

**UNCONSENTING CHILDREN?:
THE USE OF CHILDREN IN TELEVISION REALITY PROGRAMMES**

‘Children shouldn’t be used in something that children can’t see.’

Girl, Aged 11, Somerset

**A STUDY INTO THE USE OF CHILDREN ON TELEVISION,
AND FAMILY RESPONSES TO IT**

FOR THE BROADCASTING STANDARDS COMMISSION,

BY

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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank particularly the study's sponsors, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, and especially Andrea Millwood Hargrave and Lorraine Miller in the research department.

A heart felt thanks to all the children, parents and grandparents who generously allowed us into their homes and gave up their time to provide us with such valuable and interesting insights, and thanks also to those additional families who took the time to complete questionnaires for us.

We would like to thank Michael Forte and David Mercer of Carlton/Central television for their permission to carry out a production observation of their children's game show *Mad for It*, and a special thanks to the production team, under Rob Benfield, for allowing us to observe the planning and filming of the programme. Thanks, too, to the children, parents and teachers we spoke to during the production and to Gareth Andrewartha for his work on this stage of the project.

A number of people have worked on the family research, and all have contributed in distinctive ways to the diversity of the material we have gathered. A special thank you to Keri Facer, of Bristol University, who helped in the planning of the family research, and in helping to find both researchers and families to take part in it. The researchers themselves are credited on the title page of the report; the efforts and sensitivity of all in producing so much valuable material from the families they interviewed, are acknowledged here. Any perceived misinterpretation of their contributions in the final writing of this report is our responsibility, not theirs.

Thanks to Sharon McGill and Jon Adams, our technical staff in JOMEC, for help with computing and video recording and to Theresa Kibblewhite, Janis Hood and Barbara Tomlin in the JOMEC office for help with the general administration of the study. Thanks to Pauline Gysber for help with contacting families in London. Thanks especially to Marloes Holtkamp whose prompt and accurate transcriptions of the interviews greatly facilitated the progress of the final stage of the research.

Thanks, as always to family, partners and friends for moral, and other, support: John, Tom, Hannah, Huw, Eli, Brian, Patricia, Seralynne, and to Madge Messenger and Rose Davison for their words of wisdom from an earlier, less media-dominated generation.

Máire Messenger Davies

Nick Mosdell

March 2001

Executive Summary

The study: aims, issues and methods

The goal of this research was to examine the use of real children (as distinct from child performers and models) in non-fictional television programmes, and to evaluate how such images of children are perceived by children and parents in the television audience. The research pursues concerns about consent, privacy and exploitation raised in the Broadcasting Standards Commission's report on adult participants in reality television, *Consenting Adults?*¹, published in May 2000. As its title implies, *Consenting Adults?* did not consider children. This study does.

Issues in the research

Two important issues about child/adult, and child/parent relations were raised by this study's examination of 'consenting children' in broadcasting: the first was whether children are *competent* to make their own decisions in giving or withholding consent to taking part in television programmes. The second was whether parents, or other care-taking adults, have the right to *over-rule*, or pre-empt, children's decisions. Because the research primarily concerns broadcasting and its regulation, the second question raises parallel and particular concerns about professional broadcasting practice: are children always *asked* for their consent to appear in adult programmes (children's programmes are different - see Chapter 3), in forms that make the implications clear to them, or is it assumed by producers that parental approval is sufficient?

To answer these questions, production practices and regulations have been examined - and a detailed, and in-depth observation of a children's programme in which children were featured in a number of ways, provided some useful pointers towards good practice, and about the ways in which children can be meaningfully consulted (see the case study of *Mad for It* described in Chapter 3). Where adult programmes featuring children are concerned, it appeared from the programmes which generated complaints to the BSC and official warnings from the ITC, examples of which were shown to the families used in

¹ *Consenting Adults?*; Stirling Media Research Institute; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2000.

our research, that some further guidelines may be necessary to help producers act appropriately towards children. (See Recommendations, below).

Aims of the research

Our aims were similar to the aims of *Consenting Adults?* - to 'throw light on the nature of public participation in programmes' (p.11); to consider the motives of both participants and producers; to look at good practice and 'to work towards a clearer and more meaningful definition of the notion of informed consent'. In the case of children, these goals prompted additional questions:

- What is 'informed consent' where children are concerned?
- In what ways are children seen and used on television?
- To what extent does broadcasting build in procedures for consulting and informing the children used for entertainment, or other purposes?
- Whose job is it, generally, to safeguard the interests of children used in broadcasting?
- To what extent are children capable of making up their own minds about what they should, and should not, be allowed to do, or see, and at what age?
- What do children themselves, and families with children, think about these questions?

The research used four methods of investigation:

First, an examination of **regulations** on the use of children in television, particularly in non-fiction programmes.

Secondly, an investigation into how these regulations are applied in **production practice**, with the co-operation of the producers of the Carlton/ITV children's game show *Mad for*

It, who generously allowed us to observe their production (which involved children in a range of roles, including performing, competing and as a studio audience) as a case study.

Thirdly, an analysis of a recorded sample of daytime, evening and weekend programming, to see **how real children were represented in adult programming**

Fourthly, an investigation into how the use of 'real' children in a variety of non-fiction television shows, taken from our sample, was **perceived by families with children**.

The family research and its rationale

We chose to examine these issues, for the purposes of this research, in a context where it would be possible to observe how adults and children discussed potential areas of disagreement about the rights and responsibilities of children appearing on television. This involved discussing the rights and responsibilities of these children's parents, and of the people who produced the programmes. We also wanted to find out if families would adopt, or mirror, the concepts and language of regulation, which we identified in our analysis of broadcasting regulations (see Chapter 2), and in our observation of the production of the children's TV game show, *Mad for It*. Our sample of 24 families included differences of income, race, religion, region and family-type (with a number of single parents). We also expected there to be some diversity of view as a result of internal family differences - such as differences between parents, or between siblings.

We expected that families' attempts to debate regulatory issues about the use of children on television, and to reach resolutions, would provide evidence about child competence and understanding of ethical issues, and hence children's ability to give informed consent. We also expected that these discussions would illustrate family feelings about the rights and duties of parents, and in what circumstances families believed that parents' views should give way to those of children, or not. The ways in which these debates were carried out, and examples of what they show about children's understanding of ethical issues of consent, competence and privacy, and parental attitudes to regulation, are described in Chapter 7.

Twenty four families with children aged 7-14, in Bristol, Gloucester, Reading, London and Cardiff, were interviewed in depth for the project. A further 14 families were recruited through, and in addition to, these 24 families to fill in a questionnaire about

attitudes to children and television (see Chapter 6). More details about the families are given in the appendices.

Summary of main findings

From review of regulations

- Both legislation and industry guidelines exist to limit the hours worked by child performers; to protect their health and safety; to provide chaperones and educational support. Children can only work with licences issued in advance by local authorities.
- The legislation governing the employment of children does not apply in every respect to non-professional children who are appearing on television as themselves. For instance, a Local Authority licence is not required where children are not paid. However, licences are required for any child, paid or unpaid, to be absent from school.
- Producers are expected to follow industry guidelines (the ITC and BBC Codes) about the use of children on television, but the mechanisms for ensuring that they are followed can depend on producers' discretion. In resolving conflicts between parental wishes and children's feelings, the BBC Guidelines require consent from children and they recommend producers to seek professional advice, when in doubt. ITC guidelines stipulate the consent of a parent or guardian, as well as the child, 'with exceptions only for the least sensitive interview topics'.
- The extent to which children are enabled to give consent to appearing in non-professional roles on television, and the extent to which they understand the implications of such consent, are not entirely clear from our analysis of regulations. Parental supervision is seen as a safeguard, but where parents' and children's requirements may conflict, there is no obvious mechanism for ensuring that the child's point of view is given equal (or even greater) weight than the adults', or for arbitration by independent third parties.

From production case study

- In the case of the Carlton game show *Mad for It*, regulatory procedures for ensuring consent, parental approval, safety, audience feedback, welfare and active enjoyment, are explicit and routinely applied as part of the production process. We believe this to be an example of general good practice in children's programming.
- Children's game shows are popular with, and targeted at, children under 11 years; however, children appearing are usually older than this, and the preoccupations with dating, pop music, and adventure activities may be more appropriate for older children. Children wanting, or invited, to take part maybe disappointed at not, after all, being able to perform and the impression of spontaneity and audience feedback may be illusory, with studio activities being carefully 'produced' and controlled.

From analysis of programming

- An analysis of 32 hours of daytime programming, on four terrestrial channels (BBC1, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5), revealed that nearly 13% of material was child related, that is, either aimed at or featuring children.
- Broken down according to genre and target audience, 60% of this material was advertisements and 20% was News - neither specifically children's genres. Children's programmes constituted 15% and general programming (including talk shows, adult drama and comedy not specifically aimed at children) constituted 1.8%.
- An analysis of the roles the children played in this programming revealed that the way in which children were represented had three main characteristics:
 - (i) Passivity - such as a talk show item about children's criminal responsibility in which images of children were used, but children themselves did not take part or contribute to the discussion.

- (ii) Entertainment - children being used for adult entertainment (e.g. *Kids Say the Funniest Things*, ITV), or innocently mimicking adult performers.
- (iii) Emotion - the use of children to illustrate adult issues in the News, such as mortally ill children being used to illustrate a story about the BSE crisis.

How families use media – questionnaires given to families

- Our families were all diverse media consumers. In our questionnaire to 38 families (consisting of 53 adults and 78 children), 89% of the sample owned two or more televisions; 100% had a video cassette recorder; 66% had at least one television in a child's bedroom; of those, 69% had a video attached.
- Most children watched evening television programmes (i.e. those not aimed specifically at children, such as soap operas or dramas) with other family members and most children's viewing of such programming was done with their parents present (71% of 7-11 year-olds and 96% of 12-14 year-olds watch general non-children's programmes with parents). Fewer children's programmes were watched with parents (9% of 7-11 year-olds and no 12-14 year-olds).
- Younger children did not watch non-children's programming with friends much (5% of 7-11 year-olds), suggesting that fears of young children watching horror movies with friends, unsupervised by adults, are exaggerated.
- Children talked about television with parents, siblings and friends - around 29% of all children talked to all three groups. The next largest group of conversationalists about television were friends, with 20% of 7-11 year-olds talking to their friends and 33% of 12-14 year-olds.
- Parents were asked whether they would allow their children to appear in seven specified genres of programming, and children were asked if they would like to appear in these programmes. Many more adults than children would agree to their

children appearing in every genre. Greatest areas of disagreement were 84% of parents approving of children appearing in *Newsround*, but only 21% of children wanting to appear in it, and more than twice as many parents as children agreeing to their children appearing in *Grange Hill* (63% of adults compared to 29% of children).

- With the exception of radio ‘phone-ins, younger children were more enthusiastic than older children about being in all categories of programming, which suggests that children may become more diffident and self-conscious about public performance as they get older.

From the family interviews

- In the family interviews (with 24 families with children aged from 7-14) children usually accepted their parents’ rules and standards, but they also showed evidence of independent opinions and were capable of expressing them and carrying their point in family discussions.
- There was general agreement within all the families with the importance of obtaining children’s consent for their participation in programmes - although there was dispute about the lowest age that this would be possible – with children setting a younger limit than parents.
- While both parents and children generally agreed on the need for parental responsibility and permission for children to appear on television, many also argued the need for an arbitrator or ‘welfare’ officer in cases where parents and children’s interests might conflict. The ‘staring’ competition between 6 year-olds, in order to win a speedboat on *TFI Friday*², was seen as an example of this.
- Parents and children felt strongly the need to protect children from distress (as in the case of a child wanting to be adopted on *Panorama*), protection which such a ‘welfare’ person attached to the production team might provide.

² See Appendix ? for details of clips used in research.

- Parents expressed scepticism about the sincerity of producers and believed their motivations were often commercial; children, too were aware of the fabricated nature of some of the situations involving children, claiming that they were ‘set up’ or ‘fake’.
- There was general agreement about the unfairness of making a child compete for adult prizes and about the inappropriateness of using a 6 year-old to ‘kill’ and swear in the comedy sketch from Channel 4’s *Jam*. None of the parents interviewed would allow this to be seen by their own children under the age of 14.
- Both children and adults found the exploitative use of children on television offensive, but they were aware of circumstances in which such uses may be mitigated by good intention, for example, the child seeking an adoptive family on *Panorama*.
- The sexuality of a 6 year-old Michael Jackson impersonator, although seen by some as evidence of talent and ‘fun’, was seen by others (both adults and children) as ‘shocking’. There was general concern about the sexualisation of children, especially among older interviewees (including three grandmothers).
- Many discussions about television material expressed ongoing family disagreements, for instance disputes between fathers and mothers about what their children should, or should not, see; siblings disagreeing about particular aspects of programmes and so on. This reflected the regulatory process in families.
- Younger children (under 8 years) tended to get overwhelmed by older ones and were generally silent, which suggests that very young children should have special provision made for their views to be heard, whether in research, or whether appearing on television.

A major goal of this study was to help to provide, in the words of *Consenting Adults?*, ‘a clearer and more meaningful definition of the notion of informed consent’ as applied to children. We hope that the recommendations below will help to do this.

Recommendations

- We recommend that the kinds of provisions and safeguards for ensuring consent, safety, comfort and enjoyment of children participating in children's programmes should become standard good practice for the production of adult programmes in which children are involved.
- We further recommend that each production team should have a person on hand (whether brought in from the company's staff, or as part of the team itself) to monitor and ensure the application of these guidelines for the welfare of children during the course of production.
- We recommend that, given the target audience for children's participatory game shows is young children (under 11) more attention is paid by producers to the interests and likes and dislikes of this age group, rather than the interests of teenagers.
- We recommend that news editors, picture editors and documentary makers do not routinely use images of children to illustrate difficult or emotive issues; where this is done, the BSC and ITC guidelines about not exploiting sickness and distress, should be borne in mind.
Children themselves should also be consulted and quoted in stories concerning them (with full consent and, where possible, parental permission).
- We recommend that media assumptions about children wanting to appear on television, and having the necessary confidence to do so, should be re-examined. Children who themselves choose to perform on television may be more extrovert than those who are not professional performers.
- From our findings it seems that parents may be more enthusiastic about seeing children on television, than children are, which reinforces the importance of children's consent to appear on television being sought independently of that of their parents.

Policy recommendations

- The principle of informed consent should be applied to children. Children should always be asked if they want to participate in any television programme, adults' or children's. Doing it through schools, and seeking parental permission, with consent forms, as in *Mad for It*, is an example.
- Our research suggests that children at least of primary school age are competent to understand and debate the issues involved in consent and privacy raised by appearing as themselves on television. Children should be helped formally to understand the terms on which they are participating.
- We believe that to a very great extent children are capable of making up their own minds. As soon as a child is verbal, that is from three or four onwards, maybe even earlier, he or she is capable of giving consent, or not, to participation in adult activities. Such consent should be taken seriously. They should have the right to refuse.
- In terms of judging children's ability to understand, that is, their 'competence': if children say 'no' to participation in a programme, their wishes should be respected, no matter how unreasonable, or inconvenient this might be to the adults concerned.
- If they say 'yes', to ensure understanding, we suggest that examples of what they are going to be asked to do should be shown to them on video before they consent to do it themselves. They should also have the opportunity to consult and ask questions of producers, and of other child participants, before finally consenting. This consent should be signed, or recorded, and also guaranteed by an adult (parent, and/or programme ombudsman) They should have the chance to change their minds. They should have the right to withdraw if they become tired, or unhappy.

- Guidelines for programme-makers should be based on current good practice in child and family law, about the treatment of children, and procedures for obtaining consent, or not.
- These guidelines should be built into the regulations, and monitored to make sure they are followed. There should be proper training of all those working in programmes about how to treat children.
- To support these recommendations, there should be someone on hand in the production team to guarantee children's interests separately from those of their parents.
- Good practice as set out in legislation and regulations and as recommended, for example, in the Presswise/UNICEF guide to the treatment of children in the media (see Chapter 1), and which are usually applied to British children's programmes and to children's employment, should be extended to cover all uses of children on television.
- Our final two recommendations we pass on from two 11 year-olds, first, JM of Bristol:

'There should be a separate body set up that's totally in charge of making sure programmes and parents can't undermine . . . what is good for the child.'

The second, from 11 year-old GW of Somerset, draws together the two primary ways in which children are involved in regulation - the question of what they should, or should not, be allowed to see, and what they should, or should not, be allowed to do. G. points out that if children are appearing in programmes of a sufficiently 'adult' nature to warrant adult-only certifications or post-watershed scheduling, (e.g. programmes involving graphic violence, explicit sex, or a great deal of obscene language which child audiences are generally protected from), then child performers should probably not be used at all:

'Children shouldn't be used or perform in something that children can't see.'

G's point works both ways: it also suggests that some film/video classification is too protective of children, for instance, the 15 certificate given to *Billy Elliott* (2000), a film about a 12 year old boy, which many 12 year olds would have enjoyed, but which received an older certificate because of its use of four letter words. Here, G's point would recommend that children *should* be allowed to see *Billy Elliott*, because it is primarily about a child and his concerns.

To return to our question of what constitutes informed consent in the case of children; these recommendations are based on the view that even very young children have the right and the capacity to give, or withhold, consent to appearing in a television programme as themselves. Given an acceptance of this on the part of programme-makers and regulators, this means consulting children, as well as parents, when permission is sought for someone to appear on air, and it means that the child's consent should be formally noted/recorded. Children should also be informed of the implications of appearing, by being given prior explanation, perhaps in the form of video or pictures. This should be the responsibility of the production team.

There need to be mechanisms within broadcasting organisations for ensuring this procedure, and for ensuring that people working with children in television have some training and understanding of the needs and characteristics of both very young, and older (including adolescent) children. Good practice already exists within the industry, primarily attached to the production of children's programmes. There are also recommendations issued by Presswise and UNICEF about how to interview children, and how to report and represent them in the media, which do not patronise them or treat them as objects of amusement. These good practices and recommendations should be applied generally.

Chapter 1: Childhood and the media

Background context

In the summer of 2000, two home-grown News stories, both with media dimensions, dominated the popular press in Britain - first, Channel 4's programme about a group of young people marooned in a compound in London, constantly surveilled by a video camera and required to vote out one member week by week, *Big Brother*. Of particularly compelling interest was the saga of the cheating 'Nasty Nick', who was found out and upbraided by his housemates, and broke down in tears (although his subsequent celebrity career may have compensated for this to some extent) and was publicly expelled from the house. The second story was the *News of the World's* 'name and shame' campaign against suspected paedophiles, generated in response to the murder of 8 year-old Sarah Payne in Sussex, in July, and taken up by groups of vigilante protesters in Portsmouth and elsewhere. More recently, just as the present report was going to press in Spring 2001, another child-related media story hit the headlines (11 March 2001); the case of Tierney Gearon's photographs of her naked children, on show at the Saatchi Gallery in London, which resulted in a police raid on the Gallery. There were many comments on this case, including concerns about censorship and artistic freedom. The most pertinent for the purposes of the topic of our research - the topic of consent - were made in letters to *The Guardian*, 12 March 2001; the first, by Dorry Lewis of Egham, Surrey: '*Children are beautiful but their beauty should be guarded until they are legally old enough to give consent to being so used*', and the second, by Terri Johnson of Portsmouth, who raised the related issue of parental responsibility:

'When my son's friends laughed at [a photograph of my children sharing a bath] he asked us to remove it from the wall and we did. Tierney Gearon's snapshot is certainly not pornographic, but she is foolish to have risked compromising the innocence of her children, a quality every parent holds in trust and has a responsibility to guard.'

There are a number of ways in which these stories can be linked with the theme of this research project, and with each other. First, they raise the issue of the use of real people and the 'eavesdropping' on, and recording of, their lives for the purposes of entertainment on television, for selling newspapers, or for artistic display and publicity - and the extent to which these people are enabled to understand, and consent, to what is happening to them. Second, there was the public's very real, and in the case of the Portsmouth campaign, almost hysterical, fear of their children being harmed, specifically (but not only) through sexual abuse. Among the victims of this kind of media attention were the innocent 'real people' who were targeted by anti-paedophile vigilante groups. The Portsmouth case illustrated the way in which genuine and legitimate concerns to protect children from what are undoubtedly disturbing phenomena - child pornography, paedophilia, prostitution and murder - may paradoxically result in a threatening, suspicious and even physically-violent atmosphere within a child's own community. Such an atmosphere is not one within which most parents would want to raise their children. The Gearon case contributes to this atmosphere in another way, helping to create an environment in which parents allowing their children to play naked in the garden or beach, and to take photographs of them while they do so, may be induced to feel a sense of shame which could communicate itself in damaging ways to children. Parents would certainly feel threatened by the prospect of film-developers reporting them to the police. However, the issue of children's consent to the circulation of images depicting them is also raised, and not entirely answered, by this case. Even if the mother had had her children's consent to the pictures being on display in an art gallery, their reproduction in newspapers may not have been with the children's consent.

The origins of the research

Our research, although concerned with what most people would see as the relatively milder issues of broadcasting regulation, took place in a context of this continuing public debate about the nature and security of childhood, which included the way in which children were treated and portrayed in the media. The previous summer (June 1999), the use of real children in an episode of Chris Evans' pop magazine show, *TFI Friday* (Channel 4), had prompted a number of complaints to the Broadcasting Standards

Commission, which were upheld; and to the Independent Television Commission, who issued a formal warning to Channel 4 because of two ‘cruel’ incidents in the show, in which very young children were made to cry (reported in *The Independent*, 19 September 2000, and also in *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*). The warning was issued for two shows, in which young children had to win expensive prizes for their families by having a ‘staring competition’ to see who would be the last to blink. In the first contest, between two 7 year-old boys, the winner won a new car for his parents, while the loser was seen on screen looking tearful. The following week, two 6 year-old girls competed for a £15,000 speedboat and the loser was seen bursting into tears. The ITC issued a Warning (one of the most severe reprimands available) for breaching Section 6.4 of its Programme Code which states that ‘particular care must be taken to avoid causing any distress or alarm to children involved in programmes’ (see Chapter 2).

Although even Chris Evans admitted on air, after the second competition, ‘*We can’t do that again*’, the reports of this case revealed diverse public attitudes to childhood and the treatment of children - attitudes that we have explored in this research. In the first place, it revealed divergence between the ITC’s regulatory codes and the reported attitudes of the children’s parents. In responding to the ITC’s warning, a Channel 4 spokesperson pointed out that the families involved in the competition did not share the reservations of the members of the public who had complained: ‘*Letters from both sets of parents received by Channel 4 after transmission prove that far from feeling harmed by the experience, the two children were greatly excited by it.*’ (Quoted in *The Independent*, 29 September 1999).

Two issues of relevance to our research were raised by this claim: first, the need to distinguish between the impact of appearing in television shows on the children taking part, and the impact of seeing children, apparently distressed, on members of the television audience. And second, do letters from parents ‘prove’ that their children are unharmed? The question is raised (and was also raised by the families in our research) as to whether parents are always the most appropriate people to give consent for children’s participation, especially if parents themselves stand to gain very expensive prizes. And if

parents are not the most appropriate people, then who else should take responsibility? Can 6 and 7 year-old children consent, or withhold consent, on their own behalf? If these children had refused to participate, whose views would have prevailed? Such questions remained unanswered, and, to a large extent, even unasked, in the public discussion of this case.

Alongside such concerned public discourse about the vulnerability of children, there has been another, more 'tough-minded' style of public comment on children in the media, exemplified by Sue Arnold also in *The Independent*, 29 September 1999. Arnold felt that too much fuss had been made by the ITC; the prospect of an upset 6 year-old on television coming to harm seemed to her 'fiddlesticks'. According to Arnold, '*these days children have pretty much lost their innocence by the time they leave kindergarten.*' She adduced as evidence for this the fact that one of her children's friends' parents was a drug dealer, and another of her friends had had all her children modelling since birth. Whether or not the robust attitudes of media parents like Arnold, and the kinds of parents known to media personalities like Evans, who help to provide contestants for his shows, were shared by other kinds of non-media families, was one of the questions underlying our research.

