Schindler's List* (15) was chosen because it contains graphic portrayals of "violence" (hence the '15' certificate), while at the same time being recognised as a legitimate historical account of the events it represents (the video has been widely screened in schools as part of the history syllabus covering the Second World War).

None of the parents interviewed objected in principle to allowing their children (over seven) to watch *Schindler's List* (the exception was for very young children in families 9 and 10, where the subject matter was felt to be too complicated and uninteresting for younger children). What might be potentially unacceptable (the short term distress caused by the graphic portrayals of Nazi atrocities) was out-weighed by the potential value of learning about the Holocaust. However, the father in family 10 suggested pre-screening *Schindler's List* before making a decision about its suitability:

Interviewer:	Would you mind if the kids saw it?
Mother:	No, I wouldn't mind.
Son, 7:	Even me?
Mother:	Yeah. You, er=
Father:	I don't know, I'd probably have to watch it. Cos I went to the Auschwitz exhibition, and that really did upset me...I mean that's not something I'd take my kids to, and that was open to kids. I think I'd have to watch it....If it does go into it, say like the gassings, and you actually did see it, I'd see, I'm not sure. If people say it's a true account, then fair enough, but I don't think it's something the kids need to know till later on when they're, like, say 13 or 14, when they know more about it from school...

In this context, suitability is conditional on the child's level of understanding of "adult" themes, like genocide; an understanding that develops through the formal education system. The theme of maturity and schooling is dealt with at length, later in this chapter.

The discussion in this section has thus far concentrated on the issue of content. Yet it emerged during the interviews that the suitability of content is often judged according to the conditions and circumstances under which a video is to be viewed. Parents appear to make

strategic decisions about the suitability of a video on the basis of factors which are related to the viewing context. For example, the previous chapter discussed the issue of co-viewing, and it was reported that many of the parents felt that potentially "unsuitable" material is rendered more acceptable if a child watches the video in question with their parent(s).

There are other circumstances where such considerations are taken into account. The mother from family 2 pointed out that she felt *Disclosure* to be suitable viewing for her 14 year old daughter if she viewed it alone rather than in the company of her friends. The mother assumed that the presence of her daughter's friends might trivialise the subject matter at the expense of the deeper issues raised by the film's treatment of sexual harassment in the work-place:

Interviewer:	Do you know if [daughter's] seen [*Disclosure*]?
Mother:	No, she hasn't seen it.
Interviewer:	Do you know if she'd like to see it?
Mother:	I don't think so. She hasn't mentioned that one to me.
Interviewer:	And would you mind her watching it?
Mother:	I'd let her watch it, but I don't think I'd like it. But I would let her. I'd let her watch it on her own, but not with all her mates, I wouldn't. They'd be silly.

The mother's judgement is informed by her knowledge (whether fair or otherwise) of her daughter's peer relations. Thus, the determination of suitability is not simply a matter of assessing the contents of videos: parents must also take account of the under-age audience, based upon an assessment of their likely response to the video in question.

Another example of the role played by circumstantial factors emerged in discussion with family 8, whose two children (13 and 9) had been allowed to watch *Interview With A Vampire* on satellite television while on holiday in Spain. According to the father, they would not have been allowed to watch the film which is rated '18', but this was a special circumstance, part of the relaxation of family rules which go with being away from home on holiday:

Mother:	We saw [*Interview With A Vampire*] [laughs] with everybody, on holiday in Spain=
Father:	In Majorca, yeah.
Mother:	And we let them watch it!
Interviewer:	On satellite?
Father:	Yeah, Sky.
Mother:	There was too much sangria that night! [laughs].
Father:	No we let them watch it, but as it got later they went to bed. Not because it was the film that was on, but because it was a certain time. So if the film had been on a bit earlier we would have let them watch all of it.
Mother:	I think I probably, yeah...because I hadn't watched it, but I knew I wanted to watch it and they were up [laughs] you know you get caught in a trap- oh you're on holiday and we can't go to bed sort of thing=
Father:	So they watched the first half=
Mother:	So they watched...yeah. Quite a bit of it, and then they went off to bed, and it was only...Mind you they could have watched it because there was only one scene I wasn't, I was worried about, and that was with the prostitutes, where I didn't know what was going to happen next. But there was no sort of sex, just, not even that much gore, really.

The presence of popular stars (Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, Christian Slater) in the film was also a factor in this decision. As previously mentioned in Chapter Four, the BBFC now assess the likelihood that an age-restricted film on video will appeal to "under-age" audiences, and one indicator used is the presence of actors popular with children and young people (Bragg and Grahame, 1997). There were few explicit references to this factor in deliberations over suitability, although parents recognise that their children are often attracted to films on video with favoured stars. The daughter in family 1 claimed to have seen *Interview With a Vampire*, and the father assumes that its appeal is down to the presence of Brad Pitt (the daughter is not a "horror" fan):

Father:	I wouldn't actually like her to see *Interview With a Vampire*, but she obviously did.
Mother:	Well no, I wouldn't like her to see that. What did you think of that?
Daugter, 14:	Brilliant.
Mother:	Really- was it scary?
Father:	Was that because Brad Pitt was in it though?
Daughter, 14:	[affirmative nod- laughs].

Drawing together these observations about content and context, it is clear that parents base their decisions about the suitability of videos on a large number of variables which differ from video to video, and across viewing contexts. Rather than uncovering an underlying

logic to parental decision-making, this analysis highlights the contingent, indeterminate and tentative nature of suitability judgement formation. As Buckingham (1996) reports, 'the grounds for regulation and the strategies that parents use vary considerably; and it remains difficult to trace these variations to predictable social factors' (p.298).

This conclusion demands a re-evaluation of the concept of parental responsibility, as it is plainly nonsensical to measure responsibility in terms of adherence to the BBFC classification system, or even to presume that there exists a universally agreed formula for determining the suitability of videos for young people. Any account of responsibility must make reference to the complex process of suitability judgements which occur in the home. This line of discussion is developed in the next chapter. The rest of the present chapter examines the ways in which parents learn about the contents of a video in order to make the kinds of judgements described above.

Content indicators

The video classification system is in part designed to offer parents a guide to the contents of videos (BBFC, 1993). During the interviews, parents were encouraged to discuss the classification of the videos presented to them in the exercise, in order to find out what role it plays in their decision-making. Another area of interest was broached, in light of Buckingham's (1996) recommendation to review age-restricted categories because '[m]ost parents seem to agree that by the time they reach thirteen...children should be free to make their own decisions about what they watch' (p.315). Implicit within the exercise was the question: are video classifications more useful to parents of children below the age of thirteen?

All of the parents interviewed agreed that the classification system plays some role in their decision-making process. Its primary function is to provide a thumb-nail sketch of a video's contents- a guideline- a point made explicit by the mother from family 4:

Mother: Well no, it's just a guideline, right. I'd say there are some 18s that I wouldn't hire, erm, and if they said 15 on them then I might hire them. But it's only a guideline=

More specifically, the system alerts parents to the presence of potentially unsuitable content in a video, rather than offering positive content advice. This point was made during the interview with family 7:

Interviewer: What do you think about the classification system?
Father: Well, I think it's a good guide, isn't it? At least it gives you an idea of what to be wary of=
Mother: Yeah.
Father: And as I say, it doesn't worry me if [son, 14] goes for something that's...er...above that, and wants me to hire it for him as long as I know what the subject matter is. But at least it tells me that there's a warning there, and I should think about it.

Because parents do not always heed the advice about the suitability of a video in terms of chronological age given by the classification symbol, the system derives its value from the relationship between the symbols: it is a scale. A 'PG' may not be fully understood as 'parental guidance' (see BBFC, 1993 and Barratt, 1997), but it is widely understood to contain more 'unsuitable' material than a 'U'. Similarly, it is recognised that there is a qualitative and quantitative change in content the higher the classification. Certain 'adult' themes will be dealt with in higher certificated videos than in lower ones, and the portrayal of these will increase in frequency in higher classifications.

For example, the mother from family 4 allows her daughter (15) to watch '18' rated videos, but she still refers to the classification symbol, as much for her own benefit as for her daughter's:

Interviewer: What information does [the system] convey to you?
Mother: Erm, if you read the plot, and it's a 15, then I feel fairly safe about getting it. If it's an 18, I might think twice. But more, partly because I might not enjoy it myself as much as, particularly when it's, you know certain elements...
Interviewer: What elements are you not particularly keen on?
Mother: Erm...sex and violence [laughs]. Because I think quite often in a lot of the 18 films there's a sort of formula sex and a formula violence. It's almost like if they don't put them in...there's no film.

All of the parents interviewed believed that they have the right to use their own judgement when deciding the suitability of a video- a prerogative which is enshrined in the amended VRA. The mother from family 1 makes this point explicit:

Interviewer: So do you think that the system is mainly useful for parents?
Mother: ...Mainly useful for parents? I think it's useful, it helps parents, but I
                don't think it...I think it's useful for parents, but I think parents should
                be able to use their own judgement anyway.

In addition to providing general guidance about a video's likely contents, the classification system is seen as particularly valuable at the point of supply. Every parent, even those who were happy to rent an '18' rated video for their child(ren), felt that video rentailers ought to adhere to the classification system when supplying videos in the absence of parents. For example, the mother from family 2, who allows her daughter (14) to watch '15' and '18' rated videos at home, argued that the system was only useful if it is observed at the point of supply:

Interviewer: Do you think this is quite a useful system to have?
Mother: Yeah....yeah, it's useful if the shops use them. I mean [daughter] goes
                out and gets 15s, when she shouldn't, and the shop lets her. And I
                suppose some of them might be 18, I don't know. But it's useful if the
                shops use them, and go by them. And then people can get them out-
                whatever people feel's right for the age...If the parent's not there,
                then it's got to be the shop. But if the parent's there, then it's down to
                them.

The case proposed by Buckingham (1996) for reforming the classification system, described above, does find some support here. It is evident that younger teenagers (aged 13/14) are frequently granted access to '15' rated videos, and even certain '18's, raising questions about the value of a system with higher age restrictions. The classification symbols are most likely to be heeded in the case of younger children- those who are still in primary and nursery education (see section 6.4). However, the fact that parents are given licence to (and do) apply the system flexibly would suggest that there is no immediate need for the system of arbitrary age gradings to be re-calibrated. Besides, none of the parents

demanded changes to the system, even when asked to suggest ways to improve it. The current system provides unequivocal guidance for video suppliers, which is widely supported by the parents interviewed.

What the classification system cannot offer in its present format is any differentiation between types of potentially "unsuitable" content. The Video Standards Council trailer which appears on many pre-recorded videos to explain the classification decision offers nothing more than a general picture of a video's likely contents. On '15' rated videos, the following voice-over is heard:

> '...this film is unsuitable for anyone younger than 15. It may have a fairly adult theme or may contain scenes of sex, violence or drugs. It may also contain sexual swear words'.[1]

Parents are told what a video *may* contain, but they are not given explicit details. This proves problematic because "unsuitable" elements are grouped together, where parents are inclined to distinguish between them. For example, the mother from family 8 would allow her 13 year old son to watch *Pulp Fiction* (18) on video if it were not for the scene of male rape which she deems unsuitable for him. The "violence" in the film is not an issue of concern- a distinction is drawn between the unsuitability of "sex" (in this case homosexual sexual violence) and "violence":

Mother: [Son]'s begged and begged and I said no. He's not ready for *Pulp Fiction* yet. Even though it is a brilliant film. I don't know- the buggering scene I think is a bit heavy. I mean not even blowing the guy's head away cos you don't actually see that...

In order to supplement the limited information about a video's likely contents conveyed by the classification symbol, parents draw upon a range of additional sources. These include the accounts of trusted associates who have seen the film in question; professional film

---

[1] This trailer was taken from *Heat* (15) (CIC Video, 1995).

reviews; artwork and the promotional blurb on the video cover; film trailers and advertising. In order to find out which of these sources are used, when and to what effect, parents were asked where they had learnt about titles in the video cover exercise, and how they evaluated the information derived from these sources.

In the extract from family 8 given above, the mother is able to base her judgement of *Pulp Fiction* on her own viewing experience. Judgements based on this form of pre-viewing are common, particularly for videos which are owned by parents and available in the home. The father in family 10 relies upon his "reading" of the films he owns on video when assessing their suitability:

Father: So if I've seen it and I think that it's suitable, I mean these two [sons, 5 and 7] can't, but [daughter,15] and [son, 14] might say [...] can we watch this? And their mum'll say 'well has [father] seen it', and I might say yes...If I haven't watched something that [son, 14] says, then it's no.

Mother: [...] About watching and...I mean they don't lie to us. [laughs]. I think that the videos [father's] got are more safe, cos he's seen them, whereas with the telly and stuff...you don't know.

However, in the following exchange from family 8, pre-viewing is sub-ordinated to other indices of content:

Mother: ...[son's-13] been asking me to watch [*Blunt Fist* ?] which I bought at some market somewhere, but that's only a 15. But because I haven't watched it- I'm not sure what's in it so...

Interviewer: You'd prefer to view it first?

Mother: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that something you do quite regularly?

Mother: Yeah. Well, not...

Father: Not consciously

Mother: Not consciously, but if I know of a film, and I know something dodgy's going to be in it...

These other indices, as mentioned above, include film reviews, trailers, video boxes, and video shop displays. The mother from family 5, who rarely has time to read film reviews in her newspaper, relies on trailers at the start of a video, or else refers to the "blurb" on the video cover:

Mother:	Well, you get the trailers on videos. That's quite often when I've seen something and thought, oh yes, that looks good, and write it down...And that's something....I mean you write a list of what you want=
Daughter:	Yeah.
Mother:	Sometimes...you just literally look along the shelves. I look at the cover really, and read the back.
Interviewer:	Is it useful?
Father:	A lot of it is. But there's some which is very, er, they glamourise it and it's nothing like the actual film. You find that with a lot of the films that are made straight for video. And very often the trailer is better than the actual film! Like you've seen the trailer...
Mother:	It's like reading a book. If you don't know the author you look at the cover and read the back, and see if it appeals to you or not.

Many of the parents were suspicious of the promotional literature on the video cover, and used other indicators on the box when assessing suitability. For example, the cover's artwork, the film title and accompanying sub-title or caption. Both sets of parents from families 8 and 10 made extempore judgements about the suitability of *Disclosure* on the basis of the video cover they were presented with (it shows a picture of Demi Moore in an upright sexual clinch with Michael Douglas with the caption 'Sex is Power' over the title):

(Family 8)	
Interviewer:	If [son, 13] said 'my mate's lent me this video, can I watch it?'=
Mother:	I'd say take it back! [laughs].
Father:	Yeah.
Mother:	And, you know, cos I haven't seen it and cos I would see that [video cover] and think- I don't think so. What's that? 'Sex is Power'! [laughs]

(Family 10):	
Interviewer:	Would you mind if [daughter, 15] wanted to see it?
Mother:	Yes I would mind.
Father:	From what it says there [points to video cover]=
Mother:	Yes, I would mind.
Interviewer:	Why's that?
Mother:	Erm=
Father:	'Sex is Power'=
Mother:	Yeah...you know the poster [cover] alone puts me off. Er, this 'Sex is Power' stuff...From what I can see, the sex is not the problem, it's the way it's portrayed...

Film reviews in magazines were also cited as useful sources of information about a film's contents and suitability. Only one of the parents interviewed subscribed to a film magazine

(the father from family 9), although several read reviews in newspapers and periodicals. Unlike the promotional material appearing on video covers, and in trailers, reviews (whether they appear in newspapers, magazines or on television) are assumed to provide more objective appraisals:

(Family 4)
Mother: You really have to rely on reviews, because the blurb on the back of the
               video is always going to tell you it's a wonderful film. And it's only if
               it's reviewed by the Milwaukee Times that you think oh, you know!
               ...Because they're trying to sell their product, so I think you have
               to read the reviews...
Interviewer: Do you read many reviews?
Mother: Yeah, I quite often never see movies, I just read reviews.
Interviewer: Where are these found?
Mother: Usually in weekend papers.

As indicated in Chapter Four, the press have frequently covered news stories featuring specific video titles as examples of "nasties" responsible for putative social problems (juvenile criminality, moral degeneration in society and so on). Academic accounts have tended to refer to these as episodes of "moral panic" (Barratt, 1993; Gauntlett, 1995; Buckingham, 1996). These accounts are based upon analyses of the coverage itself, and little attempt is made to determine the ways in which readers engage with the putative "panic" which is carried in the newspaper(s) they read.

This vexed area was addressed in the video cover exercise by asking whether negative publicity for specific titles leads parents to judge them negatively when deciding their suitability. The exercise includes *Child's Play 3* (18) and *Clockwork Orange* (N/A), each of which has received adverse media coverage following theatrical or video release. As well as highlighting the ways in which media coverage of specific titles informs judgements of their suitability, this part of the exercise offers an insight into parents' attitudes towards the controversies surrounding these titles.

There was evidence that some parents had been influenced by negative media coverage when making their decision. *Child's Play 3* was actually banned outright in two

households (families 1 and 10). The father in family 1 even went as far as to burn his copy of the video, a tactic suggested on the front page of the <u>Sun</u> which he takes daily ('For the sake of ALL our kids BURN YOUR VIDEO NASTY' 26/11/93):

Mother:	Yeah, actually they seed *Childs Play* and so did I=
Father:	We burnt it.
Daughter, 14:	What?
Father:	We burnt it. After that kid got something happened to some kid about it.
Son, 18:	I wondered what happened to it.
Father:	We burnt it=
Mother:	Mind you, I didn't actually think. It terrified me. I never would have watched it if I'd known. I never would of let her watch it either. Did she watch it with us?
Father:	She never watched it.

In other households, the coverage of *Child's Play 3* was interpreted by parents in different ways. Rather than object to the film on the grounds that it might incite criminal behaviour, as suggested by the link to the murder of James Bulger (Smith, 1994; Buckingham, 1996; King, 1997), the parents from family 8 inferred that the film was of poor quality:

Interviewer:	So [son's] seen one of the earlier ones. Do you mind?
Mother:	Er, well I can only speak retrospectively, but no cos he seemed pretty much unharmed by the whole experience. I wouldn't say, oh don't you know 3's on, do you want to see it, sort of thing.
Interviewer:	Would you mind if he wanted to see this one?
Mother:	Yeah. Cos I'd think he had no good taste in cinema at all! [laughs].
Interviewer:	So your objection would be on the grounds of taste and quality?
Mother:	Yeah, because I haven't seen it, and just all the hype about it, I know that it's rubbish, real dross, so I wouldn't want him to waste his time...rather than being affected by it.

In the other households, however, the film had either already been viewed, or there was no immediate objection to it.

The controversy surrounding *Clockwork Orange* was not as vivid in the minds of the parents interviewed. However, the father from family 9 was still aware that the film had a reputation for its graphic portrayal of violence, and his judgement was directly informed by the impression conveyed in the media. Despite that, he did not rule out letting his nine year

old son see the film (on pirated video)- he preferred to rely on his own assessment of the film, whose "violence" might be more acceptable because it is 'twenty-five years old':

Interviewer: Would you ever consider getting it on pirate video?
Father: Yeah, I probably would. Because if this film is twenty-five years old, violence has come a long way in twenty-five years...It's now 1996, you'd say: what would I be surprised about in a film made in 1971?...As an adult I think I have the right to choose.
Interviewer: How about for [son, 9]? Would it be acceptable for him to see it?
Father: No, no, definitely not from what I've heard, and read...I would need to see it first, and it's possible that the violence in there is so sanitised compared to modern-day violence that, er, only by seeing it can I make that decision.

If adverse press coverage can have some influence over decisions of suitability, it follows that critical acclaim might also play some role. *Pulp Fiction* (18) was included in the exercise because it achieved critical and box-office success, winning the Palme D'Or at Cannes in 1994 and becoming the twelfth highest grossing UK theatrical release in 1994 (source: Screen Finance). Elsewhere it has been labelled 'ultra-violent' (see Hill, 1997) because of the amount of explicit "violence" it contains and, despite its '18' certificate on video, the title was found to be popular among teenagers (see Chapter Three). The inclusion of this title allows the question to be addressed as to whether a video which contains potentially "unsuitable" elements is judged to be more acceptable if the film is considered to be good quality.

Reviewing the interview transcripts, it does appear that "quality" is an important consideration for some parents. The portrayal of "violence", for example, in a quality production is considered different to that appearing in exploitative "dross". The mother in family 8 would be willing for her 13 year old son to see *Pulp Fiction*, which she thinks is 'brilliant'. However, this cannot over-ride her belief that the 'buggering' scene is inappropriate for her son. Quality, therefore, is less likely to be a consideration if "unsuitable" content is present.

A similar point was made during the interview with family 7. Both the father and the son (14) wanted to see *Pulp Fiction*, because they had heard that it was good, but the father would prefer to accompany his son when viewing it on video:

Mother:	And would you vet it first?
Father:	I don't think I'd vet it, but if I found it hard going then I might stop it. I do think we should be watching this together. That would be my best control, because I'd sooner I gave him that leeway to watch it, rather then go to a friends and watch it...
Interviewer:	How about [daughter, 11]?
Mother:	I don't think she's ever heard of it.
Father:	She may have heard of it, but she's not talked about it.
Mother:	She might have heard about it through [son], but=
Father:	Not talked about it with us.
Interviewer:	Would you allow her to watch it with you and [son]?
Father:	I'm not sure about this one. No, I don't think I would. Not until I'd seen it.
Mother:	And I wouldn't. I wouldn't let them watch it anyway, so [laughs].
Father:	Since we've spoken, I've noticed the 18 classification anyway, so we're getting further away from what maybe acceptable for an eleven, twelve year old.

Notice how, towards the end of this exchange, the father realises that the film has an '18' certificate. He immediately re-evaluates his decision about its suitability for his eleven year old daughter.

Not all of the parents felt compelled to see the film as a result of favourable coverage, and some even felt it was undeserving of the acclaim. Both the fathers from families 1 and 10 had seen it on video, but were unimpressed, as this extract from family 10 shows:

Father:	Well, I think...I mean I weren't impressed, I watched it in dribs and drabs.

This father had no objections to his daughter (15) seeing the film on video. He simply would not recommend it because he did not especially enjoy it.

Negative and positive coverage of a title on video does appear to have some impact on decisions over its suitability, and these effects are likely to be stronger in the case of negative coverage. However, even in the case of *Child's Play 3* which was universally

demonised in the press following the relatively recent murder trial of Jon Venables and Robert Thompson (Smith, 1994; Buckingham, 1996; Barker and Petley, 1997; King, 1997), most of the parents were prepared to allow the film to be viewed on video in the home- their only objection being that it appears, from what they have heard, to be 'dross'. In other words, the weight of moral opprobrium that was heaped on the title in 1993/94 by press commentators was not reflected in the discussions reported here. In spite of its reputation, several of the parents were prepared to judge the film according to their own criteria.

All of the content indicators reported so far can be seen as part of what Ellis (1981) has called 'narrative images': details of films which are 'widely circulated and promoted' (p. 30), allowing potential audiences the opportunity to anticipate the likely content and nature of a film. Neale (1990), in his discussion of film genres, suggests that narrative images are formed from the 'discourses of film industry publicity and marketing [and] other institutionalised public discourses, especially those of the press and television, and the "unofficial" "word of mouth" discourse of everyday life' (p.48/49). It is precisely these narrative images which parents draw upon when making extempore judgements of the suitability of films on video.

In addition to the sources listed above, Neale (1990) also includes genre in the specification of narrative images: it is 'an important ingredient in any film's narrative image' (p.49). He argues that '[g]enres do not consist of only films: they consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectations and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema, and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process' (p.46). The systems of 'expectation and hypothesis' that Neale identifies

'involve a knowledge of...various regimes of verisimilitude, various systems of plausibility, motivation, justification and belief. Verisimilitude...entails notions of propriety, of what is appropriate and therefore probable' (1990; p.46).

194

According to this account, genres are not simply neat categorisations for organising different types of film into groups, they also inform the viewing process itself. There is every reason to assume that they also inform viewing choices and, by extension, judgements of suitability (although Neale does not address this area in his discussion).

In order to examine the ways in which genre features in judgements of suitability, the video cover exercise includes two titles which contain graphic portrayals of "sex" and "violence" and possess an '18' certificate on video, but are otherwise considered to be examples of a comedy/spoof genre (*Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* and *Evil Dead II*). That is, the audience members familiar with the conventions of comedy/spoofs will recognise that the films present parodic portrayals of elements common to the genre being caricatured. These titles therefore allow questions to be asked about the interaction of genre conventions and content categories. For example, is the representation of "violence" in a "comedy" judged to be more acceptable than if it appears in a sober "action" video? Why might this be the case?

In the following extract from the interview with family 9, the father gives an insight into the types of 'expectation and hypothesis' which inform the judgement of suitability. The father is discussing *Evil Dead II*, which both he and his son (11) have seen:

Father: Films like *Evil Dead*- the title conjures up something that is evil and
              wicked, but it isn't that type of film=
Son: It's funny as well.
Father: It's a comedy, and it's a gruesome comedy, you know that the violence
              in that isn't real violence...It's very comic violence...I could justify
              allowing [son] to watch it, because a) I've seen it and I know it's a
              funny film, so he wouldn't be scared by it.
Interviewer: So when it came on Sky, you'd already seen it?
Father: Yes I had.
Interviewer: And when it came on, he said he'd like to see it?
Father: Yes, I said fine and let him sit up and watch it.

The father points out that the title of the film might be understood in terms of the horror genre which it parodies- as something which is evil and wicked. But, as he goes onto say,

it is a spoof- a 'gruesome comedy', and as such is perfectly suitable for his son to watch. This is a doubly interesting insight because the film was singled out by The Guardian (15/4/94) as an example of a "video nasty". In fact, its predecessor, the original *Evil Dead*, was one of the films to appear on the Director of Public Prosecution's list of films likely to be found obscene under the Obscene Publications Act in 1983 (Barker, 1984).

