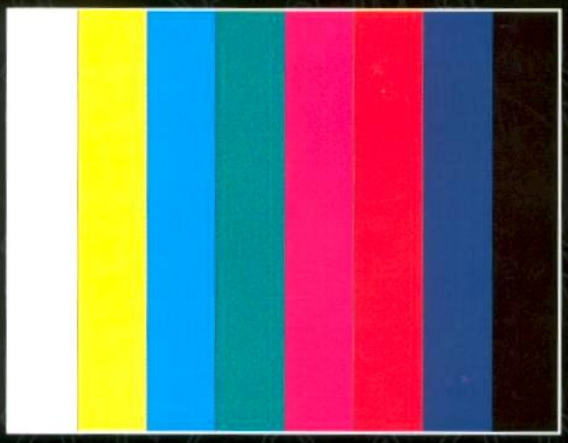
Young People and The Broadcasting Media

The Maltese Experience



Joe Grixti

A report on Qualitative Research undertaken for
The Malta Broadcasting Authority

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE BROADCASTING MEDIA

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A Report on Qualitative Research Undertaken for

Broadcasting Authority

Examining the Effects of Television and Radio Programmes on the Attitudes and Behaviour of Young People Aged Six to Fourteen

2000

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Message from the Chairman

The changes that were brought about following the enactment of the Broadcasting Act of 1991 completely changed the Maltese broadcasting scene. Seven national television stations, three of which broadcast on cable and thirteen national radio stations vie with each other to capture the nattention of local audiences. In the television sector a new phenomenon has recently asserted itself: the dominance of foreign stations over local ones has been reversed and the Maltese are today predominantly watching local programmes. Yet as we approached the first decade of pluralism in broadcasting there had been as yet no attempt made to evaluate on scientific lines the impact that these changes were having on Maltese society or, for that matter, on any aspect connected with the broadcasting industry. It was against this background that the Broadcasting Authority decided to launch a three-year pilot programme during which grants would be made available to researchers to produce qualitative studies on given topics. After careful deliberation the Authority decided that the first qualitative study should examine the effect that television and radio was having on Maltese children with the six to fourteen age bracket.

Following a public call for applications the research grant was awarded to Dr Joe Grixti, MA (Oxon), Ph.D (Bristol), a lecturer in Media Studies at the University of Albany, New Zealand and an established authority in the field. In this volume Dr Grixti sets out his finding clearly, cogently, and I dare say, challengingly. Dr Grixti gives us a glimpse of ourselves as parents, educators and broadcasters through the eyes of the children with whom he spoke and discussed the television programming that they liked, disliked or were completely indifferent to. He reveals the value judgements that children make (based on what they see on television), about life, violence, sex, entertainment, relations with the opposite sex, parental behaviour, adults in general and themselves in particular. We are confronted with the children's assessment of parental guideance, their ways of dealing with moral conflicts resulting from the screening of nudity and the

depiction of sexual acts, as well as their reactions to the advertising they are exposed to.

Equally interesting are the comparisons and contrasts that emerge from the responses to questions, and the voluntary information offered by boys and girls, respectively. From these one can discern gender based reactions to television programmes which raise the question of whether these reactions are the result of values that are being reinforced by the programmes they are watching or are being inculcated.

All of the above directly concerns parents and educators but they ought to be of equal concern to broadcasters. Undoubtedly parents must continue to shoulder their responsibilities towards their children, which include preparing them as thoroughly as possible to make the correct choices and to develop the right values. Some of the things children say suggest that rather than this being the case, there are too many parents unwilling, or unable, to wield the required degree of parental authority. There also seems to be a lack of any real evidence that educators are effectively helping children to cope with the multitudinous messages emanating from the broadcasting media. And finally, there arises the question whether broadcasters actually bother to assess the negative impact that some of the material they transmit, during those hours acknowledged as family viewing time, might have on very young and pre-adolescent audiences. These are the various factors that now require to be addressed as a result of Dr Grixti's findings.

I have no hesitation in declaring that Dr Grixti has thoroughly fulfilled the high standards that the Broadcasting Authority expected of him. I would, in fact, be quite in order for me to say that the standard set by Dr Grixti is a definite benchmark against which future studies commissioned by the authority will be set.

Joseph M. Pirotta
3rd April, 2000

For Katja and Vanessa

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If this survey proves to be of value, a great deal of the credit should go to the generosity of the persons listed above. Any faults, omissions and limitations are of course my own.

Joe Grixti
MA (Oxon). Ph.D (Bristol)

January, 2000

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION:
QUALITATIVE MEDIA RESEARCH

1.1 LOCATING THE RESEARCH TRADITION

It is important to stress that this is a report of *qualitative* (rather than quantitative) research. Though the data collected for the project as well as the size of the research sample are relatively larger than would normally be the case in this type of study, it should be stressed at the outset that it is not the main aim here to provide statistical statements about the distribution or probability of particular phenomena, or to focus on quantifiable data. Starting from the recognition that young television and radio audiences are not a homogeneous group, this project attempts to paint a clearer picture of how different groups of children and teenagers use, perceive and respond to television and radio. The main focus falls on television, and the objective is to develop a deeper understanding of viewing habits, attitudes and influences, in order to develop a more powerful set of theories and hypotheses about them.

This study is based on what children and their parents and teachers have to say about television and radio. More importantly, it is based on *how* they say it. What children and people generally say about television does not necessarily reflect the ways in which they watch it. Nor does it necessarily tell us all the truth about what they feel, about the number of hours they spend watching, or why they choose to watch one type of programme rather than another. This is especially the case with information supplied to an unknown interviewer in the company of one's peers at school. But there is a lot which can be gleaned from the ways in which they express their views, especially if one also makes allowance for the variables affecting the social interaction in which the statements are made. Trying to make sense of how children talk about their experiences of television also involves trying to understand how they define themselves and their social relations. Perceptions of and attitudes to differences in social class, gender, age, as well as regional and ethnic identity play a significant role in how children talk about their likes and dislikes, or even what they are willing to own up to when talking about television. In focus group discussions like the ones undertaken for this project, for instance, children will sometimes claim distinctly "adult" tastes and viewing habits in an attempt to gain status with others in the group, or to outrage the interviewer (see also Buckingham, 1993:77).

The question of what kinds of influence television is having on children is also one which arouses many strongly held views, emotions and preconceptions. These are preconceptions which are likely to be deeply ingrained, and often not necessarily thought out logically. Television is so familiar to all of us: we not only all watch it, but most of us have also watched children watch it and noticed its effects on them (or what we have assumed to be its effects) with varying degrees of concern and condescension. We have also all heard the many stories (usually avidly reported by the media themselves) about "copy-cat" crimes and other appalling things happening while children, young adults and immature moral defectives were allegedly under the influence of the demon tube. These preconceptions inevitably influence how we approach and respond to questions about the effects of television, and also how we react to what we are told about them by others. The trouble is that this "received wisdom" is fraught with all sorts of motivations, many of which have little foundation in the actual experiences and consequences of watching television itself. Children and adults will frequently also give answers to questions about their experiences of watching television which, they assume, will fit in with the received wisdom which they expect a figure of authority (like an academic researcher) to take for granted. In other words, they will give you the answer which they think you will approve of.

Television has become an integral part of family life. It can no longer be thought of as an external or intrusive force which (as one dark version has it) acts as an outside threat to family values, or (in the more optimistic account) has the potential of enhancing those values like a benevolent outsider. The extent to which television has become an inseparable component of family living is reflected in its positioning in the living, eating and sleeping areas of our homes; and in the fact that it is so often on when the family is doing other things. [1] It has become part of the meanings and associations of those areas and activities. To ask and answer questions about its effects, therefore, we also have to see it as part of all the experiences and meaning-making activities of everyday life which we take for granted. In this context, making direct cause-and-effect claims about the influence of, say, portrayals of sex and violence become all the more misleading. As David Buckingham (1993:103) has noted,

> The relationship between television and the family is bound to be a focus of much broader moral and political anxieties. Television is not merely part of the mess of family life, or simply an appliance like a dishwasher or a

[1]Specific numbers and locations of TV sets in the homes of the Maltese children interviewed for this survey are listed and discussed in Chapter 3.

> vacuum cleaner. In considering 'family viewing' we are inevitably considering the operation of social power, both within and beyond the family itself.

The questions of how children perceive, interact with, and are influenced by television, radio and the media more generally have been hot topics of debate for a very long time. Popular notions of how portrayals of violence and sex might influence or affect viewers assume that the medium (television, most often) has the power to change young people's attitudes, perceptions, moods, inhibitions or feelings, and in some cases even to trigger or stimulate violent action or action which imitates what is seen. For all their insistence on the primacy of common sense in this sphere, many of these assertions about the power of example and imitation are backed by a large array of data and reports of experimental studies conducted by adherents of various factions of learning and social learning theory in the social sciences. These were studies which set out to empirically test cause and effect connections between viewing and behaviour/attitudes (most notably in relation to violence and advertising), and which variously claimed to prove such connections through a range of processes — including arousal, imitation, desensitisation, disinhibition, 'mainstreaming', distorting views about conflict resolution (see Lowery and DeFleur, 1995; Newton, 1996). Over recent years, a lot of doubt has been shed on the reliability of most of these studies, particularly in terms of (i) whether their findings could be claimed to apply beyond the specific conditions in which they had been conducted, and, more importantly, (ii) in terms of what have come to be recognised as the theoretically blinkered (positivist) methodologies and assumptions on which many of them were based (see, e.g. Gunter, 1985; Grixti, 1989). As Graham Murdock (1997:69) uncompromisingly puts it, there is a

> circular relationship between empiricist science and common sense thinking [which] was built into academic work on media 'effects' from the outset. The dominant research tradition adopted the definition of the 'problem' already established in popular and political commentary. The result was banal science, which failed to ask awkward questions, to pursue other possible lines of inquiry or to place 'effects' in their social contexts.

The most influential studies of media audiences developed in recent years have placed their major emphasis on audiences as active interpreters and judges of media products, and on seeking to identify how viewers themselves define and make sense of what they watch. According to David Buckingham (1998:137),

> The notion of 'activity' here is partly a rhetorical one, and it is often used in rather imprecise ways. Yet what unites this work is a view of children, not as passive recipients of television messages, but as active interpreters and processors of meaning. The meaning of television, from this perspective, is not delivered *to* the audience, but is constructed by it.

This emphasis has led to a movement away from research that concentrates upon whether or not the mass media confirm or disrupt the status quo, and towards a more concerted effort to take account of the symbolic nature of cultural meanings and communication. As Virginia Nightingale (1996: ix) puts it, "[i]nstead of measuring the effects of the media on people's behaviour, the effects were proposed to lie in people's lived relationship with popular texts."

One key influence in this approach was the social anthropologist Clifford Geertz, particularly his insistence that what we call culture is the web of signification that has been spun by meaningful actions. The analysis of culture, Geertz insisted, is "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1973:5). Researchers have thus become more concerned with asking how different types of representations are perceived and interpreted, and how viewer responses relate to the cultural contexts in which they are produced.

> At least in principle, viewers are seen here not as unique and coherent individuals, but as sites of conflict, 'points of intersection' between a variety of potentially conflicting discourses, which in turn derive from different social locations and experiences (for example, in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity). Different discourses will be mobilized in different ways by different viewers in different contexts; and the production of meaning is therefore seen as a complex process of social negotiation. (Buckingham, 1998: 142)

The emphasis, then, is on trying to identify how meaning is constructed through social processes, and this inevitably involves taking account of the power-relationships which characterise them (see Hodge and Tripp, 1986). As Ellen Seiter emphasises:

> The methodological implications of this theoretical work are that what people say when talking about the media cannot be taken at face value. We cannot assume that what subjects say in an interview reflects individual, idiosyncratic views, or that what is spoken is all there is to be said on the subject. First our subjects may not have access to all that might be going on with their media consumption, because of the role of the unconscious. Second, media tastes do not simply reflect identity, but are actually constitutive of it. Therefore, one of the things we would expect to hear from

> subjects is the reiteration of certain prior existing discourses on the self, society, politics and gender. (Seiter, 1999:29)

One method which, since the 1980s, has become a key component of audience and reception studies inspired by these considerations in media research has been the focus group interview. This is a qualitative research technique aimed at revealing patterns of viewpoints, attitudes and feelings. In the focus group interview, a small group of people is brought to a central location where a skilled moderator leads an intensive but free flowing discussion on a predetermined topic, issue, or problem. As a form of qualitative research the interview setting here is more subjective and more informal than quantitative research, requiring the researcher to assume the role of a moderator or facilitator who encourages active participation and interchange (Schmidt and Conaway, 1999: 280). Hansen et al (1998:261-262) identify two main reasons why this approach has been found useful in studies aiming at qualitative depth:

> The first reason concerns the argument that the generation of meanings and interpretations of media content is 'naturally' a social activity, that is, audiences form their interpretations of media content and their opinions about such content through conversations and social interaction.
> [...] The second, and perhaps more pragmatic reason [...] is that [focus group discussions] offer dynamics and ways — not available in individual interviews — of eliciting, stimulating, and elaborating audience interpretations. It is precisely the group dynamics and interaction found where several people are brought together to discuss a subject, that is seen as the attraction of this mode of data-collection.

In this sense, the focus group has been described as becoming "a catalyst for the individual expression of latent opinion, for the generation of group consensus, for free-associating to life, and for analytic statements about art" (Hansen et al, 1998: 262).

1.2 TELEVISION TALK AS SELF DEFINITION

One of the main contributions of ethnographic audience research since the 1970s has been its demonstration that media consumption is embedded in the routines, rituals and institutions of everyday life. Several studies have shown how the meanings of the media are inseparable from and negotiated within these public and domestic contexts (of Seiter, 1999:2). Talking about television and radio, therefore, inevitably also involves a social process of defining or positioning oneself and others, and such positioning is part of ongoing definitions and redefinitions of power and social identity (see Buckingham, 1993:75).

This process of self-positioning and self-definition was well illustrated in this survey by the way in which a number of the children and teenagers who were interviewed in non-government schools unhesitatingly identified "all the Maltese programmes on the local stations" as the programmes they disliked most and watched least. According to one group of 14 year-old girls (39)[2], for instance, "all the Maltese channels are rubbish", and compared to English and Italian stations they are embarrassingly backward. The fact that these children and teenagers appeared to speak exclusively in English (or rather, a type of English traditionally but not exclusively associated with the Sliema area) and often also proudly drew attention to the fact that they did not speak or understand Maltese, suggests that the attitude is primarily an assertion of superior social status. The attitude was well captured in a comment made by an 11 year-old boy (53) when he was describing how his grandmother "forces" him to watch the Maltese soap opera *Ipokriti* because she wants him to learn Maltese, even though he dislikes it intensely. Asked why he dislikes it so much he replied:

> Because for me, in English a soap opera is OK, but Maltese is a rough language and I don't like it, on soap operas. I don't think it's right, *u!*

Significantly, locally produced programmes in Maltese were repeatedly identified as the most popular by children from other socio-economic backgrounds. According to these children and teenagers, it is precisely because the programmes are in Maltese that they are widely watched and enjoyed. But even here there were interesting variations and nuances which indicate the inadequacy of ascribing such differences exclusively to regional or socio-economic factors. A boy

[2] Numbers which appear in the text like this refer to the numbers assigned to interviews and other source data collected for this study. These are explained in Chapter 2.

interviewed in a state secondary school (46) was also very dismissive of local productions (including adverts) because of what he perceived as their lack of professionalism when compared with foreign productions. He gave examples of poor dubbing techniques, unconvincing acting and what he saw as shoddy production values and inadequacies. But here too there was also an unmistakable element of self-positioning involved in his assertions, particularly noticeable in the way he explained these limitations to the focus group. His preference for non-Maltese programmes thus also became a proclamation of his heightened sophistication and technical knowledge. Interestingly, one of the parents interviewed at a factory in Bulebel (58) also insisted that as far as he was concerned the local stations might as well not exist, because he watched nothing but the Italian stations and had no patience with the lack of professionalism he saw locally.

Something of what all this involves can be illustrated through the following excerpt from one of the focus group discussions conducted for this survey (44). The exchange took place towards the beginning of an interview with 11 year old boys in a state junior lyceum, while they were taking turns to say what they liked watching on television. Three boys had already answered the question, identifying cartoons as favourites, when it came to James's turn[3]. As it turned out, his favourite programmes were essentially not very different from those of his peers, but the way he contextualised his answer changed the group dynamics significantly:

James Jiena, mhux biex ng]id li jiena sinjur, imma lanqas biex ng]id li jien fqir, g]andna is-satellite, ji[ifieri g]andna xi five hundred channels, biex tqalleb...

Interviewer Five hundred?
James Xi five hundred channels g]andna...
Interviewer Il-marelli!
Boy 2 Tajjeb!

James For myself, not because I want to say that I am rich, but neither to say that I am poor, we have satellite, which means we have some five hundred channels, to flick through...
Interviewer Five hundred?
James Some five hundred channels we have...
Interviewer Goodness!
Boy 2 That's good!

[3] Names of interviewees have been changed to protect confidentiality.

James *(laughs)* u noqg]od inqalleb, [ieli nag]mel sa nofs il-lejl biex narah, noqod nara it-television. U meta nkun ninzerta], nara xi naqra cartoons, cartoons dejjem, qatt ma nitlifhom. Per e\empju, fuq id-Disney Channel qatt ma nitlifhom. U xi films hekk, thrillers, dramatic, adventure, b]al *Ace Ventura*, naqra *Mr Bean* jew xi videos, u hekk...

James *[laughs]* and I do a lot of flicking, sometimes I stay till midnight to see it, I stay up watching television. And when I happen to chance on it, I watch a bit of cartoons, cartoons always, I never miss them. For example, on the Disney Channel I never miss them. And some films so, like *Ace Ventura*, a bit of *Mr Bean* or else some videos, and so on...

Unlike his peers, who simply listed their programme preferences, James starts by positioning himself socially and claiming the superior prestige value of having satellite. By drawing attention to the fact that he has access to five hundred channels (allegedly, anyway), and to the amount of time he devotes to exploring all of them, James is also claiming greater familiarity with the type of knowledge and information which he assumes the interviewer to be after — and which in the interview situation has thus become a form of capital and a potential source of social power or authority. The fact that the establishment of this authoritative position is uppermost in his mind is also reflected in his pointed reference to the Disney Channel (only available through satellite) as the place where he never misses cartoons. Later in the interview he told at length an outrageously unlikely story which he claimed to be an actual item of news which he had got through the internet (another piece of technology to which he claimed easy access, while his peers did not) but which he said was "top secret". Immediately after the exchange quoted above, the other boys were asked if they had satellite too. One of them did, but he pointed out that it's not the 500 channel variety which his family has, but only the 200. Another boy said that his family had full cable reception, but he wasn't sure of the number of channels. James quickly informed him that it was fifty two, and took the opportunity to point out that he had cable too. By this stage, James's superior position as an authority on the subject of television had apparently been established and accepted by his peers.

There are, in other words, a number of complex dynamics at play when children (and adults) speak in group situations like those undertaken in this project. Such dynamics will inevitably influence what they say and how they say it. Understanding and giving due weight to those dynamics and other contextual factors constitutes an important component of this project's objectives.

1.3 TAPE RECORDER AND STRANGER INFLUENCE

The fact that the interviews were being tape recorded created a range of responses from the children. I explained to them that the discussion was being recorded simply to help me keep a record of what was said so that I could go through it later in order to write up the report. Because they had been told that they were going to be interviewed about television ("fuq it-televixin" in Maltese, i.e. "on television"), some of the children at first thought that I was making a television or radio programme and was recording them for inclusion in this. I explained to them that this was not the case, and that what they said would be treated as confidential, in that their names would not be revealed. Presumably because they were told that I was conducting a survey commissioned by the Broadcasting Authority, a number of the interviewees (and this included some of the parents) appeared to take the interview situation as a chance to voice complaints or influence broadcasting policy. Some of the children gave me a run down on what they thought should be changed on local television; and one parent listed local media figures who, in his view, were far too influential in the local broadcasting scene and whose power and influence needed to be controlled if content and policy were going to get any better.

Some of the children remained conscious of being recorded throughout the interview. They could see the small flat microphone lying on the table around which they were sitting. Many of them had never seen that particular shape of microphone before, and they asked questions about it. One or two frequently lent over to touch it, made funny noises or kept repeating "hello! hello!" into it. While the younger children were very keen on hearing themselves on tape after the interviews were over, most of the older ones, especially the girls, categorically refused to listen to themselves. "That would be a disaster!" one 14-year-old exclaimed. In one case, a seven year-old girl asked me to turn off the tape recorder briefly because she wanted to tell me something secret. It was something, she said, which she was not supposed to tell anyone at school, but "I'm just telling you because I trust you!" The fact that the other four girls in the group also got to hear her "secret" did not seem to bother her. Towards the end of the interview, however, she asked me again to go through why I had been asking them questions. She wanted to be reassured that I was in fact simply interested in finding out what they thought about television, and that I was not "trying to, like... you see if we like something bad, and then you tell it to the police."

In most of the cases, however, the children appeared to forget about the tape recorder fairly quickly and to speak quite fluently and openly. In a number of cases, they would address their comments to

other members of the group rather than to the interviewer. There were many occasions when they would get carried away with the subject and speak quite animatedly in response to each other. Generally, however, they took turns to speak out, often putting their hands up when they thought of something to say while someone else was speaking. I was struck by how keen many of them were to tell stories and describe their experiences. At times this led to their going off on what appeared to be a tangent — telling me about their pets, say, about the imminent arrival of a baby in their home, or about a grandfather who had seen ghosts. In most cases I allowed these digressions to proceed uninterrupted, for a while anyway, partly because this helped in encouraging the children to "open up", but more importantly because what at first appeared a digression often proved to have important connections, or led to the discussion of issues and feelings which turned out to be very relevant to the questions I wished to explore, and thus cast new light on them. This was particularly the case in relation to questions as to what distinctions children of different ages made between reality and fantasy, and their ability or otherwise to identify lines of demarcation between the two. These issues are discussed in some detail in Chapter 5.

1.4 CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Children's willingness (in group situations anyway) to provide information about all sorts of apparently unrelated subjects also underlines the fact that their understanding of and reactions to television are deeply enmeshed with all sorts of other mundane everyday experiences. In one interview(3), a seven-year-old girl suddenly announced that she used to have a lovely puppy which she really loved, but that her mother had thrown it away. Asked to explain, she said that she had been given the puppy by a relative, and that it was really cute, but her mother didn't like it, and so she had put it in a box and thrown it into the rubbish skip. This revelation came in the course of a group discussion in which the girls were talking about things on television which scare them and cause them to have restless nights. Perhaps the most disconcerting thing about it all was the fact that the girl made the revelation in a very matter-of-fact manner. In another interview(5), two seven year-old girls had just been describing how their father regularly insisted on watching the news, and how their usual response to this was either to wait for him to fall asleep so as to change channels, or else to go off to watch the family's other television set by themselves. The subject of alternating between different sets triggered this contribution from another girl in the group:

> Melissa But.. and.. we have two bathrooms, as well. This has nothing to do with it, I'm just saying it... And once I wanted to go to the bathroom where we usually go and there was my father. So then I went to the en suite where I only go sometimes, and that as well, and there was my mummy *(laughs)*. I didn't know what to do! *Hekk*, I nearly fainted! And then my mummy said, "I'm finished."

Incongruous and trivial as all this sounds, it draws attention to the fact that though children's talk flicks from one idea to the next, this flicking is not totally arbitrary or insignificant. In the process of interpreting and making sense of their world, these children are continually making active connections between different aspects of their experiences. When they think and talk about television, they see it as forming an inseparable part of that family experience. The experience of watching television is firmly enmeshed with all the other mundane aspects of everyday life. In their minds as in their talk, watching television is part of home life.

Apparent digressions often also draw attention to the fact that media consumption and interpersonal relationships are closely intertwined, and that children's enjoyment of the television watching experience takes in also what is happening around them at the time. In one interview (51), a six year old boy happily described the pleasure he gets from lying on his father's tummy while watching television. This drew similar stories from the other children — how funny a girl's younger brother looked when he fell asleep on the sofa, or else:

Id-daddy j]obb jara films li jdumu, u mbag]ad jil]aqq jorqod, u jien biex inqajmu inmur inmisslu \aqqhu! *(laughter)* G]ax idejjaqni jon]or!	My dad likes watching films which go on and on, and then he falls asleep, and to wake him up I go up to him and touch his tummy! *(laughter)* Because I don't like him snoring!

In contrast to this type of ingenuous revelation, there were occasions when it was difficult to get the children to say anything beyond what they imagined that, as a figure of authority, I would consider the "right" answers. In one interview (5), when I was explaining why I was going around schools talking to children and asking them questions, one seven-year-old girl volunteered: "So you find out if they are educated." It was presumably because of this conviction that she repeatedly responded to my questions by giving what she considered to be the "smart" or "correct" answer. This, incidentally, was in marked contrast to the types of things which were

being said by the other children in her group which, among other things, included the bathroom revelation quoted above.

More strikingly, this attitude was very apparent with the children I interviewed in an inner city state primary school. Before I met these children, I had been informed by the school authorities that they all came from disadvantaged backgrounds, and that I should be very careful about what and how I asked them about their home backgrounds. There was a distinct chance that fathers might be in prison, I was told, or mothers might be into drugs or prostitution. In contrast to this, most of the children appeared keen to describe themselves and their home lives as models of religious rectitude. They frequently gave answers which they presumably assumed to be praiseworthy, but which often sounded like a front. A number of the children appeared keen to list all the evils of television, as if these had been pumped into them. Indeed, what I repeatedly experienced in these particular interviews was an overbearing sense of rigid moral and religious censorship which the children had internalised — or at least felt they had to repeat when questioned by figures associated with authority. They sounded and felt "hemmed in" — possibly as a result of the great contrast provided by their home and school experiences.

Inevitably, my feelings about what I interpreted to be happening in these interviews will have influenced how I reacted to what the children were telling me. In the body of the report, I have tried as much as possible to let the children speak for themselves, to let their voices and concerns to come through; but I have also been very conscious of the need to contextualise what they said and how they said it so as to better understand and interpret it.

Chapter 2
METHODOLOGY

2.1 OUTLINE OF METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SAMPLE

The fieldwork undertaken for this project involved two components as the main source of data:

(i) Fifty-four separate focus group interviews with a total of 299 children aged between six and fourteen and coming from different geographic areas and socio-economic backgrounds.
(ii) Five separate focus group interviews with a total of 28 parents and teachers of children aged between six and fourteen.

All these interviews were conducted by the chief researcher. For purposes of triangulation and contextualisation, the project also included the analysis of data from four other sources. The term *triangulation* is used here to refer to the verification of the reliability of data collected using one set of research tools by comparing it with data collected through the use of different methods.[4] The secondary sources of data used for triangulation purposes were:

(iii) A total of 324 essays on the general topic of "TV Violence" written by children aged 11 to 14.

(iv) A series of tape recorded interviews with secondary school children conducted by student-teachers. These were made up of: two whole class discussions; eight one-on-one interviews; four focus group discussions.

[4] The term "triangulation" derives from marine navigation, where it refers to the use and comparison of signals from more than one navigational aid in order to work out a ship's location. As Real (1996: 267-8) describes it:

> *Triangulation* locates an unknown point, as in navigation, by forming a triangle and calculating from the two known vertices the third unknown vertex. In much the same way, triangulation in media analysis starts from several starting points, rather than only one, to work toward explaining yet unknown aspects of the media experience.

In qualitative research, the triangulation of data usually refers to the comparison of data derived through the use of different research methods (focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, observation, written reports, etc), or the comparison of data collected by different researchers, at different times, in different contexts, or with different participants.

(v) Written reports by fifty-three fourth year B.Ed. (Hons) students at the University of Malta outlining their own experiences of and attitudes towards television and television violence.

(vi) A television panel discussion on the topic of video game violence, which included a phone-in poll on the question: "Do you think that violent video games encourage violence among children and young adults?" It is important to stress that the programme was not set up as part of this research project, and the information derived from it is presented here simply as having symptomatic and anecdotal relevance. But, because a range of views and attitudes were expressed during this live transmission, and because the phone-in poll attracted votes from 666 callers, relevant material from the programme has been used to further triangulate the main research data.

Each of the items listed above is described and discussed in greater detail in the sections which follow.

Note on the Referencing of Data:

In the breakdown of data sources tabulated and discussed below, individual sources have been numbered from No.1 to 80. These numbers are used for referencing in the body of the report.

For ease of reference, the items can be broadly listed as follows:

Nos. 1 to 14 refer to focus group interviews with girls aged 6 to 10.
Nos. 15 to 28 refer to focus group interviews with boys aged 6 to 10.
Nos. 29 to 41 refer to focus group interviews with girls aged 11 to 14.
Nos. 42 to 50 refer to focus group interviews with boys aged 11 to 14.
Nos. 51 to 54 refer to combined focus group interviews with boys and girls aged 6 to 14.
Nos. 55 to 59 refer to focus group interviews with parents and teachers.

The numbering system also includes the following material:

Nos. 60 to 75 refer to essays written by 11 to 14 year old boys and girls.
Nos. 76 to 78 refer to a series of interviews conducted by fourth year B.Ed. (Hons) students.
No. 79 refers to self reports by B.Ed. students.
No. 80 refers to the television discussion and opinion poll.

2.2 DETAILS OF THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

2.2.1. Focus Group Interviews with Children

The interviews were conducted over four period blocks as follows:

16 - 18 December 1998
7 - 12 January 1999
13 - 16 April 1999
26 April - 4 May 1999

A total of 299 children aged between six and fourteen, were interviewed in 54 separate focus group discussions lasting between 25 and 90 minutes each (the average length of interviews was 45 minutes). All the interviews were conducted in schools by the chief researcher, during normal school hours, in a room away from the children's usual class, and in groups averaging five to six children of the same or similar age.

The total sample represents a broad cross section of socio-economic backgrounds and geographic regions. Children coming from most areas of Malta and Gozo are represented in the six state primary schools, the six state junior lyceums, the four state area secondary schools, and the five private and church schools where the children were interviewed. Children attending these schools also reflect a broad cross section of socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Children were asked what their parents' occupations were during the interviews, and the answers indicate the diversity of home backgrounds represented in the samples interviewed. A number of children listed more than one occupation for their father (as many as three or four jobs in some cases). A large proportion, but not the overwhelming majority, described their mother's occupation as "housewife" or "at home". A small number of the children interviewed described themselves as coming from single parent families, either because the parents were not living together or because one parent was deceased. Some described their father as "unemployed" or "on social security". A number of the younger children interviewed did not know what their father did for a living, or only had a vague idea (e.g. "lifts boxes", "works at the airport" or "stays at home").

Parents' occupations as identified by the children interviewed included the following:

home maker
dentist,
optician,
vet,
businessman,
radio engineer,
social worker,
insurance salesman,
secretary,
chef,
travel agent,
soldier,
Photographer,
farmer,
carpenter,
goldsmith,
grocer,
shop owner,
dressmaker,
bank teller,
police officer,
night watchman,
driving instructor,
waiter,
bus driver,
truck driver,
labourer,
cinema usher,
office messenger,
plasterer,
Unemployed
university lecturer,
lawyer,
architect,
teacher,
bank manager,
airport engineer,
accountant,
journalist,
computer technician,
hairdresser,
tourist manager,
nurse,
clerk,
builder,
stone mason,
technician,
fisherman,
salesperson,
plumber,
kindergarten assistant,
prison warden,
hotel receptionist,
confectioner,
bar manager,
taxi driver,
fitter at drydocks,
cleaner,
petrol station attendant,
Valletta market seller,
messenger,
doctor,
ostheopath,
pharmacist,
company director,
athletics coach,
advertising agent,
hotel manager,
designer,
restaurateur,
beauty therapist,
management consultant,
midwife,
TV camera operator,
ironmonger,
painter,
butcher,
car sprayer,
tailor,
electrician,
security officer,
gatekeeper,
motor mechanic,
factory worker,
tile layer,
ambulance driver,
stevedore,
chambermaid,
greengrocer,
ice-cream vendor,
student

The majority of the focus group discussions were with groups of five or six children. The exceptions were in cases where some children did not turn up (one group of 3, two groups of 4); or where more children than the researcher had requested were selected by the school principals — often because a large number had volunteered and were keen to take part, and (in one case) because the children's teacher was absent and sending a large group to the focus group interview solved an administrative problem!

The children sat with the interviewer around a table and were encouraged to speak openly. Every effort was made to make the interviews as informal and relaxed as possible. The children were informed that they were being tape recorded, and the purpose of the interview was explained to them at the start. They were also invited to listen to part of the recording at the end of the interview when time allowed. This part of the session was invariably the cause of much laughter and hilarity among the children.

One of the interviews was different in scope from the rest in that it was set up to take place immediately after the children (aged 6-7) had been watching a television programme (an episode of the TV cartoon *Spiderman*).

There are clearly methodological and interpretative problems associated with data collected in relatively artificial situations, involving children answering the questions of a stranger whom, because of the formal school setting, they usually assumed to be a representative of authority. These and related methodological issues are discussed in some detail in Chapter 1**.**

2.2.1.1 Breakdown of the Research Sample

Table 1 provides an overview of the total interview sample. Table 2 lists the schools where interviews were held. Tables 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 provide a breakdown of the composition of the focus groups interviewed. The interviews have been numbered for purposes of referencing in the report. These numbers do not refer to the chronological sequence in which the interviews were held.

GENDER	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	NUMBER OF CHILDREN
Girls	27	159
Boys	23	140
Boys + Girls	4	12 + 12
TOTAL	**54**	**299**

Table 1: Total Interviews

State Primary	State Area Secondary	State Junior Lyceums	Private and Church Schools (Primary and Secondary)
Valletta	Antonio Bosio Boys' Secondary, Gzira	San {u\epp }addiem Boys' Junior Lyceum, Paola	St Benild School, Sliema
Bir\ebbu[a B	Luigi Preziosi Girls' Secondary, St Andrew's	Santa Teresa Girls' Junior Lyceum, Mrie]el	Stella Maris College, Gzira
St Julian's	Lily of the Valley Girls' Secondary, Mosta	Sir Adrian Dingli Girls' Junior Lyceum, St Patrick's	St Joseph's Convent School, Sliema
Sliema	Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary, Hamrun	Dun {u\epp |ammit Boys' Junior Lyceum, Hamrun	Chiswick House School, Kappara
Mellie]a		Ninu Cremona Boys' Junior Lyceum, Victoria, Gozo	St Martin's College, Swatar
Victoria (Gozo)		Kan. {an Fran[isk A[ius De Soldanis Girls' Junior Lyceum, Victoria, Gozo	

Table 2: Schools where children were interviewed

No.	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size

1	6-7	Sliema Primary (State)	16/4/99	9.35 - 10.20	6
2	6-7	St Julian's Primary (State)	26/4/99	9.45 - 10.20	6
3	6-8	Valletta Primary (State)	18/12/98	9.50 - 10.30	5
4	7-8	St Julian's Primary (State)	13/4/99	10.45 - 11.40	7
5	7-8	Chiswick House School, Kappara (Private)	11/1/99	9.40 - 10.45	5
6	8-9	Bir\ebbu[a B Primary (State)	7/1/99	11.30 - 12.15	5
7	8-9	Victoria, Gozo, Primary (State)	28/4/99	9.25 - 10.05	6
8	8-9	St Joseph's Convent School, Sliema (Church)	17/12/98	11.10 - 12.10	3
9	9-10	Valletta Primary (State)	18/12/98	11.15 - 11.50	5
10	9-10	Bir\ebbu[a B Primary (State)	7/1/99	10.45 - 11.25	5
11	9-10	St Julian's Primary (State)	26/4/99	11.20 - 11.50	5
12	9-10	Sliema Primary (State)	16/4/99	11.45 - 12.10	6
13	9-10	St Joseph's Convent School, Sliema (Church)	17/12/98	9.30 - 10.40	5
14	9-10	Chiswick House School, Kappara (Private)	11/1/99	11.50 - 12.35	5
					74

Table 3: Interviews with Girls Aged 6 - 10

No.	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size
15	6-7	Sliema Primary (State)	16/4/99	11.10 - 11.40	9
16	6-7	St Julian's Primary (State)	26/4/99	10.25 - 10.50	5
17	6-7	St Benild School, Sliema (Church)	3/5/99	7.50 - 8.40	6
18	6-8	Valletta Primary (State)	18/12/98	9.15 - 9.45	5
19	7-8	St Julian's Primary (State)	13/4/99	9.45 - 10.30	6
20	7-8	Stella Maris College, Gzira (Church)	16/12/98	11.05 - 11.40	5
21	7-8	Chiswick House School, Kappara (Private)	11/1/99	10.55 - 11.35	5
22	8-9	Bir\ebbu[a B Primary (State)	7/1/99	12.45 - 1.30	5
23	8-9	Victoria, Gozo, Primary (State)	28/4/99	10.10 - 10.45	6
24	9-10	Valletta Primary (State)	18/12/98	11.55 - 12.30	5
25	9-10	Bir\ebbu[a B Primary (State)	7/1/99	9.40 - 10.25	6
26	9-10	St Julian's Primary (State)	26/4/99	11.55 - 12.35	5
27	9-10	Sliema Primary (State)	16/4/99	12.15 - 12.45	5
28	9-10	Chiswick House School, Kappara (Private)	12/1/99	1.45 - 2.30	5
					78

Table 4: Interviews with Boys Aged 6 - 10

No.	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size
29	11-12	St Julian's Primary (Yr 6 Repeater) (State)	13/4/99	1.45 - 2.15	6
30	11-12	Lily of the Valley Girls' Secondary School, Mosta (State)	18/1/99	12.40 - 1.15	5
31	11-12	Santa Teresa Girls' Junior Lyceum, Mrie]el (State)	18/12/98	1.30 - 2.50	5
32	11-12	Lui[i Preziosi Girls' Secondary School, St Andrew's (State)	15/4/99	1.20 - 2.00	6
33	11-12	Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary School, Hamrun (State)	12/1/99	9.05 - 9.55	5
34	12-13	Lui[i Preziosi Girls' Secondary School, St Andrew's (State)	15/4/99	12.10 - 12.55	6
35	12-13	Kan. {an Fran[isk A[ius De Soldanis Girls' Junior Lyceum, Victoria, Gozo (State)	28/4/99	1.25 - 2.05	7
36	12-13	St Joseph's Convent School, Sliema (Church)	17/12/98	8.35 - 9.30	5
37	13-14	Lui[i Preziosi Girls' Secondary School, St Andrew's (State)	15/4/99	11.15 - 12.00	6
38	13-14	Sir Adrian Dingli Girls' Junior Lyceum, St Patrick's (State)	27/4/99	9.25 - 10.45	7
39	13-14	St Martin's College, Swatar (Private)	11/1/99	1.25 - 2.15	5
40	13-14	Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary School, Hamrun (State)	12/1/99	10.10 - 10.40	5
41	13-14	Lily of the Valley Girls' Secondary School, Mosta (State)	18/1/99	1.15 - 1.50	5
					73

Table 5: Interviews with Girls aged 11 - 14

No.	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size
42	10-11	Stella Maris College, Gzira (Church)	16/12/98	10.20 - 11.00	4
43	11-12	St Julian's Primary (Yr 6 Repeater) (State)	13/4/99	11.50 - 12.30	6
44	11-12	San {u\epp }addiem Boys' Junior Lyceum, Paola (State)	17/12/98	1.05 - 1.55	4
45	12-13	Stella Maris College, Gzira (Church)	16/12/98	9.15 - 10.00	5
46	12-13	Antonio Bosio Boys' Secondary School, Gzira (State)	14/4/99	11.50 - 12.35	6
47	12-13	Ninu Cremona Boys' Junior Lyceum, Victoria, Gozo (State)	28/4/99	11.30 - 12.40	8
48	13-14	St Martin's College, Swatar (Private)	11/1/99	2.20 - 3.05	5
49	13-14	Dun {uzepp |ammit Boys' Junior Lyceum, Hamrun (State)	27/4/99	12.00 - 12.35	6
50	14-15	Antonio Bosio Boys' Secondary School, Gzira (State)	14/4/99	11.15 - 11.45	6
					50

Table 6: Interviews with Boys aged 11 - 14

No.	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size
51	5-6	Mellie]a Primary (State)	29/4/99	12.50 - 1.50	3 boys + 3 girls
52	9-10	Mellie]a Primary (State)	29/4/99	11.15 - 12.00	3 boys + 3 girls
53	11-12	St Martin's College, Swatar (Private)	30/4/99	10.25 - 11.30	3 boys + 3 girls
54	13-14	St Martin's College, Swatar (Private)	30/4/99	11.35 - 12.35	3 boys + 3 girls
					24

Table 7: Interviews with Children in Mixed Gender Groups

2.2.1.2 The Interview Setting

As is indicated by the tables above, groups were made up of an average of five or six same age children per group. Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes — the longest interviews lasted up to 90 minutes, the shortest around 25 minutes. For the majority of interviews, boys were interviewed in separate groups from girls. The reasons for this are outlined under 2.2.1.4 below. Towards the end of the fieldwork, however, a series of four mixed gender interviews were held with groups each made up of three boys and three girls and falling within the age groups 5-6, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14.

Interviews were held either in Maltese or English, depending on which language the children felt most comfortable with. In practical terms, this meant that the majority of interviews were conducted in Maltese — the exceptions were interviews with the boys and girls in the co-educational private school, the girls in the girls' church school, and some of the boys interviewed in the boys' church school.

The focus group discussions followed a similar structure, with variations to accommodate individual interests or group dynamics. I usually started by explaining that I was meeting different groups of children to find out what they liked and disliked about television, and explained that this was part of a project commissioned by the Malta Broadcasting Authority. The children then took turns to give their names, age and month of birth, parents' occupation, home town, and also the ages and sex of any brothers and sisters (I jotted this information down while they gave it). After these preliminaries, they were asked whether they liked television, which programmes they liked and which they disliked most. In a number of cases, these questions were enough to get the children to talk spontaneously on a range of topics which I had planned to cover anyway. To ensure that as many of these topics as possible were covered, I had a check list of questions in front of me to remind me of the areas I wished to cover.

This check list is reproduced below to give a general idea of areas I set out to explore. When, how or even if individual questions were put at all depended very much on how the discussions were flowing. The age and gender of each focus group clearly also determined whether and how different questions were put or explained.

GENERAL

Do you like watching TV? What do you like most on television? Why? What do you dislike most on television? Why?

Do you have more than one TV set at home? One in your room? Do you have cable/satellite? A video recorder? What sort of videos do you like watching?

Do you usually watch TV on your own or with other people in your family?
Who decides which programmes are going to be watched?

Do you think boys like watching different programmes from girls? Why do you think that is? What sort of programmes do girls like? What sort of programmes do boys like?

How much time do you spend watching TV each day? What about the weekends and holidays? Do you watch more or less than during the school week?

Can you watch TV whenever you like, or are there set times when you can and cannot watch? What is the latest time you have stayed up to watch television?

Do you think that children of your age should be allowed to watch whatever they like on TV? Why? Why not?

Do you think children can be harmed by television? How?

Are there programmes on TV which you think are not good for children of your age to watch?

Some people say that there is too much violence on TV. Others say that this is not true. What do you think?

What would you consider to be a "violent programme"? Can you name examples? Describe them? Should children be allowed to watch such programmes?

Do you think violence affects the people watching? How? In what ways?

Does it make any difference if the violence appears in a cartoon programme as distinct from the news (or an action film or a horror film)? How? Why?

Can you remember seeing or hearing about any programme or film which you thought was really unpleasant, frightening, or too violent?

Do you personally like programmes with a lot of violence in them? Why? Why not?

[For older children:]
Some people say that it is not good for children to watch programmes which deal with adult themes and matters to do with sex. What do you think?

Some people say that there is too much emphasis on politics on Maltese television and radio. Others say that that this is what most people want. What do you think? Why? Explain.

Checklist of Questions about TV

Radio

Do you like listening to radio?

What sort of programmes do you normally listen to? How often?

What do you like most on radio? What do you dislike most?

Do you listen to specific programmes, or anything which happens to be on?

Do you switch channels often? What do you look for? Why?

Checklist of Questions about Radio

ADVERTS

What do you think of adverts on TV and radio?

Do you think there are too many, too few or just the right amount? Why?

Do you think adverts influence people to buy the products or in any other way?

Have you ever wanted to buy something because you saw it advertised on television?

Can you remember any occasions when you were disappointed after buying a product because it was not as good as the advert had led you to believe?

Is there an advert which you can think of which you really like, or which you think is really good? Why? Does it make you want to buy the product?

Do you have any favourite adverts? Which? Why?

Are there any adverts which you can't stand? Which? Why?

Do you know what "product placement" is? Do you think it's more likely to make people buy products than straight adverts?

Have you ever chosen to buy something (or asked your parents to buy you something) because you saw it advertised?

Checklist of Questions about Advertising

2.2.1.3 Selection of Children

In most cases the children were chosen for each interview by their teachers, the school principal, or the assistant headteacher. The only requirement which was stipulated when arrangements were being made for holding the interviews was that the children should preferably be ones who would not feel inhibited about speaking out in a group situation. School principals and teachers interpreted this request differently. In some cases, they felt that they should have their school represented by their best students, or by members of the school's debating society. In others the sample was picked almost at random (often after I arrived at the school and in my presence), depending on, say, which children fitting the age group requested had finished their class work and could be dispensed with, or in another case, which children happened to be without a teacher on that day and would thus not be too disrupted. As emerged from the variety of ways the different children spoke (or did not speak), a wide cross section of abilities and attitudes were represented.

2.2.1.4 Gender Issues

Most of the interviews were conducted in separate gender groups. Media representations of violence and sex are often claimed to elicit different reactions from males and females (Schlesinger et al, 1992 and 1999; Greenberg et al, 1993; Goldstein, 1998; Morrison, 1999). It was therefore felt that these differences could be explored better in single-sex settings. Also, boys and girls are likely to speak differently in single-sex and mixed-gender groups. There can be a tendency for one gender to dominate the discussion, or to say things simply to provoke or impress members of the other sex. There is also the issue of different rates of development between sexes — a point which was well illustrated by the number of times that teenage girls interviewed in single-sex groups for this project commented that boys tend to mature more slowly than they do.

Towards the end of the fieldwork, a set of four interviews were held with different age groups in mixed gender groups (51-54) in order to explore whether there would be significant differences in the ways boys and girls spoke about their experiences of television in this setting. There were, in fact, both differences and similarities in the ways in which boys and girls of different ages discussed these topics in the different interview settings.

More detailed discussions and analyses of gender-based differences in responses, attitudes and patterns of behaviour are offered in the body of this report.

2.2.2. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS AND TEACHERS

A total of 28 parents and teachers of children aged between six and fourteen were interviewed in five separate focus group discussions. Participants in each case sat around a table in a relatively quiet room, with the interviewer assuming the role of facilitator. Participants were at all times aware that they were being tape recorded, and the nature and purpose of the research project in which they were participating were explained to them at the start of each session. The five interviews were made up as follows:

No.	Date	Gender	Location	Focus Group
55	13/4/99	3Male + 2Female	State primary school	5 teachers
56	25/4/99	1Male +2Female	State girls junior lyceum	3 teachers
57	25/4/99	3Male + 3Female	State girls junior lyceum	6 parents
58	3/5/99	7Male + 2Female	Factory - management and shop floor workers	9 parents
59	3/5/99	3Male + 2Female	Factory - shop floor workers	5 parents

Table 8: Interviews with Parents and Teachers

Interview No. 55 was with a group of five state primary school teachers of children who were also interviewed for the project. The interview session took place at the school and during normal school hours.

Interviews No. 56 and 57 were held during a Sunday afternoon school fest at a Girls Junior Lyceum. One group was made up of three teachers at the same school (one male, two female) who were also parents of children attending Church schools, and who chose to speak as both parents and teachers. The other group was made up of three married couples (three men, three women) whose daughters attended the school, but who also had other children (secondary school aged

boys, primary school aged boys and girls) attending other schools. Two of the men in this group were also teachers at different schools.

Interviews No. 58 and 59 were held with parents away from a school environment. The interviewees here were employees at two factories in Bulebel Industrial Estate. The interviews took place separately at the two factories. As with all the other interviews, these took the form of focus group discussions, in relatively quiet rooms made available by the factory manager or PR officer. In each case, participants sat around a table with the interviewer, who assumed the role of facilitator. One of these two groups (58) was made up of two women and seven men who ranged from management staff to shop floor workers at a manufacturing plant. The other group (59) came from a different factory and it was made up of three men and two women who were shop floor workers at the plant.

