

HOW CHILDREN INTERPRET SCREEN VIOLENCE

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Executive Summary

Background

- 1) While there have been a number of hypotheses proposed about the way in which children react to on-screen images of violence, there has been little research investigating those elements of an image that make it seem violent to them. This research project investigates what those elements might be, drawing on and developing similar work conducted among adults in 1999.¹
- 2) The study concentrates on children aged 9-13, this being the age range across which many parents express least confidence when it comes to regulating their children's in-home viewing. Younger children and older teenagers seem to offer fewer regulatory challenges in homes.
- 3) Ten extended group discussions were conducted, considering children's attitudes to a variety of representations of on-screen violence, both on television and in the cinema.

Key findings

- 4) The findings show significant consistency in the responses of these participants. They demonstrate a specific view of the world, which is primarily child-centred. Violent images are then viewed from that perspective.
- 5) Children are able to distinguish between fictional violence and violence that is 'real'. They also make clear judgements about the justified use of violence and this in turn can affect how 'violent' an image is perceived to be. This research found no evidence of a conflation in participants' minds between violence in fiction and violence in real life.
- 6) They see a variety of violent images either through film or television, and build a 'library' of such images over time. Their reactions to such images are influenced by their age, gender, maturity and personal circumstances.
- 7) Peculiar to children is the importance of certain consequences of violent actions, described by them as 'scary'. The word has a range of meanings and is further defined by the genre in which the 'scary' scene is set. The news may be 'scary' because the event depicted could happen 'to me'; this scariness is based in fear and is frightening. The scariness of a horror film however, might be enjoyed and part of a visceral reaction to the violence depicted.
- 8) Scariness is a concept closely linked with violence and is a feature that is distinct from the way in which adults consider violent images.

1. *Defining Violence: The Search for Understanding*; David E Morrison et al; University of Luton, 1999.

- 9) The concerns expressed by parents and others about personal safety are frequently mentioned and the impact these have on participants' personal freedoms and lifestyles. The news may reinforce these concerns and the research points to the continuing responsibilities of news and factual programme-makers to be aware of the impact of their output.

What makes it violent?

- 10) When asked, children talk of the visual representations of violence as being the most violent, yet – on probing – it is often the physical consequences of violence that increases the violence loading.
- 11) Participants also respond to the emotional consequences of hurt and violence, depending on the circumstances being portrayed. Shouting can be seen as a form of violence within certain circumstances.
- 12) This is most clearly represented by reactions to items on the news, although this is not a genre of viewing choice for most of these participants and is often seen within the home or family-viewing environment. Nevertheless, of all the images of violence presented to this sample, those events that were real (i.e. on the news) were the most affecting, especially if the consequences of the violence involved other children or people with whom they could identify. Conversely they empathise less with items on the news with which they can not identify or which occur elsewhere in the world, unless that 'other' place is recognisable, such as the USA.
- 13) This is not to say that the special effects of '*blood, guts and gore*' are not enjoyed, particularly by boys and especially if they do not feel personally threatened by the images being presented.
- 14) Participants say a number of factors serve to make a scene violent. Foremost, it should be realistic. By this, participants mean that the action should be recognisable as something that could occur, rather than fantastical.
- 15) If the violent action is considered either unjust or unfair, then the scene is considered more violent. Important within this was consideration of the relationship between protagonist and victim. For example, participants felt violence against a nurse was wrong because she is female, she is a person who helps other people (and is in a hospital, which should offer a secure environment) and she is alone against two attackers.
- 16) Children are very sensitive to cues provided by production techniques, responding to changes in music, aural cues and visual images to build their expectation of how violent a scene might be.

- 17) Similarly, the environment in which the sequences are set is important. Action within those environments which are recognisable (such as the street) or are considered secure (such as a hospital or the home) is seen to be more threatening than action set within a fantasy landscape, however explicit the images are and whatever the special effects used. Additionally, if there is a sense of isolation created by the scene (because the character is seen to be alone or because there is no escape offered) participants react more strongly.
- 18) The viewing environment can also affect how on-screen material is responded to. Participants talk of the comfort and security offered by the home, in comparison with the amplification of images and sounds in the cinema.

Expectations of genres

- 19) The research clearly identifies a child-centric view of the world, regardless of the image being discussed or portrayed. Reactions to the clips are related back to participants' own lives and experience, and then deconstructed into the various 'elements' of violence.
- 20) Participants have different expectations of the various programme genres and the violence expected from each genre. This is clearly illustrated by their reactions to the series of clips from pre-Watershed programmes and age-suitable films shown within the research.
- 21) Dramas and soap operas are recognised as fictional representations of the real world, while the news is known to be the real world. Hence the expectations brought to each of these are quite different. Participants accept far-fetched storylines and compressed timelines in the former genres, while an item on the news is always treated seriously.
- 22) Should the drama contain many of the elements that children define as components of 'violence' such as a high level of identification with a child character, then they are more likely to consider the action violent.
- 23) Similarly there are clear distinctions made between cartoon-like film violence, even if the characters are played by actors rather than animated, and film violence that shows human emotions and pain, even though set within a fantastical storyline.
- 24) There is an (implicit) understanding of the Watershed and the way in which television and cinema films are regulated. Children are able to talk about the conventions, and boundaries, applied to the pre-Watershed soap operas as well as the film classifications. These ensure, they say, that the images portrayed will not overstep certain parameters.
- 25) However, there are sometimes inconsistencies in how participants react to scenes of violence, depending on the genre and other factors such as the context of the particular sequence.

Differences among children

- 26) Older children, reflecting their greater maturity, have a clearer understanding of the potential consequences of violence than their younger counterparts. They are also more likely to have seen a wider array of violent images, including images classified or scheduled to be outside their age range, often with their parents' complicity. This finding reflects the tension that parents experience as their children gain independence as they progress through secondary school.
- 27) Boys in this sample are far more likely than girls to have sought out, and seen, images of violence. They admit to peer pressure and to the excitement that such viewing can bring.

Differences between adults and children

- 28) The ways in which children's reactions differ from those of adults are described in some detail in the concluding sections. Many of these differences stem from the child's egocentric view of the world.
- 29) However, there are some other key differences between adults and children: the requirement that a depiction should appear 'realistic' or seem as though it can happen is stronger for adults. For an adult to describe a sequence as 'violent', the action actually needs to be seen. For children, the seen consequences of a violent action can be enough for them to deem it 'violent'. This is especially true of older children.
- 30) Children also expect a level of security and protection that the adults in the 1999 study did not. They seem to accept that they are not in control of events and look to adults and people in positions of trust to shelter them.

Background

There is a substantial body of work which discusses the way in which children appear to receive violent images.² Much of it has been based in concern about the possible effects that such mediated images might have on the attitudes or behaviour of children and young people. This line of research began with the Payne studies into the effects of cinema between 1929-1932, moved on to study radio in the 1930s and 1940s, and progressed to the current concentration on violence on television in the 1950s. With the increasing popularity and sophistication of graphics used in computer games, video games are now added to the list and the Internet adds a further layer of concern.

Despite the fact that the media have changed so dramatically, much of the focus of academic research and political concern remains on televised and film violence. This is legitimised by the perceived influence of these media and their reach and penetration within populations.

The research into the effects of mediated images has been based in correlational studies, often driven by a behaviourist tradition within academia, primarily in the United States. In Europe, the research into the relationship between the media and audiences argues for a more active interaction. It acknowledges possible influence, rather than direct effects. Indeed the regulatory structures for the media are based on the fact that impressionable people need either to be shielded from undesirable images or at least prepared adequately for them. The academic research is grounded within the cultural studies tradition of the social sciences.

More recently, a body of work has built up in Europe that looks at the way in which different audiences receive images through the media. It recognises that there are different tolerances among audiences (as does the regulation) and seeks to understand how these are affected by variables such as gender, personal experience and so on. From here, it is argued, one can better base an understanding of the ways in which audiences interact with images.

In 1999, Professor Morrison was commissioned by a group of funders representing the television industry (including the BBC, BSC and ITC) to understand how adults defined violence, what made an image a 'violent image'.³ What he found was that there was a layered system to understanding violent images. If the action in an image or a scene was not considered justified or fair, then that action would be deemed violent (primary definers). Secondary definers determined how violent the action was considered to be, often based on the way in which the image or scene was presented to the audience.

2. *Discerning Eyes: Viewers on Violence*; Julie Firmstone, University of Luton Press, 2002.

3. *Defining Violence: The Search for Understanding*; David E. Morrison et al; University of Luton, 1999.

There has been little work considering what makes an image ‘violent’ for children and young people. Further, the research has concentrated either on very young children or on young people, adolescents and students in later education. There has been little work among children who, in the United Kingdom, are in the transition stage from primary school to secondary school. Yet, other work has shown that when the issue of mediated images is discussed, this is an age range which most concerns parents as their children find their independence and their own way, but often still lack the necessary experience to help them.⁴

It was agreed by the consortium of funders (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) and Independent Television Commission (ITC)), that a project should examine how children of this age range describe or deconstruct on-screen violence. What are the variables that they bring into play and are they the same as those for adults? As adults – both in and outside the home – conduct much regulation for children, it would be useful to discover how closely adult concerns (as reflected by parents and regulatory authorities) are in line with those of children. Recent research found parents least confident in their ability to regulate viewing – or to help their children negotiate material – from the ages of nine to about 13. This was the range of ages on which it was decided the research should concentrate.

Goldstone Perl Research, working with Slesenger Research, was commissioned to conduct qualitative research among children within these ages, in a number of locations.⁵ Groups were shown sets of clips taken from television and film footage. Not all clips were shown to all groups; these are detailed in Appendix 2.

In addition, two editing groups were conducted among older children in Edgware, with the assistance of Daryl Corner. This research technique, pioneered by the Institute of Communication Studies, Leeds University, allows participants to make changes to material and to discuss the changes made and their reasoning.⁶ The findings from both these stages of research are discussed in Chapters 1 to 4.

Professor Morrison provided advice to the project and makes a comparison between the findings of this research among children and the work he conducted among adults (Chapter 5). In conclusion, he offers a conceptual framework which seeks to distinguish the definers that work for children and why and how they are different from those that adults use (Chapter 6).

4. *Striking a Balance: The control of children's media consumption*; edited by Pam Hanley; British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting Standards Commission and the Independent Television Commission, 2002.

5. See Appendix 1 for details of sample and methodology.

6. For a fuller discussion of the methodology, see *Violence in Factual Television*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1993.

1. Findings

Violence: and how the world seems, both on and off the screen

'On the TV, (it's) just people acting.'

(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

Within the research, children were interviewed with peers from their school year, and boys and girls were interviewed separately. These were appropriate and important variables, with significant differences noted by age and gender.

As might be expected, the younger the participant the more likely he or she is to live within a sheltered environment, with relatively little independence either at school or at home. Most of the children of primary school age are taken to and from school and have structured, relatively controlled lives. However, each year-stage considered in this research shows a leap, with attitudinal and experiential change occurring quickly.

The participants aged between 9-10 (Year 5) have the lowest levels of exposure to violence, either in film or on television. Their parents are still influential, setting the agenda for what is watched at home and there is understanding of, and general adherence to, the Watershed by this age group. By the next school year, the year that leads up to secondary school, there is already a marked shift, with participants aged 10-11 talking of the greater influence that their peer group has on them and the greater independence from their parents that they feel. They have a far broader diet of film and television than their younger counterparts, including access to films classified as '12' and programmes aimed at a more adult audience, often after the Watershed.

With secondary school comes a significant leap – both in granting of independence by parents and the educational structure, and the concomitant change in maturity of attitude and experience. The peer group is increasingly important, even in matters to do with mediated images of violence. The younger members of these school years (year 7, aged 11-12) are accessing films classified as '15', while the older group is able to access '18s', often with the agreement of parents. This is especially true of boys in the sample.

'Mum wants to protect you, Dad wants to watch with you.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Edgware)

Another important shift is that both the secondary school samples are more aware of real violence than is either of the primary school groups. They witness it at school, in the playground and they see it on the street. There are differing messages given to them about the way in which they should deal with violence themselves, should they encounter it.

'If they punch you, parents say stick up for yourselves.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

*'My Dad says, "Whack them round the face." Mum says, "Ignore them."
I think, "What shall I do?"'*
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

'Tell the teacher and don't react to it.'
(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

Within this sample, there is also some evidence of violence in the home. Most of the children were subjected to shouting, although this is not considered to be violence per se.

'Yes, quite [violent], but not hurting anyone, but hurting feelings.'
(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

What is much more of an issue is that children are far more affected by those events, or on-screen scenes, that tap into their anxieties about themselves and the world around them. So the fantastical is not the issue, but rather the ordinary, which is more frightening because it increases the fear that such an event might happen – to them.

'It doesn't just have to be gore.'

'It can be facial expressions.'

'It can be mentally disturbing, too.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

Within this study, which took place before the United Kingdom went to war with Iraq, there was real concern and fear about what might happen, inflated by discussions all around these children, at home, at school and in the media. Even this, however, was overshadowed by concerns created by some recent (at that time) cases of child abduction and murder, which were felt to be near to home and which attacked their own sense of security. Those fictional images which mirror these fears are thought more 'violent' than many sequences with realistic 'special effects'.

'With real life and a movie there is a difference. A movie is fake, like a ghost train.'
(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

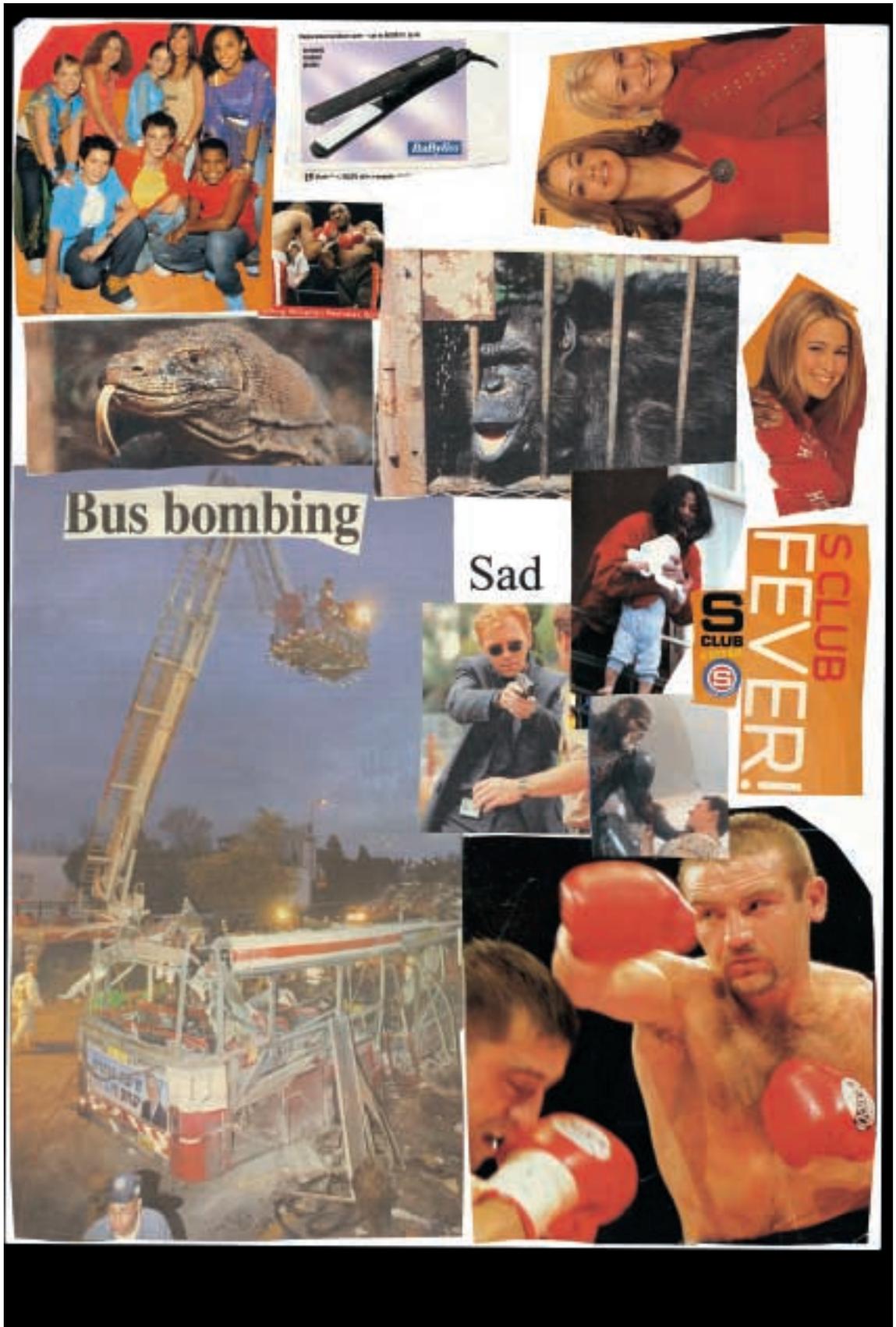
The images on the following pages illustrate some of the things that participants say when they are asked to describe what makes them happy or sad. Appendix 3, which offers greater detail of what each group said, also illustrates the range of screen images of violence they claim to have seen.