Family 7 also made explicit the 'expectations and hypothesis' associated with comedy and the treatment of potentially "unsuitable" elements, when discussing *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life*:

Interviewer:	The fact that this is an 18, would it mean that [son, 14] and [daughter, 11] could not see it?
Father:	Again, with [daughter] I think I'd have to see it first. With [son] I think he'd be okay. I think I saw a snatch from this when somebody ate himself to death=
Mother:	Eur!
Father:	Not ate himself, sorry. Ate so much that he burst.
Mother:	In Pythonesque style?
Father:	Oh yes, of course. Quite harmless style, and it was quite funny.
Interviewer:	Does it mitigate the=
Mother:	That helps, doesn't it. Does it?
Father:	I think it does, yeah.

The mother refers to 'Pythonesque style'- an allusion to the sub-genre of explicit comedies characteristic of the Monty Python team's output. 'Pythonesque style' is 'quite harmless', 'quite funny'; even though the film is classified as '18' on video it is judged on this basis as suitable for the son, and possibly even the daughter. A similar judgement was arrived at by the parents in family 9, who are both fans of Monty Python:

Son (11):	I've heard of it, but I haven't seen it. I don't think I'd be allowed to watch it.
Mother:	You probably would be able to watch it=
Father:	I would let him=
Mother:	Yeah=
Father:	Because it's really stupid=
Mother:	He'd probably find it funny.
[tape ends]	
Interviewer:	How about [daughter, 5]?
Mother:	It might be on, she'd be going in and out doing other things, she wouldn't take any notice.
Father:	Yeah, it's too, er...
Mother:	Only if something takes her interest...

Interviewer:	And would you object to her watching it?
Mother:	Only bits of it.
Father:	Yeah. It's been a long time since I've seen it...With a film like *Life of Brian* I'd watch it again to ensure there was nothing in it I didn't want her to see.
Interviewer:	Would you prefer to watch it with [son]?
Father:	Yes=
Mother:	Yeah. He wouldn't watch it alone=
Father:	If there are bits then they can just fast-forward.

Thus knowledge of film genres, the 'expectations and hypothesis' identified by Neale (1990), operates in much the same way as other content indicators discussed at the beginning of this section. It is a further specification of the type of "violence" or the type of "sex" which might feature in a video. But more than that, the presence of these elements, which may well be portrayed in much the same way as in any other film, is somehow different, depending upon the conventions associated with particular genres. *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* features many swear words, but because of the context parents are not as concerned about their suitability.

6.4 Suitability, maturity and childhood

Thus far the discussion has dealt with the issue of suitability as it applies to video contents and the viewing context. In addition to these factors, parents also assess the issue of suitability in terms of the child who wants to see a particular video. As noted above, parents make specific judgements of suitability according to the question: is this particular video viewed under these particular circumstances suitable for this particular child? This section examines those variables which parents take into account when judging the acceptability of "under-age" viewing for their own children.

The single most important variable is the child's age, a finding repeated by every study reviewed in Chapter Two. The general rule is that the older a child, the more likely they are to be allowed to watch potentially "unsuitable" content because they are better able to make informed and critical judgements about such content. In everyday parlance, they are better able to "handle" such material. Put another way, "viewing competency" develops alongside

197

other social, mental and physical capacities, with age. It is this logic which underpins the video classification system operated by the BBFC. Just like other systems of rights based on arbitrary age gradings, this system is based upon 'an alleged correlation between age and some relevant competence' (Archard, 1993 p.58).

However, unlike the BBFC system, parents do not necessarily equate chronological age with given levels of competency. A key term here is "maturity", a concept which was frequently evoked by parents during the family case study interviews. Maturity is an abstract quality which tends to develop as children age, although children will begin to demonstrate maturity at different ages. This means that it is perfectly possible for one twelve year old to be judged "mature" enough to watch a '15' rated video, while another is not. This point was made by the father from family 9, discussing the '12' rating:

Father: I believe the category you use to define 12 is specifically is that that
             child has to be of secondary school age, or over, but you are therefore
             trying to define the mentality of that child, and there are some children
             who develop earlier than others, but they are penalised because of the
             schooling system. But as a parent we have a responsibility for our
             children...There are some 12 films I would allow [daughter, 5] to
             watch...There are 12 films that I wouldn't allow her to watch...

The key indicator of "maturity" described by the parents interviewed is the child's ability to view potentially distressing material on video, and not become unduly distressed by it. Exactly why some children are better able to "handle" potentially distressing material was not ever raised by parents explicitly, although it probably accords with what media educators refer to as the development of "media literacy" skills (Alvarado and Boyd-Barrett, 1992; Buckingham, 1996) combined with more grounded knowledge of social relations and the world outside of the home borne out of children's own experiences.

A number of abilities which combine to make a "competent viewer" were mentioned in passing by parents, and they include the ability to judge the difference between what is real and what is make-believe, to take an interest in and comprehend adult themes (like marriage, warfare, politics and so on), to take these themes seriously rather than treat them

lightly, to discriminate between quality productions and inferior ones, and to be aware of sexism and racism in film texts. It is not the case that a child's "maturity" exists independently of their competency as viewers: both concepts are inter-dependent.

As there is a great deal of uncertainty about the age at which children are expected to develop the abilities associated with (viewer) competency, both within the academy and outside (Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers, 1992; Burman, 1994) parents' assessments in this area are likely to be tentative and idiosyncratic. Parents are also obliged to re-evaluate, periodically, their child's competencies because "maturity" is a quality which is attained over time. This was illustrated in discussion with family 1, where the mother is surprised to learn that her 14 year old daughter has been watching horror films on video where previously she avoided them:

Son, 18:	She's seen Freddie. Freddie Krueger.
Father:	Not round here she aint.
Daughter, 14:	I watched it round [friend's]
Son:	Freddie 5, weren't it?
Mother:	And it didn't worry you?
Daughter:	No.
Father:	I said to your mum you watched *Pet Semetary* the other week.
Daughter:	Yeah. That was good.
Mother:	See. So you're like your dad now, not me?

The mother's concern used to be that her daughter, like herself, could not "handle" horror films. Now, however, she concedes that her daughter must be more like her father, who can "handle" them. Note that this competency is not necessarily age related- after all, the mother has not developed the ability to handle 'horror' films. This is further evidence of the disparity between chronological age and competency.

The observations above would suggest that parents make arbitrary judgements about the maturity of their children, yet this is far from the case. A broad-brush developmental framework does appear to operate behind parents' decision-making, based upon age stratifications in the education system. Put crudely, children in nursery school are perceived as the least competent viewers, having difficulty making distinctions between fact and

fantasy on-screen for example. They are more likely to imitate forms of behaviour they see on screen, although they are less likely to initiate video viewing on their own. Their viewing is therefore subject to the greatest (potential) parental control. Children in primary school (5-11) are perceived as more competent viewers, and older members of this group are likely to initiate their own video viewing. Parents are still keen to monitor their viewing, and often take notice of the classification system in this regard. Once a child enters secondary school, at the age of 12, however, they are judged by parents to be more or less fully competent viewers. In part this relates to the fact that the school curriculum for this age group deals with "adult" concerns which they might encounter on video. It is also related to the idea that younger teenagers are able to interact with older members of the school, thereby "broadening their horizons".

This schema offers parents a way of organising their own expectations about their child's development. It is, however, flexible enough to accommodate their own direct experience of their children's abilities, which may confound the schema. This explains why parents appear more relaxed about rule-making for their second-born offspring. In the previous chapter it was noted that birth order appears important in patterns of home-based regulation, with eldest children often experiencing greater parental involvement in their viewing habits. In light of the discussion above, this may well be due to the fact that by the time a second or third child has entered the family home, parents' expectations are more flexible because of the first-hand experience gained as a result of interactions with the first-born child.

Within this framework of understandings about child development the transition from primary to secondary schooling appears to be a water-shed moment, when parents' and teachers' expectations of children undergo radical changes. Children are required to assume greater responsibility for their actions inside and outside of school, and their own expectations also change in light of this. As a result they begin to make demands about their

rights as autonomous agents, and that includes their right to make their own viewing decisions (or at least to have their opinions heard on this matter).

In a number of interviews, this water-shed period was referred to directly. For example, the mother in family 2 pointed to the exact point at which her daughter changed from being dependent on her mother, to become a relatively independent agent in her own right:

Mother: She erm, won't really go [to the cinema] with me. If there's anything on
               the cinema that I like she wouldn't go with me. She would go with her
               mates. But erm...no we don't really. We used to a lot, but not now. She
               does everything like that with her friends now.
Interviewer: What sort of age did it begin to change?
Mother: When she started secondary school.
Interviewer: It was as clear cut as that?
Mother: Yeah, I noticed the difference straight away. She changed so quick. I
               think she was with different people, and because they're, there's such a
               difference of age, like when they first start until 16. And she had some
               friends who she already knew in the big classes. I don't know, she just
               seems to have grown up quickly. Yeah, she just kind of changed from
               then.

Family 4 also touch on this point. Indeed, the mother from family 4 goes further, and suggests that parents of children aged between eleven and fourteen 'are constantly having to review roles and guidelines' because their children are subject to rapid changes during this period.

In addition to the concept of "maturity", which indicates some quality of the child, parents also take account of "propriety" when considering the issue of suitability. This term refers to behaviour and knowledge which is perceived as being appropriate to childhood. Childhood needs to be recognised, as Archard (1993) does, as a social construction, 'an abstract noun which denotes the state of being or the stage at which one is a child' (p. 17). The constitution of childhood is neither pre-given, universal nor is it necessarily enduring (James and Prout, 1990; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992). Thus childhood has been conceived in a variety of ways at different times and in different cultures (Jenks, 1992; Mayall, 1994). In its present form (the modern conception of childhood) it is 'a stage or state of incompetence', characterised by an absence of, *inter alia*: rationality,

autonomy and personal responsibility (Archard, 1993; p.30). Archard claims that this modern conception is what unites 'different, indeed contradictory, contemporary views about childhood...infused with what are essentially myths' (1993; p.29).

There is insufficient space to elaborate on these themes here, but one can see that parents who hold a particular cluster of ideas about the nature of childhood will make judgements about the suitability of material on the basis of these ideas. This is because parents' ideas about what constitutes childhood necessarily entail some notion of what is appropriate behaviour and knowledge for children (Goodnow and Collins, 1994). Thus videos which offer knowledge outside of what is considered appropriate for childhood are judged unsuitable for children. Archard (1993) offers a pertinent example: '[a] premature education in the facts of life is viewed with suspicion [as] it might corrupt children with an inappropriate 'adult' knowledge' (p.40). Parents are suspicious (to use Archard's term) of "sex" in videos because active sexuality is incommensurate with the modern conception of childhood.

When asked to elaborate on the issue of propriety, few parents are able to articulate their concerns. For example, the mother from family 8 claimed that her rule of thumb for the suitability of sexual material on video was whether or not she felt 'comfortable' watching it in the presence of her son (13). However, she was unable to say why she might be uncomfortable, and she apologised to the interviewer for not explaining herself. She could only point to a deeply felt unease at certain sexual representations on video.

In the extract below from the interview with family 5, the issue of propriety is made explicit:

Mother: [...] I must admit I didn't allow my children, when they were younger,
            to see horror films and all those...and I didn't like them, and I didn't
            feel it was right for them, but they actually saw them when they went
            to my sisters or my sister-in-laws. And I was only talking about this on
            Satur...on Sunday and my sister-in-law was saying how she
            remembered when [son, 18] was quite small, about five or six, and it's
            probably the first horror film he actually saw, and she said she was

Interviewer: Were you concerned by this?

Mother: I walked in and saw the film and didn't like it- yes I was. And I thought I don't think this is appropriate for a young child. It's not appropriate for me, let alone a young child! [laughs]. And I didn't like it. And that's why I didn't let them watch the films.

The mother feels that horror films are inappropriate because she has a personal aversion to them. Thus, if something is unsuitable for a mature adult, it is certainly, by this logic, inappropriate for children.

Parents (predominantly fathers) who expressed a taste for "violent" action films, or horror movies, on video were more inclined to allow their "under-age" children to watch a favoured film of the genre. The father from family 9 was perfectly happy to allow his eleven year old son to watch *Evil Dead II* because 'It's a comedy, and it's a gruesome comedy, you know that the violence in that isn't real violence...It's very comic violence...I could justify allowing [son] to watch it, because a) I've seen it and I know it's a funny film, so he wouldn't be scared by it'. In contrast, the boy's mother, who does not like 'horror type films', would not sanction her son's viewing except for the fact that the father 'had already seen it and said that it was funny and it wasn't that frightening'.

The mother from family 7 is also averse to "violence" and "horror", and this has an impact on her judgements of suitability:

Interviewer: So your concern is that they might get worried about something they've seen?

Mother: Hhmm. And it's not nice. I mean I don't like violence...I don't get, I mean lots of people get highs out of it. I don't. And therefore I presume that my kids wouldn't like it either.

Again, the mother extends to her children her dislike of certain content, basing her judgement of suitability on her own tastes and sensibility. Yet this presumes that older and younger viewers read film texts in similar ways. Little research exists on the differences between "adult" and "child" readings of film texts, except in the area of critical viewing

skills (see Buckingham, 1996). However, there is evidence from the family case study interviews that adults may well become distressed or concerned about content elements which are of secondary importance to younger audiences. By way of an illustration, consider the following statement from the interview with family 7:

Father: I watched [*The Shining*, '18'] with both of them [son, 14 and daughter, 12]...They found it, they didn't find it disturbing, they found it nasty but intriguing. It was compulsive. In fact the scenes that I found to be more frightening, they didn't. To me the realistic scene at the end where somebody is actually killed with a chopper, was more frightening to me. The scene that the children didn't like was, er, it was a dream sequence with blood washing down a corridor, twin girls...and the kids didn't like that. They didn't worry about it, but to them that was creepy. It is in a way, but to me the horrific thing was that poor old man being killed.

The father found the graphic representations of inter-personal violence between Jack Nicholson's character and his wife, played by Shelley Duval, most unsettling. This accords with the "adult" fears about "video violence" described in Chapter Four. In contrast, the children were more concerned about the supernatural elements of the film: the dream sequences and ghostly materialisations. They were able to watch the 'real' marital violence and distance it from their own, stable family lives. These episodes in the film are open to easy interpretation- the motivation of the main protagonists is relatively unambiguous. The supernatural elements, however, raise disturbing questions, with no possibility of answers, about psychosis, the after-life, the existence of ghosts and other night-time phantoms which are a childhood pre-occupation.

Although the evidence recounted here is only fragmentary, it does suggest a mismatch between what these adults assume is disturbing for children, and what their children are actually disturbed by. This lends greater credence to the argument, advanced in Chapter Four, that the narrow range of concerns expressed in public debates are at best misguided, and at worst positively misleading.

6.5 Concluding discussion

This chapter has addressed a number of issues which emerge from parents' judgements of suitability. The account makes plain the fact that these judgements are based upon a large number of variables which relate to video contents, the viewing context, children's maturity and parents' conception of childhood. Six broad factors have been identified with parents' decision-making: their previous decisions; their perception of the maturity of their children; their conception of childhood; their own tastes and viewing preferences; their assessment of the contents of videos; and their assessment of the specific viewing context.

The factors are not listed in any particular order because no single factor appears central to the decision-making process in all cases. It is impossible to make generalisations about judgements of suitability, as each decision is taken according to the specific circumstances. That said, many of the judgements made during the family case study interviews were based upon assessments of the child(ren)'s maturity and the video contents; the other variables were then factored in to the decision-making process.

Although the evidence presented above is based upon a limited number of cases, it is corroborated by research conducted on behalf of the BBFC (1993). The authors conclude that '[p]ersonal standards and values and the perceived maturity and sophistication of their children are...important factors and the category advice [classification symbol] is seen in the light of these' (BBFC, 1993; p.16).

Surveying the family case study interviews, the overall impression is that the judgement of suitability is characterised by ambivalence. Because there are so many variables involved, and so little certainty about their nature and relative significance, parents often remain ambivalent about their judgements, even when called upon to defend them. It is common for parents to fall back on precedent, and rely on previous decisions as a guide to present decision-making. The following extract from family 3 demonstrates this ambivalence. The mother is discussing her assessment of *Menace II Society*:

Mother:	But there again, it's in America, so...but then again. But violence, that sort of thing, may happen here. You're going to be 30 or 40, that's how I see it.
Interviewer:	So it may be a problem if things are realistic?
Mother:	Yeah, but then again, they frighten her, but then again she might find it exciting. You don't know, do you?

Even relying upon precedent is fraught because parents are aware that the abilities and experience which constitute children's "maturity" are subject to change over time. They must, as has already been pointed out, constantly re-evaluate their child's competency in this regard.

This is subject to further complication because parents must choose between competing notions of what is beneficial for their child(ren). Archard (1993) argues that 'a good care-taker must strive both to realise the child's particular nature and to safe-guard its "open futures"' (p.57). It is precisely because children's futures are 'open' that parents have difficulty identifying those influences which will be beneficial. For example, as Allerton (1995) notes, parents often talk about being torn between protecting their children from unsuitable influences, and allowing them freedom to develop knowledge of the world outside of the home. On the basis of interviews with parents, he suggests that:

> '[t]he parents' dilemma seemed to be that they did not want their children to be upset, frightened or worried by what they saw, but they also wanted to allow their children to learn to make their own decisions, especially as they got older. There was a recognition that children needed to be protected, but that it was also in their interest not to be sheltered too much' (1995; p.14).

In conclusion, it is apparent that the judgement about whether a particular video is suitable for children to watch is the result of a very intricate process of evaluation of a number of factors. The BBFC classification system does feature in the decision-making process, but it is not necessarily central to it (particularly for secondary school aged children). This fact

demands a re-evaluation of conceptions of parental responsibility which are based on the premise that to act responsibly is to observe the classification system in all circumstances. This view results from a misreading of the ways in which parents arrive at viewing decisions on behalf of their children. This theme is developed in the next chapter which deals, in more explicit detail, with the issue of "parental responsibility" from the perspective of parents.

Chapter Seven
Parents and parental responsibility

7.1 Introduction

To recapitulate some of the findings presented in previous chapters: "under-age" viewing appears to be widespread in occurrence, although children's viewing is uncontroversial in many family homes. The language of public debates used to describe the putative problem of "under-age" viewing is therefore misplaced in this context; it provides an inadequate basis for understanding actual patterns of home-based regulation.

The notion of parental responsibility evoked in many of the texts examined in Chapter Four is only meaningful in terms of the conception of "under-age" viewing as a social problem. Once this conception has been re-appraised in view of actual, rather than imagined, parental practices, the notion of parental responsibility which places the classification system at the centre of good parenting practice becomes highly suspect. As the previous chapter has demonstrated, parents base their judgements of the suitability of videos on a variety of contingent factors, of which the classification symbol is one among many.

The notion of parental responsibility which emerges from parents' own accounts is much broader than the narrow conceptualisations identified in Chapter Four, and it is sustained as much by the practical logistics of parenting as by reference to abstract parental rights (Archard, 1993). The next section provides an examination of the concept of parental responsibility as it emerges from these accounts. The final section then extends this analysis by discussing the various conceptions of parental responsibility articulated by the parents interviewed.

7.2 Parents and the concept of parental responsibility

A strong consensus around the concept of parental responsibility is evident in the accounts of the parents interviewed, and it is consonant with that identified in Chapter Four. Every single parent agreed that they have the primary responsibility for their children's video viewing habits in the home. According to this account, no other agency can lay claim to that responsibility, and nor should they. In the family home, parents have the right to supervise their child's viewing regime in any way they see fit. The corresponding responsibility is towards the child, to ensure that they are not distressed by what they watch, or that they encounter material deemed by parents as inappropriate for them.

That parents ought to bear prime responsibility for their children's video viewing is implicit in the argument that the role of other agencies, like video "rentailers", is conditional on the absence of parents (they act *in loco parentis*). The mother from family 2 makes this point, and in doing so asserts the primacy of parental authority:

Mother: If the parent's not there, then it's got to be the shop [who is
            responsible]. But if the parent's there, then it's down to them.

The mother from family 1 elaborates on the concept of parental responsibility:

Mother: Yeah, I think it's up to the parents, I don't think they [video shops]
            should be the judge, it should be down to the parents, you know. If we
            think it's okay for [daughter] to watch an 18, then that's okay really, but
            if we, we should know what she's like. I mean if she was some kind of
            peculiar freak who was like a bit wild, we wouldn't like let her watch
            these weird films, because, well it's just going to influence her or not. I
            mean you can be the judge of it. But shops don't know what you're like
            so they shouldn't be just giving them out....It's cos you know what the
            kids are like.

This account is significant for the insights it offers about the justification of parental responsibility. It is parental knowledge of children, rather than any special parental right, which underpins the concept of parental responsibility.

In this instance, parental authority in the home is not reduced to an abstract set of rights, but gains legitimacy from very practical considerations. Allerton (1995) has also noted the importance of parental knowledge in this regard:

> '[t]his knowledge of their children had been built up over the years by making mistakes in allowing them to watch certain programmes which they did not expect the children to find frightening, or preventing them from watching things which, in the end, did not bother them. This well of knowledge was what most of the parents said formed their yardstick for regulation- in the end, it was a matter of knowing your child and not something that could be reduced to a set of age limits' (p.15).

Parents, by virtue of a unique proximity to their children over time, develop an intimate 'well of knowledge' about them which informs their decisions about the suitability of videos. In contrast, video shop staff are constrained by law to operate within the system of classification based upon arbitrary, chronological age categories. In the absence of a parent's 'well of knowledge', video suppliers must apply apparently universal criteria to judgements of suitability. Abdication of this responsibility on the part of suppliers is considered, by most of the parents interviewed, to be of greater concern than the fact that their children might actually watch "unsuitable" material on video.

Allerton (1995) also found widespread agreement with the concept of parental responsibility from the twenty sets of parents interviewed as part of a research project for the Broadcasting Standards Commission. He reports that parents 'saw themselves as being in the front line of regulation and used their own discretion and knowledge of their own children far more than age classifications or the water-shed' (1995; p.16). This is further corroborated by research into the use of the video classification system conducted on behalf of the BBFC (1993). Over half of the parent respondents agreed that 'I am the best person

to decide what films my children watch' (BBFC, 1993; p.16).[1] The report notes that '[p]ersonal responsibility was important, both as a duty and a right, and no outside body could altogether be given this burden' (1993; p.17). The section of the report dealing with 'the role of parental responsibility' concludes: '[e]vidently, classification is seen widely as advice: information provided to help parents reach their own conclusions and it is valued on this basis' (BBFC, 1993; p.17).

It is important to recognise that parental responsibility for children's viewing habits is not dissociable from other spheres of influence in a child's life. It is part of a nexus of duties towards the welfare of children, some of which are now enshrined in law under the provisions of the Children's Act 1989 (Eekelaar, 1991). As previously noted, Archard (1993) has identified an underlying stratum of contemporary beliefs about the nature of childhood which he refers to as the 'modern conception of childhood'. This modern conception, which finds legal expression in the Children's Act 1989, positions children as dependents of adult care-givers who must assume responsibility for children's 'moral and material welfare' (Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Recommendation no. R(84)4, February 1984; quoted in Eekelaar, 1991). It is within this wider context of duties that parents assume responsibility for their children's video viewing habits, a point illustrated in this extract from family 9:

Interviewer: Do you think parents have a responsibility to monitor what their children
                are watching on video?
Mother: Yes [...] I mean it extends on what they read, where they go, who their
                friends are...it isn't just the TV.

Almost by definition, parents ought to assume responsibility for children's viewing (in the context of their wider obligations towards children's 'mental and material welfare') because childhood is conceived as a period of dependency. As Archard (1993) makes clear,

---

[1] The number of parents who answered the question is not given in the report. The total sample was 998 UK residents aged 16 and over (BBFC, 1993).

'the modern child is an innocent incompetent who is not but must become the adult. The "must" conveys both the necessity of human development and the ideal character of maturity. In our culture this outlook determines the proper place of the child as one who cannot enjoy the rights and responsibilities of the adult' (p.41).

It is equally important to recognise that parent/child relations are not static in the home. They are subject to change over time, as children increasingly confound the expectations placed upon them and begin to demonstrate a "maturity" which demands greater rights to self determination. As parents begin to recognise that their children are maturing, there is a concomitant increase in the rights and responsibilities accorded to them in areas like video viewing. This devolution of responsibilities is usually forced by practical demands. As indicated in the previous chapter, many children begin to modify their relationships with parents and peers upon entry into secondary school. One consequence is that parental authority inside the home becomes increasingly difficult to justify and implement for young teenagers. These changes are manifested in every aspect of a child's home-life, including their viewing habits. This is illustrated by the following extract from family 3, where the mother voices sentiments expressed by many of the parents of young teenagers:

Interviewer: Do you actually feel parents are responsible [for viewing regulation]?
Mother: Erm what do you [daughter, 14] think? Some people think so...some people don't. As a parent I don't.
Interviewer: You don't feel you should be responsible?
Mother: I, I...well, I can't help what she watches. Not now. But before I could.

As the mother/daughter relationship has begun to change at home, so responsibility has been re-defined. Responsible practice is not confined to the strict observance of the classification system. It is about the maintenance of amicable and workable relations with a daughter who demonstrates a willingness to take responsibility for her own viewing habits. The next section develops this theme by examining conceptions of parental responsibility emerging from the case study interviews.

7.3 Conceptions of parental responsibility

The accounts of what constitutes responsible parenting practice do vary across households. For example, some parents favour strategies of control based upon co-viewing, while others make selective use of the classification system and restrict children's viewing accordingly (see Chapter Five). The variety identified here has been recognised elsewhere: Goodnow and Collins (1994) admit, after reviewing the available literature on parents' ideas about parenting and child development, that they 'are far from clear as to what parents regard as the essentials or the limits of responsibility, and what the conditions are that give rise to different definitions' (p.34).

Despite the variation in the accounts analysed here, they are united by a single theme: responsible parents are those who demonstrate some degree of concern for their children's viewing habits, irrespective of whether they sanction "under-age" viewing or not. According to this argument, a parent can be considered responsible even if they allow their 12 year old child, for example, to watch an '18' rated video that they consider to be suitable. As the father from family 1 notes:

Father: ...most people know what they're going to watch so they know
             whether it's suitable for their kids. It's whether the parents...I suppose
             it all comes down to whether you care what your kids watch. It's
             as simple as that, [isn't it]?
Mother: Yeah, whether you're responsible enough or...
Father: Whether you're responsible enough.

