

HOUSEHOLD CULTURE;  
WOMEN, TELEVISION AND VIDEO IN THE HOME.

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*In memory of Assam.*

HOUSEHOLD CULTURE;

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This research explores the impact of video cassette recorders on family life and home based leisure and entertainment activities, but with particular reference to the ways in which women are affected by the introduction of this new technology. The actual use of the VCR is an important part of this research, but this is contextualised within the framework of power and authority relations in the domestic environment, particularly across gender.

Women are 'positioned' differently from men within the domestic environment through their labour of reproduction, child-care and domestic work. Gender, therefore, is a crucial category in any analysis of home-based leisure activities, but is particularly important when considering the introduction of a new piece of entertainment technology into the household. This research has explored the significance of the VCR as technology, and the division of labour inherent in various different kinds of technology within the home.

The VCR offers an extended choice of viewing both in terms of time and content. The implications of this extended choice is examined along with questions of preferred genres and the different pleasures which they afford for women.

The method chosen to investigate this area is the open-ended, tape recorded interview, designed to elicit information about women's home-based leisure in general and VCR use in particular. Thirty women of different age, class background, ages and numbers of children and employment status were interviewed and this data forms the basis of interpretation and analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this research is the domestic video cassette recorder (VCR) and in particular how women use this piece of entertainment technology. The VCR was the subject of a consumer boom in the early nineteen eighties and was quickly established as the major innovation in home entertainment since television. The VCR was taken up across the social spectrum, made possible by existing networks of distribution for television sets which enabled rental contracts to be entered into, thereby eliminating the necessity for the large capital investment unavailable in lower income households. The VCR offered the novelty of being able to record off-air and view broadcast material at alternative times and to hire pre-recorded tapes, mainly movies, from an increasingly large number of varied retail outlets. The VCR or 'video', as the vernacular would have it, rapidly entered the culture exciting consumers, entrepreneurs and those self appointed 'moral guardians' all of whom, in their different ways, were responding to an innovation in 'mass' culture. This thesis does not deal with the video industry which mushroomed as a result of the wide take-up of the domestic hardware as its point of departure is the household. It is true, however, that the industry, its products, marketing styles and image, and the public debates which surround the viewing of 'unsuitable' material, have an effect on peoples' perceptions of the video culture, and these issues are taken up as and when they appear during the analysis.

The recent emergence of the VCR means that very little social research has been carried out into this phenomenon in this country, although some research has been undertaken in other European countries. (Baboulin et al 1983, Roe, K. 1983 and 1985, and Gubern 1985). An exception to this in Britain is the study by Mark Levy and Barry Gunter undertaken for the IBA: *Home Video and the Changing Nature of the Television Audience*. (Levy and Gunter, 1988) Predictably, perhaps, this kind of institutional research is likely

to produce 'evidence' which is of use to broadcasters and advertisers (one of the major worries for the commercial broadcasters was whether VCR use was disrupting advertising schedules) rather than social researchers. This seems to be the case in the way that the research material has been organised in their study. The concept of 'gender' is avoided altogether, for example, in the statistical analysis. Although there is a section entitled 'The Social Context of Video Use' the questions posed were: '1) Who watches the video and with whom? 2) Is the social context of video use different from that of viewing off-air television? 3) Does the social context of video use affect the kinds of material viewed?' (Levy and Gunter 1988 p 37). This is a very limited understanding of the term 'social' in relation to home viewing.

The main argument of this thesis is that, in order to understand the domestic use of VCR's, the social and cultural dimensions of households must be explored. Therefore, the present study straddles several previously separate areas of sociological work; the study of home-based leisure, television audience research and textual analysis. To a certain extent these have already been linked under the umbrella of cultural studies, but the nature of this research requires a combination of elements of all of these traditions in one project. What follows is an outline of the specific elements, drawing on particular pieces of research which have relevance for this study.

### Home-based Leisure

Golding and Murdock have pointed out that the home is increasingly becoming the place for leisure and entertainment and we can see that the VCR is an additional piece of entertainment technology which might offer household members an alternative to seeking entertainment outside. (Golding and Murdock 1983) Whilst accepting Golding and Murdock's argument, it is important to remember that for women in particular the home is also a place of work. Research suggests' that women are still largely responsible for household work and it would



therefore seem that they may well be affected by these developments in home-based leisure:

The home for most women, employed or not, is a workplace in a way that is true for few men, except those that do paid work from home and even in this case it is not the same thing as being a place for unpaid work. (Deem 1986 p.80)

This differential positioning has a major effect on the amount of time available for home leisure activities, as well as the nature of those activities. Rosemary Deem points to the relatively scant attention which has been paid to women's leisure in existing research, with gender often used as a 'bolt-on' category. However, more recently, feminist work into women's leisure has been undertaken, and it is this small body of research which is relevant here.<sup>2</sup> The results of these and other surveys have shown that women's leisure time is more likely to be spent in the home than that of her male partner, and particularly so if she has young children or other dependents. In order to explore women's use of the VCR, we must set our understanding within the context of her work, both outside and inside the home; her responsibilities and obligations to others; and the amount of spare time which she is able to organise for herself. The problem of defining what constitutes women's leisure is raised by Deem and others, and in order to overcome this any study must enable the women themselves to define their 'leisure'. Indeed, this may involve not using the term at all, as it has connotations of 'official' leisure, or 'going out and doing something', rather than referring to those non-obligatory activities which are carried out in the home. This idea of what constitutes 'leisure' suggests the extent to which women's non-work activities are marginalised, if not rendered invisible, to mainstream research.<sup>3</sup> We need to find ways of attending to those activities which women choose to do within the interstices of their domestic routines, and to assess the degree of control they have over the organisation of 'spare time'. This obviously requires an understanding of the

domestic division of labour within households and of the decision-making processes informing family leisure activities. This can then form the context within which questions about non-obligatory activities can be raised.

### Television Audience Research

Obviously the VCR is very closely related to television both in its domestic use and in the ways in which it might be conceptualised for the purposes of research. It is therefore necessary to consider certain forms of television audience research which are relevant to this study. In this respect the most significant move in television audience research came in the nineteen sixties with what came to be known as the 'uses and gratifications' approach. This was developed from studies carried out in the nineteen thirties in America (Herzog 1944, Lazarsfeld and Stanton 1944, Berelson 1949, Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) which sought to approach radio and the press from the perspective of the audience. Research into television and its audience in the intervening years had been dominated by 'effects' studies which assumed on the one hand an all powerful form of mass communication - television - and, on the other, a passive audience, upon whom the various messages of television had effects.<sup>4</sup>

There is a wider social, political and cultural context within which we could place the various developments in research into television, which would take account of changes within the research community as well as funding agencies, but this is not necessary here. What is significant is the dominance of the 'television as problem' mode of thinking which constantly runs through the 'effects' tradition. This focus both reflected and produced attitudes towards television and its audience within the wider society. Furthermore, the academic discipline from which researchers drew their theories was, in the main, psychology, leading to a formulation of the 'problem' as behavioural, psychological, individual and measurable. One consequence of this was a failure to properly conceptualise the audience. Thus, the audience, in the dominant models of the

'effects' tradition, is seen as a mass of passive individuals who apparently bring nothing distinctive to the viewing situation but take everything from it.

The so-called 'modern' uses and gratifications approach developed in Britain proposed an active audience and, as such, made a break with the passive audience posited by the dominant mainstream tradition. Briefly, this approach suggested that what should be investigated is what people do with the media, rather than what the media does with people. However, one difficulty with the various manifestations of this tradition<sup>5</sup> was their lack of sociological discrimination. All too often these studies saw the audience as aggregates of individuals using the various media products to satisfy particular needs. Differences were conceived in terms of individual needs and 'uses' and were not related to a socio-cultural context. As Elliott has pointed out, the intra-individual process with which the uses and gratifications approach deals 'can be generalised to aggregates of individuals, but they cannot be converted in any meaningful way into social structure and process'. (Elliott 1974 p.252) The uses and gratifications approach starts from the point of the free-thinking individual and stays with that individual. It does not raise the important questions of why individuals have particular needs and how they come to choose particular forms for their gratification. Elliott again suggests that television, and, we might add, any form of cultural consumption, is 'more a matter of availability than selection..The audience has easier access to familiar genres, partly because they understand the language and conventions, and also because they already know the social meaning of this type of output with some certainty' (ibid p. 259). In concentrating on the individual, the uses and gratifications approach ignores social and sub-cultural groupings and fails to consider how audiences perceive and interpret the content of messages carried by the media.

The question of interpretation and sub-cultural variation formed the basis of the next significant shift in British audience research.