Images That Make Me Happy



Images That Make Me Sad





What makes it violent?

'When someone gets shot rapidly with a rifle and how they move when they get shot. The movements and seeing the effects of the violence.'

(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

Children's 'knowledge' of violence is changed by their experience of violence in reality, in their own lives. Therefore, it is not surprising that for these participants to feel that something can be classified as 'violent', it must be grounded in realism and feel credible. This is especially true for older boys, who think of many scenes of violence as nothing more than a string of special effects. Should the violence not be realistic, then children find ways of distancing themselves from it. And yet, the participants talk of the physical and dramatic representations of violence such as the *'blood, guts and gore'* and it is doubtful that they have experienced this. When asked to distinguish between elements of violence this group of boys described it thus:

Q. How are 'gory' and 'violent' separate then?

'Violence is about punching and stabbing.'

'And torture.'

'Gory is like legs blowing off and flesh everywhere.'

Q. Which do you find more disturbing?

'Gory. Phew . . .'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

There are other elements, in addition to realism, that add to the violence 'loading' of a scene and these are discussed briefly below. For a more detailed consideration of each element against specific examples, see Chapter 3, which offers a description of attitudes towards the clips shown in the research and the genres in which they fell.

(i) The act itself

While participants in most instances feel it is necessary to see the act of violence for it to be deemed violent, those scenes they consider most violent in this study are ones where they do not see the actual act of violence. The depiction is not always key. For example, a scene can be made more violent:

- **If the consequences of the violent act can be seen in a graphic way:** The reaction of participants to the events around September 11 2001 show that there is a mature and sophisticated understanding of acts of real violence and their effect. They are much affected, as will be seen, by news footage and the ongoing consequences of September 11 events, which are deemed ‘violent’. This sample feels both threatened and – this is true of many – personally vulnerable.
- **If the child identifies with the victim:** In research among adults the issue of identification – either with the victim or with the location – was found to be an important element in how violent a given scene was thought to be. This finding is exaggerated among children, whose world is narrow and egocentric. Analysis of reactions to the clips shows that children feel particularly uncertain when children are involved within any violent action. Similarly, they react more strongly if the violence is set within a ‘secure’ environment, such as the home or a hospital (as in the clip from *Holby City*).⁷

‘At home. If something happens in your home, that is the place that you are supposed to be most safe. If you get beaten up at home, then you can never feel safe there again.’
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

(ii) Production techniques

The impact of a violent scene can be diffused or enhanced by a variety of production techniques:

- **The mood and atmosphere of the scene:** Participants are particularly concerned or made afraid by violent actions that are set in isolated environments. For them, the sense of a lack of escape is a particular concern.

Q. Where is violence worst?

‘Where it’s dark and damp, with no noise around.’
(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

The isolation need not be actual physical isolation (although that was most commonly referred to). It could be isolation created within a public environment. One of the clips was set on a road lined with hedges (*Behind Closed Doors*, part of the *Hitting Home* series). The violence - which took place off-screen and, most participants thought, in the hedges – is heightened because the children in the sample feared the victim may not be found. Other potentially violent scenes are relieved by the public nature of the physical location or by the presence of figures of authority (as in news footage from Northern Ireland, in which policemen guard children making their way to school).

7. See Appendix 2 for a description of the clips used.

Related to isolation is a heightened sense of doom if the scene is set in the dark. The researchers who undertook this work argue that this taps into a universal fear, creating suspense and anxiety about the possibility of escape.

'Being abandoned is like silent torture.'
(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

- **The camera angles and shots:** The way in which pain or shock is represented affects participants. They react strongly, especially when the victim is a child or someone else considered 'vulnerable' or 'innocent' (*Behind Closed Doors*, but also a female nurse in *Holby City*). The camera allows the depiction of pain to be seen at close quarters. It also allows the audience to view the action through different characters' perspectives.

'The way he used all his force to get it [an instrument used for stabbing] in.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

However, some of these techniques, when combined with other tricks such as slow motion, could make depictions of obvious pain (such as in *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*) risible to some.

- **Music:** Participants are very sensitive to the use of music to convey the mood and seriousness of the action being depicted.

'Music – really high notes. Always high notes before something suddenly happens.'
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

In the clip from *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* participants talked about the tone of the music which warned of danger. Equally, music can be used to lighten the mood and take the seriousness out of the action, such as in the film *Scooby Doo*.

'Sounds that build up.'
(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

The absence of music can also heighten a feeling of violence and threat as it focuses the audience on other sounds (*The Bill*).

- **The duration of the violence:** One of the findings of the research among adults had been that those participants who had experienced 'real' violence were not fazed or excited by dramatic techniques. They expressed the view that when one was shot, for example, one simply fell down, often silently. So the drama of, or long sequences in, scenes of violence allowed them to distance themselves from those depictions. This was – albeit to a lesser extent – true of these young participants, who say that some of the longer clips shown of protracted violence are 'tedious' (*Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*).

On the other hand, some long fight sequences heighten the sense of violence, especially when there is sufficient other action. This can be shouting (in *EastEnders*) for example, or those using special effects (as in *Spider-Man*).

- **Cinematic techniques:** As suggested, techniques such as slow motion can make comedy of the pain of a character for some. For others, the use of slow motion accentuates the sense of violence, especially through empathy with the pain of the victim (as in *Spider-Man* when the hero battles with the Green Goblin). While the use of slow motion in *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* made it funnier and, therefore, distancing for some, it was more involving for others. A benefit mentioned by some participants is that slow motion offers the opportunity to see the violence and its consequence in greater and more graphic detail. This is part of the attraction, especially the use of special effects and the make-up used in such productions.

'Special cameras, camera angles.'
(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

- **The repetition of violence:** This affects the 'violence loading' of a scene. Participants talk of the way the September 11 scenes were replayed time and again on television. These have had a lasting impact and the identification with victims is reinforced through images such as those from Ground Zero and other anniversary commemorations.

(iii) Contextual features

The impact of violence is affected by clear contextual features, which also exist in adult perceptions of violence. These include:

- the genre in which the violence is set and whether the rules of that genre are seen to be broken
- whether the violence is seen to be unfair through the unequal relationship between protagonists
- whether the violence is considered to go unpunished
- the gratuitousness of the violence
- lack of preparedness for the violent action.

(iv) The emotional response

As Professor Morrison elaborates in his essay about the differences between children's responses to violence in comparison with that of adults (Chapter 5), key to understanding how children perceive screen violence are their emotional responses to it. Children's worlds are dominated by their individual place in it and much of how they frame their environment stems from their centrality in it. This frames the way in which violence is understood and responded to. A scene can appear more violent if they can identify with it, either through identification with the victim (a child as in *Behind Closed Doors*), or through imagining such an event happening to them. This last was particularly true when talking about real life violence, such as the abduction of children, reported in the news.

'Kidnapping children . . . That's really upsetting. It could happen to you.'

(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

A sense of violence can be heightened if it reflects on to the child's own fears or anxieties. For example, isolation, the dark, and places where help would not easily be forthcoming are all environments which serve to increase the violence loading in a programme.

'No one to hold your hand.'

(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

A key finding of this research is that children, unlike adults, do not talk of the violence they see in terms of its attributes, but about how it affects them. They talk at an emotional level, describing it as 'scary'. This is the response that is offered both pre- and post-violent action. Younger children and girls, in particular, use the term when they are attempting to describe how violence affects them.

Yet 'scary' has a range of meanings for these participants. The reaction can be momentary and it can be fun, particularly if shared within one's peer group, such as during a horror film. Finding something is scary is then part of the entertainment. However, if the participant thinks that the event 'could happen', 'scary' can change to something that creates anxiety. This, in turn, can change how the violence is defined and it can become more real and worrying.

'I saw a violent film – man killing people in horrible ways. I had nightmares about it. Stayed with me – was scary. I could see his face everywhere.'

(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

2. Different types of violence

There are clear differences, by gender, when it comes to the way in which participants respond to violence, and what they derive from it. Age also plays a role, but it is a lesser one, being a variable dependant on the level of violence the participant has already been exposed to.

Girls do not look to violent images to provide them with the excitement and thrill that boys seem to. They do not expend as much energy talking about or reflecting on the images they have seen. Indeed, it seems that girls are more likely to turn away from violence on screen and – when exposed to it – are more likely to seek to understand how and why it is there.

Not only are boys exposed to far more violent images than girls, seeking them out at times as a badge of identity especially with their peer group, but also violence thrills and excites them. They respond at a more visceral level than the girls and they do not seek to analyse or understand the motivations and drivers behind the violent images they see.

‘Want to keep watching it to see what happens.’

‘[Violence] gets more viewers.’
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

‘It’s a good money seller.’
(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

Real violence versus fictional screen violence

‘It’s OK on the TV screen. Real life would make a difference!’
(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

There is no suggestion from this research that participants confuse the enjoyment they sometimes derive from screen violence with real life violence. Screen violence is described in graphic detail with much concentration on the blood, guts and gore of scenes – the reactions are visceral.

Q. What about if it’s violent – where do you feel that?

‘In my head.’

‘On my hands.’

‘Feel scared.’

‘I start twitching.’
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

Participants suggest there is little lasting impact from such scenes and some talk of moving on to the next level of violence, the next special effect. This research found that participants appear to have a mental library for 'violence' and can recall particularly violent or gory or scary scenes with ease. These scenes then become their benchmark for any subsequent on-screen violence. Importantly, this mental library of clips goes far beyond any of the violence shown in the research, which was based on transmitted programming chosen from pre-Watershed programmes or age suitable film. Violence, especially fictional violence, requires a level of identification for any empathy or concern to be created by the events unfolding. In fact, participants talk of being 'used to' violence, rather than being worried or concerned by it.

'You see so much on TV now.'

'I don't really think anything of it unless it's on the news.'

'But in real life it's still shocking.'

(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

If the screen violence is based on a real life event, but is not reality, then there is still an ability to disassociate oneself from it.

'Never think about violence after a film unless it's a true story.'

(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

When asked how screen violence might impact on or affect them, participants say they are able to distinguish between what is morally acceptable and what is not. They have clear moral codes and they bring these to the way in which they decode violence.

'It's better if it upsets you because then you'll never do it.'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

'We're in a violent world, but we aren't violent.'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

'It would only affect kids who are not right in the head.'

(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

Yet, there was evidence that many of the children interviewed have seen violence in real life, especially once they reach secondary school and see playground violence (which may be mild, such as hair pulling, or more serious such as actual fights), or encounter violence while they are out on the streets or in the park. Some had, possibly, experienced violence in the home, between parents and sometimes directed at them. No link is possible from this research to suggest that participants are somehow 'prepared' for the violence they see or experience by their exposure to fictional or screen violence. Real life violence is upsetting and potentially frightening, and totally distinct from screen violence.

'You can't stop real life violence or turn the TV down.'

(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

There is a sense from this research that these children think the world is inherently more violent than it had been in their parents' day, although it is not clear where this view derives from. Partly this is encouraged (if not overtly, then certainly through more subtle cues) by parents' concerns for their safety, but also by events that unfold around them. These events are discussed openly in the home, at school and among peers and the media also bring them to participants' attention. At the time of the research, a war with Iraq was probable, but had not been declared. A missing young girl's body recently had been found and two young girls had been abducted in a high profile case the previous summer. All these were mentioned by participants as events that have impacted on their own lives, through restricting their freedoms, through parental and personal concern, through discussions at home and at school.

'News can make me scared because it's really happening. Especially when it's closer – like murders. Girls going missing and beaten up. And I saw something in the newspaper about people going missing and it was mostly all girls.'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

However, the event which dominated discussion was the attack in America on September 11 2001. There is a sense, for these participants, that their world has changed irreparably and there is no resolution of the causes that created that change. Osama bin Laden is still *'on the loose'* and other attacks feel very possible to these children.

'Now it's resulted in war!'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

In spontaneous discussion of screen violence and how it differs – at a most basic level – from real violence, respondents divided up the issues in the following way:

Spontaneous discussion of screen violence	
Screen violence	Violence in the world around them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fighting ■ Weaponry ■ Blood, guts and gore ■ Bombs/explosions ■ Death/bodily mutilation ■ Goodies and baddies <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Very visual; film-like qualities Technicolour, graphic detail</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ War/September 11 ■ Abduction ■ Rape ■ Animal cruelty <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Worrying, frightening Recalled by impact of the event</p>

The participants in this research understand the enormity and implications of the events around September 11 2001. The research shows that a small number of news stories carry the potential to cause children anxiety or fear. The participants' exposure to news was limited and it is often dismissed as *'boring'*, but when they do become interested by an issue which they perceive as violent (such as September 11 or stories involving children), the way in which the news is presented to children represents a real challenge to broadcasters.

In summary, while this research found no evidence of deep distress caused by the fictional material shown within the groups, it is clear that participants do become concerned by fears that they are unable to rationalise. In turn, this can lead to genuine anxieties and changes in behaviour. However, the on-screen violence needs to meet a number of key criteria for this to happen:

- it needs to be real and on the news
- it needs to be local or feel as though it could be local
- it needs to happen to 'someone like me' (this was personalised to be *'someone of my age'*, *'a normal child'*)
- if the aggressor is not an obvious 'baddie' but is someone in authority or a parent
- if their fears are reflected and compounded by their parents' anxieties (as with the case of the abduction of children in the news) or the media (by the concentration, unsurprisingly, on such material of national or public interest).

Coping mechanisms

Professor Buckingham's report *Moving Images* discusses in some detail the various coping mechanisms that young people employ when faced with disturbing, upsetting or otherwise difficult material.⁸ Although not a key part of this study it was of interest to know what tools these participants use to distance themselves from what they are watching, if they do not want to be actively engaged by it and by the thrill and excitement of their viewing.

As noted, participants do have concerns which can be reflected or exaggerated on-screen and these concerns are based in their own reality. So particular mention is made of attacks by strangers, abduction and kidnapping, being powerless or in darkness.

'I used to worry about what might happen to me, like abductions.'
(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

Some also mention the supernatural (ghosts, demons, ghouls) and, though they were often shouted down within the discussion groups, discomfort about this issue is clear, as it was in the Buckingham research.

Certainly much mention is made of the ability to distance oneself through recognising that what is on-screen is simply fiction or make-believe. These participants do not engage with fictional violence in a significant way and use a variety of techniques to help them.

They recognise that:

- what they are watching is fantasy and not real
- they are watching actors performing a role written for them
- they are watching a genre, such as a soap opera on television or a film (with all the accompanying experiences of cinema) - there is a significant, if tacit, recognition of the fact that different genres have different expectations attached to them
- other people are being represented who belong to a world which is not recognisably theirs
- events are fictional or occurred in the past
- the violence could not actually happen in the way depicted.
- the participants also read the cues being offered to them within the action and prepare themselves for it. These include:
 - visual cues such as changes in facial expression or the posture of protagonists
 - the depiction of violent weapons
 - aural cues such as shouting and aggression
 - the use of music and other production techniques such as the slowing of camera shots

8. *Moving Images: – Understanding Children's Emotional Responses to Television*; D. Buckingham; Manchester University Press, 1996

Nonetheless the participant's emotional response to violence varies from individual to individual, dependent on:

- that person's exposure to violence, through television, video and film
- their age
- their gender
- the environment in which they are viewing: at home, with others, in a cinema
- the child's maturity and personality.