This conception of parental responsibility is open to misinterpretation because it incorporates an ambiguity around the extent to which responsible parenting entails the application of strict controls over children's viewing habits (or the observance of the classification system in the case of videos). This ambiguity has led a number of commentators to conflate responsibility with strategies of control. For example, Hess and Goldman (1962) interviewed ninety-nine mothers and found that "good parents" are thought to be those 'whose children watch only those shows selected or approved by

adults' (p.416). As the findings reported in the previous chapter demonstrate, different parents will approve different things, and some may be more liberal in their attitudes than others. Therefore, the contention that "good" parenting entails parental approval of viewing is not suggestive of what level of overt control is "good". A lack of controls is not indicative of "bad" parenting if those controls are deemed unnecessary by parents.

This is precisely the conception of parental responsibility which emerges from accounts given by parents interviewed in the present study. When parents deem a '15' rated video as suitable for a 13 year old child, as they did in family 8 for example, they are fulfilling this definition of a "good parent" by allowing their child to watch it. However, Hess and Goldman (1962) argue, mistakenly, that a lack of controls is indicative of "bad parenting". But according to the definition given by the mothers they surveyed, a lack of controls is only indicative of "bad parenting" when parents disapprove of something and do not act to restrict their children's access to it. This confusion between responsibility and strategies of control leads them to summarise their findings with a non sequitur:

> '[i]f the..."good" parent controls the television fare of his [sic] child, it seems probable that these mothers would attempt to approach this image in their own behaviour. As will be evident in the data presented later, this is not the case' (1962; p.417).

The probable explanation for the discrepancy between what the mothers claimed was indicative of "good parenting" and their own practices is that the mothers most likely approved of much of what their children were watching, and therefore felt little need to operate any overt viewing controls. In their own minds there is no discrepancy between what they consider to be "good" parenting practice and their own actions.

Family 8 provides a useful example of the ways in which parental responsibility is conceptualised in discussion. The parents are both teachers, whose professional life is

concerned with the pastoral care of school-children during school hours, and neither would describe themselves as being irresponsible parents. This is despite the fact that they have allowed their own children (aged 9 and 13) to watch age-restricted material on video and at the cinema (see Appendix II for full details).

Both parents agree with the British Video Association leaflet (see Chapter Four) that the BBFC classification system is useful guidance for parents, while defending the principle of parental discretion in the home. This point is made by the mother when discussing the usefulness of the BBFC classification system:

Mother:	I see it as, you do need some guidelines otherwise there would be anarchy, or whatever, I think you do need some guidelines, but this is too many. I think it's left, then, for the discretion of parents to decide, and some parents are, you know, use their discretion, and some parents don't give a toss. They can't be responsible for what the parents across Britain do, can they? I mean I've sneaked [daughter, 9] into a 12 before, and I think I'm quite a responsible parent. But some people might think that's disgusting.
Interviewer:	So it's down to the parent, at the end of the day?
Mother:	Yeah...yeah. They [BBFC] might think they have the ultimate hammer knock, but they don't, really.

Note that she recognises the different standards that parents have. She does not consider herself to be an irresponsible parent, but she acknowledges that others might. Several of the mothers interviewed made reference to other people's attitudes and behaviour when discussing the issue of parental responsibility. For example, the mother from family 6 was keen to discover, at the end of the interview, how her account compared with other parents in the study:

Mother:	Did I give the right answers! [laughs]. No, with an opportunity like this, it helps, you know, you kind of sort out things in your mind. How you evaluate, you know, what you do for your children, really. And erm, I suppose I worry that I probably veer on the side of being conservative with a small 'c'. Erm, that other children have a lot more experience of videos, erm, and you know on the one hand you don't want your child to be rarefied, and kind of not in the full swing of it, but on the other hand you don't want them to go to the lowest common denominator and just be...absolutely drown in it all.

She ably demonstrates a concern which echoes the relative deprivation hypothesis advanced in sociological debates about poverty (Runciman, 1966). The mother's concern is that her own children may be placed at a disadvantage compared with their peers as a result of her self proclaimed 'conservatism'. This judgement is based upon her assessment of other parents' attitudes and practices. In other words, she evaluates her own behaviour in relation to that perceived as common in other households. The self doubt which causes this mother to "worry" about her own practices is borne out of this concern with what other parents are doing in similar situations.

It follows from this that an important constituent of parental ideas about good parenting is some degree of reflection on what other parents are doing. During the family case study interviews there were numerous examples of parents who made reference to the "bad" practices of other parents they were acquainted with. The evocation of specific examples of "bad parenting" in this context serves as a defence of the interviewee's own practices. It also lends further credence to the argument advanced here that parents are very much aware of what they think other parents are doing. These models of parenting function as yardsticks against which parents justify their own behaviour in the home. They serve to show the extent to which one household's arrangements are typical of homes in general. Typicality is a virtue in this sense; a parent may not feel their own practices to be exemplary, but at least they are typical of parenting in general.

This is illustrated in the following extract from family 3, where the mother and daughter collude in their efforts to distinguish between their home-life and that of family 2:

Interviewer: Do any of your friends' parents have rules about what can be watched?
Daughter, 14:   Er...no. Er maybe [friend from family 2], because...I reckon her mum
                 can be quite strict about what she watches.[laughs]
Mother: Yeah but, I know why you're laughing. She reckons this kid is really
                 sheltered=
Daughter, 14:   Yeah but I reckon [friend from family 2] her mum wouldn't let her
                 watch whatever she wanted to watch.
Mother: She wouldn't?
Daughter, 14:   No.
Mother: What about [friend from family 5]?

Daughter, 14: Well, yeah she can watch whatever she wants. But...[with friend from family 2] I reckon there'd definitely be some restriction.

Interviewer: But does she watch these things anyway, do you know?

Mother: No, she goes to her nan's at the weekend, so she watches whatever is there, so...maybe if she comes to my house, but she is not allowed to sleep out either so...she has quite a restricted life.

The validity of these assertions is open to question in light of the accounts provided by the mother and daughter from family 2. For example, the mother and daughter from family 3 are unaware that the daughter from family 2 has direct access to 'horror' films on video from her Auntie, which she watches with her mother's permission. However, this point is of secondary importance because the vision of family 2 presented by family 3 is designed to justify the practices in the latter household. Further justification is afforded by the alignment of family 5 with family 3, who are assumed to operate similar viewing controls. Families 3 and 5 are typical of "normal" practice in the home in contrast with the atypical arrangements presumed to exist in family 2.

Both of the passages quoted above throw into sharp relief the inter-play of "ideas" about "good parenting" and "bad parenting" which parents draw upon to justify their own practices (Goodnow and Collins, 1994). There are no absolute positions, because each parent appears to use their own practices as an example of (more or less) 'good' (or at least typical) parenting. As Goodnow and Collins argue, parents,

'like people in general, may lean towards ideas that serve a task-sustaining or ego-protecting function...One should expect to find that parents maintain some degree of "illusory glow" (Lewinsohn, Larson and Munoz, 1982) about their own performance as a parent' (1994; p.50).

That is not to say, however, that every parent has absolute confidence in their own practices. As was mentioned in Chapter Six, there is a high degree of ambivalence about the proper form and function of parental responsibility for children's video viewing habits.

Although ambivalence was a common feature of parental attitudes in this area, none of the parents interviewed ever intimated that they were "bad" parents.

Returning to family 8, in the next extract the parents lend substance to their conception of parental responsibility. A constituent part of which, they argue, is the maintenance of good relations with their children:

Mother: I suppose at the end of the day, you pull the plug, don't you? And it depends how your kids are, whether they're going to put that plug right back in or say 'alright mum'. And go up to bed or whatever.
Father: I think how useful these [classification symbols] are very much depends on the relationship you have with your children before you even get a TV or video or anything like that. You can't disconnect the two. So in one sense these could be totally irrelevant if you have a relationship where your kids just totally ignore what you tell them anyway.

Just as it was argued in the previous section that it is important not to dissociate parental responsibility for viewing from other spheres of influence in the home, these parents recognise that home-based regulation operates within the context of familial relationships which extend beyond the immediate viewing situation. This adds further weight to the criticism of previous research, identified in Chapter Two, which has examined home-based regulation in isolation from the family relationships which sustain it. Goodnow and Collins (1994) have also encountered this short-coming in research into parents' ideas about child development, which they suggest:

> 'concentrates on individuals, a concentration not yet in keeping with the recognition that we need to think also in terms of people as embedded in relationships and of families as containing people whose goals and paths of development influence and intersect with one another' (p.39).

In the extract below, the mother from family 8 also reminds us that parents face a number of (sometimes conflicting) demands on their attention in the family home, of which the

218

regulation of children's video viewing is one among many (what Buckingham calls the 'realities of family life' [1993a; p. 108]).

Mother: When you asked your first question about parenting and that, I was going to say that it's the hardest job in the world...Everything, I mean not just what they watch, but what they eat, what they dress, who they talk to, all that stuff, it's the hardest thing in the world. And nobody has written a book about the problems, well people have written about it but nobody can actually say 'come to the school of good parenting, and I'll tell you how to do it'! It's the school of life, and you kind of work out what you think is best, and it's all a bit hit and miss. Some people pick themselves up and try harder and others don't.

Hess and Goldman (1962) offer rare understanding when they note that '...parents are responsible for the set in the home. However, many factors interfere with the ability and motivation of parents in this area' (p.426). On the basis of the interviews conducted as part of the family case studies, it is apparent that children's viewing habits, particularly for young teenagers, are rarely (if ever) a major priority of parents attempting to provide for the 'mental and material welfare' of children in the home. Thus a distracted parent, or one who is not always aware of their children's viewing habits, is not necessarily "irresponsible"- such a charge is too strong given the conception of parental responsibility outlined above. In this context, irresponsibility is confined to the wilful disregard of children's viewing habits in the home. It is unclear from the family case study interviews the extent to which this might occur- certainly there was no evidence of it in the households examined here.

7.4 Concluding discussion

The concept of parental responsibility (the notion that parents have the prime responsibility for their children's video viewing habits in the home) finds unanimous support in the accounts provided by the parents interviewed. This support, it will be recalled, was also found to be widespread in the texts examined in Chapter Four. A clear distinction is drawn between the duties of the classification body, video suppliers and parents. Within this

division of labour inside and outside of the family home, the primacy of parental authority is recognised and widely supported.

The form that responsible parenting ought to take, however, is subject to a variety of specifications. A number of different strategies were identified with responsible parenting in the households interviewed. Parents' accounts are united, however, by a single theme which has been misinterpreted by previous researchers in this area. Responsible parenting is conceived in terms of the level of interest that a parent takes in their child(ren)'s viewing habits, and it is not simply a matter of applying generic controls on viewing behaviour. According to the interviewees, a parent may be considered responsible if they allow a child to watch something that they have judged as suitable. As the previous chapter has argued, suitability is not necessarily linked to the classification of a video. Thus a parent may be considered responsible if they allow their child of, for example, 13 to watch an '18' rated film on video, if it has been judged as suitable. In addition to traditional notions of *patria potestas* (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992), this expanded conception of parental responsibility is justified by the understanding that parents have developed an intimate and practical 'well of knowledge' about their children which allows them to make informed and judicious decisions about their viewing habits.

Chapter Eight
Conclusion

As stated in Chapter One, this inquiry ranges over a broad territory involving several different methodological approaches and the examination of "parental responsibility" from various perspectives. Nevertheless it is possible to draw together all of the insights yielded by this research, and this concluding chapter re-iterates the core arguments advanced in previous chapters. The latter part of this chapter presents a discussion of the various strengths and weaknesses of the approaches taken here, and consideration is given to the possible direction of future research. Finally, a tentative account of those policy implications prompted by the research is provided in due recognition of the fact that, for good or ill, the issues dealt with throughout are highly politicised in public debates about video regulation. Some reflection on these themes is therefore inevitable, if not from within the thesis then from outside.

8.1 Main arguments

From the time that the VCR was first commercially available in Britain, policy-makers and the news media have been concerned with the regulation of video supply, in an effort to control children's access to pre-recorded videos deemed "unsuitable" for their age group. These concerns have been heightened by the widespread perception that many children have ready access to "unsuitable" videos in the home. This is supported by several studies of young people's viewing habits, including that presented in Chapter Three. However, as reported, the issue of "under-age" viewing is complicated by the fact that children's viewing habits are frequently seen as mundane and uncontroversial by their own parents. The relative significance accorded to this issue by parents and agencies outside of the home differs accordingly.

The literature review of Chapter Two points to the fact that numerous studies discuss the apparent disparity between what parents claim they do and what they actually do in the

home. The assumption persists that parents are under some degree of pressure to present themselves in a positive light to researchers, and therefore tend to describe their own practice in socially acceptable ways. However, the basis for this assumption was unexplored by previous authors. Its existence is merely posited, and discussed in terms of the problems associated with self-report data collection methods. In contrast, Chapter Four presented an examination of the expectations placed on parents by agencies outside of the home. The emergent picture is a complex one, and it raises considerable problems for the argument that there is a clear set of expectations or pressures which demand conformity from parents.

In addition, Chapter Four points to the fact that the legislative framework developed to regulate videos (the VRA and subsequent amendments) confines statutory controls to supply and not exhibition in the home. While commercial video suppliers are legally responsible for restricting "under-age" access to pre-recorded videos, responsibility in the home is considered to be a moral obligation of parents. The success of the legislation is often posed in terms of the extent to which parents honour this obligation.

A distinction is drawn in this chapter between the concept "parental responsibility" and its conceptions. The concept of "parental responsibility" (that parents ought to assume ultimate responsibility for their children's video viewing habits in the home) is widely accepted, almost as axiomatic, across the political spectrum and the various agencies involved in public debates (the news media, Parliament, the video software industry, the BBFC and parents). However, there is far less agreement about what actually constitutes "good" parenting practice in this regard; there are a variety of competing conceptions of "parental responsibility" in circulation. Some of these place the BBFC classification system at the heart of good practice, while others- notably manifest in actual parental practice- accord far less weight to the classification system. They value parental discretion and recognise the contingent nature of suitability decision-making in the home, as described in Chapters Six and Seven.

It would appear, then, that the various conceptions of "parental responsibility" identified are incongruent, given their differing terms of reference. Many of the expectations placed upon parents by agencies outside of the family home (notably the print news media, Parliament and the BBFC) appear misplaced in the context of actual parental practice. It is unrealistic to assume that all parents will apply the strictures of the classification system in any mechanistic fashion; this does not reflect the way in which videos are judged within the home. The *duty* of parents implicit within the concept of "parental responsibility" which finds such widespread support is balanced by their *right* to exercise discretion within the home. Accordingly, "good" parenting involves the conscientious participation of parents in their children's video viewing habits. Beyond this vague and, for this reason, unsatisfactory conception there is little consensus about what constitutes "good" parenting as various agencies, including parents, express disagreement over the practical details of 'conscientious participation'.

This is not to suggest, however, that the classification system operated by the designated body under the terms of the amended VRA serves no useful function. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, the system does have a role to play in the 'conscientious participation' of parents described above. The parents interviewed are satisfied that commercial suppliers of videos are legally required to act *in loco parentis* and restrict the unauthorised access of "under-age" viewers to age-restricted videos. Furthermore, they are also prepared to accept the judgement of suitability based upon arbitrary age-grades encoded in the classification symbol appearing on pre-recorded videos, with the proviso that such information is advisory. In this capacity, the operation of the classification system is required to be both transparent (open to public scrutiny and accountability) and consistent.

With regards to transparency, a number of commentators have already argued that the ways in which the designated body, currently the BBFC, arrives at its determinations ought to be

more visible and accountable to the public (Matthews, 1994; Buckingham, 1996). Buckingham, for example, recommends that:

> '[t]he reasons for decisions should be published or made freely available for interested parties (for example through video shops); and it should be possible for decisions to be challenged by the public and independently reviewed. Steps should be taken to ensure that ordinary parents are involved in the decision-making process, or at least consulted- for example through establishing a representative panel of parents, and by conducting research' (1996; p.315).

Moreover, steps ought to be taken to provide 'more objective information for parents (and indeed for all viewers) about the content of programmes and videotapes, particularly where this relates to areas of general concern' (ibid.; p.314).

Both of these issues have been addressed by recent initiatives. Julian Brazier MP (Conservative) introduced a Ten Minute Rule Bill in July 1997, which sought to make the BBFC more accountable (the proposals were vague and the Bill succeeded only in raising the profile of the issue for future debate [Hansard, 8/7/97, column 774]). Meanwhile, the British Video Association, in collaboration with the BBFC, has introduced a system of consumer advice labels on pre-recorded videos which contain supplementary information about their likely contents.[1] The ultimate value of these initiatives still remains to be determined. There is every reason to pursue research examining the usefulness of consumer-advice labelling from the perspective of end-users. This could be incorporated into a rolling programme of consultation exercises by the designated body in order to remain familiar with public taste and opinion in these matters.

A number of the parents interviewed expressed concern about the apparent inconsistency of BBFC decision-making. The mother from family 8, discussing the reasons why she

---

[1] The BVA leaflet "Mum Can I Watch a Video?" gives details of the consumer advice labelling initiative. (BVA, 1994a).

allowed her two children, aged 13 and 9, to watch *Interview With a Vampire* (rated 18 on video) expresses a common sentiment:

Mother: But, you know, this is an 18 film that wasn't too bad. But you can't say
            that across the board with 18 films- you just don't know what you're going
            to get.

The perceived inconsistency of decision-making by the designated body can only be improved upon with the re-organisation of the classification process and better communication between itself and video audiences. The BBFC currently do not operate with a written set of guidelines and so consistency is unattainable in pure form because each video is judged on its own merits, and deliberations are informed by contemporaneous trends in public taste and attitudes which are subject to change over time (BBFC, 1992). However, this area is partly addressed by the initiatives relating to transparency in as much as the provision of more objective information about the likely contents of a video ought to afford parents, among others, greater insights into the reasoning behind particular decisions, thus enabling them to understand why different videos are grouped together in arbitrary age bands.

It is doubtful whether any of these measures will result in a decrease in levels of "under-age" video viewing, given that parents are often supportive of, or at least relatively unconcerned about, their own children's video viewing habits in the family home. What they will provide, for those parents who wish to take a proactive role in their children's video viewing, is an opportunity for them to base their judgements on as much information about the likely contents of videos as can be made available in a practical and accessible form. In the absence of universally agreed criteria for judging "good" parenting in this area, it is impossible, and therefore inappropriate, to say whether parents who make use of such an opportunity are any "better" than those that do not. As one ex-examiner of the BBFC explained in a letter to the Independent (12/4/94):

'[c]ertainly parents often do judge films and videos differently from the BBFC...And parents can, at present, get 15- and 18- certificate videos and show them quite legally in the home to their under-age children. But that does not make them wrong or immoral: they know their children best'.

The initiatives discussed above may not curry favour with opponents of the present classification system who want to prohibit all access to "violent videos" (as the issue is framed in the news media). In any case, as reported in Chapter Six, there is little evidence to suggest that such action is widely supported outside of the narrow confines of this debate. Opinion surveys which purport to show high levels of concern about "under-age" viewing actually confuse the distinction between the concern expressed about parents' *own* children (which is often low-level) and that for *other* children. Furthermore, they often involve reference to general content categories (like "sex" and "violence") which are notoriously hard to operationalise in research (as described in Chapter Six). For these reasons they must be treated with a degree of caution.

Moreover, attempts to extend the statutory regulation of video supply to encompass exhibition (the aim of New Clause 42, reported in Chapter Four) gain little or no support from the findings described in previous chapters. The corollary of the concept of 'parental responsibility' is support for the defence of parental discretion within the family home. It was a recognition of this fact, and the realisation that the statutory control of video viewing in the home is impractical and unenforceable, that led to the rejection of New Clause 42.

This directly undermines Professor Elizabeth Newson's suggestion, in connection with New Clause 42, that '[s]ometimes we have to find ways of preventing parents being irresponsible. Sometimes we have to find ways of showing parents that if they are irresponsible in various ways then...the law will be used against them' (The Late Show, BBC, May 1994). Instead, the present thesis lends credence to Archard's (1993) modest proposal that:

'[i]t seems reasonable to concede a certain power or authority to parents, that they may bring up children in the way they think appropriate...[although] the role of the State in recognising the powers and enforcing the duties of parents needs to be clarified' (p.11).

The arguments outlined above will not placate campaigners seeking to impose further restrictions on the supply and exhibition of pre-recorded videos. This echoes King's (1997) admission that his own conclusions

'may not answer the questions that readers who seek a better world for children want answered, or solve the problems they want solved. They may, however, take the failures and disappointed expectations of the reader and reconstruct them not as a spur to renewed efforts to find the right answers, but as the starting point for new conceptualizations of problems' (p.29).

8.2 Methodology re-considered

These observations are derived from the evidence provided by a number of quantitative and qualitative methods. Chapter Two reviewed previous studies into the home-based regulation of children's viewing habits and revealed that the majority of research in this field is based upon quantitative survey methods designed to explore the demographic and environmental determinants of home-based regulation. The research questions posed by these projects, and the means by which the variables are operationalised, are shown to be highly circumscribed and unsatisfactory. In broad terms, their conception of family relations and the mechanistic and unreflexive application of social categories based on "class", "gender" and "race/ethnicity" serve to undermine their claims to provide a valid account of household relationships. In line with the relatively small number of qualitative studies in this area, the present research attempted to provide a corrective to this body of

work by scrutinising its assumptions and claims with reference to the rich data characteristic of grounded, open-ended qualitative research.

While not wishing to downplay the importance of a re-examination of "gender" and "race/ethnicity" as they have been posed in previous research, the issue of "class" is central to this effort because of the way in which the public debate about video regulation has been formulated. Many references to "parental responsibility" are based upon the notion that "middle-class" practices represent "good" parenting, while irresponsible parents tend to be those in the "working-" or "under-class". The present study offers a rebuttal to this reductive speculation on a number of levels. The review of literature in Chapter Two highlights the fact that even in those studies which seek support for this hypothesis the evidence is weak and contradictory. Furthermore, Chapter Five demonstrates that the incidence of "under-age" video viewing does not appear to vary according to the employment status of the parents interviewed. It is as likely to occur in households with parents in professional occupations as in those in semi- or unskilled employment. Factors related to their job, for example the number of hours spent away from home, or the nature of their engagement with children other than their own, may well inform parents' attitudes and behaviour, although it is far from clear how these might be related to the socio-economic indicators employed by previous researchers. Factors which tend to cut across "class" lines (however they might be constituted) appear to be of more importance; notably access to, and the location of, audio-visual technology in the home; and the ages, and their relative distribution, of children present in the household.

Taking a historical perspective, as in Chapter Four, it is possible to see the 'respectable fears' (Pearson, 1983) of an unruly and irresponsible "under-class" of video-viewers as part of a much wider set of concerns about such features of modern political debate as welfare provision, public morality and the breakdown of the family. Yet because such anxieties are frequently expressed without reference to authoritative empirical evidence, they must be considered, as Petley argues, to be 'dangerously threadbare' (Barker and

Petley, 1997; p.100). This lends added impetus to the attempt made by this thesis to interrogate "commonsense" assumptions about "parental responsibility" and "class", based on grounded empirical data.

Although much has already been made of the shortfalls associated with survey research examining home-based regulation, this ought not to suggest that such methods are necessarily redundant when examining attitudes and behaviour in the home. When properly applied, the survey method can provide a macroscopic perspective on, for example, young people's accounts of their video viewing habits. The method was employed in Chapter Three for precisely this reason, as a means to gain some purchase, however impressionistic, on these accounts. The survey findings provide a context within which to locate the insights into family relationships yielded by the qualitative research. In addition, the two methods provide each other with a point at which to assess the validity of their data by the process of 'triangulation' (Wimmer and Dominick, 1994).

Both methods have been married together with an analysis of documents which make reference to the issue of "parental responsibility". It is this analysis which provides insights into the expectations made of parents, compared against parents' own accounts of their attitudes and behaviour which emerge from the survey and family case-study interviews. In this way it has been possible to expose the relationship between these expectations and parents' own practices in the family home, which, as discussed above, is often more complex than previous authors have assumed.

Sampling

Attention now turns to the attendant weaknesses of the approach taken here; shortfalls which are an inevitable consequence of the research design process (Shipman, 1988). To begin with, there are a number of points to be made in connection with the sampling strategies used in both the survey and family case study interviews. The most obvious being the metropolitan bias of the sample, which is the consequence of limited resources. It

is impossible to say whether rural populations, who might have less ready access to video shops in remote locations, display any differences from their urban counterparts with regards to home-based regulation. Future research might like to explore this urban/rural dimension, which is often overlooked in studies based upon crude regional categorisations (like a recent PACE report which divides its sample into geographical regions which take no account of urban/rural differences [PACE, 1997]).

Another potential problem associated with the samples relates to their size. The family case study work is based upon interviews with ten families. This compares favourably with previous work in the area (Morley, 1986; Finch and Mason, 1993; Buckingham, 1996), although it might be considered too small a sample to merit any credence by practitioners unfamiliar with qualitative methodology.

However, qualitative approaches are concerned with providing a degree of depth to an analysis which necessarily entails less concern with breadth (Gilgun *et al*, 1992; Finch and Mason, 1993). Previous survey research into home-based regulation which claims to be representative of larger populations suffers a dilution of its analytical acumen often as a direct result of its employment of crude social categorisations to dissect large samples. That said, there is still scope for well designed quantitative studies into the broad patterns of home-based regulation which take a more reflexive and less reductive approach to social categories, and these ought to be seen as complementary to qualitative studies like this one, rather than in opposition.

One final point bears mention in relation to sampling. The family case study work is based, of necessity, on a self-selected sample. That is, only those parents who agreed to participate were included in the study. This may neglect those parents who feel, for whatever reason, uneasy or even defensive about their attitudes and behaviour in the home. This problem is not peculiar to the present research, as all work based on consenting participants necessarily involves a self-selected sample. To a certain extent this short-fall is

balanced by a positive outcome of self-selection. Family recruitment was based initially on contacts established as a result of the school-based interviews described in Chapter Five. Once several families had agreed to participate they were asked to supply the names of friends and family whose presence in the research would yield insights into the ways in which children's video viewing habits are regulated across households where viewing may take place. This strategy of snowball sampling (Burgess, 1984) distinguishes the present study from previous ones based on the recruitment of discrete family units, which suffer as a result of their concentration on dissociated households. What results is a more naturalistic picture of home-based regulation as it is influenced by relationships within the home, and those which extend beyond it to friends and family.