Suffering childhood

Concerns about children on game shows may, indeed, seem trivial in the context of a continuing series of high-profile cases of child suffering that have occurred during the preparation of this research project; not only the Sarah Payne case in summer 2000, but also the North Wales children's homes abuse case, discussed in the Waterhouse Report, 2000; the murder of 10 year-old Damilola Taylor in London, possibly by a gang of other young people in December 2000; the torturing to death of 8 year-old Anna Climbie in North London in January 2001, while under the surveillance of several child protection agencies; the media-restraining order of Judge Elizabeth Butler Sloss in January 2001 to protect the anonymity of the two boys who killed 2 year-old James Bulger in 1993 when they were 10 years-old; the 6 month-old twin babies adopted by a Welsh couple through being 'sold' on the internet to the highest bidder, also in January 2001.

The issues raised by these extremely serious cases do have features in common with the apparently more ‘trivial’ concerns raised by the use of children in entertainment and other adult non-fiction television programming. Above all, the extent to which children themselves have any control over what is happening to them, and the associated question of whose job it is to ensure that children’s consent for their involvement in adult events is sought and that, where consent is not ‘informed’, because of children’s immaturity, or incapacity, their needs and welfare are safeguarded. Cases like the Bulger murder also raise the question (considered in our research) of the extent to which children can be held to be totally responsible for their actions, and at what age.

Allied to the high news value of child abuse, child crime, or child ‘barter’ stories, is an increasing use of children to illustrate other kinds of News items not of direct relevance to children, such as health stories or disaster stories, or as entertaining participants in non-fiction television aimed at adults; documentaries, game shows, talk shows and shows such as the ITV programme *Kids Say the Funniest Things*, hosted by Michael Barrymore. There is also the involvement of children in the proliferating number of ongoing situational documentaries - the *Big Brother* genre: the families in the BBC’s *Castaway 2000* and in Channel 4’s *The 1900 House* and *The 1940’s House*. The use of ‘real children’ - that is, children who are not performing but appearing as themselves - in ‘reality’ television, how this use is conducted and regulated, and how it is perceived by family audiences, is the topic of our research.

Consenting adults/consenting children

The research reported in *Consenting Adults?*³ (BSC, May 2000) set out to examine the use of members of the public in ‘a broad spectrum of television programmes, with special emphasis on informed consent’ (p.11). *Consenting Adults?* as its title implies, specifically did not concern itself with children. Our study does.

³ *Consenting Adults?*; Stirling Media Research Institute; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2000.

While there are specific recommendations in the BSC Codes of Guidance (1998) concerning the treatment of children who are themselves interviewed about sensitive issues, there is little about the use of children who are not being directly questioned. The most relevant sections suggest ‘Children’s vulnerability must be a prime concern for broadcasters. They do not lose their rights to privacy because of the fame or notoriety of their parents. . .’ (Broadcasting Standards Commission: Codes of Guidance, June 1998, Section 32). The concept of informed consent in situations where adults participate in the making of factual programmes was defined in *Consenting Adults?* as:

‘Permission based on a participant’s knowledge and understanding of (a) a programme’s format, aims and objectives, (b) how contributions will be used and (c) the potential consequences for a participant and for third parties of taking part.’ (p.71).

Clearly, very young children cannot be expected to have a sufficient understanding of these issues which again raises the question: Who should protect their interests? Parents? Programme-makers? Legislative bodies? However, children of a certain stage of maturity *can* be assumed to understand the implications of taking part in a programme; what this stage should be is not necessarily related to age, but more to ‘competence’ and ‘intellectual maturity’ (see below on the House of Lords 1985 ruling on ‘Gillick competence’ - the legal definition of children’s ability to give informed consent).

Privacy versus public interest

The ITC Programme Code (revised April 2001) cites the European Convention on Human Rights in asserting ‘*The principles of the right to respect for private and family life and the right to freedom of expression*’. It points out that ‘*As a public authority, the ITC must seek to ensure that the guidance given throughout this Code is consistent with Convention principles.*’

Article 8

Right to respect for private and family life

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.

2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 10

Freedom of expression

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

The ITC Code points out the possibility of conflict between an individual's right to 'respect for private and family life', and a licensee's right to freedom of expression - the public interest. It goes on to warn that:

‘Any act that relies on a defence of public interest must be proportional to the actual interest served . . . examples of a public interest which may justify an intrusion into an individual’s privacy include: (i) detecting or exposing crime or a serious misdemeanour; (ii) protecting public health or safety; (iii) preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organisation; (iv) exposing significant incompetence in public office.’

In the case of children, such public interest defences may apply directly to them, as in cases of children involved in crime, whether as victims or perpetrators. The public interest defence, however, is complicated in the case of children by the problem of consent. Young children are unlikely to be able to give fully ‘informed consent’ to media coverage of their lives; in such cases, should their parents be able to permit their children’s privacy to be violated on the child’s behalf? What regulations should be imposed by the media industries themselves, or by the state? This dilemma has been highlighted by the voluntary press agreement not to take photographs of the royal children, Princes William and Harry.

Contemporary childhood and children’s rights

As well as the concerns raised in the press about the state of childhood, and children, and questions raised by regulatory bodies about the increasing use of real people, including children, on television, there has also been an ongoing debate among academics about childhood and its supposed ‘death’, and the rights, or otherwise, of children to be treated as at least potential citizens⁴. The ‘death’, or ‘disappearance’ of childhood has been attributed to the modern mass media, with their premature ‘adultification’ of children, and their elimination of boundaries between adulthood and childhood which were assumed to exist in the past, especially taboos protecting children from adult sexual knowledge⁵. This adultification of children is also seen by some academics as part of a general socio-economic trend which has turned children from innocent playmates into

⁴ *The Making of Citizens: Young People, News and Politics*; David Buckingham; Routledge, 2000.

⁵ *The Disappearance of Childhood*; N. Postman; W. H. Allen, London, 1982, reprinted 1994.

sophisticated consumers of global media and other products⁶ (Kline, 1993; Buckingham, 2000). The precocious sexualisation of children performing, or appearing on television also turned out to be a persistent theme in our research.

Contemporary children's transformation into mini-capitalist consumers has been assisted by what Sonia Livingstone⁷ and Moira Bovill call a 'bedroom culture' - particularly pronounced in the UK, in contrast to other European countries - in which children spend more time in their own rooms watching television, playing with video and computer games, and surfing the internet, than on traditional childhood occupations. Children play less in the street than they did in the past (increased traffic being an obvious constraint), and few have the freedom to go out wherever and whenever they please, particularly in metropolitan areas. Most primary school children are now escorted to school, rather than walking by themselves. Any child or group of children who is seen on the streets unaccompanied by adults, may be viewed with suspicion, rather than being accepted as a normal part of the public scene. This is especially so late at night. This absence of children from the public sphere has contributed to a sense of children as alienated from the mainstream of society, and as a potentially strange and threatening sub-culture. It is in this context that their representation on television - the only public place in which the non child-rearing majority of the population may regularly get to see children - becomes an issue of public interest.

In countries like Spain, or Ireland, in which late dining and socialising is normal and where many people do not go out in the evening until around 10.00 p.m., the idea of a curfew - presented as a solution to the problem of child crime, with children barred from the streets after 9.00 p.m. - would seem bizarre. However, this is the culture within which contemporary children are growing up in Britain. It is against this background of British children being increasingly perceived as a rarely-spotted and possibly-dangerous tribe, that the issue of how children are represented both to themselves, and to their society, via the media, is discussed in this report.

⁶ *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in an Age of Television Marketing*; S. Kline; Verso, 1993; ??? which Buckingham reference – LM to check?????

⁷ *Young People, New Media*; S. Livingstone and M. Bovill; London School of Economics, 1999.

Children's agency and competence

In contrast to the public and media debate about childhood, and its alleged disappearance, its corruption and commodification, there has been a move within family law to endow children with more dignity and agency. The Children's Act of 1989 (see Chapter 2) in particular, conceives children not as the property of their parents, to be handed over to one or the other's custody, for example in divorce cases, but as people with continuing relationships with each parent and with siblings, regardless of marital break-up. In family law, attempts have increasingly been made to give children consultation rights about what should happen to them and in child abuse cases, the right of children to be believed as reliable witnesses has also been accepted. Alongside these welcome trends has been an attempt, as noted above, to establish the extent to which children are *capable* of making decisions on their own behalf, which in turn raises the question of children's 'competence.' Believing children to be competent is clearly central to any question of 'informed consent' involving children.

In a chapter in their book on family law⁸, 'Competent children, parental responsibility and decision-making', Hayes and Williams point out that it is usually parents, or parent-substitutes, who are '*entitled to make decisions about a child's upbringing*', although they acknowledge that '*children themselves hold strong opinions about their own upbringing*', which may occasionally bring them into conflict with their parents. In general though, the law does not need to be invoked; children and parents resolve conflicts internally 'in their own way', as we saw for ourselves in our family interviews in this research. However, there are cases where adults and children are in such serious conflict that '*the right to determine what should happen to the child*'⁹ has to be established by legal action.

In family law, the central case precedent for decision-making by children, as against parents, is the House of Lords' decision in *Gillick v. East Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority* (1985), in which it was decided that a girl under the age of sexual consent (16), could be prescribed contraceptives without her parents' consent, if she

⁸ *Family Law: Principles, Policy and Practice*, p.32; M. Hayes & C. Williams; Butterworth, 1995.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.32.

could be shown to be ‘competent’ to make the decision. The term ‘Gillick competence’ has entered legal language to define the ability of children and young people to give informed consent if they have ‘sufficient understanding and intelligence to make the decision and [this capacity] is not to be determined by reference to any judicially fixed age limit’¹⁰. As a result of this (at the time, extremely controversial) decision, a child became entitled to have a confidential relationship with her doctor and to obtain contraceptive advice and treatment without parental consent. The expectation has arisen from this case that children would be consulted and their wishes and feelings would be taken into account in any important decisions affecting their lives and well-being. However, parental rights - and duties - remain strong and sometimes override children’s rights, especially if the child’s life is seen to be at risk by his or her course of action.

The law in the UK progressively allows growing children to take on more responsibilities for themselves and others as they grow up; these include the private drinking of alcohol (age 5); opening a bank account (age 7); criminal responsibility (age 10); buying a pet (age 12); part-time employment (age 14); video-watching (12, 15, 18 years); licence to drive a car (age 17); legal adulthood, including the right to vote (age 18). These are laid out in guidelines produced by the Children’s Legal Centre¹¹.

Underlying this progressive legal empowerment is an assumption that as children grow up, they become increasingly competent. The concept of ‘competence’ is controversial in academic discussions of childhood since, although competence is generally and loosely associated with ‘age’ (as in these legal age limits), this cannot be a hard and fast rule for all cases. Some 8 year-olds are more competent at some tasks than some 12 year-olds, and in some human skills, competence actually *declines* with age, such as the ability to learn a language without formal instruction. Nevertheless, age inexorably confers experience; the older the child, the longer he or she has had to acquire knowledge about the society in which he/she lives. A 12 year-old, no matter how incompetent intellectually or physically, will have had four more years of learning and experience of life than an 8 year-old, and will also be bigger and stronger. A child four years older than a sibling will have this advantage to the end of his/her life.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.34

¹¹ *At What Age Can I? A Guide to Age-Based Legislation*; The Children’s Legal Centre, University of Essex; Hamilton, 2000.

People working with children in the public sphere, such as broadcasting and the performing arts, cannot rely on rules of thumb, or close personal knowledge of the competence of the children they employ. For them, legal and regulatory guidelines to establish children's general competence are necessary in determining what children can, and cannot, be expected to do, not least for the industry's own legal protection. Here, age guidelines continue to be the most relied upon. Professional child performers are protected by legislation safeguarding their health, safety and educational needs. Like other child workers, their employment is regulated by legislative provisions from the Employment of Children Act, 1933, including a lower age limit of 13 years for employment; having to be licensed by their Local Education Authorities; having restrictions placed on the number of hours they work, and having mandatory educational provision and chaperones while they are working (see Chapter 2, and Roger Singleton Turner's book *Children Acting on Television*, 1999).

However, children appearing in non-drama productions are not professional, and thus are not covered by all of the regulations relating to employment. Here, the well-being of the children depends on more general requirements about safeguarding their well-being (see Chapter 2).

Children's media rights

There have been a number of publications for media professionals giving guidance about how to treat children. The organisation Presswise, on behalf of UNICEF, has produced a handbook for media professionals¹². Sarah McCrum and Lotte Hughes' guidebook¹³ lists a number of things that children dislike about the way they are represented including: being treated as a joke, being made to perform like circus animals or being 'shown up' as ignorant. Children also object to the use of 'cute' or distressing images to evoke an emotional response; being patronised and spoken down to; adults speaking for them when children knew more about a subject; putting words in their mouths or interrupting them and being treated as homogeneous 'problem' groups.

¹² *The Media and Children's Rights*; Presswise/UNICEF; 1999.

¹³ *Interviewing Children: A Guide for Journalists and Others*; Save the Children UK; 2nd Edition, 1998.

The guidebook suggests that there should be a specialist advisor to set ground rules for the use of children in media, including safe working practices and monitoring systems, the training of supervisors, the induction of young journalists and the negotiation of guidelines about editorial control. If children are in the workplace, there must be proper written consents from their parents or guardians and adequate facilities for chaperones, first aid, rest, refreshments and transport.¹⁴ From our review of the regulations, and from our production study of ITV's *Mad for It* (see Chapter 3) - a programme which, being a children's show, did have a system of safeguards in place for the children it used - it seems that adult programmes which are not employing child actors and are not governed by regulations affecting children's programmes, may not always consider all possible aspects of children's welfare, as listed in Presswise's¹⁵ guide.

Public involvement in regulation

This research project focused on three stages of 'value formation' with regard to the use of non-performing children in television programmes; regulation, production, audience reception. The public's role in helping to formulate these values works in different ways at each stage.

Because regulation is public and legislative, it is ideally arrived at via political, institutional, bureaucratic and consultative processes, including public debate in the media and elsewhere. There are a number of regulatory bodies overseeing broadcasting, radio and telecommunications at the time of writing - early 2001. A Government White Paper¹⁶ recommends combining them all into one overall body, 'Ofcom'. Direct public consultation is, to some extent, built into the operations of the current regulatory bodies. The Broadcasting Standards Commission has a regular programme of research and consultation to take soundings of public attitudes towards taste, decency, privacy and 'offensiveness.' Both the Independent Television Commission, the body responsible for

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp 24-27.

¹⁵ *The Media and Children's Rights*; Presswise/UNICEF; 1999.

¹⁶ *A New Future for Communications*; January 2001.

regulating commercial television, and the BBC Governors, responsible for managing the BBC, conduct public opinion research, for instance citizens' juries and audience surveys. The findings of these may not be published, whereas the BSC's always are - a function of its role as a public 'watchdog', independent of the broadcasters. The BSC has welcomed the White Paper's 'acknowledgement of the significance of research'¹⁷ as a way of making sure that standards and regulations continue to reflect public concerns.

The public's involvement in programme production standards

Programme production is semi public, in that it is producing a product intended to reach the public through television, a widely available medium, which must be sensitive to perceived audience needs and tastes, established through ratings research and market research. However, the actual process of programme production takes place in a closed, professional setting where the public have limited input into decision making; at this stage, the question of public interest is the extent to which the *participants* in the programme are consulted and informed, and the extent to which programme-makers are influenced by regulations, or by other value systems deriving from outside the production situation. The use of children in non-fiction programmes is less regulated than is the use of professional child performers. It is here that there appears to be gaps in regulation.

The public and family values

The third location of this value forming process, the family, is private. However, many would argue that the family has a central public function in being 'the cornerstone of society'. More radically, sociologists such as Qvortrup (1995) have argued that children should be separately 'socially accounted' in social statistics and not just counted as part of a family unit. He further argues that children's schoolwork should be seen as part of the societal division of labour. Rather than being seen as an economic burden on their parents, children should be seen as contributing to the well-being of society as a whole through their productive role as students.

Arising from this conception of productive, rather than parasitic children, the welfare and education of children should be seen as everybody's concern, not just that of their parents - a view that is an integral part of the public service ideal of broadcasting, with its central

¹⁷ Press release; 4 January 2001.

criterion of providing children's services, as a matter of right.¹⁸ This ideal is becoming harder to sustain, given the privatisation and commodification of leisure, including television, which has come about as a result of satellite, cable and digital technology; the proliferation of channels, the convergence of ownership, and the facilitating deregulatory legislation which has been introduced round the world. In such an environment, what Zanker¹⁹ calls the 'gated communities' of specialist children's channels, like Nickelodeon, become the only child-oriented services on offer - and these come through parental subscription, rather than being directly offered to children as part of a free-to-air service *for them*.

Public production, private consumption

Television is a huge, multi-faceted public medium, produced at corporate and/or state levels, funded and licensed through a combination of commercial and governmental agencies, but paradoxically consumed privately and intimately by people in small groups, or singly.

At the level of reception, it is in the home where any immediate effects or impacts of programme content and technique will occur. Such effects include (as our research demonstrated) family debates about the limits of the permissible, which reflect and may determine, wider political and public debates about the social roles and influence of broadcasting. We chose to use the family group as the unit for carrying out our research, because we believe that it is through the dynamics of family discussion, as well as in more public arenas, that a society's values and codes are formulated. This is particularly true in the case of the values our society has about the raising of children. We were obviously interested in the contribution that children themselves make to the formulation of codes and standards, and the extent to which parents and children agree, or disagree, and how these positions are negotiated.

The research thus aimed to analyse the establishment of distinctions and borderlines between child and adult in media policy discourse firstly, through an analysis of current

¹⁸ *The Future of Children's Television in Britain: An enquiry for the Broadcasting Standards Council*; J. Blumler, 1992. Maire Messenger Davies; 2001 forthcoming. *Into the Box of Delights: A History of Children's Television*; A. Home; BBC, 1993. *Television and America's Children: a Crisis of Neglect*: E. Palmer; Oxford University Press, 1988.

¹⁹ *Children's Television Policy: International Perspectives. Media International Australia: Culture and Policy*, No. 93, pp.91-102; ; R. Zanker, 1999.

regulatory and policy documents concerning children and media, for example the ITC Advertising and Programme Codes. Its second stage was to look at how these distinctions were translated into production practice. Its third stage was to see if, and how, children and their parents perceived these distinctions, and to compare their, and their families', responses and attitudes to those of the policy makers and the producers.

The use of children on television

Like *Consenting Adults*?²⁰, our research concerned the use of real people, but in this case children, in game shows, talk shows, documentaries etc, in other words, not child performers, who have different concerns.²¹ The public's fear of child abuse, especially sexual abuse, is kept alive by a series of ongoing media stories about abuse, neglect and cruelty. Yet the media themselves could be said to be implicated in creating a climate of fear and threat for children, in the way they represent and treat children themselves. A particular spur to the study, from the BSC's point of view, came from a series of formal complaints to the Commission in 1999-2000 from members of the public disturbed by spectacles of suffering children apparently being exploited in non-fiction television programmes. Some of these children were in the News, some were not and had been enlisted especially for the programme. One of these cases showed a 10 year-old boy breaking down in tears in a *Panorama* programme about adoption; another documentary showed a little girl trapped up to her chest in water after the Mexican earthquake of 1998 actually dying on camera, which appeared to challenge the ITC code on privacy and distress in which section 2.2 states:

'The individual's right to privacy at times of bereavement or distress must be respected. Care should be taken to ensure that sources of information are the most reliable and verifiable which are available at the time (see also the BSC codes on the transmission of scenes of distress in Chapter 2).'

Ethical considerations

Along with some other examples of children being used in adult and children's programming (described in Chapter 4) we used some of the clips which had produced

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ *Children Acting on Television*; R. Singleton Turner; A & C Black, London; 1999.

these complaints in our family research, but not the child dying on camera. We did not believe that showing such a scene would be ethically acceptable, even if parents approved it. In making this decision the question of how researchers' responsibilities connect with other public groups' responsibilities to children was raised. We as researchers could be seen to be paternalistically exceeding our remit by deciding not to show a child's televised death to family groups, given that the broadcasters had already decided that this was an acceptable thing to show before the Watershed. Nevertheless, the research team unanimously felt that they did not want to use this material, and it was not used.

In the overall context of 'informed consent', we showed nothing to children that was not first approved by their parents. All families signed a letter of consent to the clips to be shown to their children. In getting parents to preview material, we were obviously carrying out a procedure which differed markedly from the ways in which families usually watch television, and the ways in which parents usually regulate their children's viewing. We also deliberately did not seek to interview children independently of their parents, because we were interested in family negotiations.

Many parents said to us that they would not normally vet the programmes their children saw, and even where they did not approve of us showing a particular clip to their children, they acknowledged that it was quite possible that their children would see such material in the normal course of their viewing, when parents were not monitoring them. Thus our research used parents as 'gatekeepers' in ways which were not 'typical' of much family viewing. This is one of the prices to be paid for ethical procedures in research and is inescapable when children are being 'used' in the public domain. However, in addition to the family interviews, we also gave each member of the family a questionnaire, which they filled in privately, and here some divergence between parents and children was able to emerge more openly.

We decided to make a virtue of the necessity of parental-previewing and to use the preview session as an opportunity for parents to make explicit their values in judging what was, or was not, suitable viewing for their children. The second session with each family was a family viewing session in which both parents and children were encouraged to debate the issues raised by each television clip so that inter-generational perspectives emerged. In both sessions, the interviewers had an integral role as a stimulus to discussion - again a procedure not found in 'normal' everyday viewing situations. However, the interviewer's role, though sometimes obtrusive, with, for example, leading

questions on the subject of external regulation, produced some useful revelations; it was found, for example, that despite prompting, many families in our sample were not much aware of external regulatory bodies or their functions.

In our next chapter we review in more detail the contents of some of the regulations surrounding children generally, and the relation of children to broadcasting in particular. This review also considers the responsibilities of adults, including parents, carers and others who may be in a position to overrule parents, such as legislators and regulators.

Chapter 2: Protecting children: regulations and guidelines

Protecting children

When the words “television”, “children” and “regulation” appear together, the most immediate thought is of regulation concerning what children can and cannot *see*. According to the Broadcasting Standards Commission report.²² Ninety two percent of their sample thought that television should be regulated and, when asked to give a reason for regulation, 61% talked specifically about the protection of children. The EC Directive 89/552²³ states that it is ‘*necessary to introduce rules to protect the physical, mental and moral development of minors in programmes and in advertising . . .*’ and subsequently requires broadcasters in member states to ‘*take appropriate measures to ensure that television broadcasts...do not include programmes which might seriously impair the physical, mental or moral development of minors, in particular those that involve pornography or gratuitous violence.*’ These principles are enshrined within the broadcasters’ codes of practice drawn up by both the BSC and ITC²⁴ and are reflected in general standards of taste and decency (including the BBFC classification system for films), pre-programme content warnings and the 9.00 p.m. Watershed.

What children can and cannot *do* on television is a more complex issue and includes legislation drawn from outside the broadcasting industry in addition to principles concerning fundamental human rights.

Professional appearances by children

In circumstances where children are employed to perform, as models or actors, there are rigorous and complex legal determinants to limit the demands placed upon them. These are drawn from Acts and Regulations of the UK Parliament such as the Children and Young Persons Acts (1933; 1963), the Health & Safety (Young Persons) Regulations (1997), the Protection of Children Act (1978), the Children’s Act (1989) and so on. Such legislation regulates the hours that children may work (according to their age), protects

²² *Briefing Update No. 5: Regulation – the changing perspective*; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2000.

²³ *Television without Frontiers*; EC Directive 89/552, 1989.

²⁴ Where ITC Guidelines are quoted they refer to the current codes. The ITC has recently updated its regulations to come into force in April 2001. These are noted in the text where relevant.

them from working within a dangerous environment and includes educational requirements concerning both the hours of employment during term-times and the amount of education provided whilst on set. In addition, there are regulations that specifically concern the child's performance and protect him/her from performing dangerous acts and from sexual exploitation.