Real violence that one might encounter in the street, the school playground or at home, is of far more concern. Coping strategies are discussed during school lessons (where there are many explicit anti-bullying initiatives in place), with parents and with the peer group. However, there seems to be a tacit agreement that resolution of conflict cannot always be arrived at peaceably and it is clear that many of the older participants, especially the males, have used violence to get themselves out of difficult situations.

The female participants are more likely to seek to avoid violence, by walking away from it or trying to use language and communication skills to find their way out of a difficult situation. Nonetheless, like boys, if these techniques do not work, a number of the older girls say they will use violent means.

'Gangs in our class – more verbal with girls, boys punch.'
(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

'Boys are more violent. They just starting hitting each other. Girls just get bugged more with the name calling.'
(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

3. Genres and clips⁹

It is clear that participants have defined expectations based on the genre of programme or film they are viewing. This series of comments shows how these expectations, derived from genre, spill over into expectations about the type of violence that will be seen.

Imagine violence on children's drama:

'It would be over a petty argument.'

'It would be verbal or punching or kicking.'

Imagine a television drama:

'More violent.'

'Slower, with music and bravery.'

Dramas like *Casualty*:

'It can happen.'

'A wider range of violence.'

Imagine a film:

'Lots of violence.'

'A happy ending, the goodies win.'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

Participants were asked to rate the clips that they were shown on a scale of 0-10 where 0 = not violent at all and 10 = very violent. They were given no clues as to what 'violent' might mean, what loading such a term might have, but were asked to do this spontaneously. The reasons for their rating were then discussed fully.

News items

Participants' exposure to the news bulletins on television is limited and it is generally thought of as the domain of adults and rather dull. Nonetheless, the news is universally believed to be accurate and real, and if an event is on the news there is recognition that it must be important.

9. See Appendix 2 for a description of the clips used in the research and the groups that viewed them.

The research found that parents initially filter much of the news, especially bad news. This can add an extra dimension to the event, giving it an additional importance and seriousness. In many cases, parental intervention or anxiety created by the news has a direct effect on children's lives and participants talk of the additional concerns for their personal safety and the concomitant restrictions placed on them.

Those news stories which do not have a direct relevance, such as news from other countries, might prick the conscience of some, especially older girls, but as the findings below show the involvement or concern is not about violence. This is because, while something may be sad and morally wrong, participants feel distant from the events (emotionally and geographically) and do not identify with what they see.

'Palestine and Israel is an ongoing thing. You can eat breakfast and know that people are dying.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

There is also the feeling that it is sometimes necessary to use depictions of violence within news stories.

'If they have been raped or something, it's bad, but if it's just from a war . . .'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

News from the United Kingdom

'It really happened and it's not on the other side of the world.'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

Participants were shown a clip from a news item in which primary school-aged children in Northern Ireland had to run a gauntlet of abuse and taunts on their way to school with their parents. This clip is seen as relatively low in terms of a violence rating (3–4 out of 10). This is because there is no physical violence seen and participants do not generally see the less targeted sort of shouting shown as 'violence'.

'It's not physical hurt, it's mental hurt.'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

'Not violent. Lady only put finger up. Bottle didn't hit anyone. No blood. It could happen to our school. Would be more violent in our own area.'

(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

Further there is a sense, for most, that the presence of the police will limit any violence these children might be subjected to and the events took place in a public space which would limit the physical violence.

*'Not violence because you didn't see anyone get hurt and the police were there.
Less violent because Catholics and Protestants.'*
(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

Also, to these participants, Northern Ireland is 'not here' and so there is a lack of real identification and personal relevance.

'Unless you are going through it, it wouldn't upset you.'
(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

This is not to say that the scenes did not make the participants concerned – they are sad for the children involved and, because there were children involved, they can empathise with the children's fear.

'It isn't violent but I think it's quite bad for the kids.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

For the violence rating to be raised, participants say the scenes would need to be localised – in a road or place that is recognised, by them and by their friends.

'Local things, not the main news. It's real and close to you.'
(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

'If you're closer and those adults were doing it to us. I would be so scared.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

News and violence elsewhere in the world

'If it happens in other countries, you don't sympathise.'
(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

It is not quite true to say that participants always require news reporting to be on their doorstep for it to feel violent. Each group spontaneously mentions the attacks on September 11 2001, even though no clips were shown in the groups. In particular they focus on the events in New York, rather than the other attacks.

'Violent because it's resulted in war.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

Much has been made of the film-like quality of the event and children talk of the visual aspects of the scenes, such as the aeroplanes going into the World Trade Center or the shots of buildings collapsing. However, these participants do not dwell on these. They recognise the seriousness of the event.

'Because you saw the plane go in and people dropping out of the building. And you thought it was only a joke until you got the full story. And then you thought, "Oh, my God, people jumping out."'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

Certainly the attacks have made children and young people reassess and think about real-life violence. Despite the geographical distance of the events, there is a strong sense of identification. Many of the children have been to the United States, all have seen films or television programmes depicting the country, especially New York. There is a strong sense that, despite the distance, the United States is a 'country like ours' and the United Kingdom and United States are 'friends'. For many of the sample, the United States is aspirational and somewhere that they would like to go.

Added to this is the strong identification with the pain of the people involved. The participants spoke of many of the scenes extending in and around that time:

- people jumping and fleeing
- the loss of the firemen, which particularly concerned many of the participants
- the rescue and recovery operation
- the way in which the people of New York responded and rallied around
- the individualisation of the victims, through photographs, telephone calls, the faces of relatives.

'Lots of people dying. Jumping out of buildings. Screaming.'

(Boys aged 12-13, Edgware)

'And they know they are going to die, they are not going to see their families again. They are trying to make their struggle, but they know that something has . . . [happened].'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

However, much more salient to these participants is the fact that the consequences of this violence are not at an end. In their words, the 'baddie' (quickly identified) has not yet been caught. The network of terrorists that he is claimed to lead has not been closed. The threat remains and it is quite clear that these participants feel strongly that they themselves, and their families, may be under direct threat through his actions.

'I'm scared about my dad working in town – they might bomb London.'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

These reactions contrast with the reactions to a news clip shown, but only to children aged 10 years and over, from the conflict in Palestine. Within the report, the presenter says that a 10-year-old boy has been killed. No footage is seen of the child's killing, which was transmitted at the time of the event, but not before the Watershed.

While the participants give this news item a high rating for violence (7–9 out of 10), they are actually rating it for the consequences of the violence. They are making assumptions about the violence, rather than the physical acts they see.

The presenter informs the viewer that violence is being witnessed and that a 10-year-old was killed. There is an understanding that this is part of an ongoing conflict, with no recognised resolution in sight. Nonetheless there are elements of violence that are recognised, such as the rioting crowds, the fact that people are wounded and that live ammunition is used.

‘They said children had been killed and they had guns too, because it’s real life. People are firing missiles and kids are being killed because both sides are shooting.’
(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

However, the piece does not impact on participants personally – they do not identify with either side, they do not identify with the location. Although there is a child involved, he is referred to rather than seen and the participants display a limited understanding of the politics of the situation.

There is also the suggestion that the familiarity of the scenes, the familiar-sounding reference to the ‘Middle East conflict’ means that – to some – this has become ‘boring news’.

Sport and news

One of the clips shown was an item within a sports round-up on a news programme. It showed a footballer fouling and then stamping on the head of his fallen opponent. The sequence was shown in real time and subsequently repeated in slow motion. Participants rate this differently, depending on their gender – male participants rate it high on a scale of 0–10, while girls are less likely to do so.

‘That’s a 10, straight away. That’s real life. It’s not funny.’
(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

Boys, in particular, recognise this as violent, partly because of the fact that it is clearly intended to hurt and also because the antagonist has broken the rules of fair play. They also feel that the fact the incident is repeated on television increases the sense of this being a violent act – the fact that it is on the news adds to its significance.

‘Attitude (of the footballer) makes it more violent.’
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

The boys are far better able to empathise with the victim: they can visualise the studs hitting the head and so ‘feel’ the pain of the victim. They comment on the way in which the victim’s head jerks back, saying it is unnatural and, therefore, must be painful. For the boys, the fact that the violence is both unexpected and intended raises the ‘violence’ quotient.

The girls in the sample, on the other hand, claim to feel no empathy with the game of football and so their interest in the incident is significantly lower than the boys.

‘If you’re going to play football, you’ve got to know that there’s a 90 percent chance of having violence against you.’

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

They argue that such behaviour is expected in sport and that the act was quick and no blood is seen.

‘It’s more violent because it’s real people, but less violent because it’s football!’

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

Again, this clip highlights the importance of identification, especially for these participants.

Wildlife programmes

Complaints are often made to the regulators about pre-Watershed programmes that deal with natural phenomena, especially animals. The clip shown to a number of the groups depicts a stoat chasing a hare. The victim is eventually caught and eaten. The chase sequence is accompanied by music. These participants, while accepting that wildlife programmes can be gory and upsetting, do not classify them as ‘violence’.

‘Probably about 7 – it’s gory rather than violent.’

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

They talk about this sequence in terms of natural behaviour and the food chain. The use of the music does not appear to impact on participants.

When asked what would make the clip appear more violent, participants mention violence perpetrated by a human who is chasing and killing the animal for sport or for fun.

Soap operas

Soap operas are widely viewed and often as a family. Therefore, participants talk about them and they are spontaneously mentioned, especially by the younger children in the sample, as the most 'violent' programmes they view on television.

'Soaps are realistic. But they go on every day.'

(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

But the quotidian nature of the genre means they are well understood and participants seem able to distance themselves from the issues presented. There is a view that the violence is part of the entertainment value of this genre and some cynical comment that much of it is gratuitous and designed to aid a ratings battle between competing soap operas.

'They leave scenes halfway through which is good because it makes you want to watch more.'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

There is also awareness that the Watershed will limit the amount of violence that can be depicted, although many say that the violence or action is always 'over the top'.

'Soaps aren't that bad because they are not allowed to be because of the time that they are on.'

(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

Certain storylines were mentioned spontaneously (the domestic violence storyline in *EastEnders* and the murderer in *Coronation Street*) and, while some of these participants say they make them uncomfortable, these programmes do not seem to elicit real worries. This is because participants are able to be distant from them and the genre of the soap opera. While the storylines can engender suspense and excitement, fear is rarely mentioned.

'I don't really mind seeing it . . . because it's not actually happening near me, it's only happening on the telly and they can't exactly come through the TV and start fighting.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

Another distancing mechanism, that is particular to the soap opera, is that it is the genre most likely to be viewed with others, either within the family or with the peer group. This means that there is a sense of the shared experience and there is often open conversation about the issues involved.¹⁰

10 *Soap Box or Soft Soap? Audience attitudes to the British soap opera*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave with Lucy Gatfield; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002.

EastEnders

In this scene from the long-running and popular soap opera *EastEnders*, a character beats and kicks a young man because the young man will not give him information he requires. The two men have the sort of relationship one would expect to find within a family, it is claimed.

The scene, as played in most of the groups, was not shown as transmitted. In the transmitted version the scenes of violence are intercut with another scene set in a more convivial atmosphere. These intercut scenes were removed in this research to see what effect the concentration of action would have on attitudes. In fact, participants rate the edited scene highly, at 6–8 out of 10.

The reasons that they do not rate the sequence even more highly are because of their knowledge of the genre of soap operas and their appreciation of the fictional nature of both action and characters.

'But it's part of soaps, people beating people up.'

(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

'I would imagine it in a soap because soaps are about drama.'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

The perpetrator of the violence is known to lose his temper and react physically – he has been seen to do so many times in previous episodes.

'Phil always gets away with everything.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

There is no true engagement at an emotional level, and the impact of individual scenes is quickly forgotten.

'Only acting in a soap, just pretending.'

(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

'I thought it quite realistic but not very scary.'

(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

While individual scenes might be quickly forgotten, this is not always true of the issues raised. Some of the participants talk about another storyline involving domestic violence, with which they identify more and find more emotionally distressing. They talk of the mental violence and cruelty within that situation, rather than the physical abuse the victim suffered.

'Yes, because he hurt her in her heart as well.'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

Participants also feel that the pre-publicity for soap operas is such that there is no surprise and expectations are often set ahead of the action.

Nonetheless there are elements that are recognised as adding to the level of violence. These include:

- the build-up of the action, which moved from verbal to physical violence

'When people shout you know something's going to happen – it's never for no reason.'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

- the unfairness of the fight - the characters were physically unequal
- the brutality of the beating and kicking
- the reaction of the character (Sonia) who was looking on

'More acting, eyes red, screaming.'

(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

Participants also recognise that the actual physical violence depicted is quite graphic for a soap opera. In particular they talk of the noise of the blows and the sound of the victim falling against a wall. They also talk of the hysterical screams of the onlooker and say that the camera angles and pace of the way in which the scene is shot contribute to the sense of violence.

Participants agree that if a child is involved then that would make the scene more distressing and violent. The nature of the relationship between the two protagonists (like that between members of a family) also makes participants rate the violence higher than they might otherwise do.

'He's actually punching someone from his family. I'd never punch someone from my family.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

When asked if the fact that the action is set within a home environment increases their sense of violence, these participants did not necessarily agree. This is because their perceptions are always overlaid with the fact that they are watching a soap opera.

In summary, while soap operas are recognised as representing true-to-life environments with realistic characters and storylines derived from everyday issues, these participants rarely seem to become involved enough with the issues to be worried by the content. This may be because the world represented in a soap opera such as *EastEnders* is an adult world, with adult issues, and there is little real identification taking place. Should the violence occur against a child, then the reactions are likely to be different – certainly the abuse of the close family relationship in this clip causes some concern.

Drama series

In contrast with soap operas, dramas are seen to be closer to real life. While participants recognise that drama is scripted and, therefore, not real, the way in which the violence can be depicted and the empathy that is built with certain characters can engender a strong emotional response. This is especially true if the setting represents their environment and it is something they can imagine happening. One-off dramas which deal with specific and ‘real’ issues, however, appear to have greater impact than ongoing drama series such as *Casualty* or *Holby City* (a clip of which was shown). This is because familiarity with the programme can reduce the sense of violence. The one-off drama made for children, *Behind Closed Doors* (part of the series of programmes on domestic abuse, *Hitting Home*) was spontaneously mentioned by some younger participants, especially girls, as the most violent programme they had ever seen on television (discussed below).

Holby City

In this clip a nurse, who chases two young men into a storeroom, is stabbed. Participants gave this a high violence rating, on average 8-10 out of 10. It is the clip which creates the most immediate and visceral reaction among the groups, with gasps heard and shocked faces. In discussion it is clear that there are a series of factors at play which make this a shocking scene.

- The victim of the violence is an unarmed woman who is stabbed. The unevenness of the power relationship in this clip makes it both disturbing and unacceptable.

‘A single woman feels more vulnerable.’
(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

- The victim’s role as a nurse and, therefore, a ‘good’ person is also abused.

‘It was actually one of the nurses that were trying to help people.’
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

- Further, the setting of the violence within a hospital means that a place that should be safe and secure has been violated.

Nevertheless the fact that the nurse has chased the two men down some stairs, away from the main part of the hospital where there were other people, means that she is isolated and vulnerable. As we have seen a number of times, isolation is one of the variables that most disturbs the children and young people to whom we spoke.

'Shouldn't have been chasing. The police should have done it. Should've waited for them.'

(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

- In addition to the uneven relationship between protagonists and the context of the setting the actual violence seen is considered brutal and sudden with no possibility of any other resolution offered.

'I thought he was going to say, "You move or this goes in you."'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

Some of the participants argue that it would have been enough to have the two men, physically stronger than the victim, push past her, that she does not need to be stabbed.

- The speed of the action creates surprise for most participants. The victim is not seen to have any time to defend herself – the action is as surprising for her as it is for the audience.