In 1979 David Morley published *The 'Nationwide' Audience* with the object of investigating:

The specificity of communication and signifying practices, not as a wholly autonomous field, but in its complex articulations with questions of class, ideology and power... This is to return to prominence..[questions] as to the structural conditions which generate different cultural and ideological competencies. (Morley 1979 p.20)

Morley conceived of a socially structured audience, consisting of sub-cultural groupings, whose position within the socio-economic structure would have bearing on individual members' meaning systems and in particular on their interpretations of media messages. Morley used Frank Parkin's model of class-based meaning systems which suggests that in western societies there are three major frameworks through which different interpretations of class inequality can be made; the dominant value system; the subordinate value system and the radical value system. (Parkin 1973) Adapting Parkin, Morley suggests that there are three different positions which the receiver or 'decoder' of the television message can adopt in relation to that message: the decoder may accept the dominant or preferred meaning of the message; he or she may accept the preferred meaning but may negotiate that meaning depending on his/her social experience or position; the decoder may recognise the framework within which the message has been 'encoded' and supply his or her own alternative reading.

Alongside this reconceptualisation of the television audience Morley, with Charlotte Brunson, undertook a semiological analysis of the early evening magazine programme *Nationwide*. (Brunson and Morley 1978) The aim here was to determine how, within the encoding process, a preferred or dominant reading was established. This was not an attempt to seek the 'true' meaning of the programme, but rather to suggest that although programmes such as *Nationwide* are open to different interpretations (as assumed by the uses and gratifications approach) they nevertheless are encoded within a

structured polysemy and that the programme makers are concerned to encourage a particular reading by the viewer.

Video tapes of the two programmes analysed were shown to a range of groups from different social backgrounds who were then interviewed in order to establish the extent to which they accepted, negotiated or opposed the preferred meaning in the decoding process. There were 29 groups in all, 18 taken from different levels of the educational system with different social and cultural backgrounds and 11 from different levels of the education system, trade union and management training centres. The groups existed as social entities prior to the research with established formal and informal networks of communication. Interviews were tape recorded and were of approximately thirty minutes duration, and they formed the basic data upon which analyses of interpretations were made. This project challenged both the predominant passive and individualistic conceptions of the audience, which it reformulated as an active, socially constituted audience, and those theories which privileged the text as the site of meaning, leaving no space for the active reading subject.

The *Nationwide* study privileges class as the major structuring factor in reading and interpretation. Morley and Brunson's work was undertaken at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham and concurrently other members of the CCCS were developing a feminist approach to cultural studies and using ethnographic methods of research.<sup>6</sup> Dorothy Hobson's work exemplifies such developments and is of particular relevance to the present study. Her two major research projects share very similar aims and methodologies. In 1978 she published 'Housewives: isolation as oppression' (Women's Studies Group 1978) and in 1980, 'Housewives and the Mass Media', (Hall *et al* 1980) both of which were extracts from her unpublished MA thesis, 'A Study of Working Class Women at Home: Femininity, Domesticity and Maternity'. The latter extract identifies radio as important for working-class women at home with young children, both in terms of time-tabling and as a link with the

'outside' world. She also suggests a gender division in television programme preferences, manifest mainly in a male preference for news/current affairs and female preference for 'entertainment' /fiction, especially in the form of soap opera:

The ideology of a masculine and a feminine world of activities and interests and the separation of those gender-specific interests is never more explicitly expressed than in the women's reactions and responses to television programmes. Here both class and gender-specific differences are of vital importance. (Hall et al p.109)

Hobson is able to explore gender-specific differences by attending to women's accounts of their own preferences and those of their male partners, but it is difficult to see how she can claim to have conceptualised class-specific differences. Her study was based on long tape-recorded interviews with young working class women, and, as such, could potentially provide a picture of that class and its gender-specific culture. However, we have no information about the activities, interests and programme preferences of women in other class positions with which to compare her material.

In 1982 her book *Crossroads The Drama of a Soap Opera* (Hobson 1982) was published. This was based on research in progress for a doctoral thesis in which she had previously claimed to be:

..looking at the production processes of various popular television and radio programmes, which involves interviewing and observing the programme makers in the encoding moment, and I will then move to the audience of those programmes to try to understand their decoding of the televisual texts. (Hall et al 1980 p 292)

Her investigation of the 'encoding moment' was traumatised by the sacking of Noele Gordon from what was then ATV's *Crossroads* and the resulting publication was aimed at a general readership because, as she put it:

the public outcry of support for the actress and media coverage of those events seemed much more relevant to a book of wider appeal than to remain part of an academic thesis. (Hobson 1982 p.11)

This resulted in a vastly truncated version of her original plan for applying the encoding-decoding model. Hobson had intended to look at the encoding of a range of popular programmes made for television and radio, and to follow this up with an exploration of the 'decoding' audience. Her section on the 'decoding moment' in which she reports on the audience for *Crossroads* is lacking in rigour. The subjects of her study are distinct only in that they are fans of the soap opera. This activity is foregrounded at the expense of important contextual factors. Information about the women, their class, age, family circumstances and employment, where it appears at all, is introduced in an unsystematic way, resulting in a collection of disembodied reports, organised around different forms of reported and observed viewing practices and pleasures. There is no attempt to relate these to wider social or cultural categories, and the study is almost a celebratory account of viewing pleasures associated with a soap opera.

In spite of the shortcomings of her *Crossroads* study, Hobson made a key intervention in the field of audience research in that she focussed her attention on the domestic environment, the context of most television viewing, and employed the qualitative methods of interviews, observations, and tape recorded 'long unstructured conversations' (ibid p.105) with viewers:

It is important to stress that the interviews were unstructured because I wanted the viewers to determine what was interesting or what they noticed, or liked, or disliked about the programme and specifically about the episodes which we had watched. (ibid p.105)

The domestic context of television watching was identified by David Morley as a lacuna of the *Nationwide* study. (Morley 1986) The groups had viewed *Nationwide* in a 'contrived' setting, their workplace, and not in their 'natural' domestic viewing contexts. In his next project Morley wanted to explore this context and the possibility of contradictory decodings which subjects may make across different

types of texts and within different contexts. He also wanted to investigate the preferred genres of particular audience sub-groups.

### Television in the Domestic Context

Readings, then, must be understood within the context of viewing and in the recognition that people occupy and assume different subject positions in their social relations. Individuals who constitute sub-groups of the television audience cannot be seen simply as bearers of deep structures (class, for example) which can somehow be read-off or matched up with their decoding strategies, but must be seen as subjects crossed by a number of different, and often contradictory, discourses. This is not to regard the subject as 'spoken' by those discourses, but, as Morley suggests, we require to:

see the person actively producing meanings from the restricted range of cultural resources which his or her structural position has allowed them access to. (Morley 1986 p. 43)

The cultural resources which are available to individuals and from which their particular cultural competencies are gained can be seen as major determining factors in the kinds of choices of popular genres which people make. Moreover, these 'resources' and 'competencies' are unevenly distributed within our society. Referring to the work of Bourdieu and others, Morley argues that the possession of cultural competence is 'determined outside the sphere of television - by family socialisation and education.' (ibid p.44)

When Morley showed his groups the *Nationwide* programme, the question of whether those groups would choose to watch that programme in the first place was not considered. In order to understand what types of material are relevant and to whom:

we need to deal more directly with the relevance/irrelevance and comprehension/incomprehension dimensions of interpretations and decoding, rather than being directly concerned with the acceptance or rejection of particular substantive ideological themes or propositions. (ibid p. 45)



What is involved here is a move away from considering the ideological problematic of specific televisual texts toward what Morley refers to as 'audience availability'. In addressing this kind of audience competence and its distribution across the social structure, we open up the important inter-discursive space which encircles the viewing subject and her/his relation to both social structures and to particular popular genres. Eighteen families were interviewed in an attempt to provide an 'ethnography of reading' (Morley 1981) of the 'politics of the living room'<sup>7</sup> and of the way in which television takes its place within the household culture.

The opening chapters of Morley's *Family Television* outlined above, suggest an alternative conceptual model for television viewing in the domestic context, but he admits in an 'Afterword' that 'in the later analysis I have been unable to operationalise effectively all the theoretical consequences of this model' (Morley 1986 p.174). One of the major problems is, in fact, that his 'sample' of families is dominated by those with a working class or lower middle class background. Given that he wanted to explore the range of cultural competencies and related choices, this restriction is a limitation on the whole enterprise. This is not to argue that a wider range of family backgrounds would have produced a more 'representative' sample, but that a more diverse selection would have permitted exploratory investigation of differences in cultural competence. Accordingly, as class slipped out of focus in *Family Television*, gender emerged as the strongest structuring element in viewing practice. Gender clearly has a major influence on viewing behaviour and other domestic practices and must play a central role in any attempt to address the social constitution of the audience. Class and gender, in particular, intersect significantly and small-scale qualitative research projects can hope to explore some part of the complexity of their interrelation.