These legal issues are combined in the requirement that production companies apply for a licence from the child's Local Education Authority. This licence also includes a section to be completed by the child's parents/guardians. Details include the dates and places of performance, the arrangements for approved chaperones (who must accompany the child at all times other than when they are in the presence of a tutor or their parents/guardians), the provision of educational tuition and so on. The ITC codes of guidance state that:

'Performances by children under the upper limit of compulsory school age are controlled by Home Office regulations administered by the Local Education Authorities. All such performances, apart from those appearances expressly exempted under the Children and Young Persons Acts, require a licence from the Local Education Authority in whose area the child lives. Parental consent alone is not enough. (Some special restrictions also apply to young people above school age but under 18 years.)
(Section 6.4 - 'Appearances by children in programmes')

It is particularly relevant to the questions raised in our research to note the phrase 'parental consent alone is not enough.' In his book²⁵ Roger Singleton Turner describes the scenario of the 'nightmare 'stage mother'(p.58). Many child performers begin their careers through modelling as a baby or toddler – a career decision that has clearly been made on the child's behalf. Once Mrs (or Mr.) Worthington has put their daughter on the stage, they may be concerned that any interruptions to filming schedules, due to the restrictions on working hours or the provision of education, will jeopardise their child's future bookings and subsequent career and/or income. Conversely, some parents may feel intimidated by the atmosphere of a broadcast production and lack the confidence to intervene. Nevertheless, these requirements are legally binding and it is the duty of the licence holder to see that they are fulfilled.

²⁵ *Children Acting on Television*; Roger Singleton Turner; A & C Black, London, 1999.

Non-professional appearances by children

There are some situations where children appearing in television programmes do not need a license from their local education authority. In 1994, a directive on child employment passed by the European Union reduced the circumstances for which LEA performing licences are not needed and these changes were reflected in amendments to the Children and Young Persons Acts of 1933 and 1963 which were implemented in 1998. The impact of these amendments was to bring modelling and some sporting activities under the wing of LEA licensing. If however, the child or his/her representative does not receive payment for their appearance then no licence is needed. The Children (Performances) Regulations (1968) still apply in terms of hours worked, and protection from potentially dangerous performances still applies under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. In addition, no child may be absent from school to take part in any employment (whether paid or unpaid) without an LEA licence. As individual citizens they are subject to legal protection from sexual exploitation and dangerous activities and there are specific laws designed to protect children involved in legal cases.

Guidelines of conduct

So far, we have seen that there are specific and wide ranging legal requirements that must be met when children are appearing on television. These, however, are primarily concerned with hours and conditions of the working environment. The specific form that their appearances take is not clearly defined, due in part to the wide variety of types of appearances made by children. To what extent is a child who is taking part in an unpaid interview under the direction of a production company actually giving a performance? He/she may well not be required to be licensed for such an appearance.

Broadcasting guidelines appear to be drawn more from principles concerning fundamental human rights to dignity and protection from exploitation. There is a fundamental concern for the well being of the child, but it is expressed in far more general terms.

The BSC Codes of Guidance on fairness and privacy state:

'Children's vulnerability must be a prime concern for broadcasters. Care should be taken that a child's gullibility or trust is not abused.'
(Section 32)

Similarly Section 6.4 of the ITC Code states that:

'Particular care should be taken to avoid causing any distress or alarm to children involved in programs.'

BSC Codes of taste and decency further require that:

'Individuals should not be exploited needlessly or caused unnecessary distress, nor should the audience be made to feel mere voyeurs of others' distress.'
(Section 17).

The recently revised ITC guidelines (2001) state that:

*'The individual's right to privacy at times of bereavement or distress must be respected.
Insensitive questioning not only risks inflicting additional distress on the interviewee; it may also offend many viewers.'*
(Section 2.2(iv)).

The issue of the extent to which not only the child, but also the audience is exploited by a child's apparent distress is discussed elsewhere (see Chapter 7).

Further provisions of the ITC Code apply to the concerns about children's rights, particularly the provisions about privacy. We have already discussed circumstances in which children's right to privacy in distressing circumstances may be breached. The Code further emphasises (Section 2.3) *'Fairness in revisiting past events'*, in which distressing events may be repeated without warning. This is true, for example, of the coverage of the James Bulger murder (described in more detail below). The Code states:

'In particular, where innocent parties are involved, special care should be taken not to present them in an unfair light. In any event, producers

should, where practicable, inform all such people of times of intended transmission of programmes and when programme trails will start to be transmitted.'

The Code also warns against secret filming and recording. Again, with children, the question arises as to the extent of their knowledge of the implications of being filmed and recorded. Even where this recording is not 'secret', as in the case of some 5 year-old twins filmed as part of an interview with their parents on *This Morning* (see Chapter 5), it is unlikely that 5 year-olds were fully aware of all the circumstances surrounding the televised event in which they were taking part. Section 2.7 of the Code also stresses the importance of ensuring that those involved in stories about their alleged, or former, wrongdoings 'should normally be offered an opportunity to take part or otherwise comment on the allegations'. This may not be done in the case of children. A further provision is protection of the public from 'set-up situations' - something that proved to be of some concern to our interviewees. Many children felt that apparently naturalistic situations in programmes were in fact 'set up' and they disapproved of the deception involved here - both of participants and of themselves as audiences.

The Code warns about the kind of set-up situation '*where the subject consents to being recorded for a different purpose from that covertly intended by the programme makers.*' This may certainly be the case in the use of very young children appearing alongside their parents or other adults in television programmes.

Interpreting the guidelines

It seems then that while there are some regulations concerning children's appearances on television, they are not specifically aimed at non-professional appearances and, since such appearances do not require a London Education Authority licence, the guidelines are open to interpretation by the individual production companies.

Many representatives of these companies that we spoke to either made vague reference to ITC or BSC regulations, or professed to have internal guidelines that offer explicit

interpretation of these Codes. Few were willing to allow public access to such documents. One company that openly publishes its policies is the BBC:

'The use of children in programmes often requires handling with great care: it can be difficult for programme-makers to strike a balance between competing interests – of the child, of the parent, and of the audience as a whole . . . programme-makers must have due regard for the welfare of children who take part in their programmes.'

(BBC Producers' Guidelines, Chapter 14)

Other companies were less open about their policies and generally stated that the procedures involved, when dealing with children, vary between situations and are the responsibility of the individual programme department concerned. Carlton TV, for example, assured us that procedures are carefully explained to both parents and child, but were unwilling to provide any written guidelines to support this. The production study detailed in Chapter 3 demonstrates that at least those involved in the production of the children's programme *Mad for It*, produced by Carlton/Central, were well aware of the regulations surrounding appearances by children, sometimes to the extent that it was not necessary to make them explicit. Similarly, a representative of the *This Morning* programme claimed that the production has its own internal procedures for dealing with children, but was unwilling to make them public.

Consent and capability

It is clear that children, as a television audience, are seen as vulnerable to distress from scenes of violence (or imitation of them), to moral corruption from pornography and to manipulation through advertisement. As active participants in television they are often portrayed in a similar vein. Note the terms of the BSC and ITC Codes above. There seem to be conflicting views, however, when issues of consent or opinion are raised. As previously mentioned, some children are perfectly capable of expressing their own opinions and find it irritating to be treated in a patronising and 'nannying' manner (see 'children's media rights' in the previous chapter). The BBC guidelines (chapter 14) reflect these concerns:

'Programme-makers should be careful about prompting children and should allow them to speak for themselves. Children should not be talked down to or patronised.'

Though the same paragraph warns that:

'Children can be easily led in questioning and are often open to suggestion.'

The consent of children is mentioned in the updated ITC guidelines, but here the emphasis appears to be more on gaining the additional and corroborative opinions of adults and circumstances in which consent is not deemed necessary are somewhat vague.

'The consent of a parent or guardian, as well as the child should normally be sought beforehand, with exceptions only for the least sensitive interview topics.'
(Section 2.10).

On the issue of consent the BBC advises that:

'... the younger and more vulnerable the child, and the more sensitive the subject matter, the more likely it is that consent will be essential. A child's own consent should always be sought about being interviewed or involved in programmes and the child's refusal to take part should not be overridden. Explanation to children should be in a language and terms they understand. In deciding when a child can give consent, the stage of development and degree of understanding as well as chronological age should be taken into account. Most children over the age of fourteen and some over the age of seven will have the necessary understanding. Programme-makers may wish to consult an appropriate professional or an adult who knows the child to help them make such judgements.'

Similarly, the Children's Act (1989) has some consideration for the wishes of children involved in legal cases concerning his/her upbringing and general welfare. It states that in circumstances where a court is considering the upbringing of a child:

‘A court shall have regard in particular to – (a) the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned (considered in the light of his age and understanding).’

This raises questions which we wanted to pursue in our research with families:

- How can understanding be judged?
- How can consent be sought accurately?
- What is the balance between parent’s *and* child’s consent, and should both always be sought?
- In the case of the public domain constituted by broadcasting, what, if any, should be the roles of public guardians, such as external assessors and regulators?

Chapter 3: Production study of a children's game show, *Mad for It* (Carlton/Central: ITV)

Children in children's programmes

Programmes featuring children are popular with children - and they are also relatively cheap to make, which makes them attractive to the industry. The children's game show/quiz show is a time-honoured genre on British children's television, and an obviously relevant (for us) example of programming in which real children are involved as themselves on television, and involved in a voluntary capacity. Thanks to the co-operation of the executive producers, we were given the opportunity to observe in depth the planning, production and transmission of a live children's game show, *Mad for It* (Carlton/Central for ITV) in its second series in 1999-2000. This enabled us to note how regulations were observed and applied in the planning of the series and how children were involved and treated during the programme. We were also able to see examples of audience feedback. We were very appreciative of this rarely conceded opportunity to see regulation and issues of consent and voluntary participation in action.

Mad for It

Mad for It was a live children's game show aimed at 4-11 year-olds, whose second series went into production in November 1999 and was transmitted from 9 January 2000 for 13 weeks - its second (and last) season. It used real children in a number of ways: as participants in games, for instance competing teams on obstacle courses; as participants in a talent competition, '*Stars up their Nose*'; as participants in a parody of *Blind Date*, the ITV dating game, in which two young teenagers were chosen 'blind' to go on a date together (this was done in the first series and was changed to a competition called '*Tug of Gunge*' in the second series, in which two young teenagers had a tug of war across a vat of slimy 'gunge', to go out on a 'date' with a celebrity - an example of the centrality of slime in this genre of programming); and lastly, as a studio audience. There were also filmed inserts, sometimes produced in children's own homes, sometimes in sports

complexes. The show's publicity claimed that it was 'packed with shocks, laughs . . . racy rudery'.

The use of children was seen as integral to the programme's success. In the first planning meeting we attended the second series producer, Rob Benfield, who had not been involved in the first series, argued that the new series would improve on the previous one if there were more involvement of the child studio audience. Throughout these planning discussions there was reiterated emphasis on involving the children in the studio, drawing the attention of the audience to them (for instance in having more reaction shots of prizewinners) and more background information on children in a talent item called '*Stars up their Nose*'. For the producers, the depiction of children was seen as an indispensable ingredient to the show's success.

As with all such programmes, adults were used to mediate between the child performers, the child studio audience, and the audience at home. Again, as is common in the genre, youthfulness, attractiveness, energy and gender balance are paramount considerations for these performers. *Mad for It* was introduced by two young presenters, a male and a female (the female presenter was changed for the second series), with another male presenter fronting the location visits to children's homes or sports centres. The studio presenters were responsible for the considerably challenging task of steering the children in the show through all its various elements throughout the live transmissions. As one of a number of interactive procedures on offer to the audience, children could interview the presenters via the programme's website and the presenters would answer. The popularity of the presenter was seen as a key indicator for the programme's success.

Consenting Adults? had raised a number of issues that we wanted to follow up through the observation of the production of this programme. They included the mechanisms for giving information to participants about the purpose of the show; whether participants were ever intentionally deceived; the selection of participants; reactions of the audience to the people involved in the show; and the effects on family, friends, employers/employees, schoolmates, of seeing their relatives, colleagues or children, involved in perhaps embarrassing situations. For children, being 'embarrassed', and, above all, the prospect of being doused in 'gunge' (see below) are not drawbacks, but are key attractions of a show like *Mad for It* - this is in contrast to the concerns expressed by adults.

This central requirement for physical risk-taking, and bodily humiliation, meant that certain kinds of children were more likely to be used in the show than others. Children were invited to participate through schools - and an 11 year-old boy taking part in the 1999/2000 series, described how he was chosen:

'The two ladies, the two producers, come to our school. Year 5 and year 6 were sitting in the hall and we had to answer some questions like "where people are from off the programmes", and I put my hand up for most of them, and you had to be really lively and not embarrassed to say things.'

This liveliness was seen as essential to the on-screen success of the programme. In an interview with one of the programme's runners, we asked how the children felt after the show and he replied:

'They're all running around hyper, happy, screaming and shouting. I think some of them are disheartened, thinking "Ohh, it's all over now. I've got to go home." But the majority of them are really, really happy. I think they're glad they had the chance and experience to come here.'

There was no evidence from our observations and interviews with children, parents, producers and crew, that children taking part in the programme had been denied 'consent', or felt that they had been exploited while they were participating. The processes of selection for the programme were transparent and were carefully explained to all correspondents writing in asking to take part. The question of post-production 'distortion' through editing, sound-enhancement and commentary, as raised in *Consenting Adults?*, did not arise in the case of *Mad for It*, since the programme was transmitted live. The 'liveness' of the programme could certainly be seen as a safeguard for participants against post-production distortion and exploitation. However, as Nick Parry, the show's Associate Producer pointed out, liveness does not mean that all the elements of the programme are not carefully 'produced'. As his comments (see below) make clear, the 'raciness' and 'liveliness' of the children's actions, all have to be planned, rehearsed, and staged. Spontaneity, especially not 'anarchic' spontaneity, cannot

be risked in a live transmission, and all games involving physical risk must, in any case, conform to the ITC Programme Code in which article 1.7 ‘Dangerous behaviour’ states that:

‘The portrayal of any dangerous behaviour easily imitated by children should be avoided, and must be excluded entirely at times when large numbers of children may be expected to be watching.’

A further safeguard of children’s interests, and a major difference between *Mad for It* and adult programmes, is the considerable extent to which the production team involved children in behind-the-scenes consultation and interaction. This did not only include the (fairly) open process of choosing child participants, done through schools, and full consent procedures and parental approval for the children taking part in the programme. Involvement also extended to the audience, including a *Mad for It* club which children could join free; correspondence with the presenters and with the team; website pin-boards and ‘phone-ins. All child correspondents to the programme were answered. This unsolicited correspondence with the producers is characteristic of children’s responses to children’s programming generally, and unlike the case of adult correspondence, tends to be positive not negative.²⁶

‘Racy rudery’: the wild child

Assumptions about the vulnerability and need for protection of children underlay all the language of regulation we reviewed. However, as the case of *Mad for It* illustrates, there is also another set of assumptions in circulation about children, more likely to be articulated by producers of children’s entertainment: of children as anarchic, ‘rumbustious’ and with a relish for trouble and mayhem - ‘racy rudery’. In an interview, producer Rob Benfield said he thought that British children’s television was more anarchic than anywhere else in the world, with the possible exception of Australia. The title of the programme itself indicates these aspirations to anarchy. Such a model of childhood may contribute to the tabloid sense (as discussed in Chapter 1) of contemporary children as a wild, uncivilised tribe, needing to be controlled and curfewed.

²⁶ *Into the Box of Delights: A History of Children’s Television*; A. Home; BBC, 1993.

The paradox of such aspirations to anarchy is that, particularly in a live show, the games, the competitiveness and the studio involvement in fact have to be extremely carefully choreographed. Nick Parry, the Associate Producer, pointed out:

'A show like Mad for It has to look naturalistic, it has to look like it's flowing . . . but to achieve that level of apparent realism, you have to produce it hugely . . . nothing [that happened on Friday, in the transmission] wasn't thought about, wasn't planned, and wasn't rehearsed, because, unfortunately, in television terms, nothing will happen unless you make it happen. If you want a kid to run into shot, or you want kids to shout out a word at the right point, you have to rehearse it, you have to make them do it. Nothing can be left to chance really.'

The other aspect of 'rudery' is the extent to which children are inducted into precociously adult behaviour. The 'rudery' mentioned in *Mad for It* on some occasions bordered more on adult sexual innuendo than on any childish obsession with, say, toilet humour. The target audience age group for *Mad for It* was 4-11 years, but most of the children featured in the show were around 12-14 years, partly because most of the tasks, games and performances - some very physically demanding, like a 'bungee slide' - were more appropriate to older children. The parodying of adult programmes (like *Blind Date* and *Stars in Their Eyes*) must have assumed the popularity of these shows amongst a child audience. Pop stars and television celebrities also featured throughout the programme, which again suggested an audience at the upper end of the childhood range, rather than under-eights. Frequent comments were made by the presenters about how 'gorgeous' or 'attractive' these guest stars were; for instance one 12 year-old boy in the show was asked if he would like to go out with the presenter, Cat Deeley, and won a 'date' with her as a prize.

There were some viewer complaints about these aspects, for example, the mother of a 6 and 4 year-old calling the Carlton Duty Office to complain about a song entitled '*Would you like to go to bed?*' and a number of callers objected to teenagers dating, and the use of words like 'lovenest'. All of these complaints were recorded by the Duty Office and passed to the production team, who allowed us to see them. This feedback contributed to the dropping of the *Blind Date* segment in the second series. Other evidence of audience feedback made available to us included detailed ratings analyses and audience reactions

to individual segments, carried out by Carlton's Audience Research department. While enjoyment and popularity were obviously of primary concern for such in-house research,

attention was also paid to comments involving taste, sexual precocity and risk. However, few of the comments in the audience feedback that we saw referred to issues of child consent and exploitation, with the exception of the concerns expressed about dating. Most of the concerns were on behalf of the child *audience*, rather than on behalf of the child participants.

Taste and 'gunge'

Taste is another area in which adult concerns and children's differ. Traditionally, good taste and restraint are not highly valued in much children's entertainment²⁷ and these vulgar characteristics are not unique to television. They are found in comics and in longstanding playground games and jokes too.²⁸ The most frequent televisual symbol of childhood carnivalesque misrule is the use of 'gunge' - coloured, slimy stuff which, in *Mad for It*, was poured over losing contestants, and occasionally over presenters and other adults at the climax of each programme. In audience research from the 1998-9 series, the '*Dungeon of Gunge*' was one of the most favoured elements amongst the child audience. Gunge was discussed at many of the planning meetings, with particular reference to its popularity and the need for it to be seen to full effect, but also with reference to health and safety. Forms were sent to parents to inform them about the possibility of 'gunge-dunking' and to request consent. Children were also required to bring changes of clothes to the studio.

The centrality and popularity of 'gunge-dunking' in *Mad for It* (as in other children's programmes) indicated that some participating children *wanted* to be doused in slime; at one of the later production meetings, it was pointed out that some winners of the prizes actually felt they had lost, because losers were deluged in gunge, and the winners would not be. It appears from this that children, more than adults, enjoy the element of being

²⁷ *In the Worst Possible Taste: Children, Television and Cultural Value*; H. Davies, D. Buckingham and P. Kelley; *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 3,(1), 2000.

²⁸ *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*; I. Opie and P. Opie; Oxford University Press, 1959 (revised 1986). *Don't Tell the Grownups: Subversive Children's Literature*; A. Lurie; Bloomsbury, 1990.

put in positions of potential loss of dignity; they can enjoy seeing each other 'set up', at least in controlled circumstances, and they want to watch this happening on television.

This is one difference from the ways in which adults are expected to be treated in reality programmes, as recommended in *Consenting Adults?* In children's entertainment and game shows, children are assumed to actively welcome elements of humiliation, disorder and mess. Whether this applies to all children, or whether some dislike it, was one of the issues discussed in our family research.

Observation methodology

We observed the production process at the first planning meeting for the second series, in November 1999, and at a sample of subsequent planning meetings prior to the first broadcast on 9 January 2000. We also attended a sample of the 13 weekly debriefing meetings held after each transmission, where audience response and likely changes to the programme were discussed. We were further able to observe studio production for two sample programmes.

The team made available to us the logs of complaints and other comments on the programme, for example those featured on the web-site, and calls to Duty Officers at Carlton.

We were also able to interview the executive producers, the programme producer, the programme director, presenters, guest artists, the children taking part, and their parents and/or chaperones.

Implicit values: establishing the programme ethos

At the team's first meeting in Nottingham, key members of the crew met and briefly discussed the schedule for the production of the programme. It was agreed that our researchers would be allowed access to any subsequent meetings and productions and could establish contacts with any of the crew or children involved in the programme. At

the second meeting with the production staff, there was a session designated for briefing staff on regulatory issues by experts from Carlton's London offices. The majority of the

time was spent discussing the new restrictions on performances by children, which had changed since the production of the last series of *Mad for It*. These were circulated to the producers by the Producers' Industrial Relations Services Ltd, IR Circular 4/98, and they pointed out that no child performer could be employed without a licence, even if it was for only one day a year. These regulations (The Children's (Performances) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations, 1998) replaced earlier, more permissive regulations, which allowed the employment of children for up to four days in any six month period without needing a licence.

These regulations apply to paid performances, including models and child sports performers. They do not apply to children appearing as themselves, unless they are taking time off school. They may also affect child performers being used in talent competitions such as '*Stars up their Nose*.' The programme team also discussed restrictions on sponsorship and securing prizes in return for promises of exposure on the programme (the programme was sponsored by *Cheese Strings*; the ITC Code restrictions meant that the product was not allowed to influence the programme's content). This was the only meeting overtly designated for discussing regulations. Carlton have a permanent member of staff in Nottingham, Jane Burrows, the production co-ordinator, to monitor any problematic issues. She commented that as the team had different backgrounds, and many were on temporary contracts, there were different levels of understanding of the relevant regulation. Many had come from satellite or cable channels, which experience different restrictions. She, therefore, saw her role as crucial in monitoring the situation, with the back-up of other Carlton workers in their London based legal department.

The new restrictions on the employment of children caused changes in the production schedule, as children's participation had to be registered a month before appearing on the programme. In this case, the rules were initially explained, and then became automatically invoked by the people involved. There was general acceptance of the

necessity of such rules. Many of the crew said that it was 'common sense' to them and for anyone dealing with children.

Participants' responses

The children involved in the programme expressed their enjoyment in interviews after the studio observations. Both the individual participants (those in '*Stars Up Their Nose*' and other competitions) and the children from the schools recruited to provide the audience were, as the runner quoted above pointed out, pleased with their experiences. However, the parents and teachers did not have such a positive reaction. Although they were happy with the way in which the children were treated, they seemed concerned as to how the children would react once they had seen their appearance on television. The adults who had come with the children in the audience particularly felt that the children would be disappointed with their limited exposure on screen.

The treatment and care of the children was impressive whilst they were at the studio. They were provided with good conditions to wait in and work in, and a team of people was designated to care for them throughout the day. All participants in the competitions were given gifts to thank them, and the presenters made themselves available after the show to sign autographs.

Viewer feedback and internet sites

We also examined the programme beyond the studio. Every episode was recorded and we monitored the show's presence on the internet (in the form of two sites, one provided by Carlton and the other by Children's ITV - CITV). Elements of the interactivity offered by the web-site, internet and telephones could have disappointed some children. Although viewers were invited to contact the show with their relevant talent to appear in '*Stars Up Their Nose*', these offers could only be taken up for subsequent series. The conditions of LEA licences stipulate that licences must be applied for at least 21 days before the first rehearsal, so no performers could be invited onto the current series as a result of e-mails

and letters. The *'Stars Up Their Nose'* contestants were drawn from contacts established by the programme researcher (using drama groups and previous talent contests). The audience was drawn from schools within a set radius of the studios. Sometimes responses to viewer competitions were exaggerated, with rubbish placed in the bins underneath genuine responses to make the audience reactions seem more numerous – however, these are fairly minor deceptions.