'It wasn't expected until he picked it [the instrument] up.'

(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

- Some participants feel the action is not in keeping with the general expectations of a pre-Watershed drama series such as *Holby City*.¹¹ However, although the genre is familiar to many participants, it is not as familiar as soap operas.

'No, it's not what Holby City writers write.'

(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

'It is a soap, but give it a 10 because you heard it.'

(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

The compensating factor for the violence for some participants is that the storyline is about the men's desire for drugs and the fact that they will not stop at anything, even murder, to get them.

11. *Dramatic Licence: Fact or Fiction?*; Lucy Gatfield with Andrea Millwood Hargrave; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2003.

'Scary that the thing went into her and it would happen because they're on drugs, which make you do mad things.'

(Girls, aged 11-12, Windsor)

Some children in the groups, especially older children or those more exposed to violent films, show themselves to be more sensitive to the subtle cues that are present in the sequence and so say they are less surprised by the violence when it occurs. They comment on:

- a camera shot focusing on the instruments in the storeroom
- the look of panic on the nurse's face

'The look on her face when he was holding the knife.'

(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

- the attacker's demeanour – he seems out of control and wild

'Didn't like the way the man approached the girl. He knocked everything over and just stood there and didn't say much.'

(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

- the man throwing the implements to the floor

The importance of consequences to these participants is seen once again, in a different context. The attackers are seen to run away as the sequence ends (as does the episode). The audience does not know if the victim will die, nor do they know if the attackers will be caught. The lack of closure is concerning to many.

The Bill

This clip from the popular drama series, based around a police station, showed a female police officer blindfolded, bound and gagged in an empty warehouse. The clip polarised participants, who generally give it a low violence rating, but have different reactions to it. The key discriminator is the maturity of the audience and how well the participant can identify with, or empathise with, the victim and her situation.

'I'd give it 0 because no one is actually getting hurt.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

The scene is thought to be realistic, especially in the way the officer tries to talk to her kidnapper and identify him or her. Her vulnerability (the fact that she cannot see or move) and her rising sense of panic all add to the sense of threat of violence within the scene. Other cues noted include the setting: again, an isolated place (an empty warehouse) with no sense that there is any escape. The aural cue of a sharpening knife adds to this tension.

'It was more worrying and scary – didn't know what was going to happen.'
(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

***Behind Closed Doors* (from the *Hitting Home* series)**

Responses to this clip vary, with participants reacting in different ways to the sequence shown. In this, a young boy taunts his stepfather to-be, who then beats him up (off-screen). The sequence moves from the dialogue between the boy and man to the ambulance taking the boy to hospital. He is seen drifting in and out of consciousness.

The differences in reaction vary by the participant's ability to:

- imagine violence

'I didn't feel much at first because I didn't actually see things. But deep inside, you can actually feel it.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

- understand the issues under consideration
- appreciate the nature of the relationship
- empathise with the situation and characters
- put the storyline in the context of their everyday lives, or recognise aspects of their own relationships in it.

Younger children, in particular, seem less able to understand the action that is unfolding. Not having seen a visual depiction of violence, they are not always clear what the scene in the ambulance is about. Indeed, for many participants, the fact that no violent action is seen diminishes the perception of violence within the sequence, despite the consequences.

'I put 6 but higher if you actually saw him beating him up.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

'It wasn't violent at first, but you saw the marks on the face.'
(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

For other – often older – participants the ordinary, everyday nature of the scene increases their sense of its reality. Both the dialogue between the adult and the child and the nature of the row are seen to be realistic and could be imagined. The actual violence need not be seen.

'Violent because it does happen. Makes a difference because sometimes you know it won't happen but if you do then it's worse.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

'When you see it, it's less. Sometimes if you don't see it, it seems more.'
(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

Interestingly, many feel that, while the child is felt to have a right to be upset, the attitude and manner of the stepfather seems reasonable at first. Out of context with the rest of the drama, this makes his subsequent attack on the child both more surprising and frightening in its unpredictability. As with many of the other clips, there is a range of cues that the participants pick up and this affects how they react to the scene. The unequal relationship, both in terms of authority and in terms of physical strength, between the male adult and the child is commented upon. Within this is the dilemma posed by the relationship. Many participants argue that a parent-child relationship should be a 'safe' relationship and the abuse of trust by the stepfather elicits dismay. However, some participants feel that it is a 'classic' tale of the wicked step-parent and that predictability is commented upon.

'You wouldn't expect a stepdad to attack his own stepkid. It's like family – they don't attack each other.'
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

'Stepdads are supposed to be bad, Mums aren't. You don't know what to expect from a stranger.'
(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

There was some discussion as to whether or not the child provokes the adult by taunting him about his relationship and rejecting him as a parent figure, although most agree the adult goes much too far and should show some restraint.

'A stepdad, he has a reason. The boy called him stupid, but he took it too far.'
(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

It is clear from some participants in the groups that a certain amount of physical violence within the family is acceptable, although the levels portrayed in this clip (severe enough for the child to be taken to hospital in an ambulance) are not.

'I don't think calling him "stupid" was enough reason.'
(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

In terms of the elements that increase the violence rating of this scene, there were many:

'The blood, being in the ambulance and the music and thinking about the fact that it could happen to you with your stepdad.'
(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

- the shouting of the protagonists
- the way in which the mood of the adult switched from verbal to physical (albeit unseen) abuse
- the surprise and lack of preparedness for the violent attack
- the ordinary, everyday setting and the fact that participants think the attack takes place in hedges at the side of the road
- in turn, this means that participants feel the attack on the boy is hidden and there is uncertainty when he will be found, who will find him
- the severity of the attack which is indicated by a number of cues showing the consequences of the violence. These include:
 - the fact that an ambulance was required
 - the look of the boy, with cuts and bruises to his face
 - his need for oxygen and hospitalisation

‘All the blood on his face and apparatus in the ambulance.’
 (Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

Some of the older participants referred to the more subtle cues they noted:

- the build up of tension and shouting
- the sound of the boy crying out
- the use of music to create tension and atmosphere
- the sound of the ambulance siren after the row and as the scene moved to the ambulance sequence.

‘You can hear him as he goes down and then you hear the ambulance.’
 (Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

- the changing focus/hazing effect which suggests the boy is lapsing in and out of consciousness.

One of the areas that is of interest is whether or not shouting is considered to be ‘violent’. In research with adults, it is certainly seen to be and adds significantly to the violence loading of a scene. As this research among children shows, children are subject to a significant amount of shouting in their lives. This means that, while it is disliked, it is never spontaneously mentioned as being ‘violent’. It is recognised, however, that it can be part of the general build-up to violence, an indicator that physical violence might occur. Therefore, it can be a contributory factor in the violence loading of a scene. This is especially true if it is combined with:

- threats and swearing
- aggressive body language
- an aggressive tone of voice.

If shouting occurs within a scene which depicts physical violence, then it will be included by participants as an element of the overall violence rating of a sequence.

'When they have guns and they are going to fight after shouting.'
(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

When asked what would make the scene more violent, most participants agree that to see the attack would have a significant effect. Such a scene is also made more violent if the attack is thought to be totally unprovoked.

'He's not that innocent because he shouldn't have given him the backchat.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

In addition to seeing the physical consequences of the violence, there is some discussion about the other consequences and a call for justice. It is assumed that the adult will be punished. If not, this would make the violence seem worse. Not only are there the issues of a betrayal of trust and unequal power, but also the lack of any punishment would suggest that such abuse might be ongoing. The possibility of it continuing in the home is worrying to many participants.

'But it was a while before he [stepfather] got found out. It happened a few times.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

Children's programming

Grange Hill

'It's not fair – it's not their fault what colour they are.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

This clip which showed shouting and racist abuse was considered to have a low violence rating (0–2 out of 10) due to a number of factors:

- The programme is an established children's drama series and carries certain expectations with it.

'It wouldn't be that violent, anyway.'
(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

- It needs to be appropriate for its target audience and there is a lack of realism associated with it.

'Well, it wouldn't be very violent anyway because it's for kids.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

- The children are often involved in arguments and fighting, but there is never any graphic violence (such as weapons and only a limited amount of punching/kicking)

'No, it's what they're saying and why they're saying it.'
(Girls, aged 11-12, Windsor)

- The environment is open and public.

Nonetheless, many of the participants express concern about racism:

'Bit more violent because they were going on about his skin. Making fun of them.'
(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

Clip from SMTV

Within this clip a plastic toy gun is used and the presenters (Ant and Dec) are seen to fall down. No participants think this clip is in the least bit violent – so much so that it was not played in later groups. Participants recognise the Ant and Dec characters, known for their zany and much enjoyed humour. The popularity of the show means that the action is never misunderstood and is never seen to be serious or even to have serious undertones.

'And you know that Ant and Dec aren't serious people.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

Film and cartoons

Clips from two cinema films were shown, both of which incorporated elements of fantasy. One was from *Scooby Doo*, in which various characters, including animals, fight. Almost all participants give this a low rating for violence (0–2 out of 10), seeing it as slapstick and fun.

'Comedy damps down the violence.'
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

'You know they're going to be all right because it's a cartoon.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

For all the groups that saw this, the sequence adheres to the rules for cartoon fantasy – even though the action includes human beings. The pace and the music serve to accentuate the caricatures and the 'goodies' triumph over the bad characters, totally.

'The music stopped it being violent.'
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

Despite recognising the martial arts aspect of the sequence, participants accept it as being totally unrealistic and it provokes laughter. Indeed, the action creates excitement. The researchers used this clip at the end of the groups to lighten the tension that may have built up as a result of some of the other clips.

'No one could kick and spin in the air. Not real.'
(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

The second set of clips was from *Spider-Man* and some reactions to this were rather different, despite it being seen, always, as cartoon-based.

'It seems for younger kids. Expect it to be a PG, but it was a 12.'
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

There was some discussion about the fact that the film had been given a 12 rating by the BBFC, which was subsequently changed to a 12A (advisory that it is suitable for those aged 12 and over, but under 12s can see it if accompanied by an adult). Some participants think that the change to what is seen as a lower rating (from 12 to 12A) means that they will automatically take less notice of such a rating and want to see films rated for an older audience.

Within most groups, participants saw a scene set in a warehouse in which *Spider-Man* (still in nascent form) traps a villain who has killed his uncle. Participants rate this over quite a broad range, 3–6 out of a possible 10. There are certain violent elements and cues that they take from the clip.

- Spider-Man's anger when he recalls where he has seen the villain before
- the smashing of the villain's head against a glass window

'Because there were knives in it, people getting their heads smashed through glass and I thought it would be above 5, so I gave it a 6.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

- physical injury
- the use of a weapon
- the overall atmosphere of the setting, especially the darkness

'The atmosphere – it was dark, in a dark room, broken down, spider's webs.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

- the fact that the villain dies at the end.

Almost all participants insist there is clear justification for the violence, however, that comes from the fact that the violence is seen as an act of revenge, for the killing of Spider-Man's uncle. The resolution, the death of the murderer, is seen as morally right.

'Would be more violent if he hadn't killed the uncle.'

(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

Nevertheless, the overall impression of violence is limited by the genre (based on a cartoon character) and the unreal aspects of the scene, which outweigh those that are considered real.

'The cartoon isn't real, but with it being human it could have been real. More real than a cartoon.'

(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

Participants comment on the fact that:

- Spider-Man is a comic, superhero and fantasy.

'You know he's going to win. He'll never lose.'

(Boys, aged 9-10, Windsor)

- There are no blood, guts and gore to speak of despite all the physical violence portrayed.

'More violence if he takes him out with blood and guts.'

(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

- The violence is an act of revenge and so justified.

'Less (violent) – he's killed Spider-Man's uncle – he's got feelings – he's not going to think, he's just going to do it.'

(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

- It is a familiar and acceptable relationship e.g. goodie versus baddie.

- The atmosphere is built up so that the violence is expected. The eventual death was not a result of the violence, but the fact that the murderer trips.

'If it was an intentional, not an accidental death (that would make it more violent).'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

Besides these factors which come from familiarity with production techniques, these participants show a keen understanding of other cues:

- They can anticipate the villain's death because Spider-Man removes his mask.

'You could kind of tell that the man was going to die because Spider-Man wouldn't have taken off his mask if he wasn't intent on killing him.'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

- They know Spider-Man will live because this scene takes place at the beginning of the film and he is the hero.

Thus there are in the scenes moments of 'realism' and the potential to build anxiety and suspense for the viewer, but the nature of the genre and the context of the violence (the Spider-Man myth) transcends the storyline and mitigates the violence. The scene keeps to the rules that are expected in this sort of film and reinforces certain entertainment values such as action and fun and moral right.

A further scene from *Spider-Man* was played to the editing groups: in this scene, Spider-Man fights the villain, the Green Goblin. This is given a far higher spontaneous rating (7-8 out of 10) because it is considered to be overtly more violent. The elements that make it so are:

- the more 'realistic' fight, in that there is greater force used and more blood

'When he was fighting the Green Goblin and the thing goes through his stomach.

That was a 6 or 7 out of 10.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

- the portrayal of violence, especially through sound effects such as Spider-Man's slow and heavy breathing and moaning or the blood pouring from his face
- the dark and remote setting
- the relentless nature of the violence - not only is Spider-Man losing and is hurt (which in itself is unexpected) - but the scene goes on for a long time as well.

Despite this higher violence rating and despite the fact that the realism of the scene is greater than either of the other two film scenes shown, this scene remains, for participants, a fantasy. The impact of the violence is reduced by:

- the overall storyline
- the Green Goblin character
- the comic book language, feel and imagery such as webs and the exploding ball used by the Green Goblin
- the excessive force used, which some participants find to be almost slapstick.

'Green Goblin makes it more of a cartoon.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Edgware)

Film and realistic fantasy

Participants aged 10 and over were shown clips from *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. Most saw a short clip from a scene in which the Hobbits, with their protectors, are attacked by the Orcs. In this sequence one of the protectors is seen to go down (in slow motion) in a hail of arrows. The editing groups saw a fuller version of the same scene. In this, an Orc's head is cut off. The shorter version will be discussed first:

'It was fantasy, with a bit of violence.'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

This clip has quite a high overall violence rating according to the spontaneous measure given by participants, at 7–9 out of 10. As before, there are clear elements and cues that serve to make it so violent:

- the heroic central character
- 'baddies' killing 'goodies'
- the inequality of the battle: a few against many
- the visual appearance of the Orcs, who were just human-like enough not to create a total distance from the audience. They also had recognisably human expressions and behaviour.

'You know they are not real, but you can get caught up with it for a moment.'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

'The faces – they're really horrible – scary faces – vampire like.'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

- the sense of horror that was noted; especially on the faces of the Hobbits (perceived as innocents in the sequence)
- the swords and arrows going into human flesh

'When the swords went in, you could hear it.'

(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

- a real sense of pain and anguish.

'You felt for his bravery, not the violence of being killed.'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

The challenging of expectations further increases the sense of violence: a hero is killed, the Hobbits are kidnapped. Participants identify with the characters. The context might be fantasy, but the characters under attack seem real, and the perpetrators of the violence are real enough. The Orcs are both frightening and behave in a recognisably human way.

'And Lord of the Rings is human beings.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Edgware)

'In Lord of the Rings it's more like real life, so it's more believable.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

The environment in which the scene is set is also an important factor in participants' responses. The action takes place in a dark forest, in an isolated place and this affects the violence rating.

'The forest they're in makes it more violent – don't know where they're coming from because of the trees.'
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

Importantly, in this clip, participants concentrate on the consequences of the violence. They 'feel' the pain of the good characters under attack and consider that the real weapons are seen inflicting real suffering.

However, for a number of participants the violence rating is tempered by the fact that it is a fantasy and the nature of the storyline is fantastical.

'It felt a bit weird because there was fighting with dwarves and Orcs and funny creatures and it's not so real. In Two Towers there's talking trees, which is less violent.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

While the depictions of suffering narrow the distance between viewer and screen for some, the unrealistic nature of the violence (the drawn-out wounding of a central character) reminds the audience this is not real.