This approach to television audience research emphasises the importance of attending to the social dimension of television viewing

and to the ways in which the dynamics of domestic life, and relationships within that environment, effect the practice of television viewing. It insists on investigating the microcosm of the household in terms of the ways in which its members, in different permutations, organise space and time within its geography.<sup>6</sup>

Reference has already been made to Hobson's pioneering work on the domestic world of television viewing which, along with *Family Television*, recognises the significance of the domestic context for television consumption. However, both pieces of research tend to conceive of a 'unified' context. In looking at the introduction of the VCR into various households, the present research suggests that this context is not 'unified' but 'diverse', constituted by different household members and 'appropriate' texts, and furthermore that each context offers specific and distinct viewing experiences for the women in the study.

The idea that television and radio tailor their output to different audiences at different times of the day is not new. Much work has looked at the structuring of schedules and the forms of popular television, assuming that characteristic audiences, particular domestic timetables, and different modes of viewing are produced as a consequence of scheduling and programming styles. Richard Paterson suggests that the scheduling of ITV and BBC presupposes an audience composed of families, their programming assuming a specific pattern of domestic life. For example: programmes for women at home during the day; childrens' television shown immediately after school; and the nine o'clock 'watershed' after which it is assumed that children will be in bed. (Paterson 1980) The schedules are therefore seen as specific modes of regulation of domestic media. More recently, Scannell has attempted to analyse the 'unobtrusive ways in which broadcasting sustains the lives, and routines, from one day to the next, year in, year out, of whole populations' (Scannell 1986 p. 1). The ways in which radio and television's output is punctuated by regular segments of, say, news, weather reports and commercials, as well as the daily and weekly programming schedules,

begins to take the place of the domestic clock. This regulation of domestic time, Scannell suggests, can be extended to the regulation of a wider 'national' time which sustains the annual round of events and festivals, weaving these into private and domestic timetabling.

Tania Modleski has considered the female audience for day-time television, suggesting that the scheduling and form of day-time output - soap operas, quiz games, etc. - assumes a distracted domestic female viewer, unable to give full attention to the screen because of her endless domestic duties and responsibilities. Thus programming fits into pre-established domestic rhythms and renders interruptibility and distraction pleasurable. Modleski focuses her account of day-time viewing on an analysis of soap opera and its 'ideal' reader, (Modleski 1982) a topic which will be taken up in more detail in the later discussion of textual analysis.

The studies by Paterson, Scannell and Modleski are all based upon analysis of the TV product from which major inferences are made about the 'typical' audience. All three seem to suggest that audience members occupy the subject position offered by these regulatory texts or groups of texts. But, whilst recognising the significance of television and radio in the organisation of domestic time, it is also important to explore the audiences themselves, not simply presuppose their uniform behaviour from institutional and textual analyses.

Obviously, the presence of a VCR in the household offers the viewer the opportunity to disrupt this 'temporal regulation', something which this study will explore. In considering the social organisation of viewing in different domestic contexts, however, it is the effect of the VCR on the 'modality of viewing' which first requires consideration. John Ellis suggests some of the differences in modes of viewing between domestic television and the cinema, summarised in terms of the difference between the 'glance' and the 'gaze'. (Ellis 1982 p 137) Unlike Modleski, Ellis suggests that the whole of television's output assumes a distracted viewer who may be constantly

interrupted by domestic diversions. Television is 'perpetually present' in the home and in its construction of immediacy, through conventions such as direct address, 'breed(s) a sense of the perpetual present.' (ibid p.134). Television is, Ellis suggests, almost too available. As a result, he argues, the form of broadcast television has developed into a constant flow of short segments which continually attempt to grab the attention of the distracted viewer, with sound used to secure a level of attention out of range of the screen. The cinema audience, on the other hand, is in a darkened auditorium in front of a large and dominating image and consequently can be relied upon to engage with the cinema narration at a much higher level of concentration. Compared with television viewing, going to the cinema is an 'event' for which money is paid before consumption. These different social viewing contexts have, according to Ellis, created two distinct regimes of representation. Now, there are obvious analogies to be drawn between going to the cinema and hiring a movie from the video library - the movie has been specifically selected and paid for - but the viewing context remains domestic rather than public. To what extent, then, is the domestic viewing regime altered by this activity? Does the capacity to time-shift broadcast material affect modes of viewing? These are questions to be addressed in this thesis.

### Texts - Subjects - Contexts

*Family Television* is primarily concerned with the social use of television, its consideration of texts being confined to the expressed preferences of members of the various households in the sample, revealing evidence of 'the ways in which particular types of material can be seen to appeal particularly strongly to particular sub-sections of the audience'. (Morley 1986 p.45). This is an obvious shift from the earlier *Nationwide* problematic in which the text, and its ideological effect, was central to the enterprise, but it also marks a continuation of the shift which the *Nationwide* study itself had already made.

It was noted above that *The 'Nationwide' Audience* challenged existing conceptions of the audience. It also challenged an influential body of work which had developed throughout the 1970's within film theory. This has come to be known as 'Screen theory',<sup>9</sup> as *Screen*, along with *Screen Education*, published much of such work in Britain. Although focussing on the analysis of film texts, their claims about the relationship between language, ideology and 'the subject' had far reaching effects across cultural studies in general. The major tools of analysis were taken from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic traditions which were used to analyse textual mechanisms which interpellated the subject at the moment of reading.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a single, universal set of psychic mechanisms were used to 'explain' the text-subject relationship. This effectively removed both text and subject from both history and society, and significantly, left no theoretical space for the subject constituted outside that relationship - through other discourses and other texts; thus, there was no point in investigating or accounting for the reading subject as:

all texts depend on the same set of subject positions, constituted in the formation of the subject, and therefore that they need be accorded no other distinctive effectivity of their own (Morley 1980 p.163)

This is obviously an unsatisfactory state of affairs if we wish to investigate 'real' readers in their social and historical specificity. Indeed, for the present research it is crucial to conceptualise a 'gendered audience'. Annette Kuhn, in the course of exploring such a possibility, notes that work on the 'gendered audience' has developed within two different perspectives - one emerging from media studies and the other from film theory. (Kuhn 1984a) This has resulted in two quite different approaches. The sociological emphasis of media studies has tended to conceive of a 'social audience', that is, an audience made up of already constituted male and female persons who bring (among other things) maleness or femaleness to a text, and who decode the text within that particular frame of reference. Film theory, on the other hand, has

conceived of a 'psychological audience', a collection of individual spectators who are subjects constituted in signification and interpellated by the film or TV text. As Kuhn suggests, these two perspectives give us a distinction between femaleness as social gender and femininity as subject position. (ibid p. 24)

Putting it at its simplest, in the first case context is emphasised over text and in the latter text over context. The spectator-text relationship suggested by the psychoanalytic models used in film theory disregard differentiating features of social context involved in film and television viewing. Also, they cannot easily include reference to the subject constituted outside the text, across other discourses, such as class, race, age and general social environment. The social audience approach, conversely, sees response to texts as socially pre-determined, and thus does not allow consideration of how the texts themselves work on the viewers/readers. This would seem to be an unproductive conceptual dualism and one which the present study attempts to overcome. An important element in this work is gendered preference for different popular genres, a pattern confirmed by Hobson and Morley's empirical research. (Hobson 1982; Morley 1986) It is therefore important to examine different attempts to account for this phenomenon. But first, we must recognise that there has been criticism of the shift away from attention to the individual text and its ideological effect apparent in the present strand of audience research. It is therefore necessary to clarify what is involved in this shift and to consider the usefulness of the concept of genre for this particular study.

In an interview with Gillian Skirrow and Stephen Heath, Raymond Williams spoke of the status of the 'text' in media/mass communication studies:

I think that the whole tradition of analysis has been of the discrete single work and while something can be done with that approach, it would be rather missing the point of the normal television experience. (Modleski (ed) 1987 p.15).

Williams here reiterates his notion of television as 'flow' originally introduced in *Television Technology and Cultural Form* (Williams 1974) and indicates the importance of attending to how people watch television in the domestic setting. More recently, and from a post-modernist perspective, Grossberg has indicated the inappropriateness of the single text-reader model, calling for an approach which recognises the ways in which subjects appropriate the multiplicity of texts available and articulate them within their own subjectivity. (Grossberg 1988) Charlotte Brunsdon is concerned that these shifts, together with the attention given to the social and domestic context of viewing, has resulted in a tendency to treat all texts as being the same.' As Morley and Silverstone point out, it is not a matter of losing the specificity of the text, but of paying attention to the specific modes of viewing of different texts. Who is viewing what, with whom and at what times of the day? (Morley and Silverstone 1988 p. 27) Television viewing is carried out, in the main, alongside domestic life and within social relations which have different effects upon the viewing/reading experience. Grossberg and Radway have criticised those studies, in Radway's case including her own, which look at 'the relationship between singular texts or genres and locatable audiences' (Grossberg 1988 p 385). Radway states:

No matter how extensive the effort to dissolve the boundaries of the textual object or the audience, most recent studies of reception, including my own, continue to begin with the 'factual' existence of a particular kind of text which is understood to be received by some set of individuals. Such studies perpetuate, then, the notion of a circuit neatly bounded and therefore identifiable, locatable, and open to observation. (Radway, 1988: 363)

Radway's study of romance readers (Radway 1984) does, indeed, fall into the 'circuit' trap which she identifies, even though she explores the social act of reading as an important part of the pleasure for the women involved. Nevertheless, all we know about the women in her study is the nature of their engagement with a specific genre consumed through a specific medium. What Radway and Grossberg are now suggesting is that reception ethnographies should

be studies of 'everyday life' which explore the plethora of texts encountered across different media and the ways in which these are constitutive of subjectivity, something which is, in their terms, always in process.