The gender combinations in both focus groups were unplanned. Participants in the first group (58) had been selected by the factory manager, who had been asked to identify a group of parents who had children whose ages fell within the research focus, and who would not feel inhibited about speaking in a group situation or uncomfortable about taking part in a survey. For the second interview (59), the PR manager at the factory had been asked to find three men and three women who were shop floor workers and who had children aged between 6 and 14. Six parents fitting these criteria were in fact identified and invited to take part in the interview; but one of the women could not get away from her place of work at the time of the interview and the discussion had to go ahead without her.

In both cases (58 and 59), the interviewees had been chosen on the criteria that (a) they had children who fell within the research age-group; (b) they would have no problem with taking part in the survey; (c) they were of an educational and socio-economic background which would be different from that represented by the parent-teachers interviewed in schools — i.e. they were not tertiary educated, and their contact with children was exclusively as parents rather than professional educators.

2.2.3 ESSAYS BY SCHOOL CHILDREN AGED 11 TO 14

This group of data, as well as that described under 2.2.4 and 2.2.5 below was collected by a group of fifty-three fourth year B.Ed. (Hons) students at the University of Malta as part of a media studies unit

assignment. For the purposes of this project, the most significant data collected by these students consisted of 324 essays on the general topic of "TV Violence" written by children aged 11 to 14 whom the student teachers were teaching at the time. The material was collected by the student-teachers towards the end of their teaching practice experience during the first semester of 1998-1999. The data thus came from children who were presumably known personally by the student-teachers, and who in their turn had also already grown to know the student-teachers over a period of time in the classroom situation.

Since this provided an opportunity to examine data collected under different conditions from those of the main research project (where the interviewer was inevitably a stranger), and because this data helps to broaden the scope and reach of the present project, this material has been taken into account for purposes of triangulation. [Please refer to the Acknowledgements section for a list of university students whose work has been quoted.]

The 324 essays were written by children aged between 11 and 14 on the general topic of "TV Violence". All the essays were written within the period 18 December 1998 - 18 January 1999.

The anticipated value of the essays was to make it possible to check for similarities and differences between the way in which children and teenagers wrote about these matters and the ways they spoke about them in the interviews, particularly if they had time to think through and possibly refine what they wanted to say. In effect, most of the patterns of ideas and attitudes which emerged when the essays were analysed were similar to those noted in the interviews, thus helping to verify and "triangulate" those findings. But on the whole, the bulk of the essays collected tended to be less informative and expansive than the interviews. Reasons for this would include the fact that a number of the children clearly had difficulties expressing themselves in written form. Many children also adopted a very formal style of writing and presentation, suggesting that they were associating the exercise too closely with assessible school work. One of the consequences of this was that what they wrote often seemed to lean heavily towards what they thought would be the "right" answer (or what they assumed would please the teacher), rather than expressing how they themselves felt about the issues. There were, however, also a number of striking exceptions to these patterns, and some of these have been quoted in different sections of this report. The fact that there were these types of patterns of response and exceptions

are significant reminders of the fact that different contextual issues need to be taken into account in the interpretation of data.

In some cases, the student teachers gave the children a series of questions to consider about the topic. In others they allowed them to write freely. The essays were mostly written in class, either in Maltese or in English according to the children's own preference. The writers come from a cross-section of state area secondary schools and junior lyceums, as well as from private schools and church schools. They are divided as follows:

No.	Age	School	Number of Essays
60	11-12	Lui[i Preziosi Girls' Secondary School, St Andrews (State)	13
61	12-13	Carlo Diacono Girls' Junior Lyceum, |ejtun (State)	12
62	12-13	Maria Goretti Girls' Area Secondary School, Santa Lucia (State)	15
63	12-13	Santa Teresa Girls' Junior Lyceum, Mrie]el (State)	6
64	12-13	St Dorothy's Convent, |ebbu[(Church)	15
65	12-13	Immaculate Conception School, Tarxien (Church)	21
66	13-14	Carlo Diacono Girls' Junior Lyceum, |ejtun (State)	5
67	13-14	Sir Adrian Dingli Girls' Junior Lyceum, St Andrews (State)	20
68	13-14	Maria Regina Girls' Junior Lyceum, Blata l-Bajda (State)	11
69	13-14	St Michael's Foundation for Education, St Andrews (Private)	8
			126

Table 9: Essays by Girls Aged 11-14

No.	Age	School	Number of Essays
70	11-12	Dun {u\epp }addiem Boys' Junior Lyceum, Corradino Hill, Paola (State)	23
71	12-13	St. Aloysius' College, B'Kara (Church)	35
72	12-13	Mikiel Anton Vassalli Boys' Junior Lyceum, Tal-}andaq (State)	92
73	13-14	Mikiel Anton Vassalli Boys' Junior Lyceum, Tal-}andaq (State)	24
74	12-14	Lorenzo Gafa' Boys' Scondary School, Vittoriosa (State)	19
75	13-14	{u\e Damato Boys' Secondary School, Paola (State)	5
			198

Table 10: Essays by Boys Aged 11-14

2.2.4 WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSIONS, ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Material for analysis in this project has also been collected from three other sets of data collected by fourth year B.Ed. students with secondary school children whom they were teaching at the time. As indicated in Table 10, this material was made up as follows:

- Two separate tape recorded whole-class discussions (76) involving two first form classes from Kan. Pawlu Pullicino Girls' Secondary School, Rabat.

- A series of one-on-one interviews (77) with eight boys and girls aged between 13 and 15 and attending :u]eppi Despott Boys' Junior Lyceum, Cottonera, and Salvatore Dimech Crafts School, Mosta.

- Four focus group interviews (78) conducted and recorded by four separate student-teachers with 11 and 12 year-old boys and girls attending De La Salle College Cottonera; Santa Teresa Girls' Junior Lyceum, Mrie[el; St Martin's College, Swatar; and Mikiel Anton Vassalli Boys' Junior Lyceum, Tal-Handaq.

No.	Activity	Number and Gender of Children	Age	Location
76	2 whole-class discussions	30 + 30 girls (approx)	11-12	Kan. Pawlu Pullicino Girls' Secondary School, Rabat
77	one-on-one interviews	5 boys 3 girls	13-15	{u\eppi Despott Boys' Junior Lyceum, Cottonera; Salvatore Dimech Crafts School, Mosta
78	4 focus-group interviews	5 boys 7 girls 3 boys + 5 girls 3 boys	11-12	De La Salle College Cottonera; Santa Teresa Girls' Junior Lyceum, Mrie]el; St Martin's College, Swatar; Mikiel Anton Vassalli Boys' Junior Lyceum, Tal-Handaq

Table 11: Interviews Conducted by Student Teachers

2.2.5 SELF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

(Data Source No. 79)

Also included in the raw data for analysis were written comments made by fourth year student-teachers about their own experiences of, opinions about and attitudes towards television and television violence. Some of these comments are quoted in the body of this report because they help towards a fuller understanding of the development and the complexities of the media viewing situation in Malta. These reports were submitted as part of a unit assignment in which the students were asked to explore the topic of "Children and Television Violence". The assignment task required students to include a "clear definition of [their] own position and ideas about this topic", and they were specifically asked to consider what these ideas were based on (their own experience? observation of children in class? relatives?); and to ask themselves how their position had (or had not) been affected by published research and/or claims made by researchers or by the media.

2.2.6. TELEVISION PANEL DISCUSSION AND OPINION POLL
(Data Source No. 80)

The programme was part of the series "Pjazza 3", and was broadcast on PBS (TVM) on 7 January 1999. The panel was made up of 4 males: two were sales agents for computer games (Nintendo and Play Station); one was a practising psychiatrist, and I was the fourth, speaking as a media studies lecturer. The programme also included a pre-recorded interview in London with the President of Sony Computer Entertainment, Europe, Chris Deering, as well as live link-ups with two groups playing video games. One of these groups was made up of older boys and young men (including a 30 year-old man who boasted that he often spent up to thirteen hours a day playing computer games during his holidays). The other was a group of younger children, apparently under the supervision of the wife of one of the main panel members (with the exception of two female interviewers, this was the only female voice heard in the programme).

The programme included a phone-in poll on the question: "Do you think that violent video games encourage violence among children and young adults?" As an incentive to encourage people to take part in the poll, the names of those phoning in went into a draw for two free Air Malta tickets to Milan.

The results of the phone-in poll were as follows:

"Do you think that violent video games encourage violence among children and young adults?"

Answer	Number of Callers	Percentages
YES	446	67%
NO	220	33%
Totals	666	100%

Chapter 3
PATTERNS AND CONTEXTS OF CONSUMPTION: TV, RADIO AND ADVERTISING

3.1 TV WATCHING PATTERNS

The amount of time which the children and teenagers interviewed said that they spend watching television varied considerably, as did the viewing patterns and locations in which they said they did this. The amount of time spent in front of the TV set ranged from around 30 minutes a day to six or seven hours.

Younger children frequently insisted that they only watch television when their parents say they can. The older age groups were much more likely to say that they could watch whenever they wanted to, or whenever they had the time. It is clear that parental controls ease off significantly as the children grow older, so that by the time they reach adolescence, young people are usually making their own choices as to what and when to watch.[5] A group of the parents interviewed (59) admitted that their teenage sons and daughters are likely to make fun of them and accuse them of being narrow minded or out of touch with reality if the try to censor their viewing.

There was also considerable variation as to where and with whom children did the watching — alone, with siblings or with parents. The responses suggest that most children watch on their own or with siblings when they watch TV after school, but are more likely to watch with one or both parents in the evening. Several reported that their fathers are usually at work or too busy to watch with them, but many also said that their fathers frequently bring videos home for the family to watch together, especially on weekends, or that their fathers insist on switching the television onto the news as soon as they get home. One 12 year-old boy (45) said that he and his two brothers usually watch together on one set, while his mother and sister watch on a separate set in the kitchen. A 13 year-old girl (37) similarly described how whenever football is on TV, her father and brother

[5] Similar patterns have been recorded in Britain. According to Buckingham (1996:304), parents' attempts to restrict their children's viewing become increasingly ineffective, and are gradually adandoned, as children enter their teenage years. Most of the parents interviewed by Buckingham argued that children should be able to make their own decisions about what they watch from around the age of thirteen, while children themselves often actively claimed the right to watch things which their parents felt to be "inappropriate" for their age.

watch it in one room, while she and her mother watch other programmes in another.

Younger children in particular frequently reported watching with siblings of similar age or younger — including 5 and 6 month-old brothers in the case of two 8 year-old girls (8). Younger children of similar ages tend to watch together and enjoy similar programmes, irrespective of gender. Disagreements and arguments with siblings as to what is going to be watched are more likely to occur as the children grow older. Several girls complained about boys always wanting to watch "fighting films" or football; while a number of boys said that girls are keener on romance, "kissing films" and Barbie dolls. It's worth noting, however, that when they spoke about specific brothers and sisters, a large proportion often said that they usually enjoyed watching the same types of programmes as they did. Methods of resolving conflict about programme choice ranged from older children bullying or tricking younger siblings into watching what they wanted, to watching in separate rooms, to taking turns at choosing. One 12 year-old boy (45), for instance, said that he and his two brothers have a roster which allows them to take turns choosing what they watch on different days of the week.

Whether children watched alone or in company also depended very much on what was being watched — cartoons and children's programmes tended to be watched alone or with siblings; TV dramas and rented videos were more likely to be watched with the rest of the family. Judging from the way they describe their viewing habits, younger children still seem to consider the TV viewing experience as a social activity, and even when they watch alone, they appear to be very conscious of the presence of parents or siblings in or near the room where they do the watching. Those who stated that they are more likely to watch by themselves or in their own bedroom tended to come from the older age groups surveyed, but even here there was considerable variation in viewing habits.

It is difficult to determine exactly how much time children and teenagers actually spend watching television on the basis of what they say about this, especially when they are providing this information to a stranger in an interview conducted in a school environment. However, a large number pointed out that their TV watching had to be juggled with other demands — including homework, study and private lessons, as well as other activities like sports, *Mu\ew*, and going out to socialise. Parental attitudes and controls clearly also play a key role in this, especially in the case of younger children. One 13 year-old girl (41) revealed that when she is not at school she spends most of the day

watching television. Many others said that during the weekend and school holidays they stay up to watch television much later than they do during the school week. In several cases, children and teenagers said that they stay up watching TV till 1.00, 2.00 or even later, and then catch up on their sleep the following morning. When asked about the 9.00 p.m. "watershed", some children commented that it does not make very much sense to have this in Malta especially in the summer months because many children stay up late anyway. One 11 year-old boy (44) boasted that he frequently stays up till about 1.00 (even during the week) flicking through cable and satellite channels in his bedroom. However, the majority said that during the school week they normally go to bed between 8.00 and around 9.30 in the case of the younger children, and between 9.00 and around 11.00 in the case of the older ones. Actual times of going to bed also varied according to what happened to be on TV.

Though they have favourite programmes which they watch regularly, the majority of the children and teenagers interviewed gave the impression that they are most likely to choose what they watch according to the station it happens to be on. Thus, when they were asked to name their favourite or most disliked TV programmes, many named channels or types or groupings of programmes (like TVM's "Kraxx") rather than specific ones. Cartoons are popular right across the age groups (and also with a number of the adults who were interviewed), though a number of the older children often also made a point of distancing themselves from a interest in cartoons because they considered them too "childish". Cable channels catering specifically for young viewers (especially the Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Fox Kids and Trouble) were also among the most frequently cited as favourite watching.

In the case of the older children and teenagers, another identifying feature for favourite film and programme genres tended to be film stars, or actors associated with a particular type of film (usually action). Thus "films of Van Damme" ("*ta' Van Damme*"), "of Schwarzenegger" or "of Bruce Lee" were often cited as examples of genre preferences — mostly by boys, but also by a considerable number of the older girls. Other genres frequently cited by boys as favourites were "fighting films", comedy, horror and soap operas. Girls frequently listed soap operas and American teen College dramas ("Saved by the Bell", "USA High", etc) as favourites. The Trouble cable station was particularly popular with girls because of the prevalence of this genre among its offerings. Maltese dramas like "Ipokriti", "Under Cover" and "Tlieta Kontra Tlieta" were also widely cited by boys and girls of all ages as greatly liked — though it should be noted that these programmes were

also described as the most hated by a number of others. Other programmes very frequently cited as favourites were "Baywatch" and "Jerry Springer". Horror was also widely cited as popular by many of the older boys and girls, though the types of horror favoured by many of the girls (especially those aged under thirteen) tended to lean more towards the milder kind represented by "Goosebumps". Here too, however, a considerable number of others specifically identified this genre among their greatest dislikes.[6]

Adverts, political debates and discussion programmes were very frequently listed as the greatest hates, though there were significant exceptions to this — particularly with TVM's "Xarabank". Though many of the younger children considered the news to be something which adults insisted on watching when they (the children) would much rather watch something else, a number said that they do enjoy the weather forecasts. Several also said that although they are not really interested in politics as such, they do follow some political reports and programmes when these deal with major national issues like the general elections and the appointment of the President.

A high proportion (especially among the older age groups) said that they do a lot of channel surfing, and usually watch whatever catches their fancy as they flick through different stations. Indeed, of the 299 children and teenagers interviewed only about three or four said specifically that they regularly choose what they are going to watch beforehand by reading through the published programme guides. The more common response to the question as to what they liked watching tended to be: "Li nsib tajjeb narah" ("Whatever I find which is good, I watch"), as one 13 year-old girl (37) put it. Many said that they watch particular programmes because there's nothing else on, or there's nothing else to do.

These patterns suggest that in general terms children and adolescents habitually associate watching television with amusement or just to pass the time. As indeed is the case with most adults, watching television is perceived as a relaxing activity which requires low concentration, and this may well lead to superficial and uncritical viewing.[7]

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[6] Attitudes and reactions to horror, action and "fighting" films are discussed more fully in Chapter 5, which deals specifically with the issue of TV violence.

[7] Similar patterns have been noted in a 1995 report published by the Department of Canadian Heritage which argues that "children of elementary school age invest increasingly less mental effort overall in watching television" and that it is "common for children to watch for relaxation, amusement or just to pass the time and hence

3.2 NUMBERS AND LOCATIONS OF TV SETS IN CHILDREN'S HOMES

In order to get a clearer picture of the contexts and environments in which young people watch and interact with television, the children and teenagers interviewed for this survey were asked specifically how many TV sets they have at home, and where these are located. The location of TV sets in the home can also indicate how possible it is for children to be watching by themselves or away from parents in different locations in the home. Of the 299 children and teenagers interviewed, 254 provided this information — a large enough sample to allow for reasonably indicative patterns to emerge. Of these, 129 were aged 6 to 10; and 125 were aged 11 to 14.[8]

The responses have been tabulated as follows:

Number of TV Sets	No. of Children Age Group 6 - 10	No. of Children Age Group 11 - 14	Totals Ages 6-14
1	31 24.03%	24 19.2%	55 21.65%
2	55 42.64%	61 48.8%	116 45.67%
3	36 27.9%	28 22.4	64 25.19%
4	7 5.43%	11 8.8%	18 7.1%
5	0 0%	1 0.8%	1 0.39%
Totals	**129** 100%	**125** 100%	**254** 100%

Table 12: Number of TV Sets at Home

These figures highlight the ubiquity of television in children's homes: the majority have more than one set (78.35%), and 32.68% have more than two. Only 21.65% have just one TV set.

process the information superficially and uncritically". In the case of adolescents too, the report contends, "watching television is a passive, relaxing activity requiring low concentration, and they are most likely to do it when they are bored or lonely (much the same way adults do)" (Josephson, 1995:17, 27).

[8] A more detailed breakdown of how these figures were reached is provided at the end of this report under Appendix B.

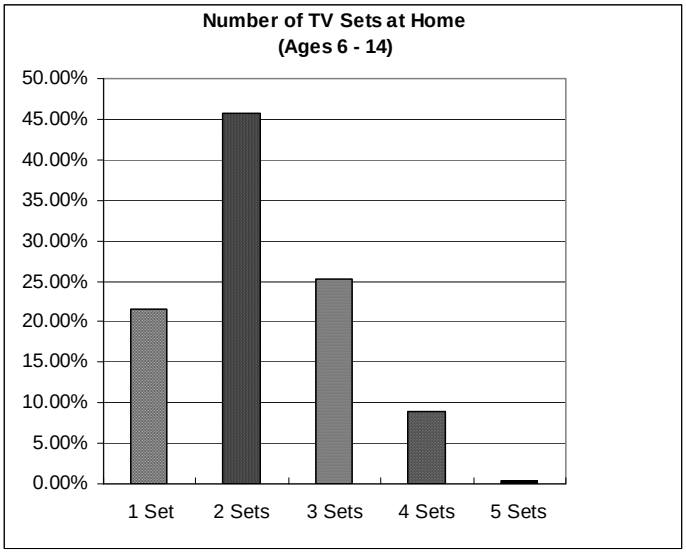

Figure 1

Television sets located in the sitting, kitchen, and dining areas of the home also tend to be on at times when other family activities are taking place. Thus, in the course of interviews, children repeatedly spoke of watching TV while having their meals, or of watching in or near the kitchen area while their mothers are busy preparing or cleaning up after meals. A small number of children also admitted that they often do their homework in front of or near a switched-on TV set, but the majority insisted that they usually only watch television before or after they finish their homework. Several also said that watching TV before they go to bed helps them get to sleep.

The following table shows the rooms in which the children and teenagers interviewed said that they have television sets.

Age	Own Bedroom	Siblings' Bedroom	Parents' Bedroom	Living Room	Kitchen	Dining Room	Other
6 - 10	32 24.8%	12 9.3%	87 67.4%	87 67.4%	36 27.9%	8 6.2%	15 11.6%
11 - 14	39 31.2%	12 9.6%	77 61.6%	98 78.4%	42 33.6%	3 2.4%	9 7.2
Totals 6 - 14	**71** 27.95%	**24** 9.44%	**164** 64.56%	**185** 72.83%	**78** 30.7%	**11** 4.33%	**24** 9.45%

Table 13: Location of TV Sets at Home

The category "Other" covers a diverse range of locations listed by interviewees, including upstairs landing, basement, garage, father's study, spare bedroom, grandmother's room, games room, and "spare sets" used only as monitors or as "substitutes" to be used when other sets break down.

According to these figures, the rooms where TV sets are most likely to be found in Maltese homes are the living room (72.83%) and the parents' bedroom (64.56%).[9] The third most likely location is children's bedrooms, since the combined total of TV sets in the respondents' own rooms and in those of their siblings is 95, ie 37.4%.

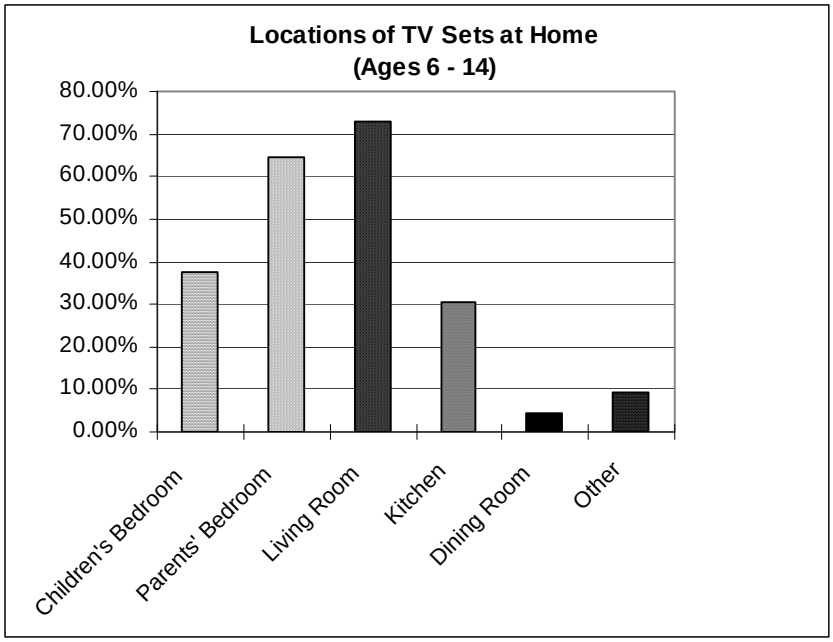

Figure 2

In most (but not all) cases, children who said they had a TV set in their bedroom also said that the bedroom was shared with siblings.

[9] These patterns are similar to those recorded in the Malta Broadcasting Authority's 1999 Media Audit Report, which shows that most respondents aged 12 to over 65 identified the sitting room as the place in the house where television is most watched. The bedroom was second in line. These trends were also noted in the Authority's report for 1996, 1997, and 1998 (Vassallo, 1999:7).

45% of those who said that they have a set in their bedroom (32 out of 71) also specifically indicated that they only use their set as a monitor for video games, or else that they most frequently watch TV on another set in the home. These figures are tabulated below.

Age Group 6 - 10	Age Group 11 - 14	Total
12 out of 32 37.5%	10 out of 39 25.6%	32 out of 71 45%

Table 14: TV Set in Child's Own Bedroom

Number of children with a TV set in their own room who also specifically said that they mostly watch another set, or use their set mainly as a monitor for video games.

These figures suggest that not more than 15.35% (39 out of a total of 254) are likely to watch TV primarily in their own bedrooms.[10] The patterns also suggest that more 11-14 year-olds are likely to have a TV set in their own bedrooms than 6-10 year-olds (31.2% as against 24.8%). It is also worth keeping in mind that a large number of the younger children who said that they had a TV set in their bedrooms also indicated that they share the bedroom with older siblings, so the difference might be more pronounced.

The figures also suggest that when they do have a TV set in their own bedroom, 11-14 year-olds are more likely to watch it regularly than 6-10 year olds. There are several reasons why this might be the case, of course, but there does seem to be a tendency to think of access to and control of TV in one's own room as a form of rite of passage into maturity. One 12 year-old boy (44) thus spoke proudly of the fact that he himself paid for access to cable TV in his bedroom out of his pocket money. Younger children whose parents could afford it often said that they had been promised their own set when they were older — when he turned ten in the case of one 7 year-old boy (20); or for Christmas of the following year in the case of an 8 year-old girl (8) who had also been promised a Play Station for Christmas this year. One 11 year-old girl (29) reported that her parents were about to buy a new TV set, and that they had told her and her brother that whoever of

[10] This calculation does not take account of patterns of watching among the respondents' siblings since this information is not available.

them was better behaved would get to have it in his or her room. If neither came up to scratch, the set would stay in the kitchen.

But even when they have their own television set in their bedrooms, a very large proportion of the children and young people still prefer to watch the "family" set. One reason for this, of course, is that the "family" (or parents') TV set tends to be the largest or best in the house. Thus, the room most frequently chosen to watch TV in often depends on which one has the best set. Several children spoke proudly of watching in the room "with the Dolby surround system". A number of boys also explained how they can link their home TV sets with the stereo system to get the best (and often loudest) sound possible.

Many of the children interviewed, especially the younger ones, also indicated that unless their parents or other family members persist in watching programmes which they absolutely do not want to see themselves, they prefer to watch with the family rather than isolating themselves in their rooms. As an 11 year-old boy (53) who said that he has his own TV set in his bedroom put it: "I like watching the TV in the living room because the whole family is there." One father (59) also described how his teenaged son still prefers to watch TV with his parents in their room, and even gets into arguments with them as to which programmes they are going to watch, even though he has his own TV set in his own bedroom. This was a point also echoed by one of the mothers (59), who complained that her children (also in their teens) regularly insist on watching TV on the set located in the kitchen (rather than the one in their room) and don't let her watch the programmes she wants. Several children also described watching television in their parents' bed, often with the whole family lying and watching together.

Other TV sets in the home tended to be watched when access to the best (or largest) set was difficult — as when older siblings or parents insisted on watching material which the children were not interested in. One 13 year-old girl (40) said that she usually watches television in the sitting room at night (and often falls asleep there) because her older sister insists on watching programmes which she doesn't like on the set located in their shared bedroom. Another 13 year-old girl (37) said that she often has to watch scary films in bed late at night because her older sister (with whom she shares the room) insists on watching these when they are both in bed. This particular girl described how she covers her head under her blankets when the film gets too scary, but continues listening, and then ends up having

nightmares or having scary images filling her mind for quite some time after.

3.3 RADIO: PREFERENCES AND PATTERNS OF LISTENING

For the majority of the children and young people interviewed, listening to radio is synonymous with listening to pop music. There were exceptions, especially among the younger children, who occasionally spoke of enjoying radio plays and stories, particularly ones dealing with the life of Jesus. Other radio programmes frequently mentioned as popular were ones which included competitions, phone-in segments and quizzes. A number also said that they listen to the news, particularly if their parents are listening. But the majority, right across the age groups surveyed, insisted that they disliked discussion programmes, talk shows and political debates. What children and young people enjoy listening to most on radio is music. Indeed, many spoke of listening to radio and playing music cassettes and CDs as though these were indistinguishable.

There is also a marked increase in the amount of interest expressed in listening to radio and music as children grow into the adolescent years. Younger children are more likely to listen to radio when their parents happen to have it on. This does not necessarily mean that they will simply go along with their parents' choice of programmes, however. Many complained of parents or adult relatives insisting on listening to the news and discussion programmes or political debates. One 9 year-old girl (12) revealed that her mother insists on having the radio on while she is doing her homework. She does this, she tells her, because it's important to get used to working with noise in the background:

Romina Jien meta tixeg]lu ng]idilha "Ma, idejjaqni!" Anki g]al homework, tg]idli:"Imma hekk suppost, g]ax fl-e\ami m'hux sa jkun hemm kwiet]afna, g]al Junior Lyceum"....

Interviewer Allura qed tg]id li meta tkun qed tag]mel il-homework, il-mummy tg]idlek t]alli r-radio]alli tidra?

Romina When she [my mother] switches it on, I tell her, "Mum, I don't like it!" But even while I'm doing homework, she tells me, "But that's how it should be, because in the exam it's not going to be very quiet, for the Junior Lyceum"...

Interviewer So are you saying that when you're doing your homework, your mum tells you to leave the radio on so that you get used to it?

Romina E]e, biex nidra. Tg]idli: "G]al-a]jar tieg]ek!" Jien ma' nkunx irridu!	Romina Yes, so that I get used to it. She tells me: "It's for you own good!" But I wouldn't want it on!

Conflicts with parents over radio are more likely to occur because children would much rather listen to music than to talk and discussion programmes. One eight year-old girl described how she sometimes slips a music cassette into the car stereo and tricks her father into thinking that what they are listening to is actually his favourite radio station. A nine year-old boy (25) described how when he's in the car he often warns his father not to dare change radio stations while he's listening to his favourite music. Another seven year-old boy (21) described how he screams at his father to switch to a music channel whenever the latter tries to listen to the news: "Change it! Change it! I hate them! I hate them!" As one 11 year-old girl (31) put it:

Jien fil-karozza irrid il-mu\ika, m'hux xi]add qed jitkellem!	What I want in the car is music, not someone talking!

"Music" for virtually all the children interviewed almost invariably meant popular music - or as a 12 year-old boy (44) put it, "diski sbie], milli]ar[u issa!" ("nice songs, ones which have just come out!") One 12 year-old girl (36) pointed out that she has no problem with listening to classical music when her father plays it in the car because she had been brought up in a home where it was played a lot; but her own choice would be pop music. Two 14 year-old-girls (38) also said that though their first love is pop music, they occasionally enjoy "classical" which they associate with calm relaxation. Especially in the interviews with the older children and teenagers, radio stations which predominantly play pop music were almost invariably identified as the most popular.

An interest in radio, or rather in listening to pop music through different media, becomes more marked as children get into the teenage years. This is a point which has also been noted by researchers working in other countries. Summarising research projects into young people's programme preferences conducted in Canada, the United States and Sweden, a 1995 report published by the Department of Canadian Heritage (Josephson, 1995: 26) contends that:

> Adolescents in middle school and high school watch less television than they did when they were younger, since they begin to spend more time away from home, do more things with peers, and listen more to radio. For many adolescents, this change in media use marks the transition between

> childhood and adolescence. Popular music becomes the medium most appropriate to the developmental concerns of adolescents — independence, romance, and sexuality — themes that are featured prominently in the lyrics of popular music. Adolescents listen to music alone or with their friends.

The fact that adolescents become more interested in listening to radio and music is well borne out by the way they spoke about it in the interviews conducted in Malta for this project. For instance, while insisting that he much prefers radio to TV, one 14 year-old boy (50) commented:

Jien jekk ittieni radio, ng]ix!	For me, if you give me a radio, I live!
Jag]tini]afna kumpanija!	It gives me a lot of company!

And according to a 14 year-old girl (39):

> Without it you feel very uncomfortable. I mean, when I have the music on, I feel there are lots of people around me!

But the issue as to whether Maltese teenagers actually watch less television as they grow older is not quite so clear-cut. Though a number of the teenagers interviewed for this survey said that they do not watch as much television as they used to when they were younger, others said the exact opposite. For instance, when she was asked whether she enjoyed watching television, one 14 year-old girl (40) exclaimed: "Dejjem narah! Na]seb]ajti!" ("I always watch it! I think it's my life!"). Similarly, a boy aged 11-12 (78) exclaimed: "Jien ming]ajr television ma jien xejn!" ("Without television I am nothing!"). It is true that as they enter the teenage years, young people find themselves with heavier demands on their time. In the interviews, a number of the older children often pointed out that their TV watching has to be fitted in around other activities. They have more homework, for instance, as well as extra-curricular activities like sports, *Mu\ew*, music lessons, etc. Many thus watch much less television during the school year than they do during holidays; and many also said that they also watch less on weekends because they are too busy with other activities, or else because that is when they go out. Radio and music, on the other hand, can be listened to while doing other things. A number of the children and teenagers interviewed described how they always do their homework with the radio or a CD playing, often insisting

that they cannot work without it. Here is how a group of 13-14 year-olds (54) described this:

> Martina I think radio is quite good, because television distracts you. Like when you're doing your homework, or something, you stare at the TV. But then if you're listening to the radio, you just listen and it's fine. You can do it, I mean....
> Sonia Really, it's weird! If you put on the radio and you're doing your homework, you do your homework much faster. You go with the beat!
> Martina 'Cause, like, if you like the songs, you know, you like it...
> Sonia I always do my homework with the beat, with the radio on...
> Martina I like doing my homework with the radio on, because it's like, doing your homework is boring, so it's entertaining by far... It's like, you're in your room and you're listening to the radio, you're like listening to things, while you're doing your homework. So you're doing two things at once!
> Luke You're concentrating!
> Sonia I always either have the CD or the radio on or MTV on when I do my homework. Even when I go to bed!

Research in the US, Canada and Britain indicates that, as might be expected, children begin watching more music programming during adolescence, but television is not necessarily the preferred medium for popular music (Josephson, 1995; Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).[11] These findings would appear to be echoed in the comments made by many of the Maltese adolescents interviewed. Many did in fact often speak of enjoying TV music programmes, especially on MTV, the 24 hour pop music channel. However, talk about the enjoyment of music much more often tended to be associated with listening to radio or CD/cassette players.

[11] The British survey notes that music continues to play a uniquely flexible and pervasive part in children's and, especially, teenager's lives. The mode of delivery is not as important as the content, but in the British homes surveyed there is almost universal access to audio equipment of some kind (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

3.4 HOME ENTERTAINMENT AND GOING OUT

The question arises as to whether changes in the availability of different types of technology may be starting to change this pattern. Young people who have access to computers, video games or TV sets with cable, satellite or video in their own rooms might well be spending at least as much time on these as on radio. But affluence on that scale does not appear to be widespread. There is also in Malta nothing like the pronounced shift towards what the British Broadcasting Standards Commission (1998) calls "high in-home entertainment and the emergence of the bedroom culture". This is partly because, unlike their British counterparts who "now have few places to go on their own"[12], Maltese teenagers and youths still clearly prefer to spend a lot of their leisure time outdoors or in public entertainment spots — as anyone who has seen the large crowds of young people who regularly congregate in the Paceville area will testify. Many of the teenagers interviewed also insisted that in the summer months especially they spend more time at the beach or going out with friends than staying home to watch television.

The extent to which Maltese teenagers tend to seek recreation in public or outdoor places of entertainment was well illustrated in comments made about the Paceville disco scene by a group of 12 year-old girls in a State secondary school (34). While I was asking them about what they thought they should and should not be allowed to watch on television, one of them spontaneously started talking about the Paceville night scene, and how unfair it was that the bouncers at the discos were inconsistent in the way they sometimes let girls of her age in and sometimes not, with the result that they often ended up having to hang around outside in the street. If they weren't going to be allowed in there, this girl and her peers in this group said, then other disco halls should be opened (not necessarily in Paceville) catering specifically for 12 to 15 year-olds:

[12] According to the 1999 survey conducted by the London School of Economics (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999), British parents are concerned for their children's safety outside the home while young people themselves say there is not enough to do in the area where they live. As a result, young people are much more likely to be watching television or playing computer games than their continental counterparts. The report also notes that British children as young as six are two or three times more likely to have a television in their bedroom and British children watch an hour a day more than French or German children.

Qiesek trid tmur tgawdi, u qiesek le, g]ax jiena in]obb]afna ni\fen, ji[ifieri, u qisni nixtieq inmur id-disco, imma ma jda]]lukx, g]ax bl-ID. Fejn ta]seb li nista ngawdi? (...) {ieli ida]]luni u [ieli le, skond il-bodyguard li jkun hemm. (....)	You sort of want to go and enjoy yourself, and sort of no, because I really love to dance, and I sort of want to go to the disco, but they don't let me in, because you have to show your ID. Where do you think I can enjoy myself then? (....) Sometimes they let me in, and sometimes not, depending on which bodyguard [bouncer] is there (...)
Jien in]obb ingawdi, kullimkien in]obb ingawdi. Imma hemm dik il-]a[a: jiena in]obb ni\fen]afna. (...)	I love enjoying myself, I love enjoying myself everywhere. But there's that one thing: I really love to dance (....)
Jiena qabel ma' tantx kont no]ro[, ji[ifieri, ma' kontx no]ro[wa]di jiena]afna, b]al fil-g]axijiet u hekk. Li qbadt qis li no]ro[qiesu meta kelli qiesu dawn it-tnax-il sena, ji[ifieri.	Before I didn't use to go out much, I mean, I didn't use to go out by myself much, like in the evenings and so on. The time when I started going out was when I was about these twelve years old, I mean.

This is linked to their conviction that if you act responsibly, then you are "mature" enough to be allowed to do adult things. As the girls in this group put it, "it all depends on how mature you are in your mind" ("skond kemm int matur minn mo]]ok")[13]. Asked how other people can tell whether you are mature or not, they replied that "it depends on how you behave yourself in public" ("skond kif i[[ib ru]ek barra").

Similar arguments were made by a group of 12 year-old Gozitan boys (47) who also spontaneously started to talk about outdoor forms of entertainment while they were discussing television, and insisted that there should be disco halls for young people of their age. One boy in this group commented that the reason why some teenagers (and especially girls) often turn rebellious and wild is that they don't go out often enough as children:

[13] In the course of the interview it became clear that this was a phrase which the girls had picked up from their science teacher, who the previous day had been telling them that classification ratings (12+, 15+ and 18+) were not really tied to age but to how mature you are. To illustrate this point while they were relaying what the teacher had told them, the girls said that a 20 year-old might get scared by a horror film, while somebody under 18 might not.

It-tfal taf 'il g]ala jag]mlu hekk, ta' tlettax u hekk? G]ax ommhom i]alluhom id-dar u hekk, dejjem imsakkrin. U mbag]ad ma jkollhomx fejn imorru. U mbag]ad jibdew jo]or[u u jitkess]u!

Do you know why children do that, when they are about thirteen? Because their mother leaves them at home and that, always locked up. And then they have nowhere to go. And then they start going out and showing off!

3.5 ADVERTISING

Though they frequently complained about the amount and frequency of television advertising, especially when these interrupted their favourite programmes, most of the children and teenagers interviewed also admitted to both enjoying particular adverts, as well as to being convinced by the ones they liked to want to go off and buy the object advertised. When they were asked what they dislike most about TV, and what they would change if they could, many said that they would get rid of advertisements, or at least limit them to slots between programmes.

Of the adverts identified as enjoyable, the most popular are (i) those for articles in which the children are interested anyway (especially toys, food, and drinks), and (ii) those which are humorous or which have funny or quirky catch-phrases or jingles (the younger children often chanted these spontaneously during interviews). Adverts for objects which children associate with people who are much older than themselves or with members of the opposite sex tended to be disliked, but this also depended on how individual adverts were presented. For instance, when they were asked if they liked adverts, two 7 year-old boys (20) responded as follows:

Henry Insomma, meta ji[u tal-girls ma' n]obbx narhom]afna!

Hugo Neqliblu!
Henry Anka jien, inqalliblu!

Henry Well, when they have those of the girls I don't like watching them much!
Hugo I change channels!
Henry Me too, I switch over!

Many also told stories of being disappointed when they actually bought the object at the fact that it did not look quite as nice as it did on TV, or did not have all the parts or qualities advertised. One boy (28) described his disappointment after he had convinced his mother to take him to a fast food outlet which had been advertising what on TV looked like a really appetising meal but which in reality proved to be

very ordinary. A 12 year-old girl (36) told of a similar experience, and of how when she and her mother complained, they were told that "the advert is different", and no, they couldn't have all the items shown in the advert because "that was just for the ad!" Another girl (36) recalled how she had convinced her mother to buy her an article of clothing because the advert gave the impression that it came in a special box with a free Barbie doll included. When she and her mother complained that they had not received the Barbie doll, they were told that "that was just for the ad, and the picture on the box is there to make it look nice!" As another 13 year-old girl (35) put it: "Ir-riklami qieg]din biex l-affarijiet jidru isba], biex iktar tixtri!" ("Adverts are there to make things look nicer, so that you buy more!").

Several commented on the fact that adverts on foreign channels often advertised items or special offers which were not available in Malta. This often turned into a source for complaints about Malta still being "backward" or "behind the times". One 9 year-old girl (13), for instance, complained how even a doll advertised on a cable TV channel as "available in all countries" had turned out not to be available in Malta.

Most of the children and teenagers interviewed insisted that adverts often "lied", or "tricked" people into buying things on false pretences. A number also said that adverts announcing massive reductions at department stores and other shopping outlets were generally no more than a ploy to lure people to go there, and that the advertised reductions were all "lies" (33, 45). As one eight year-old boy (22) put it:

Jien ma jog][buniex, ma' nixtrihomx, g]ax jg]idu per e\empju li jkunu lira, u mbag]ad ikunu lira w nofs!	I don't like them, I don't buy them, because they say for example that they cost one pound, and then they turn out to cost one pound fifty!

Several girls (4, 11, 37) also complained about a widely advertised accessory which was claimed to straighten curly hair but which they discovered to be far less effective than demonstrated in advertised images. Another boy (20) complained that his Play Station did not have as many built-in games as he had seen advertised. Parents (57) also commented that children go through fads, wanting toys they see advertised or which their school friends have, only to lose interest in them shortly after they buy them.

Though scepticism about advertising was quite widespread, the majority of children and teenagers interviewed were also convinced that advertising does influence people, including themselves. The scepticism was largely inspired by children's realisation that ads are elaborately constructed exercises in propaganda. In other words, they learn fairly early on that the intent of advertisements is to make people want to buy. Even the youngest children interviewed were quite clear on this point. When they were asked why they thought television stations put on so many adverts when so many people appeared to hate having programmes interrupted by them, they explained that they did this because they wanted to get people to buy things, and because they got money from the advertisers.

Research conducted in Britain and the US indicates that although the grasp of concepts improves with age, children as young as three years of age have exhibited some understanding of intent, even though they cannot formulate this verbally (see Gunter and McAleer, 1997:142; Young, 1990: 298, 58-68). As they grow older, then, children come to place less trust in the truthfulness of advertising appeals. The significance of children's understanding of the intent behind the advertisement is explained by Young (1990:299) as follows:

As adults, our knowledge of advertising intent means that we approach it with a degree of scepticism. We 'read' advertising as a type of communication full of rhetorical forms that are not meant to be taken literally but are designed to attract attention and convey characteristics of the good or service being promoted. The child's literacy with advertising grows and develops towards the adult norm and one of the major milestones on this road to literacy is an understanding of the intent behind the ad.

One of the most common ways in which the children and teenagers I interviewed reacted to the question as to what they thought of advertisements was to say that they often cheated. The extent to which this comes to be taken for granted was reflected in the way one 8 year-old girl (8), for instance, quite happily made up illustrations of how adverts cheat and create illusions when she couldn't remember specific examples which she had actually seen. Another form of scepticism was revealed in the way a number of children said that though they get very excited about buying toys they see advertised (and often pester their parents to buy them for them), once they do have them they quickly lose interest in them. This was a point also

echoed by one of the parents (59) who recalled having similar experiences when he was a child himself.

However, as is the case with adults, this scepticism does not make children and teenagers immune to the lures and attractions of advertising. This was evident in the number of times both parents and children reported on how frequently children demand objects they see advertised. One group of parents (59) commented on how they notice children suddenly getting thirsty as soon as they see adverts for drinks on television, especially in summer. A 13 year-old girl (35) commented that when she sees adverts for, say, cheese, she starts to long for it and heads straight for the fridge: if she can't find the advertised product there, she usually chooses something else. Similarly, a group of 13-14 year-old girls (54) admitted that, even though they are usually very sceptical about advertising, they are quite influenced by adverts for fashion clothing. As one of them put it: "Everybody wants to be like the best, especially teenagers!" Several children also described how when they ask for objects they see advertised, their parents often tell them to wait till their birthdays or Christmas or some other festive occasion. A 12 year-old girl (36) also noted that seeing an advert on TV helped her decide what she wanted as a birthday present after being undecided for a long time.

Some researchers have also noted how, even when it does not have a direct effect, advertising plays an important role in children's consumer socialisation, teaching them consumer values and ways of expressing them (Gunter and McAleer, 1997:134-5). One striking thing which emerged from comments made by different groups interviewed in Malta was how knowledgeable children tend to become as a result of watching so many adverts about different brands of groceries and other household objects which they would not normally be buying themselves. A number of the parents interviewed were convinced that a lot of contemporary advertising for household products is actually aimed at mobilising children to convince parents to purchase or switch to the advertised brand. One mother (56) told how when she does the shopping, her nine year-old-daughter regularly gives her reasons why she should choose one brand rather than another on the strength of what she had seen in adverts. The same mother also exclaimed that if she were to buy all the things her daughter regularly encourages her to buy after seeing them advertised, she would very quickly go bankrupt. A 14 year-old girl (39) similarly noted that even though adverts get on her nerves, she regularly tells her mother to buy particular brands of, say, washing powder because the ads make them sound better. In her view, this indicated that advertising is a form of "brainwashing".

3.6 PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Though they generally did not know what the phrase "product placement" referred to, many of the children and teenagers interviewed were able to give examples of the practice once the meaning of the phrase was explained to them. In the opinion of several teenagers, seeing products as part of a film's background or in use within a film was more likely to be "effective" than "straight" adverts, especially when the product is positively associated with famous film stars. Others insisted that they thought this practice did not really make any difference to whether they or other people were likely to be influenced positively towards the products thus "placed". Those who took this latter position tended to be children and teenagers who also claimed that adverts generally did not influence their attitudes and buying patterns at all.

What is significant is the extent to which children and teenagers showed by their responses that they do notice and are aware of specific products when they see them woven into the flow and setting of films or even local soap operas. In view of the fact that (as suggested earlier in this chapter) a lot of the information received while watching TV for amusement and relaxation tends to be processed uncritically, these patterns would indicate that product placement does have an insidious influence on children's and young people's attitudes to consumption generally as well as to the desirability of specific products.

Products which children in different interview groups identified as ones they had seen "placed" in films ranged from brands of cars to soft drinks to clothes and furniture. In the case of local productions, the fact that there were specific and frequent references to sponsors providing products for use in the programme appeared to make children more aware of the practice — for instance, the use of clothes by "Swinger" in the soap opera *Ipokriti* was specifically mentioned a few times. One 14 year-old boy (48) had also noticed that the practice of product placement was most widespread in action films; and a group of 13-14 year-old boys (46) also drew attention to its wide use in video games, giving as an example one action game in which players can acquire a new game "life" by breaking a vending machine and drinking Coke.

What is not clear, however, is the extent to which younger children especially are consciously aware of the fact that such products are deliberately placed there for advertising purposes. Most of the older children and teenagers gave the distinct impression that they

understood that product placement was motivated by commercial forces. Younger children did not appear to be as aware of this. One reason why it was difficult to identify definite patterns in this is the fact that the children's comments in most cases were offered after the interviewer had to explain and give examples of what was involved in the practice of "product placement". As a result, many of the examples of the practice given by the younger children tended to be very similar to those offered by the interviewer, further reinforcing the impression that they had not really thought of or been particularly aware of the practice beforehand. If this is the case, then younger children are more likely to be "vulnerable" to influence by such practices.

Chapter 4
ATTITUDES TO GUIDELINES AND ADULT-RATED PROGRAMMES

4.1 KNOWING WHAT IS SUITABLE

Before we can sort out what sense children make of adult fare, and what effects this might be having on their attitudes and behaviour, we need to find out (i) whether they can distinguish between suitable and unsuitable material; (ii) how exactly they learn to make this distinction; (iii) whether the distinctions they make are adequate and effective; and (iv) the extent to which the distinctions actually influence what they watch and don't watch.

How do children know when a particular programme is inappropriate for them to watch because it is "suitable for adults only"? And what do children take "adults only" to mean? The simple answer is that children know they are not supposed to watch specific programmes or scenes because adults tell them — as when parents block them from watching, or when the television stations issue warnings or classification guides. When the latter come with an explanation as to why the programme is unsuitable for children (e.g. violence, sexual scenes, offensive language, etc), children might be assumed to take this to mean that it is material so described which constitutes "adult fare". One possible consequence of this cognitive ascription of meanings and values might be that a precocious child wanting to act and sound "adult" might well choose to watch and/or speak about such material in order to gain peer status, or even to outrage adults. Is this indeed the case, and if so, how might all this be affecting children's growth and behaviour?