Despite this positive outcome, much could have been gained from following up references made during the interviews to other friends and family not captured by the snow-ball sampling employed. The sample size of the family case-study work had to be maintained at a low level because of resource constraints, although an exhaustive inquiry into kinship and friendship ties would have been instructive. For example, the mother in family 2 explained how her daughter tends to watch 'horror' films on video with her aunt at her grand-parents' home. Had there been time, and were the family willing, it would have been useful to conduct interviews with these extended family members in order to gain a richer account of the ways in which home-based regulation is often dependent upon friends and relatives outside of the family home. These external accounts would also offer a point of 'triangulation' (Wimmer and Dominick, 1994) with the accounts of the original family members interviewed.

Synchronic vs diachronic analysis
The number of interviews conducted with each family was also restricted, in view of the time involved and the burden that researchers can bring to bear on their sample if they make repeated visits to the family home. In the majority of cases only one face-to-face interview was conducted, with a few follow-up telephone calls to clarify details. This means that the

accounts provided by the participants represent only one moment in time, a synchronic perspective on family life. Although participants were asked to reflect on their past experiences, such recollections are likely to be incomplete and partial given memory loss and the interpretation of events in hindsight. This synchronic perspective is unfortunate because one of the salient features of home-based regulation is its changing nature over time as children age and their relationships with siblings and parents develop (Buckingham, 1996). This process can only be partially reconstructed from the accounts of the families interviewed here, and it is certainly true that a longitudinal project, based on a series of interviews over time with the same families, would be better equipped to examine this diachronic dimension.

Attitudes and behaviour

There is also a potential problem with any research which is based upon the accounts of participants rather than the direct observation of behaviour in the home (Gunter and McAleer, 1997). The problem is not in the fact that people's accounts are used, but in their interpretation as evidence of actual patterns of behaviour. Mention was made earlier of the conviction that parents frequently say one thing about their practices, but do entirely different things in the privacy of their own home. While this point has already been addressed and shown to be problematical in the present context, it is undoubtedly the case that the accounts supplied by participants are not mere reflections of their behaviour.

In the present study, parents' accounts were treated as an entry point into their attitudes and behaviour in the home, and where possible the validity of these accounts was assessed by comparing accounts between participants. The interviews occurred in the family home, and so many features of interest to the study were directly observable, for example the presence and location of VCRs and pre-recorded videos, thereby providing further corroboration of accounts.

The functions of interviews

The value of parents' own accounts also lies in the functions that the interviews served for those taking part, because these shed light on the issue of 'parental responsibility' and home-based regulation. The interviews with parents did not simply reveal their pre-existing attitudes with fixed characteristics. The notion of attitudes as fixed objects awaiting discovery by researchers has been challenged by recent work in social psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Rather, attitudes are formed and their meaning negotiated during the act of conversation itself. On one level, this process was revealed by those participants who thanked the interviewer for allowing them to "think through" ideas which previously they had taken-for-granted with little self-reflection. One of the features of parents' talk about home-based regulation, described in Chapters Five and Six, was their ambivalence towards several of the issues under discussion. There were many instances when parents appeared to be grappling with conflicting impulses in relation to issues like the positive/negative effects of "under-age" viewing of "adult" material on video.

The interviews also served another function for participants. When parents were interviewed in the presence of their children, it was apparent that they frequently took the opportunity to verbalise, and re-assert, many of the tacit understandings about home-based regulation. In other words, the interviews not only illuminated family relationships and home-based regulation but they were also constitutive of those relationships, instances of the ongoing negotiation of family roles (Finch and Mason, 1993). It is precisely through such parent/child transactions that boundaries are established around what is judged to be acceptable behaviour in the home, and the interview, far from being a simple account of such phenomena, is itself part of family negotiations (Buckingham, 1993a).

Document analysis

The document analysis employed in Chapter Four derives legitimacy from the quality and breadth of the primary sources consulted. The present study analysed those publicly available documents of institutions with either a vested or self-stated interest in video

regulation. Once the institutions were decided upon, every relevant and available document was consulted and included within the analysis if it touched on the subject of "parental responsibility". Yet this means that those documents which are not publicly available (the minutes of private meetings, unofficial memoranda, preliminary policy documents and consultation papers and so on) evaded analysis, although it is impossible to say what they would have contributed to it. Furthermore, the analysis was confined to written sources which tend to represent the polished and final form of policy statements and news reports (with the possible exception of Hansard transcripts). Future research would benefit from interviewing the main players in policy-making and news gathering (for example, Parliamentarians, civil servants, members of the BBFC, industry representatives and crusading journalists) in order to make connections between the public facade of institutions presented in their official documentation and the behind-the-scenes process of policy formation. Only then will the full historical and political context of public debates about the regulation of video and the nature of "parental responsibility" be open to full deliberation and understanding.

Past, present and future directions

These ruminations point the way towards research into the relationship between what various agencies outside of the family home demand of parents, and what parents are willing to do and are capable of doing. In the past, the absence of satisfactory research into this area has allowed the void to be filled by unsubstantiated and politically motivated rhetoric about "irresponsible" parenting. This thesis demonstrates that untested assumptions about what goes on in family homes, across the social spectrum, do not provide a sound basis upon which to formulate and evaluate policies for video regulation. What is needed is a clearer vision of the sorts of issues which are of genuine concern for parents (Buckingham, 1996). Moreover, strategies aimed at helping parents to undertake their responsibilities must first recognise what parents are prepared to do (and are capable of doing), and this entails building upon what is already being achieved in the family home.

Appendix I
VideoWatch questionnaire

Video WATCH

We want to know how important videos are to you.

500 young people from a number of schools are taking part.

What you write is completely confidential.

This is not a test, but you should try to answer each question as truthfully as possible.

To answer the questions please tick the appropriate box or boxes with a pen, or write the answers in the spaces provided.

If you have any difficulties, please ask a teacher to help you.

You may not see the immediate relevance of some questions (like those which ask about your family and background), but these help us to get some idea of the bigger picture.

1. In the last *two weeks* did you

	Yes	No
-read a book at home?.................................	☐	☐
-read a magazine?...	☐	☐
-read a newspaper?.......................................	☐	☐
-watch television?..	☐	☐
-listen to the radio?......................................	☐	☐
-play video games?.......................................	☐	☐
-use a personal computer?..........................	☐	☐
-do sports outside of school?.....................	☐	☐
-watch live sports?.......................................	☐	☐
-spend time on a hobby?..............................	☐	☐
-go swimming?..	☐	☐
-go to the cinema?..	☐	☐
-listen to music?...	☐	☐
-watch videos?..	☐	☐
-go out with friends?....................................	☐	☐
-go to a youth club?......................................	☐	☐
-go to a party?..	☐	☐
-chat with friends on the 'phone?...........	☐	☐
-read comics?..	☐	☐
-go to a friend's house?...............................	☐	☐

2. Of those things which you enjoy doing, please say which are your *favourites*:

(space is given below for up to three favourites)

_____

_____

_____

3. Which of these do you have where you live:
    -television set?

Yes (how many?)	No	Don't Know
☐ _____	☐	☐

    -Video player/recorder?

Yes (how many?)	No	Don't Know
☐ _____	☐	☐

    -satellite/cable television?

Yes	No	Don't Know
☐	☐	☐

4. Do you have a television set in your bedroom?

Yes	No
☐	☐

5. Do you have a video player/recorder in your bedroom?

Yes	No
☐	☐

6. Do you have a *Sega* or *Nintendo* machine in your bedroom?

Yes	No
☐	☐

___

7. Do you watch movies

	Yes	No
-on television?	☐	☐
-at the cinema?	☐	☐
-on video?	☐	☐

8. Do you prefer to watch movies:

    (please tick only one box)

    -on television?.................................. ☐
            OR
    -at the cinema?.................................. ☐
            OR
    -on video?... ☐

237

9.   Where do you *mostly* watch movies?

-on television?.. ☐
        OR
-at the cinema?... ☐
        OR
-on video?... ☐

10.   What is your favourite type of movie?

_____

_____

What types of movie don't you like?

_____

_____

_____

11.   At what time do you usually go to bed
       -on a school-day?

anytime.. ☐
before8.00pm... ☐
between 8.00pm and 9.00pm...................... ☐
between 9.00pm and 10.00pm.................... ☐
between 10.00pm and 11.00pm.................. ☐
between 11.00pm and 12.00am.................. ☐
after12.00am... ☐

-at the weekend?

anytime.. ☐
before8.00pm... ☐
between 8.00pm and 9.00pm...................... ☐
between 9.00pm and 10.00pm.................... ☐
between 10.00pm and 11.00pm.................. ☐
between 11.00pm and 12.00am.................. ☐
after12.00am... ☐

-during the school holidays?

anytime.. ☐
before8.00pm.. ☐
between 8.00pm and 9.00pm...................... ☐
between 9.00pm and 10.00pm.................... ☐
between 10.00pm and 11.00pm.................. ☐
between 11.00pm and 12.00am.................. ☐
after12.00am.. ☐

---

12. How many times have you been to the cinema *in the last two weeks*?

(please tick only one box)

Noneatall.. ☐
Once.. ☐
Twice... ☐
Threetimes... ☐
More than three times................................ ☐

13. Is this more or less than usual?

(please tick only one box)

More	Less	About usual
☐	☐	☐

14. Would you have liked to have gone *more often*?

Yes   No
☐   ☐

If you would, why didn't you?

(please tick only one box)

-nomoney.. ☐
-notime... ☐
-no-one to go with...................................... ☐
-not allowed to go...................................... ☐

-another reason (please say what)

_____

239

15. How do you find out about which movies to see *at the cinema?*

Yes No
- from newspapers................................. ☐ ☐
- from magazines................................. ☐ ☐
- from TV programmes........................... ☐ ☐
- from film posters.............................. ☐ ☐
- from the radio.................................. ☐ ☐
- from trailers at the cinema................... ☐ ☐
- from trailers on videos........................ ☐ ☐
- from friends.................................... ☐ ☐
- from relatives.................................. ☐ ☐
- from somewhere else (please say where)

_____

16. How many times have you watched a video *in the last two weeks?*

(please tick only one box)
None at all.. ☐
Once.. ☐
Twice... ☐
Three times....................................... ☐
More than three times............................ ☐

17. Is this more or less than usual?

(please tick only one box)

More   Less   About usual
☐   ☐   ☐

18. Would you have liked to have watched *more videos?*

Yes No
☐ ☐

If you would, why didn't you?

(please tick only one box)
- no money... ☐
- no time.. ☐
- another reason (please say what)

_____

240

19. Were *most* of the videos you watched in the last two weeks (please tick only one box)

-rented?.. ☐

　　OR

-taped from the television?...................... ☐

　　OR

-bought/given as presents?...................... ☐

20. Please give the name of each video you saw in the last two weeks.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

21. How do you find out about which movies to see *on video?*

	Yes	No
-from newspapers..	☐	☐
-from magazines..	☐	☐
-from TV programmes......................................	☐	☐
-from film posters..	☐	☐
-from the radio...	☐	☐
-from trailers at the cinema......................	☐	☐
-from trailers on videos..............................	☐	☐
-from friends..	☐	☐
-from relatives..	☐	☐
-from video shop displays...........................	☐	☐

-from somewhere else (please say where)

_____

22. Does anyone in your family have a card for *renting* videos from a shop?

Yes　No (if not, go to
☐　　☐　question 26)

If you answered yes, please say who does:

	Yes	No
-you...	☐	☐
-parent(s)...	☐	☐
-brother/sister......................................	☐	☐
-other relative.......................................	☐	☐

-someone else (please say who)

_____

23. **Where do you most regularly rent videos from?**

(please tick only one box)

-Blockbuster Video.. ☐

OR

-Ritz... ☐

OR

-Local video shop.. ☐

OR

-Library.. ☐

OR

-Don't know... ☐

24. **How do you *normally* get to the video shop?**

(please tick only one box)

-by car... ☐

OR

-on foot.. ☐

OR

-by bus... ☐

OR

-on a bike... ☐

25. Who *normally* goes with you?

-no-one:.. ☐

OR

-parent(s):... ☐

OR

-friend(s):... ☐

OR

-brother/sister... ☐

OR

-other relative:.. ☐

---

26. What are the *names* of your three favourite movies *on video*?

_____

_____

_____

27. Do you also watch

	Yes	No
-music videos?	☐	☐
-keep fit videos?	☐	☐
-sports videos?	☐	☐
-television comedy videos?	☐	☐

-any others? (Please write them here)

_____

_____

_____

28. Do you ever borrow videos from friends?

Yes	No
☐	☐

If you do, what was the last video you borrowed?

_____

29. Do you ever lend videos to friends?

Yes No
☐ ☐

If you do, what was the last video you lent to a friend?

_____

30. How many *pre-recorded videos* do you own personally?

(please tick only one box)

None.. ☐
One.. ☐
Two.. ☐
Three... ☐
Four.. ☐
Five... ☐
Six... ☐
More than six.. ☐

31. Have you ever watched a movie *on video* classified as:

	Yes	No	Don't Know
- U ?	☐	☐	☐
- P G ?	☐	☐	☐
- 1 2 ?	☐	☐	☐
- 1 5 ?	☐	☐	☐
- 1 8 ?	☐	☐	☐
- 1 8 R ?	☐	☐	☐

For each of those that you answered yes to, please give one example of a movie you have seen:

-U: _____
-PG: _____
-1 2: _____
-1 5: _____
-1 8: _____
-1 8R: _____

32. Have you ever *watched* a pirated video?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
	☐	☐	☐

If you have, please give one example of a pirated video you've watched:

_____

_____

33. Have you ever *bought* a pirated video?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
	☐	☐	☐

If you have, give an example of one you've bought:

_____

_____

---

34. Do you ever watch videos

	Never	Some times	Most times	Every time
-alone?	☐	☐	☐	☐
-with friends?	☐	☐	☐	☐
-with your parent(s)?	☐	☐	☐	☐
-with other adults?	☐	☐	☐	☐
-with a brother/sister?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Who else do you watch videos with?

_____

---

35. Have you ever bought a video for yourself?

	Yes	No (if not, go to question 37)
	☐	☐

36. If you have, please say where you bought it/them from:

	Yes	No
-Videoshop....................................	☐	☐
-Market stall..................................	☐	☐
-Newsagent...................................	☐	☐
-From a friend...............................	☐	☐

-Somewhere else (please say where)_____

_____

_____

37. Has anyone ever given you a video as a present?

Yes   No (if not, go to
☐   ☐   question 39)

Who?	Yes	No
-parent(s).....................................	☐	☐
-brother/sister..............................	☐	☐
-other relative...............................	☐	☐
-friend...	☐	☐

-someone else (please say who)

_____

38. What are the names of the videos you have been given as presents?

_____

_____

_____

_____

39. Do *you* ever watch videos

	Yes	No
-at home?......................................	☐	☐
-at a friend's house?.....................	☐	☐
-at a relative's house?..................	☐	☐

40. Where else do *you* watch videos?

	Yes	No
-at school	☐	☐
-in hotels	☐	☐
-at a youth club	☐	☐

-somewhere else (please say where)

_____

41. Where do you watch *most* videos?

(please tick only one box)

-at home... ☐
    OR
-at a relative's house............................ ☐
    OR
-at a friend's house.............................. ☐
    OR
-somewhere else (please say where)

_____

42. At what time do you *usually* watch videos on a school day? (please tick only one box)

-before 5.00pm...................................... ☐
-between 5.00pm and 7.00pm................... ☐
-between 7.00pm and 9.00pm................... ☐
-after 9.00pm... ☐
-anytime... ☐

43. At what time do you *usually* watch videos at the weekend? (please tick only one box)

-before 9.00am...................................... ☐
-between 9.00am and 12.00pm.................. ☐
-between 12.00pm and 3.00pm.................. ☐
-between 3.00pm and 6.00pm.................... ☐
-between 6.00pm and 9.00pm.................... ☐
-after 9.00pm... ☐
-anytime... ☐

44. At what time do you *usually* watch videos during the school-holidays? (please tick only one box)

-before 9.00am....................................... ☐
-between 9.00am and 12.00pm.................... ☐
-between 12.00pm and 3.00pm................... ☐
-between 3.00pm and 6.00pm.................... ☐
-between 6.00pm and 9.00pm.................... ☐
-after 9.00pm... ☐
-anytime.. ☐

---

45. What is the *latest time* that you have stayed up to watch a video? (please tick only one box)

-before 10.00pm..................................... ☐
-between 10.00pm and 11.00pm................ ☐
-between 11.00pm and 12.00am................ ☐
-between 12.00am and 1.00am.................. ☐
-between 1.00am and 2.00am................... ☐
-after 2.00am... ☐

What video were you watching?

_____

Where did you watch this video?

(please tick only one box)

-at home.. ☐
-at a friend's house.................................. ☐
-at a relative's house............................... ☐
-somewhere else (please say where)

_____

---

46. Do you know how to record things from the TV using a video recorder?   Yes   No (if not go to
                                                            ☐   ☐   question 49)

47. If you do, what kinds of programmes do you record
for yourself.   Yes No
-sport?.. ☐   ☐
-movies?... ☐   ☐
-comedy?.. ☐   ☐
-soaps?... ☐   ☐
-children's TV?... ☐   ☐
-music programmes?....................................... ☐   ☐
-others (please say what)_____

48. Do you ever record programmes from the TV
which are on after ten o'clock at night?
                                           Yes No
                                           ☐   ☐
If you do, please say what the last thing was that
you taped at this time:_____

_____

49. Roughly how much pocket money do you get each
week?   (please tick only one box)
None.. ☐
Less than 50p... ☐
Between 50p and £1.50................................. ☐
Between £1.50 and £2.50.............................. ☐
More than £2.50... ☐

50. Do you do any paid work?   Yes No
                                       ☐   ☐

If you do, how much do you get paid each week?
                              (please tick only one box)
                                       ☐
Less than £10.00.. ☐
Between £10.00 and £20.00.......................... ☐
More than £20.00... ☐

51. How old are you?_____

52. Are You?   Male   Female
                       ☐   ☐

53. **Where were you born?**

England.. ☐
Irish Republic.. ☐
Northern Ireland... ☐
Scotland... ☐
Wales... ☐
None of the above (please say where)

_____

54. **Please tick the group to which you belong:**

Bangladeshi... ☐
Black - African.. ☐
Black - Caribbean.. ☐
Black - Other (please say what)_____
Chinese.. ☐
Indian... ☐
Pakistani... ☐
White - English.. ☐
White - Irish (Northern Ireland)................ ☐
White - Irish (Republic of Ireland)........... ☐
White - Scottish.. ☐
White - Welsh... ☐
White - Other European................................. ☐
White - Other (please say what)_____
None of the above (please say what)

_____

55. **Is your family religious?**   Yes   No
                                        ☐   ☐

If your family is religious, what religion do
they follow?_____

56. **Do you speak any languages other than English**
    ***at home*?*   Yes   No
                                        ☐   ☐

If you do, what are they?_____

_____

250

57. Do you watch videos in languages other than English? Yes ☐ No ☐

If you do, please say which languages:

_____

_____

58. If you have any sisters, please say how old they are:_____

59. If you have any brothers, please say how old they are:_____

☞ Thank you very much for taking part in this important research.

Please make sure that you have answered all of the questions that apply to you.

Appendix II
Family case-studies

Family one

Family one is a dual-parent, white British family living in North London. Both parents are aged between 36-45. The mother is a school cook and cleaner, and the father is a local refuse collector. The household contains two dependent children- a son aged eighteen and a daughter aged fourteen. The daughter is in full-time education at a local Comprehensive school.

All of the family members were present during the interview. Prior to the family interview the daughter had been interviewed at school.

The household contains three television sets, one of which is in the daughter's bedroom, and one Video Cassette Recorder in the main living room. The family also has a subscription to Sky satellite television. The father and son are both members of local video rental libraries, although since subscribing to Sky satellite the family rarely watch videos (perhaps two a month). The father tends to rent videos for the family- the last rental being the feature film *Heat* (18) which he watched with his daughter. The family have a large collection of pre-recorded videos in the home, stored on shelves in the main living room. The father has collected numerous James Bond films, and various titles starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, Clint Eastwood and Sylvester Stallone, reflecting his preference for 'action' films. The mother has a Disney collection for her young nieces to watch when they visit. She describes herself as not being a 'film person', and she rarely visits the cinema, unlike her husband who prefers to see feature films 'on the big screen'.

The son and daughter have very few constraints on their video viewing behaviour at home. The only extant viewing rule is that no-one is allowed to watch "soft porn" in the house:

Mother: ...We wouldn't let either of them watch any soft porn or anything like that. They're not watching that while I'm sitting in the same room. I mean it just wouldn't be in the house.

There was little evidence that anyone wanted to watch "soft porn", or that this rule had caused any problems within the family.

The family members share close relations. According to the mother, the children treat their parents 'like brother and sister'. Even though the father claimed his daughter had a 'bad attitude' he put this down to her generation's lack of respect for elders, and to her age as a young teenager. Both parents displayed concern for their children's welfare, as evidenced by the fact that the son was 'in the dog house' for staying out late the previous weekend, which resulted in a call to the Police.

The parents attempted to enforce bed-times (9.00pm) for their children up until they went to secondary school. Since then they have tended to make their own way to bed.

The mother made it clear that responsibility for deciding what is suitable viewing in their home resides with her and her husband.

Mother: If we think it's okay for her to watch an 18, then that's okay really, but if we, we should know what she's like. I mean if she was some kind of peculiar freak who was like a bit wild, we wouldn't like let her watch these weird films [...] I mean you can be the judge of it.

Both parents felt the classification system to be useful, and that it ought to be rigidly applied by the video suppliers in the absence of parents.

The mother takes a greater interest in the suitability of material for her daughter to watch than does her husband, although she rarely feels it necessary to exercise overt controls:

Interviewer: Who would you say offers more control over viewing?
Mother: I'd say it was me
Father: I'd say yeah, her.

Mother: It's just because, well I don't know. I'd say it was me, but I'm not
                 usually here. I could be anywhere in the house or out. I'm not usually
                 here when there's something on which might need his authority, but I
                 don't think he'd give it anyway. He kind of lets them make up their own
                 minds. If they want to watch it they can watch it.

The parents appear confident that their daughter is not drawn to material which they deem

unsuitable, even though she has easy access to age-restricted videos in the home.

Neither parent subscribes to the "effects" model of harm:

Mother: ...I've never seen it but I've heard that [*The Texas*]*Chainsaw Massacre*
                 is meant to be really violent. If they come in with that, I wouldn't let
                 them watch it. Not because I think they'll copy it [...] just because I
                 wouldn't want them watching that kind of stuff because I think it's too
                 gruesome.

The mother assesses "harm" in terms of distress caused, not in terms of imitative

behaviour.

The father's taste in feature films is for "action", although he feels there is too much "sex"

and "violence" on television and videos. He does make a distinction between types of

"violent" material: that which he finds pleasurable is also more acceptable for his daughter

to see. His wife is less sanguine in her distaste for all forms of "horror" and "violence"

which she sees as gratuitous:

Mother: Yeah, well I don't think it's necessary. They don't need that much just
                 to sell the videos. But then that's because I'm not into them. [...] So I
                 think there's too much of that in videos. But then I know I wouldn't
                 watch them. So that would be my answer- the easy way out: just not
                 watch them.

There was no evidence, however, that the mother's distaste for such feature films had lead

to a direct prohibition of viewing material in the home. However, it may well have played

some role in the development of her daughter's tastes which, although not as clear cut as

her mother's, are for comedies as opposed to 'horrors'.

Of the fourteen titles in exercise two, eight had been seen in the household. The family had seen *Mrs Doubtfire* (PG), *The Mask* (PG), *Silence of the Lambs* (18) and *Dumb and Dumber* (12) on video. The father, mother and son had also seen *Disclosure* (18) on Sky (the daughter could have watched it had she wanted to). The parents had seen *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* (18) on television, and the son and daughter had both seen *Pulp Fiction* (18) and *Interview With a Vampire* (18) on video (the daughter saw both at friends' houses, without her parents' knowledge).

Family 2

Family two is comprised of a white British single-mother and her daughter. They live in North London where the mother (aged 25-36) works as a cleaner at a local primary school. The daughter was fourteen at the time of the research, and in full-time education at a local comprehensive school.

The household contains three television sets, one of which is in the daughter's bedroom along with a VCR. Another VCR is used in the main living room.

Only the mother was present during the interview. The daughter had been interviewed at school.

The mother described her relationship with her daughter as if they were friends, and she claimed to find parenting enjoyable:

Interviewer: Do you talk with her, then?
Mother: Yeah, yeah. Even though she doesn't want to that much...but [laughs]. She's in her own little world most of the time. Yeah, but I do enjoy it. I don't find any problems with it. The only problems I find is, like, erm, what time she has to come in. When her friends come in later, then she don't see why she can't and they can. That causes problems, but apart from that she, she's good. So far [laughs].

Here the mother expresses some concern for her daughter's welfare outside of the home, and refers to her peer-relations in this regard. According to the account given by family 3, this mother's concern is seen as excessive by those outside of the home, and her daughter is viewed by her friends as 'over-protected'.

Despite being 'just like friends' the mother is unable to reveal many details about her daughter's music tastes and film preferences. The daughter often confines herself to her room where she has a her own TV and VCR, or else goes outside of the home after school:

Mother: ...She's erm, every night she's out. She's never in. She doesn't
               like really being in. She says she's bored indoors. But, erm, she's
               always with friends. She's got a lot of friends. You know, she's...she
               has got a lot. Boys and girls. And she does hang around with, like, a
               gang of them. They go to the youth club... They all sit around in there
               'til about 9.00 o'clock.

She is not a frequent TV viewer, and her main viewing occurs at the weekend.

The daughter is a member of a video rental club, although she seldom uses her card now. The daughter claimed that on occasion her mother has rented '15' and '18' rated videos for her, although the mother never made such an admission during the interview. Instead, she claimed that most of the videos they watched came from her younger sister, who is a member of the Britannia video club, a mail-order supplier of pre-recorded videos.