### Genre and Gender

In this context, the present study centres on an item of domestic entertainment technology rather than a specific text or generic group of texts, the aim being to attend to how respondents themselves accounted for their own use, choices and preferences. The study then works with a concept of genre, but not with an equation between specific genres and specific audiences. Stephen Neale suggests that '...genres are not to be seen as forms of textual codifications, but as systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject..' (Bennett et al 1981 p.6). Audiences for television, cinema and reading matter possess generic knowledge and make use of this in their selections and choices of viewing and reading. Furthermore, genre knowledge is unevenly distributed across different social groups, but especially between men and women. These different generic competencies need to be explored if we are to understand the reproduction of gendered cultural consumption.

There have been attempts to link text with subject in context by examining the particular characteristics of popular genres which appear to be addressed to a female audience. Hobson's work on *Crossroads* has already been discussed, but there are two other influential pieces of work, which, unlike Hobson's, draw upon psychoanalytic theories. Tania Modleski and Janice Radway have used psychoanalytic theories of the reproduction of sex, gender and familial organisation in order to account for the psycho-social constitution of women, in particular in their role as mothers, and their relationship to and pleasures in their preferred popular genres. (Modleski 1982; Radway 1984) Modleski analyses the 'female' genre of soap opera and identifies the subject position offered as



being one of the 'ideal mother'. The female viewer is offered a maternal position in relation to the many characters in the serial, identifying with no one in particular, but empathising and sympathising with all, while having 'no demands or claims of her own'. The portrayed vicissitudes of family life have no satisfactory resolution in the never-ending world of the soap opera text. Thus, Modleski suggests:

..soap operas convince women that their highest goal is to see their families united and happy, while consoling them for their inability to realize this ideal and bring about familial harmony. (Modleski 1982 p. 92)

Modleski's 'spectator position' is that of the passive feminine subject, and her discussion of the villainess exemplifies her use of the Freudian model:

The extreme delight viewers apparently take in despising the villainess testifies to the enormous amount of energy involved in the spectator's repression and to her (albeit unconscious) resentment at being constituted as an egoless receptacle for the suffering of others (ibid p. 94)

As we shall see from the following analysis, there are problems in inferring the spectator position from a close textual analysis where, in Modleski's case, feminine spectator implied by the text as the 'ideal mother' and the female viewing subject in her domestic role are collapsed one into the other. Janice Radway uses Chodorow's re-working of Freud and as her insights would seem to have a very broad application to areas of relevance to the present study, it is necessary to examine these in more detail.

Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* represents an attempt to break with Freudian phallogentrism and its presumption of universality. (Chodorow 1978) She focuses her attention on the pre-oedipal phase of psycho-sexual development and on the quality of the mother-daughter relationship as compared to the mother-son and father-son relationships of the Freudian problematic. Chodorow also locates her theory within a patriarchal social and familial structure

in which women's primary role is to mother. She sees 'relational potential' as a crucial distinction between the genders:

The main importance of the oedipus complex, I argue, is not primarily in the development of gender identity and socially appropriate heterosexual genitality, but in the constitution of different forms of 'relational potential' in people of different genders' (ibid p. 166)

Chodorow argues that a girl continues her pre-oedipal attachment to her mother for a long time because 'mothers tend to experience their daughters as more like, and continuous with, themselves' (ibid p. 168). The daughter's separation from her mother therefore takes longer to achieve. A boy, on the other hand, experiences earlier separation from his mother, but in order to achieve masculinity must repress the feminine. According to Chodorow this

Denial of sense of connectedness and isolation of affect may be more characteristic of masculine development and may produce a more rigid and punitive super ego, whereas feminine development, in which internal and external object relations and affects connected to these are not so repressed, may lead to a super ego more open to persuasion and the judgements of others, that is, not so independent of its emotional origins. (ibid p.169)

She concludes that girls and boys develop different relational capacities as a result of growing up in families where women mother. These families produce girls who have the nurturing and relational qualities required for mothering whilst boys are constructed with firmer ego-boundaries, less dependent on relational factors:

The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate. (ibid p. 169)

Janice Radway's study of female romance readers uses Chodorow's theories of gendered development in two ways. Firstly, to explain why the women in her study read romances; she suggests that, whilst women are brought up to reproduce and nurture others, in the patriarchal family of western society no-one performs this reproducing and nurturing role for women: 'men are socially and

psychologically reproduced by women, but women are reproduced (or not) largely by themselves.'<sup>12</sup> In reading romances, Radway suggests, women are able to lose themselves in a book:

It supplies them with an important emotional release that is proscribed in daily life because the social role with which they identify themselves leaves little room for guiltless, self-interested pursuit of individual pleasure. (Radway 1984 pp. 95/96)

Radway concludes that 'emotional gratification was the one theme common to all of the women's observations about the function of romance reading' (ibid p.96). Of course, this general account of reasons for reading does not necessarily explain why it is the romance genre in particular to which women turn for their gratification. Radway, again using Chodorow, suggests that the basic narrative structure of the romance plots the woman's journey into female personhood 'as that particular psychic configuration is constructed and realized within patriarchal culture' (ibid p. 138). Initially, the heroine is plucked from an earlier relationship and thrust into a public world; a process reminiscent of the girl's break with her mother. The heroine's search for identity becomes synonymous with the promise and eventual fulfilment of her relationship with a male other. In the resolution of the narrative the heroine has successfully completed the female self-in-relation with a male who is capable of nurturing and caring for her:

Thus the romance is concerned not simply with the fact of heterosexual marriage, but with the perhaps more essential issues for women - how to realize a mature self and how to achieve emotional fulfillment in a culture in which such goals must be achieved in the company of an individual whose principal preoccupation is always elsewhere in the public world. (Original emphasis) (ibid p.139.)

The magical resolution of a 'happy ending' in the gratification of female needs validates the very institution, heterosexual marriage,

within which the reader herself is positioned and leaves her emotionally re-charged as she returns to her role.

Most of the women in Radway's sample were married, white, middle class mothers, which is perhaps why Chodorow's theories appear to have such relevance given their concern with gender reproduction within the same class and family unit. Chodorow, however, makes a wider and unqualified claim that the reproduction of mothering is achieved across all classes, and, indeed, all cultures where women are primarily responsible for child-care. She further suggests that if men were involved more in parenting, then girl and boy children would be able to identify with both parents, thereby leading to a breaking down of the traditional gender divisions. This, of course, is a reductive argument which takes no account of the economic and social context within which 'the family' exists. Structures of work would have to change in order for male parenting to be achieved. In addition, gendered subjectivity is not only achieved within the family, but is constantly produced and reproduced through other institutions such as education and the media.

However, Chodorow's important observation of gender difference based in 'relational potential' does seem useful. Radway's study did not explore differences between women, however, and the present study, whilst accepting Chodorow's fundamental premise, seeks to explore areas of difference in women's responses to cultural products and their perceptions of their roles within their families. In this way we can incorporate other determining factors, such as education, class and age which may challenge Chodorow's more extravagant claims.