'A normal person would die after one arrow.'
(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

'Managed to get up after being hit in the heart and the stomach and his side.'
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

Production techniques are mentioned: many are used, it is felt, to heighten the sense of pain, while others reduce it by reminding the audience they are watching ‘actors’. The techniques that add to the violence rating include:

- the pace and length of the scenes
- the use of slow motion

‘Adds, because you could see exactly what was happening, whereas if it was fast you wouldn’t see it.’

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

‘And it lasts longer when it is slow.’

(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

- the way the scenes are framed, for example, the way in which an Orc pulls back his bow to loose an arrow
- the consequences of the violence are seen and heard, such as the impact of swords and arrows
- the horror expressed by the Hobbits and their inability to act or react, created by their fear

‘And he suffers more. His face and hair was all wet with sweat.’

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

- there was no relief offered in this rather long scene which is unrelentingly dark and full of fear and pain.

‘If they want to make something more violent they should add more darkness to it.’

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

‘Because there were swords and stabbing. There were good screams in pain. You could see the pain on his face. His reactions.’

(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

The production techniques recognised by participants which allow them to catch their breath and avoid total immersion in the scene are:

- the heroic music, which engenders feelings of sadness and upset for the fact that the hero (in this scene) will die
- the absence of blood, guts and gore

- the relentlessness of the scene which, for some, diminishes the sense of violence because it is not felt to be realistic.

'No, Tolkien is fantasy. It's not supposed to be realistic.'
(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

Participants in the editing groups saw a longer version of the scene, which included an Orc's head being chopped off. This clip is certainly considered to be more violent than that seen in other groups. There is a shift in emphasis, with greater concentration on the combat, rather than pain. The fights are pacier, with more weapons and the two sides more equal in number. The music also changes the mood, becoming fast so the overall reaction is one of excitement, rather than sadness as in the previous clip.

'Make it shorter, quicker, less violence for young. Make it longer, slow motion for older boys.'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Edgware)

Conclusion

In summary, the sense of violence within a programme or film, is affected by a number of variables.

- **Build-up to the violence:** The shock of an act of violence is increased if the audience cannot read any cues or if the violence is unexpected.

'But films have certificates and the news doesn't tell you what it's going to be like.'
(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

- **Consequence of the violence:** This is particularly important to children, who have a clear sense of what is right and what is wrong. This research found that the consequences of a violent action could increase the violence loading. This is especially true if the act is felt to be unprovoked or unnecessary. There is little tolerance of violence for violence's sake, except in action-type films, among this sample. The violence loading is also increased if the violence is unpunished or if it is felt that it can happen again.

'More violent if he gets away with it – might do it again.'
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

Certainly violence that is seen to end in a death is a particular concern.

'More violent because dying is more violent than just having an injury!'
(Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

- Relationship between protagonists:** This is as important to this sample as it is to adults. The violence loading is significantly increased if the contest is felt to be unfair, whether because the victim is physically weaker or is outnumbered or is attacked with a weapon while unarmed. There is a clear concern about those sequences which involve a violent threat from a stranger, yet those scenes which show a parent-child relationship being abused creates most discomfort. This is because such material is felt to break established rules and norms.

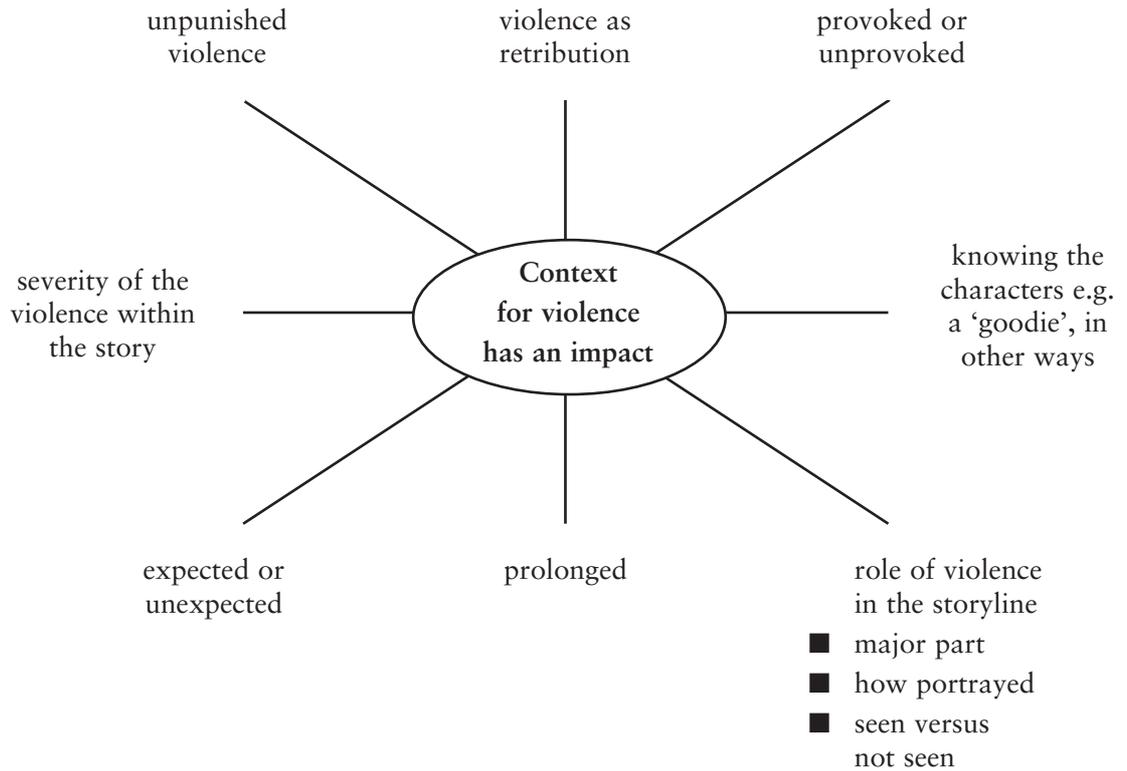
‘If it had been his mum [it would have been more violent] because usually mums care for children more than dads do.’
 (Boys, aged 10-11, Wolverhampton)

- The environment or physical context of the violence:** The diagram below illustrates how the environment in which the violence is set affects the way in which the scene is received, reflecting anxieties about dark and isolation that children carry with them.

Environment			
Anywhere isolated	Being trapped	‘Safe’ places	In the home
e.g. woods, deserted warehouse ■ No one can help/rescue ■ Concept of being alone is frightening ■ Violent act could be limitless and unwitnessed Taps into childhood fears (especially if dark)	e.g alleyway ■ Nowhere to run ■ Violence is expected Worse if combined with: ■ darkness ■ no witnesses	e.g. school or hospital ■ Should be safe and caring place Increases sense of violence and their vulnerability	■ Home = sanctuary and where you should feel safe ■ Private Child’s bedroom seen to be the most extreme place for violence

- Understanding of storyline:** As this diagram shows, the way in which the violence is presented within the storyline is important for the way in which it is received. These participants express as much dislike of gratuitous violence as do adults.

Understanding of storyline



Indicators for programme-makers

It is clear that there are a number of variables that need to be taken into account when depicting scenes of violence that children are likely to see. One of the prime considerations is the reality and closeness of the action to their own lives. That is the area that creates most discomfort and concern and plays to children's own anxieties.

Some questions posed by children as they view are:

- Is it real?
- Has it happened?
- Could it happen (e.g. supernatural)?
- Has it been portrayed in a realistic way?
- Is it in the present?
- Is it real to children/'me'?
- Is it seen to involve 'somebody like me'?

Another important consideration is what role the violence is seen to play within the storyline:

- Is it unfair?
- Is it used to resolve conflict or is it ongoing?
- Is there a reason for the violence? What is that reason – is it justified (e.g. revenge)?
- Is it expected or predictable?
- Could it have been avoided?

Also important are the consequences of the violence:

- Is the perpetrator caught?
- Is the violence punished?
- How severe are the injuries?
- Does someone die?

As is the relationship between the characters:

- How does the relationship impact on the justification for the violence?
- Is the aggressor a trusted figure?
- Is the violence against a child?

Genre is important as is the platform on which the material is being viewed:

- Is the violence being viewed in the cinema or at home?
- Alone or with the family or with friends?
- What are the genres and the expectations within that genre?

4. The Viewing Experience

At the time of writing, 59% of homes had access to multichannel television, through some platform such as cable or via satellite, digital or analogue.¹² Fifty seven per cent of children have television sets in their bedrooms and this increases to 79% of those aged 10-15, broadly the age range of the participants in this study.¹³

This research also found high levels of ownership of in-home entertainment among the sample, including multichannel television, with film often an integral part of the cable or satellite package bought by the household.

'All his brains came out when he was shot. I've got DVD surround sound and it felt like you were really there. Then I just forgot about it.'

(Girls, aged 11-12, Edgware)

As noted elsewhere,¹⁴ there is high awareness of the Watershed at 9.00 p.m. Even the younger participants in this sample are aware that programmes become more adult and less suitable for children as the evening progresses. Many talk about 9.00 p.m. as being the cut off point, while others talk about programmes that occur *'after the news'*. The Watershed is generally thought to be there to protect them from unsuitable material, often thought to be *'rude'* or containing swearing. The older the participant, the less relevant the Watershed is felt to be.¹⁵

'Because of the sex. Mum tells me to turn it off.'

(Girls, aged 9, Wolverhampton)

'Swear words, Mum says it reflects on her.'

(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

It is perhaps not surprising to note, therefore, that participants admit to watching films that are classified beyond their age range (so that 12-year-olds say they frequently watch films classified as '15'), often with the complicity of their parents.¹⁶ Fathers and older siblings are the most likely members of the household to allow, and sometimes actively encourage, such out-of-bounds viewing.

'My Dad doesn't really mind what I watch because he knows that one day I am going to see it. But my Mum, she don't think it's right for my age and she will try and stop me.'

12. *Public's View 2002*; Dr R. C. Towler; Independent Television Commission and Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2003.

13. Data based on age of eldest child in household.

14. *The Watershed: Providing a Safe Viewing Zone*; Gillian Ramsay; British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting Standards Commission and Independent Television Commission, to be published at the time of writing, 2003.

15. *Striking a Balance: the control of children's media consumption*; Edited by Pam Hanley; British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting Standards Commission and Independent Television Commission, 2002.

16. *Viewers and Family Viewing Policy*; Dr R. C. Towler; British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting Standards Commission and Independent Television Commission, 2001.

'My Mum doesn't mind if it's a 15, but if it's 18 and got sex and stuff in, she's a bit dubious, but I just watch it anyway.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

This research looked specifically at the viewing experience within the cinema compared with the home, especially of film. The BBFC, whilst using the same Guidelines for classifying film and video, does take into account the impact of the cinema experience and has been known to down-rate the video versions of some films because of the loss of impact on the small screen. However, the circumstance of home viewing of video/DVD can result in a higher category being awarded or even cuts required to the work, but the vast majority of videos are rated the same as the film version.

There is evidence of a wider range of viewing at home compared with the cinema, often condoned by a parent. This research found there is more age-appropriate viewing in cinemas than in the home. This is despite, the participants say, their efforts to look older and gain access to 'older' films at the cinema.

Q. Can you get into 15s?

'It depends on how tall you are.'

(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

The experience of going to the cinema is noted to be different from home. It is far more social, with much cinema-going involving one's peer group.

'You are with people in the cinema, so it makes you feel more secure.'

(Boys, aged 12-13, Thames Ditton)

It is an altogether more 'magnified' experience, with the dark and the size of the screen, and quality of sound, all heightening responses to what is seen.

'There are no walls.'

(Girls, aged 12-13, Halesowen)

Some participants also say the fact that there is nowhere to escape to, as there is at home, adds to the excitement of the experience. Further, the lack of ability to discuss events and so defuse an atmosphere is not accessible in the cinema.

'Sound effects louder at cinema.'

(Girls, aged 10-11, Thames Ditton)

'In the cinema it feels real because it's all around you. The sound is so loud around you.'

(Boys, aged 11-12, Halesowen)

While these can heighten the shock created by violent action, the fact that viewing is out of the home (considered a secure and safe place) and – for these participants – is often in the daytime, means they can leave their anxieties at the cinema.

This research concludes that film challenges the threshold for screen violence and young people, especially boys, are able to cope with very violent images because of the big-screen context. There is also the role of bravado and of peer status building:

'I've seen . . . have you seen?'
(Boys, aged 12-13, Edgware)

There has been much debate around the violent content of video games and an industry-based European age-based classification system came into effect on 1 April 2003. In the United Kingdom the BBFC continues to classify a small number of games which fall under the Video Recordings Act 1984 because they contain strong violence or human sexual activity. While the violence within video games was not discussed at any length in this research, it is clear that participants think they operate in a different way from the way in which violence is received from the television or cinema screen. When playing a game, the child is in control of the violence and so the sense of powerlessness which creates anxiety is removed. Further, the participants insist that these games are not real in any way, but are pure fantasy. The only anxiety they display revolves around their personal skill in getting to the next level within the game.

5. The difference between adults' and children's definition of violence

By Professor David Morrison, Institute of Communication Studies,
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Introductory statement

Perhaps one of the most significant findings, from a regulatory point of view, of the research into how adults defined violence was the uniformity of agreement found between disparate groups. In that study¹⁷ groups were recruited on the basis of their relationship to violence, ranging from 'tough' young men and women familiar with violence in places of entertainment, World War II combat veterans and police officers, to women who, never having experienced violence personally, were nevertheless fearful of either themselves or close relations becoming a victim of violence. Other groups recruited were based on standard demographics and included men and women with young children.

The fact that there was uniformity of agreement about what made an act involving violence into something that was violent is intriguing and, as stated, from a regulatory point of view important. What it means, ignoring approval or disapproval of scenes of violence, is that within Britain a consensus at the adult level exists in governing estimations of violence. Something was seen as violent if the act broke the accepted rules of performance; namely, that the force used was unjustified. In the research related to adults we called these the primary definers. These had to be in place before secondary definers could give an act a violence loading. The secondary definers were the way the violence was portrayed: the artistic manner of the presentation, such as the use of close-up shots, slowing down of moments of injury, and so on. Thus cartoon violence of the sort the children in this research were shown could not be violence because the primary definers were absent – moral rules governing behaviour could not easily be applied to animated characters.

Differences between adults and children

The above will be returned to later in an attempt to provide an overall framework for understanding children's responses to violence. For the moment, however, it is worth noting that children in the sample did not consider the cartoon violent acts they were shown, as violence. As one child said, 'Scooby Doo *could never be violent.*' Nor did they consider the scene of a stoat chasing and killing a hare as violence. In this, therefore, they did share similar estimations to those of adults concerning what violence has to be taken as meaning. But there the similarities by and large stop. Yet, in doing so, they give a clue as to why differences emerge. Children are children and adults are adults, indeed, it is best in understanding the differences to see children as individuals on the way to becoming adults. That is, similarities could be detected as part of the maturing process of internalising rules governing behaviour, but at the same time they were, at their stage of development, dependent upon the adult world for protection. Thus they tended to view material through the prism of their own concerns about the self and not from the concerns of the generalised 'other' that marked adults. By understanding this we can understand much in the differences of responses.

17. *Defining Violence: The Search for Understanding*; David E. Morrison et al; University of Luton, 1999.

Violence in the news

The perception of the degree of violence in the news was one of the most striking differences between children and adults. Children in the sample saw a high level of violence in the news, whereas adults in the previous study considered there to be little violence. This requires explanation and indeed points to important differences in the manner in which images are received between the respective groups.

For adults, for something to be violent the actual act had to be violent and had to be witnessed. This, therefore, excluded most of television news shown in this country, as it is rare for a camera to actually capture, even in war, the moment of injury to a person. The destruction of property, which might be caught on camera, was not violence, as buildings are inanimate objects. Violence had to be against a living thing. Dead bodies or injury were determined as the effect of violence and not violence itself. This is not to say that adults were not concerned about how the effects of violence were portrayed in the news, but that what was seen was usually not violence as such.