Most of the children interviewed were well aware of the signposting conventions used on television to indicate programme classifications (AO, PG, etc). When they were asked how they knew what was suitable and not suitable for them to watch, most of them referred to the little signs which a number of the Italian stations put on to indicate ratings of programmes. They were virtually all very prompt to describe and explain this signposting system, and most claimed that they usually followed it. A number of children even described the signposting system as a wonderful "invention" which has made it easier for them to know what they should and should not be watching. As one 9 year-old girl (12) put it:

Meta ma kienx hemm it-tabelli kont nara kollox, g]ax ji[ifieri ma tkunx taf. Imbag]ad meta ivvintawhom ji[ifieri tag]llimt it-tag]lima.

When there were no posters I used to watch everything, because you just don't know. But then when they invented them I learned the lesson.

Other children also explained that in the case of the Maltese stations, warnings appear before the start of the programme; but that this might not be very effective if you happen to start watching a programme after its beginning. Since channel surfing is so widespread, this is clearly an important consideration.

4.1.1 Older Children

Interestingly, the older children and teenagers frequently insisted that they thought the classification guidelines and ratings were useful and good to have, even though they often also made it clear that they themselves did not always follow them. A number pointed out that they often watched "grown-up" programmes and could not see why they were rated "adults only" — "they weren't all that violent or scary," they often insisted. [14] Older children (i.e. nine and older) often argued that they should be allowed to watch adult-rated material dealing with sex-related issues because such material deals with "real life" and they need to be prepared for this. Indeed, the older they get, the less likely are young people to think that classification guidelines or ratings might apply to themselves. As 14 year-old Angela (39) put it:

> Nobody takes any notice of [ratings], especially here. I mean I get into AO films, you know. Everybody gets into it. I mean for me that's not bad. And if you can't get into the cinema, you can rent the video anyway.

One other 14 year-old girl (39) said that she sometimes regrets having seen adult-rated films which "you know you shouldn't have or did not want to" because "then it stays as a scar". Two 14 year-old

[14] Research conducted in Belgium in 1977 found that over a three-year period, movies broadcast with violence advisories as well as those with advisories warning of sexual content earned significantly higher audience shares than those broadcast without advisories. The study (by Herman and Leyens) did not, however, take account of other contributions to a movie's audience size, such as the popularity of lead-in programmes or the way the movie was advertised (see Goldstein, 1998:93).

girls from another group (38) explained this as follows:

Josianne U mbag]ad, tista' tg]addi \-\mien bik innifsek u tg]id, "U ija, tal-kbar, jiena kbira!" Imma mbag]ad fl-istess]in, jekk naf li]a jinfluwenzani, a]jar ma nara xejn.
Florinda Jien jekk naf li]a jimpressjonani \gur ma narahx, g]ax hekk, spe`i tibqa'... Jekk, jien naf, t]osshok imdejqa jew hekk, dik ix-xena]a ti[I quddiem g]ajnejk.

Josiane And then, you can also fool yourself and say, "So what if it's for grown ups, I'm grown up!" But then at the same time, if I know that I'm going to influence myself, it's better if I don't see anything.
Florinda For me, if I know that it's going to leave an impression on me I definitely don't watch it, because you know, you sort of stay that way... If, let's say, you feel sad or something, that scene is going to come in front of your eyes.

Others also frequently indicated that they believe guidelines should be there to prevent younger children from watching adult-rated material because, in their view, younger children cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy as well as they themselves can, and are thus prone to try to imitate what they see.[15] According to 13 year-old Martina (54), it helps to have classification guidelines because "if there are the parents there, the parents will tell them, you know, 'Go to bed, or change the channel.' " The value of guidelines for these teenagers, in other words, is that they make it possible for younger children to be monitored.

Classification ratings and guidelines are frequently perceived by older children as something which, if you are "mature" enough, you can interpret flexibly. Thus, a group of 11 year-old girls (31) argued that adult ratings should be interpreted according to individual perceptions ("skond kif ta]sibha int") since many films and programmes are only so classified because younger children will imitate whatever they see. An 11 year-old girl (31) insisted that she sees nothing wrong with the fact that she regularly watches *The X-Files* with her mother, even though she thinks that this programme is rated 18+:

Per e\empju, hawn tfal daqsna jkollhom rashom f'posthom, u hawn min ma jkollux mo]]u f'postu, u mbag]ad hawn kbar ma jkollhomx mo]]hom f'postu!

For example, there are children of our age whose head is in the right place, and there are those whose head isn't in the right place, and then there are even adults who don't have their head in the right place!

[15] These points are discussed at greater length in Chapters 5 and 7.

A number of girls in the older age groups interviewed also argued that boys tend to be more childish, or less "mature" than girls. As one 11 year-old girl (31) put it, "Is-subien iktar g]andhom mentalità ta\-\g]ar" ("Boys think more like younger children"). Needless to say, the boys themselves saw the matter quite differently, often pointing to girls' inability to appreciate tough ("grown up") films with lots of graphic violence. As one 12 year-old boy (47) put it, "Is-subien jifil]u i\jed g]al-bi\a milli n-nisa" ("Boys can handle fear much better than women."). In general terms, therefore, as they grow into their teens, both girls and boys become increasingly convinced of their own ability to judge for themselves whether they can handle grown-up films and programmes — irrespective of what the classification guidelines say.

Watching with parents is often taken as an excuse for watching anything, however inappropriate. When a group of 11-12 year-old boys and girls (78) were asked if they knew why films are classified "15 and over", they answered that this was probably because of scenes of sex and violence, which young people like them should not watch. There was a recurring tendency among most of the children interviewed to assume that it was the presence of specific scenes or even specific words which made films or programmes inappropriate. There did not seem to be any notion that a film as a whole might be inappropriate because it deals with topics or themes which a young audience might not yet be ready to handle or understand. As one 11 year-old boy (43) put it,

{ieli jkun *eighteen* u ma jkun fih xejn, g]ax ikun fih xi sparatura biss!	Sometimes it's rated 18 and there's nothing in it - it might just have a bit of shooting.

This tendency is also prevalent among adults whose decisions as to what to allow youngsters in their care to watch appear to be almost exclusively determined by whether there are any explicit depictions of sex. One group of 11-12 year-old girls (78) revealed that when they are in the company of their parents, they occasionally watch adult-classified films which do not contain what they called "very hot" sexual scenes but just sexual swear-words and physical violence. In their view, this is not as bad as watching more explicit sex scenes. One girl said that the previous summer she had been to watch an 18-rated film at the cinema with her parents and the staff there found no objections because the film did not include "extreme scenes of sex".

Other boys and girls interviewed similarly pointed out that staff at cinemas often allow young children into adult-rated films. In their

view, this was justified as the rating system was often silly. Many insisted that whenever they saw adult-rated films which they assumed to have been so classified because of sex or violence scenes, they had not in fact been either worried or upset by such scenes. In other cases, children claimed that they watch adult-rated films because their parents or older brothers bring the videos home, and so they end up watching them too. As one boy put it (78), "Since we have the video at home... why shouldn't I watch it?" One girl described how her younger brother watches adult-rated films with his parents, but from a hiding place, and without their knowledge. Other members of the same discussion group (78) also insisted that they disliked the adult-oriented soap opera *Ipokriti* intensely ("all make up and hair spray" was how one girl described it), but their parents insist on watching it, and so, since it's what's on television they have to watch it with them.

This watching because "it's what's on television" (or rather what the adults have decided to have on) was also reflected in a revelation made by an 11 year-old girl in the course of a whole-class discussion (76). She sometimes has to watch "pasta\ati", she said, because they come on while the family is having dinner, and her father insists on watching them. Asked if the television gets switched off when these type of programmes are on, she replied: "Skond il-burdata tad-daddy, hu!" ("It depends on what mood dad is in!").

Children themselves, especially the older ones, also frequently commented on the pointlessness of parents trying to block them from watching material which, they felt, was part of life anyway. They should be allowed to watch such material, they argued, because they needed to be prepared for adult life. This was a comment which some older children made about the soap opera *Ipokriti* and about the American sex-and-scandal chat show *Jerry Springer* — i.e. that in their view these programmes dealt with real life situations, and that it was important for them (the children) to learn as much about real life as possible. I shall be returning to the issues raised by these assertions in Chapter 7.

4.1.2 Younger Children

The situation with younger children is a bit more complex. Some of them chose not to watch adult-rated material (even when their parents did not actively stop them) because they simply were not interested in it. But perhaps precisely because of the adult

classification, many children are often curious about such material, and the attitude of adults, both to the material itself as well as to children's watching of it, inevitably plays an important role in how children make sense of and react to it.

One variable which makes the situation more complicated and confusing for children is that parents do not appear to be consistent in their attitudes to signposting conventions and in the ways they enforce these or expect their children to follow them. Children also complained that the guidelines themselves were also inconsistent. One nine year-old boy (28) was quite indignant that films appear with one classification at the cinema and a different one when they are issued on video or screened on television.

Young children need clear and consistent guidance and explanations from their parents and significant adults. The evidence presented here suggests that this is not what they are getting. There were many stories told of one parent finding a programme unsuitable for children to watch, while the other made it obvious that he or she did not; of children hearing teachers condemning material which their parents regularly watched with them; or of children being allowed to watch programmes clearly vetoed by their parents when they stayed with their grandparents or with other relatives or friends. There were also many cases reported of occasions when children watched adult-rated programmes or videos with their parents. The assumption seems to be that if you are watching it with the family, then there can be no harm in it. More importantly, the fact that most of the children interviewed said that they have more than one TV set at home, and that a significant number of them also have their own set in their bedroom, suggests that in many cases parental controls are as difficult to enforce as they are erratic and ill defined.

When they were asked how they knew whether a programme was suitable for them to watch in situations when signposts like those on the Italian stations were not available, the children interviewed often said that they know they shouldn't be watching when there is too much fighting, when it gets too scary, or when there are too many "pasta\ati". The children themselves repeatedly insisted that they do not watch programmes which are clearly signposted as "adults only", and this was a point which was also made by some of the parents.[16]

[16] The reasons they gave for this varied, and this often reflected the types of values and ambitions which presumably prevailed in individual children's homes and socio-economic location. Thus, one group of seven-year-old girls in a private school (5) said that they knew they should not watch "whatever they liked on TV" because if they did this they would get

Here is how a group of eight year old boys (22) made this point. The discussion occurred after the boys had been saying that they enjoy watching films which have lots of fighting.

Interviewer Hawn min jg]id li programmi tal-[lied mhux tajbin g]at-tfal. X'ta]sbu?

Interviewer Some people say that programmes with fighting are not good for children. What do you think?

Kurt Ji[ifieri... hemm ... [ieli ma jkunux tat-tfal ikun hemm tonda]amra u jkun hemm...
Other Boys Ija!
Robert E]e. Jiena hekk ma nara]x.

Kurt You mean .... emm... sometimes when it's not for children there is a red circle and there is ...
Other Boys Yeah!
Robert Yeah. When it's like that I don't watch it.

Samuel Ommi tg]id li jekk ikun hemm dik it-tonda]amra, jekk mhux tajbin g]at-tfal, mhux tajbin g]al kbar...
Henry Meta jkun hemm l-a]dar tajjeb g]at-tfal.
Samuel ..Tal-kbar, g]al kbar naf li tajbin. Jekk ikun dawk it-tifel, b'dik il-]amra, jien ma nara]x. Imma il-]adra tista' tarah, tista' tarah...
Henry Tista' tarah wa]dek jew ma ommhok u missierek..

Samuel My mother says that if there is that red circle, if it's not good for children, it's not good for adults...

Henry When there's the green sign it's good for children.
Samuel .... The adult ones, I know they're good for adults. If it has those, that boy, with the red, I don't watch it. But the green one you can watch it, you can...
Henry You can watch it alone or with your mother and father...

Samuel U is-safra, is-safra tal-familja kolla dan...
Interviewer Dan fuq il-programmi Taljani jkun?
Kurt E]e.

Samuel And the yellow one, the yellow one is for all the family...
Interviewer Is this on the Italian programmes?
Kurt Yeah.

---

badly educated and then find it impossible to get a good job. In contrast to this, a nine-year-old boy with a working-class family background (26) offered the following as an example of a programme which should not be watched by children:

David Per e\empju dawk, meta jkun hemm xi ra[el mi\\ewwe[u jag]milha ma' mara o]ra...
Interviewer G]aliex jg]amel]a\in allura?
David G]ax jag]mel dnubiet, hu!

David For example those, when there is some married man who goes off with another woman...
Interviewer Why is that bad then?
David Because he's sinning, eh!

Interviewer Imma jekk ikun xi programm fuq il-Malti jew bl-Ingli\, kif...?
Kurt Le.. Fuq il-Malti u l-Ingli\ ma jkunx hemm!
Interviewer Kif tkun taf jekk hux tajjeb g]at-tfal jew le allura?

Samuel G]ax nindunaw... u jekk fil-ka\, inqalbulu!

Interviewer But what if it's a programme on the Maltese channel or in English, how...?
Kurt No... On the Maltese and English there isn't!
Interviewer So how do you know whether it's good for children or not?
Samuel Because we realise ... and if by chance, we switch it over!

This exchange also draws attention to the extent to which children's following of guidelines does not take place blindly. They try to make sense of them and need to understand their logic. Samuel's comments about his mother's views about adult-rated material reflects how children need to understand the logic of parental controls, and that they are not likely to be satisfied with blanket prohibitions. Samuel's parents are Jehovah's witnesses, and throughout the interview he showed an awareness of the fact that the standards and value judgements which applied in his home were often different from those he experienced at school, or from what his encounters with his peers led him to understand to be the case in other homes. In other words, in a possibly more marked way than his peers, Samuel is aware of the fact that the guidelines and controls imposed by adults can frequently be contradictory or idiosyncratic. So he tentatively tries to apply his own judgement, based on what he takes to be common sense. His mother insists that if a programme is not good for children, it's also not good for adults ("My mother says that if there is that red circle, if it's not good for children, it's not good for adults..."). But he seems to think that this is an exaggeration: "The adult ones, I know they're good for adults."

Indeed the fact that many of the children knew so much about adult-rated programmes, and the ways in which they spoke about them, suggests that in many cases classification guidelines, and children's own realisation that they should not be watching, do not necessarily stop them from watching. Children often reported staying up with their parents to watch programmes or films which they knew to be unsuitable for them to watch. In one interview (11) a group of nine-year-old girls were very emphatic that they always followed guidelines because, they said, they knew that adult-rated material was not good for them. However, at another stage in the discussion, two of the girls in the group responded as follows to my question as to whether they had ever seen anything on TV which had really frightened them:

Rose G]ax ommi t]obb tara films tal-bi\a, u [ieli jien nibqa' imqajma u noqg]od narhom mag]ha. U meta jibda xi]a[a tal-bi\a'...g]ax dak tarah fuq it-televixin, ma jkunx video...u meta jibda xi]a[a jien nara qiesu bi``a minnhu, imma ommi iddawwarli wi``I, imma xorta nibda nara dik il-]a[a meta qed no]lom bil-lejl, u nibda nib\a *(laughs)*.
Sarah Ukoll, per e\empju l-*X-Files*, il-[enituri tieg]i i]obbu jarawh. Xi kultant e\atti b]alhom, min]abba fihom noqg]od narah... g]ax nibqa' mqajma wkoll... Jiena xi kultant norqod wara nofs inhar...

Rose Because my mother likes watching scary films, and sometimes I stay up and watch them with her. And when something scary starts... because she watches it on television, it wouldn't be a video - - and when something starts, I watch sort of a bit of it, but my mother turns my face away, but I still start seeing that thing when I'm dreaming at night, and I get frightened (*laughs)*.
Sarah Me too, for example the *X-Files*, my parents like watching it. Sometimes exactly like them, it's because of them that I stay and watch it ...because I stay up as well ..Sometimes I sleep in the afternoon...

A number of younger children delightedly described how they "trick" their parents into thinking that they are not watching "adult" programmes. Repeatedly, the gleeful way this information was presented suggested that "getting away with it" was at least as pleasurable as watching the programme. Here's a seven-year old boy (20) describing what he gets up to:

> I... usually, emm, my mother tells me to go to bed, and I *[laughs]* don't want to... She's asleep, I go and creep in and once she's asleep, then I go, then I go back... I put on my TV and I stay watching till midnight.

Another seven-year old boy told a similar story in another interview (21):

> And once I pretended to be asleep, 'cause my mummy was coming, and then, when she went, I jumped out of bed and emm, I stayed. I went in the room and I stayed watching television, and then I jumped on my sister in bed *[laughs]* and I woke her up!

And here is six year old Tony (18):

Jien, meta ma tindunax il-mummy tag]na, ner[aw neqilbulu, hekk *(laughs)* ... Dawk in-nisa, hekk, joqog]du ji\fnu!...	Me, when mummy doesn't notice, we switch back to the channel, so (*laughs)* .. Those womans, so, they keep dancing!...

Many of the children interviewed gave what they considered valid reasons to explain why they ignored classification guidelines or watched programmes which they knew to be unsuitable. I shall be discussing some of these reasons later on in this chapter. I want first, however, to contextualise that discussion by drawing attention to the fact that in the world of commercial television, distinctions between child-oriented and adult-orient programmes have become considerably blurred.

4.2 PROMOTIONAL SPOTS FOR ADULT-RATED PROGRAMMES

Even if they don't watch the adult-rated programmes themselves, children often see trailers or promotional spots (promos) for them which frequently contain glimpses of scenes and details calculated to whet the appetite of older viewers. As is pointed out by the UCLA 1997 Television Violence Report, serious concerns are raised by promotions because one of their most frequent ways of drawing viewers into a programme is to feature violence and sex out of context:

> There are logical reasons why so many promotions feature scenes of violence. There is not enough time to explain the plot. So viewers are presented with a series of engaging sounds and images that require little explanation. With so little time, the easiest things to feature are those that require little explanation: violence and sex. The promo becomes little more than isolated and disconnected scenes of violence and sex. Viewers may need context to know why the violence is occurring, but they need little or no context to know that a show will contain action, guns or fistfights. Even promotions for situation comedies occasionally feature what little "action" may actually be in the show. Many jokes need a longer set-up or explanation than is possible in a promo, contributing to the tendency for promos to feature a scene of comedic violence or a sexual reference. (UCLA Centre for Communication Policy, 1997: Part III, Section F)

One group of the parents interviewed in Malta (59) pointed out that there have been occasions, especially on the Italian stations, when adult-rated promotional spots were screened during the breaks in children's programmes. In their view, this made the monitoring of what children can and cannot watch virtually a pointless exercise.[17] The point was also made by a nine-year-old girl (13) for whom self-monitoring is also fraught with hazards because of adult-rated promos:

> Carla In the evening, when we don't get out films and things [from the video store], we'll want to watch something that is on television. [...] There'll be things for children. There'll be the green sign. [...] And when there's the green sign, we always watch it. But we have to have our parents, because they do the film about, *hekk*, twenty minutes, then they do *riklami*, and then one other twenty minutes... And, ehmm, in the *riklami* they do, they do the *rikla...* the *publicita`* of films that have the red signs. So I have to stay changing the channels and you don't know what there is on the other channels, so it can be a real film with the red sign! So you have to know what channel, what there is.... Like, "Ciao Darling", there'll be still bad *riklami*, so if you change it, there can be the things....

In another interview (20), a seven-year-old boy gave a very graphic description of scenes which he found very frightening and which came from a film which had been advertised as adult-rated. When I asked him whether he had seen the film, he replied emphatically that he had not, but he had seen "a piece when they were telling when it would be." Similarly, a group of eight-year-old girls (8) gave graphic accounts of scenes or issues raised in the *Jerry Springer* and other chat shows which they insisted they had seen "on adverts" (i.e. promotional spots), rather than watching the whole programme. One girl in the same group revealed that "sometimes at my *nanna*, I just have a peep and go somewhere else".

[17] Similar concerns were recorded by the British Broadcasting Standards Commission in its annual report for 1995. The report noted that: "One of the problems that complainants to the Council often refer to is the difficulty of preparing for trailers in the way that they can for programmes. There is a feeling that programmes, by the nature of their storylines, generally build up to particular episodes and scenes, and viewers feel that they could take avoiding action if they wished. [...]There are other factors — such as the scheduling of the programme — which provide additional clues as to its likely content. Trailers, on the other hand, do not have these signs" (Hargrave, 1995:31).

This viewing of decontextualised snippets and glimpses might well be more confusing or upsetting for children precisely because such snippets are by their nature calculated to arouse interest and curiosity. Their aim is frequently to titillate, tantalise or shock. They follow many of the attention-grabbing conventions of advertising, and like adverts they are usually short, sharp and bitsy. They glamorise and sensationalise the everyday and the banal in order to attract viewers and sell products. In cases when the publicity spots are also for programmes clearly marked as unsuitable for children, such advertising conventions may well be encouraging children to develop ideas and images of "adult" interests and tastes which are at best limited and at worst bizarre. Here is an eight-year-old boy's version of his parents' viewing habits and his reactions to them. He made this statement as a way of "showing up" or teasing another boy in his focus group (22) who couldn't think of anything to say when I asked him which TV programmes he disliked:

Robert Dan films li joqog]du jbusu *(laughter from other boys)* u joqog]du jin\g]u j]obb jara *(laughs)* .... B]ad-daddy tieg]i! Id-daddy tieg]i *(laughter from others)* l-ewwel wie]ed! Anka... *(laughter)* u ommi mbag]ad toqg]od tara l-ir[iel jin\g]u ... T]obb... U jien il-}add. Jien *Play Station* u *cartoons* in]obb nara biss. Nilg]ab il-*Play Station* u nara il-*cartoons*...

Robert This one likes to watch those films where they keep kissing *(laughter from other boys)* and where they keep undressing *(laughs)* ... Like my dad! My dad *(laughter from others)* is really into it! Even .... *(laughter)* and then my mum keeps watching men undressing ... That's what she likes ... And I no one. I only like to watch Play Station and cartoons. I play Play Station and watch cartoons....

Another five-year-old boy (51) described how he usually leaves the room when his parents watch "adult" films and programmes. He was answering the question as to whether he thought boys liked different programmes from girls:

Dustin Jiena, ommi kienet tara]afna films, u missieri, imma ma jog][buniex, g]ax id-daddy kien jara tal-gwerra u affaraijiet li ma j]obbuniex, u [ieli joqg]od iqalleb il-]in kollu. Allura jien imbag]ad nitlaq minn]dejh. U l-mummy [ieli tara *Jerry Springer*, imma dak jien ma' n]obbhux. Jien Mowgli n[obb. Ma' nafx x'jismhu - dawk li jib\g]u mill-annimali u kollox.

Dustin Me, my mother used to watch a lot of films, and my father, but I don't like them, because daddy used to watch war films and things which don't like me, and sometimes he keeps switching channels all the time. So I just get up and leave him. And mummy sometimes watches *Jerry Springer*, but I don't like that one. I like Mowgli. I don't know what it's called – those which are scared of animals and everything.

Children as young as five clearly make rational choices about what they want to watch and what they don't, and these choices are heavily influenced by how attractive and interesting a particular programme is perceived to be. So what happens when children choose to watch programmes which they recognise as being targeted at an exclusively adult audience? How do they deal with the classification guidelines then?

4.3 HOW CHILDREN JUSTIFY THE WATCHING OF ADULT-RATED MATERIAL

4.3.1 "The guidelines are not reliable"

One very common method used by children to bypass classification guidelines and restrictions is to question their accuracy and reliability. This was not just done to justify the watching of adult rated material, however. A number also complained that programmes appearing with the green sign should really be classified as AO. According to two nine-year-old girls (13):

> Michelle Once, we were changing television, the channels, and there was this film. There was a green sign. And it wasn't true that it was the green sign. It was really supposed to be the red sign... 'cause there were murdering, shooting...
> Leanne Yes. Sometimes that's what they do...

Similarly, a group of nine year-old boys (26) responded to my question as to whether they follow classification guidelines by insisting that the guidelines are unreliable because perfectly harmless films get an AO rating, while others with "rude bits" often get the green sign. These boys also insisted that

young people of their age can handle adult material — the classification guide apparently only applies to younger children who might get frightened or copy what they watch:

Nathaniel Imma hemm xi kultant, ikun hemm films, u j[ibuhom]amra, il-bo``a, u dana, ikun tajjeb g]at-tfal...
Norbert Vera!
Nathaniel Ma' jkun hemm xejn!

Craig A]na ta' disa snin, u ta' g]axra wkoll, dana, nistg]u narawh, ma' nib\g]ux!
Nathaniel Ehe, jkun hemm bo``a]amra u ma jkun hemm xejn, tat-tfal i\-\g]ar...
Norbert {ie li a]dar ukoll. Tkun]adra, u jkun naqra pasta\ ukoll. Hux vera?

Nathaniel But there are sometimes, there are films, and they show the red circle, and, you know, it would be good for children...
Norbert It's true!
Nathaniel There would be nothing wrong with it!
Craig We who are nine years old, and ten as well, you know, can watch it, we don't get scared!
Nathaniel Yeah, there will be a red circle and there wouldn't be anything wrong, for young children....
Norbert Sometimes green as well. It would be green, but it would be a bit rude as well. It's true, isn't it?

4.3.2 "It's OK if you watch adult-rated films on video or with your parents"

One other way of justifying the bypassing of classification guides involved the suggestion that the context in which a programme or film is watched makes all the difference to the types of effects it might have on children. This aspect was well illustrated in the way children spoke about the classification of the film *Titanic*. Children's comments about the rating of this particular film provide an interesting illustration of how lines of demarcation between what is suitable for children and what is not are often perceived as either blurred or flexible - and hence as amenable to being interpreted freely or even ignored. It is also in cases like this that children get the most inconsistent messages from adults about what they should or should not watch. Officially they are told that the film is suitable only for those who are twelve or older, unofficially they are given to understand that this rating can be ignored or explained away. As one seven-year-old boy (21) commented:

Once, my daddy's friend, he said if the children are going to watch *Titanic*, and the police said it wasn't good for the children, but they still let them in...

A large proportion of the children I interviewed said that they had seen the film *Titanic*. This included a group of nine-year-old girls (11) who had also insisted that they always follow ratings guidelines. All except one girl in this group (Rose, who had seen it at the cinema) had seen it on video, even though they were well aware of the fact that it had been rated as not suitable for children under 12. The ways in which they reasoned away the adult-rating in this situation suggests that they don't so much challenge the rating itself as justify their particular interpretation of it:

Interviewer Xi]add kien qalli li *Titanic* ma' kienx tajjeb g]at-tfal. Ta]sbu li veru?
Marceline E]e. G]ax dal-film kien fis-*cinema*, u kienu jg]idu: "mit-twelve g]al kbar." U... jien xtaqt narah, u mbag]ad selfithulna din it-tifla...
Rita Jien na]seb jg]idu tal-bi\a g]ax fi`-`inema ikun hemm per e\empju dak fejn jibda' jidher il-film, u meta ji[i biex je[]req, tie]u qata' meta tarah. U fuq il-video ma' ti]ux qata', g]ax ma' jag]milx dak l-istorbju b]al ma' jag]mel i`-`inema.
Rose A]na morna i`-`inema biex narawh, m'ommi, o]ti, jien, u]abiba tieg]i, u meta nqasam fi tnejn, kien g]amel]oss kbir, qisu BUMM! u taf kif tlajna, qiesu fuq xulxin!
Sarah Jien na]seb li g]andhom ra[un, g]ax meta krijajtu (krejtu), wara kien hemm miktub li jistg]u jaraw] minn g]andu *twelve years* jew il-fuq....
Rita Il-ku[ina tieg]i marret

Interviewer Someone told me that *Titanic* was not good for children. Do you think that's true?
Marceline Yeah. Because this film was in the cinema, and they used to say: "from twelve upwards. And... I wanted to see it, and then this girl lent it to us...
Rita I think that they say it's scary because in the cinema there is for example that bit where the film can be seen, and when it comes to sink, you get a fright when you see it. And on the video you don't get a fright, because it doesn't make that loud noise as it does in the cinema.
Rose We went to the cinema to see it, with my mother, my sister, me, and a friend of mine, and when it broke in two, it made a big noise, like BOOM! and you know how we went up, like on top of each other!
Sarah I think they are right, because when I rented it, on the back there was written that it can be seen by those who are twelve or older...

Rita My cousin went to see it. She was

tarah. Kellha *thirteen*.

Interviewer Imma intom rajtuh kollha g]idtuli...

Rita E]e, fuq il-video.

Interviewer Ma rajtu xejn]a\in fih?

Sarah Jien kont rajtu g]ax ma kien jimpurtani xejn, g]ax *Titanic* g]alija kont irrid narah, u rajtu....

Interviewer Ta]sbu li hemm xi *films* jew programmi li jistghu jag]mlulhom]sara lit-tfal tal-eta' tag]kom?

Tania *Films* per e\empju tal-bi\a, films per e\empju tal-*X-Files*, u ommhom tg]idilhom "Tixg]elu]x g]ax dak tal-bi\a," u jag]mlu]ilithom li jixg]eluh, bil-fors...

thirteen.

Interviewer But you told me that you all saw it...

Rita Yeah, on the video...

Interviewer You saw nothing wrong in it?

Sarah I had seen it because it didn't matter to me at all, because *Titanic* for me I had wanted to see it, and I saw it...

Interviewer Do you think that there are any films or programmes which can harm children of your age?

Tania Films for examples which are scary, films for examples of the *X-Files*, and their mother tells them: "Don't switch it on because it's scary, and they do their best to switch it on, no matter what...

Children often make it clear that they themselves *know* when and how to judge whether something is too scary or upsetting for them to watch. In this respect, Tania's suggestion at the end of the passage just quoted becomes particularly interesting, in that it suggests that these children are not rejecting the validity and protective force of parental warnings and prohibitions when these are clear and unequivocal. But the watching of the film *Titanic* falls under a completely different category in these children's minds, not least because in many cases it was part of a shared family experience. Rose, who saw the film at the cinema, points out that she saw it with her mother and friends — in her eyes, this appears to be enough justification for ignoring the rating, even though she delightedly confirms Rita's assertion that the film was rated 12+ because it can get quite scary on the cinema screen (as distinct from video).

In Marceline and Sarah's case, the fact that they really wanted to see the film also appears to be enough justification in itself. "Jien kont rajtu g]ax ma' kien jimpurtani xejn," says Sarah ("I had seen it because it didn't matter to me at all"). We can infer several reasons for this attitude. For one thing, these girls are not far off the twelve-year benchmark indicated in the film's rating — though it should be stressed that many of the younger children interviewed had also seen

this film. There was a lot of hype and publicity surrounding the release of the film and video, which would have made the viewing of it highly attractive to young people wanting to keep up with current successes (especially in the wake of the international super star status enjoyed by Leonardo di Caprio with young viewers). Also implied in what these girls say is the fact that they recognise that adults are very relaxed about their watching a film like this — many children had seen it with their parents, and in one case another group of eight-year-olds told me that they had also been shown parts of the film at school.

4.3.3 "It's OK if you don't copy what you see"

Here is a group of nine-year old boys (26) justifying the fact that they regularly watch and play the video game "Duke Nukem", which they know to be classified as not-suitable for children. There was some confusion as to the exact cut-off age identified in the rating in this case. In quick succession the boys variously said that the game was rated as suitable only for people over 12, over 13, over 15, and over 18. This confusion suggests an almost nonchalant attitude to the ratings when it comes to video games. It also suggests that (in the case of these boys, anyway) they do not necessarily discriminate between 12+ or 18+ ratings when they decide to ignore guidelines. The boys' explanation as to why they still play this particular adult-rated game went as follows:

Craig Imma xorta nilg]abha.!	Craig But I still play it!
Nathaniel Ma' fiha xejn pasta\!	Nathaniel There's nothing dirty about it!
David G]ax i[ibu ftit, emm, ftit nisa ji\fnu... dana, jg]idu li *Over 15*, u jg]id, jitkellem bl-Amerikan dan, imma jg]id, jg]id per ezempju "Shit" u hekk. Imma ma jg]idhomx tifel, u dana, imma mhux pasta\i]afna. L-aqwa li inti ma tg]idhomx!	David Because they have some, emm, some women dancing... this, they say that it's Over 15, and he says, he speaks in American this guy, he says for example "Shit" and things like that. But it's not a boy who say them, and so, but it's not very dirty. The most important thing is that you don't say them!
Norbert E\att!	Norbert Exactly!

For these boys it is whether you allow the programme or game to influence your actions and speech that matters. They take influence to be exclusively a matter of "copy-cat" consequences. The assumption

seems to be that if you don't copy, then there's no harm in watching.[18]

A similar point was made by two nine-year-old girls (11), who insisted that they didn't think they could be harmed by watching a programme like *Ipokriti*, which they said they watched with their family, but which they acknowledged to include material which was not suitable for children ("tas-swat ... kliem mhux xieraq... forsi jg]idu kliem pasta\" — "Scenes involving beating up ... obscene words... maybe they say rude words"). Tania and Sarah explained how they deal with such material as follows:

Tania Jien jekk nara xi]a[a pasta\a fuqu ma' nag]milhiex jiena! *(Addressing another girl in the group:)* M'intiex sa tg]id, inti m'intix tifla \g]ira!	Tania If I see something rude on it, I don't copy it! *(Addressing another girl in the group:)* You're not going to say it, you're not a little girl!
Sarah Jien meta, hekk, jg]idu xi]a[a pasta\a, nismag]ha u ng]idha, imma f'qalbi. Ma ng]idhiex lil xi]add. U meta norqod malajr ninsiha! G]ax meta jkun hemm il-kliem tajbin, ma ninsihomx.	Sarah Me, when they say something rude, I hear it and I say it, but in my heart. I don't say it to anyone. And when I go to sleep I soon forget it! Because when there are good words, I don't forget them.
Il-kliem il-pasta\ biss ninsa, [urnata wara!	It's only rude words that I forget, the next day!

Unconvincing as it sounds, this last assertion draws attention to the children's desire to be allowed a certain amount of leeway in monitoring what they watch.

Another twist to this argument was provided by Robert, an eight year-old boy (22) who suggested that watching adult material was a good way to learn what behaviour you should avoid! His comment came as part of a discussion about films which have lots of fighting, and in answer to the question as to how children know when such films are not suitable for them to watch:

Josef G]ax... jekk jag]mlu]afna [lied, hekk, joqog]du ji[[ieldu]afna... joqtlu lil-xulxin, dak]a\in g]at-tfal.	Josef Because.... if they have a lot of fighting, so, they keep fighting a lot... killing each other, that's bad for children.

[18] This point is discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

Interviewer G]aliex]a\in g]at-tfal?

Interviewer Why bad for children?

Josef G]ax hekk!...

Josef Because!...

Samuel G]ax mhux suppost joqog]du jag]tu dan hekk. Jaraw u ji[[ieldu. Tag]mel... tag]mel dak...

Samuel Because they're not supposed to keep hitting and so. They see and they fight. You do ... you do that...

Robert Dak mhux film? Dak taparsi jkun!

Robert Isn't it just a film? That's all make-believe!

Samuel ... Tag]mel id-drawwa tag]hom...

Samuel ... You start doing their habit...

Robert Le! Dak trid tarhom biex ma tag]milx b]al... Tarah, tara x']a jag]mlu, jekk ikunu tal-gwerra, ma tag]milx b]alhom!

Robert No! You have to watch them so as not to do like.... You watch it, you see what they're going to do, if they're of the war, you don't do like them!

Interviewer Ta]sbu li hemm min jag]mel b]alhom meta jarhom dawn il-programmi, dal-films?

Interviewer Do you think there are those who do the same when they see these programmes, these films?

Josef Ija.

Josef Yes.

Robert Mmmm. Mhux]afna]afna..

Robert Mmmm. Not very much...

Interviewer Josef l-ewwel...

Interviewer Josef first...

Josef G]ax darba kien hemm tifla, qaltli l-mummy, rat *Mary Poppins* tin\el min fuq it-tara[, u mbag]ad provatha u waqg]et minn fuq it-tara[u marret l-isptar.

Josef Because once there was a girl, my mummy told me, she saw *Mary Poppins* coming down from the stairs, and then they tried it and she fell from the stairs and went to hospital.

The attitudes to representations of fighting reflected here are interesting. Josef had earlier declared his enjoyment of such programmes and linked it to his self-defence classes; but here he resorts to "received wisdom" about children imitating what they see. Robert's alternative account (you watch it so that you know what you should not do) did not in fact seem to carry much conviction. But it does draw attention to the fact that he is not willing to give up watching such programmes, irrespective of what others say. It is in this vein also that he draws attention to the fact that such films are make-believe, and hence (presumably) harmless. This last point raises the question of modality, and the extent to which children can distinguish between make-belief and reality. This issue is discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

4.3.4 "You know yourself when it's not good for you, and it's OK as long as you block out the bad bits"

The emphasis by children that they themselves *know* and can judge for themselves whether something is suitable or not is well captured in the way in which another group of eight-year-old girls (7) responded to my question as to how they know whether a programme is suitable for them to watch or not. Like most of the other children interviewed, these girls too were quick to refer to the signposting guidelines used on some of the Italian stations. Their comments about how they assess a programme's suitability in the absence of such guidelines are interesting in that what they stress are issues which they appear to find upsetting. Shortly before the exchange which follows, the girls had been talking about the Maltese soap opera *Ipokriti*[19].

Interviewer U kif tkunu tafu jekk programm hux tajjeb g]alikom jew le, allura?	Interviewer And how do you know if a programme is good for you or not then?
Rachel Jag]mlu xi gozz pasta\ati!	Rachel They do a bunch of rude things!
Lucy G]aliex tara dik qiesa `irklu a]mar...	Lucy Because you see that red circle thing...
Carmen Hemmhekk ma jkun hemmx!	Carmen But they don't have that [on the Maltese channel]
Interviewer Allura, jekk ma jkollhomx, kif tinduna?	Interviewer So, if they don't have it, how do you know?
Lucy Tat-Taljani jkun hemm...	Lucy They have it on the Italian ones...
Interviewer U fuq il-Malti, jekk ikun programm li ma jkunx tajjeb g]at-tfal, kif tindunaw?	Interviewer And on the Maltese channel, if there is a programme which is not good for children, how do you know?
Carmen Anki int stess tinduna, inti stess tinduna...	Carmen Even you yourself realise this, you realise this yourself...
Rachel G]ax jibdew jg]idu, per e\empju, kliem]a\in...	Rachel Because they start saying, for example, obscene words...
Carmen E\att!	Carmen Exactly!
Rachel .. u ji[[ieldu...	Rachel ... and fighting...
Carmen U ji[[ieldu!	Carmen And fighting!

[19] The media audience audit report commissioned by the Malta Broadcasting Authority in March 1999 identified the Maltese soap opera *Ipokriti* as one of the highest rating programmes in Malta (Vassallo, 1999:46)

Interviewer U jekk ikunu qed ji[[ieldu, x'tag]mlu intom?
Carmen Xi kull tant naqliblu, xi kull tant ma' naqliblux! Xi kull tant niddejjaq nara dawk l-affarijiet, hekk.. jag]tu...
Rachel Darba kien hemm l-g]arus ta' Norma u qattg]alha l-libsa!
Carmen *(laughs)*
Rachel Veru! U mbag]ad, ma nafx min da]al, u rg]at... Hilda na]seb... rg]at lil-Norma bil-libsa mqatta'.

U mbag]ad g]ajtet ma' l-g]arus tag]ha... *(laughter)*
Carmen U mbag]ad, l-a]]ar darba, nhar it-Tnejn, kienu qed ji[[ieldu. Dak il-]in kont g]adni mank xg]eltu, u g]idt "A]jar!" G]idt "A]jar!" G]ax jien dak il-[lied qisu j]abbatni, g]ax inkella no]lom bih! Qisni ma nkunx nista' norqod.
Other girls *(together)* Anke jien...
Carmen }ija j]obb jara tal-bi\a',]alli mbag]ad joqg]od ji[[ieled. U jien niddejjaq g]ax noqg]od no]lom bihom imbag]ad.

Interviewer And if they're fighting, what do you do?
Carmen Sometimes I change channel, sometimes I don't! Sometimes I get fed up seeing those things, so... fighting..
Rachel Once there was Norma's boyfriend and he tore her dress!

Carmen *(laughs)*
Rachel It's true! And then, I don't know who came in, and she saw... Hilda I think... she saw Norma with her dress torn.

And then she shouted at her boyfriend.... *(laughter)*
Carmen And then, last time, on Monday, they were fighting. At that time I had barely switched it on, and I said "It's better!" I said "It's better!" Because that fighting sort of upsets me, because otherwise I have dreams about it! I sort of can't get to sleep.

Other girls *(together)* Me too...

Carmen My brother likes watching scary ones, so that afterwards he keeps fighting. And I get fed up because then I keep having dreams about them.

The scene which these girls describe involves someone tearing a woman's dress, and verbal fighting. It is these details, presumably, which lead them to think that these scenes are unsuitable for children — though they also appear to assume that boys find such material less disturbing than they do. Carmen prefers not to watch this type of material, and says she is pleased that she hadn't switched on the TV set in time to see all the fighting because it upsets her and gives her bad dreams. She compares herself with her brother who, she says, appears to enjoy those scenes which she finds disturbing. And yet, from the way in which she spoke, it was clear that she has detailed knowledge of the series as a whole and that she watches it regularly. She does this even though she knows that there might be parts which will cause her

to have bad dreams. Her attitude suggests that she assumes that it is only those specific parts (and not the programme as a whole) which are unsuitable for children like herself to watch.

She is not, in other words, watching the programme for what she takes to be its adult content, but because there are other aspects of it which she assumes to be innocuous and which she enjoys. Judging from what children in her group and others said when I asked them why they liked this particular programme, these enjoyable aspects arise from an interest in the story line, pleasure in watching drama in Maltese, and pleasure also in the watching of material which children often assume to be providing them with information about adult behaviour and themes which might normally be hidden from them. This last point is explored more fully in Chapters 6 and 7.

4.3.5 "It's OK if you don't understand the language!"

Another interesting twist to the justification of watching adult-rated material was suggested by a nine year-old boy (28) who said that he saw the sense of his mother telling him not to watch certain films in English, but that the situation would be different in Italian:

> For me, if my mother tells me not to watch this film in English, I think it's better, because if there'll be rude words and things that I won't understand in Italian, I'll understand them in English. But in Italian I won't understand most of the words.

A similar argument was made by seven year-old Melissa (5), when she revealed that she often watched the soap opera *Ipokriti* with her mother. She clearly felt that there was something wrong with this, because she seemed uncomfortable about making the revelation, and also said that her mother didn't want her to tell anybody at school that she watches it. I asked her if she enjoys watching the programme:

> Melissa Yes, sometimes I like it because sometimes... and it's in Maltese and I don't really understand it, so it's OK for me... That's the best thing about it, I don't understand if they're saying any violence or anything ...
> Other girl Or rude words!
> Melissa Yeah! *[laughs]* So I just see the pictures, eh, I don't know what they're saying or anything!

But the conflict in her mind remains, in spite of this brave attempt to justify and make sense of the fact that her mother allows her to watch a programme which she also gives her to understand is inappropriate. Later in the interview she appeared to start worrying that she might have revealed too much, and made it clear that she wished me to reassure her that I would not be passing any information on to the police! Immediately after the passage just quoted, she described how whenever her parents wanted to say something to each other which they did not want her to understand, they normally spoke in Italian. She said that she found this very annoying, and would often put her hand over her mother's mouth to stop her doing it. The two stories are clearly related. They suggest that she has learned unintended lessons from her parents' habit of blocking her from access to "adult" information by using a language which they assume to be inaccessible to her. So she uses her claimed inability to understand Maltese as justifying the fact that she regularly watches an "adult" programme. The danger, she has decided, is in understanding the words, not in *watching*. But she also seems to realise that this is not true. In other words, this is another example of a public statement intended as a form of justification for the breaking or bending of rules.

4.3.6 "Adults are over-protective!"

Complaints about parental over-protectiveness tended to come mostly from the older age groups interviewed, but a number of younger children also queried the appropriateness or even fairness of parental restrictions on what they can watch. One feisty eight-year-old girl (8) and her two friends became very indignant about what they saw as an infringement of children's rights when adults regulate what they can watch, while they (parents) always watch whatever they like. This outburst came when I pointed out to these girls that some people say that there is too much violence even in cartoons:

> Adriana Tell me, tell me. Then what do the children see? [i.e. What is there left for children to see?] That's what I want to know!
> Interviewer Well, that's what I'm asking you!
> Daniela The Cartoon Network!
> Adriana Eh... not only the grown-ups are... the grown-ups want everything for them! They can... they can see *Jerry Springer*, they can see *Rescue 911*, they can see, they can see....
> Daniela I see *Rescue 911*.

Adriana And I! ... They can see, let's see, they can see Net Television. They can see games, they can see this... And children? Why! They can't see cartoons, it's violence! *Mela* we don't see it! We can't see this, we can't see that! *Mela* what do the children do? Nothing?
Lydia We can just sit in the shower!
Daniela Want me to stay like this all day doing nothing? No!
Adriana It's not fair! Grown-ups, *suppost* they have to work, and we have to help them a bit. But they say see this, *per e\empju*, and that, and we see nothing?
Daniela Like my father. Sometimes, he says, "Go in your bedroom, 'cause I want to watch this." And it's not violence! I don't care if it's in Italian. My mother tells me what they say afterwards, 'cause she tells me about the programme... And... if I'm not watching it, she still tells me, and I don't care if she tells me. And she tells me what it's all about, even if there's some rude things and violence, she still tells me...

For a child, being a child often means being shielded. What these girls are protesting against are what they perceive as the inequalities which follow from the need to be shielded. So they insist that they can make their own judgements.

In my interviews, there was also a marked contrast between the idealised images of responsible adulthood which many parents appeared to want their children to become familiar with, and the types of images of less-than-perfect adults which characterise many of the television programmes which were more popular with children. One of the mothers interviewed (58) said that she does not allow her children to watch the popular cartoon programme *The Simpsons* because it is "unnatural". When I asked her to explain, she referred to what she considered bad behaviour by the characters, the fact that they are always arguing, and that they use language which is both reprehensible and grammatically incorrect. One of the fathers in her group pointed out that he also objected to the cartoon programme *Cow and Chicken* for similar reasons — i.e. that the family situations depicted in it (as with *The Simpsons*) were not ideal and hence gave children "the wrong ideas" about what family life should be like.

A lot of the evidence from what children themselves say suggests that such programmes are popular with children precisely because they break conventions and undermine the idealised world which children often see adults as trying to gull them into believing to be reality. In other words, children like such programmes partly

because they assume them to be telling them more about life than their parents are willing to tell. Ironically, the types of programmes which the children I interviewed appeared to most frequently identify as fitting this category included scandal mongering chat shows like *Jerry Springer* and soap operas like *Ipokriti*.

4.4 CONTRADICTORY PARENTAL MESSAGES

A number of children appeared confused by the contradictory messages they got from their parents about the appropriateness or otherwise of different programmes. In this respect, the soap opera *Ipokriti* and what children say about it offers an interesting insight not only into how they make sense of the programme itself, but also into how they respond to what adults tell them about it. One thing is for sure, *Ipokriti* triggered some very strong reactions. Many children and adults told me that this was a programme which teachers repeatedly said was not suitable for children. In contrast to this, many children described how they regularly watch the programme with their parents as a family. One young factory worker (58) also revealed that he watches the programme regularly with his seven year-old daughter, even though his wife disapproves, and that because the girl finds the adverts annoying, he also regularly video-tapes the programme (minus adverts) for her to watch over and over again at her leisure. In the course of one interview with 13-14-year-old girls (38), a teacher who happened to overhear the girls speaking about the programme couldn't resist joining us to launch into a long diatribe about the programme's poor acting, content and moral values. Interestingly, the girls joined in the criticism of the programme while this was taking place, emphasising its limitations and negative aspects, even though they had been speaking about it much more positively before the teacher entered the room.

Children had been very confused by the conflicting messages which they had been getting about whether or not it was appropriate for them to watch this programme. This was very evident in the ways they spoke about it. One group of children insisted that there couldn't be anything wrong with the programme because it also had children in the cast. Others were not so sure, but usually indicated that they thought it was unsuitable for children because of specific scenes or words, rather than because of the themes and thrust of the programme as a whole. Here is a group of 8 year-old girls (7) responding to my question as to whether children should be allowed to watch it:

Interviewer }afna teachers qaluli li programm b]al *Ipokriti* m'hux tajjeb g]at-tfal. Carmen, int g]idtilna wkoll li anke missierek hekk jg]idlek ukoll...
Carmen E]e.
Interviewer Intom x'ta]sbu? Tajjeb jew m'hux tajjeb g]at tfal programm b]al *Ipokriti.*
Lucy and Emilia *(answering together)* Insomma... Xi kultant... Xi kultant...
Hilary {ieli jg]amlu xi pasta\ata...
Emilia Iva *(laughs)*
Lucy Jien nara] man-nanna, g]ax inkun man-nanna....
Hilary ... u mbag]ad id-daddy jaqliblu..
Lucy Jien nara] man-nanna, g]ax inkun g]and in-nanna nhar ta' }add. U ommi tg]id, meta nkun]a nara] nhar ta' Tnejn fil-g]axija, ma t]allinix g]ax tg]id "Dak m'hux tat-tfal."