The daughter never buys pre-recorded videos, relying on her mother in this regard. The mother often buys 'U' and 'PG' videos, as she is a fan of Disney animation, although she is not averse to buying videos with higher certifications:

Interviewer: So [daughter would] like to see some older ones then?
Mother: Yeah. She would. [laughs].
Interviewer: But you wouldn't buy her those?
Mother: I would, if they're not too horror, because if they've got them on at the
               time then I'll be scared- you know [laughs]. I'll be, like, scared.

The mother's main objection to "horrors" is that she does not like them, and allowing them into the house might mean she has nightmares herself. The mother is quite aware that her daughter is better able to 'handle' such material than she is:

Mother: Yeah, well she handles it better than me [laughs]. Yeah. Some of them
              I'd say she didn't. She'll get a bit nervous, and I know she is. She
              keeps leaving lights on everywhere she goes [laughs].

In addition to her fears about "horror", the mother does have some concerns about content of a sexual nature, citing a rape scene in an episode of *Cracker* as 'a bit violent...I wished she'd never seen that'.

The mother felt unable to control her daughter's viewing since she turned thirteen- a position she believed common to many parents:

Mother: Erm, I think everybody's the same, really now. I think because they're
              so different now, the teenagers, from when we were, we kind of have
              to accept they're watching more than we would. If they don't see it here
              then they see it at a friend's house. So, I mean you haven't really got
              much influence on them then.

The mother pointed out that her own parents are very supportive financially. Almost every weekend the mother and daughter go over to the grandparent's house and spend time with them and the mother's younger sister who is 28 years old.

It is during these occasions that the daughter is most likely to come into contact with "horrors", as her aunt is a 'horror film fan'. The daughter has developed a taste for these largely as a result of her contact with her aunt, despite her mother's personal reservations:

Mother: ...They scare me, the horror films, and I don't watch them. I don't
              watch them at all. [My daughter will] tape them, and watch them bit by
              bit through the day, til she's seen it all. But I don't watch them...My
              sister gets videos out to watch and they sit glued to it [laughs]. I'm not
              [laughs].

This sometimes causes concern for the mother, although she rarely objects to her daughter's video viewing habits:

Mother: I do, some of them. Some of them that are really gruesome and...I don't like them. And also like *Poltergeist* sort of films. She'll say she's not scared but I know at the end of the evening she is. She's still thinking about it. So I don't like her watching them.
Interviewer: So, supernatural ones, then?
Mother: Yeah. They do scare her a bit. Even though she won't let on, but I know they do [laughs].

Her concern is not about imitative effects, but the possibility of short term distress caused to her daughter.

The daughter conceded that videos played only a marginal role in her leisure time- she is now more interested in socialising with friends. This was confirmed by the mother, who claimed that her daughter used to watch more videos, but now tends only to do so during school holidays.

Outside of the home, the mother trusts her daughter's judgement:

Interviewer: You've already mentioned that [daughter] sees things around friends' house. Does that worry you at all?
Mother: Erm, no. No it doesn't worry me. She always tells me what she's watching- she says she's been round so and sos house watching, and they are mostly horror films. *Candyman* was one of them. And she kept on and on about how good it was. But, erm, no I don't really worry because she doesn't really get that influenced by them, so I don't really worry about it.

The mother displayed a thorough knowledge of the classification system, and agreed with its implementation in principle, as long as suppliers co-operate in its administration. However, she was aware that her daughter had access to '15's from the video shop, which was a cause for concern:

Mother: I mean [daughter] goes out and gets 15s, when she shouldn't, and the shop lets her. And I suppose some of them might be 18, I don't know. But it's useful if the shops use them, and go by them. And then people can get them out- whatever people feel's right for the age.

The daughter had seen six of the films featured in exercise two: *Mrs Doubtfire* (PG), *The Mask* (PG), *Dumb and Dumber* (12) and *Interview with a Vampire* (18) on video, and *Silence of the Lambs* (18 on video) on television. The mother had seen all of these except for *Interview with a Vampire* (18); the daughter had seen it with her aunt.

The mother felt that her daughter could probably watch *Pulp Fiction* (18), but she would have to be present at the outset to see if it was suitable.

She also claimed that she would allow her daughter to see *Disclosure*, but 'not with her mates', because 'they'd be silly'. The sexual themes of the film are not unsuitable in themselves, but would not be suitable in an atmosphere of childish silliness and titillation.

Family 3

Family three comprises a black British single-mother (aged 36-45), employed as a secretary, and her daughter (14) who attends a North London Comprehensive school.

The household contains three television sets, one of which is in the daughter's bedroom. A VCR is used in the main living room, where the main television set is located.

Both the mother and daughter were present throughout the case study interview and the daughter had been interviewed previously at school.

Although both mother and daughter claimed not to spend a great deal of leisure time together, the mother appears to be quite knowledgeable about her daughter's tastes and activities. Unlike family two there was no evidence of close association with the extended family, many of whom also live in London.

The daughter has a close circle of friends with whom she spends much of her time. The mother finds such an arrangement advantageous, as it provides her an opportunity for her own 'space':

Interviewer: Do you spend a lot of time with your friends?
Daughter: Yeah.
Interviewer: What does your mum think of that?
Mother: ...Good, I've got the place to myself, I can do what I want, I can play my own music, I can watch what I want.

Despite having an active social life outside of the home, the daughter also takes a great deal of interest in films in general, and videos in particular:

Interviewer: How would you characterise the role of videos in your lives?
Daughter: To me they're quite important.
Mother: We're quite fussy about what we watch. We don't just watch anything.

The mother openly admitted to not taking control over her daughter's viewing habits, even though she is keen to be seen as a discriminating viewer. At the outset of the interview, the mother introduced the idea of violence being endemic in society, and therefore difficult to avoid:

Mother: They don't need to watch film, they just go out into real life and see violence, from what she's saying. [she is referring to daughter's telephone conversation about a recent and local shooting].
Interviewer: Is this a rough area around here?
Mother: Yeah. It's had one murder, one shooting in this street in the last ten years.

This justified her claim that regulating her daughter's viewing habits would not serve any purpose other than to cause tension within the home.

Both mother and daughter share a wide ranging taste for screen entertainment. The mother enjoys 'black and white films and I love 1950s and 1940s English films'. As an indication of her breadth of taste, she also enjoys 'films like *Terminator*...And I liked *Howards End* and *Remains of the Day*.' They both enjoyed *Pulp Fiction*, which they intend to buy on video.

The daughter does not share her mother's preference for historical drama, although she will watch them with an open mind. She prefers contemporary dramas, like *Trainspotting* (18), *Menace II Society* (18) and *Boyz 'n the Hood* (15). These latter two films are of concern to the mother, who feels that they present realistic violence, which is unsettling in a way that other portrayals are not.

The mother trusts her daughter's judgement, and has no formal viewing rules. She is confident of daughter's ability to "handle" challenging material:

Mother:	I trust her, yeah. I know she's sensible. If she was a bit dopey no, it would be a different story. [...] But at least she can handle it.
Interviewer:	Do you trust your mum's judgement?
Daughter:	Erm, yeah. But then again I don't really ask her. If I want to get a film out=
Mother:	You still have to ask if you can get a film out.
Daughter:	Yeah it's only because your going to stay in. It's not exactly as if I say 'mum can I get this video out', or 'mum get a video out, can I watch it at this time'. Ever. But no, I don't really ask my mum at all. I just get it out.

Neither mother nor daughter could recall a recent instance where the mother had objected to the daughter's choice of video viewing. Both agreed that there had been occasion to do this in the past, before the daughter moved up to secondary school:

Interviewer:	Who does the most renting?
Daughter:	Me.
[...]	
Interviewer:	And do they let you rent 15s and 18s?
Daughter:	Yeah.
Mother:	They used to phone up, like, to ask my permission, but they don't do that any more. Do they? [laughs].
Daughter:	No.
Interviewer:	Does that bother you?
Mother:	I think it did once. I did complain once, didn't I? I think I did. I don't remember what you got...something to do with, er...what was it? Something I didn't like and didn't agree with.
Interviewer:	Did you feel they'd let you down?
Mother:	Yeah, I did. And now I've forgotten [laughs].

The fact that the details of this episode are not at the forefront of the mother's memory would suggest that it has become inconsequential. Furthermore, she has rented '15' and '18' rated videos for her daughter to watch, and sees nothing wrong in such action:

Interviewer: Do you think [the classification system] is a useful system?
Mother: I don't think anyone takes much notice, you know. They're all so strict about it, but I haven't been strict about it and she seems to be okay.

Despite dismissing the system in this way, the mother was knowledgeable about its operation, and felt parents were best served by it when children are "young"-up until children leave primary school.

The mother draws a distinction between different types of violence: that which is 'funny' and 'corny', for example in *Terminator*, and that which is realistic, as in *Menace II Society*. The former is 'acceptable', whilst the latter is of concern to her, although she rarely acts upon her concerns other than to voice them. Concern over realistic violence is rooted in a desire to prevent her daughter becoming distressed by what she sees. A recent example was given: the mother and daughter jointly decided to fast-forward through a violent scene in *Casino* (18) which they both found distressing.

Of the fourteen films in exercise two, the mother and daughter had seen *Pulp Fiction* (18), *Schindler's List* (15), *Childs Play 3* (18), *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Interview With a Vampire* (18) on video. In addition, the mother had seen *Mrs Doubtfire* (PG) on video, while the daughter saw it in the cinema. The daughter had also seen *The Mask* (PG), *Evil Dead II* (18) and *Dumb and Dumber* (12) on video.

Family 4

Family four is a dual-parent, white British family, living in North London. The mother (aged 46-55) is a librarian and the father (aged 36-45) is a local government officer. They

have one dependent child at home- a daughter aged fifteen who is in full-time education at a local Comprehensive school.

The mother and daughter were interviewed at home. The father was working in an upstairs room at the time of the interview.

The household contains two television sets, one of which is in the daughter's bedroom, and one VCR in the main living room. The family also have two personal computers, one of which is used to access the Internet.

Although the family claim to be a 'close' one, they rarely engage in shared activities, other than watching television and shopping. The father and daughter enjoy sports programmes, whilst the mother and daughter most regularly watch *The Waltons* together. All three watch comedy shows like *Harry Enfield and Chums*, and *The X-Files* together.

Visits to the cinema as a family are infrequent because the daughter does not enjoy the experience. She prefers to watch 'cult' movies which are not always available to her at the local cinema. 'Cult' films include: *Shallow Grave* (18), *Trainspotting* (18), *True Romance* (18) and *From Dawn Til Dusk* (18). Her taste for these has developed quite recently:

Daughter: [...] Cos over the last couple of years I've just been taking more of an
             interest in films because when I leave school I want to go on to A-level
             and do media studies, and eventually be a screen-play writer or
             something like that.

Unlike many of her female friends she does not particularly enjoy "horror" films, a genre which she finds predictable, although she was a devotee of Point Horror novels when she was younger:

Interviewer: Have you developed a taste for horror from those books?
Daughter: No, I'm not particularly into horror at all, but it's because it was such an
             easy read and[...] I never really watched anything heavier than
             Freddie Kreuger, but I never really enjoyed them because they're
             predictable really, a lot of them.

She shares the same tastes as her father, who tends to rent videos for the family:

Daughter: Yeah, I mean usually when dad gets a video I usually don't watch the beginning. But then I come down half-way through and watch the rest of it. I don't know why, I just...when a film starts I just feel, oh I want to go upstairs and...but I usually enjoy dad's films.

The mother enjoys a range of films, from 'drossy films like *Die Hard*' to *Trainspotting* ('I didn't like the book, but I liked the film') and *Leaving Las Vegas*. Her choices are based upon 'actors rather than directors'- a particular favourite is Nicholas Cage. She also enjoys heritage films like *Sense and Sensibility*, a taste not shared by husband or daughter.

The father has a video rental card, and he is responsible for renting videos at home. The family rent one video a week, mostly at the weekend, and the parents are not averse to renting '15' and '18' rated videos for the daughter:

Interviewer: And do you ever use the card yourself?
Daughter: No. I might go in with dad, but I would never use it myself. It's just that dad cycles down on his bike.
Mother: And anyway, she usually wants a 15 or an 18, so we have to be with her=

The mother uses video classifications as a guide to the likely contents of films, and she demonstrated a working knowledge of the symbols in exercise one:

Interviewer: What information does it convey to you?
Mother: Erm, if you read the plot, and it's a 15, then I feel fairly safe about getting it. If it's an 18, I might think twice. But more, partly because I might not enjoy it myself as much as, particularly when it's, you know certain elements...
Interviewer: What elements are you not particularly keen on?
Mother: Erm...sex and violence [laughs]. Because I think quite often in a lot of the 18 films there's a sort of formula sex and a formula violence. It's almost like if they don't put them in...there's no film.

There are no explicit viewing rules in the home, although there were in the past:

264

Mother:	Yeah, and I think...I mean when she was younger there was a definite bed-time. There was a definite end to television which was nine o'clock for a long time, wasn't it?=
Daughter:	Yeah.
Mother:	And it's only really the past eighteen months, two years that she's had more freedom about what time she goes to bed and when...because basically she now knows if she stays up late five nights, she's going to feel terrible [...] But now, basically, she can watch what she likes. And frequently does.

Both parents trust their daughter's judgement, and this was illustrated in discussion of the Internet:

Interviewer:	Are you worried about [daughter] using it?
Mother:	...No. No because I think she's fairly sensible. She never gets much chance to get on it, cos her father's always on it!

The reason is that the parents are confident that she will discuss issues emerging from her viewing experiences which trouble her:

Mother:	And I think, well I hope that we've put the sort of atmosphere that if [daughter] was really worried about something or was faced by something she didn't understand that she would be able to tell me or her father. I don't know- maybe she would, maybe she wouldn't.

Another comfort for the mother is that the VCR offers the opportunity to stop or skip through unsuitable scenes in a video, even though she has rarely been moved to take such action:

Mother:	I think the other thing about video is that you can stop something if you don't enjoy it, whereas at the cinema it's much harder to get up and walk out. You'd only do that if it was really extreme...Whereas for video, if it's staring to get objectionable, you can just turn it off.
Interviewer:	Have you ever done that?
Mother:	Er, well I quite often abandon a...what was that film we were watching? Yeah I mean quite often you get things out and they're dross=
Daughter:	Erm, like *Waiting to Exhale*, we got that out and that was just crap=
Mother:	Oh it was dreadful, wasn't it?

In this instance the issue of concern is with the quality of the viewing material (it was 'dross') rather than elements like "sex" and "violence". On the subject of specific elements

of concern the mother was less worried about sex, violence and bad language *per se-* she was more concerned with the portrayal of these elements in what she calls 'laddish' programmes, for example *Men Behaving Badly*. Her daughter does not agree with her assessment of 'laddish' humour, and it is significant that the mother does not prohibit viewing of such programmes- she merely voices her criticisms.

The mother attempts to include her husband in the decison-making process within the home, although she admits to being more sensitive to issues of concern than her husband:

Interviewer: Would you say that your mum more dad has more authority over you?
Daughter: Even though dad's are meant to be quite protective over their daughters, he does let me do things. I used to have to be back home by nine o'clock when I went out, and when mum was away this would be half-nine or something. But mum is more...I can get away with more with dad. If I want money I go to dad [laughs]. But whenever I ask dad, oh can I stay at someone's house, he says you've got to ask your mum. And she'll just say you've got to ask your dad! It's always mum that has the upper hand.
Interviewer: Do you accept that degree of responsibility?
Mother: I'm not sure that's entirely true actually. There's a lot of ask your mum, ask your dad goes on. [...] I just, I think I worry a bit more about...you know, her coming back in the dark. I used to.

Of the fourteen films featured in exercise two, the mother and daughter had seen *Pulp Fiction* (18) on video, and*The Silence of the Lambs* (18 on video) on television. The mother had seen *Disclosure* (18) and *Interview With a Vampire* (18) on video, and *Clockwork Orange* (X in cinema) at the cinema. The daughter had seen *Mrs Doubtfire* (PG), *Schindler's List* (15), and *Monty Python's Meaning of Life* (18) on video, and *The Mask* (PG) at the cinema. Her mother had no objections to her seeing *Disclosure* (18) if she wanted to.

Family 5

Family five is comprised of a white British mother (36-45), a black British father (36-45) and two dependent children- a daughter aged fifteen who is in full-time education at a local Comprehensive school, and a son aged 18 who is studying at a local college. The mother is a nursery school teacher and the father is an electrician.

Both parents and the daughter were interviewed together at home, although the father was only present for the second half of the session, due to work commitments.

The household contains three television sets, one of which is in the daughter's bedroom, and two VCRs (one in the main living room, and one in the parents' bedroom).

The mother and daughter often spend time in each other's company as the father is regularly away working. In his absence, the mother has tended to take day-to-day responsibility for the household. However, she attempts to include the father wherever possible in the decision-making process at home:

Mother: [...] But I think what is good between us is that we don't undermine
             each other. And even if I don't agree with what he's saying, I wouldn't
             say it in front of the kids, I'd wait until they'd gone to bed or out, and
             then I'd say I didn't think you was quite fair there. And then we'd talk it
             out.

As well as employing 'grounding' as a sanction against inappropriate behaviour, the mother admits to have used mild forms of physical punishment when her children were younger. The father is a keen disciplinarian, which the mother attributes in part to his West Indian background. Despite this, he has never resorted to physical punishments:

Mother: I suppose it all depends on what you had as a child. I mean my
             husband, he comes from a West Indian family, and obviously they were
             very strict, much stricter than I as bought up, and there were certain
             things in the family which were felt to be unacceptable, but which I
             would find to be acceptable[...] He's come from much more of a
             disciplinarian background than I have...I mean he wouldn't really...if
             anyone smacked the kids it would be me.

In contrast, the mother's upbringing was much more loosely controlled, and this has fed into her approach as a parent:

Mother: [...] I hope that's what I do with the kids- they do have their
             boundaries- like she's grounded.
Interviewer: Are these flexible boundaries?

Mother: Yes. And I think without that...it becomes more of a challenge, and you possibly want to rebel.

Within the framework of parental authority described above, the daughter's viewing is no longer subject to formal controls. The mother is unaware of the extent of her daughter's under-age viewing, but confident that she is able to deal with such material:

Interviewer: Do you have any rules about what [daughter] is allowed to get out on video?
Mother: ...Not now. Not at her age now.
Interviewer: So she can get out 18s?
Mother: ...Do you?
Daughter: Erm, yeah but if I'm watching it and mum comes in she and 'oh, oh'! That's too violent, 'oh'.
[...]
Mother: I don't actually stop her from seeing...films now, because I think that she's...she's probably old enough now to...I mean hopefully I've given her enough information about various things, from when she was small.

The mother has a video rental card, which other members of the family, including the daughter, are free to use. The father most frequently rents videos for the family. The mother tends to rely on other members of the family when using the VCR, as she has never learnt how to operate the machine.

The family own ten pre-recorded videos, including *Speed* (15), *True Lies* (15) and *An Officer and a Gentleman* (15), and the daughter has seen all of them with her parents' knowledge.

The mother claims to have been aware of her children's viewing habits when they were younger, and to have actively steered them away from "unsuitable" material:

Interviewer: At what age did that begin to change?
Mother: Erm, well [son] saw his first [horror film], as far as I know, to my own knowledge, when he was about six. And that was too early for me. But that, like I say, wasn't my fault. Again, [daughter] wouldn't have been able to see anything like that, well until they were much...I don't even know when the first time was=
Daughter: That's why, I used to watch all the horror films at my cousin's house.

Mother: But you never saw them here, did you?...And that's what happens unfortunately, is that your standards aren't taken on board in other people's houses.

Here the mother contrasts her own actions with those of her sister, who allows children in her household to watch material deemed "unsuitable" by the mother. She is concerned about the possibility of distress caused to her nieces:

Mother: I don't even know why my sister didn't sort of stop anything, cos she knew that I didn't like them. But I suppose her children were seeing them, so she didn't feel a problem in mine[..] But they...her children always see all these horrible, what I would call nasties.
Interviewer: And do you think this has had any effect on them?
Mother: ...I think that possibly the younger one has been inf...erm, she has these really horrible sort of quite frightening nightmares...yeah. I'd probably say that she's quite frightened. She won't go upstairs on her own. Even the eighteen year old doesn't like to be in the house on her own.

At the root of the mother's objection to her children watching "horror" is her own distaste for it, in contrast with her sister who enjoys such material:

Mother: But that's my own thing. And that's why, I suppose. Because I don't like them, I wouldn't let my children see them.

The mother prefers films which are 'lovey dovey, stories about animals and things like that', but not "action" films. The daughter is a fan of comedies and action films like *New Jack City* (18). This was singled out by the mother as one she has a particular dislike of, because the violence is "realistic". As in the discussion with family 4, reference is made to its American origin:

Mother: But I don't like too much of that American violence where, what's that Jacksonville?...
Daughter: *New Jack City*?
Mother: *New Jack City*, I don't like all that kind of=
Daughter: Drugs=
Mother: Drugs and kind of total violence and...cos I think that's too realistic, and that does happen, and...I think it glorifies the whole scene- yes we'll have a bit of coke, and we'll get money, we're gonna kill you and it's nothing, and I think that's...I'm sure that stuff influences some children. I wouldn't say a lot. And I think it would probably be children that would come from homes where you haven't got particularly...a

269

stable, or...stable background or more of a conventional
background...

The father shares his daughter's taste in comedy and action films. The difference between the tastes of the mother on one hand and the other members of the family on the other often leads to her voluntary exclusion from family viewing situations.

The mother is not concerned about bad language in videos 'Cos I swear anyway!'. Sex and violence are of concern, but only in relation to the viewing habits of younger children, below the age of ten, with whom she is in daily contact at nursery school.

She is most concerned with a child's ability to differentiate between what is real and what is fantasy. If a child is unable to make such a distinction, they may become distressed by what is seen.

The parents demonstrated quite good knowledge of the classification symbols, although they both professed a preference for the previous system of U, A and X, which was much more 'straightforward'.

Of the fourteen videos featured in exercise two, the father and daughter had seen *Pulp Fiction* (18), and *The Silence of the Lambs* (18) on video (*Pulp Fiction* was a pirated copy). The mother and father had seen *Disclosure* (18) on video- and the daughter watched it after they had, with their knowledge. The parents had seen *Clockwork Orange* at the cinema. The daughter has seen *Mrs Doubtfire* (PG), *Schindler's List* (15) and *Childs Play 3* (18) on video. She had seen *The Mask* (PG) and *Dumb and Dumber* (12) at the cinema.

Family 6

Family six is a dual-parent, white British family. The mother (36-45) is an office manager for an architect firm and the father (46-55) is a structural engineer. They have two sons aged 12 and 14, both of whom are in full-time education at a local Comprehensive school.

The mother and father were interviewed at home. The eldest son had previously been interviewed at school.

The household contains one television set. Unlike the other families in the case study selection, this one does not possess a VCR. The eldest son said that he regularly visited a friend's home to watch videos, and this family was subsequently interviewed (family seven).

The parents are both well aware of press interest in issues relating to the control of children's video viewing, although this did not feature in their decision not to have a VCR in the home. The parents have alternative spending priorities, and a VCR is not something they feel any particular need for.

Both parents were certain that any attempt to stop their eldest son watching videos at friends was both impractical and would have undesirable consequences for his peer relations:

Mother: Erm, that other children have a lot more experiences of videos, erm, and you know on the one hand you don't want your child to be rarefied, and kind of not in the full swing of it, but on the other hand you don't want them to go to the lowest common denominator and just be...absolutely drown in it all.

When viewing videos outside of the home, the locus of control shifts to the parents of friends:

Mother: [...] Really it's up to, you know, in a way I put the onus onto the friends' parents, you know.

According to the father, responsibility also lies with the son as a discriminating viewer. Both parents trust their eldest son's judgement, and are confident that he tells them about his viewing experiences. The youngest son is less interested in visiting the homes of friends, and it is rare for him to watch videos at all.

The fact that the family do not possess a VCR or personal computer is a source of mild guilt for the mother, who understands the difficulty this creates for her sons (the eldest son would like a VCR at home):

Mother: But, I mean, he hasn't even got a computer [laughs]. Poor thing! He just has to make up for it! [laughs].
Interviewer: And he doesn't seem to mind?
Mother: No, no. He's very relaxed about it.
Father: Well...yeah, yeah. It's partly because we've, we do watch television, but we don't watch too much, but we do try and get them to engage in first hand experiences, rather than rely upon somebody else's representation or digest of what's going on.

The father describes himself and his wife as 'not particularly movie people' who rarely have the opportunity to visit the cinema:

Father: We don't sort of make a point of going to films. I enjoy them when I do go, don't get me wrong, we both enjoy it, just that [laughs] planning our lives that far in advance just hasn't happened for quite some time.

In contrast, their eldest son does travel to the cinema, often with friends:

Mother: [eldest son's] definitely seen an 18 at the cinema.
Interviewer: Can you remember what it was he saw?
Mother: It was *Casino*.
Interviewer: And did he go with your knowledge?
Mother: No, he didn't. He went off down to the West-end with a friend to go and see a film. They weren't quite sure what they were going to see, and they came back and said they'd seen *Casino*.
Interviewer: And how did you react to that?
Mother: I just thought it was funny! [laughs].
Interviewer: Did you discuss the film?

Mother: Yes, yeah. I asked him why he thought it was an 18, and he said well it was pretty violent, and that it wasn't a very good film! [laughs]. But the trouble is, it demystifies it, doesn't he? He had to go and see it. I don't know whether it added to it, the spice of it, but he was too young to go and see it really. Erm, but he went with a friend who often goes to 18s, so I think he felt it helped his street cred. And it was purely a street cred thing, you know! [laughs].

This incident underlies the claim made previously that the parents are reluctant to use overt controls over their son's viewing, preferring instead to rely on his own competence as a discriminating viewer. Their younger son is less inclined to travel with friends to see films, although his parents believed he had seen *Speed* (15):

Mother: [...] Erm, he might have seen *Speed*. Erm, but he's not as sociable, and so he hasn't got the propensity to go to his friends, so he hasn't had the opportunity. He's a more insular person.
Interviewer: So he's a different person to [eldest son]. Does that mean that you treat him differently, with things on television?
Mother: Erm...he's more sensitive. And he's more likely to get hyped up about violence [...]