In a practical regulatory sense the above is mere semantics, yet it offers a crucial example of the differences in definitions of violence between adults and children. Children tended to define violence in terms not of that which was actually witnessed, but of the impression that the scene made upon them. In some ways this can be accounted for by differences between adults and children in the ability to make analytical distinction, but in another sense offers very real insight into what violence means for children, of how they construct something as violent, not just for news, but programmes in general.

How violent the scenes of September 11, with the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York, would have been ranked by adult viewers is difficult to say with certainty, for that research was undertaken before the event. However, extrapolating from responses to other material shown to the adults, it is probably fair to say that it would have been described as violent because of the fact it was an 'unfair event', but not especially so. The images seen were of the 'planes crashing into the towers, buildings collapsing, people running from the scene, rescue activity, and people either jumping or being blown from the building and falling to their death. However, in terms of how adults defined violence, that it had to be seen and it had to be against people not buildings, then more than likely it would not have been categorised as highly violent. Not so with the children in the sample. For them it was, almost universally, described as the most violent images they had seen on television. Indeed, for them, the news in general had a high violence loading in a way not the case with adults. This is not to say that adults did not find the news often shocking and disturbing. The images, however, tended to be discussed in terms of taste and decency, of whether images should be shown, rather than as the witnessing of violence as such.

It would seem, in listening to the children talk about images, and observing their reactions to images that, unlike adults, they did not filter out parts of images to then ascribe those parts as violent or not violent, but to extract, or rather build, an impression of violence.

Clearly the terrorist acts of September 11 were acts of violence, but that which was seen was the unfolding of a tragedy in the manner of an earthquake or some other event of destruction, leaving aside the falling bodies. The children, however, imbued the whole scene as violence and did so, one feels, because by describing it as violent they could capture the horror of what had taken place. It was violent, as one 12-13 year old boy said, *'because of knowing people in there are dying'*. Based on our past research, no adult would have said that and would not have done so because of analytically separating out that which was actually seen, from that which could be inferred. It was the impression that the pictures made that counted. As one 10-11 year old girl, commenting on the pictures of September 11 said: *'It stays with you forever.'*

Home alone

Like adults, for children violence involved injury. Mention was made of *'fighting'*, *'kicking'* and *'stabbing'*. Words such as *'gory'* were used to describe acts of violence. Although the study was not interested in whether or not violence was enjoyed, and neither was that the case with the adult study, it was difficult for the children not to express themselves in terms of enjoyment of that which was seen. Comments, especially from the boys, such as *'violence makes it more interesting'* were common. Violence was seen as exciting, but violence that was not perhaps enjoyed, or rather that made an impact upon them, was if it was scary. For children, and this was an important difference from adults, whether something was categorised as violence was connected to its ability to stay in the mind after the viewing. Indeed, the term *'scary'* often accompanied the description *'violence'*, something that was totally absent from the adults' definition of violence. In discussing a scene where a footballer has his head trampled, the comment was made, *'it was violent, but not scary'*, suggesting that it had limited impact.

Whether something *'stayed with them'* appeared to be a kind of *'haunting'*. That is, the violence frightened them because they wondered if it could be true for their lives. Thus, there was talk of programmes about the supernatural and comments made such as *'you wonder if it's true, like ghosts'*. Indeed, unlike adults, if something was *'true'* it more readily had the potential for being more violent. As one boy aged 11-12 said: *'If it's true it makes it more violent.'* This probably gives an explanation as to why news was defined as having a high violent content – it is a true depiction of events and happenings. It is also interesting that the outcome of violence assisted in building a violence loading. Did the person die, as the outcome of the violence, appeared to make the violence stronger than had the victim survived. What one sees in other words, and not seen among the adults, is that the consequences of violence take on a special place in judging acts to be violent. Adults judge the violence on the degree and manner of the injuries inflicted, not on the outcome of the injuries. Violence was judged as internal to the behaviour, not, as with the children, in a kind of morality play; that is, if the victim survived, then the violence could not have been that bad. This wishing to know - and children in the sample would often make enquiry of the moderator as to whether the injuries seen led to death - shows that violence is judged in terms of *'certainty'*. Children wish to know endings before they can make judgement. If the victim did not die, then in a way everything was all right. Whether the individual lived or not would, for adults, not alter the degree of violence seen.

In some ways this can probably be explained by the differences of analytical ability between adults and children in making judgements about violence, but it would seem that it relates also to a demand for security on the child's part, something that emerged at several points. The knowing of outcomes gives certainty to the world and one of the central findings, especially when compared to adults in the previous study, was the idea of personal security, both physically and, especially so, emotionally. Again, this would, in part, account for allocating a high level of violence to the news – it was something that was in, and of, this world, and therefore might affect them. As one girl, aged 12-13, commented: *'True stories make it more violent.'* To which she added: *'You feel it could happen.'*

In the adult groups it was certainly the case that authentic violence - that is violence set within a world recognisable as the individual's everyday world - had the potential, depending upon the secondary definers, to be the most violent. But it was not the case that something was more violent because it was close to home in the sense of threat. It has already been mentioned that the news was seen to include a lot of violence, which by the adults' definitions it did not, but what is interesting in the light of the above is that news in the children's own locality had the potential for being more violent than foreign news. Again, the judgement of violence is based not so much on the analysis of acts, but on the emotions that it arouses, in this case fear that the violence has entered the world as known to them. The group of girls aged 12-13 from Halesowen singled local news out for special attention on the grounds that: *'It's closer to you. If it's in "America" it's not so bad.'* It was also added that: *'When you are younger you used to worry about the news and abduction of little girls because it could happen to me.'*

It is this centring of events on the self that marks out children's understanding of violence as different from that of the adults. In the same group as the above, one girl said that she had been on holiday in Spain and had read an English newspaper about some violence and said: *'It didn't frighten me until I got home.'* In other words, the violence only became real - and if something were real it gave it a full violence loading - when the child entered the domain from within which the violence had arisen, namely England. It became a threat.

Violence as a threat and lack of control

Something is judged violent by these participants if it is seen to threaten or to pose a danger to their emotional well-being. To be scared does precisely the latter, especially if that which has created the scare stays with the child. It means that they are not in control of the world around them. They then feel insecure. This even manifested itself in a discussion of violent computer games. Perhaps to an adult some computer games might seem very violent, but the children tended to see them, in part, more akin to cartoons. That is, they were not real, but more important in terms of insight into how violence is constructed out of something being scary is that it was claimed that they were not scary or violent because, as a player, participants were in control of that which was happening.

Indeed, it is this fear of not being in control, of events happening to them, that distinguishes them from adults. It was noted above that one girl said that she was frightened of abduction stories in the news when she was younger. What such stories represent is the fear of the unknown, best exemplified by the stranger and what the stranger might do.

This came to the fore in discussing *Behind Closed Doors*. The primary definers were in place, namely, that it was unfair for a grown man to pick on a child and, further, that the offence of answering back did not warrant the degree of punishment inflicted. At this point, adult responses to the scene would have been the same as those of the children in the sample. The scene had the possibility of being violent because it was unfair due to the unequal distribution of power. In addition, this inequality of power which makes the scene potentially violent was overlain by the cultural assumption that adults protect children, not hurt them. For adults, whether the scene would have been ranked violent would depend on the secondary definers, that is, how the actual scene was played out in terms of the representation of injury as it occurred. The violence in this scene was implied, with the violence corroborated by the child having to be taken to hospital as a result of the beating given. For all the reasons given, adults, unlike the children, would not have considered that this scene was violent – despite strong primary definers, there was an absence of secondary definers.

The difference in reaction to the ‘violence’ between adults and children to this scene is that for the children the scene involved, so to speak, them. Adults would, if asked to discuss the scene, have condemned the man’s actions and been morally outraged that such things happen. The manner in which the children discussed the scene, however, was not simply that such an attack by an adult on a child was wrong, but determined by evidence and engagement with the scene. There was an identification that was unlikely to be found in adults. The closest to this strength of engagement in the adult study was in response to scenes of domestic violence.

Adults could identify with such violence. Even so, it was only the violence in one of the clips shown in the adult study, from the film *Ladybird Ladybird*, that was considered strong violence due to the graphic portrayal of the assault (secondary definers), which was not the case with a clip of domestic violence from the soap opera *Brookside*. In this latter clip, as punishment for the police having been called to the house, the husband beats his wife once the police have left. The assault, however, is not actually seen. It is implied and not graphic. In fact, the domestic violence in *Brookside* was shown in a similar fashion to the violence in *Behind Closed Doors*.

Yet, the fact that the violence in *Behind Closed Doors* provoked the response that it did in the children offers a crucial insight into the differences in response to violence between children and adults, namely, that the world of the child is an uncertain one in terms of being in control of their lives and well-being. They are dependent upon others for their safety. This came out at several points in the research and is probably responsible for why ‘scary’ and ‘violence’ often came together as a composite whole.

In the final chapter I will deal with how images of the world possessed by children have been built socially, which then impact on the interpretations of violence, but for the moment will attempt to be as descriptive as possible. What the children are doing in giving accounts of violence is very similar to that provided by adults; namely, applying rules to behaviour. For adults there are rules that govern violent exchange and if those rules are broken, for example, the violence is not justified or the severity of the violence uncalled for, then the scene is set up to become classified as violent should the actual depiction become graphic. The children in the sample operated with similar rules concerning violent exchange, but extended the rules to include how children in general should be regarded, which then had implications for how violence was interpreted. Hence, a violent clip, especially if it involved children, had the capability of going beyond the image itself to prompt lessons about the world. Indeed, central to a child's world is his or her relationship to parents or guardians. A slightly older boy, aged 12-13, in commenting on the clip from *Behind Closed Doors* said that it, '*Could happen because a stepdad may not like you*', and added, '*Normally your real dad stands up for you, therefore, would be worse [if a real dad had done it].*'

What we see here, and not present in the adult study, is the construction of stories about how the world operates and how the world ought to operate. These constructions are drawn from central concerns that they have, which can be summed up as a desire for security – the stranger is dangerous because he/she is not governed by the rules that are presumed to operate with parents. For a real father to behave in the manner shown in the clip would be worse than a stepfather because of the presumed automatic love of the blood parent. The definition of a parent or guardian is one that does not inflict serious harm on the child that they are responsible for, and by extension the home is a place of safety. If the security of the home is breached, then violence that occurs within that space is deemed strong violence. This was not the case with adults, although it was certainly true that violence in a domestic setting had the possibility of being defined as massively violent. Such violence was authentic violence, but whether or not it became massive violence depended on how the violence was 'played' – the secondary definers. This was not the case with children. The setting itself made any violent act violence.

The home is, as one girl in the sample said: '*A place where you feel safe*', and for that reason '*if in the home it is more violent*'. It was even mentioned that if you had a '*bad day at school you want to go home – it's a comfort place*'. The home, as with parents, embodies security.

This idea of security within the family emerged not simply in relation to the stepfather scene, but also when discussing a scene from *EastEnders* where Phil hit Jamie. One boy held it as strong violence: '*Because he punched someone from his family – it's not street violence, it's home violence.*' This was added to by the comment: '*Being beaten up in the home is worse than the street because you would never feel safe again – you see that person everyday.*'

The conclusion we can draw here in comparing the meaning of violence to adults, to that of children, is that for the latter, the potential for a scene to carry meanings of violence is far greater than it is for adults. In short, violence is not a restricted definition, but covers fears and also unpleasantness. But, as we have seen, the idea of violence is built, quite often, upon the notion of scary. That is not to say that everything that is scary is violent, but that often violence was scary, especially if the images stayed with the child.

Unlike adults, children did not seem willing, or perhaps even able, to draw too fine a distinction between actual physical acts of hurt and other forms of hurt. There was talk of mental violence such as in the news footage from Northern Ireland. Mental anguish is certainly real, but to include it as violence is not something adults would readily argue for, or at least it was never raised as violence in the adult research. Many of the children considered that shouting could be an element within violence. How far this separated them from the adult definition of violence is difficult to say. There was debate in the adult sample about whether or not shouting could be construed as violence. The difficulty is that, in the adult groups, the clips shown included extremely strong language, including the use of the 'c' word. Such language was followed by physical violence. When it was asked of the young adult women familiar with violence, '*Can language itself be violent?*' the response was, 'Yes', followed by, '*Emotional abuse isn't it? Like you [pointing to another participant] were saying at the beginning, "Gobbing off" – that can be violent, it doesn't have to be physical.*'

This was interesting in that such a statement was contradictory to earlier comments the group had made when it was stated that one needed to see a physical act of hurt for something to be defined as violent. We also see in the above the introduction of 'emotional abuse', which might be the equivalent of 'mental violence' mentioned by some children. Yet, for adults to signify shouting as violence, what appeared to be in operation was the fact that the shouting and language used – the 'c' word – was of such intensity that it signified that physical violence was bound to follow.

The difference between adults and children with regard to language and emotional abuse/mental violence being defined as acts of violence is not easily settled, but it did seem that children were more ready to include shouting as an element of violence than was the case with adults. In the case of *EastEnders* it was mentioned that the shouting of a '*Full grown man at an 18-year-old girl*' – Phil shouting at Sonia – played a part in the violence loading of the scene.

It is not that adults are not familiar with shouting, but it was quite clear from statements given by the children in the sample that they were the subject of quite a lot of shouting at home. They clearly did not appear to enjoy this aspect of home life, but from the accounts given it is difficult to say how upsetting such behaviour was. It was said, however, that shouting in a film did not bother them as it '*was only acting*', but '*shouting at home did.*'

It is the place of the home for children as a sanctuary against harm that at base may account for differences in how violence on television, video or film is framed. It is a place where one ought not to feel threatened. This is undoubtedly the case for adults also, but this premium put on security is witnessed in how screen violence is constructed.

Situation, darkness and scary

Certainly, children appeared more sensitive than adults to the framing of scenes and a general sense of atmosphere created within a scene. When adults talked about whether an act was violent or not, it was done in an analytical or clinical fashion. It was because of this clinical dissection, and operating with a shared set of values about what was legitimate violence and what was not, that uniformity in agreement of what made something violent was witnessed. For children, on the other hand, how violence was organised depended on what, so to speak, it did to them. A great deal of blood and gore was enjoyed, especially by the boys, and all had seen violent films beyond the categories designated as suitable for children of their age to watch. Yet, what was interesting, and something never raised in the adult groups, was the place of reception as an influence on how they related to that which was seen. This seems to offer a crucial difference in the understanding of violence. It was stated by boys aged 11-12 that: *'Cinema is more scary because it's dark. It's silent. At home you have cars going past and someone in the kitchen, and you get your mum and dad with you.'* This statement talks about not being able to escape, in a cinema, from a realistic image. Cars going past or having noises from the kitchen made images safer, not as scary. Indeed, one girl, aged 12-13, supported the boys on this point, noting that: *'More violent in the cinema because of sound. The noise is all around. At home you can get out of the room. At the cinema you are focused on the screen, there's nothing around to look at.'*

Concluding differences

Unlike the study of adults' understandings of the meaning of violence, where definitions could be given, the children in this study appeared incapable of doing so. Differences in analytical ability alone cannot account for this.

The way in which children talked about violence was in terms of how it related to them, something not found in the adult groups. Thus it was not so much that they had a definition of violence, of what violence was, but of how they personally responded to that seen. Important here was whether or not they found the violence threatening. At no point in the adult groups was 'scary' used in conjunction with violence, whereas in the children's groups it was frequently drawn upon in a discussion of violence. Thus, the news was more violent for them than for adults because it was real and what was real might become real for them. This identification with violence as a threat to them was missing, on the whole, in the study of adults' understanding of violence.

6. Conceptual framework

**By Professor David Morrison, Institute of Communication Studies,
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In the previous chapter the differences in the understanding, or definitions, of violence between adults and children were discussed, the conclusion being that the differences were greater than the similarities. That on its own is an important finding. It is important, not least, because there is an assumption that adults generally know the thinking of children. This belief is based more on moralising authority than empirical certainty. Of course, at the formal intellectual level this is not the case, otherwise there would hardly have developed whole disciplines examining child development. Yet, given that all adults have been children, there is a presumption of knowing drawn on past experience of what it is to be a child. But one was only one child, not all children, and even then each biographical experience is unique and circumstances of one's own childhood are not eternal circumstances. In terms of knowing the distant world, for example, to live in the age of radio is not to live in the age of television, and to live in the age of early television is not to live in the age of digital television and technological developments that beam images of distant events instantaneously to the living rooms of the contemporary child. Drawn from the study it is worth extracting that one of the lasting images, and most disturbing, even calling it violent, mentioned by children was the attack on the Twin Towers and the witnessing of bodies falling or jumping from the inferno that engulfed the World Trade Center.