Ien Ang has approached the text-reader problem from a rather different perspective, by setting out to discover why the popular American serial, *Dallas*, is so pleasurable. (Ang 1985) She executes an impressive and useful analysis of *Dallas* as text, focussing on its strategies and mechanisms for generating pleasure,

and examines interaction with the text as conceived by viewers. Ang's viewer data comes from letters sent in response to her advertisement in a women's magazine. From these letters she identifies the appeal of *Dallas* in its achievement of 'emotional realism' for its fans:

More specifically, the realism has to do with the recognition of a tragic structure of feeling, which is felt as 'real' and which makes sense for these viewers' (ibid p.87)

Using written accounts is problematic in terms of the 'distancing' involved and because the respondents come across as disembodied voices, lacking in any kind of social context. However, she does not take the letters 'straight' but attempts a 'symptomatic' reading of them:

..the letters must be regarded as texts, as discourses people produce when they want to express or have to account for their preference for, or aversion to, a highly controversial piece of popular culture like *Dallas* (ibid p. 11)

What Ang found was that the majority of letter writers, whether they hated or loved *Dallas*, framed their responses within a familiar ideology of mass culture - the view that *Dallas* is bad by virtue of its status as a product of commercial mass culture. Those who claimed to dislike *Dallas* could justify themselves by reference to its commercial nature, its use of stereotypes, and the fact that they saw it as 'rubbish', views which, Ang argues, reflect the dominant social attitudes towards products like *Dallas*. The majority of *Dallas* fans recognised this ideology, but managed to negotiate their own position within it. Ang argues that there is no readily available cultural framework through which lovers of *Dallas* can express their pleasure in the serial, although some of her respondents invoked what Ang describes as an 'individual right of determination' (ibid p.113). These respondents speak from a position within the ideology of populism, a position summed up in the phrase 'There's no accounting for taste'. (ibid p. 113) This

offers them the possibility of simply rejecting what is claimed to be 'good' and following their own taste. Ang suggests:

There exists [then] a cynical dialectic between the intellectual dominance of the ideology of mass culture and the 'spontaneous' practical attraction of the populist ideology. (ibid p. 115)

Ang makes the connection between populist ideology and what Bourdieu has called the popular 'aesthetic', diametrically opposed to the bourgeois 'aesthetic'. The latter adopts a distanced and analytical position in relation to a cultural artefact, judging it upon established and universal criteria. The former, as expressed by Bourdieu, is marked by :

The desire to enter into the game, identifying with characters' joys and sufferings, worrying about their fate, espousing their hopes and ideals, living their life, [and] is based on a form of investment, a sort of deliberate 'naivety', ingenuous, good natured credulity..' (Bourdieu 1980 p 238)

In identifying the different ideologies which inform her respondent's letters, Ang is able to suggest the social definitions of cultural products to which people have access. However, because her analysis focuses on the text-reader relationship alone, we do not know which viewers evoke the ideology of mass culture and which the ideology of populism. What we do know about her sample, however, is that the majority of letter writers were women. This is not surprising given the location of her advertisement, but Ang goes on to argue that, although *Dallas* as a prime-time serial is aimed at a mixed audience, viewing data suggests that it is predominantly watched by women. This is significantly reflected in the present study as are the ways in which different women account for their preferred texts and genres. The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is of relevance here in that he points to the close relationship linking cultural practices to educational capital. Bourdieu is concerned to examine the unequal distribution of 'cultural capital' across class and the role which familial and educational factors play in this cultural appropriation. Gender is

largely ignored by Bourdieu, but differences in cultural competence and the acquisition of cultural capital are not only defined by class, but also by gender. In 'The Aristocracy of Culture', quoted above, Bourdieu outlines the results of research into 'taste' and discusses this in terms of 'aesthetic disposition'. Bourdieu does have something to say about women in relation to their responses to the question 'Given the following subjects, is a photographer more likely to make a beautiful, interesting, trivial or ugly photo.' (ibid p 241) Amongst these subjects were a landscape, a car crash, a pregnant woman, butcher's shop, cabbages, etc. He notes that:

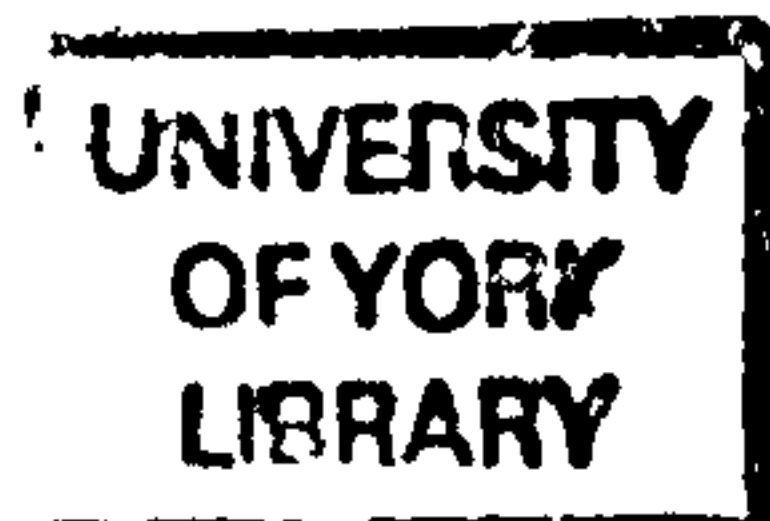
The statistics..show that women are more likely than men to manifest their repugnance at repugnant, horrible or distasteful objects. (ibid p. 243)

Bourdieu accounts for this by suggesting that traditional divisions of labour between the genders assigns:

'human' or 'humanitarian' tasks and feelings to women and more readily allows them effusions and tears...men are *ex officio* on the side of culture whereas women (like the working class) are cast on the side of nature. (ibid p.243)

The 'aesthetic disposition' demands a distancing of subject from cultural artefact, and a refusal to 'surrender to nature'. This, Bourdieu suggests is 'the mark of the dominant groups - who start with self-control [and] is the basis of the aesthetic disposition'. (ibid p. 243) This appears to be an essentialist argument about both women and the working class. However, in a footnote, Bourdieu indicates that the traditional divisions of gender roles tends to weaken as educational capital grows. Thus:

Women in the new petty-bourgeoisie who, in general, make much greater concessions to affective considerations than the men in the same category, much more rarely accept that a photograph of a pregnant woman can only be ugly than women in any other category. In doing so, they manifest simultaneously their aesthetic pretensions and their desire to be seen as 'liberated' from the ethical taboos imposed on their sex. (ibid p.243)



There are two important points to be extracted from Bourdieu's work which have relevance to the following analysis. Firstly, the notion of distance and self-control required for the aesthetic disposition which he locates within the dominant groups (i.e. middle class males), positioning women and the working class as subordinate groups within the popular aesthetic. This is manifest in close engagement with the cultural artefact, emotional affectivity, and lack of self-awareness and control. Secondly, the fact that middle-class educated women are likely to resist their gender defined position and adopt a more distanced and self-controlled attitude, although they are still likely to be more emotionally affected than males in the same group. Bourdieu was primarily concerned to account for the reproduction of class through culture, but his work also suggests how we might think of class, gender and educational capital as relatively weighted determining factors in the formation of cultural preferences and competencies. He is not concerned to account for how 'traditional' gender attributes are reproduced but here we can return to Chodorow's work on the different relational potential of gendered subjects. It is possible to map this into Bourdieu's account of cultural reproduction as follows:

**CLASS/CULTURE REPRODUCTION (Bourdieu)**

bourgeoisie distance	(middle class/ masculine)	
		'public' discourses
popular aesthetic	(working class/female)	

**GENDER REPRODUCTION (Chodorow)**

separate self	(masculine)	
		'private discourses
self-in-relation	(feminine)	



By combining these accounts of reproduction we are able to conceive of the constitution of the subject in terms of both class and gender, but note that they both suggest the significance of the relational factor. In Bourdieu's terms this refers to cultural consumption as it relates to education and class, and for Chodorow to the differences in male and female sense of self and the extent of their dependence on others. This suggests that the 'aesthetic disposition' might more readily be attained by the 'separate self' of the masculine subject, and conversely, that the 'closeness' of the popular aesthetic lends itself to the feminine construction of self-in-relation. This study explores the different ways in which class and gender produce particular subjectivities and the extent to which a more complex account of the female subject will be required.

Finally, it is necessary to raise one further cultural dimension which has effects at many levels of relevance to this study: the VCR's status as technology within the household. Men and women have unequal access to technological knowledge within our society, generated through familial socialization, education and work-place experience, and this has resulted in an ideology of female-related technical incompetence. Research has been carried out on gender and technology in the workplace,<sup>13</sup> but the whole area of domestic technology has been neglected. One exception to this neglect is a collection of work edited by Wendy Faulkner and Erik Arnold, *Smothered by Invention*, which looks at technology in women's lives. (Faulkner and Arnold 1985) In this collection there are discussions of housework and domestic technology, but no attention is paid to the increasing technologisation of leisure and entertainment in the home. It is important to consider the ways in which women relate to new entertainment technology compared with, for instance, new domestic technology, as each is inscribed with gender expectations disseminated through marketing and advertising. VCR's were marketed from the outset as hi-tech equipment which had to be mastered, thereby apparently addressing the male consumer. However, as Cynthia Cockburn points out, not all men are

technologically competent. (Cockburn 1985) It is relevant to this research, therefore, to explore the degree to which men were expected to have technical knowledge of the VCR and the extent to which women felt technologically incompetent.