Carmen B]al missieri! Meta jkun hemm hu ma j]allinix \gur, g]ax x']in jara dawk l-affarijiet jaqliblu mal-ewwel.

U mbag]ad, x']in immur jien fis-sodda, jer[a jaqliblu fejn kien *(laughter)*]alli jarah hu! Isss!

Rachel Lanqas hu, m'hux suppost jarah...
Interviewer Allura m'hux suppost jarawh il-kbar lanqas?
Rachel E[e.
Carmen G]al-kbar, iwa... Imma xi kull tant jg]o[obni aktar milli tas-soltu.

Interviewer Many teachers told me that a programme like *Ipokriti* is not good for children. Carmen, you also told us that your father says the same to you as well...
Carmen Yeah.
Interviewer What do you think? Is a programme like *Ipokriti* good for children or not?
Lucy and Emilia *(answering together)* Well.... Sometimes... Sometimes...

Hilary There are times when they do something rude...
Emilia Yeah *(laughs)*
Lucy I watch it with granny, because I'm with granny then...
Hilary ....and then daddy switches it over.
Lucy I watch it with granny, because I'm usually with granny on Sundays. And my mother says, when I'm about to watch it on Monday evening, she doesn't let me watch it because she says "That's not a children's programme."
Carmen Like my father! When he's there he doesn't let me for sure, because as soon as he sees those things he switches over straight away.

And then, as soon as I go to bed, he switches it back to where it was *(laughter)* so as to watch it himself! *Isss! (i.e. "what cheek!" or "it's not fair!")*
Rachel He shouldn't be watching it either...
Interviewer So aren't grown-ups supposed to watch it either?
Rachel Yeah.
Carmen For grown-ups, yes.... But sometimes I like it more than usual.

One message which comes across very clearly from what these children are saying is that they are confused because adults are inconsistent in their attitudes, and they themselves are not sure as to which version is right. When I asked a group of five-year-olds (51) whether they thought *Ipokriti* was OK for children to watch, one girl who had already identified herself as a regular watcher replied:

Samantha Le, kien hemm, kien hemm... Ta' qabel meta kien spi``a, qalu, qalu li mhux tajjeb. Imma meta kien]a jibda qalu fuq it-television li tajjeb jer[g]u jarawh it-tfal... Issa ma nafx..

Samantha No, there was, there was.. When the previous [series] finished, they said that it was not good. But when it was about to start again, they said on television that it was good for children to watch it again... Now I don't know ...

It is worth noting the uncertain way in which she ends her explanation: "Now I don't know." The uncertainty as to whether she is doing right or wrong in continuing to watch the programme is probably compounded by the fact that she watches it with her parents. And she assumes that what made the programme inappropriate on the occasions when children were advised specifically not to watch it were individual scenes or words, rather than the fact that as a whole it might be pitched at a level with which children cannot be expected to cope.

A tendency to think that there is danger of being caught out by the authorities, even though your parents might allow you to break the rules, is reflected in the following seven-year-old boy's description of how he had watched an "adult" video with his family (21):

> Konrad You know the video which I was talking about: I wasn't allowed to see it, because it was from 13 upwards and I... and I only seven. But no one care... But no one would know, only my family, 'cause... because, emm, the man wasn't, wasn't there. He can't see me. He's not psychic!
> Interviewer So did your mum and dad know that you were watching that?
> Konrad Yes, 'cause they were with me, and then my uncle and auntie came back from abroad, from the honeymoon, 'cause they just got married, and they got me a cup of Donald Duck!

"The man" here is presumably the video rental owner. One thing worth noting here is that Konrad describes the whole watching experience as a family affair, newly married uncle and aunt included. He seems to have learned at least one lesson from all this: if you don't get caught,

then no one cares and no harm is done! I stress this point not because I believe that the watching of this particular video is likely to have harmed this boy, but because it draws attention to the manner in which he is trying to make sense of contradictory messages coming from his parents — messages which are in conflict with those coming from other figures of authority, here possibly represented by the non-psychic man who is presumably assumed to represent the guardians and enforcers of video-rating standards!

4.5 ASSUMING ADULT ROLES BY "PROTECTING" YOUNGER SIBLINGS

Some children described how their parents often instruct them to cover their eyes during scenes which they do not wish them to see. A seven-year-old boy (16) delightedly described how he had peeked through his fingers anyway when his father instructed him to do this during the scene in *Titanic* when Leonardo Di Caprio draws Kate Winslett in the nude. A nine year-old boy (26) had his friends roaring with laughter by telling them how his mother had tried to distract him during the same scene by sticking a packet of popcorn in front of his face and telling him that she might buy him a Play Station. An eleven-year-old girl in another school (75) described how when she was younger, her older sister used to cover her (the girl's) eyes whenever there were any "pasta\ati": "O]ti kienet taqbadli g]ajnejja u tg]attihomli!" ("My sister used to grab my eyes and cover them!").

Concern about younger siblings being harmed by what they see was repeatedly expressed. Here is a seven-year-old girl's description (5) of how she monitors what her four-year-old brother is watching, even when her mother is apparently negligent (according to the girl's criteria, anyway) :

> Sandra My young brother, sometimes, ehmm, he watches... ehmm.. bad films, or he likes violent films, and when I come in the room and I see him watching them, I change the channel *[laughs]* to something like... he likes it, girl things.... 'Cause like, my mother was watching something violent, and she went to do something, and she left it on, and my brother was in the room, playing. Then he saw what's on the telly... I would come in, if I had, and really quick change the channel, 'cause I don't want my brother to start fighting with all his other friends and fight me!

As is the case with adults, children often believe that TV can indeed harm children, but only those who are younger than themselves.[20] Whenever I asked children of different ages whether they thought television could be harmful to children, I was either told that yes it would, if you sat too close to the set, or else that *younger* children than themselves (and this claim was also made by the six year olds) were likely to be affected badly because they would want to imitate what they saw. Over and over again I was told the story (or variations of it) of the small boy who tried to imitate Superman by jumping out of the window to his death. Many had stories to tell about neighbours' children (usually boys) or cousins, or other boys in the school, who were very badly behaved or were always fighting and copying all the violence they saw on TV. There were also frequent tales told of children in other countries (especially Britain and the US) being so badly influenced that they even started killing.

Interestingly, whenever I asked the children if they thought that they themselves had ever been influenced in these ways, they always said that they had not. In one interview (51), I told a group of 5-6 year-olds that older children had told me that children of their age were likely to imitate what they saw on television, especially fighting. Was this true? They all chanted "No!" What about the stories about children of their age thinking they were Superman and jumping out of the window, then? Was this true? Again they said "no", and one of them explained that those who say this might get the wrong idea because they see them *playing* at this. Another group of six year-old boys with whom I had just been watching an episode of the cartoon *Spiderman* told me that they enjoy playing at superheroes and wearing Batman and Superman costumes. When I asked whether they had ever thought of "flying" out of a window on such occasions, they all laughed and said that they wouldn't want to end up in hospital or in a coffin![21]

[20] The implications of this point in relation to the question of media violence are explored further in Chapter 5. Similar patterns have been reported in a number of British studies, including Buckingham (1996), Hargrave, Halloran and Gray (1996); and in a *Guardian/ICM* poll published 11-12 May, 1996 which found that only five per cent of the sample surveyed felt that they personally had been "influenced by television".

[21] The question of the extent to which children can distinguish between reality and fantasy is explored more fully in Chapter 5. See also Hodge and Tripp (1986), Buckingham (1993), and Davies (1997).

For these children then, as for their parents, the child who is negatively influenced by television is always "other." Because children regularly see themselves excluded from watching particular types of programmes because of their "child" designation, it is perhaps not surprising that this is one designation which they learn quickly to deflect away from themselves. According to Ellen Seiter, "people always compare their own television viewing to that of the imagined mass audience, one that is more interested, more duped, more entertained, more gullible than they themselves" (1999: 130). This is a frequently repeated claim (cf Barker and Petley, 1997). But when the children I interviewed were asked to describe *specific* instances involving "negative" influence, they did so in ways which indicated that they thought that it was this more vulnerable and more gullible "other" which was the minority, and that they themselves were really part of a more enlightened mass. They usually assumed that their peers and most children of their age and gender normally shared their advanced stage of enlightenment. In cases when they defended their rights to watch adult-rated programmes, for instance, this was usually done in the form of an assertion of their age group's maturity and ability to deal with such material — not as one individual's claim to being more "adult" than his peers.

When children rationalise their behaviour in watching programmes which they know to be designated as "not suitable for children," it is not so much the designation itself which they contest, but their own ability to judge for themselves — an ability which they want to be recognised as an indication of their more "adult" status. Over and over again, children and teenagers right across the age groups surveyed insisted that films and programmes rated as not suitable for their age-group often turn out to have "nothing wrong with them". But in many cases they were also able to find reasons to explain why the programme or film had been so classified, and these were usually reasons which might apply to others (especially younger children) but not to themselves. Children, therefore, rarely challenge the idea that there should be classification guidelines. As we have seen, they also take on "adult" roles by shielding their younger siblings from watching material which they themselves designate as "not suitable for children." This is their way of lifting themselves up the "maturity" scale and distancing themselves from "childishness."[22] In

[22] An interesting variation on this pattern occurred when a 9 year-old boy (27) described himself as a bit of a baby because he likes watching "baby cartoons" like *Rugrats.* As soon as he said this, the other boys in the group told him that there is nothing babyish about liking cartoons because many adults enjoy them too.

doing this, they are also helping to perpetuate established assumptions about the parameters distinguishing childhood from adulthood.

This attitude is often reinforced (or even inspired) by parental behaviour and attitudes. For instance, one 11 year-old girl (29) described how her mother allows her and her younger sisters to watch programmes which are signposted as "AO" with her in the kitchen, but she tells them that she will keep the remote control in her hand and will change channels as soon as she sees any "bad scenes". In cases when such scenes occur, the girl explained, she as the oldest sister is sometimes allowed to go to her bedroom and watch the rest of the film by herself; but there are also times when she too is blocked from watching further. Other children described how their parents will often watch (or check) AO-rated videos or programmes themselves before deciding whether to allow their children to watch them. When they decide that "there's nothing wrong with them", the children are allowed to watch — thus, among other things, reinforcing the idea that official classification guides are not reliable.

Buckingham (1996: 80) has suggested that what lies at the root of much popular as well as academic concern about the negative effects of the media on children are dominant constructions of childhood which define children largely in terms of what they lack. This lack manifests itself in "negative" qualities (vulnerability, ignorance, irrationality) which are also seen as an inability (or unwillingness) to conform to adult norms. By implication, children wanting to distance themselves from the "childish" therefore stress that they do not share this lack. But the defining of subjectivities through the negation of lack is likely to lead to confusion when adequate alternative concepts of "adult" remain so fragmented. It is precisely through a willingness and even eagerness to appropriate norms which they understand to be "adult" that children usually distance themselves from the "lack" which characterises the "childish" and "immature." One problem with the ways in which this appropriation takes place in contemporary media cultures is that younger children's understanding of the "adult" world which they assume their parents to be shielding them from is often pieced together from disjointed glimpses of sensationalised and consumption-oriented material. In this sense, it is on fragmented and disjointed notions of what it means to be an adult that these children are building their own "adult" subjectivities.

On a more practical level, there is clearly a need for a serious re-evaluation of how classification and advisory guidelines are determined, as well as of the manners in which they are presented and

applied. Though they frequently ignore or work their ways around ratings, children and teenagers both need and appreciate having guidance which is clear, consistent and reliable. The ways they use and respond to it is often very different from what adults may intend or realise. But even when they deliberately go against what is advised, young people's choices about what to watch are still made in the light of the reliability or otherwise of the guidelines available.

Chapter 5
SCREEN VIOLENCE: EFFECTS AND ATTITUDES

"Dak li jsebba] il-film: il-qtil!"
["That's what makes the film beautiful: the killing!]
(12 year-old boy)

5.1 FICTIONAL MEDIA VIOLENCE AS ENTERTAINMENT

"Death, sex, violence, Cameron Diaz.... what else can you ask for? A must see." This was Simon J.J. Gatt's verdict on the film *Very Bad Things*, which he reviewed in *The Malta Independent* on 10 April 1999 (p.29), under the heading "Hysterically sick". "This movie is second to none," he asserted: "It made me laugh and it made me cringe... just what I want when I go to a movie." Reviewing the same film in *The Times* of the same date, Johan Galea similarly enthused about how much he had enjoyed the film's "deliciously horrid" qualities:

> If you are repulsed by three-legged dogs, impaled prostitutes, murder upon bloody murder, dismemberment jokes and several kinds of disabilities, then this movie is not for you. I simply enjoyed this movie.

I quote these reviews at the start of this chapter because they help to draw attention to the extent to which violent entertainments have become an integral part of contemporary media culture. Violence is often so taken for granted as an acceptable and even desirable component of screen entertainment that children and young people find it difficult to imagine alternative forms of enjoyable screen fare. In the course of interviews conducted for this survey, children and teenagers frequently insisted that it is violence which makes films entertaining, and that films without violence are not what films should be. As the following examples show, girls were as likely to express such views as boys:

Il-film, ming]ajr vjolenza ma' jkunx sabi]!

If the film has no violence, it's not nice!

11 year-old girl (60)

Vjolenza, meta ji[[ieldu, l-isba]]a[a!	Violence, when they fight, is the most beautiful thing! 13 year-old girl (37)
	But a film without violence, what is it?!" 12 year-old boy (44)
Ming]ajr naqra vjolenza, qisu film ma jkunx sabi], hekk, ma jkunx film!	Without a bit of violence, it's like a film is not nice, it's not a film! 12 year-old boy (45)
G]alija films ming]ajr vjolenza bla sens.	For me films without violence are meaningless. 12 year-old girl (60)
Imma dak li jsebba] il-film. Jien g]alija il-qtil isebba] il-film!	But that's what makes the film beautiful. For me it's the killing which makes the film beautiful! 12 year-old boy (47)
Fil-films, jekk ma jkun hemmx l-g]adam ma' jkunx sabi]!	In films, if there are no bones, it won't be nice! 12 year-old boy (47)

It should be stressed that it is when violent encounters are understood to be fictional and served as entertainment that children and young people find them attractive and enjoyable. Violent situations which they believe to be real (like news items or documentaries portraying real violations and atrocities) may exert a different form of fascination, but they are not watched with the same enthusiasm, pleasure and excitement as fictional material. In marked contrast to the excitement about killing reflected in the excerpts above, children of all ages repeatedly also said how saddened they had been when they saw news reports and pictures of the suffering and carnage caused by the war in Kosovo (which was at its peak when the interviews were being held). This is how one five year-old girl (51) described her reactions:

Jien noqg]od ng]id ir-ru\arju wa]di, biex il-gwerra li jag]mlu huma tieqaf, g]ax jien ma' tantx in]obba.	I keep saying the rosary by myself, so that the war which they make will stop, because I don't like it much.

"Violent fictional entertainment" is of course a very broad category which includes a range of sub-genres — including "shoot-them-up" adventures and action thrillers, martial arts vehicles, as well as disaster and monster movies, horror films and murder mysteries, as well as soap operas depicting domestic conflict or suffering. As the list suggests, each of these genres carries different associations which encourage different modes of response from viewers (fear in the case of horror, excitement in that of thrillers, etc.). The positions which viewers are invited to take in relation to the situations they portray also vary considerably. Action adventures, for instance, usually present scenes of conflict from the perspective of the hero, horror films more frequently encourage viewers to imaginatively place themselves in the position of the victim.

It is important to remind ourselves of these distinctions and of the extent to which violent entertainments have become part of the media culture in which children grow when we consider the effects which media violence may be having on the attitudes and behaviour of children and young adults. The ways young people perceive, interpret and respond to screen violence are constantly and significantly being mediated by contextual and cultural factors.

These factors can be listed in the form of a series of propositions as follows:

(i) As is the case with "sex" on television, screen violence is not a homogeneous entity which is either present or not present in a film or programme. Screen representations of violence, suffering and the abject can vary considerably in the connotations and values which they project or encourage. These can range from the disturbingly realistic to the exaggeratedly cartoonish.

(ii) What we see on the screen is not simply "violence" but ways of showing violent encounters. These modes of representation play a crucial role not only in how the violent encounters are perceived and understood, but also in determining the types of attitudes and ways of behaving which they might be encouraging their viewers to endorse as desirable, attractive or even inevitable.

(iii) Films in which the violent content is understood to be fictional rather than "real" are usually approached, interpreted and responded to as "no more than" entertaining and inconsequential spectacle.

(iv) When fictional portrayals of violence and horror become heavily repetitive and exaggeratedly gory, they often take on the characteristics of camp — for some viewers, their "bad taste" can come to be seen as something to be enjoyed and laughed at.

(v) Though there is an apparently avid market for the commercialised culture of fictional violent entertainments, there is also widespread concern about the effects which "violent TV and films" might be having on the young and impressionable. The most widespread perception is that immature children who watch violent programmes and films will start imitating what they see.

(vi) There is also another equally widespread conviction among adults and children of all ages that they themselves are immune to such negative effects: bad media influences happen to others — younger children, children whose parents have not brought them up properly, or children and teenagers who live overseas.

We start with an examination of the nature and consequences of the last two considerations listed.

5.2 IMITATIVE BEHAVIOUR AND GENDER DIFFERENCES

The widespread conviction among adults and children alike that media violence is likely to have negative effects and cause imitative behaviour was interestingly reflected during a live TV panel discussion aired on TVM in January 1999 (80), when viewers were invited to take part in a phone-in poll about whether violent video games "encourage violence among children and young adults". Of the 666 people who took part in the poll, 67% said that they believed this to be the case. One possible reason for this belief is that, especially in their games, children can frequently be observed to be imaginatively recreating situations and scenes which they have seen on TV and in films. Younger children especially enjoy dressing up as super-heroes or playing with toys based on popular films or TV series. In the course of the interviews conducted for this survey, a number of girls said that they enjoy imagining themselves in situations like those of their favourite TV programmes (e.g. teen US college dramas and sit-coms like *USA High* , *Sweet Valley High* or *Saved by the Bell*) or as having powers like those of Sabrina, the TV teenage witch. One mother (56) said that she often notes how her nine year-old daughter repeats phrases she hears on her favourite programmes, trying them out as if she is consciously trying to include them in her conversations. Boys on

the other hand often spoke of the pleasures of watching "fighting films" and learning martial arts techniques from the likes of Jean Claude Van Damme or Bruce Lee.

Boys are perceived as being much more prone to imitate violent behaviour in games than girls, and there appear to be distinct expectations and stereotypes as to what boys and girls are likely to get up to. Teachers and parents of young boys in particular frequently insist that what boys do when they are at play is turn scenes, characters and fighting techniques which they see in violent films into fodder for their games. Boys themselves will tell you that while girls are more likely to be interested in "Barbie stuff" or "romantic stuff", they themselves enjoy "action", "adventure", football and "fighting stuff" ("tal-[lied"). While several of the girls interviewed indicated that they like "fighting films" of the Van Damme variety as much as boys, they did not seem to get as carried away by the excitement of it all as boys. Indeed, such behaviour among girls is perceived to be so unlike the norm that, during interviews, girls who were observed to play in the rough manner associated with boys' games were frequently described as "tomboys" by other children.[23] Girls thus often contrasted their tastes and interests from those of boys by stressing how much boys love watching gore and violence. According to one 12 year-old girl (36):

> The more blood there is, the better, for them [i.e. boys]. Killing, murdering... If they see a murder, they call it a fantastic film. It's horrible!

In general terms, many of the boys interviewed relished showing off their toughness — as they believed it to be reflected in their ability to handle and enjoy violent or scary material in films, or even in their understanding of fighting and self-defence techniques.

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[23] As is illustrated by the following story told by an 11 year-old girl (31), negative reactions to behaviour by boys which does not fit male stereotypes are also widespread:

Darba kellna wie]ed a]na, fil-klassi tag]na, u kien *prefect*, u kienu g]amlulhu]ajtu orribli, konna *Year Four*, u kienet [iet it-teacher, u beda jibki dan, u beda jista]ba, hekk. Il-boys qabdu kollha "Tkunx tifla! Toqodx tibki!" Imbilli qed jibki! M'hux anke hu g]andu s-sentimenti tieg]u? (...) Jien ma tantx nibki malajr!

Once we had a boy in our class, and he was a prefect, and they made his life horrible, we were in Year Four, and the teacher came in, and he started crying this boy, and he was hiding, like this. The boys all started: "Don't be a girl! Don't cry!" So what if he's crying! Doesn't he have his feelings too? I don't cry very easily myself!

They frequently paraded their knowledge of screen violence or of fighting techniques which they had seen in films as a form of cultural capital — as in the following boast by 12 year-old James (44):

Jiena fuq il-vjolenza nifhem]afna ji[ifieri, g]ax jiena g]andi l-videos ta' *Die Hard - Die Hard One, Die Hard Two, Die Hard Three, Die Harder*... Dan, tad-*Die Hard* kolla g]andi, is-sett kollu!	I have a lot of knowledge about violence, because I have the *Die Hard* videos - *Die Hard One, Die Hard Two, Die Hard Three, Die Harder*... You know, the *Die Hard* ones I have all of them, the whole set!
M'g]andu xejn dan. Naqra vjolenza, naqra sex ukoll... Imma film bla vjolenza x'inhu? U jekk ma jkollhux xi]a[a tad-da]q? Ija naqra gideb ukoll....	There's nothing wrong with it. A bit of violence, a bit of sex as well. But what's a film without violence? And if it doesn't have something to make you laugh? Yes, it's a bit exaggerated as well...

Eleven year-old Peter (53) described what he likes about action films as follows:

> Peter I like Rambo... Ehm, it is good. Let's say for our age it's good. But I wouldn't recommend children of three years old, because he gets a knife, slits the neck open....
> Interviewer This is Rambo?
> Peter Uhuh. I think *Rambo 2* or *Rambo 3.* He gets the knife, slits the neck open, gets a bomb stick, throws it in his trousers ... he literally blows up.

Boys will often also claim to have seen "grown-up" action or horror films simply to impress. Earlier in this interview (53), for instance, Peter had said that he gets scared when he sees horror movies at night, though he doesn't mind them if he sees them during the day. He described a scene from the film *Scream* which he said he found really scary, though it was also clear from the way he described this film that he had not actually seen it himself. When I asked him how the Rambo throat-slitting scene was different from the horror film scenes he had been describing earlier, Peter replied that in films like *X-Files* or *Scream* you might get shown bubbles on someone's eye, or "bubbles popping and cockroaches coming out of his body". He contrasted this with Rambo: "But let's say, like, slitting a neck open is not that bad."

In contrast to this, a number of girls said that they find such material disturbing and even frightening.[24] One 11 year-old girl (32) said that she finds "grown up films" ("films tal-kbar") of the Van Damme variety upsetting when she sees them fighting so violently. Another girl, aged 12 (60), described her feelings about such films as follows:

Jien [ieli nib\a u immur norqod meta narah il-film ta' Bruce Lee ji[[ieldu, nib\a meta jirwilhom g]onqhom u joqtolhom (...) Jien nib\a minn dawn ix-xeni g]ax nib\a na]seb fuqhom.	I sometimes get frightened and go to bed when I see the film of Bruce Lee fighting, I get frightened when he twists their neck and kills them. ... I get frightened by these scenes because I keep thinking of them.

Here is how a girl who had just turned seven (2) described a "fighting film" which had upset her:

Jien rajt wie]ed, jisparaw lejn xulxien, imut, u mbag]ad sejjer xi]add jer[a' jmur i[ibu, jaqq, jintela' kollu demm, jer[a' jisparawlhom [o idejhom, imbag]ad jer[a jisparawlu [o qalbu. A]], bdejt nibki, jin\illi d-dmug]....	I saw one, they were shooting at each other, he dies, and then someone else goes to get him back, ugh, he gets completely covered in blood, they shoot them again in their hands, and then they shoot him again in his heart. Ouch, I started crying, tears falling down my face...

Interestingly, when this girl was asked later in the same interview what types of computer games she likes she replied "tal-[lied" and listed "Tomb Raider" and "Crash", where the violence is presumably sanitised, and where you are not forced to see the consequences of violation. Similarly, another ten year-old girl (12) declared:

[24] A 1994 survey conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Authority similarly found significant differences between girls and boys in this area. Girls were found to be much more likely to have negative reactions to violent scenarios in different types of programmes, including ones which show people fighting and beating each other up, programmes action packed with guns and car chases, programmes showing dead bodies with lots of blood, ones showing parents arguing or hitting each other, and programmes that make it look as if animals are being hurt or killed (Sheldon et al, 1994: 36-38). Similar patterns were found with older viewers in a 1999 survey in Britain, which noted that while for some of the women interviewed "violence can be entertaining, but only 'harmless' violence", the absolute enjoyment of violence was very much a male preserve (Morrison, 1999:125, 131).

Jien tal-[lied in]obbhom ....In]obb nara meta ji[[ieldu mara kontra mara biex xabla. (...) Imma m'hux li j[iblek lil xi]add mejjet, ta! Nib\a]afna mbag]ad!

I love fighting films... I like watching when there are women fighting against each other with swords. ... But not if it shows you someone dead, mind! I get really scared then!

Particularly in the older age groups, several girls insisted that they enjoy seeing "fighting films" (including the martial arts type associated with Van Damme and Bruce Lee), but that they don't like them when the violence becomes too graphic.

But the excited ways in which many of the boys gave accounts of their favourite fighting films left no doubt about how much they enjoy such fare, or about the extent to which it colours their games and imagination. They also often quite consciously watch such material with an eye to learning new fighting techniques or "self-defence" moves. As 8 year-old Josef (22) put it:

In]obbhom tal-[lied g]ax jien inmur nitrejnja.... il-Jujitsu, self-defence, in]obb narah.

I like fighting films because I go to train... Jujitsu, self-defence, I like watching it.

Similarly, one fourth-year male university student (79) recalled his childhood interest in screen fighting as follows:

> I recall my personal experience of when I was a kid. I used to see Van Damme's and Bruce Lee's films to learn their fighting techniques because I was convinced that I would find them helpful when I had some clash with one of my school mates.

In the course of an interview with 9-10 year-old boys (27), I was given fairly detailed instructions on different types of kicks and punches, and on how it is important to hit your opponent in the chest or stomach. Two of the boys got so excited while giving this explanation that they stood up and jumped around the room demonstrating the moves. These moves, one of them explained, were not the sort which you would use in play:

Imma din m'hux li tkun [o log]ba din. Per e\empju, jekk tiltaqa' ma' wie]ed u jibda' jag]tik, dik il-mossa hawnhekk trid ittihielu, hawn... fuq sidru biex ittajru...
G]ax jekk int]a tag]tihielu hawn, [o wi``u, twaqqg]u biss..... Imma jekk ittajru u jaqa' wa]da sew, jista' jikser siequ, jista jikser.... u inti jista' jkollok i\jed, kif tg]id....

But this isn't the sort of move you'd do in a game, this one. For example, if you meet someone and he starts hitting you, you have to hit him with that move here, here... on his chest, to make him fly...
Because if you hit him here, in his face, you're only going to make him fall.... But if you make him fly and he has a hard fall, he can break his leg, he can break .... and you can have more, how do you say it...

Interestingly, when at a later stage in the interview, these boys were complaining about how much they hate adverts interrupting their favourite programmes, one of them exclaimed that he feels like smashing the TV set when that happens ("Ikolli aptit inkissru dak il-]in it-televixin!").

Are we to take such statements and modes of behaviour as symptomatic of how children are being influenced by television, or are they no more than localised examples of boyhood hyperactivity and boisterousness? Reflecting on the long-term implications of their childhood enjoyment of violent TV fare, three fourth-year male university students (79) insisted that this has not turned them into violent adults, even though they still enjoy the adrenalin rush they get from such fare, and though they did a lot of fighting in imitation of TV programmes when they were children. But they also suggest that their interest in such fare was significantly related to other aspects of their childhood experiences. Their reflections are worth quoting in full:

> We have a lot to say about TV violence and ourselves. Like many others of our age, we were very exposed to TV violence from birth till now. At primary we used to play 'A-Team'. The game was simple: fighting with boys from other classes. One of us always wanted to imitate *BA Baracus* who was personified as the strongest. We used to watch a lot of violent cartoons like *He-Man* and in fact one of us has a vast collection (sixty) of *He-Man* action figures. Our toys reflected most of the time violence, so violence was also included in our play. In fact we used to play according to what we have just seen on TV. The three of us used to be punished very hard and physically, for example smacks by our fathers. As a result we used to watch violent programs to get ideas on how to revenge

> ourselves. At this point we are not so sure which of the two is the most harmful: TV violence or father abuse? Both are certainly very influential. Nowadays we know that violence never solves problems and in fact we are never violent with others. However we like to watch violent programs because they are exciting. Perhaps we have become addicts to adrenaline!

When adults speak of children imitating screen violence, they often acknowledge that this most frequently happens in game situations, but they also insist that it often gets out of control in that the children get carried away and can end up hurting others, or doing nasty things to other people. In the most extreme cases, they will tell you, children can get so caught up in the "game" that they lose contact with reality, forgetting that violent actions can have serious, long-term and even fatal consequences. When discussing this issue, several of the children interviewed described how their teachers had told them the horrific story of James Bulger (the little boy killed in 1993 by two older children in England) as a graphic illustration of the alleged pernicious consequences of watching too much violence on TV.[25]

Given the intensity with which these convictions appear to be held, one would expect adults and children alike to shun or at least control exposure to the material which they believe to be so lethal. But this is far from the case. Is this because, as the university students just quoted speculate, we have all become "addicts to adrenalin"? But artificially induced adrenalin rushes which are genuinely believed to be dangerous (like some forms of drugs or life threatening activities) are not normally condoned, advertised and propagated with the type of openness and relish which characterises the popularity of violent entertainments. As the evidence presented in the next section suggests, the reasons for the complacency with which screen violence is popularly approached have more to do with the blinkered way in which "influences" and "effects" are usually interpreted.

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[25] The James Bulger murder was widely represented by the media as a horrific illustration of the effects of screen violence, and it was also claimed that the two boys who committed the murder had been specifically influenced by the video *Child's Play*. A number of researchers have argued that the facts of the case were not so clear-cut and that the whole episode is better understood as an example of moral panic — i.e. that people and the press were using "media violence" as a relatively easy (but unproved) explanation for a horrific and deeply disturbing crime. Discussions of the details of the Bulger case are provided by Buckingham (1996), Barker and Petley (1997), and Petley (1997).

5.3 COPY-CATS AND "MATURITY"

Though there is a widespread belief that children are likely to mindlessly imitate what they see on TV, there is an equally widespread conviction that really serious and negative instances of this usually only apply to others. When I specifically asked a group of 14 year-olds (54) who had been describing how younger children imitate all they see whether they themselves had ever done this when they were younger, one of them replied:

> No, but there are the odd ones who would and those odd ones would have a fatal accident.

In this respect, the sentiments expressed in the following excerpt from an essay[26] written by a 12-13 year-old boy (71) were echoed by many others:

Lili l-vjolenza ma timpress-jonanix g]ax jien matur bi\\ejjed g]ax il-[enituri tieg]i rabbewni ta' ra[el b'karattru sod. Xi nies ji[u nfluwenzati g]ax ikunu jie]du kollox bi`-`ajt.	Violence doesn't impress me because I am mature enough because my parents brought me up as a man with a firm character. Some people are influenced because they take everything as a joke.

The reason why it is possible for so many children and young people to be convinced of their own and their peer group's immunity to the "effects of screen violence" is that, for most of them, to be "influenced" by television is synonymous with being led to imitate what one sees. The only effects possible are assumed to be of the "copy-cat" variety. So, whenever they were asked whether they thought TV or film violence had any influence on them personally, most of the children and teenagers interviewed insisted that it did not because they don't start acting violently after watching. As one 13 year-old boy (49) put it,

M'hux g]ax rajt, sa tmur wara toqg]od tag]ti g]ax tkun rajt film!	Just because you saw, you're not going to go afterwards and start fighting because you saw a film!

[26] Quotations from essays written by children and teenagers are copied here exactly as the children wrote them. Orthographic mistakes have not been altered.

Children insist that even if they do occasionally playfully imitate what they see, they still remain in control, and are able to distinguish between imaginative play and reality. They assume that it is only the "immature" who are so impressionable as to imitate mindlessly, and they believe this to be so because, in their view, the "immature" and the very young are incapable of distinguishing fact from fiction. A 13 year-old girl (41) thus insisted:

Vjolenza, g]alija, jekk narah fuq it-television ng]id m'hux vera g]alija g]ax qed *jektjaw*. Imma forsi g]a\-\g]ar iktar jinfluwen-zhom....	Violence, for me, if I see it on television I say it's not real because they're acting. But maybe for younger ones it influences them more...

One of this girl's peers (41) elaborated on this by saying that younger children think that all they see on TV is true. For instance, she explained, when they see cartoon characters getting up again after being killed in violent scenes, young children think that they can do the same. I asked this girl whether she herself used to think this when she was younger. As was the case with others when asked this question, she replied that she herself did not.

I was told many stories intended to illustrate the dangers of TV violence for *younger* children. These stories tended to be based on the assumption that "influence" is exclusively a matter of direct imitation. They were also usually linked with generalised assertions or even what sounded like urban legends — most frequently represented by stories of very young children mindlessly imitating what they see in cartoons, or else of the boy who wanted to imitate Superman by jumping out of a window (or variations of it). In the course of one interview with 12 year-old boys (44), one of them pointed out that "fantastical television" ("televixin fantasju\") is bad for seven year old children because in New York two boys of that age had jumped from a 54th or 45th storey window after watching Superman. Twelve year-old Malcolm elaborated as follows:

Malcolm G]ax jien, per e\empju, m'hinix mi[nun, u jekk nara xi]add bil-*hand grenade* f'idejh m'hux]a nag]mel xi]a[a hekk. Imma jekk ikun tifel \g]ir, l-ewwel jibda jixtri t-toys, imbag]ad jog][buh u jista' ja[]mel xi]a[a di\astru meta jikber... Anke t-toys, meta jkun \g]ir ikollu xi senter...
James Meta jikber, jista' jaqbad fih, jew jaqbad jixtri xi wie]ed u joqtol lil kull]add!

Malcolm Because me, for example, I'm not mad, and if I see someone with a hand grenade in his hand I'm not going to do something like that. But if it's a small boy, first he starts buying toys, then he starts liking them and he can do something disastrous when he grows up... Even toys, when he is small he could have a gun...

James When he grows up, he might grab hold of it, or he might go and buy one and kill everybody!

Similar points were made by two 14 year-olds (54):

> Jesmond They'll get it the wrong way. When you're old enough you can enjoy it without, you know, trying to be it. But when you're young you'll say "I wanna do that, I wanna do that!" It will give them a good imagination, but then it will go too far, like actually doing it. They have to realise that those certain things don't happen in real life.
> Martina Yeah. Children see cartoons with people jumping off cliffs and nothing happens, and they want to do the same. They're brainwashed! Like, if you jump or something, you won't die!

Several older children and teenagers also recounted specific stories of what their own younger siblings get up to when they are "influenced". A 13 year-old girl (35), for instance, described how her younger brother keeps watching violent TV programmes and then grabs hold of her dolls and starts hitting them. A 14 year-old girl (38) insisted that her five year-old brother always copies what he sees on TV, especially cartoons, and that on one occasion he even copied the bizarre behaviour of a character in the soap opera *Ipokriti* by telling her that he loved her, kissing her, and then slapping her across the face. Another 14 year-old girl (38) said that her brother was so affected by the violence he saw on TV that when he was six or seven he got hold of her father's hunting gun and gave them all a big fright by pointing it at them as if he was going to shoot them. He was not joking or playing, she insisted.

> It also seems to be widely believed that even when this "influence" does not show itself in immediate imitative

behaviour, it is still somehow working away inside the "immature" child like some sort of virus or infection. As one female primary school teacher (55) put it:

Dak kollu storjat [o fihom sa jkun, hu. (That's all going to be stored up inside them.) I mean, eventually, it *will* come out. We don't know when and how.

On several occasions, I was told by children and teenagers that *younger* children who watch killing and fighting films, for instance, might well end up becoming criminals and killers when they grow older. Thus, when he was asked if he thought that watching a lot of violence on TV can be bad for children, 7 year-old Konrad (21) responded as follows:

Konrad Because then they can grow up to be killers.... They can act like them...
Interviewer Young children or older children?
Konrad Mmm... It can be big children and small children, and even babies....they still can remember... and they will grow up to be killers.
Interviewer Even children of your age?
Konrad *EJe* [Yeah], But if you see it you don't need to become killers, you just see it....

It is worth noting how Konrad introduces the qualifying clause ("you don't need to become killers") when he is asked whether what he says also applies to children of his own age.

These patterns are interestingly echoed in the following excerpt in which 12 year-old Paul (44) reflects on his own enjoyment of toy guns and violent action movies, acknowledges that they often encourage imitative behaviour, and then worries about the copy-cat effects which he sees them having on another boy at his school:

Paul Is-senters jien in]obbhom, tat-toys, ji[ifieri. Il-[enituri jixtruli xi kultant. Meta kont \g]ir kienu jixtruli, u ng]idlek il-veritaÏ g]adhom g]andi.

Paul Guns, I like them, toy ones that is. My parents sometimes buy them for me. When I was younger they used to buy them for me, and to tell you the truth I still have them.

Xi kultant nilg]ab ma hija, ikollu burdata tajba, jg]idli "mur sta]ba".
(.....) PeroÏ jiena, g]al films b]al ta' Rocky, Van Damme, u hekk, narhom....
Pierre Ehe, jog]o[buni jien!
Paul PeroÏ jimpressjonawk, qisek meta tkun tarhom qisek ituk dik ix-xi]a[a li j[eg]luk tag]mel b]alhom xi kultant.

Hawn wie]ed, f'din l-iskola ta, jara]afna films hekk, u tant kemm jimpressjonawh, qed jag]mel b]alhom. Ng]idu mod....
Malcolm Anke jkun xi bullying, hekk isir u [ieli. ...

Paul Jara film, per e\empju, u jekk ikun]a ji[[ieled ma' xi]add, jekk f'dak il-film kien hemm wie]ed]a jag]ti daqqa ta' sieq u qabadhielu, b]alu jag]mel e\att... jew jimbuttah, jew jixkanah....

I sometimes I play with my brother, when he's in a good mood, he tells me "go and hide".
(.....) But for me, about films like those of Rocky, Van Damme, and so on, I watch them....
Pierre Yeah, I like them!
Paul But they have an impression on you, it's like when you are watching them it's like they give you that something which makes you do the same as them sometimes.
There's one boy, in this school, you know, he sees a lot of films like this, and they impress him so much that he's doing the same as them. For example....
Malcolm Even if there is some bullying, that's what happens sometimes....
Paul He sees a film, for example, and if he is about to fight with someone, if in that film there was someone about to kick and he grabbed his foot, he does exactly the same as him... or if he pushes him, or barges him...

The general pattern was to claim immunity for oneself and one's peer group, while expressing concern over the vulnerability of younger or different children. Here is how a group of 12 year-old girls (36) responded when, after they had been discussing how other children are "influenced", I asked whether there were any programmes which may have similarly affected *them* :

> Kate I think we know, I mean, we're mature by this stage, so I don't think, for me....
> Gabby I think our friends are more, I think, advanced now, and we've been from at least Grade Five. I'm sure there are girls in our class who watch things like that, but I don't think they will get influenced from it. *Iktar* [More] people who are younger.

As we saw in Chapter 4, it is this sense of the invulnerability of oneself and one's peers to what are assumed to be the weaknesses and limitations of others which is frequently used to justify watching material classified as suitable only for mature audiences. The fact that this pattern recurs right across the age groups is interestingly reflected in the way in which the following 8 year-old girl (3) answered when she was asked whether she thought that TV programmes can harm her or others:

Antonia Heqq, g]ax mbag]ad hu, int dejjem tibda' tarah u tarah u tarah, u mbag]ad tibda' tag]mel int.	Antonia Well, because then you always keep watching it and watching it and watching it, and then you start doing it yourself.
Interviewer Kien hemm xi program fejn rajtu u rajtu u rajtu u mbag]ad ridt tag]mel b]alu?	Interviewer Was there any programme which you watched and watched and watched and then wanted to do the same
Antonia Le!	Antonia No!

A relatively small number of children and teenagers did describe how they themselves have been "influenced" in this direct "copy-cat" fashion. A girl aged 12-13 (60) wrote in an essay that after she sees boxing on TV she starts practising on her sister and on soft toys. An 11-12 year-old girl (60) wrote about how she sometimes teases her sister in the same way that the girl in her favourite funny programme "Dexter Laboratory" teases her brother. One 14 year-old boy (54) reported that when he was younger he used to kick his brother in the backside after watching *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.* And a 14 year-old boy (50) described how he still gets carried away and starts jumping around when he sees action films:

Kif nara xi film li jkunu fuq il-muturi u jtieru, nibda nag]mel b]alhom ta jien, u anke il-ku[in tieg]i, hekk ukoll...	As soon as I see a film when they are on motorbikes and flying, I start doing the same as them, you know, and even my cousin, he does the same....
Per e\empju, il-film ikun g]addejjin bil-muturi, u jtieru, u joqog]du jag]mlu il-kutrumbajsi. Niprova fuq is-sodda, nag]mel b]alhom jien!	For example, in the film they'll be driving on the motorbikes, and flying, and doing somersaults. I try to do the same things as them on my bed!

There is an element of self-mockery in the way these children and teenagers describe their imitative actions. All the examples they give are seen and presented as being trivial and ultimately

inconsequential. In other words, none of the children or teenagers surveyed saw *themselves* as having been corrupted or seriously damaged by their experiences of screen violence. Such experiences are all seen and understood as an aspect of popular entertainment or even as a form of harmless childish mischief.

To summarise, then, the types of "effects" which children and young people usually describe when they speak about media influence and screen violence are limited to the "copy-cat" variety. When specific examples are given, these effects tend to be short-term and localised (younger or other children copying what they see shortly after watching). More generalised claims about long-term effects (e.g. that younger children may become criminals when they grow up as a consequence of watching too much TV violence) are also extended versions of the copy-cat type of influence. In all cases, these patterns of effects are believed to somehow not apply to the speakers themselves or to their peers. One major source of immunity identified by most of the older children interviewed is their own ability to distinguish what is real from what is not.

The exclusive emphasis on copy-cat effects allows children and young people (whatever their age group) to distance themselves from any serious or long term liability to being "influenced". If influence is simply a matter of imitating bad or dangerous behaviour, then proving immunity is simply a matter of showing that you don't copy such stuff yourself, or that you only do so in play mode, and that (unlike "younger children") you can tell the difference between what is real and what isn't.

There are three main problems with these arguments: (i) they completely ignore the implications of the fact that commercialised "violent entertainments" form part of wider and more complex cultural and economic forces; (ii) the types of influence they take as the most widespread or important are actually the least common, significant or provable; (iii) young people's assertions that they can distinguish between what is real and what isn't when it comes to screen representations are anything but well-founded.

5.4 VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT PERCEIVED AS THE NORM

Linked to the widely held conviction that media influence is primarily a question of direct imitative behaviour by the immature is

the equally widespread belief that it is individual scenes or specific details which constitute the most problematic aspects of media violence. Take out any scenes which are disturbing, or else look away while they are on, or tell yourself that you are not so naive or impressionable as to actually copy what you see, and the film or TV programme is assumed to somehow become innocuous. This focus on individual detail at the expense of the whole structure in the area of concern about media effects is like missing the wood for the trees.

The failure to identify and take full account of the culture and the value systems underlying popular TV and film for what they are has made their audiences more prone to accept the world views they portray as somehow normal, "natural" and inevitable. Fictional violent encounters are repeatedly approached and consumed as exciting and "escapist" entertainment, and this might be having a more significant effect on the attitudes and behaviour of young people than the number of fights which young boys actually imitate in their games, or the specific amount and detail of guts and gore which they parade like scalps as part of their masculine cultural capital. Among the most recurring assumptions which such popular entertainments repeatedly propose to their viewers as absolutes are the notions that (i) violence is an inevitable fact of life, and (ii) the threats posed by violent forces of evil can be neutralised through greater dexterity and skill in the use of violence (usually as exercised by glamorous and sexy heroes).

One of the most striking things about the ways in which children and young people talk about screen violence is that they see it so much as the norm that they cannot imagine how a film or programme could possibly be entertaining without it. As one 14 year-old girl (69) put it:

> Can you imagine a film which would not contain any type of fighting or war at all? Everything would end up that people wouldn't go to see those films at all.

Such convictions are not made up by young people themselves: they are often picked up from more widespread "common sense" assertions circulating in the culture in which children grow. For instance, the belief that the enjoyment of violent entertainments and spectacles is somehow part of human nature was interestingly echoed in an unsigned promotional article which appeared in *The (Malta) Sunday Times* of 2 May 1999 (p.21) inviting readers to make their way to the theatre to see a local production of *The Elephant Man*:

> It seems to be an integral part of human nature to exorcise one's shortcomings through other people's suffering and degradation. It was so in the blood-soaked arenas of Imperial Rome and it is still the same today on the small box, as Jerry Springer parades his guests' dirty linen for everyone to jeer and applaud.

Young people have thus come to assume that screen violence is little more than a reflection of real life, even though they also realise that films at times exaggerate in order to grab the audience's attention or to raise the levels of excitement. One unmistakable message one gets from talking to young people about this issue is that violent entertainments are seen as "normal", necessary and desirable facts of life. According to a 12-13 year-old boy (71), it is violence which makes films realistic and interesting:

Na]seb li jda]]lu l-vjolenza biex iktar tid]ol fir-realtaÏ tal-istorja u tibda tag]ti ka\ aktar.	I think they bring in violence so that you get more into the reality of the story and you start paying more attention.

And for another boy aged 12-13 (71), screen violence is a mirror of reality because it shows you how criminals live:

G]alija vjolenza fuq ¸ it-T.V. tfisser il-mera tar-realtaÏ. Films b]al ta' Van Damme "Double Impact" jirriflettu il-]ajja tat-traffikanti tad-drogi.	For me violence on TV means the mirror of reality. Films like those of Van Damme "Double Impact" reflect the life of drug dealers.

Young people also assume that watching screen violence can serve the function of preparing them for the challenges of life - even though (as we have seen) they also insist that they are not themselves "influenced" by such fare, and that they know that the violence is only an act. In the view of one 14 year-old girl (39), we live in a violent world where you have to learn to be tough:

> If you're very worried about violence, you might as well not go out at all because it's just showing you what real life is like. I mean, it's not: 'Here, do you want this? Do you want that?' You fight over everything, really... But you get used to it.

And according to a 14 year-old boy (74) screen violence can often also serve as a teacher:

Il-vjolenza xi kultant tg]allmek. Il-film li g]alija tog][obni l-vjolenza tieg]u huwa ta' Rambo g]ax ja]tfulu lil s]abu suldati u jibqa' sa kemm joqtolhom kollha!

Violence sometimes can teach you things. The film which for me I like its violence is the one of Rambo, because they kidnap his soldier friends and he goes on and on until he kills them all!

It is also worth noting that the fact that these young people are growing in a predominantly Roman Catholic environment means that they are also very familiar with a wide range of often quite graphic images of physical violence and violation. They grow up surrounded by statues and pictures of the bleeding and battered bodies of Christ and various saints, and they are very familiar with the gory details of Christ's suffering, as well as with those involved in the martyrdom of several saints. In the course of the interviews, some of the children made specific reference to the Holy Week processions and to the graphic re-enactments of the crucifixion which they had seen or even heard on the radio. As is suggested by the following excerpt from an essay written by a 13-14 year-old boy (73), these images from Church iconography can often get conflated with those seen in violent entertainments on the commercial screen, thus further reinforcing the mental view of the world as somehow dominated by the inevitability of violence. The essay is clearly written in a rush and without much conscious effort or reflection. This boy is also obviously enjoying himself by mischievously egging on his teacher (a female Physics student teacher) by listing various forms of torture which come into his mind. But the images which he comes up with in an essay which is supposed to be about TV violence are straight out of Catholic iconography. The first part of the essay was written in English. Opening with: "In some ways I like violence because it will use to self-defence," this section mentioned thieves breaking into your house and the need to do something in order to be rescued when this happens. The boy then switched to writing in Maltese, and continued as follows:

Meta tara nies jaqtg]u l-irjus bil-giljottina jew b'xi vle[[a jew ige\wrulek rasek u mbag]ad jirrumblawha u mbag]ad ja]qruha b]all-San Fran[isk meta xwew]]aj. (....)