Change in telecommunications is only one factor in generational differences in providing access to events and happenings in distant places, and indeed to events and happenings that, at the intellectual or political level, may not be understood. Another factor is social change of a general nature, which means that the world inhabited by the contemporary child is not the same as, or even in many instances, proximate to, the world that the adult occupied during their childhood. Yet, adults still would claim understanding of the thinking of the child. In part, the explanation here would be that, given many adults are parents, the observing of their child's development makes them an authority. Indeed, in some ways they are in terms of their own child, but most often only in the sense of moods, what their child likes and dislikes, what upsets them, what frightens them and so on. Even so, the ignorance of the parent concerning the thinking of their child is massive, as often only discovered years later in conversations between the parent and the adult child.

We often presume that we know how the child will respond, of what will frighten or upset. But what we are often saying is that we know what is good for the child and hence prohibit access to various experiences, including visual material. The parent, in our type of liberal democratic society, is given a great deal of authority in how they raise their offspring, yet the structures within which the child develops are not that open to alteration by the individual parent and this would include culture as it is structured by media institutions. However, it is this lack of control of something that is held as important to the development of the child that, in part, has led to state interference through the establishment of regulatory bodies to safeguard the interests of the parent and, it must be said, the interest of the State in terms of unwanted consequences of the consumption of material held to be damaging to the formation of a desired type of citizen and, by extension, a desired society.

We are concerned, and all liberal democratic societies are, about levels of mediated violence. Yet dramatic violence is enjoyed, otherwise the popular would hardly be popular. Such enjoyment, like all taste, is not evenly distributed. One thing for sure, however, is that, whatever the distribution of taste for violent material that exists in the adult population, we do not wish the distribution of violent material to the young, or at least not strong violence. Here we come back to the idea of ‘knowing the child’, of what is good for him or her, and, most importantly, of knowing what harm such material might inflict. The assumption here is that exposure to violent material may produce a violent personality, something that is not functional for civic society of a liberal democratic kind.

Parental rights and concerns

This research, an examination of how children define, give meaning to or understand mediated violence could not, and did not, address the vexed question of the effects of such imagery on behaviour. (Full reviews of the literature dealing with the effects tradition of research can be found elsewhere.)¹⁸ The argument over whether or not a relationship exists between exposure to violent material and violent behaviour ought not to overlook objections to certain material by adults, parents or otherwise, based on sets of values concerning what is good. A parent might object to a heavy exposure to programmes that, in value terms, ran counter to values they wished to instil about the world – the resolution of conflict by violence might be one, but it might also include programmes that depicted a materialistic view of the world to the exclusion of other views. In short, whatever the child likes may not be to the liking of the parent and hence demand for, or attempt at, the control of consumption. Even if it were demonstrated that watching a heavy diet of violence had no effect on behaviour it would not follow that parents would agree that it was acceptable for their child to watch such material, or to watch certain types of violence.

The above is presented as a reminder that because something is enjoyed does not necessarily make it good, but also to note that even if something cannot be demonstrated to have harmful effects, in a behavioural or physical sense, it does not follow that concern over consumption may still exist. The values of parents must be taken into account in consideration of consumption. The statement, ‘*I don’t like my child to watch that type of programme*’ does not have to be based on believed effects that such material might have on behaviour, but that the material runs counter to that which parents consider is good in a developmental, intellectual or emotional sense for their child when set against the values that the parents carry.

18. See among others: *A Measure of Uncertainty – The Effects Of the Mass Media*; Dr. G. Cumberbatch, Dr. Howitt; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1989.

What this research wished to do was to understand how children construed or defined media violence. The manner in which children talked about real life violence as opposed to screen violence quite clearly differed, with attitudes towards violence in real life unaffected by images of violence seen on-screen. However, it seems the case that the children spoken to were more accepting of images of violence on the screen the more they saw them. The children in the sample, for example, would compare the scenes shown with other acts of violence they had witnessed at the cinema and on television to make judgements about the strength of the violence shown, making comments such as, *'I've seen much worse than that.'* What can be said, from both this and the research among adults, is that familiarity with screen violence led to visual acceptance of the scenes. Expressed another way, it can be said that exposure to images of violence reduced the shock value as the viewer 'learns' the rules of how violence will be portrayed – they come to know what to expect. But coming to expect violence on the screen does not automatically transfer into the different sphere of reaction to real life violence.

The child's world

The media are one aspect of the child's world. Lessons about the world are variable and drawn from a multiple of sources. We are taught from a very early age, by parents, guardians, teachers and others responsible for our development, that the resolution of conflict by violence, or the obtaining of reward by violence, is neither right nor efficient. Yet what was witnessed from attending the focus groups conducted with children was that all the efforts, particularly on the part of school teachers, to teach, indeed socialise, children into the ineffectiveness and wrongness of the resolution of conflict by violence was only a half-learned lesson. Their existence in the world told them that violence was at times not simply effective, but necessary.

Indeed, in watching the groups in operation, one of the strengths of the research it seemed to me was that it got below official statements that children might make about their lives and into how they operated and negotiated the world at the unofficial level, that is, at their own level. They were children, but children with lives of their own, attached to adults, but also removed from them. Questions relating to their own experience of violence were most interesting, especially their experience of violence within the setting of the school. At first one tended to receive 'teacher-speak' about violence, of how it was wrong. They were delivering an ideology on violence, which many of them, particularly among the boys, did not share, or at least they had failed to fully incorporate the ideology as practice. Probing revealed that they did not accept the adult view of appropriate children's behaviour. The lesson that some had clearly drawn was that to remain behaviourally passive in the face of physical aggression was not to be recommended. In short, the lessons of the schoolyard worked to undermine or moderate the lessons of the classroom.

What this tells us is that we cannot operate assumptions about children in terms of what we would like them to be, what we hope them to be, or from what we feel they are.

Many contemporary parents might talk to their children as participatory members of the family in a way not so in the past judging by research at Leeds University.¹⁹ For example, accounts given by those aged 60+, especially from working class families, describe the home as a place of residence and not somewhere that involved them in decision-making or any kind of democratic exchange. What these older people, when they were children, 'got up to' outside the home, unless it brought the attention of neighbours or police, appeared to be of little concern. The contemporary family has seen a closure of worlds and the centring of the child within the family as an individual.

Compared with the older people in the above-mentioned previous study, there is less surveillance in the home than in the past but, on the whole, the individualising of the child pushes for surveillance, not just outside the home, but mental surveillance as well. Knowing what the child 'gets up to' and knowing what the child is culturally consuming are taken as the mark of responsible parenting. This surveillance and micro-responsibility for the child's wellbeing probably enhances the feeling of knowing the child in a way not so prominent in the past, nor desired. It certainly leads to concern, and one of those concerns is the harmful effect, however harmful is defined, of the exposure of the child to violent imagery. Yet, despite conversation within the family and increased democratic participation of the child in family matters, especially those relating to themselves and the consultation of desires, it is far from clear that in watching television adults understand the meaning that children attribute to what they watch. We must move now, however, from the descriptive level of documenting the differences between adults and children in how they interpreted or defined violence to asking, at the conceptual level, what accounts for the differences.

Moral beings – a reflection of adult values

It was quite clear that the children in the groups had incorporated the values relating to violence of the adult world, as given to them by teachers, parents and so on, but then made 'on the ground' judgements about the value of the ideal when faced by threatening situations. No one showed any sign that they considered violence as good in its own right.

The successful transmission of values produced in these children crucial similarities to adults in defining violence. They had a concept of fairness and justice, the nature of which bore striking similarities to that found in the adult group. It was wrong for men to hit women, and it was wrong for men to hit children. It was wrong to use violence without good reason, and even in using violence the contest had to be reasonably evenly balanced. We learn the moral rules governing power from a variety of sources. Without doubt, the children in our sample had embraced the core values of our society given to them by adults and, thus, the primary definers of violence were well in place. At this level then there was no departure in establishing the building blocks for judging what was violent on the screen. What was violent on the screen was what was violent in real life. From there on, however, departures occurred in how violence was seen, and the responsibility for this was due to the fact of being a child, or rather, what childhood has come to embody in contemporary society. The meaning of childhood influenced the meaning of violence.

¹⁹ *Regulating for Changing Values*; Institute of Communication Studies, Leeds University; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1997.

The definers

Primary

In the adult study we distinguished a set of definers, the primary definers, that determined whether or not a scene was capable of being defined as violent. They were drawn from real-life estimations of whether an act was violent or not and were constructed out of a set of values commonly held about the justice or fairness of the violent acts witnessed.

For example, if someone in a public house was slapped across the face it would not be considered violence in any serious sense, but if the person had a glass thrust into their face it would be defined as violence on the grounds that the injury was serious and it was difficult to imagine that anyone would deserve such a response to a disagreement or offence given. Such behaviour broke the norms or values people held about how to behave. These primary definers, therefore, are derived from society or, rather, social expectations governing behaviour.

Secondary

In terms of mediated violence it is the primary definers that say whether or not a scene has the capability of being violent. However, whether or not it was defined as truly violent was a dependant of the secondary definers, namely how the scene was artistically carried.

For example, the glass in the face carried the possibility of being violent because it was wrong, but whether it was actually considered violent would depend upon how it was shot – the damage actually shown or merely suggested. In other words, it was the secondary definers that gave a scene its violence loading.

As already discussed, the children did possess the primary definers and did so fairly strongly. This, as argued, is not surprising because the primary definers are social constructions of appropriated behaviour, which children learn and internalise in the course of growing up. In terms of the secondary definers then matters differ somewhat. Scenes were discussed in terms of the secondary definers and undoubtedly they were at work in giving a violence loading. For example, a boy aged 12-13, reflecting the statements of others, said: '*Violence involves pain, suffering, blood, gore.*' It was mentioned in a group of girls, aged 10-11, that: '*Slow motion makes it more violent.*' Slow motion, concentration on the injury and so on are all secondary definers. It is they that take over from the primary definers and actually do the work of raising the level or determining the level of violence.

In talking of *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* it was mentioned that the '*music made it more violent than Spider-Man*'. The children paid attention to atmospherics more than adults in talking about shadows, darkness and so on. The adults tended not to include atmospherics as part of the category of secondary definers unless they directly related to the act of violence itself, such as the noise accompanying blows to a person.

Tertiary

Thus children did, in defining or discussing violence, work through secondary definers in coming to judgement. But, and this is most important, such definers were overridden by other sets of considerations. These considerations we can call 'tertiary definers' and are related to the lives of the children themselves.

It was the operation of these tertiary definers that limited, analytical competence apart, the production of a clear definition of violence. It was the existence of the tertiary definers that gave a different meaning to violence than was the case with adults. It should be added that tertiary definers will wither and be left behind as the children mature to adulthood, which is not the case for the primary or secondary definers. The latter two categories are constants, but for children it is the tertiary definers that do the most work when estimating and discussing violence.

The tertiary definers are built out of life experiences, of what it is to be a child. How self-centred children are, seeing the world existing for them, is very much cultural. It depends very much on the duties and tasks allocated to the child at certain ages and privileges granted because of age. One is taught to be a child just as one is taught to be an adult, captured by the phrase 'grow up'. What is witnessed, however, from the children in our sample, is that childhood was marked by concern about the world as it affected them and by 'them' one means concern was manifested about the world of children in general.

What was seen repeatedly in the focus groups was the mention of children, and also the relationship of adults to children. Thus, in discussing violence, much play was made of the violence within the family and how much worse it was to be the subject of violence at the hands of a parent. This is perhaps not surprising. Domestic violence for adults has a special place in violence to be condemned, but what was interesting was the accompanying articulation of why violence by a parent was stronger than other violence: because one would not feel safe if someone who supposedly loved you did that. Violence that took place in the home was also rated as strong, even if not engaged in by a family member. The home, and mention was made of the bedroom, was a sanctuary from danger. One was dependent upon others for safety and seemingly unable to protect oneself from dangers. While this was also the case for adults, it was far more clear as a concern for children.

It is the centrality of security to a child - and the impression gained was that the world was a threatening place - that is essential in understanding the workings of the tertiary definers. The dependency on others for one's wellbeing (parents or guardians) is to be vulnerable. It is not to be in control of one's life or destiny, and the death of friends and parents were mentioned as worries by the children. Yet part of the notion surrounding contemporary childhood is that the child should be free from worries, that it is a protected period. Protection, however, cannot be assured. Indeed, the desire to protect can lead to worries that one needs to be protected. Most interesting, for example, was the place that the 'stranger' occupied in the discussion of violence. In fact, the lesson of the danger of the stranger appears to be part of the modern school curriculum.

The spectre of the 'stranger' as a threat to safety mentioned by children finds place in the imagination of the parent also, indeed, operates as an expression of what parenting has come to mean - an acceptance of almost total responsibility for the child and his or her wellbeing. Part and parcel of concern with media content, and what this might mean for the child, is a product of this ethos of 'protective custody'. These adult concerns, because the presence of the stranger is something that they cannot control, are fed as insecurity about the world to the child. Thus, in discussing violence, it was seen that the violence of the stranger was of a particularly strong type - 'He may lose control', and as one child said, 'A parent would not put you in hospital.'

Tertiary definers in operation

Once we understand the presence of these tertiary definers, constructed out of the world of the child, we can more readily understand a whole variety of responses to violence and how it was judged. It also offers explanation of why 'scary' was often linked to violence. Part of being scared is that one does not know what will happen next. Of course, one might be scared because one does know what will happen next, but, in terms of viewing, for something to be scary invariably means that what is to follow is not known. As one girl aged 11-12 said in talking about violence: 'Scary is music - scary, it makes you wonder what will happen next.'

Although by no means common, some children did mention having had bad dreams after watching films. One child, talking of violent/scary films, said that they were like '*a ghost train ride*', which suggests the operation of a type of investment in viewing not so readily apparent in adults. There was never any suggestion that the children could not distinguish between that which was meant to capture the real, and the unreal. For example, in talking of *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, girls aged 12-13, made the following comment: 'The Orcs are like monsters, it makes it more violent - like a monster when you were a kid.' This shows a very fine distinction between the real and the unreal, but the reference that, when at a younger age, monsters make it more violent, is interesting in that, again, the manner in which violence is discussed is not so much in terms of injuries shown, the secondary definers, but in terms of fears. Monsters are fearful to children because they represent those which have powers beyond the control of the world of adults - parents. There is little protection from creatures drawn from 'another world'. It is the stuff of nightmares or 'bad dreams', to quote the children. Hence, scary and violence tended to come together to a now not unsurprising degree, and violence was frequently referred to definitionally as images that stayed with them.

News

If violence, as the adults defined it, had to show the act of violence itself, and not the aftermath and consequences of violence, the news includes very little violence. In some ways, this is counter to how one experiences the news – it looks violent because of the images of the effects of violence, and the capture of those effects can be deeply disturbing to the sensibilities. In a practical sense we can call it violence, but, in the manner of how adults analytically constructed violence, strictly speaking the news is not violent. The children, however, made no such distinction – if it looked like violence, it was violence. But remember, the news was not simply violent when viewed this way, but was also considered of all material that they had seen, be it drama or film, to be the most violent.

The news was signalled as being violent because, to quote one youngster: '*It's real, people get hurt*'. In discussing the destruction of the Twin Towers, it was commented that it was '*not acting*', referring to people falling from the building. In short, such events took place in a world that they could recognise, and the more it could be recognised, by and large, the more violent it was considered to be. What was real became real for them in that it offered a challenge to the security of their own established world. It is this interaction with the news, the stories that it tells about violence in the world, which made it unnecessary for actual acts of violence to be seen for scenes to be bracketed as violent. What children appeared to be doing therefore, in labelling the news as violent, was extracting a message, which they then in some way related to their own lives to provide grounds for concern.