The mother and father take a slightly different approach as parents, and this finds expression in their attitudes towards screen entertainment. The mother takes more of an active interest in her son's viewing habits, and this was confirmed at the end of the interview:

Interviewer: Is it generally you rather than your husband that has these concerns?
Mother: Yeah, I don't think he could be bothered! [laughs]. Yeah I think he, I don't think he would see any harm in that. I tend to be more emotional about it. I think that's why [eldest son] being mugged affected me so much, it just, you know I felt...I probably made it in my own mind something more than it was, erm, whereas[father] was quite 'well, he's coping, just let it be, don't make a big thing of it.' So yeah, I think it's probably me.

The fact that the son coped well with being mugged is seen by the father as evidence of his son's maturity. He believes his son brings this maturity to bear when viewing violence on screen, and this gives him confidence in his son's ability as a discriminating viewer outside of the home.

The main area of concern for the mother is with the quality of programming that her sons watch:

Mother: Erm, well, we tend to...I tend to not want them to watch Soaps, at all. Or Game Shows.

Father: [...] As long as it's not too late in the evening we let them watch. They've got to get some sleep. We usually say yes.

Mother: The important things that they watch, like *The X Files*, I mean that seems to be a must, erm and then there's this other thing called *Wanted* which is a really dreadfully rubbish programme, but they seem to think it's fun. But I say it's such cheap television, look! It's just really rubbish television! [laughs] But hey, you know, that's what all the kids watch it, and I don't think, if they've done their home-work and music practice and things, then I can't see why not.

Within this general framework of qualitative judgements, the mother casts her disapproval of elements like bad language:

Mother: I think it's pretty hard to avoid bad language. I'm just stunned by how crude comedy programmes are. I mean they can be very funny, but the language, and the kind of jokes. I mean...the Rowan Atkinson thing, *Thin Blue Line* I think it's called, I mean it's actually very crude, the humour is very basic, erm and the language in, don't watch it very often, but, *Birds of a Feather* . I mean it's exceedingly crude, and I'm just surprised that it's on, that the BBC allows it...

Family 7

Family seven is a dual-parent, white British family. The mother (36-45) is a primary school teacher and the father (46-55) is an office manager for the London fire brigade. They have one son aged 14 (who is best friends with the eldest son from family 6) and a daughter aged 11. Both children are in full-time education at local schools. The mother and father were interviewed at home.

The household contains two television sets, one of which is used as a computer monitor in the son's bedroom, and one VCR which is located in the main living room.

The family members rarely spend their leisure time together, other than to watch television in the evening. They tend not to go to the cinema as a family, as the eldest son prefers to socialise with his friends.

The family have a broad range of tastes in television. The son enjoys comedies, like the *Brittas Empire* and *Bottom*. The daughter is a fan of *Grange Hill*, and is tempted to watch the *X-Files*, which her older brother and father watch. However, as the father explains, this is not always possible:

Father: But number one it's on at nine-thirty five. Usually she's in bed by then.
             Erm, secondly some of the content of *The X-Files* is a little bit dodgy,
             for kids, you know. It can either be frightening or...violence.I mean
             [daughter]'s not really bothered- she'd watch it, but there was an
             episode where a young girl was taken by somebody who hid her away
             in the darkness...So I don't let her watch them. I'll tape them, because I
             watch it occasionally. And if it's suitable then it's okay, she can watch
             it. But [mother] and I disagree on the thing entirely=
Mother: Cos I don't like it at all=
Father: [mother] doesn't like it at all. She won't watch it and give it a chance.
             So she's set against it.
Mother: And if [daughter] wants to watch it, I'd like her to watch it with
             someone.

The mother displays most concern for the children's viewing habits. Her experience as a primary school teacher has given her a distrust of television:

Mother: [...] I mean it just dominates. I've seen children who have television on
             in the morning when they wake up, and these children shout from the
             moment they get up because they have to go over the top of the
             television in the background. And they can't do anything unless it's
             with a screen. And, I blame that on television.

The father believes that television also has the potential to educate, if the programme contents can be discussed. He is keen to discuss things with his children which they find difficult to understand:

Father: [...] We say if it is good, then we talk about perhaps something that was
             said that the children don't understand, perhaps it was of its time, and
             we explain what it was about. You know- why it's funny...
Interviewer: Who tends to initiate these discussions?
Father: Both- both ways.

According to the father, there are few disputes over the children's viewing, although the mother anticipates such conflict may occur in the future:

Father: But fortunately we don't have a problem with our kids, over controlling
             the television. They're not ones to say, oh I want to watch this, and
             fight you if you say no.
Mother: We haven't got there yet, have we?

Both parents trust their children's judgements, which extends to situations outside of the household:

Mother: And also, if [son] goes round the corner to his friend's house, he will
             have films that we wouldn't necessarily let [son] watch. And [son]
             would go along with his friends, I think. Peer pressure. So yes, you
             trust them in certain circumstances.
Interviewer: Does [son] tell you then, what he's seen at his friend's house?
Mother: Mostly. Mostly.

The parents had little recollection of visits by the eldest son from family 6. They could not remember the last video the two boys had seen together at their house, but were confident it was nothing they would find inappropriate:

Interviewer: And did they watch videos?
Mother: They did. I can't remember what=
Father: Yeah, I don't know what, but I'm quite happy they could watch
             anything that's here.
Interviewer: It would only have been something that was here?
Father: That's right. They wouldn't have hired one, because they are under age
             and the local shop wouldn't have let them hire one=

The family do not rent videos very regularly, and are not members of a rental club. The parents both displayed a good knowledge of the video classification system, although the father, who tends to rent the videos for the family to watch, claimed not to pay too much attention to the classification, preferring to rent videos on the basis of whether 'I fancy something or not'. The father collects films he has time-shifted, including *The Shining*. The family also have a number of pre-recorded videos, including *Robocop* (18), *Platoon*

(18), *Spaceballs* (PG), and a number of Walt Disney films, all of which have been bought by the parents.

The daughter has a bed-time of nine-thirty , but even this is flexible. Their son goes to bed when he chooses, although he rarely stays up beyond 10.30 pm. He has a television in his bedroom, although his parents are not concerned about late-night viewing.

The mother appears to play more of an active role in monitoring her children's viewing, and enforcing bed-times- she describes herself as more 'autocratic' than her husband.

The parents are not unduly concerned about sexual material, because the children are too embarrassed to watch it. However, they are concerned about the portrayal of women:

Mother: We're very up on the way people treat women, you know=
Father: Well=
Mother: And therefore that plays a big part in, you know=
Father: Well, it's natural respect, you know, for women and men as well. I'd
            rather it wasn't sleazy sex, or violent sex or...anything bestial...

Bad language is not an issue of particular concern, mainly because the family's viewing habits are such that they do not come into contact with it regularly:

Father: I mean bad language I can accept. The children now know it enough,
            and it's not a worry to me. But I still don't like to hear it used
            needlessly=

Language use is of concern, however, if it trivialises violence:

Father: And I find one of the most distasteful things for me are these odd throw-
            away lines when somebody's been killed. You know, it's...I remember
            that Arnold Schwarzenegger shoved a great big lance through
            somebody's chest and the comment was 'stick around'. [...] But I think
            a lot of street-wise kids might think it's funny, to them, the whole act it
            becomes cheap, doesn't it?

The issue of violence is one of concern for the parents, although context was all-important is deciding what is suitable:

Father: If you don't have violence you can't have cowboy films, or pirate films or war films or whatever. You'd censor the life out of everything then, wouldn't you?

The father has a particular dislike of 'slasher movies':

Father: The other thing I wouldn't want them to watch are things like *Friday the Thirteenth*. The sort of Slash type movies, which I think should be totally banned. I really don't like them at all. I know that a lot of people get a lot of harmless fun from them but I'm always...there's somebody out there who, well there are people that will kill. People like...Jeffrey Dahlmer.

The parents are also concerned about the issue of racism in media representations:

Father: One of the things we haven't talked about in relation to censorship is political...censorship. I'm very anti-fascism, as [mother] is as well. If there was a way to take any glorification out of it, I'd be very keen, but again that's my view.

This issue forms the subject of many discussions around the children's viewing, which serve a didactic function:

Interviewer: Are your children sensitive to these issues as well?
Mother: Hhmm.
Father: They are, yes=
Mother: They are. It's been pointed out to them.
Father: Yeah, I mean they've got a great sense of fairness now. Plus what they hear us talking about, because of our politics, they are very keen on social issues...Any sort of unfair treatment.

Of the fourteen videos featured in the video cover exercise, the family had seen *Mrs Doubtfire* (PG), *The Mask* (PG) and *Dumb and Dumber* (12) on video at home. The son had seen *Schindler's List* (15) at school, on video. The father had seen *Clockwork Orange* at the cinema.

Family 8

Family eight is a dual-parent family, containing a black British mother and a white British father. The mother (25-35) is a primary school teacher and the father (36-45) is a secondary school teacher. They have one son aged 13 and a daughter aged 9. Both children are in full-time education at local schools. The mother and father were interviewed at home in East London.

The household contains three television sets, one of which is used as a computer monitor in the son's bedroom, and one VCR which is located in the main living room.

The father is not biologically related to the children, although he has 'been in a relationship with them for just over three years'. The mother, who is the children's biological parent, feels increasingly out of touch with her son's lifestyle, which is less of a problem for the father who teaches children of a similar age:

Mother: [...] I have to keep watching stuff like *Live and Kicking*, so I know
            what's going on...It's easier with my daughter because I am a primary
            teacher, so I know what they like and how they talk.

Relations within the household are complicated by the presence of biological parents outside of the home, with access rights to the children:

Mother: I just thought of another external pressure- fathers. They both have,
            erm, different fathers...but they have access rights and you've got to
            juggle all that as well, and when they do come back from their dads
            feeling not very happy you've then got to turn it up and make them feel
            safe and...happy and blah blah blah.

As teachers, the parents do try to encourage the children academically, which sometimes leads to tension in the home. They also encourage their social lives with a programme of outside activities. However, the organisation of outside activities is as much for the benefit of the adults as for the children:

Mother: As a parent I think it's great because, especially in the summer months, when they're literally under your feet, bouncing off the walls, they're bored, you don't know what to do with them. You know even if it's a miniscule kind of interest they have in something, find the club that does it and send them off. Pay the 2 quid or whatever, and send them off.

Despite having a varied range of outside interests, the children do find time to watch television and videos at home. The parents disagree over how much television the children watch, and this reveals a central tension between their views on regulation:

Father: But I mean [son] certainly watches videos quite a lot. And [daughter] sometimes, but then it's the same ones over and over again! [laughs].
Interviewer: How would you characterise their viewing habits?
Mother: Er, sometimes it's definitely space-filling [...] I know I'm going to disagree with him here, because I don't think they watch as much TV as he makes out!
Father: [laughs] No I don't...I mean I think they certainly, they don't video something if they're doing something else to miss it. But I think they watch more videos they buy or hire or whatever=

The father is concerned about the displacement of other more "worthy" activities, like reading:

Father: I mean I certainly think, not just in terms of visual media but in reading, [son] is far, I think, and I know we've had major debates about this, I think [son]'s far more not into reading than [daughter].
Mother: [...] Yeah, but then that's partly because he's in a more scientific mode, isn't he. He can't, he's not into fantasising as much as [daughter] is. She likes stories or films that will carry her off.

The mother enjoys European art house cinema, and 'black and whites', while the father enjoys 'political stuff. Sort of films like *La Hain* and things like that.' They admitted to liking most types of film, the exception being "trashy Hollywood" movies. The son is a fan of "action" movies, like *Total Recall*, while the daughter is content with animation (particularly Disney films).

The parents do attempt to operate certain viewing rules within the household:

Father:	[laughs]. Certain bed-time rules and certain things they can and can't watch. Like, which are sort of, vary...I mean for example, theoretically [son]=
Mother:	They're not set in stone.
Father:	No they're definitely not set in stone, they're meant to be...nine-thirtyish, I mean [daughter] nine during the week, nine-thirty.

There is a degree of flexibility in the application of these rules, although the father admits to being strict:

Father:	[...] But I think we're quite strict on what they can and can't watch. And I think we are starting to get, not problems, but there are certain things [son] wants to watch which we wouldn't allow [daughter] to watch=
Mother:	Yeah.

Meanwhile, outside of the family home control over the children's viewing is more complicated:

Father:	I think genuinely the only time they see things which we don't approve of would be outside the house. And obviously they, [son] will go around and stay at his friend's house and his uncle's house [family 9]. They both have Sky, and I know they have watched stuff, you know, really late at night and on about 2, or 3 o'clock in the morning.

This is the case when the children visit their biological fathers, when tensions between the adults surface:

Father:	I mean I'm sure...they have both seen, for example, films round their fathers' which we would not approve of.
Mother:	Yeah, that is a definite. And it's a problem.
Father:	And they know we don't approve of it- I mean they're quite open about it.
Interviewer:	So they told you?
Father:	Oh yeah=
Mother:	And I say 'what, he let you watch that!', 'yeah, mum'. But there's nothing you can do when they're not there.

In addition to the father's concerns about the amount of viewing the children engage in, both parents have reservations about content. Violence is of particular concern, although the parents draw a distinction between types of violence:

281

Mother: ...It sounds stra...probably not strange to you in research, but there is different levels of violence, isn't there? Like violence that was in *The Last Action Hero*, they know that it's not real. But then there's kind of violence that is sort of intentional and...quite gory, which even I would flinch at. Erm, sometimes it's a very fine line. Sometimes it's very distinct.

The main concern here is for the daughter, who is prone to become distressed by what she sees. Although the son feels he is more able to cope with such material, his parents are still keen to monitor his viewing, and restrict it where they feel necessary. The father is concerned about the son's video game playing habits because of the violent content of games, although this fear is not shared by the mother:

Mother: I don't think he's into the violence, as much as the build-up and the anticipation and, you know, the action.

The father did voice his concern over the possibility of imitative media effects. It is notable, however, that he does not think that his son is directly affected in this way. Evidence of such effects emerges from both parents' professional experience as teachers, and from encounters at their relative's home (family 10):

Mother: Yeah, you see lots of fly-kicks [at school]. That's partly due to Eric Cantona! Streetfighting...and they know all the moves.
Father: That's like [son]'s cousin [the youngest boy from family 10]=
Mother: Yeah.
Father: He's quite young, but when you go round to his house he will=
Mother: My nephew, sort of born and bred to sort of breathe and live McGuyver...what is it, *The Guyver*? All of that, and all of the Batman films. I mean he can barely recite his ABC [laughs], but he knows the script by heart! It's sad, I think.

An area of concern for both parents was with content containing 'dodgy politics', like racism:

Interviewer: You mentioned dodgy politics in films. Is that an important area of concern?
Mother: I mean, I think even if there were dodgy politics in something, I wouldn't, I would sometimes watch it as a talking point, not like this is

an educational video, but we could talk about it after...if it also had a good drama element.

The issue of sex was of concern to the parents, depending on its portrayal on-screen:

Father: I think [daughter]'s much more...will turn away- she's at that age, really=
Mother: Yeah.
Father: Whereas, I think [son]'s at that age where he becomes interested in it. And I don't think we would stop him.
Mother: Yeah but then it's like the violence. It depends=
Father: Oh it depends=
Mother: You know, if it's tasteful sex [laughs], but if it's puffing and panting, *9 1/2 Weeks* kind of stuff, then I don't think so.

Whilst there was an unease about their children watching sex portrayed on screen, the mother feels it is necessary to let them come into contact with such material:

Mother: It's in your life, and it's in the world, so it's, I wouldn't want to completely block their view. They'd get freaked out then if they saw a naked man! [laughs].

Both parents have a video rental card, although the father never uses his. The children are also able to use the cards, but rarely do so on their own. The family tend to buy more pre-recorded videos than they rent. The family borrow videos from a relative's (the father from family 9) extensive collection.

The family's own video collection is dispersed around the house, although videos deemed unsuitable for the children (which includes *Pulp Fiction*) are stored separately:

Mother: Also, a lot of the 18s and stuff that we have, the videos that we have, are somewhere else. I mean we've got stacks of stuff, haven't we? That's, where they can't get it anyway. I mean they can=
Father: [Son] knows where it is.
Mother: Yeah they know where it is, but they're not to touch it.
Father: And as far as we know he's never watched something...he's asked about some, for example *Boyz 'n the Hood*, which is a 15, he's asked if he can see it. And I've said yes he can.

Both parents demonstrated a good knowledge of the video classification system, and both agreed that it serves a useful purpose informing parents about the likely contents of videos. However, there was some disagreement with BBFC decision-making:

Father: Again I think, like [mother] says, I think they are useful guidance, but, you know I've seen 15s which are more than suitable for someone who's younger.

Of the fourteen video titles in exercise two, the parents had seen *Pulp Fiction* (18) on video, and *The Silence of the Lambs* (18) and *Clockwork Orange* (X) at the cinema. The family had seen *Mrs Doubfire* (PG) and *Dumb and Dumber* (12) on video together. They had also seen *Interview With a Vampire* (18) together on satellite while on holiday. The son had seen *Akira* (15) and *Evil Dead II* (18) on video.

Family 9

Family nine is a dual-parent family, containing a white British mother and a black British father. Both parents (aged 36-45) are local government officers, and they have one son aged 11 and a daughter aged 5. The whole family was interviewed together.

The household contains two television sets, one of which is used as a computer monitor in the son's bedroom, and one VCR which is located in the main living room. The family also have Sky satellite television connected to the main set in the living room.

As with the previous family, the parents both try to encourage outside interests, as a diversion from television viewing. Both children claim to enjoy family activities (which include trips to museums and the cinema), and the parents do not consider it a problem to "drag them away from the television".

There is a kids club at a local cinema with reduced prices for children, which the family visit nearly every week. However, family members have different tastes, and this, combined with the difference in the children's ages, complicates such outings:

Father: We have a lot of hassle with the films. I mean if it's one of these films that I don't particularly like, I won't go. I mean if this film's of interest, like it's a cartoon or something, then we'd go. But there are occasions where we'd maybe go and see two films- myself and [son] will go see one, and [mother] and [daughter] go and see another...So we do go as a family, albeit that we don't see the same films.

The mother prefers "comedies", and certain science fiction films (*Star Trek* in particular). She does not like "violent films", nor "horrors". The father considers himself to be 'a film buff' (he subscribes to *Sight and Sound* and *Empire* magazines):

Father: Er, it's one of my interests. Perhaps I'm too critical of some films, but er...I do enjoy film. Yeah I do, I have a great interest in film. I'm very critical of what I see, very often you see a film's been given a good review, and then you see the film and it wasn't worth going [laughs]. So I'm very choosy about what I watch.

Like his wife, he is not a fan of "horrors":

Father: Erm, personally I don't like horrors either, I agree with [mother], I don't like horror films. I don't see why you should pay good money to be frightened, to have the wits frightened out of you. I prefer films which are, which have some kind of plot, that grabs your attention...interesting.

The son shares many of his parents' tastes. He favours comedy and science fiction films and claims to like "horrors", although he included *Independence Day* (PG) within this category. The daughter enjoys animation (for example, *James and the Giant Peach*) and family comedies like *The Nutty Professor*. She has been taken by the parents to see films rated 12 at the cinema (most recently *Cable Guy*).

The parents do operate viewing rules within the home. The children have set bed-times, beyond which they are not allowed to watch televsion. In addition, they are restricted to watching one video or one hour of television once they get in from school, although this is a flexible arrangement.

The family are members of a video rental club, although the membership is only used by the son to rent video games. The family rarely, if ever, rent videos since subscribing to Sky. The only videos they watch are those which they buy as part of the family collection (over thirty titles). Most of these are collected together on shelves in the main living room, while the children keep their own videos in their bedrooms.

Some effort has been made to place '15' and '18' rated videos out of arms reach on the top shelves (for example, *Silence of the Lambs* [18], and*The Cook, The Thief, The Wife and her Lover* [18]).

The parents are confident that neither child has ever helped themselves to these titles :

Mother: There are a couple just at the top that are out of reach. Cos they're not
             suitable just yet. Although [son] wouldn't=
Father: Dream of going up there to=
Mother: Wouldn't put them on.

The father's interjection serves a didactic function, making it clear to the son that he should not touch the videos in question. In other words, the father uses this opportunity during the interview to reaffirm the viewing rules at home.

Some titles (for example, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* [15]) were not out of the children's reach. Nevertheless, the parents were certain that their children would not engage in unauthorised viewing:

Mother: They wouldn't put it on without asking. They can watch their own ones
             on their own, but if they want to watch one of the others, they'd ask.
             But they would normally be films that they wouldn't want to particularly
             watch anyway.

The children understand that if they want to watch a video which has previously been deemed unsuitable for them, they must ask a parent first. Neither parent has a special authority over the videos- the children will ask whoever is present at home.

The children tend to watch videos at the weekend, and when visiting grandparents. They also watch videos at their auntie's house (family 8):

Son: No, she, she watches like, erm, allows us to watch what we want, well [cousin's] got a TV upstairs, so we normally don't...so we normally play computer upstairs. And she lets us watch what we want upstairs, or out somewhere...

The fact that the auntie allows her son and nephew to watch what they want does not necessarily mean that they are watching anything "unsuitable". It is more likely, given the auntie's own account, that they make no demands to watch "unsuitable" material at home, and so the issue never arises. In any case, the mother has no complaints about her son's viewing habits outside of the home.

Both parents demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the video classification system, and felt it to be useful as a guide to the probable contents of a video. However, the father took issue with the '12' classification:

Father: But I think, I mean it's like number three, '12', where you say it's got to be twelve, but [son]'s watched, and he's eleven. It's 12, I would say yes. Because I believe the category you use to define 12 is specifically is that that child has to be of secondary school age, or over, but you are therefore trying to define the mentality of that child, and there are some children who develop earlier than others, but they are penalised because of the schooling system. But as a parent we have a responsibility for our children...There are some 12 films I would allow [daughter] to watch...There are 12 films that I wouldn't allow her to watch...

According to this account the classification system serves a general purpose, but specific viewing decisions, and judgements about suitability, ought to be made by parents who have a full knowledge of a child's 'mentality'.

Of the fourteen videos featured in exercise two, the family had seen *Mrs Doubtfire* (PG), and *The Mask* (PG) on video. The family, including the daughter, had also seen *Dumb and Dumber* (12) at the cinema. The father and son had seen *Evil Dead II* (18) on satellite

television, and the parents had seen *Pulp Fiction* (18) at the cinema. The parents had seen *Schindler's List* (15), *Disclosure* (18) and *Interview with a Vampire* (18) on satellite television. Finally, the father had seen *Akira* (15) on video.

Family 10

Family ten is a dual-parent family, containing a black British mother (36-45) and a white British father (25-35). The mother is an artist and the father is a motorbike despatch rider. They have three sons aged 3, 7 and 14 and a daughter aged 15. Both parents, the two youngest sons and the daughter were interviewed together at home.

The household contains two television sets, both in communal rooms, and one VCR which is located in the main living room.

Although the family do try to spend leisure time together, such occasions are infrequent because of the wide age range of children at home. The presence of very young children largely determines the activities engaged in, and this includes television and video viewing:

Mother: I think it's very difficult when you have so many ranges of different people- myself, [father], [daughter] the teenager, [son, 14] the teenager, then we have seven year old [son, 7] and three year old [son, 3]. And you have people sitting there because there's something they want to see- you try and watch something in a room with these two young ones- it's very, very difficult.

The mother enjoys craft and DIY programmes, although she claims not to follow particular series. The father prefers 'true stories', documentaries and political programmes. The daughter enjoys soap operas and *The X-Files*. The seven year old son prefers children's programmes, although he enjoys watching the things his parents do. The youngest son enjoys animated series, particularly *Spiderman* and *Batman* .

The father is a member of Britannia Video mail order, and derives information about upcoming releases from the monthly catalogue:

Father: I belong to Britannia...So I get their monthly thing through. Stuff on
               there's so expensive, well they never have been cheap...What we
               normally do is wait if there's a video going that's either on the cheap or
               its in the sale, because I've got quite a build up because I've got a lot of
               bonus, I'll get it that way. But a lot of it you can get it cheaper in
               Woolworths.

With the exception of the mother, the family members all go to the cinema with some
regularity, although not always together. The mother is not 'really bothered by films' and
so takes little interest in the cinema and videos:

Father: You like some films=
Mother: What- *Thelma and Louise*. I'm not a film person, I'm not a cinema
               person. Friends come over and say there's such and such a film on and
               it doesn't really bother me. There is a film I'd like to see, but I can't
               stand, I mean any form of violence I can't bear it.

The parents are divided in their attitudes towards horror and action films. The father is a
'very big' horror fan, and he enjoys action-based films. The mother, in contrast, dislikes
horror and action movies, and does not find the portrayal of violence entertaining.

The father is a member of a video rental club, and the family tend to rent videos at the
weekend:

Father: Mostly, I mean we don't get a video during the week, but on a Saturday
               night we'll say, because telly's pretty naff Saturday, unless there's
               something they want to watch, then we'll say nip down there, and say
               who's turn is it to pick one...and they can pick one. But because it's not
               like a big one...with the kiddies videos it's like, seen it, seen it, seen
               it...

The choice of video is usually governed by what is felt suitable for the youngest members
of the family. The family members (excluding the mother) take turns to decide what to
watch:

Interviewer: Does [son, 14] ever get a video out on his own?
Father: No, cos what he'll do...is he'll say can you get this out, or he'll come
               with you...He'll just wait until it's his turn, and he'll know what he
               wants. If it's like, if it's 18 then it's no...There's a couple that I let him

see cos I've seen them, and they're just like the B comedy movies, so...But if it's something that he wants but it's unsuitable, then it's no you can't watch it.

The family has an extensive collection of pre-recorded videos, mainly comprised of the father's purchases. They are stored on shelves in the main living room, within easy reach of the children. There are rules governing access to videos on the shelves. The father makes a clear distinction between his videos, and those for general consumption:

Father: [...] Basically what's on this side is mine, they're not to watch and
               there's a couple of things they are. Basically what is there is blank or
               what's been taped. Then over there there's some they can't watch. [son,
               7] knows there's sex ones in there that he's not to watch, but [son, 14]
               and [daughter] can. All my stuff's there and up there.
Interviewer: They're all within easy reach- but you mention certain rules.
Father: Most of what's over there, they can watch, it is down to...Like these
               ones, the 18s and that, they know they can't touch.