When you see people cutting off heads with the guillotine or with some arrow or they wrap up your head and then they roll it and then torture it like Saint Francis when they toasted him alive. (.....)

Hemm xi u]ud li jg]allmuk kif toqtol bniedem jekk f'xi]a[a vera gravi u din hi tag]lima ta' meta tara vjolenza anke fuq l-annimali meta tixwihom b[al meta jixwu xi teacher b]al tal-Physics u nies o]ra.

There are some which teach you how to kill in something really grave and this is a lesson of when you see violence even on animals when you toast them like when they toast some teachers like the one of Physics and other people.

5.5 CHILDREN'S ACCOUNTS OF FICTIONAL SCREEN VIOLENCE

In the course of interviews, children were frequently very eager to give detailed accounts of gory scenes which had captured their imagination. Here are a group of 7 year-old boys enthusing over screen fighting and "killing stuff" which they saw in what they insist "was only a film". The scenes which the boys are describing are from the film *Starship Troopers*, which had been classified as not suitable for young children when it was released in the cinemas. The video version which these boys saw was also clearly signposted as not suitable for children under 13 years. Konrad was aware of this, but seemed to think that since he saw it with his family, and no other figure of authority was there to find out, there was nothing to worry about.

> Konrad: Once at night me and my father and my brother, we went upstairs and we switched on the fighties, and we saw this movie about aliens. And then at the end there was this queen alien and she sucked up a brain from a man and these aliens they had claws and they can separate you. They squeeze you and your body goes somewhere else and the legs I don't know where they go. But they bled a lot, and this woman, a claw got stuck in her back but she didn't die. I forgot what it's called...
> Chris: Did that monster put that thing through?
> Konrad: A point... in the girl ... like that..
> Jurgen: It was of soldiers?
> Konrad: Uh-ha. And aliens. They were carrying the aliens.
> Jurgen: I think I saw that.
> Interviewer: Was it scary?
> Konrad: Mmmmm [hesitating]... Not so much...
> Marco: Like *Goosebumps* is scary!
> Konrad: But I didn't get scared.
> Jurgen: I've seen *Goosebumps* !
> Konrad: And then... then a teacher of the soldiers... they were teaching... eh... they were training, and this boy said: "What?

What? How come we're training with knives? They don't hurt!" Then the teacher said, "Put your hand against the wall!" And then he threw a knife in his hand...
Jurgen: [shouts gleefully] I saw it! I saw it! I saw that one! When he said "Go like that," and then Pshaw! Aahh!
Konrad: Uhuh. And he started screaming...
Jurgen: He had yellow hair.
Konrad: Uh-huh.
Jurgen: I saw that.....
Interviewer: Yeah?
Jurgen: On video.

In this case, because a film like *Starship Troopers* as a whole is designated as "only a film" and "not real", representations of someone throwing a knife into another person's hand, or of a man's brain being sucked out of his head have come to be interpreted by these seven year-old boys as inconsequential entertainment, and hence as not really scary. Shortly after this exchange, one of the boys said that his parents don't let him "watch all the things... like *Titanic*." Konrad announced that he had seen *Titanic*, and that he had "really got scared", especially "when the ship broke up, and all the people were in the water, and everybody was yelling". For him this was "real" and "a true story", unlike the graphic violence of *Starship Troopers* which he claimed not to have frightened him, though he was clearly fascinated by it.[27]

When I asked these seven year-old boys whether they thought that too much violence on television can be bad for children who watch it, their answers were fairly standard: "we'll get bad dreams," "we get square eyes," and "they [i.e other children] can grow up to be killers." When I asked for examples of programmes which they thought might not be good for children, they were very forthcoming with further examples of guts and gore scenes which they had seen themselves — in Konrad's case, with his father again:

[27] Andrea Millwood Hargrave (in Hargrave et al, 1996: 38) draws attention to the fact that "many studies have illustrated the audience's ability to distinguish between on-screen violence which is real (as in news or documentaries) and violence in fiction (such as drama or films)." She notes that there remains debate about the age at which children are able to distinguish these differences. As is argued in the rest of this chapter, developments in narrative approaches to different genres, as well as advances in special effects technology, have made the acquisition of this ability more tenuous and complex.

Jurgen: Like blinding them, like cutting, getting their eyes cut with knives...
Konrad: Like *Anaconda*. It was a video about a big snake, and this snake, it kills people... And then it squeezed a panther and its eyeball flew out on a plant. And I thought it was a snake. Then my father said.... he had pushed me... that that was an eyeball...
[....]
Jurgen: Once I was watching a programme, and, em, he was crazy, he was drunk. And then he went on the rocky beach and then he fell and his head went on the rock, and it cracked open, like that...
Marco: Aahh [scared and hurt sound].
Jurgen: [laughs] But it wasn't real, *ta'*. It was only a film.
Interviewer: So how do you know when it's real and when it's not real?
Marco: Buh! [I don't know!]
Jurgen: Sometimes... it tells us...
Interviewer: Do you think it's more scary when it's real than when it's not real?
Konrad: When it's real, it's really scary. When it has killing, shooting... slaying..

The pleasures and delicious thrills experienced by children and teenagers while watching and talking about films and programmes which they designate as fictional and unreal are clearly reflected in the ways they talk about horror movies. As two young teenage girls put it:

Iktar ma' jkun ibe\\ani, iktar jg]o[obni!	The more it frightens me, the more I like it! 13 year-old girl (41)
In]obb narahom tal-bi\a jien, g]ax naf li nimpressjona ru]i, allura iktar n]obb narahom! G]ax in]obb nie]u qtajja u hekk. Affarijiet hekk in]obbom jien!	I love watching them, the scary ones, because I know that they leave an impression on me, and so I love watching them even more! Because I enjoy being made to jump with fright and things like that. I love things like that! 13 year-old girl (37)

As we have seen, there is also an element of bravado in all this, of showing how tough or knowledgeable one is about grossly violent material. Children and teenagers will thus give graphic accounts of

such material to impress peers or shock and outrage adults. But the details they provide in such cases are also clearly ones which have made quite an impact on them — as in this excerpt from an essay written by a 12-13 year-old girl (64):

> A violent programme would be one with murder; with a lot of blood, breath taking homicide, intestines coming out of the body, persons turned up to pieces; head in one place, hand in another, feet in the garbage bags. People being killed for their hearts (to be transplanted) even though they were still healthy; hearts and organs for the black market. Throwing new born babies in the bin. Killing someone by throwing a piece of iron on wood in the person.

A group of nine year-old boys (26) were also fascinated when one of them described a gory sequence from the horror film *Piranha*:

Craig I[iblek ra[el hekk, ra[el qed jistg]ad, saqajh [ol-ba]ar, hekk.
F'daqqa wa]da, daqqa wa]da, ma jindunax hu, itella saqaj] hekk, u ma' jarahiex i\jed, saqaj]!
Norbert Ma' jarahiex?
Craig E]e. Ma jarahiex i\jed saqaj]....
Nathaniel Ehe, tikolielu, tikolielu...
Craig U mbag]ad, u mbag]ad jara piranha taqbe\ u tqaxxrhu, u t]alli, t]alli l-g]adam biss, tqaxxru...
Nathaniel Tqaxxru....
Craig U mbag]ad, mbag]ad, sa kemm, s'hawnhekk taqlalu s'hawnhekk...
u mbag]ad jitla', jitla' hekk ma' l-art, u j`empel lil-191 u f'daqqa wa]da tara il-piranha hekk itiru. FUMMM! Jaqbduh biex jiklu...

Norbert Piranha xi jkun?
Craig Piranha]uta.

Craig It shows you a man, a man fishing, his feet in the sea, like this.

Suddenly, he doesn't realise, he lifts his foot like this, and he doesn't see it any more, his foot!
Norbert He doesn't see it?
Craig Yeah. He doesn't see his foot any more...
Nathaniel Yeah. It eats it up, it eats it up...
Craig And then, and then he sees a piranha jumping and it skins him, and it leaves, it just leaves the bones, it skins him...
Nathaniel It skins him...
Craig And then, then, until, it takes off up to here, up to here...

and then he goes up, he goes up like this crawling on the ground, and he rings 191 and suddenly you see piranhas flying. FUMMM! They grab him to eat...
Norbert What's a piranha?
Craig Piranha is a fish.

Nathaniel Daqsekk (*shows size*). Tikol in-nies...
Craig U mbag]ad ti[i o]tu g]alieh, g]ax hu ma' kienx bil-karrozza, u dana, u ... EEEEH! (*imitating scared scream*)... u telqet ti[ri, qab\et fil-ba]ar, u kielu lilha! (*laughs*)

Nathaniel This big [*shows size*]. It eats people...
Craig And then his sister comes for him, because he wasn't there with a car, and ... EEEEH! [*imitating scared scream*].... and she ran off, she jumped into the sea, and they ate her too [*laughs*]

Commenting on the fact that film critics and parents are often puzzled and worried by how young horror film audiences appear to relish and applaud the violent acts which they come to predict, demand and take for granted, Rikke Schubert (1995:231) speculates that the reason lies in "the mythic quality these highly repetitive stories achieve." Like fairy tales, these stories and films offer figures and situations onto which children can externalise what goes on in their minds, in controllable ways (see also Twitchell, 1985, Bettelheim, 1976). In other words, they can enjoy this type of predictable and repetitive material because it helps them gain a measure of control over emotions which are potentially overpowering:

> The repetitious structure is clearly a wish to control the dreadful events and overcome the feeling of horror [.....] The audience is laughing not just because of the attack on taboos and rationality, but also because it is finally in full control of the text and the Otherness, able to predict and contain it without fear. (Schubert, 1995: 231, 235)

Something along these lines is presumably what is taking place in the nine year-old boys' recounting of the Piranha scenes quoted above. Further dimensions of what is taking place in such situations are revealed more clearly in the following exchange between a group of nine year-old girls (13). The distance and control which these girls appear to feel over the gory and potentially very disturbing situation which they are imaginatively recreating is possible because (as they keep reminding themselves and each other) the events and images are neither "real" nor intended to be taken seriously. Their laughter can thus be read as a result of the tension generated by the shocking grotesqueness of the events themselves, and the relief provided by the fact that these horrors have been sanitised through cartoonish exaggeration:

> Michelle: Once, of *Are You Afraid of the Dark*, there was this... it wasn't true, it was just a film.... there was this man, and there

were two children. They were running and he said, “You want some sweets or something?” And he came and he said, “Just put your neck on this log, like that.” And he got an axe, and he started chopping off their legs, and making them into meat and things.... Aahh..
Carla: *Jaqq!*
Michelle: He started... And then there were... and all the children killed... He started going *[demonstrates]* ... He put their legs... and the children *[laughs]*... He kept one of ... his, his ... one of...
Grace [prompts] A head..
Michelle: their heads.. and there was a man, and then, he started playing basketball *[laughs]* with his head. *[Laughter from the other girls]* Then there was a tree, there was a nest, and he putted it in the nest, and there was an egg and he squashed it.... *[laughter] Jaqq!*
Other girls: *Jaqq!*
Michelle: It was disgusting!
Interviewer: So do you think those programmes are scary, or silly, or funny, or what?
Carla: Silly!
Michelle: Eh, silly and scary...
Carla: I like them, because I don’t like films like, the goodies always win. I like, *hekk*, the baddies do these naughty things to the goodies, and they manage to do it. Like once on the *Shark Kids*.... There was this man, and he gets these five brothers, and big injections... and they go into these [*indecipherable*]...
Other girl [*very loud*] Ahhh!
Carla: No! It doesn’t even show! These men go like this: “Aargh!” *[laughter]* It’s really funny! And that’s OK! It will be OK... And then, when they become sharks, they come up...they get on these, and they throw them *[laughs]*. They all end up... It’s a bit funny! It’s good! *[laughs]*.

The reassurance provided by the grotesquely exaggerated and cartoonish style of such film material can only be experienced if the events portrayed are perceived and interpreted as belonging to a cognitive realm of fantasy or fiction rather than of fact. Just as older children use their vaunted ability to distinguish between fact and fantasy as a measure of their immunity to imitative effects, so too they use this to distance themselves from a preoccupation with the consequences of aggression and violation when they see these portrayed in fictional entertainment.

One of the problems with this position is that, as is indicated by the evidence presented in the next sections, young people's abilities to distinguish between the fictitious and the real are frequently not as reliable or refined as they would like to believe. Further, the distinctions between screen fiction and reality are often themselves both arbitrary and illusory. They are also becoming increasingly more blurred.

5.6 COPING STRATEGIES AND BLURRED DISTINCTIONS

When they describe potentially disturbing scenes, children will frequently insist that "it wasn't true, it was just a film", or that it was all part of an exaggerated act, or of a funny (cartoon-like) film, and that makes it OK. The term which has been developed by other researchers in this area to describe these "coping strategies" is "modalisation" — i.e. the ability to interpret and classify the material watched according to its verisimilitude, and the possibility or impossibility of its content. Through these strategies, viewers often distance themselves from disturbing material by reminding themselves that "it's not real" (see Hodge and Tripp, 1986, Buckingham, 1996, Davies, 1997).[28]

Several of the children and teenagers interviewed for this survey indicated that they find material which is "real" much more frightening than that which they know to be fiction. According to one 14 year-old girl (67):

> If the film is true and it has violence in it I don't like it, but if it's not true and it has violence it's all right.

A nine year-old girl (52) also described how when she gets scared, she tells herself that it's not real. And a 12 year-old girl (60) symptomatically declared:

Jien ma' nib\g]ax bil-vjolenza g]aliex]afna minnhom tkun re`ta.	I'm not afraid of violence because most of them is an act.

[28] Gunter (in Bryant and Zillmann, 1994:189) similarly reports studies by Cantor, Sparks and Hoffner which set out to show how young children's fear reactions to action-adventure programmes can be reduced by "revealing the fantasy nature of the show to the children". This was done by focusing on the TV series "The Incredible Hulk" and showing children a video taking them behind the scenes and looking at the way the actor who played the Hulk was made up. It was found (predictably, perhaps) that children who saw the video exhibited less fear while watching the show than did children who had not seen it.

A 12 year-old boy (47) was similarly convinced that if younger children are taught how to distinguish between make-believe and reality then they too would be immune from harmful effects. So, he explained, toddlers should be told that what looks like blood is really tomato sauce, and what looks like someone getting hit is nothing but illusion and make-believe — no one really gets hurt:

Jien ng]id li kieku lit-tfal jg]allmuhom minn meta jibdew \g]ar, kieku il-films kollha jaruwhom!	I say that if they teach children from when they are still young, then they would be able to watch all the films!

Designating something as "not real" somehow neutralises its threat. Eight-year-old Adriana (8) described how she often watches the programme *Beyond Belief: Fact or Fiction?* in which viewers are invited to guess whether stories dramatised on the show are actually based on fact or simply invented. She said that she often had nightmares and could not sleep when the presenter identified scary episodes as "fact" at the end of the programme. If they were declared to be "fiction", they somehow lost their bite.

What Adriana and the other children often do not seem to take enough account of is the extent to which the so-called "facts" in TV and film dramatisations are heavily elaborated on and even fictionalised for the sake of dramatic effect — in other words, that distinctions between fact and fiction are not as clear-cut as is suggested to Adriana by the programme she describes. The issue of how children (as well as adults, for that matter) distinguish between the real and the fictional in screen portrayals of violence is further complicated by the fact that in a cultural context saturated by images created in and referring to "virtual realities", and by what Baudrillard famously described as simulacra[29], it is becoming increasingly more difficult to distinguish between representations which refer to actual events, and those which have been deliberately manufactured by special effects technicians. The nature and existence of reality itself have become questionable. A number of TV programmes and films are deliberately ambiguous in this respect. Indeed, many popular films tend to be noteworthy primarily for the skill with which they create elaborate special effects to convince viewers of the "realism"

[29] The simulacrum is sometimes described as a copy of a copy, but is perhaps more accurately defined as a copy that subverts the legitimacy and authority of its model. On Baudrillard and the simulacrum see Durham (1998), Kellner (1994), and Genosko (1994).

of illusions, and of the verisimilitude of characters and situations which are often marked by their sheer implausibility. At the same time, news reports, current affairs programmes, "true crime docudramas" and "infotainment" programmes have increasingly come to look and sound more like fictional entertainment, and to follow many of the narrative patterns, codes and conventions of narrative fiction.

Given this context, it is not surprising that children's and young people's criteria for distinguishing between screen portrayals of the real and the unreal can often be very erratic. As 12 year-old Anselm (47) remarked:

Meta nibda nara xi programmi b]al *Emergency ER* ng]id "Dan ta' bi`-`ajt." Imma malli jg]addi xi ftit]in, qisni ma nkunx irrid nemmen li ta' bi`-`ajt, na]sbu ta' vera.	When I start watching some programmes like *Emergency ER* I say "This is all make-believe." But after a while it's as if I don't want to believe that it's make-believe, I start thinking it's true.

It is also this blurring of distinctions which makes programmes like *Beyond Belief* or *The X-Files* so frightening for children who cannot quite decide whether what they are watching is real or not, or more specifically perhaps, whether what they are watching could actually happen, perhaps to them. An 11-12 year-old girl (60) described in an essay how she had been so terrified after seeing an episode of *The X-Files* that she woke everyone up and insisted on keeping all the house lights on:

Kien hemm xeni li jekk je\istu tib\a to]ro[barra, tkun trid toqg]od [o dar li hi mag]mula biex]add ma ji[i joqtlok b]al aljeni, persuni strambi jew qattelin.	There were scenes which if they exist you'll be afraid of going out, you'll want to stay in a house which is made so that nobody will come to kill you like aliens, strange persons or killers.

5.7 DISTINGUISHING FICTION FROM REALITY

It is not just scary stories which are perceived and responded to differently according to whether they are seen as real or fictional. A "heart-warming" story which is assumed to be "real" can also be the source of greater enjoyment — but young people's criteria for determining this "reality" can often be quite arbitrary. For instance, a

group of 12 year-old girls (34) whose class was being shown a recent filmed dramatisation of Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* were convinced that the film portrayed a "true story". This perception somehow made their enjoyment greater:

Sabi] g]ax [rat vera. Iktar tie]u gost taraha.	It's beautiful because it really happened. You enjoy watching it more.

Children and teenagers' lack of sophistication in distinguishing the real from the fictional and the invented were reflected in their frequent assertions that you can tell that scenes and situations in films are real or not because films are often advertised as a "true story". According to a group of 13-14 year-old boys (49), it is this information which tells you whether something in a film is real or not:

Jekk jg]idlek "true story", jew jekk tkun taf li *true story*, u ma tarahx affarijiet li qatt ma jistg]u ji[ru, affarijiet li huma impossibli.	If it says "true story" or if you know it's a true story, and you don't see things which can never happen, things which are impossible.

Thus, for instance, when they spoke about the James Cameron movie *Titanic*, many appeared to assume that all the characters and events portrayed in the film were real and had actually taken place. They knew that the film was a dramatic recreation performed by actors with lots of special effects, but the details of story itself were assumed to be real. For the 13-14 year-old boys just quoted (49), the parts of the film which they felt were unreal and "impossible" were when the heroine cuts through the handcuffs imprisoning the hero with just one blow of the axe, and when the hero and heroine jump off the sinking ship and are not sucked under. Otherwise, they said,

Hija storja vera, g]alhekk temmen.	It's a true story, that's why you believe.

Because they understood the film to be "a true story", and knew that the Titanic had really existed and had really sunk in the way shown in the film, they appeared to also assume that the story of the characters played by Leonardo di Caprio and Kate Winslett was also "real". They could clearly distinguish between the actors and the characters, but not, apparently, between the historical events and all the invented elaborations, additions and changes which went into the fictional reconstruction. In another interview, when an 11 year-old girl (33) insisted that even *Titanic* is a "rexta" (play-acting), one of her peers

announced that she had actually seen "the real one, the old one", by which she meant one of the older film dramatisations of the Titanic story which she somehow assumed to be more "real".

What determines how young people decide whether something is "impossible" or unlikely to happen in real life also varies considerably. For instance, a number of children and teenagers appeared to be quite willing to accept stories of the supernatural as real if there was any suggestion that these might be "a true story". Several thus spoke extensively about being frightened by ghost stories and other mysterious supernatural visitations when they saw these in programmes like *Enigma*. Many were scared by stories which they had heard about the film *The Exorcist* (which was enjoying a successful late-night re-run at local cinemas at the time of the interviews) because they were convinced that it was a "true story". As 13 year-old Luke (54) put it:

> Luke I mean, if you had to watch a horror movie about a monster, you can tell yourself, you know, "This doesn't exist." But something like *The Exorcist*, it can happen, and that's what's so scary about it.

This group of 13-14 year-olds (54) even assured me in relation to this film that all the actors and directors who had been involved in its production had committed suicide. In their view, "actually knowing what effect it had on the people, that they went and killed themselves" made the film even more scary. Similarly, an 11 year-old girl (33) insisted that the stories in the horror movie series *Nightmare on Elm Street* were also based on fact because she had read in the newspapers that a man called Freddy Krueger had really been killed by parents. When I asked this girl whether she meant that this was what was shown in the film, she insisted that it was reality, not just in the film. [30]

In a not dissimilar way, 14 year-old Angela insisted that unlike horror films which present monsters which are obviously "all made up", films like *Scream* are "not fake". Here is how Angela and her friend spoke of their perception of this film's "reality":

[30] In the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films Freddy Krueger is a monstrously scarred supernatural killer who has knives for fingernails and can enter the dreams of teenagers and children and then kill them in macabre ways. The films present him as the vengeful ghost of a man who had been killed by the parents of the children whom he now attacks.

Angela Let's say things like *Scream* and stuff like that, they're not fake, they're not with monsters or things which it's not real. Basically what happens in those films can happen to anybody, you know.
Interviewer In films like *Scream*?
Angela Like *Scream*. I mean they can happen to anybody. But you're not gonna stay worrying, you know, how can I face the music! Because you take life as it comes, you know...
Rosanna You just need to watch your step, that's all really.

The film *Scream* and its sequel, it should be noted, very deliberately draws attention to its play on the often exaggerated motifs of the horror genre, and it shows teenagers getting horribly murdered by stalkers who systematically follow all the cliched conventions of horror movies.

Younger children's criteria for recognising and explaining the special effects used to make film illusions look real can also be very rudimentary — as illustrated by the way the following eight year-old boys (22) explained the "lies" in Superman films:

Kurt Jag]mlulhu spaga...
Josef Ikun hemm arjuplan, jag]mlulu]abel hekk, taparsi qed itir...
Samuel Dak m'hux veru ta, jo]ro[dak l-a]mar minn g]ajnejh!
Henry Dak ikun dawl ...
Robert G]at-taparsi jmutu! (...)
Josef Jekk jaqtawlhom rashom, jer[g]u ji[i... Dik gidba! Dik ikun hemm xi wie]ed qed imexxih b]al robot!

Kurt: They tie him to a string...
Josef: There would be an aeroplane, and they tie him to a rope, so, making believe that he's flying...
Samuel That's not true, you know, that red stuff comes out of his eyes!
Henry That's a light ...
Robert They only pretended to die ...
Josef If they cut off their heads, they come back... That's a lie! What happens is that there's someone controlling his walking like a robot!

The younger the children, of course, the more are these confusions likely to be marked. In one interview (17), a group of six year-old boys had quite an animated debate as to whether people really do get killed while making films. They all knew that cartoons are just "drawings", but John and Pierre were convinced that since films like *Zorro* were acted by real people, the deaths they showed were also real. George disagreed:

George Imma x'affarijiet dawn! }a joqog]du jag]mlu l-plays, biex it-tfal jaraw it-television, *for the sake* li n-nies joqog]du jmutu? Hekk!
Interviewer Allura jmutu veru?
Pierre E]e. Jien hekk ng]id, jien hekk ng]id!
John Jien hekk ng]id ukoll!

George But my goodness! Are they going to be making plays, so that children can watch television, and for the sake of that people are going to be dying? Like that!
Interviewer So do they really die?
Pierre Yeah. That's what I say, that's what I say!
John That's what I say too!

John's reasons for believing that people really died in the making of *Zorro* were based on what he saw as the film's realism and verisimilitude. Thus, for instance,

John Meta jispara tin]ass il-bomba... Puh! Allura ta' vera jmutu!

John When he shoots you can feel the bomb... Puh! So it's for real that they die!

He had also seen a sword going into a soldier's heart and then coming out covered in blood, and "in the film there was written 'dead soldiers' at the end". When the other boys told him that the blood was really tomato sauce, he remained unconvinced:

John Le, g]ax kieku taqa' l-][ie[a, kieku...
Interviewer Liema][ie[a?
John Il-][ie[a tal-flixkun tas-sauce, kieku...

John No, because in that case the glass would fall, if [it were true]....
Interviewer Which glass?
John The glass of the bottle of sauce, if [it were true]...

I asked John how come the police don't do anything about so many people getting killed for real. He replied:

John Le, g]ax mbag]ad il-pulizija jg]idulhom g]al-film tistg]u...

John No, 'cause then the police tell them for the film you can...

In contrast to this boy who cannot imagine how blood is not real in films, nine year-old Carla (13) had grown so used to explaining all film blood away as tomato ketchup that she had difficulties imagining that any blood she saw on screen could be real. This is how she reacted when her friends were describing a documentary showing a surgical operation:

Grace: You know what I hate? When they do of a hospital, like they come like this and they get their heart... Once they were opening it...
Leanne: Ahhh!
Interviewer: A real one?
Grace: Uh-ha, real. It was real, of a hospital, and...
Carla: Disgusting! All that ketchup! Blurghhh!
Grace: No, it wasn't ketchup! It was real.
Carla: It *has* to be ketchup!
Leanne: It was blood!
Grace: It was real! It was real!
Carla: What? They're going to get a man, open him, just because of a film?
Grace: No, no, because....
Carla: That's stupid!
Grace: It was *real*! They get it on the news.
Leanne: Like once, umm...
Interviewer: Let's talk about the news, because that's different, isn't it? When it's a real operation, for example, and then they have a film of a real operation....
Grace: Uh-ha... and then it got his heart, *ta*. It was like... but it was *real* blood, *ta*, this....
Other girl: Jaqq!
Grace: ... and then, they give like this injection, and put it in him, like....
Interviewer: What do you think, Carla?
Leanne: She thinks it's not true!
Interviewer: But if it's true, what would you think about that?
Carla: I don't know. From what they told and that, I think it's stupid.
Interviewer: Let's say someone had an accident...
Carla: Uh-ha. That I know, but .... like there'd be blood on the floor. That, we know that it's true. But that I don't really watch it.... but those I don't get scared with them, because I know, I mean... it's in Malta, and it's no one's fault. *Heqq*... It just happens.....

Carla's almost incoherent comments at the end of this exchange suggest that when such material is approached as reality, it is also responded to, and indeed evaded, in a completely different way from that which characterises the viewing of fictional entertainment. Carla's comments that she doesn't "really watch it" in this case, like Grace's method of introducing the story as something which she hates,

indicate that when it comes to screen violence, too much reality is anything but reassuring.

5.8 SPECTACLE AND EMPATHY

A young Maltese student in his twenties recently remarked that young people's awareness that they are engaged in a "one life game" adds to the adrenalin rush they experience while taking part in high-risk sports or driving on bikes and motorbikes.[31] "One life game", of course, is a phrase and concept which comes from computer games, where players are usually given several "lives" to be able to survive the "life-threatening" challenges of the game. In this young man's view, the knowledge that there are no second chances on this side of virtual reality makes the taking of risks that much more exciting and tempting. If what he says is true, then for young people like him the experience of putting one's life in mortal danger is perceived in terms of the language and rules of computer games. Life too becomes a game — only it is more exciting than "real" games because the dangers have real consequences. Reality thus becomes inseparable from the language and headily fictitious graphics of fast action computer games. Matters of life and death become part of the logic of virtual reality and are interpreted in terms of the impossibly dramatised heroics of characters whose existence is confined to cyberspace, and whose actions are no more than a manifestation of special effects technology.

In his inaugural lecture as professor of drama at Cambridge University in 1974, Raymond Williams commented that because of the impact of cinema, radio and especially television, we are now living in "a dramatised society". We have never as a society, Williams remarked, acted so much or watched so many others acting:

> In earlier periods drama was important at a festival, in a season, or as a conscious journey to a theatre, from honouring Dionysus or Christ to taking in a show. What we now have is drama as habitual experience: more in a week, in many cases, than most human beings would previously have seen in a lifetime. (Williams, in O'Connor, 1989:3-4)

We are so accustomed to watching dramatised recreations of all sorts of real and imagined experiences that drama is now built into the

[31] I am grateful to Dr Kathryn Rountree for telling me of these comments, which were made in a class she was teaching at the University of Malta.

rhythms of everyday life. And it is not only actors who take on parts and act out scenarios:

> We are far past that. On what is called the public stage, or in the public eye, improbable but plausible figures continually appear to represent us. Specific men are magnified to temporary universality, and so active and complex is this process that we are often invited to see them rehearsing their roles, or discussing their scenarios. [...] Like many actors, people find roles growing on them: they come to fit the part. [...] Beyond what many people can see as the theatricality of our image-conscious public world, there is a more serious, more effective, more deeply rooted drama: the dramatisation of consciousness itself. (ibid: 9)

If anything, since Williams made those remarks over a quarter-century ago, our societies and consciousness have become even more markedly dramatised. Young minds hanker for a constant flow of images, sound and movement. The delivery of all sorts of information is required to be fast, attention-grabbing and dominated by "sound-bites". "Boredom" and distraction set in as soon as leisure pursuits fail to live up to the pace and patterns of the types of TV and movie dramas with which the young have grown most familiar — fast-paced, colourful, adrenalin-raising.

In a media culture saturated with glamorised images of fictionalised violence served as entertainment, children and teenagers who themselves have little direct personal experience of horrific violence are likely to find it difficult to understand and empathise with the harsh realities which are confronted by those for whom physical and psychological violence are an everyday part of their lives. Much as children are disturbed and upset by news and documentary coverage of real suffering and violation, their more common experiences in their leisure and recreation times are likely to be dominated by images in which violence and horror are trivialised and applauded as pleasurable thrills. Indeed, a common complaint made by children and teenagers about films which they don't enjoy is that they don't have enough action, explosions, killing and "violence", because for them "films ming]ajr vjolenza bla' sens" ("films without violence are meaningless").

Young people are thus much more likely to be familiar with fictional violence than with the atrocities which are happening in the world around them. Though our children are growing in a media

culture saturated with images of violence, they are also in danger of losing contact with the real meanings of violence. The Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke (Falcon, 1998) has noted that in a world dominated by Hollywood style images everything becomes drained of reality. "This permanent falsifying of the world in the media," Haneke points out, leads us to perceive the world only in terms of images. The watching of screen violence becomes indistinguishable from watching advertisements, and audiences are paradoxically comforted by the images of violence which fill up so much of their time because these are repetitively projected and consumed as having little contact with their own reality and experience:

> This permanent presence of violence — in television series, films, documentaries — means that a Coca-Cola advertisement takes on the same level of reality as news footage. (Haneke, as quoted in Falcon, 1998:12)

In this context, children and teenagers have become very adept at relegating the implications of violence to a realm of the unreal, where nothing ever matters because "it's only a film". One has to wonder what long term effects this might be having on their abilities to feel empathy and compassion.

Media representations which are primarily oriented towards mass consumer entertainment habitually invite viewers to approach both reality and fiction as spectacle. And the spectacle, as Guy Debord famously put it, aims at nothing other than itself. "All that once directly lived," noted Debord (1994:12), "has become mere representation":

> The spectacle erases the dividing line between true and false, repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances. (Debord, 1994: 153)

This is quite different from portrayals of violence or suffering which encourage viewers to confront unpleasant realities in order to better understand and deal with them. In his now classic study of violence in the arts, John Fraser (1974:66) suggested that a very important way in which certain violences shock us — and shock us salutarily — is that they undermine the yearning for invulnerability that violent entertainments cater to. In contrast, "violent entertainments normally involve a blanking out of the really unpleasant, and tend to promote a sense of security and invulnerability in the reader or viewer". Quoting

Nietzsche's aphorism that "when you look long into the abyss, the abyss also looks into you", Fraser (1974:113) insisted that there are serious moral responsibilities as well as dangers which accompany the production and consumption of portrayals of violence:

> It is in violent encounters [...] that one is required most obviously to reaffirm or reassess one's own values or to acknowledge the necessity of having as strong and clearly articulated a value-system, as sharply defined a self, as much alertness to others, and as firm a will as possible. (1974:157).

When they become vehicles for the provocation of thought and reflection, media portrayals of violence can also have the potential of becoming channels of moral discourse and communicators of the central moral value of solidarity. As the philosopher Richard Rorty (1989) points out, moral solidarity involves the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation — "the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of 'us'" (Rorty, 1989: 192). But though the media have the potential for being agents of moral progress and communicators of moral value, it is not the case that this is the role which they habitually perform.

To illustrate how this culture of trivialised violence is distancing young people from the real implications of violence, I want to look at a couple of fairly long excerpts from two focus group discussions — one with girls and one with boys.[32] Both excerpts deal with the issue of empathy and feeling sorry for victims.

In the first excerpt, a group of 13-14 year-old girls (37) discuss scenes of suffering which make them cry. This exchange took place after one girl announced that she had seen the film *Schindler's List* (which deals with the Nazi holocaust) three times but that she doesn't like to see suffering. The other girls started talking about animals:

[32] Gender differences in attitudes to scenes involving sexual violence are discussed more specifically in Chapter 7. See also Schlesinger et al, 1992, 1999.

Janika Jien fejn jid]lu l-klieb, films ma narhomx, ja]qru l-klieb...

Dorienne Anka jekk joqtlu l-annimali!

Chantelle E]e, fejn jid]lu l-annimali,]alli jmutu n-nies, hekk! Imma l-klieb, l-annimali, hekk...

Interviewer G]aliex, jekk tarahom qed imutu in-nies veru, ma jdejqukx?

Chantelle U jien naf! *(laughs)* Le! Ma jdejjaqnix!

Interviewer Allura fuq l-a]barijiet, dawn l-istejjer li qed i[ibu fuq il.... ?

Chantelle Le, fuq l-a]barijiet e]e. Dik naf li vera. Peroï mbag]ad nara film hekk,]alli jmutu n-nies, imma jmut kelb, ja]asra! Fil-film, eh, ji[ifieri. *(giggles)*

Interviewer Ji[ifieri jekk tarah fuq l-a]barijiet, per e\empju...

Chantelle Le, ma nibkix jien daqs kemm nibki g]al-klieb!
Per e\empju, l-a]]ar darba rajt film fuq il-klieb, mietu, il-]in kollu nibki. Insomma mbag]ad jispi``a l-film, nispi``a nibki, nibki bil-lejl, qiesni belha!
Noqg]od nibki bil-lejl, sa kemm norqod! O]ti tag]tini fuq darhi, "U]allini kwieta!" Kien hemm kelb, Lassie, waqa' l-ba]ar. "A]jar waqajt jien," bdejt ng]idilha! *(laughter)*

Janika Me, when it comes to dogs, films in which they torture dogs, I don't watch them.

Dorienne Even if they kill animals!

Chantelle Yeah, when it comes to animals, it's not so bad if people die, so! But dogs, animals, like that....

Interviewer Why, if you see real people dying, doesn't that worry you?

Chantelle How do I know! *(laughs)* No! it doesn't worry me!

Interviewer So what about on the news, these stories which they're showing about the ....?

Chantelle No, on the news yes. I know that that's true. But then I see a film like that, it doesn't matter if people die, but if a dog dies, poor thing! In the film I mean, though. *(giggles)*

Interviewer So if you see it in the news, for example....

Chantelle No, I don't cry as much as I cry for dogs!
For example, last time I saw a film about dogs, they died, and I was crying all the time. Anyway, then the film ends, and I end up crying, crying at night, like a fool!
I keep crying at night until I fall asleep. My sister hits me on my back, "Oh leave me in peace!" There was a dog, Lassie, he fell into the sea. "It would have been better if the one who fell had been me, I was telling her! *(laughter)*

The light-hearted tone, self-mockery and trivialising of the whole experience suggests that this is not something which this girl "wants to take too seriously." Like another group of 12 year-old girls (36), who all agreed that as girls they like "soppy stories" and that they "like to cry", what Chantelle is here describing are the distanced, and perhaps synthetic or

voyeuristic, pleasures of melodrama. The self-mockery is partly an acknowledgement of the inconsequential nature of the material over which she is crying, and partly a reaction to the manner in which others usually behave when they see someone crying over "unreal" films and programmes. Other girls in different discussion groups also described how boys tease and make fun of them in such situations, often telling them things like "Qisek belha" ("You look like an idiot"). One 12 year-old girl (36) described how, when she started "really crying" over the scenes of drowning people in the film *Titanic,* the boys around her were laughing at her and teasing her with comments like "Ah! They're dying! They're dying!" Another 13 year-old girl (37) revealed that when she cries while watching TV she avoids being teased like this by hiding her tears by pretending to be yawning, or else by leaving the room and going to the toilet.

In this context, the admission by Chantelle (quoted in the above excerpt) that when she watches fictional films she finds it easier to empathise with the suffering of animals than of people is quite significant — particularly if we consider it in relation to other girls' insistence that they enjoy weepies. What she is describing has nothing to do with the type of emotional engagement described by Rorty and Fraser in the passages discussed above. What Chantelle is talking about is a much more synthetic and unengaged emotion. Feeling sorry for dying dogs is perhaps more comfortable than thinking too closely about the sufferings of humans. To actively imagine the suffering of real humans as frequently as people normally engage in escapist entertainment could prove too upsetting and too close to the bone. This is why empathy and seriously thoughtful responses to screen violence and suffering are so frequently blocked out, and why the most popular accounts of human suffering (as in films like *Titanic,* for instance) are either sanitised or else heavily diluted with Hollywood-type spectacle and melodrama. As T.S. Eliot once put it, "human kind cannot bear very much reality".[33]

In the second excerpt a group of 12 year-old boys (44) insist that females "have smaller hearts" and cry more easily than males when they see suffering in films. They admit that they also feel a knot in their throats when they see this material themselves, but all except one (who speaks of shedding buckets of tears over a dog) claim that as boys they find it virtually impossible to actually cry (or at least cry openly) over a film. The exchange is worth quoting at length because of what it suggests about the methods used by boys to assume "manly"

[33] T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets,* "Burnt Norton", Section I.

positions and distance themselves from the implications of screen suffering when they see this in fictionalised ("unreal") forms on television:

Malcolm Jien nie]u e\empju minn ommi, e\empju kbir. Ommi g]andha qalba wisq \g]ira, g]ax jekk tara per e\empju film, u wie]ed qed jibki g]ax [ralu xi]a[a, tibda tibki mieg]u.

James Tieg]i ukoll!
Malcolm Tibda tibki mieg]u, tibda tibki, tibki, tajjat, hekk, qisa tifel \g]ir, tifla \g]ira.

Jien ng]idilha, "Xi [ralek?" Tg]idli, "G]ax qed nit]assru. "

Ng]idilha, "M'hux fil-film qieghed? L-aqwa li m'hux qieg]ed hawn! "
James L-aqwa li m'hux qieg]ed veritaÏ!
Malcolm Heqq!

Malcolm I take my mother as an example, a big example. My mother has a heart which is too small, because if she sees for example a film, and there's someone crying because something happened to him, she starts crying with him.
James Mine too!
Malcolm She starts crying with him, she starts crying, crying, shouting, like this, as if she were a little boy, a little girl.
I say to her, "What's happened to you?" She tells me, "Because I'm feeling sorry for him. "
I tell her, "But it's in the film, isn't it? The best thing is that it's not happening here! "
James The best is that it's not reality!

Malcolm Yepp!

Malcolm's description of his mother's behaviour is obviously a caricature: the exaggeration is a further way of distancing himself as a male from its perceived femininity. As a boy, his account implies, he keeps his cool and finds it hard to understand the absurdly intense "emotionality" with which his mother engages with the film. It is worth stressing here that all this is clearly understood by both the boys and the mother to be about events and people (presumably fictional) which do not have any direct bearing on their own lives and experiences. Both Malcolm and James stress this point — the situations are not worth engaging with, feeling sympathy in cases like this is a feminine over-reaction because ultimately "it's not happening here" and "it's not reality".

At this point in the discussion, Paul started telling a story which made it clear that in the area of emotional engagement with fictional screen portrayals of suffering, gender differences are not quite so clear-cut, even though the behavioural roles which boys assume in such situations appear very different from those of girls. Though the

boys acknowledge that the situation depicted is upsetting, and even admit to being moved and to experiencing the symptoms of being close to tears, they do not want to be seen crying over a film, so they distance themselves from the emotions evoked by this story by repeatedly reminding themselves that "it's just a film".

Paul Ommi xi kultant, anka tal-*cartoons* ta, ji[ifieri *(laughs).* G]anda qalba tant \g]ira li kultant anka tal-*cartoons*....
James Qalba tal-][ie[jg]idhula!

Paul Dan l-a]]ar kont qed nara *cartoon*, u a]na l-annimali n]obbuhom, anke jekk imut xi wie]ed taf kemm jiddispje`ina...
Anka tag]na kif kien]a jne]]ieh missieri, barmil kont]a nimla bil-biki, imma *(laugh from other boy)* qalli "}a n\ommu!"

U nsomma, u kont qed nara dal-film jien ta, tal-*cartoons* u kien hemm ra[el, u vjolenza mhux fuq nies u\aha, fuq kelb li ma jista' jag]millu xejn!
U beda jtih bil-frosta, g]ax ried i[orrlu karru kollu armat, b]al tas-suq ng]idlu jiena...

James Mela daqs x'hiex kien? Daqsekk jew?! *(laughs)*
Paul Kelb, normali! Minn dawn, hekk...
Interviewer Dan fuq it-televi\ion?
Paul E]e.
Malcolm *Cartoons*.
Paul E]e. U nsomma, u dan beda jtih, beda jtih, u ommi, hekk, t]assrithu. Anke jiena. Jien m'hux nibki, n]oss qisni xi]a[a, hawn *(points to his throat and chest).*

Paul My mother sometimes, even for cartoons, I mean *(laughs).* Her heart is so small that sometimes even for cartoons....
James Her heart is made of glass, that's what they call it!
Paul Recently I was watching a cartoon, and we love animals, even if one of them dies we really feel sad about it...
Even ours, when my father was going to get rid of it, I was going to fill a whole bucket I cried so much, but *(laughter from other boy)* he told me, "I'm going to keep it!"
And anyway, I was watching this film, you know, a cartoon it was, and there was a man, and he was using violence not on people but on a dog which cannot harm him at all!
And he started hitting it with a whip, because he wanted it to pull a heavy loaded cart, like those of the market I call it....
James How big was it then? As big as this?! *(laughs)*
Paul A dog, just a normal one! One of those, you know...
Interviewer Was this on television?

Paul Yeah.
Malcolm Cartoons.
Paul Yeah. And anyway, this man started beating it, beating it, and my mother, you know, she felt sorry for it. Me as well. But I don't start crying, I feel like something, here *(points to his throat and chest).*

Malcolm E]e. T]ossok qiesa....

Paul ... Inkun]a ninfaqa' ta, imma ma nkunx irrid, hekk, g]ax anka meta....
James M'hux g]ax ma tkunx trid, ma tkunx tista'!
Pierre Ma tasallhekx, hekk!

Malcolm Ma tasallhekx, g]ax dik m'hix....
James Ma tasallhekx...
Pierre Ommi taf x'ng]idilha? G]ax tkun qed tara films hekk u tibda tibki. Ng]idilha, "Inti x'[ejja toqg]od tibki g]al dal-film! " ng]idilha jiena.
Tg]idli, "Jien in]oss. Ma nafx kif inti ma t]ossx! " Ng]idilha, "Ma tasallix, hu, biex ninfaqa' nibki g]al film!" *(laughs)*

E\empju tara film b]at-*Titanic*. *Titanic* g]o[obni]afna. Kwa\i taqbi\lek de... hekk, xi naqruwa, ta.... g]at-Titanic.... g]ax sabi]...

James Imma ma tibkix!

Malcolm Yeah. You feel like there's something...
Paul .... I'll be on the point of bursting, mind, but I wouldn't want to, so, 'cause even when....
James It's not that you don't want to, you can't do it!
Pierre It just doesn't come out, like that!
Malcolm It just doesn't come out, because that's not...
James It just doesn't come out....
Pierre You know what I tell my mum? Because she'll be watching films like that and then starts crying. I tell her, "What on earth are you crying for this film for! " That's what I tell her.
She tells me, "I feel. I don't know how you don't feel! " I tell her, "I can't go that far, to burst into tears for a film! " *(laughs)*

For example she sees a film like *Titanic*. I liked *Titanic* a lot. It's almost like one does escape you, a te.. just a little mind.... for the Titanic... because it's beautiful...
James But you don't cry!

The ways of watching illustrated in the two excerpts are in many ways not very different from those which characterise the ways boys and girls watch and react to "fighting films" and fictional horror. In each case, the real implications of human suffering are held at arm's length through repeated reminders of the unreality of the medium through which they are portrayed. Rather than developing what Rorty (1989: 192) calls "the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of 'us'", what these young people seem to be learning is how to assume stereotypical gender-differentiated ways of distancing themselves from experiences and people who do not impinge directly on their own lives.

One reason for all this of course is that most of the popular fictional material which takes up so much of young people's time is of its nature so shallow, frivolously unchallenging and inconsequential. At a time when special effects dominate which films attract the largest

audiences, and when film studios go out of their way to publicise the skill and expense involved in the creation of illusions, it is perhaps little wonder that so much of how young people perceive fiction films is heavily mediated by an awareness of its unanchored fictionality. Contrast this with Rorty's account of how the morally committed fictions of more reflective novels, movies and TV programmes can touch the lives of those who come in contact with them by provoking thought and a type of emotional engagement which is grounded in reality and which can lead to meaningful involvement and action, thus becoming "vehicles of moral change and progress":

> Fiction like that of Dickens, Olive Schreiner, or Richard Wright gives us the details about kinds of suffering being endured by people to whom we had previously not attended. Fiction like that of Choderlos de Laclos, Henry James, or Nabokov gives us the details about what sorts of cruelty we ourselves are capable of, and thereby lets us redescribe ourselves. (Rorty, 1989: xvi)

Young people have become so used to watching violence presented in the form of sanitised and frivolously inconsequential spectacle that even their understanding of "a true story" appears to be losing contact with the realities and implications of lived experiences. To borrow a phrase from Paul Fussell's account of the cultural heritage of the Great War, it is thus that "the drift of modern history domesticates the fantastic and normalises the unspeakable" (Fussell, 1975:74). The transformation of violence and human suffering into commercial spectacle not only trivialises the horrors of violence, it can also encourage "gamelike" audience positions which are voyeuristic and incapable of moral solidarity with the victims of violence. And as soon as what is watched starts to become uncomfortable or disturbing, viewers opt out of the "game" by telling themselves that "it's not real", that what they are watching is nothing but spectacle. But violence and suffering are usually anything but a game for those who are caught up in them. And if young people are to learn how to deal with these realities with dignity and responsibility, they will require more than macho stances or the types of evasive habits developed while crying over the melodramatic misfortunes of cartoon characters.