Conceptual summary

In large measure, that which made something violent was how a scene was pulled through the child's concerns about the world, or rather how scenes touched those concerns. Thus, a scene of an adult threatening a child was considered violent even if little actual violence was portrayed. In that sense, violence was used as a metaphor for threat. Hence, acts that an adult might analytically categorise as violence were not necessarily categorised so by children. Blood, pain and gore might be taken as violent, but unless combined to offer threat to the child were not readily labelled as violence. Scenes that did not contain violent acts, yet appeared threatening, were labelled violence. Their response to the news demonstrates this point. Violence was not so much defined, as judged.

Appendix 1: Sample and methodology

The sample comprised 10 two-hour extended group discussions among the target audience – children aged between nine and 13 years, with a total of 83 children surveyed.

The research was conducted in three phases: a pilot stage, the main stage of research and editing groups. Both the pilot and editing groups each comprised two group discussions.

The sample was segmented by age and gender. As far as possible, region and location were also taken into consideration. Northern and southern regions, as well as urban and rural areas, were represented.

All children took part in a pre-group task. They made collages about what makes them ‘happy’ and what makes them ‘sad’. A questionnaire on film and television programmes was also included as part of the task. The questionnaires have been analysed, with feedback included in this report.

The groups were structured as follows:

Pilot Groups	Class	Area/Venue
Girls 10–11	BC1	Thames Ditton
Boys 12–13	BC1	Thames Ditton
Main Stage	Class	Area/Venue
Boys 11–12	C2D	Halesowen
Girls 12–13	C2D	Halesowen
Boys 9–10	BC1	Windsor
Girls 10–11	BC1	Windsor
Girls 9–10	C2D	Wolverhampton
Boys 10–11	C2D	Wolverhampton
Editing Groups	Class	Area/Venue
Girls 11–12	BC1	Edgware
Boys 12–13	BC1	Edgware

Research was conducted between 3 and 17 March 2003 by Goldstone Perl Research and Schlesenger Research.

Appendix 2:

Clips using in Research

News and reality programming

Holy Cross

A clip from the news discussing the ‘wall of shields’ needed to protect Catholic children as they walk through a Protestant mob on their way to the Holy Cross Primary School.

Viewers are warned that the report ‘*contains strong language*’.

Israeli/Palestinian conflict

A clip from the news discussing violence in Israel. The report talks about ‘700 *people injured*’, ‘*gun battles*’ and ‘*bloodshed*’, and refers to the earlier killing of a 10-year-old boy.

Sports item

A clip from the news showing Lee Bowyer stamping on another footballer’s face. The attack is shown in real time and slow motion and is described as the newsreader as ‘*appalling*’.

The Stoat

A rabbit is pursued and eventually killed by a stoat. The chase is set to action packed music.

Soap operas and drama series

EastEnders

A character beats and kicks a young man because the young man will not give him the information he requires. The two men have the type of relationship one would expect to find within a family.

The scene, as played to all groups with the exception of the editing groups, was not shown as transmitted. In the transmitted version the scenes of violence are intercut with another scene set in a more convivial atmosphere. These intercut scenes were removed for all but the editing groups, to see what effect the concentration of action would have on attitudes.

Holby City

A nurse chases two young men who have stolen drugs from the hospital. She corners them, but they turn on her, stabbing her with a sharp medical implement before running away.

The Bill

A kidnap victim is blindfolded and bound to a chair in an abandoned, dark and dusty looking place. She is talking to her captor, desperately trying to establish his or her identity. As she talks, we hear the sound of a knife being sharpened.

Behind Closed Doors

Part of the *Hitting Home* series, this clip shows an increasingly violent verbal exchange between a boy and his stepfather-to-be. While the final physical attack on the child is not shown, its severity is apparent as the boy's injuries and subsequent treatment in the ambulance and hospital are filmed in great detail.

Grange Hill

A mixed-race school-age couple are accosted by a gang of boys. Two blows are exchanged before the couple run away.

Comedy and children's programming

SMTV

Dec repeatedly shoots Ant, claiming '*it's an accident*'. The slapstick mood and feel is enhanced by the over-dramatic music.

Film

Scooby Doo

Scooby and team are confronted by a masked man, giant dog and cavemen. Action-packed, fast-paced and lots of slapstick fighting all set to the jaunty *Scooby Doo* music.

Spider-Man – warehouse revenge scene

Spider-Man confronts the villain who murdered his uncle. The scene is set in an abandoned warehouse. During the fight, *Spider-Man* loses control of his temper and forces the villain through a glass window. The villain gains control of the situation, using *Spider-Man's* emotional anguish to his advantage. However, as he walks back to aim his gun at *Spider-Man*, he trips and falls backwards through a window.

Spider-Man – Green Goblin scene (editing groups only)

The scene is the climax of the battle between the Green Goblin and Spider-Man. The Green Goblin has control of the situation and Spider-Man suffers at his hands. However, the Green Goblin comes to a sticky end when one of his weapons backfires.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

The Orcs kidnap the Hobbits – the scene is set in the woods. The hero is surrounded by Orcs and is repeatedly shot at with arrows. His pain and anguish are apparent as he falls to his knees and is powerless to protect the Hobbits.

The editing groups were shown an extended version of this scene where the Orc leader has his head cut off with a sword.

Appendix 3: How the world seems

Gender/ Age/ Location	What makes me happy?	What makes me sad?	Exposure to screen violence
Girls, aged 11–12, Edgware	Family, music, shopping, friends, CDs, parties, holidays, theme parks, television, peace, chocolate, my house	Braces, cruelty to animals/children, lying, death, violence, my dad upsetting my mum, missing friends, war, meat, shopping in Ikea, family problems, illness, September 11	Television <i>Jerry Springer</i> <i>EastEnders</i> (Mo and Trevor), <i>Casualty</i> , <i>In Deep</i> Film <i>Resident Evil</i> , <i>Deep</i> <i>Blue Sea</i> , <i>Gladiator</i> , <i>James Bond</i> , <i>What Lies Beneath</i> , <i>The Haunting</i> , <i>Saving Private Ryan</i>
Girls, aged 12–13, Halesowen	Flowers, texting, shopping, sunshine, Disney, friends, pets, chocolate, parties, music, sport	War, disease, silence, poverty, mum and dad, famine, smoking, animal cruelty, animal testing, guns	Television <i>Buffy the Vampire</i> <i>Slayer</i> , <i>Bad Girls</i> , <i>Dispatches</i> , <i>Crimewatch UK</i> Film <i>The Valentine</i> , <i>The Mummy</i> , <i>Blade</i> , <i>Scream</i> , <i>Alien</i> , <i>Pearl Harbor</i>
Boys, aged 11–12, Halesowen	Football, chocolate, computer games, when your team wins, PlayStation 2, cycling, sleeping in, the weekend, sports, food, money, holidays, music, snow, going out	Clothes shopping, getting up, war, homework, team losing, sister on PlayStation, food shopping, arguments, brother messing room	Television <i>Band of Brothers</i> <i>Wrestling</i> <i>The News</i> Film <i>Sixth Sense</i> , <i>Terminator</i> , <i>13th</i> <i>Ghost</i> , <i>The Matrix</i> , <i>Lock, Stock and Two</i> <i>Smoking Barrels</i> , <i>Hannibal</i> , <i>Scream</i> , <i>Resident Evil</i>
Boys, aged 12–13, Thames Ditton	<i>The Simpsons</i> , blading, animals, music, football, girls, sport, friends, <i>Jackass</i> , family, holidays, PlayStation 2	Drugs, cruelty to animals, school, smoking, war, my brother, Saddam Hussein, death, murder, non - skaters, Gareth Gates and Will Young	Television <i>Band of Brothers</i> , <i>Wrestling</i> , <i>The News</i> Film <i>Sixth Sense</i> , <i>Terminator</i> , <i>13th Ghost</i> , <i>The Matrix</i> , <i>Lock, Stock and Two</i> <i>Smoking Barrels</i> , <i>Hannibal</i> , <i>Scream</i> , <i>Resident Evil</i>

<p>Boys, aged 12–13, Edgware</p>	<p>Rachel Stevens, football, cars, <i>FHM</i>, sport, friends, mobile phones, <i>The Simpsons</i>, PlayStation 2, Internet/MSN, music, cinema, everything electric</p>	<p>Homework, school, siblings, death, war, Arsenal, teachers</p>	<p>Television The News <i>The Osbournes</i></p> <p>Film <i>Black Hawk Down</i>, <i>Chucky</i>, <i>Texas Chainsaw Massacre</i>, <i>Behind Enemy Lines</i>, <i>Starship Trooper</i>, <i>I Know What You Did Last Summer</i>, <i>The Exorcist</i></p>
<p>Boys, aged 9–10, Windsor</p>	<p>Fact books, films, music, watching television, GameBoy, computers/computer games, friends, animals/pets, sport, rollerblading, playing outside, chocolate/sweets, PlayStation 2, <i>The Simpsons</i></p>	<p>Being grounded, mum in hospital, cruelty to animals, illness, mum and dad in a bad mood, school/school work, chores, football team loses</p>	<p>Television <i>Midsomer Murders</i> <i>WWE World Wrestling Entertainment</i> <i>James Bond</i></p> <p>Film <i>Die Hard</i>, <i>Terminator</i>, <i>Saving Private Ryan</i>, <i>Lethal Weapon 4</i>, <i>Platoon</i>, <i>Planes, Trains and Automobiles</i></p>
<p>Girls, aged 11–12, Windsor</p>	<p>Friends, my mum, reading, pop stars, horses, Internet, DVDs, videos, films, chocolate, parties, shopping, holidays, make-up, sunny days, pets, sleepovers, music (<i>Blue</i>), Will Young, cooking, television, Ant and Dec</p>	<p>Missing people, bullies, being grounded, deaths, cancer, cruelty to animals, accidents (cars, run over etc), threat of war, school, Twin Towers</p>	<p>Television <i>Coronation Street</i>, <i>EastEnders</i>, <i>Jackass</i>, <i>The News</i></p> <p>Film <i>Scream</i>, <i>Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i>, <i>Pearl Harbor</i>, <i>The Haunting</i>, <i>Sixth Sense</i>, <i>Blair Witch Project</i></p>
<p>Girls, aged 10–11, Thames Ditton</p>	<p>Television, Dance Mat, friends, chocolate/sweets, sport, phones, pets, money, shopping, family, boy band <i>Blue</i></p>	<p>Homework, breaking up with friends, friends hurting you, getting told off, Tony Blair, war, school, not being able to watch my television programmes</p>	<p>Television <i>The Bill</i>, <i>Coronation Street</i>, <i>EastEnders</i>, <i>Jackass</i></p> <p>Film <i>Pearl Harbour</i>, <i>Spider-Man</i>, <i>Scream</i>, <i>Minority Report</i>, <i>Deep Blue Sea</i>, <i>Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i></p>

<p>Girls, aged 9–10, Wolverhampton</p>	<p>Sunny days, skiing, music, cinema, laughing with friends, GameBoy, holidays – the beach, make-up, clothes, shopping, my family, chocolate, mobile phones, internet, Christmas / Easter, Gareth Gates, books, animals, television, pop, David Beckham, roast beef dinner</p>	<p>Train/rail crashes, fighting, war in Iraq, falling out with friends, dark, violence – guns, kidnapping on the news, school – tests, bullies, animals endangered or abandoned, death, poor and starving people</p>	<p>Television <i>Coronation Street, The News – Iraq, Reality TV, Hitting Home</i></p> <p>Film <i>Braveheart, Child's Play, Zorro, The Mummy Returns, Scary Movie</i></p>
<p>Boys, aged 10–11, Wolverhampton</p>	<p>Scalextric, family, Lego/Bionicle, cars, playing on the computer, holidays – camping, rollerblading, food – pizza, burgers, James Bond movies, television, Wolves win!, animals/pets, sport, PlayStation 2, mobile phone/texting, bikes/scramblers, scooters, Harry Potter, reading, my bedroom</p>	<p>School, bullies, cleaning/chores, television breaks down, being grounded, being shouted at, homework, war - people being killed, death, not having money, cruelty to animals, when people argue</p>	<p>Television SAS programmes, <i>Crimewatch UK, Coronation Street</i></p> <p>Film <i>James Bond, 51st State, Die Hard, The Matrix, Lethal Weapon 2</i></p>

Appendix 4:

British Broadcasting Corporation

The British Broadcasting Corporation is the world's largest public service broadcaster providing programmes and content through digital, analogue, cable and satellite services, as well as on-line. It aims to be the world's most creative and trusted broadcaster, seeking to satisfy all of its audiences with services that inform, educate, entertain and enrich their lives in ways that the market alone will not. The BBC also aims to be guided by its public purposes, to encourage the United Kingdom's most innovative talent, to act independently of all interests and to aspire to the highest ethical standards. The BBC has a global reputation for setting standards and the corporation's Editorial Policy team advises programme-makers across the BBC on the most difficult editorial issues and helps them to achieve the highest editorial and ethical standards as set out in its public statements of standards and values, the BBC Producers' Guidelines. Editorial Policy also acts as the point of contact for outside bodies on editorial matters and, as with this report, undertakes research to enable the BBC to stay in touch with the views of its audiences on a wide range of broadcasting issues.

Viewers and listeners with serious complaints about what is broadcast by BBC licence fee funded services on television, radio and on-line may write to the Programme Complaints Unit, Broadcasting House, London W1A 1AA. The Unit, which reports to the Director-General, is commissioned to investigate complaints impartially and independently of the interests of the programme-makers. Appeals against its findings are considered by the BBC Governors' Programme Complaints Appeals Committee. BBC e-mail addresses are listed on www.bbc.co.uk/talk. Other comments about BBC programmes and policies can be addressed to BBC Information, PO Box 1922, Glasgow, G2 3WT, tel: 0870 00 0222 (calls may be recorded). Minicom 0780 00 022.

British Broadcasting Corporation
Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London W1A 1AA
Telephone: 020 7580 4468
Website: www.bbc.co.uk

Appendix 5: British Board of Film Classification

The BBFC classifies films for cinema exhibition on behalf of local authorities, and videos, DVDs and some video games under the Video Recordings Act 1984. The BBFC is a private limited company funded wholly by the fees charged for classification.

British Board of Film Classification
3 Soho Square
London W1 3HD
Tel: 020 7440 1570
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Website: www.bbfc.co.uk

Appendix 6: Broadcasting Standards Commission

The Broadcasting Standards Commission is the statutory body for both standards and fairness in broadcasting. It is the only organisation within the regulatory framework of UK broadcasting to cover all television and radio. This includes the BBC and commercial broadcasters, as well as text, cable, satellite and digital services.

As an independent organisation, the Broadcasting Standards Commission considers the portrayal of violence, sexual conduct and matters of taste and decency. It also provides redress for people who believe they have been unfairly treated or subjected to unwarranted infringement of privacy. The Commission has three main tasks set out in the 1996 Broadcasting Act:

- Produce codes of practice relating to standards and fairness
- Consider and adjudicate on complaints
- Monitor, research and report on standards and fairness in broadcasting.

This research working paper is published as part of a programme into attitudes towards standards and fairness in broadcasting. This research, which was carried out by independent experts, is not a statement of Commission policy. Its role is to offer guidance and practical information to Commissioners and broadcasters in their work.

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Appendix 7: Independent Television Commission

Operating in the interests of viewers, the Independent Television Commission is the public body which licenses and regulates all television services broadcasting in or from the United Kingdom, other than BBC licence fee funded services and S4C in Wales.

The Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996 charge the ITC with tasks that include:

- setting standards for programme content, advertising, sponsorship and technical quality
- monitoring broadcasters' output to ensure that it meets those standards and applying a range of penalties if it doesn't
- ensuring that broadcasters operate in an environment which encourages innovation and widens viewer choice
- ensuring that viewers can receive television services on fair and competitive terms
- investigating complaints and regularly publishing its findings.

Each year the ITC undertakes an extensive audience research programme to help identify areas where viewer attitudes or behaviour may be changing. It liaises regularly with stakeholders, including consumer groups, and takes advice from its own advertising, schools, medical and religious advisory committees.

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