Participation and viewer feedback

Offers of involvement were sometimes extended to the studio audience, which required the liveliest children to be selected for reaction shots. The researcher employed to prepare the children for their appearance on the show, told them the 'madder' they appeared and the more noise they made, the more likely they were to be featured on the programme. On the production days we observed, all of the children who had a specific, individual role to play were selected well in advance. Nick Parry's comments illustrate the necessity of this from the production point of view, and the need to make the programme seem smooth-flowing and lively to the television audience. However, from the point of view of the children taking part, the need to 'produce' totally restricted spontaneous reactions.

Although the interactive nature of the website was limited, it was reasonably well used. The questions posed on the Carlton site were genuinely answered by the presenters, while on the CITV version children actively used the 'pinboard' section to communicate with each other, with interjections from the programme's staff. Some comments were used to shape the programme at the post-transmission debriefings, with a game being re-introduced at the request of one viewer. This raised questions as to how representative using this form of audience reaction is, compared to the true composition of the viewers (as not all children have access to the internet). The producers stressed that other means of communication are still used. However, although there was one employee designated to monitor and update web responses, there did not seem to be a similar mechanism for dealing with 'phone calls, with telephones being described by a member of the production team as *'old technology'*.

With this limited influence on the part of the viewers, questions are raised as to what benefits there are for the audience of the programme being live. The only formal consultation with their target audience was in the form of focus groups conducted after

the first few weeks of the programme. Thus, the audience at home appeared to have little genuine influence over the nature of the programme, but they were often told that they did.

All 13 episodes of *Mad for It* were taped and watched and analysed in detail to generate ideas for research questions for audiences, and to see how the production practices we observed looked on the screen. In the fieldwork stage clips of the programme were shown to families. In the next chapter, we look more closely at some of the other ways in which children are represented on adult television, comparing these with examples from *Mad for It*.

Chapter 4: How children are represented on television: an analysis of a sample of daytime television

Children on television

When children appear as themselves on television, their identities, their talents, if any, and sometimes their vulnerabilities, are revealed to two audiences. Firstly, to the people in the studio where the programme is taking place, which may, or may not, include a live studio audience, but will always include programme presenters, other participants, and a production crew. This is very obvious in a game show like *Mad for It*. And secondly, there is the television audience, including their own families, friends, schoolmates and acquaintances, as well as strangers of whom children will not be aware at the time of recording, but whom they will have to face when they go back to their schools and neighbourhoods. Whether or not the children have actively sought the opportunity to appear and voluntarily to take part in the activities of the programme with real enjoyment and control, are clearly important issues in the case of children appearing in children's television programmes.

From our questionnaire data, it appeared that some children would welcome the chance to appear on children's television and similarly, many parents, given safeguards, would be happy for their children to appear on television. Others were more reluctant (see Chapter 6).

Despite production pressures to control and monitor children's behaviour and responses to the show, *Mad for It* (Chapter 3) could be seen as an example of good practice in the application of regulations; it was aimed at children, children appeared in the show voluntarily and regulations designed both to protect and enable children were referred to and applied at each stage of the production. This is not the case with some other uses of children on television, especially children appearing in adult programming. We wanted to get a sense of the different ways in which children are represented on television from a broader sample of television material than specific children's shows, or the programmes involving children which had been the subject of complaints to the BSC. We also wanted to find samples of such material featuring children that we could show to our families in the audience research stage of the project.

Selecting material

In choosing material to show to the families in our study, we used three sources:

1. Material which had been the subject of complaints to the BSC and hence was already controversial and the subject of public scrutiny and debate.
2. Clips from our production study programme, *Mad for It*.
3. Material which occurred as part of regular programme output, in which children were represented as themselves, that is, not as actors or as models. To generate such material we sampled a random selection of video material on one day (4 October 2000), switching every 40-50 minutes from one commercial channel (that is Channels 3, 4 and 5) to another, throughout the day from 9.30 a.m. until children's time - that is approximately 4.00 p.m. We thought it might be necessary to do this on several days in order to find a range of reality and factual television featuring children, but in fact this one day produced several examples, two of which, from *This Morning* (ITV) from the *Jenny Jones Show* (Channel 5), were particularly appropriate for our purposes, because they involved the use of children in programmes aimed more at adults and featured topics which ordinarily are not seen as appropriate for children.

The sample clips that we finally selected to show to our families are described fully in Chapter 5. They included:

- three clips from *Mad for It* (ITV)
- a clip from *This Morning* (ITV)
- a clip from an American talk show, *Jenny Jones*, also in the morning on Channel 5
- a clip from the BBC's *Panorama* (the subject of a complaint to the BSC)
- a clip from Channel 4's *TFI Friday* (the subject of complaints to both the BSC and the ITC).
- We also included a clip from *Jam* (Channel 4), a late night satirical sketch show. Although the show is fictional, a young actress (aged 6) featured in a violent and disturbing scene that was also the subject of a number of complaints to the BSC.

A day's sample of child representation on British television

To discover whether these samples were exceptional or not, we decided to take further samples from daytime programming in order to assess how frequently the use of real children occurred in different programming contexts. We sampled three British commercial channels (Channel 4, Channel 5 and HTV) and, to a lesser extent, BBC1, throughout the day on Friday, 27 October 2000, and Sunday, 12 November 2000, both from 05.30 a.m. until 10.00 p.m., a total of approximately 32 hours. From this sample, an analysis was made of all the clips related to children, whether programmes aimed at children (e.g. cartoons) or programmes aimed at different audiences, but where children were directly or indirectly used through images, references or participation. This sample also included advertisements.

The details of the programmes in which children occurred, or were targeted, during this sampling 'sweep' are given in Appendix 4.

The clips' nature and context

On 27 October 2000 there was a total of 55 child-related sequences - between 12% and 13% of the material recorded. These were categorised according to genre and/or targeted audience below. By far the greatest number of child-related items were advertisements (60%); the next most frequent category was News (20%) - neither are specifically children's genres.

- 1. Children's programmes** (including cartoons and other genres aimed at and featuring children): 15% of the sample was classified as children's programmes, of which 37.5% were animated cartoons, and 62.5% were from entertainment/competition shows.
- 2. Advertisements** (of products for children, products for men or women, products for the family and 'others' including charity advertisements): 60.2% of the sequences belonged to the advertisements category and 67% of advertisements consisted of advertisements for children's products; 18.2% of family products; and 12% were for 'others'. Some featured children, others were aimed specifically at children or advertised children's products.

3. **News:** 20% of the sample came into the News category, with items on the early release of the child murderers of the toddler James Bulger; on the BSE inquiry; on the appeal made by the Duke of York against child cruelty; on a toy fair; and on British schools failing black students.
4. **General programming** (including family programmes, adult entertainment (such as dramas, comedy shows etc.), talk shows): 1.8% of the sample was from all these categories together - the talk show/debate category (*The Wright Stuff* on child crime); adult entertainment (the drama *The Ruth Rendell Mysteries*); and family programmes (a clip from *Collectors' Lot* about mobile 'phones).

On the second day of recording, the Sunday, apart from advertisements, it was not possible to identify any sequences where children had been used directly or indirectly.

The role played by children

From this analysis, it could be seen that children are used in television in a range of different genres. We might expect the ways in which children are involved to differ according to the genre and content of the programme; a news story on child crime, for example, should perhaps have little in common with a children's game show. However, this is not automatically the case; television programmes with distinct contents may reflect similar representations of childhood. Apart from the obvious role of the use of children in advertisements, it was possible to identify three main characteristics of the use of children in these various genres: passivity, entertainment and emotion.

Passivity:

Passivity arises from the lack of participation of the child in the events, that is, when images are used to illustrate a subject, when children are the topic of debate, but the children have no intervention in it. Passivity also arises from a lack of agency (ability to control the action) - even if some form of participation is allowed. This happens, for example, when children participate in game shows where, despite the fact that they may be the competitors, all the circumstances of their participation are controlled by the producers of the programme and where, often, the main characters are the adult presenters, around whom the action revolves.

In our samples, there were two genres that could be used as examples of these forms of passivity: News and children's programmes (namely entertainment/competition shows). As mentioned, 20% of the clips were categorised as News and in none of them was the child an active agent. Most of the pieces analysed had as central a subject related to children, but no children were given the opportunity to express their views on the subject. For example, in the first ITV news at 5.30 a.m. on 27 October 2000, there was an item on the BSE inquiry, with images of 14 year-old Zoe Geoffrey infected with CJD, the BSE human variant, lying paralysed in bed, accompanied by two other young girls, in what was obviously an attempt to appeal to the viewer's emotions. The children in this item were not given any agency, or part to play; their images were simply used to illustrate a news item about the broader issue of BSE.

The second genre, where the programme *Mad for It* can be included, had as central figures the young adults presenting the show. The presenters' posture in the studio was often characterised by constant motion (to which the fast editing of the pictures also contributed); by fast and loud speech and by mainly talking to the camera, that is, to the children at home rather than to the children participating in the studio. Though the programmes are designed to allow the children's participation, the presenters are in control of the child's performance - they ask the questions, they determine the subjects to be talked about and the duration of the child's intervention.

In this context it is also worth mentioning as an exception to the general 'passivity' of children, a clip recorded from HTV's *Draw your own Toons* (a programme based on Disney's characters where a group of children are taught how to make animation). Here, although their intervention was limited and the expertise was given to adults, children were introduced to the audience and given the opportunity to participate in a creative and inventive way by drawing their own cartoons, rather than automatically following instructions.

Entertainment:

The child as entertainer is a role present both in adult and in children's programmes, where the child is taking part in games or is exhibiting skills such as singing and dancing. There are two features that regularly recur in the programmes where children are used to entertain. The first is embarrassment: children are involved in potentially humiliating

situations aiming to create comic moments that may be appealing to the audience. The second is the display of adult-like behaviours, which seem to be used to appeal both to child and adult audiences.

The first feature - embarrassment - is well portrayed in the clips from *Mad for It* where children take part in a series of games involving gunge and one of the regular pleasures of the programme is to see one of the presenters, Danielle, being gunged, as well as one of the studio assistants of the '*Celebrity Bowling Game*'. This is a popular feature in a children's show, but less appropriate in adult programming. Adult-like behaviours can be found in both child and adult entertainment; they are very common in advertising (for instance, with adult voices being dubbed on to children's actions, as in the *Safeway* advertisements); they are also associated with children impersonating adult celebrities. Children are used as a cheap form of entertainment (certainly when compared with the celebrity impersonated) offering the child and the family opportunities, real or illusory, to display talents and perhaps to pursue an ambition of entering show business. Such examples often raise questions of consent and suitability, as in the case of one of the clips shown to the families who participated in this research - the performance of the 6 year-old Mickie J impersonating Michael Jackson, a child among an adult audience, dancing in the same sexualised style as the controversial celebrity, wearing similar garments, with an identical hair-style, and named after the singer.

Emotional:

Children can be used to appeal to adults' feelings and to influence their views on certain subjects. Charity advertisements to aid African countries, for example, tend to make use of images of children in need of urgent aid as a direct and easy way to appeal to compassion and solidarity, often replacing the necessity to provide deeper explanations of the cultural, economic, and political realities behind the crises. Other genres such as News and talk show/debate may use similar strategies; an example was a piece on the BSE Inquiry Report shown on the ITV News throughout the 27 November in which images of a 14 year-old girl were used to illustrate the News item. The teenager was shown paralysed in bed and being cared for, along with images of dead animals being incinerated; images of the former Minister of Agriculture feeding a hamburger to his little daughter; images of Parliament; and images of the press conference for the report's public

presentation. The organisation of the piece, and the fact that the images of the girl were used at the end, appeared to be an attempt to use this child, obviously incapable of consent, to appeal to the viewers' emotions regarding BSE. They were also used to indicate a preferred meaning by the bulletin's producers concerning the seriousness of the situation and the consequences of the government's measures.

The ITC Code in its section on 'public domain' 2.2(ii) refers to such situations, especially as they apply to people who are sick.

'When by reason of age, disability or infirmity a person is not in a position either to give or to withhold agreement, permission to use the material should be sought from the next of kin or from the person responsible for their care, unless a decision to proceed without such permission can be justified as a matter of important public interest.'

Children as 'monsters'; children as 'innocents'

There is a duality in regarding the ways in which children are represented on television. On the one hand, we see the innocent child who, for example, is allowed to play adult-like roles for the sake of entertainment; on the other, there is a controversial child who is of interest to the audience due to a capacity to behave in ways that are not associated with child behaviour because of their 'evil' nature, such as children who kill.

Some of the clips recorded from the news on the 27 November, and a clip from Channel 5's *The Wright Stuff* concerned the early release of the young murderers of James Bulger, using the event as the background to a debate on child crime and whether young children should be held to be criminally responsible. The news coverage emphasised the court's decision on the early release of the two boys, and James' parents' reaction. It showed photographs of the three children at the time of the murder. Later items showed images of the special prison where the killers were staying and some convicted young men shot from behind. No youngster was interviewed or shown expressing views. Channel 5's *12 o'clock News* showed a photograph of James Bulger, images of the toddler being led away in the shopping centre, images of the murder location with police investigators,

photographs of the two killers; it also featured a debate with guests - again, none of them young - about the release of the two boys.

Further News items about children included one about Prince Andrew campaigning against violence towards children. It showed him being photographed by reporters in several locations in the company of his children and their mother. Again, no agency was given to children. The same was true of an item on a Child Fair and the candidates for the Toy of the Year. Adults commented on the toys and there was a very short image of a little boy playing. The *ITV Lunchtime News*, shown at 12.30 p.m., featured a survey on British schools failing black pupils and the gap between white and black children at GCSE level, showing students in a school environment but there were no interviews with adults or students.

The talk show, *The Wright Stuff*, had formal features suggesting a hybrid between a talk show and a News bulletin; the logo of the programme is similar to those of some of the tabloid newspapers; the posture of the presenters in the studio resembles that of News bulletins' presenters; it also has an audience in the studio able to intervene. The programme discussed the capacity of the child to distinguish between good and evil, as well as the penalties appropriate for child criminals. Experts and audience were given the legitimacy to present their views, but no children were asked to express *their* opinions. Although some adult participants argued that children could make a distinction between what is right and wrong, the programme itself did not provide children with the authority to participate in the debate. Despite this, images of children illustrated the discussion and were its main emphasis.

From this sample, it was apparent that in the majority of cases where children appear on television, the children concerned are being used to illustrate, or exemplify, some other agenda than their own - whether to advertise products, or to generate emotional viewer responses to stories about adult crises. Even where children were the subject of debate, as in *The Wright Stuff*, and being discussed as responsible for their own actions, they were not considered sufficiently responsible to take part in the discussion on the programme. Children do play more central roles in children's programmes - but these may be choreographed rigorously by adults, producers and presenters, thus precluding any spontaneous contribution initiated by children themselves. We recognise there are a number of children's programmes where children are given more agency, for instance, they get to make their own video diaries, as in the BBC's *The Lowdown*, a children's

documentary. However, from our random sample of a whole day's terrestrial output, such empowering of children seemed not to be typical.

In the next section, we describe our empirical study with families, in which these issues, and others mentioned in the foregoing chapters, were raised with both adults and children in their own family environments - their homes.

Chapter 5: Study with families: method and design

Family study rationale

It was decided to make the main focus of the research qualitative, since our major goal was to find out how children themselves thought about the representation of children on television. It was also to find out how parents felt about some of the issues raised by the material we were using, and about the provisions protecting children in the broadcasting Codes and regulations. This required families to view television material involving children, it required observation of their viewing, and it required verbal discussion of this material. Usually children in social research are accessed via schools; we wanted to observe and talk to children in the more naturalistic setting of their homes - more naturalistic, at least, because this is where television is normally viewed. There were other aspects of this research situation which were less naturalistic - these are discussed below. We modelled our research protocol on a study on children's computer use carried out by Bristol University²⁹ in which 16 families were observed and interviewed at home about their use of IT.

The second rationale for basing our research on the family unit was dynamic: we wanted to observe and record, if possible, the ways in which responses to controversial television material might vary within families - especially between parents and children - and to find out how these differences were dealt with, negotiated and resolved, prompted by viewing and also, where necessary, by our interviewers' questions. We envisaged this process of family discussion and negotiation as a form of regulation and we were interested to find out if the regulatory processes within the family either mirrored, or diverged from, the official regulatory processes and language described in Chapter 2. To this extent, the involvement of the interviewers represented the intervention of the public values of regulation in the debate; our questions prompted the family members to consider external sources of television regulation in addition to their own private, family codes.

²⁹ *Screen Play: An exploratory study of children in 'techno-popular' culture*; K. Facer, J. Furlong, R. Sutherland and R. Furlong; University of Bristol, 2000.

Sample of families and research team

A team of six researchers was asked to recruit five families in their respective locations, with a range of demographic variables. The breakdown of these families is shown in Appendices 2 and 3.

Pilot study

To evaluate our procedures, both questionnaire and interviews, we conducted a pilot study with a family in Bristol - consisting of a mother (employed as a social worker) and three boys, all of Afro-Caribbean origin. The mother and two of the boys, aged 11 and 14, viewed some of the material we wanted to use in the study and answered our questionnaire. The pilot study helped to refine the interview protocol and also raised some issues that the research group felt were important to explore in subsequent interviews. These were:

Parental responsibility

The point was raised by both mother and sons, that parents are not necessarily the best regulators of the pressures placed on children during competitions where prizes are at stake (as discussed in Chapter 1). Should the production team or the television company, therefore, accept responsibility? Should there be an independent body that must be consulted in addition to parents (for example, a Local Education Authority, as in the case of licences for child performers)?

Children as props

A related point is the extent to which programmes ostensibly aimed at an adult audience utilise, and perhaps exploit, the comments of children for comedy value, as discussed in Chapter 4. The family referred to several instances where children are encouraged to speak seriously about issues that affect them only for such opinions to be ridiculed by host and audience alike. Likewise, children featured in programmes where the studio audience is mainly adult may not be aware of the adults' interpretation of their

behaviours, for example the clip showing a 6 year-old boy imitating Michael Jackson (see below).

Presenters' behaviour

Several comments were made at the pilot interview during the screening of the *Mad for It* clip at the pilot interview suggesting that the presenters were not relating at all to the children participating in the competitions. They seemed only concerned in aiming their remarks at the camera.

Fairness and pressure

The children in the pilot study were aware of the pressure induced by participation in televised games and involving the presence of a studio audience, whether that audience comprises adults or children. The *TFI Friday* clip, where Chris Evans, the presenter, presides over a 'staring competition' between two 6 year-old girls to win a £15,000 speedboat, raised issues of fairness to both competitors and of the pressure under which both children were put.

Children's contribution to regulation/child competence

The debate following the *TFI* clip revealed the extent to which children can rationally consider the issues of regulation. The younger child of the pilot family (aged 11) was asked what sort of rules he would impose given the opportunity. He said:

'You could make a law and it's got to be over a certain age. And they've got to be told what's going to happen and they can't be pushed into it - and there should be a runner's-up prize if they're doing it with children.'

After this formulation, there followed an extensive discussion of the ages of consent and, while the family could not agree on a definitive age limit, the general consensus was that the child should be sufficiently mature to be completely aware of what was going to happen and that there should be no deception or humiliation.

Children's media literacy

The children in this pilot family, as are children generally³⁰, were extremely media literate. The pilot children showed awareness of concepts such as production, editing and the difference between live and pre-recorded television and also, to some extent, awareness of public concerns such as the need for external regulation.

The pilot family agreed that children can make a valuable contribution to the design of regulations and that they do have the capacity to consider and debate these complex issues in a rational manner.

Visual materials

After the pilot sampling of material, six clips were chosen for the main study. Each member of the research team was given a VHS tape containing these six clips. Of these clips, three were subject to BSC and ITC complaints and adjudications (two had been found to breach broadcasters' guidelines), the other three came from the samples collected by the research team (see Chapters 3 and 4).

The sample clips used were:

A choice of one out of three clips from *Mad for It*, in which children are put into situations where consent, or potential public embarrassment, could be issues. For example, a dating game based on *Blind Date* in which two young teenagers are randomly paired for a trip to Amsterdam. The clips also featured a variety of challenges and games, many involving "gunge", and a segment entitled *Stars Up Their Nose*, in which singers, dancers and variety acts have a chance to demonstrate their talents. Each clip lasted approximately 10 minutes and researchers could choose which particular clip they wanted to show to families.

³⁰ *The Provision of Children's Television in the UK: 1992-1996*; M.M. Davies and B. Corbett; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1997.

A clip from *TFI Friday* (Channel 4) in which two 6 year-old girls take part in a 'staring competition' with a £15,000 speedboat as the prize. The competition takes place live in a rowdy bar setting in front of an audience comprised mainly of adults. The girls are briefly interviewed by the host Chris Evans and then compete in a 'first one to blink' contest. The winner is paraded triumphantly in the speedboat with a ticker-tape celebration while the loser is briefly seen, clearly upset, being consoled by her mother. The audience seems to react adversely to this distress and while the host attempts to defend the competition, arguing that life is tough and hard lessons have to be learned and promising to treat the loser 'like a princess' for the rest of the day, he too is perhaps taken aback by the reaction of the crowd, commenting to his off-screen producer 'We can't do that again'. This competition, and a similar event in the previous week's show, in which two young boys compete for a sports car, prompted several complaints from viewers and adverse rulings from both the ITC and the BSC based on the distress caused to the participants and the value of the prizes.

A clip from *This Morning*, shown on ITV in the morning, in which two five year-old twins sit with their parents while their parents discuss the difficulties of their birth. The girls were conjoined twins and doctors at the hospital gave the parents 20 minutes to decide on a course of surgical action from various possibilities, none of which gave both twins a chance of survival. The interview is lengthy and there is considerable medical detail about the operation. The interview took place in the context of a high profile media case of the time involving conjoined twins Jodie and Mary, who were later separated, resulting in the death of Mary.

A clip from *Jenny Jones*, an American talk show shown as part of Channel 5's daytime schedule, in which a 6 year-old boy impersonates Michael Jackson's dance moves in front of an all adult audience. The show's theme was celebrity doubles and Mickie J (the young boy) was the only child in an otherwise adult line-up, which also included a lookalike of American 'shock jock' Howard Stern, with attendant scantily clad females.

A clip from *Panorama* (BBC1) discussing adoption, in which a young boy is interviewed about his desire for a foster family to the point where he breaks down in tears. This clip was also the subject of a complaint to the BSC.

A clip from *Jam* (Channel 4), a late-night satirical sketch show, in which a young girl (stated as being aged 6) is called to a man's house to help in disguising an apparent crime. She shoots and kills a man and then proceeds to dismember his body with various household appliances. She also uses several strong sexual swear words. The lighting and sound combine to produce an unnerving and menacing atmosphere throughout. The series was subject to a number of complaints to the BSC and the ITC, but this particular segment was not deemed to have contravened any particular guidelines on the grounds that the child had been chaperoned throughout and that the disturbing tone of the sketch had been added in post-production.

This raised issues of the extent to which adults chaperone child actors, and also whether the actress in question would have wanted to see the finished sketch in its entirety. Would participation in such scenes cause distress to child actors at the time, or in later life?

This clip caused controversy at all the parental preview screenings. Only two parents were willing to show this clip to their children, and then only to their older ones, and all expressed concern as to the potential harm done to the child actress.

Interview materials

Each researcher was provided with a pack containing the following research tools.

- Household questionnaire: to provide general information about the household, family members, household income, location of televisions etc.
- Adults' questionnaire: information on entertainment habits, regulation of their own family's television viewing etc.
- Children's and teenagers' questionnaire: similar to the adults' questionnaire.
- Interview protocol: emphasising key themes that had been identified by discussion among the research group members, and which were considered desirable to explore during the recorded family interviews.