The system operates on the basis of mutual trust, although there are no guarantees that the rules are observed:

Interviewer: And they don't [watch these videos]=
Mother: [laughs]
Father: No, they don't. No I don't think they do=

There was no evidence to suggest that the children ever sought to subvert their father's authority, even when viewing decisions caused annoyance:

Son, 7:   Well, I would get, like, a bit annoyed, but I mean, if the older tells you
               you can't watch it, you can't watch it! There's nothing we can do.
               We're the children, they're the olders, respect what they say.

Both parents demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of the video classification system, and see it as a necessary source of information about the likely contents of videos. The classification featured in their deliberations over suitability, but the father often made his own judgements in this area. The mother supports her husband's judgements, in deference to his greater familiarity with films:

Mother:	But generally I go by what he says. If it's alright with him, I'll go by what he says...
Interviewer:	[...] Who monitors [viewing]?
Father:	I don't know...I suppose you're there during the day, I'm at work. But for videos, it's normally down to me.
Mother:	Yeah, the videos, is down to [father]=

The parents are not especially worried that their younger children might imitate anti-social behaviour as a result of video viewing, although they do monitor their children's viewing in this regard:

Mother:	So, yeah, I do think you have to monitor everything they watch, otherwise, you know, to look at, what's the other one? The one that they're kicking everybody in. What're they called? *Power Rangers*?
Daughter:	Oh yeah.
Mother:	Even if I hadn't seen it, I would know that he'd [son, 7] heard about that or he...by the way that he was behaving, you know. Kicking and- not violently, but, you know, acting out what's...he thought that it was all about.

To an outsider (the children's aunt from family 8), the possibility of imitative effects was an issue of concern within the household. Nonetheless the mother is dismissive of such concerns: her children merely act out what they see, and such behaviour is not necessarily harmful. Violence is an issue of concern to the parents in as much as it might cause distress to the children.

The youngest children are expected to be in bed by eight-thirty pm, although this is flexible, for example when a nature programme is on television after this time.

The parents are not especially concerned about bad language in videos:

Son, 7:	We're a pretty open family and we don't really worry about much stuff. If there's a swear word, we'll just think , like, yup, swear word's over and done with, lets try to forget about that and get on with our lives. We don't really care about that sometimes.
Mother:	Yeah, I'd say we were pretty open.

291

However, an issue of particular concern for the mother is sex on screen, which makes her feel uncomfortable in the presence of children. Nevertheless she has attempted to foster a degree of openness in discussing such issues:

Mother: [...]I think it's there and that [son, 7] needs to know...I just think it's, I mean something comes on and unless it's not really close to the bone, then yeah. But we try to turn [son, 7] away quite gently...[laughs]

Of the titles featured in exercise two, the whole family had seen *Mrs Doubtfire* (PG), *The Mask* (PG), *Dumb and Dumber* (12) and *Akira* (15) on video. The father had watched *Pulp Fiction* (18), *Interview with a Vampire* (18) and *Clockwork Orange* (pirated) on video. The father and eldest children had seen *The Silence of the Lambs* (18) and *Evil Dead II* (18) on video.

Appendix III

Relevant publications

Barratt, A J B (June 1995); **Moral Crusade Post-1960.** <u>Sight and Sound,</u> p. 22-23 (Forbidden Cinema supplement).

1964 was marked by the beginning of a resurgence in Christian political activism with the launch of Mary Whitehouse's Clean Up TV Campaign (CUTC). In the following year the National Viewers and Listeners Association (NVALA) was born. The successes of this group have been marginal if measured solely in terms of legislative gains (although the 1990 Broadcasting Act did fulfil one NVALA aim by instituting the Broadcasting Standards Council). Even civil actions have proven unproductive. In 1974, Mary Whitehouse failed to prosecute the Curzon cinema under the Vagrancy Act for showing Marco Ferreri's Blow Out (La Grande bouffe). However, Whitehouse and her supporters have been successful in keeping Christian moralism on the political agenda and in the headlines of the nation's press.

Other less-publicised organisations have had more direct influence on the regulation of our media and public morality. The Christian Action Research and Education (CARE) Trust and the Movement for Christian Democracy (MCD) are noteworthy examples.

CARE began life as the Nationwide Festival of Light (NFOL), launched at a Rally Against Permissiveness in 1971, but largely failed to capture the imagination of the politicians. Edward Shackleton, an executive member of the NFOL, attempted to bring a private prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act against the producers of Last Tango in Paris. His failure prompted a change of strategy: CARE was then developed to inform and co-ordinate Christian activism in mainstream politics where it was felt fundamental change might be encouraged.

The Organisation is now headed by the Reverend Lyndon Bowring, and has an affiliated membership of around 80,000. With headquarters less than five minutes walk from Parliament and an extensive catalogue of publications (from fact-files on lone parenthood, pornography and Aids, to practical guides on campaign techniques), CARE, is an extraordinarily well organised and informed lobby group.

CARE Campaigns has been instrumental in promoting a fundamentalist agenda in some key legislation, including the Protection of Children Act 1978, the Indecent Displays (control) Act 1981, the Local Government (Misc. provisions) Act 1982, the Video Recordings Act 1984 and the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Recently, CARE contributed written evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on screen violence and its effects. Their recommendation on 'retrospectivity', namely the need for a re-examination of selected titles from the back catalogue of 30,000 titles already certificated by the BBFC, was subsequently taken up. CARE operatives also lobbied Members of Parliament to support the Alton amendment.

The MCD, only in existence since 1990, grew out of the Epiphany Group, a collective of Christians interested in politics. Its guiding principles are contained in the Westminster Declaration, a four-page document outlining a vision of public life underpinned by six core Christian values: social justice, respect for life, reconciliation, empowerment, active compas sion and wise stewardship.

The movement has a membership of over 8,000 and publishes a bimonthly newspaper, The Christian Democrat, with a circulation of 40,000. It is nondenominational, and draws members from across the political spectrum. The MCD's most significant action has been

in support of the Alton amendment to the Criminal justice and Public Order Bill: it was with the aid of the MCD that Alton drafted the amendment, and lobbied for its support in Parliament.

These groups are united by an evangelical calling. Evangelism follows a fundamentalist theology (adherents believe in the literal veracity of the Bible). Evangelists recognise their duty to deliver the 'good news' to everyone and success means salvation for all. They are first and foremost committed to the creation of a society based on the gospel; inevitably this brings them into the secular domain of mainstream politics.

The most curious aspect of Christian political activism is its relative anonymity. Many are aware of the staunch Christian beliefs of Mary Whitehouse and David Alton MP, but few will have any idea about the activities of the MCD or the influence of CARE on public policy.

Yet we may be forgiven our ignorance, for two reasons. First, as Dr William Thompson of Reading University has pointed out, commentators have been quick to dismiss these groups as merely linked to the rise of new right political and economic doctrines under Thatcherism. But, as Dr Thompson rightly argues, these groups are often opposed to the moral relativism and materialism associated with a market-led society. Second, these groups (the NVALA and Mary Whitehouse aside) often evade publicity. David Alton MP has given us a clue towards understanding this tendency. In the June 1994 issue of The Christian Democrat he suggests practising caution when dealing with the media, for fear of being "caricatured as a worthy but eccentric God-squad [which] would damage us for the future." Nobody's fool, Alton is aware that the astute image management of campaigns is the best way to "go way beyond the Christian constituency in order to win some of these arguments."

The success of these groups in projecting their lifestyle choices onto the agenda of public policy can be attributed to their knack for linking religious moralism with more marketable secular rationalism; hence the high profile involvement of scientists, such as Professor Elizabeth Newson, who reported on connections between screen violence and violent behaviour, at the forefront of their campaigns.

Dr Thompson has suggested that, in the future, the influence of these groups will probably wane with the increase of European political power in British affairs. However, he was writing before the MCD came properly onto the scene. Also, given that the MCD has strong links with other Christian democratic parties in Europe, who are markedly more influential in the politics of their own countries, it is perhaps premature to prophesy the fall from grace of fundamentalist activism around censorship in Britain.

Barratt, A J B (1997); **Video Rights and Wrongs: Teenagers' Attitudes to Video Classification in Britain.** The English & Media Magazine, 36.

Down Up with Rules!
During an event organised by *The Guardian* and hosted at the National Film Theatre last year, the television critic of *The Sunday Times*, A.A.Gill, recommended the abolition of all cinema and video classifications in Britain.[1]

This prompted me to think about how such a proposal would be greeted by the very people who might presumably 'benefit' from laxer controls over film distribution and exhibition-young people themselves. From my discussions with year nine pupils (thirteen and fourteen year olds) I was not entirely sure that such radicalism would be welcomed in quite the way that might be commonly assumed. Far from advocating a libertarian attitude to film

---

[1] *Too Much Too Young?* (16/5/96).

censorship and classification, many of the young people I have encountered proffer quite conservative views on the subject, even when their own behaviour is clearly at odds with the spirit of age-graded classification. In this article I want to explore the issue of centralised regulation by looking at what young people have to say about video classification in Britain.

Videowatch

Last year I administered a questionnaire survey during term time at ten secondary schools in north London as part of a research project for the British Film Institute and Middlesex University. Four hundred and eighty-four year nine pupils participated (202 girls and 282 boys). The questionnaire was designed to obtain information about their use of video cassette recorders (VCRs) for viewing pre-recorded videos and time-shifting television programmes.

The subject of video classification was broached during class discussions which followed a number of the survey sessions. These led me to consider more deeply the whole issue of video classification from a young person's perspective. Contrary to my assumption that year nine pupils would find the imposition of controls over their video viewing worthy of hearty criticism, many (perhaps the majority) of those voicing an opinion were broadly in favour of some sort of system of classification.

I want to discuss these issues as they have emerged in subsequent interviews with members of this age-group. Before doing so, I include a selection of data from the questionnaire survey which provides a background against which to situate this discussion. It is important to locate young people's attitudes to classification within the wider context of their viewing habits, for there often appears to be some discrepancy between their feelings towards classification, and their own viewing behaviour.

Video re-view

Thirteen and fourteen year olds appear to have ample access to televisions and VCRs: ninety-eight per-cent of the sample have a television at home, and ninety-six per-cent have a VCR. Two thirds of the sample claimed to have a television set in their bedroom (boys=73.5%; girls=59%), whilst thirty per-cent claimed to have access to a VCR in their bedroom (boys=35%; girls=23.5%). As the figures in parentheses show, clear gender differences are in evidence here.

This group appears to use the VCR with some frequency- one third of the sample claimed to have watched three or more videos in the two week period prior to the survey, whilst only ten per-cent of the sample claimed not to have watched any videos in the same period. In spite of this, only one-in-seven members of the sample listed 'watching videos' as one of their three favourite leisure activities.

Of the fifty most popular pre-recorded titles viewed in the two weeks prior to the survey, two thirds carry either a '15' or '18' certificate. Further evidence of 'under-age' viewing is revealed when examining this group's list of favourite movies on video. Of the ten favourite titles listed by girls, seven have a '15' certificate on video (two are rated '12' and one 'PG'). Of the favourites listed by the boys, two carry an '18' certificate, and four are rated '15' (in addition to two '12's and two 'PG's).

These data suggest that while many thirteen and fourteen year olds frequently engage in video viewing, it is not worthy of a favoured, special status, perhaps because it has become so common-place. In addition, young people, at least as far as their viewing patterns suggest, appear to show little regard for the video classification system, often viewing movies which are deemed by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) as unsuitable for their age-group.

On the basis of this evidence it would be tempting to conclude that many young people would favour the abolition or relaxation of the classification system operated by the BBFC, perhaps seeing it as an irritating hindrance, or unnecessary in the face of such casual abuse.

However, it is foolhardy to base assumptions about such attitudes on the evidence of behaviour alone. A more valid approach to understanding attitudes in this area must begin by asking people what they think, and not just what they do. There already exists some information in this area, provided by research which was commissioned by the BBFC prior to the introduction of the '12' certificate for video classification.[1]

This study (based upon a national sample of people over the age of sixteen) was designed to highlight the ways in which consumers perceive and use the classification system. The research suggests that the system is generally well understood by consumers, and that the efforts of the BBFC are appreciated by the "video renting public". However, such support is more likely to be true "in the context of family viewing where classification provides parents and guardians with valuable support and guidance about the likely content of videos." In terms of specific decisions, the sample generally claimed that they were 'always' or 'usually' in agreement with BBFC classifications.[2]

It is worth recalling that this study does not deal with the perceptions and behaviour of people below the age of sixteen- one of the groups most directly affected by the existence of a classification system. As Julian Wood has noted in this context: "young people have become a focus of forms of concern and debate which often seem to bear little relation to the concrete realities of their lives, or to take account of their perspectives on the issues."[3]

Children Talking Classification
I can offer some preliminary thoughts in this area, as a result of recently completed pilot work, designed to inform the recruitment of families for the second phase of the videowatch project. This research took the form of semi-structured interviews with thirty-nine year nine pupils arranged into groups of three and four. Each group of pupils was interviewed on a range of topics relating to their video viewing habits.[4] The interviewees were selected by their class teachers, who described them as of 'mixed ability'. Each school visited has a varied intake of both 'middle-' and 'working-class' pupils and the discussion groups contained a mix of individuals from a variety of backgrounds.

The issue of video classification was raised during the discussions. Each participant was asked about their awareness of the present system administered by the BBFC, and whether they thought it necessary and useful. They were also asked whether they would make any changes to it. A range of themes emerged during the sessions, and I shall concentrate on a selection of these in the discussion below.

The need for video classification
The majority of interviewees expressed support for the existence of a video classification system, although this does not necessarily translate into support for the current system operated by the BBFC.

Support for a system of classification was often conditional, with the proviso that it operate in an advisory capacity, and not necessarily as a restrictive code. The current system operates three restrictive categories ('12', '15' and '18'. 'R18' is only available in licenced

---

[1] British Board of Film Classification (1993) **Video in View: Public Attitudes to Video Classification**; London; BBFC.

[2] ibid., p.ix.

[3] Wood, J (1993) **Repeatable Pleasures: notes on young people's use of video** (pp.199-200) in Buckingham, D (1993) **Reading Audiences**; Manchester, Manchester University Press.

[4] For a detailed discussion of the methodological implications of such a research strategy, see Buckingham, D (1993a) **Children Talking Television: The Making of Television Literacy**; London, The Falmer Press (in particular chapters three and four).

sex shops), and these apply to the supply of videos by retail or rental outlets. Once inside the home, the certificates are only of value as a guide to content. The other three classifications ('Uc', 'U' and 'PG') are purely advisory, and carry no restrictive authority.

extract one

Int: (...)Do you think it's a good idea to have a classification system?

An: I think it should be like- they should have the classification system, but if you want to have a video you should be able to have it. It should be like a warning. If it's, like, an '18', you can buy it whenever you want, but it just tells you it's really violent, lots of sex in it or whatever. Instead of telling you you can't have it because of this.

M: Yeah. Yeah, I agree.

D: It's just a basic right to videos really, isn't it?

Int: And do you think that it is how people use it anyway?
(general agreement).

In the extract above, there is clear agreement that the system should operate in an advisory capacity "like a warning". D rationalises this position by claiming that there exists some "basic right to videos", which is presumably extended to all members of society, and not just those over a certain age. Interestingly enough, when asked whether they thought the system already operated in a purely advisory capacity, there was general agreement that it does. Elsewhere in the interview session, A and D claim that their parents allow them to watch '18's. It is their parents who provide them with access to such material, by renting or buying them on request, thereby circumventing the restrictive authority of the classification system. In other words, A and D's own experience of the system has led them to dismiss it's restrictive authority.

Only two interviewees argued for the abolition of the classification system, and even then there was some concession made to younger children:

extract two

C: I don't think [video classification is] particularly good because, like, at my age I'm, like, watching the '18' films. Not the rude ones, but the other ones. Like, if there's an '18' film that I want in the shop, and you can't buy it because I'm under-age, my parents get it for me. I ask my parents to get it. But the 'U's and the 'PG's for the little ones, I think that's okay. But the '12's, '15's and '18's- I could get the '12's easy now- the others, there's not much point.

One boy was quite clear about the consequences of abolition:

extract three

M: ...Having no classifications at all would make things completely out of control.

Even though such a sentiment was rarely voiced by other participants, it may well accord with a tacit faith in rules and boundaries which is widely held by young people. It is certainly true that, as a social group, children are strongly encouraged to observe adult authority at home, in school and elsewhere, which may in turn foster a generalised acceptance of such structural relations.[1]

More often, the reason offered by the interviewees for their support of a system of classification was simply that some form of protection is necessary for younger children.

---

[1] See Pilcher, J (1995) **Age and Generation in Modern Britain**; Oxford; Oxford University Press.

The logic of displacement

This group's support for a system of classification to protect younger viewers is linked to their tendency to disclaim any personal vulnerability to 'media effects' by displacing this onto younger children:

extract four

R: Erm, it's good to have [a classification system], because you can't have little kids watching '18' films, they'll just go to school and start...little kids like that do get influenced]

A: And they get upset, when they see these things happen.

This line of reasoning has also been recognised by Julian Wood (1993), and I refer to it here as the 'logic of displacement'.[1] I can only offer anecdotal evidence in support of it's pervasiveness. Whilst pilot testing the questionnaire survey, I had discussions with a number of seven, nine and thirteen year olds. In each case the participants were keen to stress that they were not personally at risk from the media they consumed, but that their younger associates were. One group of seven year olds agreed that it was not they themselves but 'little kids' who were susceptible to 'media effects'.

Clearly there is some difference between what young people (of all ages) believe to be the age-group reputedly at risk from the media, and what certain adults argue to be the case. As the anecdotal evidence suggests, such differences are not just inter-generational, but also intra-generational. In other words, there is as much variation in opinion within the category of 'young people' as there is between 'young people' and 'adults' (just as there is much debate between adults over this issue), making it exceedingly difficult to justify generalisations in this area.

The logic of displacement begins to offer a possible explanation for the discrepancy between young people's general support for video classification and their own viewing behaviour. If a young person does not feel personally vulnerable to the reputed effects of particular videos, then they will not necessarily heed the restrictions placed upon their viewing, or respect the guidance offered by the classification system. However, their apparent faith in a system of classification follows the common belief that *younger* children *are* at risk and in need of protection.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider the types of 'media effect' which concern this age group. Two models are commonly evoked in these discussions. The first of these concerns the issue of imitative effects: the argument that young children viewing violent scenes, for example, will subsequently mimic such behaviour. One widely held belief is that the ten year old murderers of James Bulger were imitating behaviour they had seen in the film *Childs Play 3*.[2] Indeed, this case was mentioned on several occasions during the interview sessions. For example:

extract five

Int: (...)So first of all, do you all think that it's a good idea to have a video classification system?

S: Yeah. Erm, there's this programme on Channel Four one day in the Easter holidays, talking about violent films and the case of that Jamie Bulger and *Child's Play 3* .(...)

---

[1] ibid., p.194.

[2] As an example of folk-belief, the veracity of this story is unimportant, although it has been contested elsewhere. That there is a widespread belief in the possibility of such an occurrence happening is enough to sustain the story.

The second model of media effects referred to during the interviews relates to the idea that young children can become distressed by what they see on video.[1] This area is often overlooked by researchers examining media effects, even though it may offer a more fruitful line of enquiry than attempting to demonstrate the link between screen violence and 'copy-cat' behaviour, which is notoriously hard to achieve objectively.[2] More often than not, interviewees justified the need for regulation by arguing that it was necessary to protect younger children from things which they might find disturbing:

extract six

Int: What sort of age would you say is the cut-off point [below which children are vulnerable to media effects]?

I: About eight or nine.

Int: [Al]Right.

E: Because when you want to watch a film and they, like, want to watch also you say "don't watch it" because we don't want them to be scared. But then we can't watch it ourselves!

T: They should be about at least ten or eleven. They don't really understand, at eight or nine, because they can't tell fact from fiction. Maybe because they get worried about the films.

Parental responsibility

Even though the interviewees were asked to consider the role and efficacy of the classification system operated by the BBFC, it was widely recognised that parents should (and do) play a key role here as well:

extract seven

A: If the child's not mature enough to watch it, they shouldn't watch it.

Int: Okay=

R: =What it all comes down to is the parents, if they don't want them to watch it.

Int: A[name]- any further thoughts on this?

A: Well, it's up to the parents.

It was generally felt that parents should accept the ultimate responsibility for their children's viewing habits; following the logic of displacement this was felt to be particularly relevant in the case of younger children:

extract eight

C: [the classification system is] useless to us, because we're gonna watch them anyway. But it's for parents to know that they shouldn't buy it for the little ones.

In these discussions parents are not simply presented as enforcement agents for the classification system. Instead, the interviewees were often keen to stress that parents should arbitrate between their children's desire to watch a video, and the classification system which seeks to sign-post its acceptability for particular age-groups. As such, parents have the freedom to decide, on the information supplied by the system of classification (and other sources like film reviews and the testimony of trusted associates), what their child should be allowed to watch.

It is worth remembering that for parents who are above the age of eighteen, the classification system operates in an advisory capacity, as they can legitimately rent or buy videos with an age-grade restriction for their children, who could not otherwise do so for

---

[1] David Buckingham (1996) has begun a timely examination of this whole area - see **Moving Images: Understanding children's emotional responses to television**; Manchester, Manchester University Press.

[2] See David Gauntlett (1995) **Moving Experiences: Understanding television's influences and effects**; London; John Libbey & Company.

themselves. In complying with their children's desires in this way, parents are presumably drawing upon knowledge of their children's tastes and competencies. This knowledge is the privilege of close familial association:

extract nine

Km: Yeah, it's good to have [a classification system] so there's guidelines ⌉
Int: For [whom]?
Km: For, like, so the parents can decide. Because '18', it could be just swearing in it, but then there's sex, but not that much violence so then parents can look at the '18' and read the back [cover of the video box] and decide if a kid can watch it.

What appears to be important in this context is the quality of information available to parents to help them decide whether their child should watch a particular video. The classification system obviously cannot supply the kind of personal information which parents possess about the maturity, competency and tastes of their children, but it does offer generalised prescriptions about suitability which can be used *in conjunction* with this parental knowledge. At the moment such information is restricted to the classification symbol itself, although other sources of supplementary information about the content of videos are currently being tested.[1]

When thinking about the efficacy of the classification system, and whether or not it should be changed, we must consider the nature of the information which the system conveys to consumers. Currently the operation of the system is predicated on the idea that age-graded prescriptions of suitability are sufficiently understood, and valid (that is, they correspond to commonly held beliefs about the ability of certain age-groups to cope with challenging material) to be a useful *general* guide for consumers making *specific* viewing decisions. Up until now, however, there is little evidence that the views of young people are being taken into account in the system's specification. This is in spite of the fact that a young person's perception of their own capabilities is certain to influence the extent to which they feel justified in gaining access to videos which the BBFC deems 'unsuitable' for their age-group.

Changes to the system
Although there was widespread agreement about the need for a system of classification, a number of different opinions were voiced regarding the form that it should take. Its current format received a good deal of support, although there was some debate as to the necessary specification of age-graded classifications. One common suggestion was for the abolition of the 'PG' category, which was not felt to be particularly useful, nor widely understood.[2] In addition, arguments were put forward for the abolition of the '18' category, on the basis that '15' is sufficient in itself; the replacement of the '15' and '18' categories with the '12' category which is currently operated, and even the development of a '21' category for particularly offensive productions:

extract ten

Ti: Erm...I quite like [the current system], but, erm, I think they should put it down a bit [laughs]. Perhaps, like, the '15' should be '14' and '18' should be '17' because I watch '15's all the time, and sometimes '18's, but sometimes it can be a bit erm, I think some should be '21's because they are really scary.

Another suggestion was for a system based upon content-specific, rather than age-graded, ratings:

---

[1] A recent initiative by the British Video Association and the BBFC tested the efficacy of labelling on videos which indicated something of the video's content in terms of categories like violence and bad language.

[2] This was also a finding of the survey of adults carried out by the BBFC (1993) ibid., p.4.

extract eleven

An: I think they ought to change [the current classifications]. Like, they should have 'V1', 'V2', 'V3', 'V4' and 'V5'. Or if it's a sex film, they'd have another one for how raunchy it is.

Int: Like a star system?

An: Yeah. 'Cos it's easier. If you just want a mild violence film, you get one with two stars.

D: Like they do in TV magazines.

Doubts were also raised about the decision-making process at the heart of BBFC operations. Frequent mention was made of poor classification decisions regarding particular video titles. For example:

extract twelve

S: That *Forrest Gump* - d'you see that bit [with] the sex scene? Where she goes, she takes all her clothes off actually [laughs] and it's like, I thought 'PG'! [laughs].

Int: Right- so there are individual instances, like *Forrest Gump*, where you think it has the wrong classification=

S and T: =Yeah.

Some interviewees were moved to blame such decisions on the examiners at the BBFC, calling into question both their consistency and sensitivity to contemporary cultural attitudes:

extract thirteen

M: I think the people who judge the system- the special people who judge it- I think some of them are really strict and some people aren't.

Int: So there's no consistency there?

M: As in...you see *Mrs Doubtfire*, that was made a '12' and *Spyhard*, with a man's head exploding, that was made a 'PG'.

A: It should've been the other way around.

extract fourteen

E: People who rate the movies, they're not young, are they?

Int: [laughs]=

E: =I mean, they- the generations change, and they should bring in younger people who are in touch with life as it is now, rather than people who are, like, old.

At the same time, however, there was also an expression of sympathy for those responsible for classification in circumstances which are characterised by controversy and continual debate. Above all, it was felt that the classification system must operate pragmatically:

extract fifteen

Int: So you think it's good to have a system?

E: Yeah, but it's just so easy to get a video, it's just- I don't know what else they could do, but...

(...)

E: Younger kids want to watch these things. If someone's going to break these things there's no way you can make a law perfect.