\* \* \* \* \*

The analysis which follows is structured so as to establish the social and cultural contexts of the households in which the VCR functions. Chapter 1 deals with research method and sample profile; Chapter 2 examines divisions of domestic labour and organisation of spare time within the household; Chapter 3 looks at the different viewing contexts, their appropriate related texts and viewing modes; Chapter 4 examines women's viewing and reading preferences, and those of their male partners as they were reported; Chapter 5 looks at the VCR as technology in relation to other forms of domestic technology and reports on the decisions leading to its acquisition; Chapter 6 deals with the VCR and its use for time-shift; Chapter 7 reports on the use of video libraries and hiring of pre-recorded video tapes.

By exploring VCR use within its wider social and cultural context it is possible to investigate to what extent those contextual factors determine the ways in which women use this new piece of entertainment technology and how, if at all, it disrupts those existing social and cultural patterns. These questions form the basis of the concluding chapter.

## 1 METHOD & SAMPLE

In sociological research it is essential to find a method which is appropriate to the object or subject under study. The theoretical framework through which research is approached will impose its own demands upon the nature of the data required and the method of information/data gathering should be capable of eliciting this in the necessary depth or breadth.

In their collection of Working Papers in Cultural Studies published in 1980 as *Culture, Media, Language* the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies included a section entitled 'Ethnography'. They wanted to:

indicate the presence within Cultural Studies of a method - through shifting theoretical and substantive focuses - which continues to offer...an important mode of the production of concrete studies of the cultural level.  
(Hall et al 1980 p.73)

Setting this development of an ethnographic method within a general and reawakened interest in *verstehen* after the 'breakdown of the dominance of structural-functionalism' (ibid p.73) in mainstream sociology the Centre saw it as a 'growing interest in methods capable of delivering qualitative knowledge of social relations, with all the rich distinctions and tones of living societies.' (ibid p.73). This 'search for a method' was important for the Centre, given their emphasis on the significance of 'lived cultures' as a politically necessary area for study, particularly those of working class youth. (e.g. Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979; Hall and Jefferson 1976)) However, such work was also carried out at the Centre in relation to women, construed as an appropriate research method for investigating women's lives in the domestic sphere, their engagement with different media products, and the ideologies of motherhood and femininity which were seen to compound their oppression. (Hobson 1978, 1980; McRobbie 1978, 1981, 1982b) The present study has

much in common with the work of the Women's Studies Centre at the CCCS particularly in terms of its exploratory nature.

Addressing more specifically the methods applied to related television audience research, it is clear that those television audience studies to date which are committed to qualitative research have not fulfilled the conditions necessary to be described as 'ethnographies'; Dorothy Hobson's work remains as the nearest example of an ethnography in television audience studies. (Hobson 1978, 1980, 1982) However, what 'audience led' research like Morley's *Family Television* has as its aim is to examine the way in which people live their culture; it insists that we must locate subjects in their social and historical contexts and develop ways of researching 'real' viewers. In this respect the study can be described as having ethnographic intentions. The present study follows Morley<sup>2</sup> in adopting the method of semi-structured, open-ended, tape-recorded interviews carried out in the respondents' homes and lasting for a minimum of 1½ hours. It attempts to explore the significant areas of women's daily lives which would seem to have a bearing on their use of the VCR and television. An important dimension of this study is the way the women make sense out of their own experience. Other feminist researchers have noted, that this open approach to the interview situation allows the respondents to raise issues and topics which they feel are important to the subject of the study, and in this way participate in the research. (Oakley 1981; Finch 1984 and Graham 1984) Graham goes further and suggests that in allowing women to recount their experiences through the telling of stories the researcher will gain a sense of the interrelatedness of certain aspects of women's lives, particularly in the domestic environment, thereby avoiding the tendency of more traditional survey methods to fragment women's accounts of their experience.<sup>3</sup>

Turning to the interviews themselves, it is a common misconception that the difference between survey interviewing and the ethnographic interview is that one is structured and the other is not.<sup>4</sup> All

interviews are 'structured' but the ethnographic interviewer approaches the interview with a set of issues and interests to be explored, but without a specific set of questions. The list of topics which informed my interviews forms Appendix B. By being an 'active listener' the researcher is able to respond to the concerns and interests of her interviewees, allowing them to initiate and motivate the discussion. The interview/discussion is a form of conversation, a social event, but with a particular relationship between researcher and researched. I was constantly aware of the need to negotiate this relationship so that the women were neither inhibited by too much formality, nor given total 'freedom' to change the nature of the social event. At the beginning of the interviews I explained the background to my research and briefly described the project and its aims and throughout the discussion answered any questions about myself which were put to me by the women. Armistead makes this point with regard to gaining trust and confidence of the respondents:

Genuine trust and confidence are likely to exist only when the researcher fully explains the reasons for research and those reasons are accepted by the subject. Such an outcome is more likely where the researcher is involved or identified in some way with those (s)he is researching.' (Armistead 1974 p. 120)

Although interviewing the women in their own homes has many advantages for the accumulation of relevant data, they are seldom places of uninterrupted peace and quiet. Small children, dogs, telephones, husbands, callers and biscuits in the oven all claimed attention at some time or another during many of the interviews, and whilst they provide an insight into the various demands on women's time in the home, they also disrupted the interviews considerably. A great degree of flexibility was therefore required as each interview situation presented different problems, but again I was conscious of the need to adapt and adjust my own practice in order to facilitate discussion and make the women feel at ease with me.

It is inevitable that this kind of data gathering is based on an extremely limited form of actual 'observation' and relies heavily on respondents' accounts and explanations of their own actions, feelings and attitudes. It would, of course, be naive to suggest that this kind of interview/discussion is sufficient in itself. However, through careful analysis, such material can be used to investigate the wider structural and ideological frameworks within which the respondents form their attitudes.

This research, therefore, does not take the the 'centred' creative human subject as its point of departure, but rather recognises that subjects are in part constituted by conditions which are external to them, As Giddens says:

The realm of human agency is bounded. Men [sic] produce society, but they do so as historically located actors, and not under conditions of their own choosing. (Giddens 1976 p. 160)

What the women said to me does not directly reflect their experience, but it is their way of articulating that experience. The interview data upon which this project is based has therefore been subjected to a double interpretation: the first is the interpretation which the women bring to their own experience, and the one which they share with me, whilst the second is the interpretation I make of what they say. Their interpretations depend on their subject position and the discourses to which they have access and through which their subjectivities are constructed. My interpretation depends on these things also, with the important addition of a theoretical and conceptual discourse which constitutes the framework of my analysis.

The problem of the 'status' of experience has concerned feminists<sup>5</sup>, many of whom believe that women's experience, unmediated by further theory, is the source of true knowledge. This, according to Chris Weedon, is a belief which:

rests on the liberal-humanist assumption that subjectivity is the coherent source of the interpretation of the meaning of 'reality' (Weedon 1987 p. 8)

We cannot rely unproblematically on 'experience' as the source of knowledge, but we must not deny subjective experience since 'the way people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society'. (ibid p.8)

What I have attempted to do in this research is to provide an 'ethnography' of a number of female subject positions, exploring the differences and coherences in those subjectivities and making sense of these contradictions and cohesions by constant reference to relevant structural factors. I have not, however, rendered the women 'invisible' in my interpretation, nor my presence as interviewer. Extracts from the interviews are quoted extensively throughout this thesis, not merely as examples in support of my interpretation, but in order to give the reader more direct access to the subjects of this study and the process by which the empirical data was obtained.

### Selection of Sample

My initial focus for study was gender and the use of the VCR. The decision to interview women alone was made for reasons already given in this Chapter, i.e. my interest in how women account for their own experience in relation to gender and the VCR. Furthermore, the locus of the VCR, is in the traditionally 'female' and far from neutral domestic environment where power relations exist across gender and age. I took gender as the dominant factor in the organisation of domestic life, especially within familial relationships, and then chose a sample of women whose class, age, employment position, number of children and age of children differed in order that I could explore the differential relevance of these factors in relation to TV viewing and video use. My sample consists almost exclusively of women who live with a male partner, in full employment, most of whom were married. The exceptions to this are a widow, living with her teenage sons and daughters, and

two young single women living with their parents. The reason for including these women was to explore, to a limited extent, slightly different living units and to pay some attention to younger women. All the women shared the same ethnic background, for two main reasons. Firstly I wanted to explore how factors such as age, class, employment and so on crossed gender within a broadly culturally homogenous group, and secondly because it is in the nature of this kind of research that the relationship between researcher and researched is a particularly delicate one. Quite simply, as a white researcher, I felt unqualified, to establish the appropriate subject to subject relationship with women whose ethnic background I did not share. This requirement for homogeneity also accounts for my not looking at other kinds of domestic unit where different relationships are lived out. However, in focussing my attention on 'families' I do not assume that 'the family' is somehow natural; clearly it is a socially prescribed way of living. But we must recognise that the ideology of the family as a naturally given, desirable 'institution' is a powerful force across different discourses within our society, especially for those living in that particular kind of domestic unit. Ownership of VCRs is most common in households with one male adult, one female adult and children of school age.<sup>6</sup> This group is not only the major user of video recorders, but it is also the group which is socially positioned as 'the family', both materially and ideologically.