- Interview procedure plan: procedure for the two family visits, list of sample clips to show etc.
- Consent form: on the first visit, interviewers provide a parental preview of the material to be used to ensure that the parents are happy for their children to be exposed to these clips. This not only gains the trust and co-operation of the families, but can also provide very interesting data concerning the types of material which parents allow or forbid their children to watch.
- VHS tape of clips to show the family (see section 5.4 above): each researcher had the same tape and was asked to preview all of the adult clips with the parents prior to the main interview.
- Microcassette recorder and tapes with which to record the family interviews.

Interview procedure

Interviews took place on two separate occasions. The first visit was to complete the questionnaires, with each family member filling in the questionnaire privately and separately, and to conduct a parental screening of the television material. At this visit, parents were asked to preview (without the children present) a short segment of *Mad for It* and all of the other five clips. Their responses and reactions were recorded as additional data. Basically, they were asked if they would allow their children to watch each clip. If so, why? If not, why not?

The second visit was based around a recorded discussion of the clips which parents had agreed to let their children see and followed the procedure set out in the interview protocol, as refined after the pilot interview. Obviously, the clips which were used in this interview varied according to parents' wishes, but a *Mad for It* clip was always shown first. This was because it was felt that a non-controversial clip, aimed explicitly at children, would be the most likely to generate an atmosphere of fun conducive to informal family discussion. The microcassette tapes were transcribed, and copies of the transcript returned to the families to allow them to verify the transcript's contents and

make any additional comments (none did). Each family received a £20 W H Smith gift voucher as a gratuity for their involvement in the project.

All clips were shown individually to the parents in the 'consent' stage of the research. They were asked if they would be happy for their children to view the clip and to explain their reasoning. Their comments were recorded and transcribed.

Three clips, including one from *Mad for It*, were then selected from those permitted by the parents, for the second stage.

The interview process

Since a recurring theme in the project was the ways in which families perceive children on television and the ways in which they determine general standards as a unit (specifically television viewing), an important and rich source of data was the family interview. In addition to external guidelines, such as the BBFC classifications or the Watershed, families constantly redefine and renegotiate the ways in which they watch television and the suitability of material to be viewed. This process is individual to each family and takes place in an informal way and, therefore, it was decided to speak to the families in their own homes, in an informal interview, in order to elicit their views on the central concerns of the study in a natural setting.

Clearly, as a scientific process, the interview raises questions about the objectivity of the data it produces. This must be balanced with the necessity of making the situation as natural as possible so that each family member feels comfortable in expressing their honest opinions to the researcher (and to the rest of their family). The following section aims to set out some of the research team's concerns about the process.

Situation effects

The interviews took place in the families own homes in order to make them feel as comfortable as possible. Viewing conditions were not equal for each family as they obviously had different television equipment, different locations, family numbers, seating arrangements and so on. Interviewers attempted to include the family in the process as much as possible, for example by asking a member of the family to control the video, so

that the experience became one in which the interviewer became part of the group, rather than a clinical observer. There were inevitable interruptions from 'phone calls, visitors and families pets, but these are part of everyday life and are to be expected in a normal family home. Each interviewer had a microcassette recorder and family interactions were recorded but its presence was quickly forgotten once the debate had begun.

Interviewer effects

The research team was diverse in its membership and reflected diverse concerns and techniques. We aimed to make the interview process a naturalistic one and inevitably any interaction is dependent upon the relationship between the interviewer and the family. There were no hard and fast rules, therefore, other than the requirement that a clip from *Mad for It* always be shown first (for reasons discussed above) and a general interview protocol outlining the basic issues that we had decided to investigate.

Researchers were encouraged to be flexible in their questioning, to elicit conversation rather than a strict question-and-answer regime. However, the team was very aware of the time constraints of the situation and subsequently was forced to impose a degree of structure on the proceedings.

Leading questions

These families had generously allowed us into their homes, mostly in the evenings, and we were conscious that we should not abuse their kindness by taking up valuable family time. The process was therefore a subtly managed one, in that we had targets to meet in terms of the material covered, in addition to the collection of questionnaire data, arrangements for return visits and so on. Within the interview itself these time constraints necessitated some measure of guidance from the interviewer. In some cases, children, particularly the younger ones, were wary of expressing themselves and perhaps needed some encouragement from the interviewer. In the vast majority of cases, however, this initial reluctance is soon replaced by a delight in expressing opinion which can lead to unfettered discussion on just about any topic. One thing about television is that everyone

has an opinion about some part of it! In such situations the interviewer must take control of the conversation at some point and gently guide it back to the central issues of the study at hand. The research team members were acutely aware of asking potentially leading questions in order to elicit 'satisfactory' responses to a particular topic before moving on and, therefore, endeavoured to follow-up responses with questions asking respondents to explain their answers. Inevitably this required some expression of the interviewer's own views and opinions, rather than a cold reserve. In this way the interview was conversational rather than formal and aimed to avoid answers that the family might have considered 'correct' or desirable for the researcher. Interviewers were conscious that their line of questioning should be one of targeted probing rather than directed prompting.

In the next two chapters we describe the results of the family questionnaires and interviews.

Chapter 6: Family questionnaire results

Rationale for questionnaire

Although our sample of families was quantitatively small (24 households, consisting of 35 adults and 53 children) we wanted to get some numerical demographic data from them and also some information about their media habits, including co-viewing between parents and children, and about some of the individual attitudes to what was, and was not, acceptable on television - attitudes which might not have freely emerged in the competitive situation of a family debate. Thus we gave everybody a short questionnaire to collect this information, and we also gave this questionnaire to a further 14 families recruited through our sample of 24. This gave a total of 38 families, consisting of 131 individuals (53 adults and 78 children). Details of the entire sample are shown in Appendices 4 and 5.

The sample was quite diverse in terms of location, income, occupation and ethnicity/religion, but we have not looked at all demographic variables; we have primarily looked at differences between adults and children, and also at gender and age differences. This is because the main focus of our research is on attitudes to children and their use in adult programming. The sample is also too small for any meaningful conclusions based on region, religion, income, occupation or ethnicity to be drawn. There were also a number of qualitative comments in the questionnaires, which we refer to where relevant.

Television and other media

Table 1: Proportion of families with televisions in the house and in children's rooms

Number of televisions	House %	Children's bedrooms %
None	0	34
One	13	26
Two	21	32
Three	29	8
Four	26	0
Five or More	11	0
Television Add-Ons	Television in living room %	Television in children's room %
VCR	50	42
Cable	0	0
Satellite	0	0
Digital	0	0
Cable and Satellite	0	0
Cable and Digital	0	0
Satellite and Digital	0	0
Cable, Satellite and Digital	0	0
VCR and Cable	5	0
VCR and Satellite	8	0
VCR and Digital	3	3
VCR, Cable and Satellite	0	0
VCR, Cable and Digital	3	0
VCR, Satellite and Digital	3	0
VCR, Cable, Satellite and Digital	29	3

Table 1 above shows the number of televisions located in living rooms and children's bedrooms and the additional features that they have (other than terrestrial broadcast reception). First, it is notable that 66% of our sample had at least one television in a child's bedroom. Of these, 70% had a video tape recorder attached, but only 8% had any additional subscription broadcast services. In our sample 86% had at least two televisions

within the household. Of those located in the living room, 50% had additional subscription services. All had a VCR attached as this was a pre-requisite for participation in our interview study, but this also applied to the additional families recruited by the families who we interviewed.

Table 2: Adults and children’s media consumption

Media	Consumption	Adults %	Children %
Watch television	Never	0	0
	Less than one hour per day	17	17
	Two to three hours per day	58	51
	More than three hours per day	25	32
Read books	Never	0	5
	Less than one hour per day	75	69
	Two to three hours per day	24	22
	More than three hours per day	2	3
Listen to radio	Never	4	19
	Less than one hour per day	62	51
	Two to three hours per day	17	19
	More than three hours per day	17	10
Go to the library	Never	28	15
	Less than once a year	6	1
	Once a year	9	10
	Two to three times a year	28	5
	Six or more times a year	15	24
	Once a month	13	44
Go to the cinema	Never	2	3
	Less than once a year	4	3
	Once a year	30	10
	Two to three times a year	28	31
	Six or more times a year	26	31
	Once a month	9	23
Go to the theatre	Never	28	36

	Less than once a year	21	19
	Once a year	28	22
	Two to three times a year	15	13
	Six or more times a year	4	8
	Once a month	4	3

Table 2 above shows consumption of media by adults and children. There is surprisingly low radio listening: 62% of adults and 51% of children listen to the radio for less than one hour a day, and even lower figures for reading; 75% of adults and 69% of children read for less than one hour a day. There are high figures for television viewing; watching for two hours or more per day comprises 83% of adults' responses and 83% of children's responses. Theatre outings are comparable across the two age groups, perhaps because this is an unlikely activity for unaccompanied children, but regular cinema and library attendance feature higher percentages of children than of adults; 44% of children claim to go to the library once a month and 23% to go to the cinema once a month compared with 13% of adults for the library and 9% for the cinema.

General television viewing - adult/child differences

Most families claim to watch around two to three hours of television per day (58% of adults and 51% of children, as in Table 3 above). In terms of the time until children are allowed to watch television there is general agreement until nine o'clock, but children claim that they are allowed to watch until later, although parents qualify this by claiming that times vary. This may be because of different weekday and weekend allowances or because families contain children of different ages.

Table 3: Adults and children's and teenager's versions of the time limits they have for television viewing

Time	Adults %	Children %
Until 8.00 p.m.	22	23
Until 9.00 p.m.	48	39
Until 10.00 p.m.	18	28

Later	0	6
Varies	12	4

Many families expressed some concern over the content of daytime television shows, particularly controversial and confessional discussion shows such as *Jerry Springer*. In our sample 52% of children said that they watched daytime television sometimes, with 30% claiming to watch it regularly.

When asked what television programmes children should not be allowed to watch there was a wide variety of responses from children, mainly because they named specific programmes (29 different responses compared to 16 for adults). Adults tended to mention more general programme types or programme content (for example, ‘violence’). The second most common children’s response was post-Watershed programmes (14% compared to the most common, *South Park*, with 16%). All of the children who mentioned this were 7-11 year-olds. Adults also mentioned the Watershed (16%) with this, sex and violence (25%) and violence (10%) comprising 51% of their concerns. Interestingly, adults also specifically mentioned *South Park* (12%). Other than the age difference in the post-Watershed response, there were no major differences within age group or gender for the programmes mentioned as taboo by children. Within the sample of adults the only obvious gender difference was that the majority of those who specifically mentioned violence as a taboo were women (80%).

We also asked about favourite television programmes, inviting respondents to name both their favourite show and their favourite children’s show. Understandably, this brought a wide variety of responses, with 55 different categories for favourite television show and 56 different children’s programmes.

For favourite programmes in general, the most popular were soap operas with *EastEnders* (17%), *Coronation Street* (4%), *Neighbours* (2%) and *Brookside* (1%) combining to comprise 24% of all responses. Children account for 18% of this. Within the children’s age group, *EastEnders* was the most popular choice (23%) followed by *The Simpsons* (17%). *Blue Peter* led the favourite children’s television category with 11% of the total

responses (9% due to the adults). This was followed by *The Simpsons* (10%, 7% of which was due to children) and *Sabrina The Teenage Witch* (10%, 9% due to children). Other programmes mentioned included *Pokémon* (5%, all but one from children), *Byker Grove* (6%, with 4% due to children) and *Scooby Doo* (5%, equally split).

Children’s television viewing

We were interested in the role of television within the children’s social life and, therefore, attempted to discover who they talk to about television and with whom they watch certain types of programme. The table shows that substantial percentages of viewing with parents consists of programmes aimed at adults. This is due in part to children watching soap operas with their parents, as well as the fact that many parents in our sample did not watch programmes exclusively aimed at children. Understandably, as children grow older their viewing habits with their friends and their siblings become more adult oriented.

Table 4: Children’s television viewing with different family members and friends ³¹

What sort of programmes do you watch with...	7-11 year olds			12-14 year olds		
	All adults %	Adults and children’s %	All children’s %	All adults %	Adults and children’s %	All children’s %
Parents	71	18	10	96	4	0
Siblings	9	45	40	33	25	33
Friends	5	39	46	36	46	5

³¹ For the ‘siblings’ and the ‘friends’ categories percentages do not always total 100. This is because some respondents have said that they do not watch any programmes with these groups.

We also asked children and teenagers about who they talk about television with. Table 6 shows their responses. Clearly peers are an important group in their discussions, with 20% of 7-11 year-olds and 33% of 12-14 year-olds claiming that they talk with friends alone, but far fewer claiming to talk exclusively to their parents or their siblings about television.

Table 5: Who children talk about television with

Who do you talk about television with?	7-11 year olds %	12-14 year olds %
Parents	4	0
Siblings	6	0
Friends	20	33
Parents and siblings	4	4
Parents and friends	18	22
Siblings and friends	10	11
Parents, siblings and friends	29	30
No one	2	0
Don't know	6	0

Specific Television Appearances

On the adults and the children and teenagers questionnaires we asked a number of questions about children's appearances in different types of programmes. The questions were phrased to use specific programmes as illustrations of different genres. For example, the adults' questionnaire stated: '*I would be happy for my children to act in a fantasy programme like The Worst Witch*', while in the case of the children and teenagers questionnaire: '*I would like to act in a fantasy programme like The Worst Witch*').

We were interested in the amount of agreement within families between the types of programmes children would like to appear in and those that their parents would be happy for them to be in. Table 6 below compares their responses.

Table 6: Children’s and adults’ responses to appearances in specific types of television programmes

Programme	Adults			Children		
	Agree %	Not sure %	Disagree %	Agree %	Not sure %	Disagree %
<i>Castaway</i>	27	43	31	23	45	32
<i>Grange Hill</i>	63	25	12	28	41	31
<i>Live and Kicking</i>	86	8	6	67	15	18
<i>Mad for It</i>	46	25	29	36	43	21
<i>Newsround</i>	84	14	2	21	31	49
<i>‘Phone-in</i>	54	22	24	45	27	28
<i>Worst Witch</i>	60	27	13	40	19	41

On the whole there is agreement between the adults and children, but it is noteworthy that in every case, parents are more likely to agree to children appearing on television than

children are - this tends to underline the point (which appears more strongly in the interview discussions) that there may be an element of parental ‘pushiness’ in children’s appearances on television.

Adults certainly appear far more interested in their children appearing in drama programmes such as *Grange Hill* and *The Worst Witch* than the children themselves. The most striking finding is that adults would be very happy for their children to appear in a factual programme like *Newsround* (84% agree) whereas children seem less interested (21% agree but 49% disagree). Programmes that the children would most like to be in are discussed below.

Age differences in children are shown in Table 7 below. These are mainly reflected in the responses to *Mad for It*, with 46% of 7-11 year-olds agreeing that they would like to appear in the programme compared to just 22% of 12-14 year-olds, perhaps confirming the programme’s target audience age range, in contrast to the ages of the children who generally appear in it. Within the drama programmes, 49% of 7-11 year-olds agreed that they would like to appear in *The Worst Witch* whereas 59% of 12-14 year-olds disagreed. Responses for *Grange Hill* tended more towards general disagreement: 47% of 7-11 year-olds were not sure (25% disagreed) and 44% of 12-14 year-olds disagreed (26% were not sure).

Table 7: Age groups opinions of specific television appearances

Programme	7-11 year olds			12-14 year olds		
	Agree %	Not sure %	Disagree %	Agree %	Not sure %	Disagree %
<i>Castaway</i>	27	45	29	11	48	41
<i>Grange Hill</i>	29	47	25	30	26	44
<i>Live & Kicking</i>	67	14	18	67	15	19
<i>Mad for It</i>	46	38	17	22	52	26

<i>Newsround</i>	22	31	47	19	30	52
<i>'Phone-in</i>	45	25	31	48	26	26
<i>Worst Witch</i>	49	22	29	26	15	59

Gender comparisons are shown in Table 8 below. The most striking difference is in drama appearances: a far higher percentage of the girls would like to be in *Grange Hill* (44%) and *The Worst Witch* (59%) compared to boys (13% and 21% respectively). More boys than girls would be willing to take part in 'phone-ins (51% boys, 39% girls), and more girls (77%) than boys (56%) would like to be in *Live and Kicking*.

Table 8: Male and female children's opinions of specific television appearances

Programme	Male			Female		
	Agree %	Not sure %	Disagree %	Agree %	Not sure %	Disagree %
<i>Castaway</i>	28	36	36	18	54	28
<i>Grange Hill</i>	13	49	39	44	33	23
<i>Live & Kicking</i>	56	15	28	77	15	8
<i>Mad for It</i>	37	45	18	36	41	23
<i>Newsround</i>	23	28	49	18	33	49
<i>'Phone-in</i>	51	18	31	39	36	26

<i>Worst Witch</i>	21	15	64	59	23	18
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Children and teenagers were also asked what programme they would most like to appear in. Of the 34 different answers given the most popular answer was soap operas (15%) with twice as many girls saying this as boys, followed by *The Simpsons* (8%, with twice as many boys saying this than girls). Some of the programmes that were mentioned on the questionnaire did appear in these answers; *The Worst Witch* polled highest (7%, four girls and just one boy); *Newsround* was mentioned by two boys and *Castaway* by one girl. *Live and Kicking* was mentioned by one girl and one boy.

There were a number of qualitative comments on the questionnaires, in which both adults and children elaborated on their views about children appearing on television and on television content and their family management of it, generally. Some of these comments have been incorporated into the account of the qualitative data from the family interviews in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Qualitative study with families: family debates

7.1 The family interviews

As mentioned in Chapter 1, studies in family law indicate that where there is conflict between parents and children in families, these conflicts are usually resolved internally 'in their own way.' Sometimes serious cases of conflict have to be resolved outside the family, through the law - child protection and custody battles after divorce are obvious examples. There are also rarer examples, as in the Gillick case about contraception, where the law rules that a child has the right to make decisions about his or her own health without reference to the parent. In general, however, it is assumed that parents have their children's interests at heart and can be trusted to act in those interests; the law also holds parents responsible for their children's well-being. This is a state of affairs that has to be accepted by children, whether they like it or not, since they are deemed to be legally, and in the earliest years of life, totally physically, dependent on their parents for life support. This dependence, however, does not mean that children are incapable of forming their own judgements, nor of having those judgements taken seriously in situations outside the family, as well as inside it.

As discussed earlier, two important issues about child/adult, and child/parent relations are raised by this study's examination of 'consenting children' in broadcasting: the first is whether children are *competent* to make their own decisions in giving or withholding consent to taking part in television programmes which may invade their privacy. To answer this question, evidence needs to be offered of children's understanding of the issues involved in making decisions (for instance the 'fairness' of having to compete for adult prizes, as in *TFI Friday*), and of their ability to make independent judgements, uninfluenced by fear of retribution or by peer or family pressure.

The second important issue is whether parents, or other care-taking adults, have the right to *over-rule*, or pre-empt, children's decisions and to act on their children's behalf, because 'they know best' for the child, even where the child may disagree. An important subsidiary question is raised here about professional practice - are children always *asked* for their consent to appear in programmes, in forms that make the implications clear to

them, or is it assumed by producers that parental approval is sufficient? To answer these questions, production practices and regulations have had to be examined - and this is where our detailed, and in-depth observation of a children's programme in which children were featured in a number of ways, provided some useful answers about good practice and about the ways in which children *can* be meaningfully consulted. Where adult programmes featuring children are concerned, it appeared from the programmes which generated complaints to regulatory bodies such as the BSC, that some guidelines are necessary to help producers act appropriately towards children used in their programmes.

We chose to examine these issues, for the purposes of this research, in a context where it would be possible to observe how parents and children identified, debated, and resolved (or not) potential areas of disagreement about the rights and responsibilities of children appearing on television, and those of their parents, and of the people who produced the programmes. We wanted to use these family debates to help identify aspects of child-competence, and parental approaches to regulation, by examining the ways in which our families discussed issues of consent, privacy, exploitation, child/parent conflict and producer-responsibility, arising from the TV clips they were shown. As a result of earlier research with children (Davies, O'Malley & Corbett, 1997; Davies, 2001 forthcoming), in which children were asked to role-play broadcasting schedulers and regulators, we expected children to be familiar with regulatory concepts and to adopt protective attitudes towards more vulnerable children, while at the same time defending the rights of children generally to be heard and heeded. When doing this in the context of their own families, we were interested to see how children would position themselves in relation to their parents and parental authority, as well as to each other, on these matters, and how these positions might be changed and negotiated in the course of discussion.

We also wanted to find out if the families' discourses would reflect the concepts and language of regulation, as identified in our analysis of broadcasting regulations, and in our observation of the production of *Mad for It*. Would there be ways in which families' discussions of the codes and ethics of broadcasting might be the same, or different, from those of the professionals? Although our sample was only 24 families, it included differences of income, race, religion, region and family-type (with a number of single parents), and these differences might affect their responses. We also expected there to be some diversity of view as a result of internal family differences - such as gender differences, or conflict between generations, or between siblings. How would these be resolved? We expected that families' attempts to reach resolutions would provide

evidence about child competence and understanding of ethical issues, and hence children's ability to give consent. We also expected that these discussions would illustrate family feelings about the rights and duties of parents, and in what circumstances families believed that parents' views should give way to those of children. The debate format of the family discussions in fact provided many opportunities for parents' views to give way to those of their children, and often they did.

The family interviews took place on two separate occasions, both in the families' own homes. First, there was a parents-only preview of the clips, and then there was a whole family discussion. The parents-only preview allowed parents to decide which three or more clips from the six on offer they would permit their children to watch, and this provided an opportunity for parental regulatory codes to be made explicit, before these were applied in the whole-family discussions with children present. With regard to the artifice of this 'gatekeeping' process, which is obviously not part of normal everyday viewing procedures, the parents we interviewed were accepting of the fact that their children must often see material on television that they knew nothing about, and might not approve of, and were not unduly worried about this. All the parents we interviewed appeared to trust their children to apply the general values of the household in how they used and responded to television. However, the questionnaire responses, as well as comments in interviews, suggest that each household and each member of the household, has a strong perception of its own controls and limits, no matter how temporarily negotiable, and in these individual responses, there were some marked variations between different family members.

Most of the clips were approved by most of the families in the preview stage. The main exception was the sketch from C4's *Jam*, featuring the six year old 'killer', which was rejected by all parents, except two who said they would allow their teenage, but not younger, children to watch it. None would have allowed their children to appear in such a sketch. As indicated by the questionnaire responses to taboo material (see Chapter 6), the clip's violence was its most objectionable aspect, followed by the bad language. All were shocked at the use of the six year old to portray these features, but the parents of teenagers recognised that their older children would see the irony and would find it 'funny'. Hence, we have no children's responses to this clip.

The second most contentious clip was the adoption sequence from *Panorama*, which raised the question - obvious in family research, but not obvious in research conducted

with children in similar-age groups outside the family - of within-family age and gender differences and how differing vulnerabilities, due to age (and perhaps to gender), are taken account of in the home. The R. parents, from East London, with two sons aged 12 and 11, and a daughter aged 8, debated the clip's effect on their 8 year old:³²

M: [defending showing the *Panorama* clip to the 8 year old] *'That is real life, that's what's happening.'*

F: *'Oh, I don't know, I think I have reservations about that one with R. especially . . . to have a kid like that upset on the telly, it might upset her a little bit . . . '*

I: ***'Is that because of her age?'***

F: *'It might be more her age, she's a bit sensitive because of her age isn't she?'*

M: *'Yes [...] I think she'll be disturbed by it "cause she might not yet understand what's going on there. Not old enough to understand what the thing is about . . . "'*

I: ***Would you let them carry on watching it?***

M: *'Oh yes. I definitely would. They would probably ask why, or what does that mean, or what is adoption [...] it's things that happen all the time, you know, it does happen.'*

I: ***'So, you wouldn't switch it off or . . . ?'***

F: *'Oh, I would switch it off if it was disturbing them.'*

³² Unless otherwise stated, the following abbreviations apply to interview transcripts: I = Interviewer; F = Father; M = Mother; S = Son; D = Daughter. Elisions, in the form of . . . , are made where repetitions, digressions, and comments such as 'um' and 'you know' appear in the transcripts.