P: If you compromise, it's easier than if...so, you know, people are going to be going before [they are old enough], so you put [the classification] up a bit so that they will fit into the right band that you were thinking of. It would be easier than, like, putting it down, and saying that's rigid, because people are still going to watch.

301

'Forbidden fruit'
A number of interviewees introduced the idea that they and their contemporaries are often drawn to videos which carry restrictive certificates. This phenomenon is widely documented and supported by a wealth of research findings.[1] However, matters are more complicated if we look beyond its mere occurrence to examine the underlying mechanism at work here. Christenson (1992) has allied the operation of what he calls the "forbidden fruit hypothesis" with Brehm's reactance theory which argues that "when an individual's freedom is threatened or taken away, the individual is motivated to restore that freedom...[o]ne method of doing so is to actively engage in the proscribed behaviour."[2]

Yet the suggestion that a video with a restrictive certificate becomes attractive by virtue of the very fact that it is restricted is only of limited explanatory value. This is because videos are subject to restriction solely at the point of sale (or rental)- there is ample evidence that teenagers often have unrestricted access to videos in the home. This argument also fails to explain why an '18' rated video might carry greater attraction than a '15', even though both are restrictive certifications:

extract sixteen
C: I think people get the '18's- like youngsters- because they hear about them. These bad things on the news and that, and they want to see what it's like, and they find more of a thrill in the '18' year ones. '12' ones, 'PG's and 'U's are kind of boring.
Int: So the actual certificate suggests=
C: =Suggests that there's more, erm, violence...

Young people may well be drawn to videos with restrictive certificates simply because the rating system carries with it information about the quality and quantity of challenging scenes (those that contain violence, bad language, sex and so on). An '18' rated video has, by definition, qualitatively and quantitatively more explicit material than a '15'- and young people can use the classification system as a scale against which to judge their viewing choices. It is not necessarily the very fact of classification which promotes a video in the minds of young consumers. Rather, their perception of the classification decisions which are codified in the symbol appearing on the video box plays a significant role here. For this reason we need to be aware of young people's perception of the classification decision-making process, not least because the evidence would suggest that it plays some part in their selection of videos to watch.

Conclusion
David Buckingham (1996) has offered several "modest suggestions" for the development of "constructive alternatives" to an increase in screen censorship.[3] His proposals for video regulation include a call for more information to be made available about the content of videos, the opening up of BBFC decision-making to public scrutiny and accountability, and the development of educational strategies aimed at guaranteeing "an informed and critical audience for all media output".[4] All of these suggestions find support in the views expressed by those young people interviewed here, and therefore have at least the potential to succeed if they are ever implemented.[5]

---

[1] Buckingham (1996) ibid.; Wood (1993) ibid.

[2] Christenson, P (1992) **The Effects of Parental Advisory Labels on Adolescent Music Preferences**, Journal of Communication 42, 1. (p.106).

[3] ibid., p. 314

[4] ibid., p.317.

[5] Buckingham also implies that the '18' category ought to be replaced by a lower age-rating. This is certainly supported by some of the young people interviewed here, although not all were in favour of such action. Given the prevailing climate of opinion regarding video classification and censorship in this country, I doubt whether such a proposal will be taken up in the foreseeable future.

In addition, Buckingham (1996) recognises that centralised regulation is going to become increasingly difficult as technological advances result in ever more ungovernable methods of media output.[1] If this is to be the case, then alternatives to increased censorship must be introduced soon enough to have some impact before such developments occur. On the strength of the evidence presented here, I agree that new measures must "begin with parents and with children themselves" -for ultimately these are the very groups whose attitudes and behaviour will determine the efficacy of any system of regulation.[2]

Although the research presented here raises more questions than it could possibly answer, I hope to have highlighted some of the ways in which listening to what young people actually have to say about the classification system can reveal important details about its current operation and potential development in the future.

---

[1] ibid., p.314.
[2] ibid., p.314.

Bibliography

-Alexander, D (1994); **Nasty Fears and Fearful Nasties. Sex and Crime and Blaming the Media: a Brief History.** Samhain (August) pp25-27.

-Allerton, M (1995); **The Regulation of Television Viewing Within the Family,** conference paper , Electronic Children, London 1995.

-Alvarado, M (1988); **Video World-wide: An International Study.** London, John Libbey and Company Ltd.

-Alvarado, M and Boyd-Barrett, O (1992); **Media Education: an introduction,** London, BFI Publishing.

-Archard, D (1993); **Children: Rights and Childhood.** London, Routledge.

-Armes, R (1989); **On Video.** London, Routledge.

-Atkin, C, Greenberg, B, Korzenny, F and McDermott, S (1979); **Selective Exposure to Televised Violence.** Journal of Broadcasting, 23(1).

-Atkin, D, Greenberg, B and Baldwin, T (1991); **The Home Ecology of Children's Television Viewing: Parental Mediation and the New Video Environment.** Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media.

-Atkins, L and Jarrett, D (1981); **The Significance of 'Significance Tests'.** in J. Irvine, I. Miles et al, Demystifying Social Statistics, London, Pluto Press Ltd.

-Austin, E A (1993); **Exploring the Effects of Active Parental Mediation of Television Content.** Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media (Spring)

-Avery, R K (1979); **Adolescents Use of the Mass Media.** American Behavioural Scientist, 23(1).

-Bandura, A (1973); **Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis,** Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall.

-Barcus, F E (1969); **Parental Influence on Children's Television Viewing.** Television Quarterly, 8(3), 63-73.

-Barker, M (1984a); **A Haunt of Fears: The Strange History of the British Horror Comics Campaign.** London, Pluto Press.

-Barker, M (1984b); **The Video Nasties.** London, Pluto Press.

-Barker, M and Petley, J (1997); **Ill Effects: the media violence debate.** London, Routledge.

-Barlow, G and Hill, A (1985); **Video Violence and Children.** London, Hodder and Stoughton.

-Barratt, A J B (1993); **Myth-Print: Ideology and the Press Coverage of Juvenile Crime.** Unpublished MA, University of Essex.

-Barratt, A J B (1995, June 1995); **Moral Crusade Post-1960.** Sight and Sound, p. 22-23 (Forbidden Cinema supplement).

-Barratt, A J B (1996); **VideoWATCH: Report on Part One.** Unpublished manuscript, British Film Institute and Middlesex University.

-Barratt, A J B (1997); **Video Rights and Wrongs: Teenagers' Attitudes to Video Classification in Britain.** The English & Media Magazine, 36.

-Barwise, P and Ehrenberg, A (1990); **Television and its Audience.** London, Sage Publications Ltd.

-Bazalgette, C and Buckingham, D (1995); **In Front of the Children.** London, BFI Publishing.

-BBFC (1983); **Report of the Video Working Party**, London, BBFC.

-BBFC (1985a); **Annual Report**, London, BBFC.

-BBFC (1985b); **Video Recordings Act 1984: A Guide to its Implementation and Practical Consequences**, London, BBFC.

-BBFC (1992); **British Board of Film Classification Information Pack.** London, BBFC.

-BBFC (1993); **Video in View: Public Attitudes to Video Classification**, London, BBFC.

-BBFC (1996); **Annual Report**, London, BBFC.

-Betancourt, H and Regeser and Lopez, S (1993); **The study of Culture, Ethnicity and Race in American Psychology.** American Psychologist, 48(6).

-Blood, R O (1961); **Social Class and Family Control of Television Viewing.** Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 7.

-Bragg, S and Grahame, J (1997); **Does it Hurt When They Fall Downstairs: An Interview with James Ferman of the British Board of Film Classification.** English & Media Magazine, 36.

-Brake, M and Hale, C (1992); **Public Order and Private Lives: The Politics of Law and Order.** London, Routledge.

-Brannen, J, Dodd, K, Oakley, A and Storey, P (1994); **Young People, Health and Family Life**, Open University, Buckingham.

-Brannen, J and O'Brien, M (1996); **Children in Families: Research and Policy.** London, Falmer Press.

-Brown, J R and Linne, O (1976); **The Family as a Mediator of television's Effects.** in R. Brown, Children and Televsion. London, Collins Macmillan.

-Bryant, J and Anderson, D R (1983); **Children's Understanding of Television.** London, Academic Press Inc. Ltd.

-BSC (1994); **A Code of Practice.** London, Broadcasting Standards Council.

-BSC (1996); **Young People and the Media.** London, Broadcasting Standards Council.

-Buckingham, D (1987); **Children and Television: An Overview of the Literature.** London, BFI mimeograph.

-Buckingham, D (1993a); **Children Talking Television: The Making of Television Literacy.** London, The Falmer Press.

-Buckingham, D (ed) (1993b); **Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media.** Manchester, Manchester University Press.

-Buckingham, D (1994); **Television and the Definition of Childhood.** in B. Mayall, <u>Children's Childhoods Observed and Experienced.</u> London, The Falmer Press.

-Buckingham, D and Sefton Green, J (1994); **Cultural Studies Goes to School.** Lonfdon, Taylor & Francis Ltd.

-Buckingham, D (1996); **Moving Images: Understanding children's emotional responses to television.** Manchester, Manchester University Press.

-Burgess, R G (1984); **In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research.** London, George Allen & Unwin.

-Burman, E (1994); **Deconstructing Developmental Psychology.** London, Routledge.

-BVA (1985); **A Trade Guide to the Video Recordings Act,** London, British Videogram Association.

-BVA (1994a); **British Video Association Yearbook 1994: A Year in Video,** London, British Video Association.

-BVA (1994b); **A Parent's Guide to Video Classification: Mum, Can I Watch A Video?** London, British Video Association.

-BVA (1995); **British Video Association Yearbook 1995: A Year in Video,** London, British Video Association.

-BVA (1996); **British Video Association Yearbook 1996: A Year in Video,** London, British Video Association.

-BVA (1997); **British Video Association Yearbook 1997: A Year in Video,** London, British Video Association.

-Calcutt, A (1995); **Interview With the Censor.** <u>Living Marxism,</u> (May).

-Caughie, J (1992); **Television and Young People,** Research Working Papers (VI), London, Broadcasting Standards Council.

-CAVIAR (1994); **Cinema and Video Industry Audience Research,** London, CAA.

-Christenson, P (1992); **The Effects of Parental Advisory Labels on Adolescent Music Preferences.** <u>Journal of Communication,</u> 42(1).

-Clover, C (1992); **Men, Women and Chainsaws.** London, BFI Publications.

-Cohen, S (1990); **Folk Devils and Moral Panics.** Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd.

-Cohen, S and Young, J (1973); **The Manufacture of the News.** London, Constable.

-Coleman, J C and Hendry, L (1990); **The Nature of Adolescence.** London, Routledge.

-Collins, W A, Sobol, B L and Westby, S (1981); **Effects of adult commentary on children's comprehension and inferences about a television aggressive portrayal**, ChildDevelopment, 52, 158-163.

-Conservative Central Office (1987); **Conservative Party Manifesto.** London, Conservative Central Office.

-Corder-Bolz, C R (1980); **Mediation: The Role of Significant Others.** Journal of Broadcasting, 30.

-Cubitt, S (1991); **Timeshift: On Video Culture.** London, Routledge.

-Cullingford, C (1984); **Children and Television.** Aldershot, Gower Publishing.

-Cumberbatch, G and Howitt, D (1989); **A Measure of Uncertainty: The Effects of the Mass Media.** London, John Libbey.

-Cunningham, H (1995); **Moral Kombat and Computer Game Girls.** in C. Bazalgette and D. Buckingham, In Front of the Children. London, BFI Publications.

-Daly, K (1992a); **The Fit Between Qualitative Research and Characteristics of Families.** in J. F. Gilgun, K. Daly*et al*, Qualitative Methods in Family Research. London, Sage Publications.

-Daly, K (1992b); **Parenthood as Problematic.** in J. F. Gilgun, K. Daly*et al*, Qualitative Methods in Family Research. London, Sage Publications.

-Davies, M M (1989); **Television is Good for Your Kids.** London, Hilary Shipman.

-Desmond, R J, Singer, J L, Singer, D G, Calam, R and Colimore, K (1985); **Family Mediation Patterns and Television Viewing**, Human Communication Research, 11, 461-480.

-de Vaus, D A (1986); **Surveys in Social Research.** London, George Allen & Unwin.

-Devine, F (1998); **Class Analysis and the Stability of Class Relations**, Sociology, 32, 23-42.

-Dewe Matthews, T (1995); **Censored**, London, Chatto & Windus.

-DNH (1996).**The V-Chip: Report on Consultation by the Department of National Heritage**, London, Department of National Heritage.

-Dorr, A (1986); **Television and Children: A Special Medium for a Special Audience.** London, Sage Publications.

-Drummond, P and Patterson, P (1988); **Television and its Audience.** London, BFI Publications.

-Dyja, E (1995); **BFI Film and Television Handbook 1996.** London, BFI Publications.

-Eekelaar, J (1991); **Parental Responsibility: State of Nature or Nature of the State?** Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law, 1, 37-50.

-Ellis, J (1982); **Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video.** London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

-Evans, E (1997); **Thatcher and Thatcherism.** London, Routledge.

-Evans, G (1996); **Putting Men and Women into Classes: An Assessment of the Cross-sex Validity of the Goldthorpe Class Schema.** Sociology, 30.

-Ferri, E and Smith, K (1996); **Parenting in the 1990s,** London, Family Policy Studies Centre.

-Finch, J and Mason, J (1993); **Negotiating Family Responsibilities,** London, Routledge.

-Fishman, M (1978); **Crime Waves as Ideology.** Social Problems, 25 531-543.

-Fowler, R (1992); **Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press.** London, Routledge.

-Fowler, R, Hodge, B, Kress, G and Trew, T (1979); **Language and Control.** London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

-French, K (ed) (1996); **Screen Violence,** London, Bloomsbury.

-Friedman, M and Friedman, R (1980); **Free to Choose.** Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

-Galtung, J and Ruge, M (1973); **Structuring and Selecting News.** in S. Cohen and J. Young, The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media. London, Constable.

-Gauntlett, D (1995); **Moving Experiences: Understanding Television's Influences and Effects.** London, John Libbey & Company Ltd.

-Gilgun, J F (1992); **Definitions, Methodologies, and Methods in Qualitative Family Research.** in J. F. Gilgun, K. Daly *et al*, Qualitative Methods in Family Research. London, Sage Publications.

-Gilgun, J F, Daly, K and Handel, G (eds) (1992); **Qualitative Methods in Family Research.** London, Sage Publications.

-Glaser, B G and Strauss, A L (1967); **The Discovery of Grounded Theory.** Chicago, Aldine.

-Goodnow, J J and Collins, W A (1994); **Development According to Parents: The Nature, Sources and Consequences of Parents' Ideas.** Hove, UK, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

-Gordon, C (1980); **Michel Foucault Power/Knowledge.** Hemel Hempstead, Harvest Wheatsheaf.

-Gray, A (1992); **Video Playtime: The Gendering of a Leisure Technology.** London, Routledge.

-Greenberg, B and Dominick, J (1969); **Racial and Social Class Differences in Teen-Agers use of Televison.** Journal of Broadcasting, XIII(4)

-Greenberg, B and Lin, C (1989); **Adolescents and the VCR Boom: Old, New and Nonusers.** in M. Levy, The VCR Age. London, Sage.

-Gross, L S and Welsh, W R (1980); **Factors Affecting Parental Control Over Children's Television Viewing: A Pilot Study.** Journal of Broadcasting, 24, 3(Summer).

-Gunter, B and McAleer, J (1997); **Children & Television.** London, Routledge.

-Gunter, B, McAleer, J and Clifford, B (1991); **Children's Views About Television.** Aldershot, Avebury.

-Gunter, B, Sancho-Aldridge, J and Winstone, P (1994); **Television: The Public's View 1993.** London, John Libbey.

-Gunter, B and Wober, M (1989); **The Uses and Impact of Home Video in Great Britain.** in M. Levy, The VCR Age: Home Video and Mass Communication. London, Sage.

-Hagell, A and Newburn, T (1994); **Young Offenders and the Media.** London, PSI Publishing.

-Halldén, G (1994); **The Family- A Refuge from Demands or an Arena for the Exercise of Power and Control- Children's Fictions on their Future Families.** in B. Mayall, Children's Childhoods Observed and Experienced. London, The Falmer Press.

-Halloran, J and Gray, P (1996); **Television and the Family.** in A. Milwood-Hargrave, Young People and the Media. London, Broadcasting Standards Council.

-Hansard (1983); **Orders of the Day** (11 November): Video Recordings Bill. London, Hansard Society.

-Hansard (1993); **Written Answers** (7 December): Obscenity and Violence. London, Hansard Society.

-Hansard (1994); **Orders of the Day** (12 April): New Clause 42. London, Hansard Society.

-Hansard (1997); **Points of Order** (8 July): Film Classification Accountability and Openness. London, Hansard Society.

-Harre, R and Secord, P (1972); **The Explanation of Social Behaviour.** Oxford, Blackwell.

-Hartley, J (1982); **Understanding News.** London, Methuen.

-Hartshorn, D (1983); **Children and Video Films at Home.** Educational Studies, 9(3).

-Hayek, F A (1978); **Denationalisation of Money.** London, Institute of Economic Affairs.

-Hendrick, H (1990); **Constructions and reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative survey, 1800 to the present.** in A. James and A. Prout, Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood. London, The Falmer Press.

-Henwood, M (1987); **Inside the Family: Changing roles of men and women.** London, Family Policy Studies Centre.

-Hess, R D and Goldman, H (1962); **Parents' Views of the Effects of Television on their Children.** Child Development, 33.

-Hill, A (1997); **Screening Violence.** London, John Libbey Publishing.

-Himmelweit, H, Oppenheim, A P and Vince, P (1958); **Television and the Child.** Oxford, Oxford University Press.

-HMSO (1994); **Social Focus on Children 1994.** London, HMSO.

-Hockey, J and James, A (1993); **Growing up and Growing old: Ageing and dependency in the life course.** London, Sage Publications.

-Hodge, B and Tripp, D (1986); **Children and Television.** Cambridge, Polity Press.

-Holman, J and Braithwaite, V A (1982); **Parental Lifestyles and Children's Television Viewing.** Australian Journal of Psychology, 34.

-Home Affairs Select Committee (1994).**Video Violence and Young Offenders.** (No. 4), London, HMSO.

-Hood-Williams, J (1990); **Patriarchy for children: on the stability of power relations in children's lives.** in L. Chisholm, P. Buchner et al, Childhood, Youth and Social Change: a comparative perspective. London, Falmer.

-Howkins, J (1979, Summer 1979); **Television may never be the same again...** Sight and Sound, p. 148-151.

-Hunnings, N (1984, Summer); **Video Censors.** Sight and Sound, p. 186-171.

-IBA (1980); **IBA Attitudes to Broadcasting 1980,** London, IBA.

-IBA (1986); **Parental Control of Children's Viewing Experiences,** London, IBA.

-ICM (1994); **Censorship Poll,** London, ICM.

-Irvine, J, Miles, I and Evans, J (1981); **Demystifying Social Statistics.** London, Pluto Press Ltd.

-ITC (1995); **Television: The Public's View 1995,** London, Independent Television Commission.

-Jackson, S (1982); **Childhood and Sexuality,** Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

-James, A and Prout, A (1990); **Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood.** London, The Falmer Press.

-Jenks, C (1992); **The Sociology of Childhood: Essential Readings.** Aldershot, Gregg Revivals.

-Kim, W Y, Baran, S J et al (1988); **Impact of VCR on Control of Televsion Viewing.** Journal of Broadcast and Electronic Media, 32, 3(Summer), 351-358.

-King, M (1997); **A Better World for Children: Explorations in Morality and Authority**, London, Routledge.

-Kress, G R (1985); **Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice.** Victoria, Deakin University Press.

-Letwin, S (1992); **The Anatomy of Thatcherism.** London, Fontana.

-Levy, M (1989); **The VCR Age.** London, Sage.

-Levy, M R and Gunter, B (1988); **Home Video and the Changing Nature of the Television Audience.** London, John Libbey and Company Ltd.

-Lin, C A and Atkin, D J (1989); **Parental Mediation and Rulemaking for Adolescent Use of Television and VCRs.** Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 33, 1(Winter).

-Livingstone, S (1995); **Making Sense of Television: the psychology of audience interpretation.** Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd.

-Lull, J (ed) (1988); **World Families Watch Television.** London, Sage.

-Lull, J (1990); **Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on Television's Audiences.** London, Routledge.

-Malcolm, D (1989); **Codes of Practice: The Classifier.** Sight and Sound, May 1989.

-Manchester, C (1995); **Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994: Obscenity, Pornography and Videos.** The Criminal Law Review, February 1995), 123-131.

-Marsh, C (1981); **Opinion Polls- Social Science or Political Manoeuvre?** in Irvine et al Demystifying Social Statistics. London, Pluto Press.

-Masson, J and Morris, M (1992); **The Children Act Manual.** London, Sweet and Maxwell.

-Mayall, B (1994a); **Children in Action at Home and School.** in B. Mayall, Children's Childhoods Observed and Experienced. London, The Falmer Press.

-Mayall, B (1994b); **Children's Childhoods Observed and Experienced.** London, The Falmer Press.

-McCleod, J and Brown, J (1976); **The Family Environment and Adolescent Television Use.** in R. Brown, Children and Television. London, Collier Macmillan.

-Millwood Hargrave, A (1995); **The Scheduling Game,** London, The Broadcasting Standards Council.

-Mohr, P (1979); **Parental Guidance of Children's Viewing of Evening Television Programs.** Journal of Broadcasting, 23,2(Spring).

-Moore, M, Sixsmith, J and Knowles, K (1996); **Children's Reflections on Family Life.** London, Falmer Press.

-Moores, S (1993); **Interpreting Audiences.** London, Sage Publishing Ltd.

-MORI (1994); **Attitudes Towards Videos and Child Violence** <u>BBC Late Show</u> (May).

-Morley, D (1986); **Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure.** London, Comedia.

-Neale, S (1990); **Questions of Genre.** <u>Screen</u>, <u>31</u>(1).

-Newson, E (1994); **Video Violence and the Protection Of Children,** Unpublished discussion paper.

-Norris, B (1983, Spring 1983); **Video Report.** <u>Sight and Sound,</u> p. 106-108.

-O'Bryant, S C and Corder-Bolz, C R (1978); **The Effects of Television on Children's Stereotyping of Women's Work Roles,** <u>Journal of Vocational Behavior</u>, 12, 233-244.

-O'Donnell, M (1991); **Sociology in Focus: Race and Ethnicity.** Harlow, Longman Group UK Ltd.

-Oppenheim, A N (1992); **Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement.** London, Pinter Publishers Ltd.

-Oswell, D (1995); **Watching With Mother: A Genealogy of the Child Television Audience.** Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Open University.

-PACE, (1997); **The 1997 PACE Survey,** London, PACE.

-PAT (1994); **The Street of the Pied Piper,** London, Professional Association of Teachers.

-Pearson, G (1983); **Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears.** London, The Macmillan Press Ltd.

-Pilcher, J (1995); **Age and Generation in Modern Britain.** Oxford, Oxford University Press.

-Polon, M (1980, August 1980); **The Future of Home Entertainment and the Four Horsemen of Technology.** <u>Sight and Sound,</u> p. 224-229.

-Potter, J and Wetherell, M (1987); **Discourse and Social Psychology.** London, Sage Publications.

-Prandy, K and Blackburn, R M (1997); **Putting Men and Women into Classes: But is that where they belong? A comment on Evans.** <u>Sociology</u>, <u>31</u>.

-Reeves, B and Wartella, E (1985); **Historical Trends in Research on Children and the Media: 1900-1960.** <u>Journal of Communication</u>, <u>35</u>(2).

-Reid, L (1979); **Viewing Rules as Mediating Factors of Children's Responses to Commercials.** <u>Journal of Broadcasting</u>, <u>23</u>(1).

-Roe, K (1981); **Video and Youth: New Patterns of media use.** <u>Media Panel Report no.18</u>, <u>Lund, Sweden: Department of Sociology</u>.

-Roe, K (1983); **Mass Media and Adolescent Schooling.** Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.

-Roe, K (1987); **The Swedish Moral Panic over Video 1980-1984.** Nordicom Review of Mass Communication Research, June), 20-25.

-Roe, K (1989); **School Achievement, Self-Esteem, and Adolescents' Video Use.** in M. Levy, The VCR Age. London, Sage.

-Runciman, W G (1966); **Relative Deprivation and Social Justice.** London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

-Sarland, C (1991); **Young People Reading: Culture and Response.** Milton Keynes, Open University Press.

-Sarland, C (1994); **Attack of the teenage horrors: theme and meaning in popular series fiction.** Signal, 73.

-Shipman, M (1988); **The Limitations of Social Research.** London, Longman.

-Singer, J L and Singer, D G (1981); **Television, imagination and aggression: a study of preschoolers,** Hillsdale, Erlbaum.

-Simpson, P (1987); **Parents Talking Television: television in the home.** London, Comedia.

-Smith, D J (1994); **The Sleep of Reason: The James Bulger Case.** London, Century.

-Smith, D M (1971); **Some uses of Mass Media by 14 Year Olds.** Journal of Broadcasting, XVI(4).

-SMRC (1995); **Childwise Monitor Autumn 1995.** Norwich, SMRC.

-Stainton Rogers, R and Stainton Rogers, W (1992); **Stories of Childhood.** Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf.

-Staples, T (1997); **All Pals Together,** Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

-Stanfield II, J H and Dennis, R M (1993); **Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods.** London, Sage Publications.

-Strasburger, V C (1995); **Adolescents and the Media: Medical and Psychological Impact.** London, Sage Publications.

-Strauss, A L and Corbin, J (1990); **Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.** London, Sage Publications.

-VSC (1995a); **Ensuring Compliance with the Law: Staff Training for Video Rental Dealers.** London, Video Standards Council.

-VSC (1995b); **Retailer's Guide.** London, Video Standards Council.

-VSC (1995c); **What You Always Wanted to Know About the Video Recordings Act But Were Afraid to Ask.** London, Video Standards Council.

-Wimmer, R D and Dominick, J R (1994); **Mass Media Research: An Introduction.** Belmont, CA, Wadsworth Publishing Company.

-Wood, J (1993); **Repeatable Pleasures: notes on young people's use of video.** in D. Buckingham, <u>Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media.</u> Manchester, Manchester University Press.