Locating an appropriately stratified sample of women was not easy. This is always the case in this kind of research, but my problem was compounded by the fact that, at the time, there was some public anxiety about people enquiring into ownership of a VCR. This was based on large numbers of reported burglaries supposedly linked to the presence of a VCR in the household. The strategy I employed was to establish contact and win the confidence of the owner of a video library in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire. He agreed to my undertaking a questionnaire-survey of the people who came into his shop. This survey would provide useful information for him and respondents could be asked if they were willing to assist in further



research. This produced a largely working class sample of women. The middle-class women in my sample came from two separate personal introductions and selection of women appropriate to my sample 'snow-balled' from them. Sample details are outlined in the following table:

**SAMPLE DETAILS**

Code+	Age	Age left Education	Occupation	Ages of Children at Home	Home Status	Partner's Occupation
A/1	44	U*	p/t ESL Teacher	13/16	owners	Professor
A/2	43	U	f/t Research Fellow	5/12	owners	Architect (SE)
A/3	46	17	f/t Nursery Nurse	13/15	owners	Clinical Psychologist
A/4	37	U	f/t Lecturer/Architect	6/8/11	owners	Lecturer/Architect
B/1	39	15	p/t Nursery Assistant	10/15/17	owners	Pensions Consultant
B/2	35	U	p/t Careers Advisor	2/4	owners	Grammar School Teacher
B/3	25	18	f/t Family Manager	4 mths	owners	Sales Director
B/4	48	15	p/t Clerical Assistant	18/20	owners	Sales Executive
B/5	50	14	p/t Wine Bar Assistant	-	owners	Leisure Executive
B/6	36	U	Vol, ESL Tutor	2/5	owners	Solicitor
Code	Age	Age left Education	Occupation	Ages of children at Home	Home Status	Partner's Occupation
C1/1	29	15	p/t plant displayer	4/7	owners	Plumber (SE)
C1/2	40	17	p/t book-keeper	18/21	owners	Chef
C1/3	29	15	f/t Hairdresser's	-	owners	Motor Accessories Distributor
C1/4	51	15	Receptionist p/t Dr's Receptionist	27	owners	Haulage Contractor (SE)
C1/5	34	15	f/t Family Manager	7/10/12	owners	Electrical Engineer

C1/6	33	TT**	f/t Primary Teacher	-	owners	Actor
C1/7	44	TT	f/t Middle Schl, Teacher	19/23	owners	Fire Officer
C1/8	52	16	Newsagent	25/25/17/16	owners	-
C1/9	31	16	Temp School Assistant	7/9	owners	Area Manager/Oil Co.
-----						
C2/1	21	15	Packer (eve)	2	owners	Maint, Engineer
C2/2	32	15	Domestic (eve)	4/7	owners	Electrician
C2/3	34	15	p/t Cashier	12/15	owners	Sheet Metal Worker (SE)
C2/4	35	15	f/t Family Manager	0/10/13/15	owners	Sheet Metal Worker
C2/5	27	16	f/t Family Manager	2	owners	Fitter/Engineer
-----						
D/1	36	U	p/t Clerical Admin.	8/10	tenants	Process Worker
D/2	30	15	f/t Family Manager	3/6/8	tenants	Asphalter
D/3	21	16	f/t Shop Assistant	-	tenants	-
D/4	48	15	p/t Textile Mender	17/21	tenants	Warehouseman
-----						
E/1	19	17	Unemployed	-	tenants	-
E/2	38	15	Casual Worker	17/19	tenants	Casual Worker
-----						

§University Education

\*\*Teacher Training Qualification,

+The coding represents identification by class. The location of class was established through consideration of education, housing as well as occupation of the male partner.



## 2 ORGANISATION OF SPARE TIME

C1/5: I feel guilty, I feel as if I've cheated and taken something that's not mine, you know..I've taken that out of the day and that is not my time.

In this section I will discuss the organisation of spare time in two separate areas, that of going out, i.e. 'official' leisure, or leisure as it is perceived by the women themselves, and that of staying in, often seen as 'not leisure' but also as 'not work'. In general, these two uses of time were of major concern to the women, but tended to throw up contradictions. However, most of the women when asked about leisure at home replied 'what leisure?'. Obviously the whole question of women's leisure in the home is linked to the division of domestic labour, and this therefore required some examination.

### Domestic Division of Labour

In this context it is important to determine which member(s) of the household are responsible for day-to-day domestic servicing, e.g. child care, food provision and cooking, washing and ironing, cleaning of the house and maintenance of the garden (if applicable) and upon whom performance of particular tasks routinely depend. The person who is responsible for the completion of tasks bears a very different relationship to those tasks than does the person who 'assists'. Whilst it is true that many of the male partners in the sample performed some domestic duties, they did so from the position of 'assistant'. This confirms what Cynthia Cockburn refers to as the relatively autonomous relationship which most men have with the domestic environment in general and with domestic 'chores' in particular. (Cockburn 1985) Within the informal, unwritten constitution of domestic 'units' the responsibility is

often unspoken and assumed. Domestic work is performed by the woman and goes largely unnoticed by her family. These responsibilities, pressures and demands, however, occupy her mind to a greater or lesser extent; whatever else she does in the day she must ensure that members of her family have food to eat, clean clothes to wear and that their house is not a health hazard. Within the ideology of 'the family', these duties and obligations are the woman's by 'natural' right; she carries them out for love of her family, her reward being their comfort and happiness. This has implications for the quantity, quality and individual understanding of leisure time spent in the home by men and women.

Because the division of labour has become embedded in the 'unconscious' of many of the households it proved difficult to elicit information about it. To overcome this problem a 'colour coding' strategy was employed whereby the women were asked to imagine different tasks and equipment as coloured either pink or blue.' This simple method revealed the gendered division of labour in the home to the women themselves, which they were then able to discuss, and there are references to this coding in some of the following extracts.

Out of the sample only three women reported that they shared responsibility for domestic work equally with their husbands. Two of these women, aged 29 and 33 years old respectively, were full time workers with no children, the third was 37 and a full-time worker with three children. Their initial response was not taken at face value and further questioning as to the nature and distribution of domestic tasks performed did indeed reveal a shared responsibility with their male partners. Washing, ironing, cleaning, shopping and cooking were all shared. It is worth noting here that in the case of the two younger women, their joint incomes and freedom from children gave them the choice of going out if neither had provided food for the evening meal. This option was not open to the majority of the sample, because of lack of funds, presence of children, or both.

## Group A

The notable feature here was that two out of the four A's had paid domestic cleaners to assist with the housework, and occasionally the ironing, and one had a 'nanny' to help with the childcare. All were in paid employment - two part-time, two full-time. This 'help' enabled them to spend time on other pursuits - either work or leisure:

A/2: The ironing is done by the staff, we've got a very good system where the nanny's mother comes in one day..this was a brilliant, brilliant piece of organisation: the nanny's mother came in on the evening that the jazz was on, babysat, and did the ironing...it's a perfect example of working woman's leisure that - you are enjoying yourself, but while you are enjoying yourself, the thing that needs to be done is being done.

This woman, 43, a graduate and full-time Research Fellow, lives with an architect and has three children. She confirmed that the division of labour in the home fell into the rather traditional categories of blue and pink:

A/2: I think they do actually, I think they do. And I have been subjected to considerable pressure from my more sorted London chum who says, you know, 'there are things here that you ought to be doing'. But I'm already doing...I mean it seems like the car...which I suppose is classic pink and blue, things like petrol, oil, tyres...she says 'you should do these'. And I say 'Look, you know, I'm already doing an amazing number of things' and I think this matter of having your life very full already means that the entering of the blue territory is actually very difficult to achieve.

A/1 reported a similarly traditional division of labour and felt that there were some advantages in terms of smooth running of the household:

A/1: And you do, of course, evolve a pattern, which in a sense works quite easily in many ways, you see, I mean it works quite well because everybody knows what they're doing...it sort of moves along.

This woman, married to a university professor with two teenage children, unlike A/2 had been unable to go back to her career as a teacher once her children were older. Her first child was born in 1971, before the 1975 Employment Protection Act which introduced six weeks' paid leave for women who had two years' service with their employers. She therefore had little option but to give up working to look after her children, but always assumed that she would be able to return to teaching.

A/1: Once you give up work you tend to adopt a different attitude in the home...it didn't seem to me particularly sensible if Philip had been working all day that he should come in and do all the housework, if I'd been at home all day because I'd rather spend the evening pleasantly with him than Hoovering the floor. You establish a pattern of behaviour, whereas, fewer women now I think give up work when they have children.