Chapter 6
SEXUAL CONTENT AND YOUNG CHILDREN (Ages 6 to 10)

6.1 CORRUPTION OF THE INNOCENT?

In an article appearing in *The Malta Independent* on 6 May 1999, and headlined "Girl, 9, made up indecent assault allegations," it was reported that a 49 year-old man had just been acquitted of corrupting a nine-year-old girl "after she admitted to police that she had been lying about accusations she made against him" (Carabott, 1999). The girl had originally told the court that the accused, a close friend of the family, used to engage in sexual activities with her on a bed. "We used to do what men and women do," she said. When asked by the court as to whether she knew what they do, the girl replied: "Of course, I see them do it on the television." The article reports that the girl changed her story after she had been asked repeatedly by the prosecution officer if she was telling the truth:

> The inspector said that on 27 November 1997, she again asked the girl if her allegations were true. She said that the girl looked as if she was going to cry and said: "No, it's not true."
>
> The girl was again put on oath, but this time said that all allegations she had made against [the accused] were totally unfounded and untrue. She said: "I saw these things on television." (Carabott, 1999)

What are we to make of this girl's claims and counter-claims? Who is the victim and who is the villain? Whatever the truth of the case may have been, there is clearly inscribed in the report, and in the court case as a whole, an assumption that the boundaries between "childhood" and "adulthood" had been transgressed. The girl's confusion about how to deal with a world of adult sexuality into which she has been thrown prematurely also speaks of her difficulty in knowing how to locate herself appropriately within received notions of childhood and adulthood. Irrespective of whether we take the girl to be an ingenuous victim of abuse, a desperate exploiter of adult concerns, or even a precocious Lolita, she still comes across as a child who has been robbed of her "childhood," and betrayed by the adults who should have been protecting her innocence. Even in the version of the events in which the girl said that she had made up the allegations, she still comes across as a victim, not because of any specific evidence refuting other interpretations but because she is seen as a child. If she is not a victim of the older man, then she is a victim of television, which allegedly

filled her mind with images and ideas which she was ill-equipped to understand and cope with.

The fact that the girl in this case identified television as the source of her apparently precocious knowledge of adult sexual behaviour raises serious questions about how young children are coping with the type of knowledge and information to which they are daily exposed by the media. According to some writers, television has become an important sex educator for two major reasons: (i) its portrayals of sexuality are frequent, consistent, and they are usually assumed to be realistic by young people; (ii) there is a lack of alternative sources for learning about sexual behaviour (see Strasburger, 1995: 38-45; and Roberts, 1982). As one group of US researchers put it, "depictions of human sexuality are being consumed in reasonably large quantities [...] but useful and informative messages are not being conveyed to many young people" (Buerkel-Rothfuss et al, 1993:113). This has become more marked at a time when the boundaries of what is acceptable television fare have been pushed back considerably.

A number of TV content analyses indicate that this pushing of boundaries is indeed incremental. The 1997 annual Monitoring Report published by the British Broadcasting Standards Commission noted that there had been an increase in the inclusion of sexual scenes in "soaps", confirming the continuation of a trend in popular TV programmes which had been identified in earlier studies. One such study, for instance, had analysed portrayals of sexual behaviours on prime time television programmes in the US in 1987, and compared these with findings from an identical study in 1979, and found a generally higher rate of sexual behaviours per hour in 1987 (Lowry and Toules). That study had also found that over the period under scrutiny there had been a substantial increase in the portrayal of sex between unmarried persons, with few attendant consequences. According to Gunter (1995:105), television provides young viewers with frequent lessons on how to look and act "sexy," while "prime time dramas and movies feature explicit portrayals of sex; magazine and talk shows feature intimate conversations about impotence and orgasms; situation comedies are filled with sexual innuendo and suggestiveness." As a result, and in the absence of alternative sources of information, "the sexual lessons young viewers derive from television foster an inaccurate image of sex that can lead to unrealistic expectations, frustration and dissatisfaction" (Gunter, 1995:111, citing studies by Baran, 1976a, 1976b, and by Fernandez-Collado et al. 1978).

How does all this relate to the ways in which young people in Malta make sense of the portrayals of sex and sexuality which they see on television? This chapter and the next report and explore what children and teenagers themselves have to say about these issues. The focus of the present chapter is children aged six to ten, but also includes the discussion of statements made by children as young as five. Young people aged eleven to fourteen are discussed separately in Chapter 7.

6.2 PASTA|ATI

It needs to be stressed at the outset that "sex" (like "violence", in fact) is not one clear-cut entity which is either present or not present in particular television programmes. The word itself carries different connotations in different contexts, so that there is not simply "sex" on television, but rather different ways of portraying various forms of human activity which we habitually place under this broad heading. The ways in which these activities are portrayed will also be loaded with a wide range of possible associations and value systems (ranging from the exploitative to the educational) which will also play a key role on how the material is perceived, interpreted and responded to. To give a fairly obvious example, a discussion programme looking at the implications of extramarital relations among young adults is as much about sex as a late night striptease show, but this hardly makes the two programmes comparable in terms of the types of responses which they are likely to encourage.

As the evidence presented in this chapter indicates, younger children tend to talk about media representations of sex in very generalised ways, rarely differentiating between different representations or contexts. But the fact that they do not make such differentiations, as well as the shapes taken by their generalisations, are in themselves quite significant.

We can get a sense of the types of factors which influence how young children approach the topic of sex on television by looking at a few examples of how they bring up and discuss the topic in a group situation. There was an interesting mixture of embarrassment, innocent fun, desire to please or outrage, limited understanding as well as confused values in all this. The confusion was quite well captured in the ways in which most of the children interviewed repeatedly used the blanket term "pasta\" or "pasta\ati" (or "rude" and "rude parts" when they spoke in English) to describe material which they either found objectionable themselves, or else assumed that adults would consider unsuitable for children. They usually used these terms very vaguely. A

group of 6-7 year-old boys (17), for instance, described the villain of a cartoon programme as "pasta\" because he used to steal money. Another group of 7-8 year-old boys (19) referred to one of their group as "pasta\" because, they said, he frequently got into fights and also made a mess of his desk in class by sharpening his pencils over the floor and not stacking his books in order.

For most of the children interviewed, however, the term "pasta\ati" was charged with sexual meanings. When they were asked to explain, they often looked embarrassed and unwilling to give more specific descriptions. But from what they did say, it was clear that for most of them "pasta\ati" referred to scenes involving nudity and sexual encounters (ranging from couples kissing to simulated sex). The fact that such scenes were so frequently described as "pasta\ati" (a term which normally has negative and condemnatory connotations) suggests that many of these children have been developing attitudes to adult sexual behaviour which are dominated by inhibition. Comments made by children and parents interviewed indicate that children form these attitudes partly in response to how they perceive adults reacting to such material when they know children are watching.

I want to look first at a fairly long transcript from an interview with six to eight year-old boys in a state primary school (18). The children in this group came from what is generally taken to be a disadvantaged area. They were restless and easily distracted throughout the interview, and it became clear that one of them at least (six year-old Tony), was keen on testing out how far he could go in giving "naughty" answers. The fact that I did not tick him off for doing this, but asked him to explain, appears to have led the other boys in the group to change tack in what they were saying and join in with him. The excerpt is interesting in that it reveals the extent to which these young children are already preoccupied with issues of sexuality, but the only ways they have been able to develop for dealing with the topic are either to joke "naughtily" and surreptitiously about it, or to take what they imagine will be the attitude of teachers and other authority figures, and condemn any television reference to sex as "bad".

In this excerpt, Tony and Martin[34] are six years old; Matthew and Kenneth are seven; and Jonathan is eight. The exchange took place early on in the interview and started in response to my asking them whether there were any television programmes which they disliked. One boy answered "no", then:

[34] Again, it's worth stressing that all names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Jonathan Iva. Tal-bews, hawn...

Interviewer Tal-bews idejquk?
Matthew Mela b]ali! Jiena tal-bews u tal-[lied idejquni!
Jonathan Hiii! *(fed up type of exclamation)* Il-]in kollu jilag]qu!
Matthew G]ax niddejjaq narhom ji[[ieldu!
Tony Jien dan ma n]obbx nara, ta' sexy *(laughs)*.
Interviewer Kif?
Jonathan *(shouts out as Tony speaks)* Anke lili jdejquni!
Tony Sexy... qishom g]ajnhom barra.. Dak li jin\g]u g]arwenin barra.

Jonathan Yes. Kissing ones, you know...
Interviewer Kissing ones annoy you?
Matthew Just like me then! I dislike kissing and fighting ones!
Jonathan Eee! *(fed up type of exclamation).* All the time licking each other!
Matthew Because I get fed up watching them fight!
Tony Me, it's this I don't like watching, of sexy *(laughs).*
Interviewer How?
Jonathan *(shouts out as Tony speaks)* They annoy me too!
Tony Sexy ....as if they're all exposed. That one where they strip naked outside.

At this point, Martin (6 years old) tries to interrupt, and apologetically explains to me that what the others are *really* talking about is the number six ("six u sitta"). But Tony shouts over him and continues:

Tony Sir, l-Ecstasy, Sir. Joqog]du jidru hekk, g]arwenin.
Interviewer Fuq it-television dan ikun?
Tony Ehe... u jkun hemm dak, jaqq!
Jonathan Veru! {ieli ta'. Anke dawk idejquni jien...
Tony Dawk ikollhom il-qalziet ta' ta]t tal-lastku *(laughs, other boys laugh with him)*. Ikollhom il-qalziet ta' ta]t tal- .... *(indecipherable amid laughter)*. Fix-xaqq ta' sormhom darba! Anke fix-xaqq ta' sormhom ikun! *(more laughter from other boys)*

Tony Sir, the Ecstasy, Sir. They appear like that, naked.
Interviewer Is this on television?

Tony Yeah...and there's that, yuk!

Jonathan It's true! Sometimes. Even those annoy me...
Tony Those ones, they have their underpants made of elastic *(laughs, other boys laugh with him).* They have undies made of ... *(indecipherable amid laughter).* In the crack of their arse once! Even in the crack of their arse it is! *(more laughter from other boys)*

Jit]lilhom [o sormhom hemm! Jew inkella fis-sodda, hemm, bil-make-up hekk, u ... *(indecipherable*). U il-qalziet ta' ta]t fix-xaqq ta' sormhom! *(more laughter).*

It gets into their arse, there. Or else in bed, there, with make-up, so, and ... *(indecipherable)* . And the underpants in the crack of their arse! *(more laughter)*

Interviewer Dan fuq it-television, jew qed tivvintawhom?

Interviewer Is this on television, or are you making them up?

Tony Fuq it-television dawn!

Tony These are on television!

Jonathan Fuq it-television, vera.

Jonathan On television, it's true.

Interviewer Iva? Fuq liema stazzjon?

Interviewer Really? On which station?

Tony Fuq l-Italja Uno, [ieli ta'...

Tony On Italia Uno, sometimes...

Jonathan Kollha ta', bil, bil, bil ..dak...

Jonathan All of, with, with, with... that...

Tony Dak il-qalziet ta' ta]t, bil-patata barra.

Tony Those underpants, with their bottoms showing.

Martin Qed nid]aq f'qalbi!

Martin I'm laughing in my heart! *(i.e. to myself, quietly)*

Interviewer Dawn spiss ikunu?

Interviewer Are these on often?

Tony and Jonathan *(together)* Iva, spiss.

Tony and Jonathan *(together)* Yes, often.

Interviewer Fit-tard jew kmieni?

Interviewer Late or early?

Tony and Jonathan *(together)* Fit-tard.

Tony and Jonathan *(together)* Late.

After this, Tony, apparently realising that he has milked the underpants joke as far as it will go, but not willing to give up the floor, reverts to talking about Mr Bean who also makes him laugh, and he insists on recounting favourite episodes from the Mr Bean programmes. Shortly afterwards, I asked the boys what they think about advertisements. Jonathan talked about a "rude" advert:

Jonathan Ir-riklami in]obbhom, imma irid ikun forsi tal-Pepsi, tal-Kinnie, hekk. Imma `ertu riklami ikunu pasta\i...

Jonathan I like adverts, but it has to be maybe for Pepsi, for Kinnie, so. But some adverts are rude...

Kenneth Vera

Kenneth It's true.

Jonathan E]e. Ta' Swinger by VF, per e\empju, dak...

Jonathan Yeah. The one for Swinger by VF, for example, that one...

Kenneth Tajjeb dak.

Kenneth That's good.

Interviewer Dak x'inhu?

Interviewer What is that?

Tony *(and then joined in chant by the other boys)* "Swinger by VF. Kwalitaï, moda, prezzijiet u servizz."	Tony *(and then joined in chant by the other boys)* "Swinger by VF. Quality, fashion, prices and service. "
Jonathan Le. M'hux dak. G]amlu ie]or [did.	Jonathan No. Not that one. They've made a new one.
Interviewer G]idilna fuqu, Jonathan.	Interviewer Tell us about it, Jonathan.
Jonathan Peter Busuttil u ma' nafx min hi l-o]ra. Ikunu g]arwenin, u jg]idlhek, "Jew Swinger, jew xejn"	Jonathan Peter Busuttil and I don't know who the woman is. They're naked, and it says, "Either Swinger, or nothing"
(another boy joins in so that "jew xejn" is chanted in chorus).	*(another boy joins in so that "or nothing" is chanted in chorus).*
Kenneth Naf..	Kenneth I know...
Jonathan Dak pasta\..	Jonathan That's rude...

Are these boys simply larking around and scoring points by being outrageous in the presence of the interviewer? There is certainly a strong element of this influencing the exchanges quoted above. But the fact that they choose nudity or women's underwear to do this also reflects the kinds of attitudes which they are growing up with when it comes to matters of sex, sexuality and the human body. Nudity is "rude" ("pasta\"), but it can also be very funny and also a means to gaining peer approval when used in a daring joke. Talking and joking about it is seen as breaking a social taboo. This is presumably what triggers Tony's repeated exclamations. Jonathan's description of the Swinger by VF advertisement, on the other hand, can also be read as offering the reverse side of the same assumption. His contribution too is presumably influenced by what he assumes the figure of authority (the interviewer) will consider inappropriate. And so he insists that he can both identify and censure "pasta\ati".

The switch from bottoms and underpants to the mad antics of Rowan Atkinson as the childlike Mr Bean indicates the level at which these children are talking. Adult women parading around with their bottoms showing through "elastic underwear" are perceived as not all that different from Mr Bean, especially when he is caught with his pants down. The scenes are funny because they show adults doing things which these children at least do not normally associate with responsible adult behaviour. Given the suspicion with which these particular children appeared to approach figures of authority, it is perhaps not surprising that such images of adults caught in undignified positions should cause so much hilarity. Tony's references to the women wearing make-up in bed is probably another instance of the

incongruities which he is noticing. But he is also aware, I think, of the fact that this type of adult fare is not really put on for his kind of farcical enjoyment, and that, for adults at least, the public display of scantily dressed bodies can also be sexually charged. Even a "showing off" exchange like this, in other words, suggests that young children often make sense of and react to material aimed at an adult audience in ways which recreate its meanings and connotations for their own purposes and uses. In some cases, these purposes can be quite removed from what the programme's producers may have intended, or what adults may assume to be the case.[35]

6.3 PARENTAL RESTRICTIONS

One of the teachers interviewed (55) commented that advances in communications technology have made it increasingly more difficult for parents to keep track of and control what children watch on television when the parents are not around. He explained that his own children were now grown-up, but when they were young it used to be possible for him to control what they could and could not watch at night by having the switch to the aerial booster in his own bedroom. That way, he said, he knew that they could not switch the television on while he and his wife were asleep.

Parents' reactions clearly play an important role in how children respond to adult-rated material. For instance, concerns about adverts being "rude" or "obscene" because of nudity were also expressed by a young factory shop-floor worker who is also the mother of a three-year-old boy and a six-year-old girl. I had just asked the parents in her group (59) if they thought there was anything on TV which could be harmful to children. Adverts can be harmful, she said, because even in an advert for soap they show a naked woman.[36] One of

[35] The notion that groups or individual viewers decode and restructure meanings in ways which may not be parallel with those intended by the programme's producers lies behind a lot of research into "the active audience" conducted since the 1980s, and largely inspired by Stuart Hall's "encoding/decoding" model (Hall, 1980). Interesting applications of this notion can be found in David Morley's "Nationwide" studies (1980), in Henry Jenkins's account of science fiction fans as "textual poachers" (Jenkins, 1992), and in the different accounts given by John Fiske (1989) and bell hooks (1992) of the meanings which the pop star Madonna has for her fans.

[36] Compare this with findings from a 1999 survey published by the British Broadcasting Standards Commission which noted that almost 40% of the sample they interviewed thought that advertisements used too much sex to sell products. When shown a Citroen advert, in which Claudia Schiffer strips off her clothes, the women in the British survey felt strongly that this was not acceptable because it was

the other members of the group (referred to as "Young father" in the transcript which follows) pointed out to her that he thought children should be encouraged to accept the human body as natural, and not as something obscene. She explained:

Young mother Jien, din il-[img]a, ji[ifieri, kont qed nara t-televixin, fuq it-Taljan insomma. [ie r-riklam... Qabe\ i\-\g]ir, qalli, "Dawn x'inhuma?" Mar quddiem it-televixin, imiss, jara... X'sa taqbad tirrispondih, tifel ta' tlett snin?

Interviewer Kif? Kien hemm xi]add g]arwien?

Young mother Mara! U [ie u jg]amilli hekk *(motions poking gesture with finger)*. Bqajd imbell]a!

Interviewer Fuqhek, ji[ifieri?

Young mother Mela! I\-\g]ir!

Older mother Tiddejjaq! Veru tiddejjaq!

Young mother Ji[ifieri, m'hux fis-sens g]ax kien hemm mara gharwiena]a ng]idlu]a\ina u tara]x...
Imma...na]seb minn hemm jibdew, hu! M'hemmx g]alfejn biex tag]mel riklam ta' sapuna....

Older father Insomma, jekk ma jibdewx minn hemm, jibdew minn xi mkien ie]or!

Older mother Jien, it-tifel meta kien i\g]ar, kien ikun [ieli jara t-televixin]dejna, u kien ikun hemm xi *film*, xi tnejn minn nies qed jitbewsu u dan...
Kont ng]idlu, "G]atti g]ajnejk!" Kien jg]attihom, u mbag]ad

Young mother Well, this week I was watching television, on the Italian station, anyway. The advert came on... The little one jumped up, he told me, "What are these? " He went up to the television set, touching, looking.... What can you say to answer him, a boy of three years?

Interviewer How? Was there someone naked?

Young mother A woman! And he came and started doing this *(motions poking gesture with finger).* I was speechless!

Interviewer On you, you mean?

Young mother Of course! The little one!

Older mother It's annoying, it's true!

Young mother I mean, it's not in the sense that because there was a naked woman I'm going to tell him it's bad and don't see it....
But... I think it's from there that they start, eh! There's no need just to make an advert for a bar of soap...

Older father Anyway, if they don't start from there, they'll start from somewhere else!

Older mother When my son was smaller, sometimes he used to be watching television next to us, and there would be some film, two people kissing and so on...
I used to tell him, "Cover your eyes! " He used to cover them, and then I'd

gratuitous. There was also comment that it was not possible to anticipate the content of adverts and no mechanism to avoid them, if so wished (Hargrave, 1999).

The young father's allusion to the prospect of the young mother's three-year-old son seeing topless bathers in the summer months was but one instance where he expressed the view that what children see and hear on television is likely to be matched or reflected in real life. Later in the same interview, the discussion came round to the topic of the soap opera *Ipokriti.* There was a range of conflicting views about this. One father said that what he found objectionable was the fact that it was teaching children that those who are successful in life are those who are most dishonest. He also commented that people were objecting to specific scenes in it, even though they were long used to seeing these types of scenes on programmes produced overseas. Another father (referred to as "Older father" in the transcript) said that he thought it was screened too early (at 8.30 p.m. on Mondays and early in the afternoon on Sundays) considering its adult content. The older mother and the young father felt that there was nothing wrong with it. The young mother disagreed:

Young mother Jiena, it-tifla tieg]i li g]andha *six* ma n]allihiex tarah, jiena, g]ax nar il-}add kien hemm bi``a, qallha "qa]ba". Dik, bla ma trid, tismag]ha, ti[i tg]idli "qa]ba"...

Older father U, m'hux hekk? E]e, vera...

Young mother ...twarrabha. Ara, I[[iebek \ibel quddiem innies...

Older father E]e, e\att...

Young mother ... X'sa taqbad tg]idilha? M'hux hekk smajt int fuq it-televixin, mela oqg]od, qa]ba!

Young father Kemm g]anda \mien?

Young mother *Six*.

Young father Ma' tmurx skola?

Young mother Tmur skola, imma ma na]sibx li minn [o klassi ta' *Year One*]a tisma' dal-kliem!

Young father Iva, jisimg]u!

Young mother I don't let my six year-old daughter watch it, I don't, because last Sunday there was a bit, he called her "whore". That one, without wanting to, hears it, and comes over and says "whore"....

Older father Yes, that's right! Yeah, it's true...

Young mother .... you push her aside... She really embarrasses you in front of people....

Older father Yeah, exactly...

Young mother .... What are you going to say to her? Isn't that what you heard on television, so keep quiet, whore!

Young father How old is she?

Young mother Six

Young father Doesn't she go to school?

Young mother She does go to school, but I don't think that she is going to hear such words in a Year One class!

Young father Yes, they hear them!

Young mother Le, tieg]i ma tismax!

Young mother No, mine doesn't hear them!

Whatever the influence of peers at school and elsewhere may be, it is clear that the pervasive presence of television has also inescapably affected the different attitudes to child rearing reflected in this exchange between these young parents. What determines when parents like these discuss (or refuse to discuss) sex-related issues with their children is likely to be when such images appear on television.[37] The young mother just quoted is left "speechless" and incapable of dealing with a situation triggered by the TV advert because, in her mind, children of that age should not be conscious of such issues. Her concept of childhood innocence is one, presumably, where three-year-old boys should have no idea of, and ask no questions about female breasts. For her, the viewing of such images on television is what sets children on the wrong path — "I think it's from there that they start eh!" — though what exactly she assumes them to start is not clear. Judging from the types of comments made by boys like six-year-old Tony (quoted above) what does seem to start is a realisation that such material is something which makes adults uncomfortable and embarrassed in the presence of children. And hence, presumably, particularly since children understand that adults claim such material to be "adult fare" or "suitable for adult viewing only", that expressing an interest in such material can also be one way of embarrassing adults, as well as somehow claiming adult status with one's peers.

The young father quoted, on the other hand, appears to be constantly *reacting* to what children see on TV. He doesn't get to choose himself when to raise these topics. What he appears to see himself as doing is closer to damage control — trying to encourage his three sons to view representations of the human body as "natural", even though (as he said later in the interview) he doesn't want them to watch exploitative smut. Shortly after this exchange, he described how his seven year-old son had on one occasion asked his mother whether she had sex with his father, and how they had tried to deal with this question as "naturally" as possible. In his view, it was not so much television as his sons' peers at school, and at the *Mu\ew* and other

[37] The 1999 survey published by the British Broadcasting Standards Commission notes that 30% of the adults they interviewed said that there was too much explicit sex in soap operas, and that they thought such material should not be aired till after the 9.00 pm "watershed" (Hargrave, 1999). However, earlier research undertaken by the same Commission also suggests that parents often welcome the introduction of difficult subjects as a way of talking to their children (Hargrave, 1995).

youth centres who introduced them to topics, words and information about sex. But his other contributions also made it clear that he recognised that television might be introducing his children to material and ideas which he would prefer them not to be exposed to. At one point, for instance, he commented that he prefers his sons not to watch programmes like *Jerry Springer* because it takes him so long afterwards to explain all the issues it raises, and he doesn't even understand some of them himself! He saw it as his and his wife's responsibility to balance what his sons picked up from TV and from their peers with what he considered more sensible and responsible attitudes and information. The point is that the choice of *when* these issues are raised and confronted somehow appears to be no longer in the hands of the parents — or, more specifically perhaps, that parents generally choose not to raise and deal with such issues until after they appear on television.

Joshua Meyrowitz has argued that children may love television precisely "because it extends their horizons of experience, because it expands their awareness of adult behavior and adult roles, and because it keeps them abreast of the latest adult attempts to control them" (1995:45). In his book *No Sense of Place*, Meyrowitz (1985) ascribed this phenomenon to the fact that new media change patterns of access to information. What a young child knew about the world was once determined primarily by where he or she lived and was allowed to go. Parents could mould their young children's upbringing by speaking and reading to them only about those things they wished them to be exposed to. By making it possible for children to have access to images and ideas over which their parents have little direct control, television has radically changed the patterns in which this happens:

> Unable to read, very young children were once limited to the few sources of information available to them within or around the home: paintings, illustrations, views from a window, and what adults said and read to them. Television, however, now escorts children across the globe even before they have permission to cross the street. (Meyrowitz, 1985:238)

Television's visual nature and universal presence have thus broken down many traditional distinctions between adult and child. Meyrowitz argues that by exposing children to the very topics that adults are trying to keep from them, television dilutes the authority of grown-ups and limits traditional systems of adult control. It even lets children in on the biggest secret of all, the secret of secrecy: that adults are conspiring to censor their knowledge:

> Television dilutes the innocence of childhood and the authority of adults by undermining the system of information control that supported them. Television bypasses the year-by-year slices of knowledge given to children. It presents the same general experiences to adults and to children of all ages. Children may not understand everything they see on television (do adults?), but they are exposed to many aspects of adult life from which their parents (and traditional children's books) would have once shielded them. (Meyrowitz, 1995: 43)

Forceful as Meyrowitz's argument is, it might be more accurate to say that, in a global media context dominated by commercial interests and the demands of advertising, television is not so much expanding children's understanding of adult behaviour and roles as introducing them to a complex and often confusing bricolage of images whose main unifying force is the fact that they are consumption-driven. In contexts where television has become "primarily a vehicle for broadcasters to sell people to advertisers" (Allen, 1992: 18), both programme content and audiences become commodified. Children may assume that programmes are more "truthful" when they are different from the idealised world which their parents would like them to take on board, and because adults designate such material as "not suitable for children." But the fact that the programmes contain material which subverts this ideal does not necessarily mean that they are more realistic, or that they give a more accurate picture of what adult life is all about.

Further, as Judith Van Evra (1998: 45) points out, if the increased access to information which television makes possible is coupled with children's greater likelihood of decoding in ways which are different from those used by adults, the potential for misinterpretation is greater. In effect, they are seeing, and trying to interpret, the adult world through children's eyes and with children's cognitive capacities.

It is to a consideration of specific examples of how representations of the adult world are decoded and interpreted through children's cognitive capacities that we now turn.

6.4 CHILDREN'S TALK ABOUT SEXUAL CONTENT

Children's talk about sexual content in films and TV often takes on carnivalesque dimensions. The word "carnivalesque" is used here in the sense suggested by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin

(1968), in order to draw attention to similarities with situations in which normal behavioural rules and expectations are loosened (as traditionally happens during the days of carnival), giving rise to dramatic changes in behaviour and discursive conventions. What is said and done in carnivalesque situations is largely inspired by the desire to behave outrageously in order to test out how far boundaries can be pushed. Conventional behaviour and habitual social relations are typically reversed: servants take on the role of masters, for instance, or men dress as women; but these unwonted roles are assumed in a manner which is conspicuously exaggerated. What is said and done in such situations thus becomes primarily a self-conscious and deliberate performance — one which while being entertaining and pleasurable, also allows those taking part a chance to experiment with roles which would normally be prohibited. The incongruity and absurdity of the switching of habitual roles are highlighted and underlined, partly to encourage laughter and ridicule, but also (paradoxically) to reinforce the idea that this is only a temporary and outrageous reversal of what the participants and spectators assume to be the "natural order".

What I am suggesting is that, for many children, talking about sexual issues in the presence of peers as well as adults, as in interview situations like those undertaken for this project, can often take on carnivalesque dimensions. This carnivalesque element becomes more pronounced in the interview setting because the children are being encouraged to speak openly about matters which are not usually considered strictly appropriate in a school setting, and they are being encouraged to do so by an adult figure of authority (the interviewer) who is obviously not enforcing normal restrictions on what can and cannot be said. Interpreting what children say in this type of context therefore needs to take serious account of the fact that when they speak about a subject like sex, many children frequently slip into performance modes. Their performances can be a form of what looks like frivolous entertainment (involving pleasurable daring or teasing); but they can also assume more earnest and serious dimensions. In the latter case, the aim appears to be that of projecting a preferred image of themselves as a "non-childish" person who has not been unduly shocked or "badly influenced" by the experience of watching such fare.

It's worth stressing that the term "performance" is used analogically here, and not in any negative sense. It is certainly not being suggested that these children are deliberately setting out to deceive or to pretend to be something which they know to be untrue. Rather, what they are engaged in is trying to locate themselves within what they perceive as a desirable stage of growth and social relations. Thinking of their talk about sex and its representations in the media as

a type of performance can help us get a bit closer to identifying what assumptions they make about the “natural order” when they shape their particular “performance”.

Some of the performative activities engaged in by the children I interviewed can be listed and interpreted as follows.

6.4.1 Professing Disgust and Ridiculing Others

Children frequently describe portrayals of couples kissing or engaging in love-making as "disgusting" or "gross".[38] The striking thing about such descriptions is that they are often made in a deliberately exaggerated way, calculated either to shock or to make the other children present laugh. The mode of delivery also underlines the speakers' desire to distance themselves from any interest in the activities described.

In the course of one interview (28), nine year-old Michael tried to describe a promotional spot he had glimpsed on a private Sicilian station in such terms. For the other boys in his group, discussing such a topic with a strange adult at all was clearly embarrassing and inappropriate: they looked uncomfortable while he spoke, tried to change the subject, and then told me apologetically that "Michael's little brain doesn't work!" The subject is clearly not one which can be broached openly, at least not in the presence of adults. But if, like Michael in this group, you can distance yourself by asserting disgust, then it becomes possible to show and share knowledge of what adults can get up to. The other boys in the group had just said that seeing nudity on TV was wrong because it's rude. Michael agreed:

> Michael There's another one. I like to see *Europa Sette* on Antenna Sicilia, and I saw, *din g]awn , riklam* [an advert] *[other boys giggle uncomfortably]* ... Uff, sir, they were rude, *hekk*, sir, naked. They were kissing, they were kissing in front...
> Albert Leonardo di Caprio, *Titanic*....
> Sandro What are you saying? *Titanic* was UPG, *ta* ...
> Michael No, I thought I saw a film, it wasn't a film, they were going to do it, a bit, then... then this had a lot of that... *[laughter from other boys]* It's disgusting!
> Sandro Of that of what? *G]id! X'qed tg]id?* [Say! What are you saying?]
> Albert Of that of what? Of his face?
> Michael I don't know what it was, I forgot it. But, *jaqq*, it's disgusting. They were kissing in front of a corridor!
> Albert Michael's little brain doesn't work!
> Michael See of Antenna Sicilia, then you'll see! It's very disgusting! [....] I don't like to see them!

[38] The report of a survey conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Authority examining children's attitudes to violence, kissing and swearing on TV is interestingly entitled *'Cool' or 'Gross'* (Sheldon et al, 1994).

Another approach is to ridicule the whole issue through exaggeration, and in the process insist on one's own distance from any interest in it. According to one eight year-old boy (22):

Josef Il-ku[in tieg]i taf kemm i]obb jarhom il-*girls* g]arwenin *(laughter)* .... fuq it-television! Ta' prima klassi!	Josef You know how much my cousin loves watching naked girls *(laughter)* .... on television! First class!
Interviewer Hemm]afna *girls* g]arwenin fuq it-televixin?	Interviewer Are there many naked girls on television?
Josef Uuuuu, kemm jag]mlu! Fuq it-Taljan!	Josef Of course, they have loads of them! On the Italian channels..
Interviewer Liema stazzjonijiet?	Interviewer Which channels?
Henry Anke fuq it-Tele Plus jag]mlu!	Henry They also have them on Tele Plus!
Josef Kieku nkun hemm....	Josef If I'm there....
Samuel Aktar fuq it-Taljani...	Samuel Mostly on the Italian...
Josef ... u nkun qed ni[ba mill-film, naqtaw.. nitfih... g]ax ma jkollhomx jarawhom...	Josef .... and I'm getting fed up with the film, I cut it... I switch it off.... because they mustn't watch them...

In the course of the same interview (22), another eight year-old boy answered the question about which TV programmes he dislikes most as follows:

Robert Idejquni dawk il-films li joqog]du ibusu lil-xulxin.	Robert I get annoyed by those films where they keep kissing each other.
Interviewer G]aliex idejquk?	Interviewer Why do they annoy you?
Robert G]ax joqog]du jin\g]u *(laughter, also from other boys)* u jdejquni u nitlaq il-fuq nilg]ab il-*Play Station*	Robert Because they keep taking their clothes off *(laughter, also from other boys)* and they annoy me and I just go upstairs to play Play Station.

Later on, Robert indicated that he likes to watch films about soldiers and Formula One races. He said that when he watches them he wishes he was there himself and he wishes to be a soldier. This was clearly something about which he felt passionate. I pointed out that some people say that films with lots of fighting are not good for children, and asked whether he thought this was true:

Robert Jien in]obbhom, imma meta jkun hemm ... xi jkunu, jkunu sa jitbewsu jew hekk, ng]atti g]ajnejja u nid]ol ta]t dar.... hawn, immur wara dar il-mummy *(laughter from others)*

Interviewer G]aliex?

Robert Biex ma' narhomx. G]ax idejquni joqog]du jitbewsu, joqog]du mmm -aaah -aaah ! *(laughter)*

Robert I like them, but when there is ... what is it, when they are about to kiss or something, I cover my eyes and I go under ... I mean, I go behind my mum's back *(laughter from others)*

Interviewer Why?

Robert So as not to see them. Because they annoy me when they keep kissing, they keep going mmm-aaah-aaah! *(laughter)*

Since he associates action films with masculinity (Formula One racing and his dream of becoming a soldier), this boy sees no problem with watching screen fighting and violence.[39] What he does have problems with is kissing — something which he associates with girls. Indeed, when asked whether he thought there were differences between what boys and girls liked to watch on television, he replied:

Robert Il-boys jaraw li ji[[ieldu, u il-girls li jitbewsu! *(laughter from others)* (.....) Jaraw tal-boys jitbewsu mal-girls....

Robert Boys watch fighting ones, and girls kissing ones! *(laughter from others)* (....) They watch those of boys kissing with girls....

But the assumption that young girls enjoy such fare is anything but borne out by the girls themselves. This is how nine year-old Sandra (10) replied when she was asked whether she thought that there were any programmes which could be harmful for children of her age:

Sandra Ta' Danielle Steele, g]ax il-mummy kienet qed tara ta' Danielle Steele, ta' ktieb, u kien hemm tnejn qeg]din jitbewsu, jaqq!

Sandra Of Danielle Steele, 'cause mum was watching a Danielle Steele film, from a book, and there were two people kissing, yukk!

Daisy Jaqq! (laughter)

Daisy Yukk! [laughter]

[39] The issues raised by the fact that so many boys claim that they have no problems with watching violence, but admit to feeling uncomfortable about portrayals of sex are discussed more fully in Chapter 7.

Interviewer Allura g]aliex tg]id li jag]mel]sara lit-tfal?
Sandra G]ax idejquni quddiemi!

Interviewer So why do you say that it harms children?
Sandra Because they get on my nerves in front of me!

6.4.2 Pushing Boundaries and Being Outrageous

Though talking about sex and sexual TV content often appears to be embarrassing to young children, some of them also use the subject to sound daring, or as a way of "testing out" how far they can go in a situation like that of the interview (in school, with an unknown male interviewer associated with school authority figures). Thus, there is often a lot of laughter (embarrassed or otherwise) when the subject is broached, or exaggerated coyness mixed with mischievousness — as in the following group of eight-year old girls (8). The exchange took place after one of them had mentioned the cable channel *Trouble.* There is a lot of self-conscious *performance* in this exchange. But it is precisely in this that a great deal is revealed about the assumptions which these children make about what is or is not appropriate for them to watch, talk about, or even mention.

Adriana But *Trouble, suppost*, is for older children, not for our age.
Interviewer Do you watch *Trouble* ?
Adriana Yes, with my family, because it's not supposed to be for our age....
Daniela But when it is, you know what, I turn it over.
Adriana *E]e* [yes]. You know what? Emm...
Interviewer What is it about?
Adriana *Trouble* is about... like.... *[Turns to other girls]* How can we say it? *[laughter]*
Daniela It's like... emm...'cause there's a man *[interruptions from Adriana]* ... There's a woman and a man ... and they, like, solve their problems...
Adriana And they get drunk, and they do this.... *[laughter]*... I can't say it, *ma*, but don't tell anyone... they...*[more laughter from the other girls]* ... Now I've got to say it! ... They like.. they do...
Lydia Don't say anything else! *[laughter]*
Daniela Oh no!
Adriana Do.... They do like .... I say?
Lydia Oh no!
Daniela Humm...
Adriana They do like .... *[indecipherable]* or make like... I'm scared to say what they do *[laughs]*. They do...
Daniela Don't make it worse now!

Adriana I *have* to say it!
Lydia *[pretends she's about to leave the room]*
Adriana I'll say it, *mela* ... No. They do some *[more laughter from Daniela]* sex and.... I said it!
Daniela Ooooh!
Adriana That's what they do it, but.... we change it *[the TV channel]* when there's something like that. When it's OK, we see it.
Interviewer Do you change it yourself, or do your mum and dad change it?
The three girls together: We change it! *[laughing]*
Lydia We change it to something worse! *[more laughter]*
Adriana No, no. We change it to something better.
Lydia That's what I do. I change it to something worse.
Adriana But we change. We keep it, and then, when I hear my mother come, click! I switch it on a good programme.

The girls here apparently assume that the appropriate and expected way for them to feel when mentioning the s-word in the presence of an adult is embarrassment. But they are also having a great deal of fun playing with the contrasting roles of innocent child and knowledgeable "adult". Through all the play-acting and carnivalesque performance in which they are engaged, however, it is also clear that they understand that the issues to which they are referring belong to the world of adults, and also that these issues are real. As another group of 7 year-old girls (5) put it when they raised the subject of sex in a comparable situation, in their own way what they are doing is "saying it as it is".

6.4.3 Self-Censorship

A number of children described how they often censor their own viewing by blocking out material which they think they should not be watching, or about which they feel guilty. In the case of boys especially, it was usually sexually oriented material (and not violent or scary scenes) which created these reactions. As the following excerpts indicate, how to respond to representations of nudity can often be particularly problematic for boys in these age groups. Thus, one eight year-old boy (22) described how he sometimes fast-forwards the video tape of one of his favourite movies so as to skip over scenes which he thinks he should not be watching:

Samuel Ta' *Titanic* jien m'hux kull darba narah. {ieli inne]]ih g]ax... g]ax dak [ieli jkollu dan... affarijiet]ziena...	Samuel Of *Titanic*, I don't watch it every time. Sometimes I take it off because... because sometimes it has this.... bad things....
Henry Mmm *(agreeing)* Jew li jpen[iha... li jpen[iha...	Henry Mmm *(agreeing)* Or else when he draws her... when he draws her....
Samuel Ehe...	Samuel Yeah...
Henry ... tkun g]arwiena...	Henry ... when she's naked...
Samuel Noqg]od ng]amillu *forward* jien. Nitfi, ng]amillu *forward*, u dan...	Samuel I keep fast-forwarding it, that's what I do! I switch it off, press fast-forward, and so on...
Henry Biex ma narahiex....	Henry So that I don't see her...
Samuel Imma jbe\\ani xi kull tant...	Samuel But it scares me sometimes....
Kurt Jien xorta narah!	Kurt I watch it anyway!
Henry Anka jien!	Henry Me too!

Another ten year-old boy (42) described how and why he censors his own watching while channel-surfing as follows:

> Roderick Once I was turning the channel, and.... and I.... and while I was turning —'cause me, I stay seeing what would it be, what it was about — and while I was seeing what this programme was about, eh, they, this man opens the door and he found a lady half naked, and then I just changed the channel, in a half, in a split second!
> Interviewer Why did you do that?
> Frank It's rude!
> Roderick Because it's rude! It's not your business to see a lady half naked! *[laughter from other boy]* [.....] And rude words as well. When there are rude words I change it, 'cause then I learn them and I start saying them. And I don't want to learn them, so I change it!

6.4.4 Paying Lip Service

Another form of performance in which children often engage when they talk about sexual content on television is that of paying lip service to what they take is the official adult line and repeating "received wisdom" about "rude" scenes being bad for them. They often do this even though they think that some of the "rude" things which they are banned from watching are ones which they know to be common practice among adults and can often be seen in public places.

How children understand and respond to television is inseparable from how they understand and respond to the rest of their social experiences. When a group of 6-7 year-old girls (1) were asked why they had identified TV scenes with kissing as ones which are not suitable for children, they said that they often see such things even in the street anyway. In other words, though they start off by repeating "received wisdom" about material which as children they find embarrassing or "gross" to watch anyway, they also realise that kissing is a fairly widespread and often public form of adult behaviour. This then is how they answered when asked if there were any programmes which were not good for children:

Pauline Li joqog]du jitbewsu n-nies!	Pauline The ones where people keep kissing!
Other girls *(together)* Dik kont sa ng]id! Iva, dika! Naf! *(laughter)*	Other girls *(together)* That's what I was going to say! Yes, that one! I know! *(laughter)*
(....)	(....)
Interviewer G]aliex]a\in li jitbewsu mela?	Interviewer Why is it bad when they kiss then?
Monique Eeee... Jien naf!	Monique Mmmm... How do I know!
Pauline Jiena nara nies jitbewsu! *(laughs)*	Pauline I see people kissing! *(laughs)*
Joanna L-g]arajjes ma' jitbewsux?	Joanna Don't couples kiss?
Pauline Mela!	Pauline Of course!
Cassandra Iva! Kien hemm bank, fejn tieqaf tal-linja, kien hemm \ew[nies jitbewsu quddiem in-nies! *(laughs)* Rajnihom a]na! O]ti qabdet il-mera u rathom! *(more laughter)*	Cassandra Yes! There was a bench, near the bus stop, there were two people kissing in front of people! *(laughs)* We saw them! My sister got hold of the mirror and saw them! *(more laughter)*

Children frequently compare what they see on television with their everyday experiences — just as they often try to make sense of their experiences in terms of what they see on TV. It is here that they often find parental restrictions contradictory and difficult to understand. These difficulties are well captured in the way another nine year-old girl (14) spoke about scenes showing couples kissing:

My mother says that it's bad for me and my sister. I don't know why, really, because it's just what people do when they love each other. But, ehmm, she still doesn't let us watch it, because it's not nice to see that!

6.4.5 Making Sense of Disjointed Fragments

Young children frequently choose not to watch adult-rated material (even when their parents do not actively stop them) because they simply are not interested in it. But this does not mean that they have no access to information about "adult" issues. In my interviews I came across several instances of younger children piecing information together from fragments culled and integrated from different popular media, and then basing their claim to "adult" knowledge on this piecemeal information. Here is how one eight-year-old girl (8) responded to my question as to whether she likes listening to radio:

> Daniela Sometimes, when the weather is on, I listen to it. And when there's songs, I listen to it, and there's my mother's favourite one. It's about.. it's... well... she.. it's ... drums a lot. And at the end of it, she asks a man or whatever, I don't know what, and she asks, and she asks her, him: "Will you sleep with me?" At the end... It's like on *In and Out*. They're getting married and he says "She's gay!" because this man kissed that man. *[Interruptions]* Wait! He was a video man. He, umm, like there's a video man, he takes a video of us... and, and one day, when he was going to get married, he kissed him! The man kissed Kevin Kline!

This girl is making sense of the words of her mother's favourite pop song through her understanding of another unusual situation which she saw (and apparently found strange enough to remember vividly) in a popular movie. This apparently has been her introduction to the notion and existence of homosexuality. Intertextuality, and an ability to negotiate meanings through cross referencing discrete items from different entertainment-oriented media has become this girl's source of knowledge about this "adult" subject.

6.4.6 Reactions to Sex-and-Scandal Chat Shows

Television programmes about which a number of children spoke extensively included American sex-and-scandal chat shows like *The Jerry Springer Show.* The following examples of children talking about these programmes provide an interesting indication of how they react to aspects of adult sexuality which these type of TV programmes exploit or sensationalise in order to attract viewers.

Ten year-old Marisa (9) described the antics which people get up to in *The Jerry Springer Show* in a relatively distant and matter-of-fact fashion:

Marisa Dak, per e\empju, ikun hemm tnejn, mara u ra[el, u il-mara tkun qed to]ro[ma ie]or. U j[ibuh fuq dan ix-*show*. U jibdew jitkellmu dawn it-tnejn li kienu l-ewwel wa]da. Imma mbag]ad i[iblek l-ie]or, u il-mara tmur ma' l-ie]or, u jibdew ji[[ieldu. Insomma, ji[[ieldu, jg]idu kliem]a\in, u hekk.

Simone Jien qatt ma' rajtu!

Interviewer Jarawh]afna nies dal-programm?

Marisa Per e\empju zijuwi u zijti i]obbu jarawh.

Interviewer Inti g]o[bok meta rajtu?

Marisa Insomma, ma' tantx g]o[obni, g]ax iktar ji[[ieldu u jg]idu kliem pasta\ milli joqog]du daka, jitkellmu hekk.

Marisa That, for example, there would be two people, wife and husband, and the wife would be going out with another man. And they bring this man on the show. And they start talking, these two who were there first. But then they bring in the other one, and the wife goes with the other one, and they start fighting. You know, fighting, swearing, and so on.

Simone I've never seen it!

Interviewer Do many people watch this programme?

Marisa For example, my uncle and aunt like to watch it.

Interviewer Did you like it when you saw it?

Marisa Well, I didn't like it much, because they spend more time fighting and saying rude words than, you know, speaking normally.

A more emphatically condemnatory stance was taken by a group of eight-year-old girls (8), when they were discussing the types of marital relations which they had seen paraded in such programmes. It's worth pointing out that these were the same girls who have already been quoted as making a big fuss about saying the word "sex". Later in the interview they appeared to become more open and relaxed about all this — or at least about discussing portrayals of adult sexuality which they recognise as being so grotesquely exaggerated and abnormal that they become laughable — more like cartoons, in fact, than serious representations of adult issues. The girls also insisted that they never

watch the whole programmes, but only parts of them, or else promotional spots for them.

In the exchange which follows one can see how though these girls speak in a very disapproving fashion about the programme's content (some of their comments, in fact, sound like the sort of thing they may have heard from their parents), they are also fascinated by its circus-like qualities:

> Adriana The thing is, *Jerry Springer* is a bit over-reacted *[overacted]* ... You know what I mean with over-reacted? Like "Hey you!" They fight, they slap across: it's over-reacted. Get married! If you get married, you can't divorce! Stay and sleep in different beds!...
> Daniela And the women, they go like that, and they jump on each other....
> [.....]
> Daniela *Jerry Springer*: they talk about marriage. Why they, why this man has two wives, not wives, one's a girlfriend and one's his proper wife. And then, as this man and this wife, they should stay together, not this man sleep with her and with her....
> Lydia I saw that film!
> Daniela "Not with my sister!" *[laughs]* And it's like, at the end they just slap each other, and all that, and then the man goes with the girlfriend not her wife...
> Adriana *E]e*, and I was seeing *Ronaldo* [*Rolanda?*], I think, and then there was this lady, and I show you how she went. *[Gets up to demonstrate]* And she was a bit fat, big butt! And they used to talk, these ladies, they used to say, "You look so ugly!" "I say," she said, "I don't care how I look! Have a good life!" And she started slapping all the people because they laughed at

It is the circus-like qualities of the programmes which make it possible for these children to dismiss the situations and characters portrayed as exaggerated, bizarre and unusual. But the grotesque and carnivalesque qualities also allow the children to talk openly (if carnivalesquely) about the adult issues which are raised. Daniela's comments about divorce are an expression of what she takes to be the right and properly "adult" position on these issues. But the real fascination here is with excess, and with how adults often break the rules and behave outrageously. In other words, what these children have recognised is that adult sexuality too can be anything but "grown-up", and that "childish" behaviour is not confined to children or to childish concerns.

As a number of other children pointed out, watching sex-and-scandal chat shows and other adult-rated TV programmes is often also a way of finding out what sort of things adults can get up to. This was a point which was made more specifically by a number of the older children surveyed,[40] and it is discussed further in Chapter 7.

6.4.7 Making Childish Sense of Adult Issues

How do young children talk about adult themes when they are not so concerned about "rude bits", "rude words" or about transparently grotesque situations? How, for instance, do they react to dramatic portrayals of broken marriages, marital infidelity or domestic violence? In the course of one interview with a mixed gender group of five year olds (51), Dustin and Samantha[41] got into an extended debate with each other about the details of these type of adult scenarios as they had seen them portrayed in the Maltese soap opera *Ipokriti.* Both were particularly keen on showing that they had a clear understanding of the issues involved, and their way of talking about these quickly developed into a kind of competition as to who had the better (and hence more "mature") understanding. This is what they said:

Dustin Jiena fuq *Ipokriti*, hawn, kien hemm wa]da tifl.... mara, u l-mara, kien hemm ra[el l-g]arus tag]ha...	Dustin Me, about *Ipokriti*, well, there was one gir... woman, and the woman, there was a man, her boyfriend...
u dan qisu kien naqra kattif, g]ax dan kien jisraq, ix-xog]ol tieg]u. Allura, hi libset xi]a[a, u lag]bu log]ba (.....)	and this one was like a bit cruel, because he used to steal, that was his job. Well, she wore something, and they played a game (.....)
Samantha Le. Dik kienet *girl*, u mbag]ad kien hemm ... (.....)	Samantha No. That was a girl, and then there was.... (.....)