I: 'OK.'

F: 'Then I would switch it off, definitely [...]. We could talk and see how they would get along with it but if it's disturbing, then we would switch it off.'

[the mother did not disagree with this]

It is noteworthy here that the discussion divides on gender lines, with the father protecting his little daughter, and the mother initially being less concerned about the child's vulnerability, while eventually going along with the father in the final decision not to show the *Panorama* clip. In the family discussions, the daughter more than held her own with her older brothers, for example,

There was no sense here, of the parents not accepting that their daughter, after all, was capable of making intelligent contributions to the family discussion. In such ways, we suggest, ethical issues raised by television, can help to facilitate rule-formation and socialisation processes in families. Mrs. R. was one of a number of parents who explicitly made the point that difficult situations like the fostered boy breaking down were painful, but necessary for her own children to see, so that they could appreciate 'real life.'

However, both she and her husband, like the other families in the study, expressed concern for the child in the programme and felt he had been pushed too far by the producers. This highlighted the distinction which it has been important to emphasise throughout this investigation, between the effects of distress on children *watching*, and the effects on children *participating*. The needs and rights of both sets of children are not always equivalent and both need to be considered in regulations.

The family debates

At the second interview, the whole family, parents and children (and in one case, a grandmother, and in another, two of the children's friends) all participated in the viewing of the clips and the discussion afterwards. The format of the interviews was somewhat similar to that of a tribunal, with family members being asked to sit in judgement on the television material. The interview schedule was relatively open, with a brief explanation about the BSC being interested in what people think of children appearing on television, and the first question being: 'what did you think of that clip?'. If the topics were not touched on spontaneously, the interviewers were required to introduce questions about the relationship between the children and the adults on screen; about the role of the

presenters; and about family awareness of regulation. The opening question was addressed at the whole family group and the usual response was for one person to offer an opinion, and then for other members of the family to respond to it, sometimes with encouragement from the interviewer. For example, 12 year old C. in the C. family of East London, responded promptly to the interviewer's question after the *Panorama* clip, which then led to an exchange between her and her mother about her feelings:

C: *'Why is there no people coming to adopt him? Most children have been but he's not, like, being adopted.'*

I: *'... What did you think about seeing him upset?'*

M: *'Did you feel upset watching that?'*

C: *'Yes'*

M: *'Or sorry for him?'*

C: *'Yes'*

M: *'Sorry for him - why?'*

C: *'[...comment or question about]family'*

M: *'He's probably in a foster family.'*

There then followed a long discussion, involving the mother, father and son (aged 11) about the ethics of the producers, during which they asked the interviewer questions about the programme. In all of this the daughter remained silent. Then the next clip was shown, the staring competition on *TFI Friday*, and once again, the daughter was the first to comment, making another emotion-related comment about the winning child: *'She didn't look happy.'* Again, the emotional states of the participants became the focus of a long family discussion.

This family used the pretext of the interview and the strong emotions raised by the clips to have a very wide-ranging discussion about the ethics of reality TV generally, in which

considerable scepticism about the motives of TV producers was shown. Here the parents had most to say; although, in this case (unlike some others) the children's comments were brief, they were direct, frank and uninhibited.

The transcripts of our interviews with our 24 families produced over 300 single spaced A4-sized pages of discussions, an indication of the willingness with which our families entered into discussion. One reason for this willingness, it seemed from some family transcripts, was that debating ethical and regulatory issues on television was an opportunity for long-running family rivalries to be continued. An example was the exchanges between A (12 year-old girl) and T (11 year-old boy) in the G family of East London, discussing the ethical issues raised by splitting the conjoined twins, Mary and Jodie, as discussed in *This Morning* - ethical issues which were very relevant to the discussion of parental responsibilities and the rights of children, raised by the project generally:

T : (aged 11): *'I do think the babies should have been split up because one of them was only going to be a little bit handicapped, but the other one was going to be dying because she had no heart or liver or nothing . . . They should be split up.'*

A: (aged 12): *'I think they shouldn't because it's the parents' decision and by splitting them up they are killing one child and eventually they are both going to die . . . If they are both going to die, I think they should die together . . .'*

The boy found himself at odds on this issue with the rest of his family, who tended to agree that it was the parents' decision, but he still maintained his position. When asked how he felt about everyone else disagreeing with him, he said:

T: 'I don't care what people say.'

I: ***'Where do you get your opinions?'***

T: 'I just think them up. I see like, adverts on television and me and A end up having an argument. And then my parents agree with her.'

F: 'We don't always agree [with her].'

A: 'Usually I get to be the more logical side of the argument.'

In the case of this 11 year old, even considerable family pressure to take an alternative view did not alter his opinions, an example of the sort of 'competence' necessary to demonstrate that children are capable of understanding the issues behind informed consent. T's views were not just stubbornly adhered to, so that he could annoy his sister, they were also intelligently argued in a more abstract sense. This was the case for many families and many wanted to continue talking after their scheduled hour was up. In the transcripts, all family members, except the very youngest (children under 8, who usually had to be prompted to contribute) were generally well represented, although some had to be brought in by the interviewer in such forms as, 'Now, what do you think, D.?'. We can note, simply as an observation rather than a scientific finding, that the way in which the very youngest children sometimes felt inhibited in a family debate with a stranger present (even though in their own homes) could be indicative of the kinds of embarrassments and pressure that very young children might feel in television studios.

Balance of contributions

The children (53) outnumbered the adults in our sample : there were 35 adults - 26 of them in couples; 9 single parents; and in one household, a grandmother joined in. We also took the opportunity to show the material to two great-grandmothers who were visiting an interviewer, and thus obtained some comments from a much more senior generation, who generally felt that childhood in their own child-rearing days – despite the hardships of depression and war – was less problematic than the representations of childhood they saw in the media today; they were particularly concerned about the precocious sexualisation of children, as in the child performers in *Mad for It* (who included disco dancers and an Elvis Presley impersonator).

In many transcripts, although parents tended to give the lengthiest and most considered comments, the majority of contributions to the conversation were made by the children. In some families, particularly the larger ones (three families had four children and one had five), the parents are hardly represented at all in the whole-family stage of the interviews. Again, although the sample is small, this could be indicative of the way in which family size, age difference and general adult-child ratios could determine the ways

in which values and regulations are negotiated in the home. In the larger families, for instance, parents often took the role of arbitrators in arguments between children, rather than giving their own views. This suggests that children were seen within the families as intelligent commentators, entitled to debate with each other, without having parental views imposed on them, in ethical arguments.

Themes for ethical debate

The format of the conversations in families was primarily one of debate, with some digressions for discussions about other programmes, or individual conversations between two family members, as in the example of the Cs above. Many issues arose from these debates, but for the purposes of this report, we had identified a number of themes from our pilot study, particularly relevant to issues of consent, competence, and professional and parental responsibility, around which family debates were organised, and examples of these debates are given here under these thematic headings.

Parental vs. programme-makers' responsibility

A key point raised during the pilot interview was that parents are not necessarily the best regulators of the pressures placed on children during competitions where prizes are at stake. They may also encourage their children to participate in potentially stressful activities for material gain, or to see their offspring on television. Should the production team or the television company therefore accept responsibility?

The clip from the Channel 4 late night satirical programme *Jam* was particularly provocative. The series was the subject of a number of complaints from viewers and a comprehensive evaluation by the BSC. While parts of the complaints were upheld, those specific to this clip were not, on the grounds that:

'The incongruity of the child's role was the point of the humour. She had understood the fictitious nature of what was happening. The child actress had been chaperoned by her mother who had approved the script. The dark and menacing tone had been created in post-production.'

(Broadcasting Standards Commission - Bulletin No. 35, October 2000)

The parents in our study unanimously rejected this point of view, with all of them expressing shock at the use of a 6 year-old child in such a context, and at the parents allowing this to happen. Mr. and Mrs. S, based in Gloucester (the father was a policeman and the mother a learning support worker, with three children, girls aged 12 and 11 and a boy, 7) discussed *Jam* at the preview stage:

I: *'The mother was exercising her parental responsibility.'*

F: *'If anything, I think it makes it worse . . . she obviously must have been told the effect they were hoping to achieve, what they were going to do and how things would have been added on afterwards . . . she knew what it was going to end up like, but she was still prepared to let her child go through it . . .'*

M: *'Somebody has to take up the rights of the children . . . If you've got pushy parents that, you know, just want their kids to do these kinds of things and they don't really care about them . . .'*

I: *'The producers of the programme take some responsibility . . . so long as the parent has given consent, I think I'm right in saying that's as far as it goes. . . .'*

F: *'They [the producers] are not interested. All they're interested in is the television programme.'*

M: *'That's right. They're passing the buck to the parent aren't they? Really they are saying, look you know, this is your child, if you are OK with it then great, we'll go ahead and do it.'*

F: *'And we'll pay you this amount for doing it anyway.'*

Not only were these parents shocked at the mother allowing her child to act in the sketch, they were also cynical about the producers' motives. They recognised the limits of parental responsibility and mother and father agreed with each other, with each adding to the other's point. Here, as in other interviews, the interviewer's role was to query their awareness of external regulation - in which they also expressed little confidence.

The irresponsible ‘pushiness’ of parents was also discussed in the context of 6 year-old ‘Mickie J’, the Michael Jackson impersonator, who appeared on *Jenny Jones* on Channel 5. The parents in the CS family in Bristol, thought that the situation was exploitative and that the parents were to blame. However, their younger children were less aware of this aspect and enjoyed the child’s performance. In contrast, again, the older son of the family, an engineer, was strongly opposed to the ‘exploitation’ of this child and the mother ended up arbitrating between the children’s opposing views:

I: *‘Your impression of that Michael Jackson clip?’*

D1 (aged 13): *‘I thought that was OK, ‘cause he was showing what he was good at to everybody on television so they could see how good he was.’*

I: *‘Right, what about you, G?’*

D2: (aged 12): *‘I reckon it was better ‘cause on that programme we watched first of all they didn’t show much of what they were.’*

I: *‘What, on Mad for It?’*

D2: *‘Yeah, what they were going to . . . grow up to be, on there [the Jenny Jones show] they showed more of what he wanted it to be. . .’*

M: *‘I see that the child was obviously taking off Michael Jackson and I would certainly allow the girls to watch Michael Jackson; well obviously the little lad has, and he did what he did extremely well. . . was the child there because the parents wanted the fame rather than the actual child?’*

S: (adult son, no age given): *‘He didn’t know why he was doing it, did he? He didn’t even know he’d been to Las Vegas.’*

M: *‘No, he didn’t understand.’*

S: *'No he just knows he's performing as though he was being put through a performing animal act.'*

As a result of this discussion, the daughters then came up with a pragmatic suggestion in which the child's talents could have been shown off, without him being exposed to the 'scantily clad females' and the noisy adult audience in the studio:

D1: *'I suppose they could've filmed him and then sent it off to a television programme . . . so the child could see it instead of actually taking him on that show - or put him on a children's programme.'*

Although this family showed some divergence of view, they all agreed that neither Mickie J's parents, nor the programme producers, had shown proper consideration for his welfare in allowing him to appear in such an adult, sexualised context as the *Jenny Jones* show, and that alternatives should have been found.

Some families came up with practical solutions to the problem of parents not having the children's interest at heart, for instance the W family of Bristol, who suggested a programme regulator for each show, who monitored children's welfare especially in cases where children might be subject to parental pressure to appear:

M: *'There should be somebody to look after the children, so that if they are forced to do something they don't want to do, they can approach them and say I'm not happy about this.'*

Her elder daughter was more uncompromising about not allowing children to appear in potentially 'unsuitable' adult contexts:

D1: (aged 11): *'I don't think there should be children in adult programmes.'*

This family had recently been involved in a situation in which TV producers had appeared to act without due consideration for children's rights or welfare. A children's drama had been filmed in their village, and the W children had been asked to take part as extras, apparently without contractual or supervisory arrangements:

D2: (aged 10): *'We were in a background of a show, we had to run around things.'*

I: *'Right. And who looked after you then?'*

D2: *'Nobody.'*

I: *'What show was that?'*

M: *'It was a children's drama and we actually missed it when it came on television.'*

I: *'Did they pay?'*

D1: (aged 11): *'They were supposed to but we were the last to get there so they actually didn't pay us.'*

I: *'Oh, right.'*

M: *'They don't pay kids. . . '*

I: *'And nobody approached you to ask?'*

M: *'No. . . I knew they were in there.'*

The family were less surprised than the interviewer at this apparent lack of producer responsibility; however, they did agree that ideally there should always be some form of parental permission in such cases:

I: *'Should you make a law that, before you take part in any television programme - you've just given me that example - your parents should be asked?'*

D1/

D2: 'Yeah.'

The P family of Gloucester, with a daughter aged 12 and a son aged 9, recognised the necessity, but also the limitations of parental responsibility and debated possible alternatives:

S: (aged 9): *'The parents tell you that you are under their responsibility, but when parents put their kids onto those shows, [Jenny Jones and TFI Friday] it shows they're not showing responsibility for their child.'*

I: ***'So if the parents can't take responsibility, . . . then who should take that responsibility?'***

S: *'The producers. If they don't think the kids are good enough or old enough, there should be a sort of line between how old, and how to be performing on live television in front of millions of people.'*

D: (aged 12): *'They've got a right to stand up and say [to parents], I don't think you're taking the right control of your child, you're not doing it in the way that we want, we don't want this child to be distressed or to be forced into anything. Therefore, we don't think he should be doing this.'*

I: ***'So are you saying then you think there should be some rules on top of the parents saying yes it's OK or no it's not?'***

D: 'Yes.'

Content - good and bad

Although our study primarily concerned the actions of children participating in television programmes, this was inevitably linked with discussion of programme content unsuitable

for children to see. Most families referred to the 9.00 p.m. 'Watershed' as a guideline, particularly as parents often do not watch television with their children, whether because they are busy with other things, or because their children have televisions in their bedrooms. Different families had different rules on programme content, and these values constantly change as children become older, as new television programmes emerge which challenge existing guidelines, or as parents become more aware of specific programmes they have not seen before.

The children in the study appeared to be well acquainted with these rules and, while the rules are often worked out by the parents, the children generally seemed to accept that they would have to wait until they were older to see certain types of material. Some of the children had clear views about the types of programmes that they did not want to watch even if they were allowed to. An example of how content rules were discussed in the family came from the interview with the CS family of Pucklechurch, Bristol, with daughters aged 13 and 11. Whether or not the family is putting on a good show of responsible regulation, purely for the benefit of the interviewer, it is clear that the impression they all want to create is common across the generations:

I: *'Now, do you always agree on making decisions about what can be watched and can't be watched?'*

M: *'No we don't; basically if the children want to particularly want to watch something, even though they might say, like, "Our friends watch it, blah blah blah," the ultimate decision lies with the adult and that is how it's always been and if you say "no" (talking to father) . . .*

F: *'I say "No", it stays no . . . our girls are good anyway. If they've been watching something our K [daughter, aged 13] definitely she'll say I shouldn't be watching this and she'll switch it off.'*

I: *'So what you're saying, as parents you involve your children in that decision?'*

F: *'eah, we do.'*

M: *'Yeah, we've brought them up - basically we govern their decisions in some way, because we say you can't watch that, you can watch that, but even though we know we can be out and they're left here on their own, they would know that mum and dad wouldn't particularly want them to watch that . . .'*

D1: (aged 13): 'I'd turn it off if it got bad or dirty, then I'd turn it off. Mum and dad always says if they haven't saw [seen] a programme before they'd let us watch it, but if it got bad they would say "No" and we would understand that.'

I: **'OK.'**

D2: (aged 11): *'I reckon they should have a channel like for adults then another channel for children.'*

I: **'Right, so you couldn't access it by accident!'**
(Laughter)

In contrast to the questionnaire responses, where adults were more disapproving of sexual content than children were, children were most likely to express disapproval of sexual content in the family interview setting, for instance, the 9 year-old son of the W family in Reading, responding to the Michael Jackson impersonation:

S: *'It was a bit rude . . . I saw a woman in a swimming costume!'*

Similarly, the 10 year-old daughter of the W family in Bristol also commented on this:

D: *'And there's people in bikinis and sort of stuff.'*

I: **'What do you think about that?'**

D: *'Disgusting . . . it's horrible to see that on telly.'*

Parents tended to echo the language of regulators, not only in not wanting their children to see sexual or violent content, but also to hear swearing and offensive language. The

mother and daughter (aged 13) in the P family of Cardiff discussed multi-generational family codes on this issue:

D: (aged 13): 'Grandma and grandad don't think I should watch *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* . . . anything with swearing in . . . but you don't mind me watching *Big Brother*.'

M: 'No.'

D: 'But before they put it on they said there is strong language in it . . . and my granddad said, "Oh, you shouldn't be watching that, are you sure your mother lets you watch that?"'
(Laughter)

I: 'So you don't mind swearing?'

M: 'Well, I don't like swearing but I don't think that you'd necessarily copy a television programme.'

D: 'I don't mind swearing . . . I mean, I don't like people who swear, you know you get like people who . . .'

M: 'No, I don't like people who swear all the time . . .'

D: 'But it is , if something happens, like you drop a brick on your foot, "Oh dear that hurt", but grandad hates any of it, and so does grandma but once she's had a sherry, she's OK.'
(Laughter)

This mother/daughter unit described themselves as having '*millions of arguments about what to watch*' but, according to the mother, this was more about whether '*something's drivel*' - a quality issue, rather than a moralistic one. The daughter then disagreed that they argued a lot, pointing out that they shared a distaste for violence: '*Things that you don't want me to watch, I don't want to watch them myself, I don't like watching violence.*' This single parent, mother/daughter household, the only one in the sample with only one television set, appeared to have successful and good-humoured strategies for

working out shared values, and resolving disagreements without conflict, in which the interviewer's role was primarily to comment, rather than to intervene.

Most comments on content concerned content which was not allowed, but sometimes positive views were expressed. The 9 year-old daughter of the H family in Gloucester, expressed enthusiasm for *Mad for It* and also explained the appeal of gunge:

D: (aged 9): 'I think it was really good . . .'

I: ***'Why do you think children like gunge so much?'***

D: 'Because it's all icky, and children like icky stuff.'

This child - a refreshing example of enthusiasm - wrote in her questionnaire: *'I think television is great!'* Similarly, 10 year-old MT of East London, whose family had come from Somalia, also enthused in his questionnaire: *'I like to watch cartoons; I like reading books.'*

The questionnaire comments section allowed parents and, more rarely, children to be more reflective about their own values in managing television viewing in the household. Their comments demonstrate an awareness of external regulation, such as the Watershed and film classifications. While they indicate some uncertainty about how parents can negotiate their own values with other values outside the home, they also indicate very firm ideas about what is, and what is not, suitable, alongside a recognition that controversial material on television can sometimes be valuable in children's upbringing. The comments also give a sense of parents respecting and listening to their children's views, including distinguishing between children of different ages in their families, and sometimes, having to 'give in'. The comments below come from the questionnaires:

M: (aged 32, Family R, Gloucester): *'I think it is quite important for children to watch some documentaries so they can see and understand what is happening in real life and how some people are a lot less fortunate than ourselves.'*

M: (aged 42, Family G, East London, four children aged 7 - 12): *'I have found monitoring of programmes increasingly difficult as the*

children have got older. Many programmes going out at 7.30 p.m. or 8.00 p.m. have 'adult' issues and storylines which, although I have given in and let the children watch, I still feel uneasy about. For children approaching, or in their early teens, I feel some programmes which go out post-Watershed can provide a useful discussion point and a way into a discussion that might otherwise be awkward to initiate.'

- D: (Aged 14, Family CS, Bristol): *'I believe children of a young age should not be allowed to watch Power Rangers, because it's teaching them that fighting is good. Children do go out and pretend and they get hurt. I think children should make their own fun.'*
- M: (Aged 42, Family L): *'I particularly dislike much of the daytime programming they watch during the holidays: Kilroy, Trisha, all those programmes giving pseudo sympathy to people who are being cynically exploited. I am uneasy about the mushrooming growth of programmes about real people, which encourage us to sit back and watch the misery of other people's lives.'*
- F: (Aged 41, Family C, Cardiff): *'I think that the soaps deal with a lot of issues that perhaps younger children would not normally be able to watch. However, I think in the main they are dealt with in a sensible way. It does at least allow us to discuss sensitive issues when they are portrayed in these programmes e.g. sexuality, race etc. I'm not sure I agree with a "Watershed" as parents should be responsible and turn off things that are not appropriate. However, parents are not always with their children when they watch television, especially as more and more children have television/video in their own rooms.'*
- M: (Aged 40, Family C, Cardiff): *'Violence is probably more worrying than sexual content. The latter can be discussed reasonably but I feel violence tends to be absorbed into the consciousness more subtly. I'm not convinced by arguments that*

there are no statistics to support the idea that children aren't affected by what they see on television. However, this doesn't mean I'm particularly censorious. I'd prefer my two children to be exposed to ideas and aspects of life in a situation that allows us to discuss these things with them, for example, drugs, sex, whatever. Fortunately they are quite open with me still and often ask the meaning of things they see on different programmes.'

Consent and exploitation

Two clips particularly raised concerns among our families about the children's consent to what was going on in the programmes. These were the *Panorama* sequence in which a young boy who wanted a family broke down and cried, and the *TFI Friday* 'staring competition'. In both these cases, our families used the term 'exploitation' to describe the ways in which the children were used, and one divorced mother, from family J in Somerset, did not want her children, aged 10 and 9, to see *Panorama*:

I: *'And what about the children seeing that?'*

M: *'No, I don't think I'd like them to see that.'*

I: *'And why is that?'*

M: *'Because there's enough bad things happening in the world which unfortunately they sometimes see on television and I have to explain it, or things that they've been told. No I can't, I mean like any mother sees any clip like that, you just think of your own child in that situation. My son has been through a lot since our divorce three years ago . . . and when they've been through so much you don't want to . . . but seeing that clip, it's just dragging it out for the boy. . . .well, I wouldn't like to see too many kids like that on the television. I have never seen anything like that. I have seen other things that break your heart, but I can't stand it, children [crying], I can't bear to think of it.'*

This mother did not believe that anyone involved in the *Panaroma* adoption programme had the child's welfare at heart. She described it as 'cold' and lacking in tenderness. Other families, although disturbed by the way the child was treated, distinguished between their objections to the programme's use of the crying child and its effects on their own children. For instance the P family of Cardiff:

D: (Aged 13): *'Probably watching the whole of it I'd end up crying.'*

I: ***'What makes you upset about that?'***

D: *'I don't like seeing people upset.'*

M: *'I think she [the television interviewer] pushed him a bit much for my liking, but if, as K said, you know if it means that more children are adopted, then it's a worthwhile cause, but I thought the interviewer was a bit pushy.'*

D: *'And the questions weren't very, you know, asking him why he wanted a family . . . maybe they should have gone over how they were going to do it, and you know, he could have said, what he wanted to do . . . it made him more upset the way she [the interviewer] was.'*

M: *'Well it depends what he was told beforehand as well, mightn't it . . . and what he thought he was getting into.'*

The C family, also of Cardiff, compared the way in which children were used in the children's game-show *Mad for It* in which children were competing on their own behalf, and nothing expensive was at stake, and the adult show, *TFI Friday*, where children were competing on behalf of adults, to win expensive adult prizes:

F: *'I think that where the children are being used for the gain of the adults, I think that's different to the way that, like in that other clip [Mad for It] the bungy, gungy, whatever it was, the one kid won*

and the other lost, but there was no indication that the kid got upset . . . because what was at stake wasn't as much, and it was a bit of a laugh, and they probably enjoyed splattering around in all the beans and stuff, whereas when they are being used for adult gain, the guidelines perhaps'

M: *'Yeah, they [the children in TFI Friday] were kind of in proxy weren't they . . . they weren't winning for themselves . . . and there's something slightly odd about that, that's again, as you say, the size of the prize.'*

There is some contrast between parents insisting that *they* should have the final say in the case of their own children, but suggesting that programme-makers should overrule parents in the case of other parents, such as the parents of the children in *TFI Friday*.