[40] Two 12 year-old girls (34), for instance, insisted that they like watching *Jerry Springer* because it allows them to find out about other people's problems ("tkun]a[a sabi]a li tara kif inhuma l-problemi tan-nies u hekk").

[41] Dustin and Samantha had earlier on described their fathers' occupations as motor mechanic and soldier, and the mothers' as seamstress and cleaner. The other children in the group had described their parents' occupation as nurse, "computing", and housewife. One child did not know.

Dustin }a ng]idlek, jiena, ta' *Ipokriti.* Kienu I\\ew[u w imbag]ad x']in kien izzew[u, hawn, qieg]ed...

Dustin Let me tell you, me, about *Ipokriti.* They had got married and then as soon as they got married, I mean, there is...

Samantha Dak kien William! William kien mar il-]abs, u mbag]ad]ar[u mill-]abs u mbag]ad \\ew[u..

Samantha That was William! William had gone to jail, and then they got out of jail and then they got married.

Dustin Ehe. Imma kien hemm mara o]ra riedet ti\\ewwe[mieg]u. Imma hu, qal xi gidba, u minflok I\\ewwe[ma' l-o]ra. U mbag]ad hi bdiet tirrabja mieg]u, g]ax ma \\ewwi[x mag]ha.

Dustin Yeah. But there was another woman who wanted to marry him. But he, he told some lie, and instead he married the other one. And then she started to get angry with him, because he didn't marry her.

Samantha I\\ewwe[mag]ha!

Samantha He did marry her!

Dustin Imma, le, imma, qalilha "all right", imma dik gidba. Allura mbag]ad hi.. hu jo]ro[ma' mara o]ra...

Dustin But, no, but, he told her "all right", but that was a lie. So then she.. he goes out with another woman...

Samantha Le! Ma \\ewwe[ma]add! Dik, dik, hi... Dik kienet, dik kienet [a' mi\\ew[a. Imma hu, ir-ra[el tag]ha, ma kienx i]obbha. Kien joqg]od jag]tiha...

Samantha No! He didn't marry anyone! That one, she ... She was, she was already married. But he, her husband, did not love her. He used to beat her....

Dustin Mmm *(agreeing)*

Dustin Mmm *(agreeing)*

Samantha U mbag]ad hi, g]amlitlu hekk, g]ax ma setg]etx, g]ax, dak id-dag]a .... U mbag]ad ma' setg]etx timxi... (.....)

Samantha And then she, she did this to him, because she couldn't, because, that swearing ..... And then she couldn't walk... (.....)

Dustin U qabad itiha. Allura mbag]ad [abitlu *black eye*... It-tifl... hawn il-mara, kella *black eye*, kien taha daqqa ir-ra[el tag]ha....

Dustin And he started hitting her. And so, then, she got him a black eye ... The gir... I mean the woman, had a black eye, her husband had hit her.....

James Eh. Hawnhekk kella daqqa hu? U mbag]ad daqqa hawn..

James She had a blow here, didn't she? An then a blow here...

Samantha Le, hi bdiet... qabdet senter u riedet tisparalhu. Kuljum riedet tisparalhu. U mbag]ad re[a' taha xeba' u mbag]ad re[g]et kienet]a tisparalhu... u ma sabitux...

Samantha No, she started... she grabbed a gun and wanted to shoot him. Every day she wanted to shoot him. And then he gave her another beating and then she was going to shoot him again.... and she didn't find him...

As already suggested, one striking thing about this exchange is that the two children are keen on showing that they individually

understand what is happening in the programme they describe. In this sense, their debate takes on the characteristics of a display of cultural capital, and hence of "adult status". There is something both incongruous and bizarre about the fact that these five year-old children were childishly arguing about the details of television portrayals of marital infidelity and domestic violence in order to prove that they were not "childish". That incongruity became more marked when the other five year-old children in the group (who were not regular watchers of the soap opera) insisted on giving examples of their own "grown up" tastes and lack of "childishness". One described how he used to enjoy *Teletubbies* but is now off it because he doesn't like hearing them talk like babies all the time; another announced that she had seen two scary films (one about dinosaurs, the other about James Bond) but that they weren't scary for her; and a third suddenly announced that her family was going to have a baby!

So are these children using talk about this material to prove that they can handle it? They are told that it's adult fare, but they respond to this by talking extensively about "adult" details in order to show that they have a clear understanding of it. Indeed, when I pointed out to them that some teachers had told me that the serial wasn't suitable for children, they did not challenge this but said they agreed because of all the fighting which it contained. What the children who watched the programme regularly appeared to be doing was putting themselves on the side of responsible adults (the teachers) by drawing attention to the parts which they assumed were not good for children, but at the same time somehow exempting themselves from that classification by also proving that they are not themselves "childish". The performance in this case involves a more deliberate attempt to take on what the children think of as a "grown-up" role.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS

I started this chapter with an account of how a nine year-old girl's claim that she was sexually abused was allegedly based on what she had seen on television. Can we draw any links between that story and the different ways in which various groups of children have been quoted as talking about sexual content on television and films? One clear similarity lies in the fact that all appear to be examples of children trying to deal with apparently precocious "adult" knowledge by taking on "adult" roles in ways which look premature. As we have seen, it is often a sense of confusion which can be heard in many of these young voices — as they speak about adult themes, and as they try to make sense of the often ill-defined and contradictory messages which they get from their parents and other significant adults.

Given the evidence presented in this chapter, it is clear that young children are being introduced to some forms of sexually explicit material at a very early age. It is also clear that, however vigilant many parents are trying to be in order to protect their children from exposure to such fare, the reality is that children will almost inevitably come across at least glimpses or snatches of such material while watching television — e.g. during promotional spots or advertising breaks. For some children, these glimpses can become the building blocks out of which they construct their own bricolage of "knowledge" about adult themes.

What this chapter has also shown is that, partly because the reactions of adults to such fare are often inconsistent, embarrassed or evasive, some children come to use talk about it as a form of cultural capital. They use such talk as a way of being outrageous, or as a way of showing that they are not "childish". What they appear to be saying is: "I know this programme is 'not suitable for children' for the following reasons, and my ability to understand this proves my exemption from that classification!" This is not unlike the comment made by a number of children in relation to scary material when they say: "it was a scary film, but I wasn't scared!"

Another way in which children use talk about sexually related material is as part of what I have described in this chapter as carnivalesque performances. This is also part of children's way of experimenting with what types of roles they can assume in different social settings, and of testing out the extents to which they will be allowed to assume "adult" roles and "adult" social relations. In this sense, children's talk about the adult material they encounter on television can be read as a testing of boundaries, and an exploration of what types of impact they can have on adults, siblings and peers. This

is why they often try to prove that they are not “childish” by talking about such material in one of several modes — outrageously, carnivalesquely, earnestly.

Television thus clearly does exert a crucial influence on how and when children become aware of adult themes and issues of sex and sexuality. But this influence is both experienced and expressed as part of a broader set of social relations. Children make sense of and use what they see on television very much in the light of the contexts in which they see such material, as well as in the light of how they see adults reacting to it and to the realisation that children are watching it. Its effects and consequences are therefore also heavily mediated by the values which prevail in their homes and in their broader cultural environment.

CHAPTER 7
SEXUAL CONTENT AND ADOLESCENTS
(Ages 11 to 14)

7.1 LEARNING ABOUT ADULT ISSUES FROM TV PROGRAMMES

Older children and teenagers frequently insist that watching adult-rated TV programmes and films is a good way for people of their age to learn about the world of adulthood which they are entering. As one 13-14 year-old girl (67) put it in an essay:

> I like watching films grated *(sic)* to an older audience and I always learn something new from them. [...] I like telling my friends what films I saw and if they were violence or not and I like describing. All my friends see violent film or grated to an older audience and we like describing them. I think that I am in a good age to see these films so I could learn more.

The statement reflects the extent to which TV watching by young adults serves social and socialising functions.[42] It is used as an important part of a ritual of measuring and proving one's stage of growth and maturity with peers. Talking about "adult-rated" material seen on television allows these young girls to discuss and share new experiences and ideas associated with the discoveries of growing into adulthood. The programmes provide a frame of reference against which they can test themselves as well as forge and reinforce their emerging sense of adult identity. Such material is thus approached as forming an important part of what Jerome Bruner (1979, 1987) has called the library of scripts or cultural "tool kits" which individuals use to make sense of their existence, and to judge the play of their multiple identities.

The idea that watching adult television programmes is a way of learning about life was expressed on several occasions. A 12 year-old girl (34) said that she likes watching *Jerry Springer* because it shows her what types of problems people have ("nara kif inhuma l-problemi tan-nies"). An 11 year-old girl (32) similarly justified her enjoyment of this programme by citing what she saw as its pedagogical merits:

[42] A similar point is made by Hargrave, Halloran and Gray (1996:5) who argue that the media fulfil the two principal roles of providing young viewers with a system of communication, and of providing a frame of reference against which they can test themselves.

G]ax titg]allem]afna affarijiet mil-]ajja. Nitg]allem li m'g]andhekx tag]mel hekk, m'g]andhekx teqlibha....

Because you learn many things from life. I learn that you shouldn't do those things, you shouldn't cheat [on your partner]....

In this respect, the Maltese soap opera *Ipokriti* was frequently cited as a source of learning about the world of adult relations. This is how one group of 12 year-old girls (34) justified the fact that they regularly watched and loved this series:

Marlene G]ax fi] `ertu problemi li forsi rridu ng]addu minnhom. M'hux ng]addu minnhom, forsi hawn min g]adda minnhom, hu...

Interviewer X'tip ta' problemi?

Marlene Per e\empju mara o]ra tkun mi\\ew[a u tmur ma' ra[el ie]or u titradih, hekk....

Claudia G]ax qisu fih naqra tag]lim, hu. G]ax qed tarah inti u qisu fih it-tag]lim biex inti m'g]andekx tag]mel dak, hu, la tikber.

(.....) Jien ommi ma' tie]ux pje`ir ta, g]ax noqg]od narah. Imma t]allini ommi g]ax nitg]allem minnhu, hu...

Marlene Because it has certain problems which we might have to go through ourselves. Not go through them ourselves, maybe there are people who have gone through them, eh...

Interviewer What type of problems?

Marlene For example another woman might be married and she goes with another man and betrays him, like that....

Claudia Because it like has a bit of teaching, eh. 'Cause you're watching it and it has teaching so that you should not do those things, eh, when you grow up.

(...) My mother doesn't like it, mind, that I keep watching it. But she lets me because I learn from it, eh....

The idea that the real world of adults is full of sexual betrayals, infidelity, and double-dealing (as shown in this particular soap opera), and that it is important for a growing person to be aware of these "realities" so as to know how to deal with them when they arrive was also expressed by 12 year-old Fergus (45):

Imma huma jtuk lezzjonijiet. Xi darba na]seb]a tiffa``jhom dawk il-problemi, ji[ifieri.

But they give you lessons. Some day I think you're going to face those problems, I mean.

When I asked Fergus and his peers what type of "problems" they thought the series was teaching them how to face, they listed the following topics: problems of marriage, changing partners ("Ji[ifieri l-

ewwel imur ma' din, u mbag]ad imur ma l-o]ra"), work problems, jealousy, drugs, debt, poker, beatings and domestic violence, prostitution and attempted murder. When I asked whether they really thought that the portrayal of all these things provided lessons about real adult life, they replied:

Rupert Tkun taf tiffa``ja l-affarijiet. G]ax per e\empju, ji[ri xi]a[a fuq il-relazzjonijiet u inti taf li]a tag]mel dik. Tag]mel]a[a]a\ina u tkun taf li]a ti[ik]a\ina fuqhek .... ma na]sibx li]a tag]milha....

Rupert You'll know how to face things. Because for example, something happens on relationships and you know that you're going to do that. You do something bad and you'll know that it's going to go badly for you.... I don't think you'll do it.

Sandro You'll be more aware of things, *hu* !

In the course of another interview with a group of 11 year-old girls (32), one girl exclaimed that it's true that it's not good for children to watch this particular programme (*Ipokriti*), but she still watches it. Asked whether she was saying that it's not good for children because it has references to sex, she replied:

E]e, imma m'hux g]al dak biss, g]ax I[ibu il-lesbjani u mbarazz hekk...

Yes, but not for that only, because they show lesbians and rubbish like that...

It is worth stressing that there were also other children and teenagers who insisted that they did not take what they saw on this soap opera seriously because they thought it was full of unrealistic exaggeration.[43] A secondary school teacher (56) reported that though the girls in her school had been great fans of the series during its first season, many had also started finding it unrealistic later on, saying that it can't be that so much weird stuff can happen to one family ("Dan ma' jistg]ax ikun li [o familja wa]da hemm dak l-imbarazz kollu!"). Similarly, a 14 year-old boy (50) exclaimed, "Fih]afna gideb, je\agerawha, itawluha" ("It's full of lies. They exaggerate, they stretch it out"). And yet, when I pointed out to the boys in this particular group (50) that teachers had told me that children should not be watching this programme, one of them exclaimed:

[43] See also Chapter 1, section 1.2.

Mela ma jistg]u jaraw xejn, na]seb! G]alija, vera kif qal dan hija bba\ata fuq storja realtaÏ. Imma bihom tista' tkun taf kif tista' ta]rab, ikollok problema. M'hux ta]rab minnha, issolviha.

In that case they might as well not watch anything, I think! For me, it's true as this one said that it's based on a story which is reality. But it's through them that you can know how you can escape, when you have a problem. Not escape from it, how to solve it.

But it was precisely the idea that this particular series dealt with common "real-life" problems, and that it was a good source of learning about adult life, that many teachers found offensive. When she overheard a group of girls who were being interviewed mentioning the programme (38), one female teacher couldn't resist joining in the discussion. *Ipokriti*, she exclaimed, was "the most stupid programme God could have created!" ("l-iktar program stupidu li l-Bambin seta' jo]loq!"). She elaborated:

> The worst part of it is that they're giving the impression that life is like that, *illi dik tpo[[i ma' dak, dak jo]ro[ma' l-ie]or, dik taqlibha lil dak! M'hux veru! M'hux veru!* [that that woman is living with that man, that man is going out with the other man, that one is cheating on that other one! It's not true! It's not true!] I'm a normal family. My parents are a normal family. My sons live a normal family. And there are many thousands like me!

The passion and intensity of this eruption suggested that this teacher at least may have felt that she was fighting a losing battle. Indeed, the fact that teachers often denigrated and criticised this series with their students somehow seemed to reinforce the assumption that it provided useful lessons about the shady aspects adult behaviour.

It's worth stressing that children and teenagers usually stressed that what they were learning from this soap opera and similar programmes was not how to behave immorally, but how to avoid such behaviour because the programme showed the negative consequences.[44] For 14 year-old Angela (39), if you are "mature" enough and "know what sex is and know how you should be careful not to do it the wrong way", then you can watch any films about sex because they can teach

[44] Similar attitudes have been recorded by the British Broadcasting Standards Commission in its annual survey reports. Thus, one report records a 15 year-old girl as saying: "They don't put sex on to tell people to go and do it, it's to let people understand the consequences and all that. It's educational" (Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1998).

you about life and how to avoid mistakes. This is how she responded when asked whether young people in her age group should watch adult material dealing with sex and relationships:

> Angela Depends how mature you are. If you're mature in that aspect, you know, go ahead. I don't think there's anything wrong with it, 'cause basically we all know what sex is, we all know what happens and what it's about, what the consequences are, you know. So I think there is nothing wrong watching films about sex, because they teach you that, you know, not to make any mistakes or not try anything stupid.
> Interviewer Do you mean *all* films?
> Angela No, it depends, I mean, if you know what sex is and how you should, how you should, you know, be careful not to do it the wrong way, not to do it with the wrong people at the wrong age, you know, if you know what the consequences are, then you can watch any film about it, 'cause you can see different aspects of how they talk about sex, you know, when they look for the way of true loving, or you know, to have sex, or when somebody's raped, which is basically usually the case, you know, when somebody is raped then that's a bad case. I mean but then some people can be affected by it....

7.2 ATTITUDES TO VISUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIAL

Though older children and teenagers frequently argue that it's silly to classify films and programmes as "Adults Only" because of violent content, they do seem more willing to accept such ratings as justified when there is visually explicit sexual content. As one 12-13 year-old girl (64) put it: "In my opinion there is too much sex not violence on TV". But this does not necessarily mean that they will not watch such material because it has earned an AO rating.

There was a marked difference between the way in which many young people spoke about their attitudes towards the "adult world" narratives of soap operas, and what they called "bad programmes" or "bad pictures" ("stampi]\iena"), or even "sick stuff", which showed more explicit portrayals of sexual encounters or nudity. 12 year-old Fergus (45) explained that the difference was that in *Ipokriti* you are not shown nudity; you might see a man first talking with one woman, and then with another, or maybe kissing one woman and then going out with the other one. But in the "bad programmes", "if he goes with a woman there's always sex involved, it's almost always like that"

("jekk imur mag]ha jid]ol is-sess dejjem, kwa\i dejjem hekk"). Thus, though they claimed that they were learning useful lessons about the problems they'll have to face as adults by watching the soap opera *Ipokriti*, these 12 year-old boys (45) also insisted that they always switch channels or leave the room briefly whenever they come across kissing, nudity or other forms of visually explicit sexual content:

Interviewer L-ewwel semmejtu "programmi]\iena", u tajtuni e\empji ta' vjolenza, u ta' programmi li jkun fihom sitwazzjonijiet tas-sess u affarijiet hekk. Dawk x'ta]sbu fuqhom?
Fergus Taqliblu mill-ewwel.

Sandro Jien ma narhomx.
George L-anqas jien!
Rupert Jien kieku jkun hemm parti \g]ira biss narhom.
Fergus E]e, g]ax [eneralment ikun film, ikun hemm tnejn, mara u ra[el, ikun PG, per ezempju, jew ikun xi film hekk, *adventure*, u mbag]ad i[iblek bi``a \g]ira. Iddawwarlu, u mbag]ad wara]ames minuti ter[a ddawwarlu.

Rupert Iddawwarlu g]al dik il-bi``a biss.
Sandro Inkella n]allih hemm, no]ro[minn [ol-kamra, u mbag]ad ner[a' nid]ol, meta jfettilli nid]ol...
Rupert Issib sku\a li sejjer it-*toilet*.

Sandro E\att! Issib sku\a hekk.

Interviewer Earlier on you mentioned "bad programmes", and you gave me examples of violence, and of programmes which include sexual situations and things like that. What do you think of those?
Fergus You switch it over straight away.
Sandro I don't watch them.
George Me neither!
Rupert Me, I only watch them if there is just a small part.
Fergus Yeah, because generally you might have a film, there would be two people, a woman and a man, it would be PG, for example, or it might be some adventure film, and then it shows you a small bit. You switch it over, and then after five minutes you switch it back again.
Rupert You switch it over just for that bit.
Sandro Or else I leave it there, I go out of the room, and then I come in again, when I feel like it I come in ...
Rupert You find an excuse that you're going to the toilet.
Sandro Exactly! You find some excuse like that.

In similar tones, [45] when she was asked what types of films might not be good for her to watch, 11 year-old Juanita (32) mentioned films "fejn ikun hemm]afna m]abba" ("where there is a lot of loving").

[45] Similar statements are quoted in the 1994 Australian Broadcasting Authority's survey into children's attitudes to violence, kissing and swearing on TV. That report notes that the reported incidence of leaving the room or changing channels because something on television had upset them was far greater among girls (66%) than boys (44%). This of course did not just refer to instances involving sexual content but also

In marked contrast to these claims of self-censorship, 12 year-old James and Pierre (44) argued that shielding their eyes from seeing scenes of sex and nudity was no longer appropriate, since as growing youths, they will sooner or later have to experience such things themselves:

Pierre Nikbru qeg]din a]na!
James Eh, nikbru issa qeg]din!

M'hux]a jkun hemm xi wa]da bil-partijiet tag]ha g]arwenin, hawn *(laughter)*, u ommok m'hux]a t]allik tara!
Xi darba jew o]ra bil-fors]a tarhom, tal-mara jew tal-g]arusa forsi, bil-fors]a tarhom xi darba jew o]ra! ... Ma' t]allikx tarhom, tg]idlek "G]alaq g]ajnejk!" Meta kont \g]ir ommi kienet... kont nid]aq *(laughs)*....
Pierre U issa t-*teachers* ukoll qeg]din ikellmuna fuq is-sess u hekk. Dik]a[a naturali, hu!
James Dik]a[a fin-natura,]alaqha Alla, bil-fors trid tag]milha issa! Jekk trid.... imma jekk issir patri le!
Interviewer Jekk issir patri x'ji[ri allura?
James Jekk issir patri tinjorhom, hu!

Pierre We're growing up now!
James Yeah, we're growing up now.

It's not going to happen that there is a woman with her parts naked, you know *(laughter)*, and your mother won't let you watch it!
One time or another you're bound to see them, your wife's or your fiancee's maybe, you're bound to see them one time or another! ... She won't let you see them, she tells you, "Close your eyes!" When I was little my mother used to... I used to laugh *(laughs)* ....
Pierre And now even the teachers are talking to us about sex and things like that. That's a natural thing, eh!
James That's something in nature, God created it, you have to do it now! If you want to.... but if you become a monk, no!
Interviewer If you become a monk what happens then?
James If you become a monk you ignore them, eh!

A group of 11 year-old girls (33) similarly argued that they can no longer be treated like little children, since they are even being taught about sex at school, and at some stage or other they will themselves be engaging in activities like kissing. The different gender positions here in relation to attitudes to adult sexuality are interesting. While the girls spoke of the prospect of eventual adult relationships

violence and other material. The report also notes that in this matter there were no significant differences across the age groups or between city and country children. Whether children watched alone or with other people also did not have a great influence on them in this respect. (Sheldon et al, 1994:20)

which would also involve the activity of kissing, the boys spoke of the taking on of adult male roles as involving the inevitability that they will soon be able to see their eventual partner's "naked parts".

The temptations and often compulsive pleasures of voyeuristic TV watching were specifically mentioned by a group of 11-12 year-old boys (78) when they were asked what they would do if their parents allowed them to watch any programmes they liked, even ones with explicit sexual content. This is what they said:

Tonio Jien jekk t]allini ommi ovvja li narah g]ax qisek tibda tie]u pja`ir tara xi]a[a li inti ma tistax tag]milha u qed tara quddiem g]ajnejk.
Edward Jien ukoll, kieku I]alluni ommi u missieri narah, iva. (..) G]ax mo]]ok jg]idlek li trid tarah, ma tkunx tista' taqliblu.
Interviewer Inti tarah? Ma g]edtilniex.
Charles Le, na]seb li ma narahx. Imma id-darba l-o]ra kont qed nara l-futbol u qlibtlu u inzerta fuq *blue film*. Ng]idlek il-veritaÏ komplejt narah ghax ma' stajtx naqliblu. Fil-fatt [iet ommi u ndunat. G]idtilha li ma tistax taqleb ir-remote. Ji[bduk wisq!

Tonio If my mother lets me, it's obvious that I watch it because you sort of get pleasure from watching something which you can't do yourself and you're seeing it before your eyes.
Edward Me too, if my mother and father let me, I watch it, yes. ... Because your mind tells you that you have to watch it, you won't be able to switch it over.
Interviewer Do you watch it? You haven't told us.
Charles No, I think I wouldn't watch it. But the other time I was watching football and I changed channels and there happened to be a blue film. To tell you the truth I carried on watching it because I couldn't switch it over. In fact my mother came and she realised. I told her that the remote couldn't switch over. Their pull is too strong!

Another instance of older children's reactions to adults' attempts to censor their access to sexually oriented material was provided by a particularly boisterous 11 year-old girl (76) who said that she likes watching "striptease" programmes, but that her sister doesn't let her watch them, especially when she (her sister) is with her boyfriend. Asked what she does about this, and amidst a lot of laughter from her classmates, the girl replied:

Girl 1 Eeeeh! Kif tridni nag]mel? Meta ma jkunx hemm o]ti noqg]od narhom, meta jkun hemm o]ti jkolli ma narhomx!

Girl 1 *Eeeeh!* What do you want me to do? When my sister is not there I keep watching them, when my sister is there I have to miss them!

Girl 2 Titrejnja! *(more laughter)*	Girl 2 She's training! *(more laughter)*
Girl 1 Eeeh! X'nitrejnja? Ma min tridni nitrejnja? Mas-sufan?	Girl 1 *Eeeh!* What do you mean training? Who do you want me to train with? With the sofa?
Girl 2 Mal-pupa!	Girl 2 With the doll!

But there are also occasions when the material watched can turn out to be more confrontational than titillating. In the following excerpt, a 14 year-old girl (77) describes a scene which she said she saw on local television quite some time before. Though she says that she could not see the point of the scene (thus projecting herself as a more "mature" viewer who can judge levels of appropriateness according to whether a scene has a justified purpose or else is simply gratuitous), she had clearly been both surprised and engrossed by what she saw:

Niftakar darba rajt film, ma nafx nistax ng]ida,]a nara, ji[ifieri... Darba minnhom rajt film u kien, kien veru tajjeb g]ax [eneralment tie]u dik il... eh... l-imma[inazzjoni, g]ax qieg]ed fuq Television Malta]a jkun hemm `ertu restrictions...	I remember once I saw a film, I don't know if I can say it, let me see, I mean.... Once I saw a film and it was, it was really good because generally you take that ... uhm.. imagination, because since it was on Television Malta there will be certain restrictions...
Biss, peroÏ, kont qed narah, kien qed jg]id fuq il-problemi tal-familja u hekk, u f'daqqa wa]da, eh, i[iblek dan it-tifel ikun qed jag]mel *masturbation* ji[ifieri.	Only, but, I was watching it, it was saying about family problems and things like that, and all of a sudden, uhm, it shows you this boy, and he is doing masturbation.
Jiena vera ma bsarthiex, g]ax mbag]ad kien qed juri li]utu,]utu w il-]bieb tag]hom bdew jarawh, u hu ma kienx, ma kienx jaf li qed jaraw], ji[ifieri...	I really was not expecting it, because then it was showing that his brothers, his brothers and their friends were seeing him, and he didn't, he didn't know that they were seeing him, you know...
Kienet xi]a[a li, kienet etaÏ verament \g]ira, u tant... dak il-]in vera rajtu bla sens, g]idt, ghax ma...	It was something that, it was a really young age, and it was so... at that time I thought it was so without sense, I said, 'cause I can't....
vera ma rajthux mil-bidu....g]idt imma ma nistax nifhem l-iskop, l-iskop tag]ha.	it's true that I didn't see it from the start.... I said but I can't understand the purpose, its purpose...

Others complained that there is too much prudery in the way people in Malta react to sexual content, and this was taken as an indication of cultural backwardness. This is how a group of 14 year-old boys (50) described public (or rather "older people's") reactions to the soap opera *Ipokriti* :

Kevin Ara, b]ala Maltin g]adna lura]afna, eh.
Interviewer F'liema sens?
Kevin Ija, g]adna lura, g]ax anka, fl-ewwel episodju kien? Ma nafx, kif bdew jg]idu, ne\g]et xi libsa, ji[ifieri ma deher xejn, eh! Kemm [iet il-libsa taqa' biss...
Daniel L-ewwel wie]ed, is-sena l-o]ra.
Kevin L-i\jed ix-xju]. eh. Nannti l-ewwel wa]da. Kabbruha. Il-Maltin g]adhom daqsxejn lura!

Daniel E]e, f'dak is-sens vera.

Kevin Look, as Maltese we're still very backward, eh.
Interviewer In what sense?
Kevin Yes, we're still backward, 'cause even, was it in the first episode? I don't know, how they were saying, she undressed or something, but nothing was shown, mind! There was just the dress dropping only...
Daniel The first one, last year.

Kevin Especially the old ones, eh. My grandmother was among the first ones. They made a big deal of it. The Maltese are still a bit backward.
Daniel Yeah, in that sense it's true.

13 year-old Stephen (46) was similarly convinced that there was no harm in watching material with sexual content, even though he felt that there was some pretty disgusting material around:

Ma na]sibx li jag]mel]sara. Ija vera [ieli hawn xi films iqa\\uk, imma ma na]sibx li jag]mel]sara ... g]at-tfal i\-\g]ar. (...) Ma' na]sibx li jg]amilli]a\in lili...

I don't think it does any harm. Yes it's true that there are some films which disgust you, but I don't think that it is harmful... for small children. (...) I don't think it does me any harm.

But seeing such material in the presence of parents, older people, or even members of the opposite sex, is usually found very embarrassing. As is revealed by the number of times parents were reported as switching channels or telling children to look away when such scenes came on, embarrassment is also experienced by adults who find themselves watching programmes with sexual content with children[46].

[46] A recent British survey of attitudes towards the portrayal of sexual activity on television conducted by the Broadcasting Standards Commission (Hargrave, 1999) notes the importance of the viewing context in determining attitudes. Women were generally less comfortable than men watching scenes depicting sexual activity when viewing with others, and at times on their own. In most cases adults said they would

One group of 12 year-old boys (45) suggested that adults are less tolerant than themselves in this respect. "We can put up with more than they can," they said ("A]na iktar nissaportu minnhom"). But generally speaking, embarrassment is clearly a common experience in such situations, and older children were as likely to admit to experiencing it as younger ones[47]. Here is an 11 year-old girl (76) describing how she reacts to sexual content, especially if it comes on when grown-ups are around:

Girl 3 Per e\empju, anke x']in jibdew jin\g]aw, hekk, affarijiet hekk *(giggles from other girls).* Jiena ng]id il-veritaÏ x']in narhom naqbad nid]ak u nmur ni[ri g]al-qattusa biex noqod nilg]ab mag]ha u ma noqg]odx in]ares lejhom!
Girl 4 Veru!
Girl 3 Anke meta jkun hemm il-mummy u d-daddy, jew inkella ninfexx nid]ak, allura ma n]arisx lejhom.

Girl 3 For example, even when they start taking their clothes off, and things like that *(giggles from other girls).* To tell you the truth, when I see them I start laughing and I run off to get the cat so that I can play with her and I don't have to look at them!

Girl 4 It's true!
Girl 3 Even when mum and dad are there, otherwise I burst out laughing, so I don't look at them.

As was the case with comments about portrayals of violence, a number of the young people surveyed also expressed concern about the possibility that others or younger children might want to imitate sexual activity irresponsibly if they saw it on TV. One girl aged 13-14 (68) claimed that one of her friends was influenced in this way:

Jien g]andi]abiba li meta tara xi film bi tnejn fis-sodda, allovlja l-etaÏ li g]anda tkun trid tag]mel b]alhom.

I have a friend who when she sees a film with two in a bed, in spite of her age she'll want to do the same as them.

be less comfortable watching such scenes with children. Similar trends were also reported in the Commission's annual report for 1995, which noted that embarrassment was usually created if children watched scenes containing sexual content with their parents, and that in such cases, the children were likely to take themselves off to watch television elsewhere (Hargrave, 1995:101).

[47] See Chapter 6 for examples of younger children talking about leaving the room when their parents happen to be watching sexually related material.

A group of other girls aged 11 (29) spoke of sixteen year-olds whom they know, and even of fourth and fifth formers at other schools, who are already pregnant and this, they said, is all somehow related with their having watched "bad scenes" when they were younger.

One girl aged 12-13 (64) did write about being herself tempted to imitate what she called the "sex violence" which she had seen on TV. But her way of expressing this is more suggestive of teenage precociousness and confusion than of her having been "corrupted" by television. "In my opinion," she wrote in her free essay about TV violence, "there is too much sex not violence on TV." "Real violence," she explained, "is when there is forced sex," and when someone is "blackmailed into having sex". She continued as follows:

> Sex violence does affect people because I did feel inclined to do it with someone (at one time it was you[48]) but then I realized that I was too young. Violence of sex should be continued but they shouldn't show too much. People should go to counselling.

7.3 GENDER DIFFERENCES (i): BOYS' PERCEPTIONS

Boys tend to view portrayals of sexual behaviour and nudity, even when this involves sexual violation, almost exclusively from a male-centred perspective. They also realise that most sexually titillating material involving female nudity is aimed at a male viewership, and so they often respond to such material in ways which they take to be appropriately "masculine", but which are perhaps better described as stereotypical and chauvinistic. One 12 year-old boy (78) commented:

In-nisa ma j]obbux jaraw nisa g]arwenin u mbarazz hekk. Dawk g]al ir[iel qeg]din.	Women don't like seeing naked women and rubbish like that. Those things are there for men.

This can be argued to be another instance of a major influence of contemporary media cultures which was explored in Chapter 5 — i.e. that they encourage the pursuit of voyeuristic thrills whose pleasures are based on an inability to recognise the realities, perspectives and even the suffering experienced by those who are different from oneself.[49]

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[48] i.e. the student teacher who had set the essay.

[49] A recent British study published by the Broadcasting Standards Commission (Schlesinger et al, 1999) notes a startling difference in the attitudes of men and women to watching violence on television. The report includes an analysis of the

There were thus very marked differences between the ways in which boys and girls spoke about the subject of rape. For girls, screen portrayals of rape and sexual violation are a matter of fear and concern. For boys, the subject is something which they seem to only vaguely understand, and from which they appear distant. Significantly perhaps, though many girls spontaneously raised the subject of rape and described how frightening they find it, hardly any of the boys mentioned the subject at all, and when they did it was clear that they had a very limited understanding of its meaning. For one 13-14 year-old boy (73), for instance, rape only occurs when the woman is killed after forced intercourse:

> Violence can give bad ideas to small children. Violence can also be like sex. First you sex a woman and then you shot her or kill her with a knife. Raping *[sic]* is also violence. Raping is when you get what you want from a woman and then killing her.

What boys seemed more concerned about when it came to "sexual violence" was "provocation" by women — as revealed in one 14 year-old boy's (77) description of what he called the "sexually violent" behaviour of an Italian variety show hostess :

Huwa programm ftit vjolenti sesswali, g]ax dik li tipre\entah toqg]od tag]mel ftit mossi hekk, m'hux xierqa g]al quddiem in-nies.... Ehmm... u xi kull tant toqg]od tie]u ftit kunfi... eh, tag]mel kunfidenza \ejda ma, mal-dana hawn, man-nies, ma' l-ir[iel u hekk....	It's a programme which is a little sexually violent, because the woman who presents it keeps making these sort of moves, which are not appropriate to show in front of people.... Ehmm... and sometimes she keeps taking a few liberties... I mean, she gets too familiar with these, you know, with people, with men and so on...

As is forcefully illustrated by the examples quoted in section 7.4 of this chapter, this male-centred perception of "sexual violence" as something perpetrated by "provocative" women provides a

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reaction of men and women to the portrayal of domestic violence on TV. An earlier study (Schlesinger et al, 1992) had shown that women often identified with an abused woman and were apt to speculate on the motives for men's violence. However, the men in the more recent research showed little curiosity about motivation and an inclination to be dismissive of some violent acts.

worrying contrast to the concerned and often frightened ways in which girls repeatedly spoke about the abuse and exploitation of women for men's sexual gratification.

The phrase "sexual violence" was frequently used in this confused manner by a number of boys. There seems to be a habitual conflation of sex (or more specifically perhaps, of material which is sexually arousing) and violent behaviour. The following statements made independently by two boys aged 12-13 (72) capture this confusion neatly:

Il-vjolenza li tfisser g]alija huwa [lied, vandali\mu u sex.	What violence means for me is fighting, vandalism and sex.
Il-vjolenza fuq it-televi\joni g]alija tfisser films ta' [lied, gwerrer, abbu\ kwalinkwe jew programmi ta' sess li jsiru fis-sieg]a ta' filg]odu	Violence on television for me means fighting films, wars, abuse of any kind or sex programmes which take place at one in the morning.

Another boy aged 12 (78) distinguished between "sexual violence" and "violence of stealing" ("vjolenza sesswali" and "vjolenza ta' serq") and said that he thinks that "violence of sex stays inside you more" ("Na]seb li vjolenza ta' sess tibqa' aktar fik").

These sentiments may be related to the fact that, for boys growing in a predominantly Catholic environment, sex is something which is often associated with temptation, sin and guilt. As one 13-14 year old boy (73) put it:

Imma jekk tara affarijiet]\iena b]al films pasta\i tkun qed tag]mel id-dnub Kbir g]ax mhux suppost tara affarijiet hekk....	But if you see bad things like rude films you'll be committing the Big sin because you're not supposed to see things like that....

Yet this boy also insisted that there is nothing wrong with watching films which are full of violence and fighting. Boys also notice that adults are often more concerned about their viewing sexual content than violence. According to another 12-13 year old boy (72):

~erti films ta' l-azzjoni jg]o[buni i\da meta ikun hemm xi sess jew hekk ommi ma' l-ewwel taqleb l-istazzjon u wara xi minuta ter[a' teqilbu biex inkomplu narawh.	I like some action films but when there is any sex or that my mother immediately switches channel and after about a minute she switches it back so that we can continue watching it.

According to another 13-14 year-old boy (49), the reason why sexually explicit material on the screen is a bad influence is because the couples shown always appear to be too concerned with enjoying themselves, rather than thinking about the responsibilities of producing children:

G]ax fuq il-films u hekk, qatt ma jkun hemm ....insomma, rari jkun hemm il-mara u r-ra[el li j]obbu lil xulxin u jridu it-tfal. Dejjem g]al-gost!

Because on films and so on, there never is... anyway, there rarely is the woman and the man who love each other and want to have children. It's always for pleasure!

The really problematic issues which are raised by what all this suggests about how boys tend to approach sexually explicit material do not come so much from the fact that it might or might not arouse them sexually. What is more worrying is the suggestion that they so frequently associate sex with violence, and that when they do so, it is not the violence which they usually think of as problematic, but the sex. The frequent conflation of sex with violence is largely a result of the fact that film makers frequently and deliberately mix them as a hook to draw in more audiences. In contexts as diverse as film reviews and classification guides, as well as in classroom and other popular discussions about "sex and violence" in the media, these two areas of human experience are often spoken about together as if they were indistinguishable. When it comes to popular thinking about the media, habit and linguistic usage have welded these two activities together as though you can't have one without the other. The phrase "sex and violence" (not "sex *or* violence") has become a bit of a cliche. It slides off the tongue as easily and familiarly as do the names of other duos welded together for all time by the forces of fame and somebody's fortune — Laurel and Hardy, Jekyll and Hyde, Abbott and Costello, Ginger and Fred, French and Saunders, Morecombe and Wise, Beauty and the Beast....

The mental conflation of sex with violence which results from this habitual association is not just unfortunate. It is also dangerous. This is particularly the case in media contexts where the combination of sex with violence is not used to show the aberrant inappropriateness

of such a marriage, but actually to encourage voyeuristic pleasures in repeatedly seeing them portrayed together in this welded fashion.

7.4 GENDER DIFFERENCES (ii): GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS

Several girls expressed concern about the way in which sexual content in films and TV often involved the abuse and exploitation of women and women's bodies. As one 11-12 year-old girl (60) put it:

Meta jsawtu l-mara jew meta l-mara ju\awha biex tidher ming]ajr]wejje[dik hi \gur vjolenza wkoll.	When they beat up the woman, or when the woman is used so that she is seen without clothes that is definitely violence too.

Some girls were also worried that such material might be encouraging boys to act similarly, partly because they felt that boys are more impressionable, or as one 12 year-old girl (33) put it, because "is-subien iktar nittinien mil-bniet" ("boys are filthier than girls"). Another girl aged 13-14 (68) wrote in an essay:

Xi kultant meta tara xi film jirrejpjaw xi tfajla nibda nib\a. Il-[uvintur izjed jimpresaw *(jimpressjonaw)* ru]hom mit-tfajliet. Izjed jekk ikun hemm xi film li jirrejpjaw fuq it-tfajliet.	Sometimes when you see a film where they rape a girl I get scared. Guys are more impressionable than girls. Especially if there is a film when they rape on girls.

Another 13-14 year-old girl (68) commented:

> Violent videos are sometimes very dangerous like when they kill someone or they steal a woman or a girl to do disgusting things.

It is worth stressing that though almost all the girls who spoke of screen portrayals of rape said that they saw them as frightening and very disturbing, no comparable concerns were expressed by the boys included in the survey.[50] Many girls spoke of having sleepless nights and nightmares as a consequence of seeing such material. This is how a female university student (79) recalled her childhood experiences of such scenes:

> Whenever I saw a film with a particularly violent scene, especially a rape or murder, I could say that for at least three days after watching the film I would be scared of being alone in my room at night. I would remain sleepless in bed amplifying small meaningless sounds into grotesque noises, all the time feeding my imagination with my mind going in circles. Not

[50] cf Schlesinger et al (1999)

> even if I had an urgent need to go to the toilet would I leave my bed. The most frightening film, though is from my secondary school days when I accidentally met with one of Charles Bronson's "Il Giustiziere della Notte" [*Death Wish*], where a girl was being raped. I can still remember my feelings about it. Even now that I am 22 years old, I tend to avoid films with such themes, which shows how my attitude has changed due to that viewing experience.

For one girl aged 12-13 (64) it is the possibility that men and "dirty-minded people" might get strange ideas from such material which makes it frightening:

> I think there is too much violence on T.V. [....] People are usually influenced by T.V. to rape or manipulate someone. In many cases men who watch violent films may get strange or rather "funny" ideas. What happens in films doesn't usually happen in reality. Many dirty-minded people abuse children sexually.

And yet, the same girl who wrote this concluded her essay on TV violence as follows:

> In my opinion I think they should not stop violent programmes because there are many people who enjoy watching these types of films. An example of these people is myself.

Similarly another 11-12 year-old girl (60) whose essay ended with the assertion that for her films without violence are meaningless ("G]alija films ming]ajr vjolenza bla' sens") also expressed the following worries:

Kieku nara fuq it-televi\ion film tal-biza' inmur neqliblu.	If I see a scary film on television I go over and change channels.
Jien nib\a' g]ax jistg]u jirrejpjawk u joqtluk. In-nies mhux sibos *(suppost)* jaraw vjolenza g]ax jistg]u jag]mluh huma.	I get scared because they can rape or kill you. People are not supposed to watch violence because they can do it themselves.

One fourteen year-old girl (77) similarly stressed that she does not agree with censorship, though she does see the point of classification guides. In her view, everyone has the right to see what

they want, and if anyone is negatively affected it's their own problem ("jekk jaffetwa]]azin, g]alih, hu!"). She asserted this even though she admitted to having been very upset by a rape scene which she had watched with her mother some time previously:

Kien hawn film darba, kont qed narah fuq il-Malti wkoll, allavolja kien hemm is-sign u kollox, imma jien *(laughs)* narah xorta,]a ng]idu hekk. Kien hemm dana hawn, jail, hawn, ...]abs.

There was a film once, I was watching it on the Maltese channel as well, even though there was the sign and everything, but I *(laughs)* watch it anyway, let's put it that way. There was this thing, you know, a jail....

}abs, e]e, u sewwa, kienu qieshom qed jag]mlu kanzunetta u ifhem, ikantaw u hekk, u j[ib wie]ed beda, hemm, jirrejpja wa]da, u vera baqhet f'mo]]i dik ix-xena ...

A prison, yes, and they were sort of doing a song and you know, singing and so on, and it shows a man who started, there, raping a woman, and it really stayed in my mind that scene .....

Asked what she had felt while watching it, she answered:

Dak il-]in m'hux xi gran ke, imma mbag]ad bdew ji[uni `ertu imma[ni... images, anka s-song li bdew idoqqu qiesek tibqa' ti[ik f'mo]]hok. Affetwani]afna,]a ng]idu hekk, dak il-film, f'dak is-sens.

At the time I was watching it, it was no big deal, but then I started getting these images, even the song which they were playing it's like it keeps coming back into your mind. It affected me a lot, let's put it that way, that film, in that sense.

Another girl aged 11 (76) spoke about the sexual abuse of very young children:

U films ta' vjolenza `ertu minnhom ida]]lu t-tfal ta' tlett snin... Issa b]al dak, dak inhar kont qed nara film, tifla ta' sitt snin, irrejpjaha ra[el. Issa dik]a[a sabi]a? Tifla \g]ira, g]ala jda]]luha f']a[a hekk?

And films of violence in some of them they bring in children who are three years old... Like that one now, the other day I was watching a film, a six year-old girl, she was raped by a man. Now is that a nice thing? A little girl, why do they bring her into something like that?

When she was asked whether such films frightened her or had a negative impact on her, the girl replied:

Ija, g]ax umbag]ad nib\a', g]ax issa ilna nisimg]u]afna li dawn, dawn]afna nies hawn hekk, jag]mlu]afna hekk. Allura nib\a'. Inkun miexja mat-triq, ji[bduni u jag]mlu hekk. Allura nib\a' jiena.	Yes, because then I get scared, because now we've been hearing for a long time that these, there are many people like that, they do many things like that. And so I get scared. I might be walking along the street, and they might grab me and do that to me. And so I get scared.

In a series of studies spanning more than three decades, George Gerbner and his associates at the Annenberg School of Communications (University of Pennsylvania) have argued that the repetitive emphasis on images of violence on television drama gives viewers an exaggerated impression of the extent of threat and danger in society, and that these impressions cultivate fear and distrust of fellow citizens in real life. Heavy viewing of such material, Gerbner (1980:245) argued, "is associated with greater apprehension of walking alone at night in the city in general and even in one's own neighbourhood."

In a sense, the fears expressed by these girls could be interpreted as a further example of what Gerbner and his associates (1986, 1994) have called "the cultivation process" and what has also been referred to as "the mean and scary world syndrome" (VEA, 1997). But though young people often express fears like those quoted above, they are also, as we have seen, likely to insist that the material they describe as frightening should not be censored. They are also likely to complain that it is their parents who panic and get overanxious about their safety because of all the violence and abuse which they hear about and see on the media. For the majority of the girls (and boys) interviewed, this is a symptom of parental over-protectiveness and nothing more. As one group of 12-13 year old girls (35) put it:

G]ax ja]sbuna li g]adna \g]ar! Kull meta' no]ro[, il-]in kollu tag]milli l-istess priedka!	Because they think we're still little children. Every time I go out, she always gives me the same sermon!

Most girls acknowledge that there are dangers, and they do worry about them, but they also insist that these are facts of life which they themselves are aware of and know how to avoid. They certainly do not believe that this awareness should stop them from going out and mixing with members of the opposite sex, for instance.

In view of the fact that rape and sexual abuse are hard and disturbing facts of life, and that many young girls as well as boys in

Malta have found themselves in serious trouble not just in situations involving sex, but also in the area of drug abuse, it should be stressed that these frequent expressions of fear and concern are anything but unjustified. But the statements can also be seen as another illustration of the tendency to vaguely project susceptibility to "copy-cat" and other negative effects onto others (in this case, onto members of a different sex). Thus, though the girls often spoke of their fears about what "sick ideas" boys and men might be picking up from "bad films and programmes", they were also likely to qualify their position when they were asked specifically whether they thought that boys should be stopped from watching such material. Fourteen year-old Angela (39), for instance, declared that some boys can be affected by rape scenes because they might "think it's nice, that it's cool to rape a girl". When the other girls in her focus group commented in agreement that boys mature more slowly, and even that "they're babyish", Angela elaborated as follows:

> Angela It takes guys longer to mature than it takes us. I mean if we were to watch a porn or, you know a rape film or something, it wouldn't affect us in that way. Guys would want to act differently. If they watch a rape, they would think it's cool, you know. Even though they know deep down it's really, it's not right. We know that it's not right, but they, they think it's cool. That's why.

But even though she had these concerns, Angela did not think that censorship would solve the problem. Nor did she think that it was a simple matter of copy-cat behaviour:

> Interviewer So do you think boys shouldn't be allowed to watch programmes like that?

> Angela I've never heard of a case of guys being really affected into doing it, you know.... But, I mean, I don't think they shouldn't watch the movie. I just think they should, they should think about it personally, you know, and say "Why am I thinking about this in this way?" etcetera.

Though more sophisticated and mature-sounding than many of the other voices recorded here, Angela's argument is caught between her wanting to sound open-minded and liberal (because she wants the liberty to explore and discover her own boundaries as a growing young woman), and a nagging concern that some material can affect others

negatively, and that this in the long run could also impact on how such people might act towards her.

Girls' perceptions of how boys' attitudes and reactions to sexual content are different from their own were also reflected in the way another group of 14 year-old girls (38) spoke of the contrasts between how girls and boys watch films about love and amorous relations. One girl commented that boys usually make fun of such material because they are still too young to deal with it, even though they are interested in it. And according to Monica:

Monica U anke na]seb it-tip ta' romanti`i\mu, spe`i ta', a]na naraw minn *view* o]ra, spe`i ta'. Is-subien ta' daqsna jew ftit ikbar minna, *let's say sixteen*.
Interviewer Xi j]obbu jaraw huma?
Monica Per e\empju, jien naf,]a nie]du affarijiet, *films* Taljani, a]na *allright* naraw spe`i ta' l-im]abba ta' bejniethom u hekk. Huma ovvja jaraw il-figuri u... ji[ifieri]ajja sesswali u hekk. }afna minnhom, m'hux kollha.

Monica And also I think the type of romanticism, kind of, we watch from a different point of view, kind of. Boys of our age or a bit older, let's say sixteen.

Interviewer What do they like to watch?
Monica For example, how do I know, let's take things, Italian films, OK we see the love between them and things like that. They obviously see the figures and... I mean the sexual life and things like that. Many of them, not all.

Another 13 year-old girl (54) commented that while she enjoys watching films and cartoons in the afternoon, her sixteen year-old brother stays up very late watching "films, like you know, it's like sick stuff and that, sex and all that stuff." Other girls (54) agreed that boys are likely to watch channels like Bravo which they described as being "more about sex".

These statements and those made by the boys suggest that two popular stereotypes of what it means to be a young man and young woman play a significant part in the ways both girls and boys perceive their own and the opposite sex's attitudes to sexual content on the screen. Boys are often primarily perceived as voyeuristic and mainly obsessed with the physical side of sex; girls are projected as being primarily interested in romance. Though these perceptions have a firm foundation in biological and cultural realities, they are also very generalised and their stereotypical aspects are also close to caricatures. This is why, presumably, there is a tendency for young people to make very generalised assertions about how members of the opposite sex are influenced by the media, but that they then backtrack and modify when they are asked to specify and locate their assertions in specific known

examples. But such caricatures and stereotypes are nevertheless very widely relied on by young people when they discuss and explain attitudes and influences in this area of experience. This also means that the stereotypes are probably often functioning as self-fulfilling prophecies.

7.5 INTERNET CHALLENGES

In the course of one interview (34), a girl aged 12 jokingly remarked that her older brother frequently stays out very late at night because he spends a lot of time and money at an Internet cafe, "picking up girls" from all over the world on Internet chat sites. Judging from the fact that the subject of the Internet was only raised by young people themselves on three occasions throughout the interviews conducted for this survey, it would appear that at this stage at least, regular use of new Internet technology for recreation purposes among those under the age of fourteen is not very widespread. However, it is also worth noting that a check through the numbers and ages of people who frequent some of the Internet chat sites located in Malta also suggests that this is indeed a fast growing area of interest and involvement. Given the wide global sweep of the net, local sites of course only represent a very small fraction of likely locations for this type of pursuit.

Teenagers are clearly well aware of the Internet's uses and possibilities. They are also aware of the fact that it can be used to access material which is not readily or even legally available through other outlets. If young people are basing so much of what they know about sex and adult sexuality on what they see through the media of film and television, what about the information and images which they can access through the Internet?

When the topic of Internet pornography was specifically raised by one of the older age-groups interviewed, the comments made suggested that the speakers were reticent or embarrassed about revealing too much of what they may have explored themselves in this area. But they were keen to talk about what "others" or "friends of friends" were getting up to. The topic came up in a focus group discussion with a mixed group of 14 year-olds (54) who had just been saying that though there are a lot of "references" to sex on TV, "they don't really show it" and that there's "nothing too harmful". When I told them that a number of people, especially parents, had told me that

children are getting exposed to too much material about sex too early, they replied that it is not from TV that they are getting this exposure but from the Internet:

Jesmond Well, that's mostly from the Internet, really, rather than TV.
Luke From the Internet, exactly!
Interviewer How do you mean?
Jesmond Because there are web sites...
Luke *E]e*, there are a lot of web sites..
Jesmond They click on it...
Luke ...You can see everything on it...
Sonia Really, it's really easy, all you have to do is type it in and press *search*, and there you get everything. I haven't tried it personally but whenever you do, I think it's the same thing.
Interviewer What kind of thing do you mean?
Jesmond I don't know, but I know of a friend's friend who, who, ss... who said he, he goes on them. And you know, he says it's easy. I said, "Yeah, but you need, eh, you need to go over eighteen to go on those and everything"....
Luke Uhuh...
Jesmond ... and he said, "Oh, just put in your mum's details or your dad's, and you can go on them".
Interviewer How do they check whether you're eighteen or not?
Jesmond ID. You have to write identification number, details, credit card number...
Luke *E]e*, they check the number, everything.
Interviewer But if they use the credit card number of their parents, won't the parents find out?
Luke I don't think so.

Jesmond I have no idea!
Luke I don't know!
[...]
Interviewer So do you think this is very widespread? Do many people sort of clock into these things?
Jesmond I wouldn't know. Most of my friends don't have the Internet.
Luke I think it's possible because it's so easy to get into these things that...
Joseph Even there are chat lines of the Internet...

The exchange suggests that Luke and Joseph might know more than they are willing to admit to, while Jesmond wants to show how much he knows about it, while still distancing himself from the whole issue

Problems arising out of the easy accessibility of Internet sites which carry pornographic material have been noted by a number of commentators. According to Lim (1998:2):

Access to pornography on the Internet is relatively simple, as it is widespread and generally poorly regulated. There are several methods by which pornographic materil can be transmitted to and from the Internet, many of which are complemented by the use of thorough and efficient search engines. In short, anybody who can use the Internet can freely access pornographic material, unles they are restricted in some way.

Wallace (1999: 159) similarly notes that it is possible to "accidentally run across" sexually explicit material on the Internet, expecially when using search engines.[51] In her view, the "anonymity, phsical distance, and perceived lack of accountability in cyberspace may all contribute to some differences in the nature of pornography, its use, and its effects of behaviour."

Comments like those quoted above are a salutary reminder of the ways in which advances in media technology are constantly forcing

us to reassess our ideas about how young people's lives and attitudes are being affected by broadcasting and other modes of communication. Since the Internet was not part of this project's terms of reference, questions about its use were not specifically included in the interviews and the matter was only discussed on those occasions when it was raised by respondents themselves. In fact, the only other occasion when the subject was raised at all was when a fourth former aged 15 (50), said that he spends more time on the computer than watching TV, and that he is usually on the Internet after 6.00p.m. or writing computer programmes before that. But this is clearly an area which is

[51] According to Lim (1998:4): "a totally innocent search my bring up sites that contain sexually explicit material. For example, fans of the music group "Wet Wet Wet" wishing to perform a WWW search on them may be surprised by the search results. Instead of finding information on the music group, the search engine returns a hefty listing of adult sites." On the impact of the Internet and new media technology more generally see also Watson, J. (1998: 258-80), Sefton-Green (1998), and Watson and Shuker (1998: 165-93).

very much on the increase, and which is likely to assume much more significant proportions over the next few years.

The growing infiltration and patterns of influence of these and other new communications technologies will clearly need to be studied more closely. Learning more about their actual and potential impact will hopefully put us in a better position not only to understand today's youth better, but also to be able to help them grow more healthily and with dignity in a media-saturated environment whose driving force is becoming increasingly more indistinguishable from the imperatives of corporate gain and financial profit.

Chapter 8
CONCLUSION:
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This final chapter offers a review and a summary of conclusions reached on the basis of the data set out and analysed in the rest of the report. The findings have been listed under separate headings for ease of reference and to draw attention to salient patterns. Given this arrangement, it is inevitable that there will be an element of overlap and repetition, since some information may have a bearing on issues which appear under different headings.

8.1 TV WATCHING PATTERNS

- **Patterns and times of viewing vary considerably between ages as well as between schooldays and holidays.**

Younger children tend to only watch television when their parents say that they can. But parental controls ease off significantly as children grow older, so that by the time they reach adolescence, young people are usually making their own choices as to what and when to watch. Most watch on their own or with siblings when they watch TV after school, but are more likely to watch with one or both parents in the evening. The amount of time which children and teenagers said they spend in front of the TV set during the school week ranged from around thirty minutes to six or seven hours per day. Though there are considerable differences and variations, most younger children said that they normally go to bed between 8.00 and around 9.30 during the school week; the times nominated by the older age groups ranged from between 9.00 and around 11.00. Actual times of going to bed among the older age groups also varied according to what happened to be on TV. During school holidays, however, TV watching is likely to go on till very late right across the age groups, and even into the small hours in some cases.

- **Children and adolescents generally watch television for amusement or just to pass the time.**

As indeed is the case with most adults, watching television is perceived as a relaxing activity which requires low concentration, and

this may well lead to superficial and uncritical viewing. Many said that they watch particular programmes because there's nothing else on, or there's nothing else to do. Channel surfing is very widespread, and though they often have favourite programmes which they watch regularly, young people are more likely to choose what they watch according to the station it happens to be on. When they were asked to name their favourite or most disliked TV programmes, many named channels or types or groupings of programmes rather than specific ones. Selecting which programmes to watch and when by going through schedule guides regularly is not a widespread practice.

- **Patterns of TV likes and dislikes vary according to gender, age group, home and socio-economic background.**

Adverts, political debates and discussion programmes are frequently listed as the greatest hates, though there are significant exceptions to this. Action, adventure "fighting films", comedy and sports (especially football) are among the most favourite programmes with boys. Drama series, comedy and romance were frequently identified by girls as favourites. Cartoons are popular right across the age groups (and also with a number of the adults who were interviewed), though some older children often also make a point of distancing themselves from an interest in cartoons because they consider them too "childish". Maltese teleserials are both the most popular and also the most detested programmes, often (but not always) depending on home and socio-economic background and on familiarity with Maltese or English.

- **Television is an integral and ubiquitous part of young people's home lives and interests.**

The majority of young people (78% of those surveyed) have more than one TV set at home. The most likely locations are the living room, parents' bedrooms and children's own or their siblings' bedrooms. Those who said that they regularly watch TV in their own bedrooms tended to belong to the older age groups, and they were also a minority (15% of the total sample). For most, the "family set" is where they do most of their watching.

- **The emergence of a "culture of the bedroom" and a preponderant dependence on in-home entertainment are not as widespread in Malta as in other countries.**

Though they have access to a wide range of home entertainment technology, Maltese teenagers and youths still clearly prefer to spend a lot of their leisure time outdoors or in public entertainment spots. This is especially but not exclusively the case in the summer months.

8.2 RADIO

- **Most young people are only interested in radio for the music.**

Listening to radio for most children and teenagers is synonymous with listening to pop music. Other radio programmes frequently mentioned as popular include competitions, phone-in segments and quizzes. Discussion programmes, talk shows and political debates are generally disliked and frequently dismissed as only of interest to older people.

- **Interest in listening to music on radio or other media increases with age.**

There is a marked increase in the amount of interest expressed in listening to radio and music as children grow into the adolescent years. Several said that they regularly have the radio or a CD on while doing their homework, and that this was less distracting than television and even, in some cases at least, allegedly helped with their concentration.

- **Younger children are more likely to listen to different types of radio programmes with parents, but their first preference is usually pop music.**

Younger children are more likely to listen to radio when their parents happen to have it on. However, this does not mean that they will simply go along with their parents' choice of programmes, and young children too are more likely to insist on listening to pop music. Several reported arguments with parents over choice of programmes and types of music played both at home and while driving in the family car.

8.3 ADVERTISING AND PRODUCT PLACEMENT

- **Though young people often complain about advertisements, they also enjoy them.**

Though they frequently complain about the amount and frequency of television advertising, especially when these interrupt their favourite programmes, children and teenagers also enjoy particular adverts. Of the adverts identified as enjoyable, the most popular are those for articles in which the children are interested anyway (especially toys, food, and drinks), and those which are humorous or which have funny or quirky catch-phrases or jingles. Adverts for objects which children associate with older people or with the opposite sex tend to be disliked, but this also depends on how individual adverts are presented. Fashion-related adverts are particularly popular with older girls.

- **Scepticism about advertisements and a belief that they are often dishonest and deceptive are very widespread.**

Most of the children and teenagers interviewed insisted that adverts often "lie", or "trick" people into buying products on false pretences. Many told stories of being disappointed when they actually bought the object, insisting that it did not look quite as nice as it did on TV, or did not have all the parts or qualities advertised. Some also complained that foreign channels often advertise items or special offers which are not available in Malta.

- **Though children and teenagers understand the intent behind advertising, they are still frequently persuaded by its images and language.**

Though children and teenagers right across the age groups surveyed clearly understand the intent behind advertising and are often sceptical about this, their scepticism does not make them immune to the lures of advertising. They admit to being regularly persuaded to want to buy objects they see advertised, and that they also frequently convince their parents to purchase different brands of groceries and other household products which they would not normally be buying themselves, but which they think are better on the strength of what they see on adverts.

- **Product placement techniques are poorly understood by younger children.**

Older children can generally recognise the uses and intents of product placement techniques in advertising. However, younger children's recognition and understanding of this form of publicity and its purpose are limited, and this may make them more susceptible to its influence.

- **Advertising plays a crucial role in the socialisation of children as consumers.**

Even when it does not have a direct effect, advertising plays an important role in children's consumer socialisation, teaching them consumer values and ways of expressing them. This is particularly the case since a lot of the information which young people receive while watching TV for amusement and relaxation tends to be processed uncritically.

8.4 PROGRAMMING AND GUIDELINES

- **Both younger and older children are aware of and understand classification guidelines, and they recognise their importance and usefulness.**

Most children understand the signposting conventions used on television to indicate programme classifications (AO, PG, etc). When they were asked how they knew what was suitable and not suitable for them to watch, most referred to the little signs which a number of the Italian stations put on to indicate ratings of programmes. They were virtually all very prompt to describe and explain this signposting system, and most of the younger children claimed that they usually followed it. Some commented that in the case of the Maltese stations, warnings appear before the start of the programme; but that this might not be very effective if you happen to start watching a programme after its beginning. Since channel surfing is so widespread, this is clearly an important consideration.

- **Children also understand that late night TV programmes are usually aimed at an adult audience.**

Older children especially insist that adult-oriented programmes should not be screened till after their younger siblings are in bed. However, when they were asked about the 9.00 pm "watershed", some children commented that this does not make sense when you have child-oriented channels like the Cartoon Network running 24 hours a day. Others also argued that it does not make very much sense to have a 9.00 pm "watershed" in Malta particularly in the summer months because many children stay up late anyway.

- **Watching adult-rated programmes and films is often perceived as a measure and test of "maturity".**

As children grow older, they tend to insist on their own ability to choose what is and what is not appropriate for them to watch. Classification ratings and guidelines are generally perceived by older children as something which you can interpret flexibly if you are "mature" enough. Older children and teenagers also see the activity of watching material described as "not suitable for children" as a measure of their own maturity. In their view, they can show that the classification no longer applies to them by asserting that they are not frightened or shocked by individual scenes, and that they are old enough not to copy what they see.

- **Though younger children are more likely to follow classification guidelines, they too will often find reasons for ignoring them.**

Younger children claim to follow classification guidelines, and in many cases they apparently do so. But if there are programmes or films which they want to watch anyway, they will find many ways of justifying watching. The ways they do this include questioning the accuracy and reliability of the guidelines; and claiming that children of their age are mature enough to handle it. One way in which they reinforce both these positions (and their own implied maturity and responsibility) is by assuming the role of censor for siblings who are younger than themselves — frequently blocking younger brothers and sisters from watching programmes or scenes which they consider unsuitable for them.

- **Parental guidance is inconsistent, contradictory and confusing.**

Watching with parents is often taken as an excuse for watching anything, however inappropriate. Some children revealed that they often watch adult-rated material because their parents or older siblings happen to be watching, or else bring the videos home, and so they end up watching too. The most likely occasions when adults will impose restrictions or instruct children to look away are when there are scenes with explicit sexual content. Generally speaking, parental attitudes and restrictions appear to be marked by inconsistencies and contradictions. This partly explains why children themselves are so inconsistent in how they interpret and respond to guidelines. Children notice the inconsistencies or lack of conviction with which guidelines or classification ratings are decided and applied by adults. It is partly because of this that they feel justified in deciding for themselves whether the ratings are relevant or accurate. At the same time, the lack of reliability can also lead to a sense of vulnerability when children feel that they might also inadvertently be exposed to material which might be upsetting to them (eg when flicking through channels, during advertising breaks, or even when watching with their parents).

- **It is generally assumed that what determines classification ratings are isolated scenes or words.**

Children insist that they themselves know when programmes are unsuitable. Their criteria for this are based on levels of violence or sexual content in individual scenes or words, as distinct from the approach, thrust and orientations towards particular adult issues adopted in the programme as a whole. In many cases this is also reflected in the criteria used by parents in deciding what to allow their children to watch. Many parents' habit of telling their children to close their eyes or look away during specific scenes reinforces this assumption. Children themselves also quickly learn to imitate this habit in the ways they monitor younger siblings' viewing. In doing this they are also helping to perpetuate the assumptions and attitudes which underlie it.

- **There is need for a re-evaluation of the ways in which classification and advisory guidelines are determined, presented and applied.**

Though they frequently ignore or work their ways around ratings, children and teenagers both need and appreciate having guidance which is clear, consistent and reliable. The ways they use and respond to it is often very different from what adults may intend or realise. But even when they deliberately go against what is advised, young people's choices about what to watch are still frequently made in the light of the reliability or otherwise of the guidelines available.

8.5 VIOLENCE

- **Fictional violent entertainments are generally perceived as normal, enjoyable and inevitable facts of life.**

Young people's attitudes to media violence vary significantly according to gender, age and home background. In general terms, however, violent entertainments have become such an integral part of contemporary media culture that most young people find it difficult to imagine alternative forms of enjoyable screen fare. It is when violence is presented in a fictional context and served as entertainment that young people find it attractive and enjoyable. Representations of violent situations and suffering which they believe to be real (like news items and documentaries) are usually perceived very differently and are more likely to cause concern or pity rather than enjoyment. But though young people are frequently disturbed and upset by news and documentary coverage of real suffering and violation, their more common experiences in their leisure and recreation times are likely to be dominated by images in which violence and horror are trivialised and applauded as pleasurable thrills. They have become adept at relegating the implications of violence to a realm of the unreal, where nothing ever matters because "it's only a film".

- **Especially in their games, boys are more likely to imitate rough behaviour seen on the screen than girls.**

Though there are exceptions, boys are much more likely to nominate films with lots of fighting and violence as their favourite viewing. Boys are also perceived by adults and children themselves as being more likely than girls to engage in rough games that imitate violent

behaviour which they see on the screen. When girls engage in such behaviour, they are likely to be described as "tomboys", thus reinforcing the notion that it is somehow more "natural" for boys to be rough in this manner. Many younger boys often get carried away while playing at "fighting games", and they frequently insist that watching screen violence is a way of learning new skills in fighting and self-defence. Younger as well as older boys frequently also boast of their knowledge of screen violence and fighting techniques learned from action films as though these were a form of cultural capital.

- **Girls are more likely to be upset by scenes of graphic violence.**

Several girls indicated that though they too enjoy action films which feature a lot of fighting, they often find them upsetting and disturbing when the violence becomes too graphic or realistic. Many of them associate the enjoyment of such fare with boys.

- **Most believe that *others* can be negatively influenced by screen violence, but that they themselves and their peers are immune.**

Though many told stories of having nightmares as a result of watching frightening material, none of the children or teenagers surveyed saw *themselves* as having been corrupted or seriously damaged by their experiences of watching screen violence. Virtually all, however, believe that others (especially younger children and those whom they designate as "immature") can be adversely influenced. This sense of personal immunity is partly based on the erroneous assumption that the only or most significant media effects possible are of the "copy-cat" variety. Young people also believe that it is those who (unlike themselves) cannot distinguish fact from fiction that are likely to mindlessly imitate the violence which they see on the screen.

- **Though they regularly insist that they are not themselves influenced by screen violence, older children and teenagers often also claim that watching screen violence is a way of preparing themselves for the challenges of real life.**

Young people often insist that screen violence is little more than a reflection of real life, even though they also realise that films at times exaggerate in order to grab the audience's attention or to raise the levels of excitement. Older children also use their vaunted

ability to distinguish between fact and fantasy not only as a measure of their immunity from imitative effects, but also to distance themselves from a preoccupation with the consequences of aggression and violation when they see these portrayed in fictional entertainment. Though they are growing in media cultures saturated with images of violence, young people are also in danger of losing contact with the real meanings of violence.

- **Young people's abilities to distinguish fact from fiction are not as accurate or sophisticated as they believe.**

The abilities of children and teenagers to distinguish fact from fiction are generally not as accurate or sophisticated as they would like to believe, particularly when a film's handling of reality-fantasy distinctions is ambivalent, or when a fictionalised narrative is advertised as "a true story" that "really happened". Especially among younger children, there is also a limited understanding of the perception management and special effects techniques used by filmmakers to create illusions of reality.

- **The value systems underlying popular violent entertainments are rarely consciously identified or questioned.**

The widespread belief that it is individual scenes or specific details which constitute the most problematic aspects of media violence fails to take account of the broader and possibly more insidious value systems and assumptions about life and about appropriate modes of behaviour which provide the driving force behind popular violent entertainments. One major characteristic of commercially profit-driven violent entertainments is that they encourage the pursuit of voyeuristic thrills and a loss of contact and empathy with the reality of the suffering experienced by those who are different from oneself. A complaint commonly made by young people about films which they don't enjoy is that these are boring because they don't have enough action, explosions, killing and "violence", and because for them "films without violence are meaningless".

8.6 SEXUAL CONTENT: (i) Children Aged Six to Ten

- **Young children's talk about adult sexual content tends to be generalised, but they usually perceive verbally or visually explicit material as "bad" or "rude" (*pasta\ati*).**

Young people's talk about and attitudes to sexual content obviously change significantly as they grow older. In general terms, children in the six to ten age group talk about such material in very generalised ways, rarely differentiating between types of representations and contexts. Screen portrayals of kissing, physical intimacy and nudity tend to be described and ridiculed as "rude", "disgusting", or "gross". Verbally explicit material and swearing also tend to be generally classified in this fashion as *pasta\ati*.

- **Adult-oriented material which is less visually explicit is usually found more acceptable.**

Less visually explicit portrayals of adult relationships (as in soap operas), especially when there are also no swear words involved, tend to be approached less negatively, and many children are clearly fascinated by them.

- **Children often assume that television gives them a truer picture of what adults get up to than adults themselves.**

Children often note that situations and images like those which embarrass their parents on TV when they are around, or which they are told are not suitable for them to watch, can also be seen in the real world (couples kissing, nudity or near-nudity on beaches, etc). They also often think that they are getting a truer picture of sexual issues from television and films because parents often either block such issues out, or look embarrassed when they are encountered, or tell children to look away, or appear to enjoy watching such material themselves while blocking their children from watching. A number of the ideas which children appear to be getting from television about sex also often tend to lean more towards information about abnormal and bizarre situations, particularly as these are sensationalised in scandal-oriented chat shows and soap operas, or glimpsed in advertisements and promotional spots.

- **Young children's ways of interpreting, discussing and dealing with sexual content are significantly and qualitatively different from those of adults.**

Young children decode and interpret portrayals of adult issues in their own cognitive terms. As a result, the ways they make sense of such issues are often quite different from those of adults. How children deal with such material is reflected in the varied performative roles which they assume when they speak about it. In some cases, children use their awareness and understanding of such material (however fragmented or incomplete) as a way of testing the boundaries of acceptable child behaviour. They can also use it as a way of distancing themselves from "childish" roles and designations. Children will thus frequently talk about adult content as a way of making jokes and scoring points with peers, or even as a way of embarrassing, impressing or outraging adults. The patterns in which they do all this suggest that they engage in such talk and behaviour in order to project themselves as more "mature" or grown-up.

- **Sexual content is often seen as being more problematic than violence.**

This is more particularly the case with boys, who often insist that censorship based on violence is unreasonable or over-protective, but who appear to feel at least an occasional compunction to exercise self-censorship when they come across scenes involving nudity or sexual encounters.

8.7 SEXUAL CONTENT: (ii) Adolescents Aged 11 to 14

- **The watching of adult-oriented films and programmes is often perceived as a rite of passage into adulthood.**

For older children and teenagers, watching and talking about adult-oriented and adult-rated material is a way of measuring and proving their stage of growth and maturity with peers. The programmes are often also seen as providing a frame of reference against which they can test themselves, or within which they can forge and reinforce their emerging sense of identity.

- **Young people also approach the watching of adult-rated material as a way of learning about the adult world.**

By watching soap operas and other dramas dealing with adult issues, young people believe that they are learning about aspects of adult life which are often kept hidden from them. They insist that what they are learning is not how to behave immorally, but how to avoid making mistakes or how to solve adult problems when they eventually have to face them. They often argue that as growing adults they will sooner or later have to confront such problems themselves, and that it is therefore important that they know what to expect.

- **Visually explicit sexual content is usually approached and reacted to very differently from the "adult-world" narratives of soap operas and adult dramas.**

Though adolescents, like their younger counterparts, frequently argue that it is silly to classify films and programmes as "Adults Only" because of violent content, they also seem more willing to accept such ratings as justified when there is visually explicit sexual content or excessive swearing. However, this does not necessarily mean that they will themselves refrain from watching such material because of the AO rating.

- **Though young people often dismiss adults' objections to visually explicit material as out-dated, scenes involving nudity and love making are likely to cause embarrassment when viewed in the presence of adults.**

Several older children insisted that they always switch channels or leave the room briefly whenever they come across nudity or other forms of visually explicit sexual content. Others argued that since they are now entering adulthood where they will be experiencing such things themselves, they should be allowed to watch, and that being expected to shield their eyes from seeing such material is absurd. For these young people, censorship and complaints about sexual content coming from adults are often a sign of being out of touch with the times and cultural backwardness. Several also admitted to watching sexually titillating material when adults were not around. Generally speaking, however, seeing any form of sexual content in the presence of adults is considered very embarrassing.

- **Complaints about explicit sexual content usually take the form of claims that *others* could be negatively affected.**

As is the case with attitudes towards screen violence, there is a tendency to express concern that *others* or younger children might want to mindlessly imitate sexual activity after watching representations of it on the screen. Some girls also cited examples of other teenage girls falling pregnant as illustrating this type of influence.

- **Boys tend to view portrayals of sexual behaviour and nudity, even when this involves sexual violation, almost exclusively from a male-centred perspective.**

While boys are more likely to focus on the more physical aspects of the sexually-oriented material they see on the screen, girls often insist that they are more interested in relations and romance. Boys also realise that most sexually titillating material involving female nudity is aimed at a male viewership, and so they often respond to such material in ways which they take to be appropriately "masculine", but which are often better described as stereotypical and chauvinistic.

- **Girls often worry that boys watching scenes showing rape and sexual abuse might be tempted to imitate what they see.**

There are very marked differences between the ways in which boys and girls speak about sexual violation and rape. For girls, screen portrayals of rape and sexual violation are a matter of fear and concern. For boys, the subject is something which they seem to only understand vaguely, and from which they appear distant. Boys also frequently seem to associate sex with violence, and when they do so, it is not the violence which they usually think of as problematic, but the sex.

- **Tighter controls of what is screened and watched are not seen by young people themselves as the solution.**

Both girls and boys insist that screen portrayals of either sex or violence should not be banned. However, they do believe that guidelines should be there so that people know what to expect. Though many older girls especially acknowledge that there are dangers and that they worry about them, they also insist that these are facts of life

which they themselves are aware of and know how to avoid. In their view, parental concerns over their safety in relation to these issues are symptoms of over-protectiveness.

- **Further research will be required to assess the impact of new Internet technology and the easy accessibility of sexually explicit material through this fast growing medium.**

Though access to Internet technology still appears to be relatively limited, many teenagers are well aware of the Internet's uses and possibilities, including the fact that it can be used to access pornographic material which is not readily or even legally available through other outlets. This is an area which raises issues that will need to be addressed much more seriously and systematically in the future.

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APPENDIX A

SCHEDULES OF INTERVIEWS AND OTHER DATA COLLECTION PROCESSSES

Numbering System used in Report

1 to 14 - focus group interviews with girls aged 6 to 10.
15 to 28 - focus group interviews with boys aged 6 to 10.
29 to 41 - focus group interviews with girls aged 11 to 14.
42 to 50 - focus group interviews with boys aged 11 to 14.
51 to 54 - combined focus group interviews with boys and girls aged 6 to 14.
55 to 59 - focus group interviews with parents and teachers.
60 to 75 - essays written by 11 to 14 year old boys and girls.
76 to 78 - a series of interviews conducted by fourth year B.Ed. (Hons) students.
79 - self reports by B.Ed. students.
80 - television discussion and phone-in opinion poll.

GENDER	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	NUMBER OF CHILDREN
Girls	27	159
Boys	23	140
Boys + Girls	4	12 + 12
TOTAL	**54**	**299**

Table 1: Total Interviews

State Primary	State Area Secondary	State Junior Lyceums	Private and Church Schools (Primary and Secondary)
Valletta	Antonio Bosio Boys' Secondary, Gzira	San {u\epp }addiem Boys' Junior Lyceum, Paola	St Benild School, Sliema
Bir\ebbu[a B	Lui[i Preziosi Girls' Secondary, St Andrew's	Santa Teresa Girls' Junior Lyceum, Mrie]el	Stella Maris College, Gzira
St Julian's	Lily of the Valley Girls' Secondary, Mosta	Sir Adrian Dingli Girls' Junior Lyceum, St Patrick's	St Joseph's Convent School, Sliema
Sliema	Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary, Hamrun	Dun {u\epp |ammit Boys' Junior Lyceum, Hamrun	Chiswick House School, Kappara
Mellie]a		Ninu Cremona Boys' Junior Lyceum, Victoria, Gozo	St Martin's College, Swatar
Victoria (Gozo)		Kan. {an Fran[isk A[ius De Soldanis Girls' Junior Lyceum, Victoria, Gozo	

Table 2: Schools where children were interviewed

No	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size
1	6-7	Sliema Primary (State)	16/4/99	9.35 - 10.20	6
2	6-7	St Julian's Primary (State)	26/4/99	9.45 - 10.20	6
3	6-8	Valletta Primary (State)	18/12/98	9.50 - 10.30	5
4	7-8	St Julian's Primary (State)	13/4/99	10.45 - 11.40	7
5	7-8	Chiswick House School, Kappara (Private)	11/1/99	9.40 - 10.45	5
6	8-9	Bir\ebbu[a B Primary (State)	7/1/99	11.30 - 12.15	5
7	8-9	Victoria, Gozo, Primary (State)	28/4/99	9.25 - 10.05	6
8	8-9	St Joseph's Convent School, Sliema (Church)	17/12/98	11.10 - 12.10	3
9	9-10	Valletta Primary (State)	18/12/98	11.15 - 11.50	5
10	9-10	Bir\ebbu[a B Primary (State)	7/1/99	10.45 - 11.25	5
11	9-10	St Julian's Primary (State)	26/4/99	11.20 - 11.50	5
12	9-10	Sliema Primary (State)	16/4/99	11.45 - 12.10	6
13	9-10	St Joseph's Convent School, Sliema (Church)	17/12/98	9.30 - 10.40	5
14	9-10	Chiswick House School, Kappara (Private)	11/1/99	11.50 - 12.35	5
					74

Table 3: Interviews with Girls Aged 6 - 10

No.	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size
15	6-7	Sliema Primary (State)	16/4/99	11.10 - 11.40	9
16	6-7	St Julian's Primary (State)	26/4/99	10.25 - 10.50	5
17	6-7	St Benild School, Sliema (Church)	3/5/99	7.50 - 8.40	6
18	6-8	Valletta Primary (State)	18/12/98	9.15 - 9.45	5
19	7-8	St Julian's Primary (State)	13/4/99	9.45 - 10.30	6
20	7-8	Stella Maris College, Gzira (Church)	16/12/98	11.05 - 11.40	5
21	7-8	Chiswick House School, Kappara (Private)	11/1/99	10.55 - 11.35	5
22	8-9	Bir\ebbu[a B Primary (State)	7/1/99	12.45 - 1.30	5
23	8-9	Victoria, Gozo, Primary (State)	28/4/99	10.10 - 10.45	6
24	9-10	Valletta Primary (State)	18/12/98	11.55 - 12.30	5
25	9-10	Bir\ebbu[a B Primary (State)	7/1/99	9.40 - 10.25	6
26	9-10	St Julian's Primary (State)	26/4/99	11.55 - 12.35	5
27	9-10	Sliema Primary (State)	16/4/99	12.15 - 12.45	5
28	9-10	Chiswick House School, Kappara (Private)	12/1/99	1.45 - 2.30	5
					78

Table 4: Interviews with Boys Aged 6 - 10

No.	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size
29	11-12	St Julian's Primary (Yr 6 Repeater) (State)	13/4/99	1.45 - 2.15	6
30	11-12	Lily of the Valley Girls' Secondary School, Mosta (State)	18/1/99	12.40 - 1.15	5
31	11-12	Santa Teresa Girls' Junior Lyceum, Mrie]el (State)	18/12/98	1.30 - 2.50	5
32	11-12	Lui[i Preziosi Girls' Secondary School, St Andrew's (State)	15/4/99	1.20 - 2.00	6
33	11-12	Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary School, Hamrun (State)	12/1/99	9.05 - 9.55	5
34	12-13	Lui[i Preziosi Girls' Secondary School, St Andrew's (State)	15/4/99	12.10 - 12.55	6
35	12-13	Kan. {an Fran[isk A[ius De Soldanis Girls' Junior Lyceum, Victoria, Gozo (State)	28/4/99	1.25 - 2.05	7
36	12-13	St Joseph's Convent School, Sliema (Church)	17/12/98	8.35 - 9.30	5
37	13-14	Lui[i Preziosi Girls' Secondary School, St Andrew's (State)	15/4/99	11.15 - 12.00	6
38	13-14	Sir Adrian Dingli Girls' Junior Lyceum, St Patrick's (State)	27/4/99	9.25 - 10.45	7
39	13-14	St Martin's College, Swatar (Private)	11/1/99	1.25 - 2.15	5
40	13-14	Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary School, Hamrun (State)	12/1/99	10.10 - 10.40	5
41	13-14	Lily of the Valley Girls' Secondary School, Mosta (State)	18/1/99	1.15 - 1.50	5
					73

Table 5: Interviews with Girls aged 11 - 14

No.	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size
42	10-11	Stella Maris College, Gzira (Church)	16/12/98	10.20 - 11.00	4
43	11-12	St Julian's Primary (Yr 6 Repeater) (State)	13/4/99	11.50 - 12.30	6
44	11-12	San {u\epp }addiem Boys' Junior Lyceum, Paola (State)	17/12/98	1.05 - 1.55	4
45	12-13	Stella Maris College, Gzira (Church)	16/12/98	9.15 - 10.00	5
46	12-13	Antonio Bosio Boys' Secondary School, Gzira (State)	14/4/99	11.50 - 12.35	6
47	12-13	Ninu Cremona Boys' Junior Lyceum, Victoria, Gozo (State)	28/4/99	11.30 - 12.40	8
48	13-14	St Martin's College, Swatar (Private)	11/1/99	2.20 - 3.05	5
49	13-14	Dun {u\epp |ammit Boys' Junior Lyceum, Hamrun (State)	27/4/99	12.00 - 12.35	6
50	14-15	Antonio Bosio Boys' Secondary School, Gzira (State)	14/4/99	11.15 - 11.45	6
					50

Table 6: Interviews with Boys aged 11 - 14

No.	Age	School	Date	Time	Group Size
51	5-6	Mellie]a Primary (State)	29/4/99	12.50 - 1.50	3 boys + 3 girls
52	9-10	Mellie]a Primary (State)	29/4/99	11.15 - 12.00	3 boys + 3 girls
53	11-12	St Martin's College, Swatar (Private)	30/4/99	10.25 - 11.30	3 boys + 3 girls
54	13-14	St Martin's College, Swatar (Private)	30/4/99	11.35 - 12.35	3 boys + 3 girls
					24

Table 7: Interviews with Children in Mixed Gender Groups

No	Date	Gender	Location	Focus Group
55	13/4/99	3Male + 2Female	State primary school	5 teachers
56	25/4/99	1Male +2Female	State girls junior lyceum	3 teachers
57	25/4/99	3Male + 3Female	State girls junior lyceum	6 parents
58	3/5/99	7Male + 2Female	Factory - management and shop floor workers	9 parents
59	3/5/99	3Male + 2Female	Factory - shop floor workers	5 parents

Table 8: Interviews with Parents and Teachers

No.	Age	School	Number of Essays
60	11-12	Lui[i Preziosi Girls' Secondary School, St Andrews (State)	13
61	12-13	Carlo Diacono Girls' Junior Lyceum, |ejtun (State)	12
62	12-13	Maria Goretti Girls' Area Secondary School, Santa Lucia (State)	15
63	12-13	Santa Teresa Girls' Junior Lyceum, Mrie]el (State)	6
64	12-13	St Dorothy's Convent, |ebbu[(Church)	15
65	12-13	Immaculate Conception School, Tarxien (Church)	21
66	13-14	Carlo Diacono Girls' Junior Lyceum, |ejtun (State)	5
67	13-14	Sir Adrian Dingli Girls' Junior Lyceum, St Andrews (State)	20
68	13-14	Maria Re[ina Girls' Junior Lyceum, Blata l-Bajda (State)	11
69	13-14	St Michael's Foundation for Education, St Andrews (Private)	8
			126

Table 9: Essays by Girls Aged 11-14

No.	Age	School	Number of Essays
70	11-12	Dun {u\epp }addiem Boys' Junior Lyceum, Corradino Hill, Paola (State)	23
71	12-13	St. Aloysius' College, B'Kara (Church)	35
72	12-13	Mikiel Anton Vassalli Boys' Junior Lyceum, Tal-}andaq (State)	92
73	13-14	Mikiel Anton Vassalli Boys' Junior Lyceum, Tal-}andaq (State)	24
74	12-14	Lorenzo Gafa' Boys' Scondary School, Vittoriosa (State)	19
75	13-14	{u\e Damato Boys' Secondary School, Paola (State)	5
			198

Table 10: Essays by Boys Aged 11-14

No.	Activity	Number and Gender of Children	Age	Location
76	2 whole-class discussions	30 + 30 girls (approx)	11-12	Kan. Pawlu Pullicino Girls' Secondary School, Rabat
77	one-on-one interviews	5 boys 3 girls	13-15	{u\eppi Despott Boys' Junior Lyceum, Cottonera; Salvatore Dimech Crafts School, Mosta
78	4 focus-group interviews	5 boys 7 girls 3 boys + 5 girls 3 boys	11-12	De La Salle College Cottonera; Santa Teresa Girls' Junior Lyceum, Mrie]el; St Martin's College, Swatar; Mikiel Anton Vassalli Boys' Junior Lyceum, Tal-}andaq

Table 11: Interviews Conducted by Student Teachers

APPENDIX B

Numbers and Distribution of TV Sets at Home

Number of TV Sets	No. of Children Age Group 6 - 10	No. of Children Age Group 11 - 14	Totals Ages 6-14
1	31 24.03%	24 19.2%	55 21.65%
2	55 42.64%	61 48.8%	116 45.67%
3	36 27.9%	28 22.4	64 25.19%
4	7 5.43%	11 8.8%	18 7.1%
5	0 0%	1 0.8%	1 0.39%
Totals	**129** 100%	**125** 100%	**254** 100%

Table 12: Number of TV Sets at Home

Age	Own Bedroom	Siblings' Bedroom	Parents' Bedroom	Living Room	Kitchen	Dining Room	Other
6 - 10	32 24.8%	12 9.3%	87 67.4%	87 67.4%	36 27.9%	8 6.2%	15 11.6%
11 - 14	39 31.2%	12 9.6%	77 61.6%	98 78.4%	42 33.6%	3 2.4%	9 7.2
Totals 6 - 14	**71** 27.95%	**24** 9.44%	**164** 64.56%	**185** 72.83%	**78** 30.7%	**11** 4.33%	**24** 9.45%

Table 13: Location of TV Sets at Home

Age Group 6 – 10	Age Group 11 - 14	Total
12 out of 32 37.5%	**10 out of 39 25.6%**	**32 out of 71 45%**

Table 14: TV Set in Child's Own Bedroom

Number of children with a TV set in their own room who also specifically said that they mostly watch another set, or use their set mainly as a monitor for video games.

Numbers and Distribution of TV Sets at Home According to Gender, Age and Focus Group

Girls Aged 6-10 (Total Number: 71)

Group	Total	Own Bdrm	Siblings Bdrm	Parents Bdrm	Living Room	Kitchen	Dining Room	Other
1	2			1	1			
	3				1	1		1 (spare room)
	4	1	1	1			1	
	3	1		1	1			
	2			1				1 (roof)
	1			1				
2	2	1			1			
	3	1		1				
	2			1	1			
	3	1		1	1			
	1				1			
	2				1			1 (landing)
3	2			1		1		
	2			1		1		
	2			1	1			
	2			1	1			
	3		1	1		1		
5	3			1	1			1 (basement)
	2			1	1			
	2			1	1			
	2		1		1			
	3			1	1	1		
6	2			1	1			
	1				1			
	1				1			
	2			1		1		
	3			1	1	1		
7	2			1		1		
	3			1		1		1 (old kitchen)
	1	1						
	2			1	1			
	2				1	1		
	1				1			
8	4		1	1	1	1		
	2				1		1	
	1						1	
9	2			1		1		
	3		1 + 1		1			

	1			1				
	3	1	1	1				
	2			1		1		
10	1				1			
	1				1			
	3	1		1		1		
	1						1	
	2			1	1			
11	2			1	1			
	3			1	1	1		
	2			1	1			
	2	1			1			
	3	1		1		1		
12	3	1	1	1				
	1				1			
	2	1		1				
	2		1	1				
	1				1			
	3	1		1	1			
13	1					1		1(gran's room)
	3			1	1			1 (games room)
	1				1			
	3			1	1		1	
	2			1	1			
14	3	1		1	1			
	1				1			
	1				1			
	2			1	1			
	2	1			1			
51	2	1		1				
52	2				1	1		
	2			1		1		
	3			1	1	1		
TOTAL		**16 ***	**9**	**46**	**46**	**20**	**5**	**7**

Number of TV Sets	Number of Girls
1	17
2	32
3	20
4	2

* **Own TV Set**:
Number who said specifically that they generally watch a different TV set at home, or use the one in their room mostly as a monitor for video games:

6 out of 16 (37.5%)

Boys Aged 6 - 10
Total Number: 58

Group	Total	Own Bdrm	Siblings Bdrm	Parents Bdrm	Living Room	Kitchen	Dining Room	Other
15	3	1		1	1			
	3	1		1		1		
	2			1	1			
	2	1			1			
	3	1		1	1			
19	2			1	1			
	4	1		1	1	1		
	3			1	1	1		
	2			1			1	
	2			1	1			
20	3		1	1	1			
	3	1		1	1			
	4	1	1		1	1		
	2			1		1		
	1			1				
21	2			1	1			
	3			1	1			1 (spare room)
	1				1			
	3	1		1	1			
	2			1	1			
22	3	1			1	1		
	1				1			
	2	1		1				
	4	1		1		1		1 (caravan)
	1				1			
23	2			1				1 (spare room)
	2			1		1		
	2			1		1		
	1				1			
	2			1				1 (garage)
	3			1	1			1 (spare)
24	1				1			
	3			1	1			1 (spare)
	1			1				
	4	1		1	1	1		
	3	1		1		1		
25	1				1			

	2			1		1		
	1				1			
	2			1			1	
	2						1	1 (spare)
	3		1	1		1		
26	2			1	1			
	3	1		1	1			
	2			1	1			
	4	1		1	1	1		
	1				1			
28	2			1	1			
	2			1	1			
	2			1	1			
	2				1	1		
	3	1		1	1			
51	2			1	1			
	1				1			
	1			1				
52	1				1			
	1				1			
	3				1	1		1 (spare)
TOT		**16 ***	**3**	**41**	**41**	**16**	**3**	**8**

Number of TV Sets	Number of Boys
1	14
2	23
3	16
4	5

* **Own TV Set**:
Number who said specifically that they generally watch a different TV set at home, or use the one in their room mostly as a monitor for video games:

6 out of 16 (37.5%)

Girls Aged 11-14 (Total Number: 74)

Group	Total	Own Bdrm	Siblings Bdrm	Parents Bdrm	Living Room	Kitchen	Dining Room	Other
29	3	1		1		1		
	2			1	1			
	2			1			1	
	2				1	1		
	3		1		1	1		
	1				1			
30	2					1		1 (garage)
	1				1			
	3			1	1	1		
	1			1				
	4	1		1	1	1		
31	2			1		1		
	2			1	1			
	3			1	1	1		
	2			1		1		
	2			1	1			
32	4	1	1	1		1		
	2			1	1			
	2	1			1			
	4	1		1	1	1		
	1				1			
	2			1	1			
33	3	1		1			1	
	4	1		1	1	1		
	3	1	1	1				
	3	1		1		1		
	2			1		1		
34	1				1			
	1				1			
	3	1	1		1			
	1					1		
	1					1		
	3	1		1		1		
35	3			1	1	1		
	1				1			
	2			1	1			
	2			1		1		
	1				1			
	3			1	1	1		
	2			1	1			
36	3			1	1			1 (dad's office)
	5	1		1		1	1	1 (dad's office)
	2			1	1			

	1				1			
	2			1	1			
37	2			1	1			
	4	1	1	1	1			
	3	1		1	1			
	2			1	1			
	2	1			1			
	2	1		1				
38	2			1	1			
	2	1			1			
	3	1		1		1		
	3			1	1	1		
	2				1	1		
	3			1	1	1		
39	1				1			
	3			1	1			1 (basement)
	2				1	1		
	1				1			
40	2			1	1			
	2			1	1			
	1				1			
	2	1			1			
	1			1				
41	1				1			
	4	1		1	1	1		
	3		1	1	1			
	3			1	1	1		
	2			1	1			
53	3	1		1	1			
	2	1			1			
	2	1			1			
TOT		**23 ***	**6**	**48**	**55**	**28**	**3**	**4**

Number of TV Sets	Number of Girls
1	16
2	31
3	20
4	6
5	1

* **Own TV Set**:
Number who said specifically that they generally watch a different TV set at home, or use the one in their room mostly as a monitor for video games:

5 out of 23 (21.74%)

Boys Aged 11-14
Total Number: 51

Group	Total	Own Bdrm	Siblings Bdrm	Parents Bdrm	Living Room	Kitchen	Dining Room	Other
42	2			1	1			
	2			1	1			
	2				1			1 (monitor)
	1				1			
43	2			1	1			
	2				1	1		
	2				1	1		
	3	1		1	1			
	3	1		1	1			
	2			1	1			
44	4	1	1	1	1			
	2				1			1 (grandma's)
	3	1		1		1		
	2	1			1			
45	2			1	1			
	2	1				1		
	2			1	1			
	3			1	1	1		
	2				1			1 (games room)
46	2	1		1				
	4		1	1	1	1		
	4	1	1	1	1			
	2	1			1			
	2				1	1		
	2	1			1			
47	2			1	1			
	1				1			
	1			1				
	2			1	1			
	2			1		1		
	1				1			
	2			1	1			
	1				1			
48	2			1	1			
	2			1	1			
	2			1	1			

	1				1			
49	3			1	1	1		
	2	1			1			
	3	1			1	1		
	3			1	1	1		
	3		1	1	1			
	2				1	1		
50	1				1			
	4	1	1	1		1		
	1				1			
	2	1		1				
	2		1	1		1		
53	2	1			1			
	2			1	1			
	4	1			1			1+1 (roof + father's study)
TOT		**16 ***	**6**	**29**	**43**	**1**		**5**

Number of TV Sets	Number of Boys
1	8
2	30
3	8
4	5

* **Own TV Set**:
Number who said specifically that they generally watch a different TV set at home, or use the one in their room mostly as a monitor for video games:

5 out of 16 (31.25%)

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