Children as 'props'

Many families commented on the use of children in roles that portrayed them as 'cute' puppets for adult entertainment, with little or no input from themselves - a persistent characteristic of the way children are used in a variety of television genres (see our analysis in Chapter 4). Many of these comments were prompted by the 6 year-old Michael Jackson impersonator, on the adult Channel 5 show *Jenny Jones* (discussed above). Two issues were raised by this: first, the extent to which parents have, or do not have, their child's best interests at heart and second, the acceptability, or otherwise, of exploiting the innocent remarks and behaviours of children for adult amusement. This was seen as particularly objectionable when children were mimicking adult sexual behaviours, especially given Michael Jackson's reputation and the allegations of sexual offences made against children, as the father in the R family of East London, pointed out:

F: *'How could you let your little boy do Michael Jackson, after what Michael Jackson has done? He's a sex offender and you dress your boy to look like him, that's sick. That's just sick. You wouldn't do it, would you.'*

There seemed to be some cultural differences in attitudes to the Michael Jackson impersonator, with white, British families being very aware of the controversies around

Jackson's behaviour, which caused them to have reservations about the 6 year=old's imitation of him, and, in contrast, the DS family of Gloucester (Asian Moslems with very strong family morals) and the T family of East London, an African family from Somalia, who were practising Catholics, admiring the little boy (who was black) for his talent and for his entertainment value:

I: *'So that was Mickie J; again would you be happy for your children to watch that?'*

M: (DS family, Gloucester): *'Yes, it's alright.'*

F: *'We don't mind really, because there's nothing indecent or anything for the children. He's having a nice time, he's enjoying himself. Yes, we'll be quite happy.'*

Similarly, Mrs. T of East London:

I: *'What about that one, the Michael Jackson?'*

M: *'They'll love it, they'll love it.'*

I: *'They'll like it? . . . What did you think of it?'*

M: *'It's really good.'*

I: *(. . .) 'Why is that?'*

M: *'His ambition maybe. Maybe it's the child's ambition, maybe that's what he wants to be . . .'*

I: *'How would you like to see one of your children there?'*

M: *'It's very nice but I want them to be educated. They might go into singing without education but. . .'*

I: *'We'll see what they think when we show them that one.'*

M: *'They'll love it.'*

The presence of children during adult discussions of sensitive topics was also an issue in this context. The discussion about the clip from *This Morning*, showing an interview with the parents of twins conjoined in the womb, centred around the parents' decision-making process at the time of birth, and the potentially fatal consequences for one, or possibly both, of the twins. Throughout the interview the twins in question, two 5 year-old girls, were present. The pilot family, family M from Bristol, questioned the need for the children to be physically present during the process, suggesting that their presence added nothing more to the piece than a photograph would. This family also was concerned about the effects of participating and subsequent viewing for the children in later life, since they had not consented for their parents to discuss such matters on national television.

The DS family of Gloucester, who were Moslem, also discussed this programme:

I: *'So that was the programme about the twins who were joined in the womb. So what did you think about that programme?'*

S1: (Aged 11): *'I thought it was a little bit like News, because there's every one talking . . .'*

I: *'What about you?'*

S2: (Aged 8): *'I don't think it was that much for children really. I don't think many kids watch that. I think it was mostly for adults.'*

S1: *'Yes, so do I.'*

S2: *'Children, most of them would get bored watching it.'*

I: *'What do you think about the fact that the little girls were there on the programme? Because the mum and dad were saying that they were quite poorly when they were in the womb and that they*

might have died and the girls were sitting there listening to it. So why do you think the girls were on the programme?’

S2: ‘... maybe they never knew what happened before, that they were like that inside. Maybe that’s so they could find out what happened before to them.’

I: *‘Do you think that would be a good way to find out?’*

S2: *‘Not really, but if their parents wanted to do it, they wouldn’t really know what to say.’*

I: *‘Do you think the little girls would have been happy to have been on the programme?’*

S1: *‘Yes.’*

S2: *‘Not really because all they did was sit there.’*

S1: *‘Yes . . . one of them sat there quite still and just kept blinking and when their mum was talking, the lady who presented it, she kept interrupting her.’*

The PS parents of Bristol were in favour of their own children, a 14 year-old girl and a 12 year-old boy, watching the programme because it was ‘educational’, but had strong reservations about the way in which the five year-old twins were displayed:

M: *‘I would let them [my children] watch it, now, at this age.’*

I: *‘Why?’*

M: *‘Because it’s educational, it’s real life. It’s good for them to find out what actually can happen in a pregnancy. So I do feel it’s quite educational, yes.’*

F: *‘I agree with that, I would let them watch it. The only thing I don’t agree with is that they have the children on these kinds of*

programmes parading them like they're some kind of freak show, you know. I mean, fair enough, discuss all the stuff. Obviously . . . when the decisions are made they are obviously not there because they are only babies . . . I don't think the kids should be allowed on the programmes at all.'

Mrs P of Gloucester articulated objections to the exploitativeness of the Mickie J. sequence and the *Panorama* adoption clip particularly forcefully:

M: *'I think that the thing that comes over with the two clips that we've seen is children mimicking adult behaviour and I think C (daughter aged 12) said that is unsuitable. I think that any child mimicking adult behaviour which they don't appear to understand is unacceptable, because that action has therefore been given to them or they've copied it; they've been told to do it by an adult, rather than initiating it themselves.'*

I: ***'So it's not an informed decision in a way?'***

M: *'No, it's not the child doing it, it's the parents doing it through the child. The other thing is, it's like using the child for display purposes, to try and prove a point in a situation that might distress the child. That little boy, you know, the boy that was looking to be adopted and he was effectively being blackmailed into speaking about his feelings on television. He was in a no win situation. If he didn't speak, he maybe thought he wasn't going to get a family, but he did speak and got upset, so then, he then thought he wasn't gonna get a family, because he changed emotions on television. So putting a child under that amount of duress in order to get something which is so important to him, I think is just all unacceptable.'*

Presenters' behaviour

Several comments were made during the screening of *Mad for It* (the Carlton/ITV children's game show) suggesting that the presenters were not relating to the children participating in the competitions. They seemed only concerned in aiming their remarks at

the camera, even while apparently explaining the rules of the various games to the contestants. There was a sense (also the case with the daytime talk shows) that presenters did not directly involve the children, or relate to them on the children's level.

'The adults just seem to be, to come out stealing the show really - not really engaging the children very properly. Even with that boy at the end, you didn't feel that [they] even were relating to him.'

Mother (M family, Bristol, 3 sons, aged 7, 11, and 14)

One of the children of this family pointed to the behaviour of the interviewers in the *This Morning* clip, noting that while the children might be upset in later life, at least the presenters were nice to them. The presenters do in fact make a point of talking directly to the children, once the interview has finished, but this is the first time that their presence has been acknowledged directly.

The W family, of Bristol, had a great deal to say about presenters' attitudes, with the mother taking a hard line, particularly on *Mad for It*, in contrast to her daughters, who to some extent resisted this line - although they had reservations about the behaviour of the presenters.

M: *'Thought they were a bit patronising the presenters.'*

I: *'What do you mean?'*

M: *'To the kids.'*

I: [To daughter 2, aged 10]: *'What did you think?'*

D2: *'They were a bit cruel.'*

I: *'Could you give me an example?'*

D2: *'I think they were cruel because they pushed them around. . .'*

I: *'What about the children who appeared on the show itself? What did you think about it?'*

M: *'Well, I didn't like the way the presenters kept saying things to the camera, 'Look at her, she's gorgeous', and stuff like that, just makes me feel self-conscious about things like that.'*

I: ***'Well, what about you two girls? What do you think?'***

D2: *'The same as mum.'*

D1: *'They were being made to do the things they were doing, that's what I think. . . When they were doing the talent contest all the people they had there were saying the same things, so, obviously, the presenter told them what to say.'*

This family also had reservations about the presenters' attitudes in *This Morning*:

I: ***'Girls, what's your views of that? How do you think the presenters dealt with the children there?'***

D1: *'They ignored them.'*

I: ***'They ignored them? And you [to D2] said they were nice?'***

D2: *'Yeah, yeah.'*

D1: *'I didn't think so, because they've ignored them, there was no point to them really being there because they didn't say anything.'*

Chris Evans in *TFI Friday*, came in for the most stringent criticism for his role as presenter. The CS. family from Bristol, with two daughters, aged 13 and 12, discussed this episode. Their media-literate conversation, involving the whole family, and demonstrating close observation of the behaviours and language of the participants in the television clip, evolved into full-blown scepticism about the motives of the presenter and producers. The discussion contrasted the performative, rehearsed, and unspontaneous

aspects of the professionals' behaviour, with the fearful demeanour of the winning child, and the distressed behaviour of the losing child, concluding with a call from the mother for more appropriate regulation:

M: *'I just can't believe that Chris Evans would've put those two children in that position - like the girls said, [her daughters], they were playing for prizes that weren't in any way beneficial to themselves and there was no prize for the loser, and what on earth were the adults doing, putting them in that position?'*

F: *'Did you find that little girl that was on first, when Chris Evans was saying, are you happy? - did she look happy?'*

M: *'No.'*

F: *'I think she looked nervous, scared to death.'*

M: *'Yeah, she looked very frightened.'*

I: *'What do you think about that (to daughter)?'*

D1: (Aged 13): *'She did look very scared and I know he said he was going to treat that other girl as a princess for the rest of the night, but that's not going to change anything, she's always going to have, like, guilt in her, like thinking she wasn't good enough. . . .'*

M: *'If you heard Chris Evans right at the end of the actual competition he said something like . . .'*

F: *'We can't do that again.'*

I: ***'Do what?'***

D1: *'Do the competition again; he was saying, "oh 'cause she's crying we can't do that again . . . it could happen to other kids".'*

- F: *'... or we're not going to put children through this again.'*
- M: *'Yeah, he realised he made an extremely big mistake.'*
- D1: *'...and I reckon he realised he was going to have quite a lot of complaints come into his show because of that...'*
- D2: (aged 12): *'I agree with mum, K [daughter] and dad... he was trying to make it a laugh and he shouldn't do it again, but I reckon he felt inside that he should do that again.'*
- D1: *'...and also he lied to the audience saying she wasn't crying, she was shy, because he didn't want people thinking "Oh he's put that child through that and made her cry". He actually lied. I don't reckon that's right...'*
- M: *'I think the programme-makers will obviously use whatever tactics they have to get their viewers in. I mean, if they feel by using a child... that's going to make their programme look better, get more viewers, not really taking in the interests of the child at all. There should be a separate body set up that's totally in charge of making sure programmes and parents can't undermine... what is good for the child.'*

Fairness and pressure

The children particularly, both in the pilot and the main study, were clearly aware of a concept of 'fairness' in the context of television game shows, in that they saw a need for consolation of losers. The behaviour of the presenters also played a part here. The children were aware of the pressure induced by participation in games that are televised and involve the presence of a studio audience, whether that audience comprises adults or children. Our participants expressed concern about the pressure induced by high value prizes and studio audiences, and as discussed, the *TFI Friday* clip provoked much discussion on these issues. The children of the family in our pilot interview were appalled at the treatment of the loser, the older boy, aged 14, calling it 'evil'. When asked to explain what he meant, he said:

'Cos they're really small and there's a loser and a winner and then she goes off dancing and the other one's on her own.'

The P family of Gloucester, with a daughter aged 12, and a son of 9, were asked if it would make any difference if the children were doing something personally for themselves and if there were a prize for the loser. They articulated the need for other adults to take responsibility for the welfare of children on television, who appeared to be under pressure from the persuasions or actions of their parents :

D: (Aged 12): *'Yes. It wouldn't have made it right, it still wouldn't have made it right, but it might have made it slightly fairer for the child that lost to win something. Rather than just a shoulder to cry on. A little prize, a consolation prize or something.'*

M: *'If the parent is taking the decision to put the child on television, then it has to be the child that benefits by it and not the parent.'*

S: (aged 9): *'It's the child that's winning.'*

M: *'Yes, but as I say, if they both win.'*

I: ***'You were saying . . . if the parents wanted the boat then they should have gone through the tough part and played the game.'***

D: *'Yes . . . if you're a child you won't be able to stand up to their parents and say, "This isn't fair, I don't want to do this", when they've got so much pressure on them to do . . .'*

S: *'If you're good at the thing then the parents are getting more and more publicity, they're getting more and more money. You never know, a kid might not like it, but it's their parents' decision and if their parents say "You are going on there", that's not fair on the child. Because there should be a rule in the childcare thing, to not allow you to make your child do something if it's against their will. If they say, "No I don't want to" they should let them off.'*

Even in a children's programme, where care is taken to make sure that everything is child oriented, and that children only take part in activities for which they have volunteered, the issues of fairness and pressure can emerge. This was particularly so for the dating game in *Mad for It* (dropped in the second series, for precisely these reasons), which the three boys of the T family in East London, aged 15, 12 and 10, found particularly humiliating for the boy in the couple chosen to go 'on a date':

I: *'What did you think about the dating game?'*

S1: (Aged 15): *'They won't like each other.'*

S2: (Aged 12): *'Definitely not . . . I think they didn't like each other very much. The girl didn't like him.'*

I: *'How did he feel about the girl?'*

S2: *'He might be happy about the girl. . .'*

I: *'What do you think it might be like to be in a programme like that?'*

S1: *'I would be embarrassed.'*

S2 and

S3 (Aged 10): *'Yes.'*

Children's contribution to regulation: child competence and media literacy

It is obvious from the family discussions that most families agree that children can make a valuable contribution to the design of regulations and that they have the capacity to consider and debate these complex issues in a rational manner - in other words, they are 'competent'. The middle child of the pilot family (aged 11) was asked what sort of rules he would impose given the opportunity. He said:

'You could make a law and it's got to be over a certain age. And they've got to be told what's going to happen and they can't be pushed into it - and there should be a runner's-up prize if they're doing it with children.'

Many children in our study showed awareness of concepts such as production, editing and the difference between live and pre-recorded television, as for example, the constructed nature of *TFI Friday*. *Mad for It* also produced some comments about the artifice of television, as in these comments from the B family of East London, a family of five children, aged from 6 - 13, who watched the clips with two extra boys. For this group the production values of the show were more noteworthy than any aspect of content:

'I think it was fake when they opened the door and started screaming and then straight away after the questions just left . . . it was set up before the programme, they told them what was going to happen before.'

(Boy 1: Aged 13, family friend)

'I think the presenters were a bit rubbish because they are not really good . . .'

(Son 3, aged 8)

'I think it was a bit er tacky, that's the word . . . it should look more professional.'

(Boy 2, aged 13, family friend)

The T family of East London discussed the possibility of complaining and the interviewer asked the children to guess which of the clips they had seen had been the subject of complaints. In order to answer a question like this, children need to be aware of the public controversies about broadcast regulations, and to have some sense of the institutional arrangements surrounding these:

I: *'Two of the things we saw today had been a subject of complaint. They've actually been officially investigated because people wrote in. I wonder if you can guess which ones.'*

S1: (Aged 15): *'The last one [Jam].'*

S2: (Aged 12): *'Yeah.'*

S1: *'And the TFI Friday.'*

I: *'What makes you think so?'*

S1: *(. . .) 'the girl crying.'*

S2: *'And this one [Jam] because of the violence.'*

S3: *(Aged 10): 'And TFI Friday because of the girl (. . .)'*

I: *'What do you think people complained about then?'*

S3: *'The children.'*

I: *'. . . you have the right to complain and I just wonder what you think . . . would it make any difference?'*

S3: *'[No] Because you never really hear about it.'*

I: *'So what would you like to see done? Do you think there should be some kind of law about not letting children do that? Do you think it would really work?'*

S3: *'It could - if the parents follow the rules, it could work.'*

I: *'Who should make the rules - the parents or the programme-makers?'*

S3: *'Both.'*

The M family of Bristol interpreted Chris Evans' comment *'we can't do that again'*, in the *TFI Friday* staring competition, as 'a joke':

'He was just saying that as a joke . . . they probably will do it again, 'cos everyone was all laughing and they all had fun . . . he didn't mean it like as a promise or anything, he was just like joking.'

(Son 2, aged 11)

They then went on to speculate about the competence of children according to age. The boy thought five would be old enough for a child to be competent to make decisions on his/her own behalf, the mother thought 12 was more likely - an unsurprising difference, with children more likely to assess other children as competent, and adults being more conservative about children's competence. They then went on to discuss gender:

I: *'Would it have been different if it had been two little boys do you think?'*

Son 2: (Aged 11): *'No, 'cos . . . when you're little . . . they would cry about everything.'*

Son 1: (Aged 14): *'I think with boys there would probably be more pride you know, and sort of trying to hide crying and stuff like that.'*

M: *'What even at seven? I don't think so.'*

Son 1: *'Yeah.'*

Such conversations illustrate how debating ethical and production issues on television can enable family discussions on issues of importance to themselves, such as age and gender. In selecting quotations from the lengthy transcripts of our interviews, on the above themes, we have tried to give a sense, not just of individual 'sound bites' of opinion, but also of how these opinions were arrived at through family debate. It was obvious from many passages of these conversations, that these discussions were an opportunity to express, and reflect upon, family dynamics generally - an illustration of how value judgements about television link up with family values, and the resolution, or otherwise, of family conflict or disagreement. For example, the mother and father in the PS family of Bristol (with two children, a daughter aged 14 and a son aged 12):

I: *'Would you let your children see that [Mad for It]?''*

M: *'Yes, I would let them watch it.'*

I: *'Why?'*

M: *'Just the simple fact that it is a children's programme.'*

I: ***'Right.'***

M: *'Some of the things on there I don't like, but as it is a children's programme I would let them watch it. They do make their own minds up, if they feel they don't want to, they won't watch it.'*

I: ***'Right. So if you can keep some of the things in your mind you don't like for next time to bring into the discussion. Mr S has returned just as we've shown the Mad for It clip again. Would you show that to your children?'***

F: *'No.'*

I: ***'Why not?'***

F: *'I think it makes kids unruly and see that they can act like hooligans on television, basically, and get away with it.'*

I: ***'Right. In so far as this project is concerned, are they allowed to see the clip, next time we come?'***

F: *'No'*

I: ***'Not at all?'***

M: *'No, fair enough.'*

I: ***'OK, fine, could you just explain that. You say it encourages them to be hooligans on television?'***

F: *'Well yeah, I mean, they are thought to say what they like and different things like that in front of kids on television and kids see things on television and think it's acceptable, but it's not, is it, really you know. . .?'*

I: *'So asking both of you, who should be responsible then to actually monitor the contents of that programme?'*

F: *'Well, partly the producers of the programme and it's also down to the parents, isn't it.'*

M: *'I think it's down to the parents, actually down to the parents, definitely.'*

I: *'Do you think the producers have an obligation as well?'*

F: *'Yes, obviously parents can't be everywhere when these programmes are on and the producers should think about that before they even put their stuff on the television basically. It's at the time when the parents are obviously probably busy making the tea or whatever else, the kids will just be stuck in front of the television watching it you know and obviously taking it all in.'*

Other parents had no problem with *Mad for It*. As the parents in family J, also of Bristol, pointed out, *'It's specifically made for children to enjoy. It's entertainment for children and children like watching that sort of thing.'* The concept of a programme being labelled as 'children's' was seen by several parents as a guarantee of suitability, without them having to monitor it.

In the G family of East London, the three oldest of the four children debated what 'should' and 'should not' be allowed on television among themselves, with very little intervention from their parents. They particularly disliked the idea of children being used to entertain adults, by imitating adult behaviour:

Son: (Aged 11): *'That boy [Mickie J] was doing inappropriate moves and he should be stopped.'*

D1: (Aged 12) [talking about Michael Barrymore's programme, *Kids Say the Funniest Things*]: *'Children shouldn't have to say things and sit on a chair and have cameras looking in their faces at six*

years-old and trying to say loads of things . . . they are obviously made up, because they are not real.'

I: *'Why do you think people do use children in this way then?'*

D1: *'Because of the innocence and they think it's funny.'*

I: *'Should it be allowed?'*

S: *'No.'*

D1: *'No'*

I: *'How would you stop it?'*

D2: (Aged 8): *'Police station!'*

By comparison, the enlightened, and fairly permissive attitude at the preview stage of the C parents in Cardiff contrasted with a very unwilling daughter, and a not very forthcoming son, who agreed to comment once his interest was aroused, but only with heavy prompting, in the family interview situation. This interest was aroused by a discussion of how television was used as an instrument of family discipline:

M: *'What do you watch T. [son]?''*

S: (Aged 13): *'Wrestling.'*

M: *'When it's not banned . . . it's a good punishment, wrestling, taking it away is, because it's such a desirable commodity!'* (laughter)

I: *'Do you do that a lot?'*

F: *'We have been lately.'*

M: *'Last week and this week we have because he's not been behaving very well, it does work, doesn't it T? The tape can't hear a nod, you have to say "yes".'*

S: *'Yeah.'*

There were a number of single parents in our sample, and in one - the B family of East London - the issue of different approaches to television viewing between her household (where the children were based) and her ex-husband's household, which they regularly visited, was a troubling one. This mother (training to be a teacher) also expressed anxieties about the sheer amount of television on offer to her children, and its competition with books for their attention - especially since she sometimes had to be aware that it was used as a babysitter:

M: *'There is a bit of conflict because they often stay with their father on weekends and he lets them watch things that are totally . . . videos aged over 15, even the younger ones [aged 7, 8, and 9], which is not at all acceptable.'*

I: *'Whose opinion prevails here?'*

M: *'So far so good, but if they watch it there, they're coming back saying things about films, and I'll ask them "Where have you seen that?" and they say "At dad's" and I have to get back to him and say "No, absolutely not!". I mean [I want] . . . stuff for the younger ones . . . stories with a happy ending and stories that make them feel good, not horror or violence, and real adult things . . . from what they're saying, they watch the horror type of film, which I don't watch at all.'*

I: *'Do they like it? Are they glad that their father lets them watch that?'*

M: *'Yes, I think they're really glad.'*

I: *'Well, that happens even with families who live in the same household, you get that kind of conflict.'*

M: *'I find that a lot happens with the television nowadays [. . .] because, apparently, I don't watch as much as I would like . . . sometimes there are really good documentaries, a really good film I want to see, and I choose . . . I know that as soon as they come home they switch the telly on, which is fine because there are some really good children's programmes [. . .] but they would sit there, I'm sure, maybe the whole weekend if I let them.'*

I: *'So, you don't?'*

M: *'No, because, luckily, they quite like reading as well, they've been sort of forced to read, but I buy loads of books so they can have loads of choices. They can read something [...] the younger ones like Harry Potter ... I don't say that ... there is a lot more demand for children's time now and it's taking over from things like reading.'*

Family dynamics: general summary

In reviewing the transcripts of these family interviews, we identified a number of issues where there were areas of general agreement, both within and between our 24 sample families, despite the fact that there were demographic differences between the families, and despite the fact, as noted in the transcripts above, that families often had strong internal disagreements between individual members. We suggest that where there is this kind of general agreement, over-riding other sources of difference, the families' views, as tested, challenged and agreed through argument, may well represent more general views in the population about these matters.

We also identified areas where there was mild disagreement between family members and between family and family, and these tended to be issues where less serious concerns than child welfare and parental responsibility were at stake. They were more a matter of taste or of different cultural perceptions, for instance, the differences in attitude to Mickie J.

We identified fewer areas about which there was strong disagreement. Strong disagreement was partly based on pre-existing family conflicts, for instance T and A in the G family who seemed to disagree with each other on principle, and who invoked parental support, or lack of it, as part of their argumentative ammunition. There were some parents who disagreed with each very vehemently, for instance the father who refused to let his children see *Mad for It*, in contrast to the mother's permissiveness about it. In this case the father's view prevailed, and in general, where parents disagreed, fathers' views tended to prevail, which raises wider gender issues about family politics (c.f. Morley, 1980). Among children, girls were as articulate as boys, and as likely to hold their own in debate - and as with AG, sometimes more so.

Television and family values: generally agreed issues

- The importance of obtaining children's consent for their participation in programmes - although there was dispute about the lowest age this would be possible - between 5 and 12 years old.
- The need for parental responsibility and permission.
- The need for an arbitrator or 'welfare' officer in programmes, in case parents might be 'pushing' children to do things in the parents' interest rather than their own.
- The need to protect children from distress (as in *Panorama*), protection which such a 'welfare' person might provide.
- Scepticism about the sincerity of producers, including their commercial motivations.
- The unfairness of making a child compete for adult prizes.
- The calculatedness of *TFI Friday*'s attempt to get children to win prizes for parents.
- The inappropriateness of using a six year-old to 'kill' and swear in *Jam*.

- The inappropriateness of the sketch from *Jam* for showing to children under 14 because of its violence and obscenity, and because of its representation of the six year old.

Issues with diversity of views, but not strong disagreement

- The entertainment value of *Mad for It* ('a bit of fun') versus its 'stupidity' and 'patronisingness'.
- The advantages of a child finding a family versus the disadvantages of being distressed on television (*Panorama*).
- The sexuality of the six year-old Michael Jackson impersonator - for some 'fun', others 'shocking'.
- The degree of offensiveness of *Jam* - some saw the irony, others thought it was totally indefensible; the two teenage children who saw it laughed, but still disapproved of it for younger children, and disapproved of the use of the six year-old actress.

Issues with strong disagreement

Strong disagreement was usually between members of the same family, and seemed to be derived more from familial differences, such as ongoing sibling rivalry, than from issue-based intellectual positions. These cases included:

- Fathers and mothers disagreeing about *Mad for It*, and *Panorama*.
- Siblings disagreeing about particular aspects of programmes, such as whether they were 'stupid' or not.
- What was and was not allowed in terms of different aged children in the same family, for instance the older child in the G family watching *Queer as Folk*, but not the younger ones.
- Sexuality and gender (especially elderly versus younger, with grandparents being particularly disapproving of sexualised performances such as Mickie J, and the

children in the *Mad for It* talent competition, including 10 year-old disco dancers and an Elvis impersonator).

- Younger children tending to get overwhelmed by older ones and being upset by this.

What is or is not acceptable for children in a particular family to view reflects that particular family's standards as a whole – how the children are brought up and how they relate to others, both within and outside the family. Standards of taste and decency particularly are constantly changing and being renegotiated inside the family as the children develop, as many parents pointed out in their questionnaires. A particular criticism of the questionnaire in this study is that it requires parents to set specific answers (e.g. *until when do you allow your children to watch television?*). Answers differ with the child's age and, to some extent, their personality and also the nature of the programmes. Some popular and non-controversial programmes span the Watershed, others may raise difficult issues pre-Watershed, but in an acceptable way which parents find useful. Our interviews showed that there can be conflicts within a family as a result of children watching in different homes (separated parents, grandparents, friends' houses). Each may have different standards when the children are with them. This also applies to films i.e. what certificates they will allow. This is increasingly relevant in the digital age, with more pay-per-view and video on demand services springing up. In the privatised world of multi-channel broadcasting, parents' and other adults' discretion becomes ever-more relied upon, just as it becomes increasingly impossible for individuals to monitor the vast plethora of services on offer.

Inevitably, people within this project often talked about what children can and cannot *see* on television, as well as what children can *do* when appearing in television programmes. Pre-Watershed scheduling was often mentioned as 'safe' time, but parents often allowed their children to watch beyond, provided they were accompanied. In some cases it was seen as a good thing to watch programmes which raise difficult or sensitive issues with children in order to provide support and answers to questions arising. This seems to reflect a desire for a basic standard of content (at least until 9.00 p.m.) but beyond that parents appear to want to decide for themselves what their children watch rather than it being enforced from outside by a 'nanny state'. Different families obviously had different standards. Many claimed to prefer to use the off switch rather than complain formally. Families had to balance censorship against the risk of glamorising the taboo. Children obviously are curious about that which is forbidden, but they also have their

own standards and many do not *want* to watch things which might disturb them. Generally, families felt they functioned better when children are told why they cannot watch things rather than simply forbidden to.

In general, from our first review of these interview transcripts, we have observed a number of noteworthy dynamics in terms of shedding light on how families discuss and debate values arising from controversial television programmes, specifically those involving children. There were obvious differences between the parental preview and the whole-family discussions, with parents' strong views having to be negotiated later with, and sometimes modified by, their children. There were instances of parents prompting children, and children failing to respond, and in contrast, of parents not being able to get a word in edgeways because of the arguments between children; mothers and fathers disagreed sometimes, but generally, parents were able to reach consensus easily; the interviewer's role varied from interviewer to interviewer, but in general, the interview schedule usually required some prompting about regulation, especially since many families seemed not to be aware of regulatory processes, such as the rules governing child employment, or the possibility of complaining to the BSC or ITC.

Overall, we were struck by the readiness of families (except for the very youngest children) to give opinions and to make value judgements, many of which appeared to derive from considered positions on ethical issues, such as the rights of children to give consent, the responsibilities of parents, the professional responsibilities of producers and concerns about sexualisation of children, and violence. These people had access to a range of language with which they could confidently discuss these matters and their language often echoed the regulatory language we noted in our review of regulations and legislation (Chapter 2). Many of the interviewees were also familiar with broadcast technicalities - close-ups, directors, set-ups, fakes and so on.

Above all, there was no question of the *competence* of the children involved as potential consultants on these issues. Within the family set-up, and the somewhat artificial situation of a strange interviewer prompting questions about a selection of short television clips, there was no evidence of children in our chosen age group (7-14) being unwilling, or unable, to give opinions and make judgements about the range of issues discussed. Where they were unwilling, or shy, this was more to do with family dynamics (being overwhelmed by siblings, or being in a bad mood with parents) than any inability to formulate and express intelligent viewpoints. We hope the study provides evidence of

child competence which may be of use to broadcasters and policy makers in future consideration of the role and treatment of children on television, and in the television audience.

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Relevant Acts, Regulations and Legislation

- Broadcasting Standards Commission Codes of Guidance 1998
- Broadcasting Act 1990; 1996
- Children's Act 1989
- Children (Performances) Regulations 1968 (S.I. 1728)
- Children and Young Persons Acts 1933; 1963; 1998
- Council Directive EC/89/552 (1989) Television Without Frontiers
- Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations (1997)
- ITC Programme Code 2000
- ITC Programme Code 2001
- ITC Code of Programme Sponsorship 1989
- ITC Code of Advertising Standards and Practice 1998
- Obscene Publications Act (1959)

Protection of Children Act (1978)

Appendix 1: Table of demographic data of the interviewed families

Location	London	5
	Reading	6
	Bristol	5
	Gloucestershire	5
	Cardiff	3
Ethnicity*	White British	10
	British	4
	White	2
	Asian	2
	White Other	1
	Black African	1
	Happy Go Lucky	1
	Not Entered	3
Religion*	Church of England	9
	Catholic	6
	Christian	3
	None	3
	Moslem	1
	Sikh	1
	Not Entered	1
Number of Adults in the Household	One	9
	Two	15
Number of Children in the Household	One	1
	Two	13
	Three	6
	Four	3
	Five	1

Household Income	Less Than £10,000	5
	£10-15,000	3
	£16-20,000	4
	£21-25,000	4
	£26-30,000	3
	£31-35,000	2
	More than £35,000	1

* For the Religion and Ethnicity questions, respondents were asked how they would describe themselves (as is obvious from some of the answers!).

Appendix 2: Table of occupations of the adults from the interviewed families

Male	Courier	2
	Security	1
	Carpenter	1
	Firefighter	1
	Director (careers)	1
	Police Constable	1
	Nursing	1
	Farmer	1
	Financial Administrator	1
Female	Housewife	4
	Student	2
	Secretary	1
	Beautician	1
	Personal Assistant	1
	Carer	1
	Playgroup Assistant	1
	Occupational Therapist	1
	Child Care	1
	Learning Support	1
	Information Analyst	1
	Nursing	1
	Research Technician	1
	None	1
	Security	1
	Not Entered	3

Appendix 3: Table of demographics for the non-interviewed families in questionnaire sample

Location	London	2
	Bristol	7
	Gloucestershire	5
Ethnicity	White British	6
	British	1
	White	6
	Not Entered	1
Religion	Church of England	9
	Christian/Pentecostal	1
	None	1
	Not Entered	3
Number of Adults in the Household	One	2
	Two	11
	Three or more	1
Number of Children in the Household	One	4
	Two	6
	Three	3
	Four	1
Household Income	Less Than 10 Thousand	0
	10-15 Thousand	2
	16-20 Thousand	0
	21-25 Thousand	3
	26-30 Thousand	1
	31-35 Thousand	1
	More than 35 Thousand	7
Occupation	Facilitator	1
Male	Sales Manager	1
	Warehouse Supervisor	1
	Civil Servant	1

	Local Government Manager Quantity Surveyor Film Editor	1 1 1
Occupation Female	Teacher Housewife Financial Administrator Team Administrator Administrative Manager Local Government Manager Medical Secretary Account Manager Not Entered	3 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 4

Appendix 4: Table of demographics of whole questionnaire sample (38 families)

Location	London	7
	Reading	6
	Bristol	12
	Gloucestershire	10
	Cardiff	3
Ethnicity*	White British	16
	British	5
	White	8
	Asian	2
	White Other	1
	Black African	1
	Happy Go Lucky	1
	Not Entered	4
Religion*	Church of England	18
	Catholic	6
	Christian	3
	None	4
	Moslem	1
	Sikh	1
	Christian/Pentecostal	1
	Not Entered	4
Number of Adults in the Household	One	11
	Two	26
	Three or more	1
Number of Children in the Household	One	5
	Two	19
	Three	9
	Four	4
	Five	1
Household Income	Less Than 10 Thousand	5
	10-15 Thousand	5
	16-20 Thousand	4

	21-25 Thousand	7
	26-30 Thousand	4
	31-35 Thousand	3
	More than 35 Thousand	8
	Not Entered	2

* For the Religion and Ethnicity questions, respondents were asked how they would describe themselves (as is obvious from some of the answers!).

Appendix 5: Table of occupations of the adults from the whole questionnaire sample (38 families)

Male	Courier	2
	Security	1
	Carpenter	1
	Firefighter	1
	Director (careers)	1
	Police Constable	1
	Nursing	1
	Farmer	1
	Financial Administrator	2
	Facilitator	1
	Sales Manager	1
	Warehouse Supervisor	1
	Civil Servant	1
	Local Government Manager	1
	Quantity Surveyor	1
Film Editor	1	
Female	Housewife	5
	Student	2
	Teacher	3
	Secretary	1
	Beautician	1
	Personal Assistant	1
	Carer	1
	Playgroup Assistant	1
	Occupational Therapist	1
	Child Care	1
	Learning Support	1
	Information Analyst	1
	Nursing	2
	Research Technician	1
	None	3
	Financial Administrator	1
	Security	1
	Team Administrator	1
	Administrative Manager	1
	Local Government Manager	1
	Medical Secretary	1
	Account Manager	1
	Administrative Assistant	1

	Not Entered	3
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Appendix 6: Analysis of child-related clips, Chapter 4

Analysis of a random video recording of British commercial channels:
Channel 4, HTV, and Channel 5 (some recording of BBC1 programmes was also done).

Date of recording: 27/10/2000

Total of hours recorded: approximately 16h

Tape 1: From 05.30 a.m. to 12.00 p.m.

Tape 2: From 12.05 p.m. to 06.15 p.m.

Tape 3: From 06.20 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.

Content analysis of child-related television clips

Categories:

1- Ads

- a) Products for children
- b) Products for the family
- c) Others (charity; man; woman; etc)

2- Children's programmes

- a) Cartoons
- b) Programmes featuring children (entertainment shows; drama; comedy; etc.)
- c)

3- Adult programmes

4- Family programmes

5- News

6- Talk shows /debate

- A total of 55 child-related clips

- A total of 11 clips (4 in Tape 1, 7 in Tape 2) belong to the 'News' category: pieces on the early release of the murderers of toddler James Bulger; pieces on BSE measures ending with images of infected 14 year old girl; Duke of York appeals against child cruelty; Toy fair; British schools failing black students).

- A total of 33 clips- approximately 12 minutes- belong to the 'Ads' category: 23 are ads of children's products; 6 are ads of family products; 4 belong to the sub-category of 'Others'.

- A total of 8 clips belong to the 'Children's programmes' category (1 in Tape 1; 7 in Tape 2): 3 are cartoons; 5 are clips from entertainment/competition shows.

- 1 belongs to the 'Talk shows/ Debate' category (Tape 1: *The Wright Stuff*, opinions on child crime).

- 1 belongs to the 'Adults' programmes' category (Tape 3: *The Ruth Rendell Mysteries*, mother finds neighbours murderer; boy has nightmares about it, and has an absent father who is unable to keep promises).

- 1 clip belongs to the 'Family programmes' category (Tape 2: *Collectors lot*, a clip on mobile 'phones shows, among others, a boy calling his mother and giving her authoritarian instructions about what he wants for food, and about his computer).

News:

ITV news – 5.30

a) Piece on the BSE Inquiry Report

Schedule and Context

This news is first on air on ITV News at 5.30a.m, the first morning news, and it was also videotaped on ITV lunchtime news at 12.30p.m.

It is the second piece recorded of the specific programme, preceded by a news item about the Inquiry on rail safety, and followed by a news item on the early release of the murderers of toddler James Bulger.

Contents

It shows images of press conference and government representatives; of infected animals and of meat being incinerated; images of former agriculture minister giving his little daughter an hamburger; John Major talking in Parliament; current agriculture minister; again the press conference; and finishes with images of 14 year old Zoe Geoffrey infected with BSE human variant, these images show the girl paralysed in bed and being cared for in her room (close-up of Zoe's face; images of adult carers; long shot of the teenager's room walls covered by posters of the Titanic and Leonardo Di Caprio, and of Zoe lying in bed with two other young girls), in what is possibly an attempt to appeal to the viewer's emotions. The children are not given any agency; their images are used to illustrate news items. The syntagmatic organisation of the piece reveals what appears to be an use of the child's images as an attempt to appeal to the viewers' emotions regarding BSE, also indicating a *preferred meaning* of the news as to the seriousness of the situation, and to the consequences of government measures.

b) Piece on early release of toddler James Bulger's young killers:

Contents

This news item emphasis the courts decision on the early release of the two young boys, and James parents reaction. Still, it does show photographs of the three children at the time of the murder.

(All of the first three stories refer to the loss of human lives)

c) Prince Andrew campaigning against violence towards children.

Contents

The news is about the prince's interest on a campaign against child cruelty, and shows him in the company of his children and their mother being photographed by reporters in several locations. Again, no agency is given to children.

GMTV News

d) Piece on earlier release of J. B. murderers

Schedule and context

Second item on GMTV (ITV) news at 7.00 a.m. (following the BSE Inquiry).

Contents

This is a shorter piece than the one developed in the ITN news at 5.00a.m. James' photo is not shown but the photograph of the two children convicted for his murder is, as are their names referred to. Also, images of the special prison where they stay are shown, and some convicted young men are shown from behind. No youngster is interviewed or is seen expressing views.

Ch. 5 News

e) Piece on the murderers of J.B.

Schedule and context

This piece is part of the Channel 5 12 o'clock news.

Contents

Photo of J.B.; images of the toddler being carried away in shopping centre; images of the murder location with police investigators; photo of the two killers; debate with guests about the release of the two boys.

f) Toy fair

Contents

Piece on a child fair and the candidates for the toy of the year. Adult's commenting on toys and a very short image of a little boy playing.

ITV lunchtime news

f) Piece on BSE inquiry

Schedule and context

Piece shown on ITV news at 12.30p.m.

Contents

Similar to previous piece on earlier edition of this channels news again finishing with Zoe's images.

Interview on studio with mother of victim expressing her opinion on the inquiry and newspapers comments.

g) Survey on British schools failing black pupils

Contents

News item on the gap between white and black children at GCSE level, showing students in school environment (no interviews with adults or students).

h) Piece on the Bulger killers

Contents

Similar to earlier piece.

Talk show/ debate

The Wright Stuff

a) Discussion on child crime

Schedule and context

This is a channel 5 live programme aired at 11.00 a.m., which invites viewers to express their opinions on specific topics featured on the news.

Contents

In this programme Mathew Wright invites the viewers and audience express their opinions what age does a child become criminally responsible; and what to do with child criminals when they turn 18.

The programme has formal features that suggest an hybrid between a talk show and a news programme (e.g.: it has an audience which participates; newspapers spread on the presenters' desk; the logo of the programme is similar to some tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun*; the posture of the presenters on studio resemble those of news' presenters). Presenters, guests, audience and viewers present their opinions. No opportunity for children to show their understanding of the problem during the short period the programme was actually videotaped.

Ads:

Schedule and context

The majority of the ads of children's products are shown during the break of children's programmes in the afternoon schedule (mainly videotaped between 3.15 and 4.40 p.m.).

Contents

The ads for children's products usually feature children playing, and use a child's voice-over. Adults' voice-over are used on ads of products for toddlers (probably indicating that though these are products for children the targeted audience are adults), and sometimes on ads of boys' action figures.

On what concerns the other categories I would say that children are used in two main ways: to appeal to adults' feelings such as compassion or solidarity (e.g.: charities ads), and to entertain (e.g.: *Robinson's juice* featuring young girls asking naïve questions; *Dairylea luncheable pizza*, featuring students on a school visit).

Family Programmes

a) Piece on mobile 'phones collectors

Schedule and context

Piece on mobile 'phones' collectors on Collectors' lot, a Channel 4 programme at 3.00p.m.

Contents

Piece on mobile 'phones' collection shows presenter walking on a train while observing passengers' use of mobiles (all passengers speak on the mobile; many mobiles ringing) and how irritating it can be. It features a young boy calling his mother and giving her instructions in an authoritarian way showing how people may take the use of the mobile 'phone too far (similar sketches featuring adults).

Children's programmes:

CITV

a) *Pokémon* competition

Schedule and context

This competition is part of CITV (ITV's daily children's scheduling, between 3.15 and 5.00p.m, which includes cartons; game shows; children's drama etc). CITV has two main presenters (two young and very active adults, male and female) in a colourful studio.

Contents

A very short competition where viewers are invited by the presenters on studio to answer a question related to the next programme and win some Pokémon prizes. The goal of the competition is to captivate viewer to watch the next programme.

b) Draw your own toons

Schedule and context

Shown at 3.35p.m. on ITV, this is a cartoon class programme presented by Fern Cotton.

Contents

This is a cartoon class programme based on Disney's characters where a group of children are taught how to make their own animation by a cartoon expert. This particular programme shows how Pluto is animated (shows some cartoonists stating their opinion); shows pre-recorded clips of the children on studio talking about their pets, and making their own animation after listening to the cartoonist. Though the children's intervention is limited and the expertise is given to adults, children are introduced, and they do have the opportunity to participate and are given some space to create and be inventive.

c) Digimon challenge

Schedule and context

Competition aired around 4.30 p.m. on ITV.

Context

Finalist of the challenge goes on studio to name the Digimon characters in 60 seconds and win the chance to become CITV 'Digidestined'.

d) Top ten of everything

Schedule and context

Entertainment show part of CITV, shown at 4.40p.m.

Context

This is an entertainment programme presented by two young adults (boy and girl) offering a diversity of items under the subject 'Top Ten' ('phone poll for the top 10 Digimon characters; young cheerleaders perform while nominating their top ten list of scary things; magic numbers) and invited guests (girl band 'Girl thing').

In general some animated cartoon series (like *Pokémon* or *Digimon*) have a strong commercial component. Not only their characters have equivalent action figures, but also the entertainment shows for children evolve around them. As to the competitions though these are designed to allow the children's participation, I would suggest that the agency really belongs to the programmes' presenters and adult guests. Usually young adults, presenters are key figures on the programmes' action. They do most of the talking; talk loud and fast; and 'manipulate' the child's performance on the programme (they ask the questions; determine the subjects to be talked about and the amount of time the child has to intervene). Though these are children's programmes, the opportunities that children have to participate beyond the competitions are limited.

Adults' programmes

a) The Ruth Rendell Mysteries

Schedule and context

Aired on Channel 5's Watershed at 9.00p.m.

Content

This is a mystery drama, where a little boy plays the part of the son of the main character (who apparently witnessed a crime, or saw the victims). In the videotaped clip of the drama it is possible to understand that his character is aware of the deaths (he asks the mother about the dead bodies, and he wakes up dreaming someone is trying to kill him); also his character has an absent father who cannot keep his promises.

During the period of film videotaped with do not see the boy involved in violent or distressing scenes, though he does play a character with a somewhat disturbed life.

Appendix 7: Child-related clips randomly videotaped from British commercial channels: Channel 4, HTV, and Channel 5

Friday, 27th October 2000, between 05.30 a.m. and 10.00 p.m.

Programme	Genre	Time	Channel	Production	Performers
ITV morning news	News	05.30am	ITV	ITV production	
Sesame Street	Pre-school	6.00am	Ch. 4		
GMTV	News & entertainment	6.00am	ITV	ITV production	
Robinson's Juice	Ad				
Robinson's Juice	Ad				
Whack Mole	Ad (board game)				
Cindy	Ad (doll)				
The Wright Stuff	Debate (live show)	9.00am	Ch. 5	Ch5 production	
Amazing Ally	Ad (doll)				
McDonald's Disney's	Ad (Children's meal)				

'Dinosaur' promotion					
Teksta	Ad (robotic dog)				
...	Ad (sweets)				
Whack Mole	Ad (board game)				
Nestle's Disney's 'Dinosaur' promotion	Ad (cereals)				
News	News	12.00 p.m.	Ch. 5		
News & Weather	News and weather bulletins	12.30 p.m.	ITV	ITV production	
Leonard Cheshire disabled people trust	Charity Ad				
SightSavers	Charity Ad				
Collectors' Lot	Collections & Hobbies	3.00 p.m.	Ch.4		Presenters: Sarah Greene (studio); Robert Smith (piece on mobile 'phones)
Witness children's past lives	Ad of programme				
Pocket Dragon Adventures	Cartoon animation	3.45 p.m.	BBC1		
Pokémon competition	Short children's competition	3.20 p.m. (approx.)	ITV (CITV)		
Mickey Mouseworks Draw your own toons	Cartoon class	3.35 p.m.	ITV (CITV)		Presenter: Fern Cotton
My 1st Thomas	Ad (toy)				
Dancing Teletubbies	Ad (toy)				

Play-along Barney	Ad (toy)				
Pretty Plats	Ad (doll)				
Magic Sing-along Susie	Ad (doll)				
Nestle's Disney's 'Dinosaur' promotion	Ad (cereals)				
Connect 4	Ad (game)				
Love-to-dance Bear	Ad (toy)				
Digimon action figures	Ad				
Pokémon	Cartoon animation	4.10 p.m.	ITV (CITV)		
The Wild Thornberrys	Cartoon animation	4.10 p.m.	BBC1 (CBBC)		
Digimon Challenge	Short children's competition	4.30 p.m. (approx.)	ITV (CITV)		
Lego Star Wars	Ad				
Thomas the Engine	Ad (toy)				
Barbie & Ken	Ad (doll with horse and carriage)				
Power Rangers	Ad (action figures)				
Digimon playing cards	Ad				
Autotech	Ad (toy)				
Barbie Radio Home	Ad (doll and accessories)				
Tomy Toys	Ad				
Lego	Ad				
Top Ten of Everything		4.40 p.m.	ITV (CITV)		
5 News	News	6.00 p.m.	Ch. 5		
The Ruth Rendell Mysteries: The secret house of	Mystery drama	9.00 p.m.	Ch. 5		

death					
L'Oreal Mature Skin	Ad (face lotion)				
Dairyalea Luncheable	Ad (pizza snack)				