At the point at which she was ready to return to the job market, it had virtually closed and she is now working as a part-time ESL teacher. In the meantime her husband's career developed:

A/1: I think the other thing that influenced us was that my husband became much more successful than we expected, because computers kind of took off and we never really expected..because he's only got a white tile degree [laugh]...he never expected to end up as a university professor. So, far from being a relaxing job it was when he started, its now a tremendously complicated job...It requires a..I mean it's not much good me expecting him to run the house...he hasn't got the time, he's working most evenings until 10 o'clock. I mean it does cause resentment, I'm not good about it all the time, I do get fed up and bitchy on occasions. I mean you can see how it happened...and it happens very slowly of course over a period of about six or seven years.

Both these women offered a further 'explanation' for the ways in which their domestic worlds had been established. This was the important influence of their own and their partner's family background and upbringing. Particularly, for A/2, the influence of her mother, referring initially to the use of domestic equipment:

A/2: I realise, though, that I bring to this erm..you know, as with women of my generation...our mothers were very poor on the domestic equipment and it was important to them to remain that way...that whole notion of feminine behaviour. And although my mother worked full time all her life: was a teacher, a graduate, my father likewise, my mother never learnt to operate the gramophone, never learnt to drive. There were a lot of things she didn't do. And he [father] used to say...she's a funny woman your mother..he was very wry, but yet, when she tried to operate those things, he would say 'oh, Nancy'..there were..real power things going on somewhere underneath there..but also her life was full, it was absolutely jammed full, so I bring that kind of pattern..you know how difficult it is to break those patterns..and I look at things like the electric drill and I think, well mm..I don't need to know how to operate this.

In a very similar way, A/1 reflected on her personal history and family background, but also setting it within a socio-historic context:

A/1: I mean, I'm not telling you I do lots of Women's Institute and knitting, you know. I'm not a sort of standard housewife. I think you are fairly subscribed, except I suspect people are a little..you see I'm a little bit old..you see I went to University in 1960, really the beginning of the explosion, and I suspect people that are ten years younger than me or those who were rather more *avant-garde* than I was..I mean I was the complete antithesis of *avant-garde* because I was very narrowly brought up, a very subscribed Northern background which I found it difficult to break away from...I suspect that people ten years younger who also had the pill when they were younger, this is the thing..actually have more



equal relationships with their partners whereas mine is really quite traditional.

A/1 then went on to say that this was in spite of the fact of her being a graduate and both her and her husband being 'University People' and continued:

A/1: I think that now I've got to my age I've become quite, as it were, limited in this way, and looking back it is rather difficult to see how it happened. I think it pre-eminently happened when I had children, but I also think it was because I had very deeply rooted into me very, very old-fashioned, rigid ideas about male and female roles which you never really break away from...I mean you just don't expect the man you're married to to make the tea, that's just not an expectation you have...I often think about this because I do wonder quite how one did arrive as limited as I am...I mean I'm really making a blow for freedom taking Celia [daughter] away with me and that's only because I earn my own money, there's no way I could do that if I didn't.

This woman, aged 44, whose education and material circumstances placed her at the 'top' of the sample, reveals in her autobiographical account of her position the complexity of her experience. The strong ideological pull of her family background with its assumptions about women and men could not be resisted through her university education. But there are also significant material factors influencing her life. Not having adequate contraception, lack of state provision for maternity leave and child care led almost inevitably to her adopting the role of full-time mother and housewife, thereby establishing a pattern of living which now seems impossible to change. Her domestic servicing undoubtedly enabled her husband's career to develop - 'he never changed a nappy or thought of washing the childrens' hair' - as he was always free of childcare and domestic responsibilities. Her attempt to return to full-time teaching also demonstrates the vulnerability of women in her position and their dependance on the vagaries of the labour market. Financial autonomy, as she pointed out, is the key to her 'blows for freedom' - to be able to do

things on her own. Women in her position, married to successful and well-paid husbands, live within constraints which would not be immediately obvious.

A/4 is five years younger than A/1, a graduate, married with three children. Unlike A/1, she has managed to pursue her career as well as having had children. She is a full-time university lecturer and runs an architectural practice in partnership with her husband who is also a university lecturer. Their professional equality is reflected in the domestic division of labour in that 'things are fairly evenly divided', and has produced some interesting 'role reversals'. Her husband, for instance, would choose to bake at the weekend, whereas she would choose to do the heavy work in the garden:

A/4: [domestic work] has always been fairly evenly divided, but I think because he's not expected to do it [cooking] he probably gets more enjoyment from doing it. In the same way that I get more enjoyment from building stone walls, because I'm not expected to be able to do it you see. So I think there's a trade off there. You see the normal roles suggest that the man shouldn't be interested in doing cooking, so by being perverse, and doing it, he gets a kind of pleasure out of it. He thinks, well, here's an achievement, I wasn't expected to achieve, and I can do it.

Q: What kind of pleasure do you get out of building walls?

A/4: It's the finished product. I think if I can make anything I'm happy...anything that exists slightly longer than a fruitcake...I mean it's very nice when you're cooking to produce something, but it disappears too quickly for me..I want things to be around a little bit longer.

This couple's constant project was their large, old house which they were 'doing up' and she was asked about the division of labour in this area:

A/4: Well, building technology falls into the pink and blue categories: if it's rigid, George usually does it, if it's wet and floppy, it's left to me. So, I put a carpet down, anything that's slightly [hand gesture to indicate 'adjustment'] ..there's a certain amount of division there. So when it comes to the tiling we do it together. I always do the painting..erm..but in using domestic technology, there isn't much distinction there.

The other area of shared work was in their architectural practice and she discussed their occupational roles here:

A/4: Yes, there are distinctions in what we do. I tend to do the design work - I always do the landscape drawings. He tends to do the major structural sections and I will then come along and do all the schedules that go with those. So there is a division of labour within the practice that I think is quite interesting.

Q: Did you consciously decide who was going to do what?

A/4: No, no, it just developed, it just happened that way, but you can see it's quite well defined, who does what. I always do the practice filing, I also do the accounts, but he always does the structural calculations, so it isn't that...both of us can cope with the mathematics, it's just again the division of labour, I don't know why it ...just happened.

Fortuitously perhaps, this division of labour has meant that A/4 had become much more adept at operating their new computer/word processor than her partner as she is the one who does the practice's correspondence and accounts. This household is unique in the sample, particularly in terms of the parity which exists between the male and female partners. However, this case allows us to explore the extent to which male/female prescribed roles are subverted, and the point at which they are not. It is interesting, for example, that they both take pleasure in reversing their roles in what are largely considered to be 'domestic' tasks -

cooking, gardening, etc., but that the nearer the work moves towards their professional practice, the more rigidly defined the roles become. She provides the office 'servicing' - a traditionally female function - as well as the landscape drawings whilst he does the structural calculations. He apparently does not find pleasure in doing landscape drawings, accounts or office correspondence in the way that he does in baking - simply because he is not expected to know how to do it. What is perhaps the key point here is that the issue has never arisen, it has never been discussed - 'it just happened that way', suggesting, perhaps, that the professional ideology of appropriate gender roles and associated tasks is much more deeply ingrained than the domestic ideology. This may be to do with professional self-image on his part; whilst he feels his self-image or masculinity is not compromised by adopting the traditional female role in the kitchen, it probably would be if he were to adopt it in the studio.

#### Group B

The first point to make about the B women is that all but one ( a 25 year old with a 4 month old baby) spent some time outside the home working. Of these one worked as an ESL tutor on a voluntary basis, while all the rest were paid for their work. None had paid cleaning help and all claimed responsibility for the domestic labour.

Within the sample there are two women graduates in their mid-thirties, both with children, one of whom described herself as a full-time mother. The other had recently returned to her work on a part-time basis, but prior to this had also given her occupation as 'mother'. These two women offer a comparison with A/1 above, being a decade younger and therefore having, as A/1 would see it, a wider range of choices than she had. However, there is a similar pattern repeating itself here in terms of staying at home to bring up the children - here out of choice rather than necessity. Also,

in the case of B/6, her husband's career development takes priority over his involvement in domestic tasks. In both cases we see the consequent breaking down of domestic labour into the 'traditional' patterns. B/6 finds herself totally responsible for domestic work and child-care. The only truly 'blue' item in the kitchen is the coffee percolator:

B/6: I suppose that mostly it's [kitchen] pink...I mean he would work the dishwasher and the washing machine, but I'd have to give him specific instructions. The coffee percolator can be blue - he'll often make the coffee after a meal.

This is mainly because her husband works long hours, often working at home until 9 p.m., but there was a sense in which she felt that the kitchen was her 'territory':

B/6: I'm not averse to anybody going into the kitchen and cooking a meal for me - that would be wonderful. But it annoys me sometimes; my husband..it's probably fair to say he's tidier than I am and occasionally he has these binges which extend to the kitchen cupboards...I do feel 'hands off'..he can clear up in the lounge as much as he likes, but I suppose it's because I'm the one that's got to go and use things and find them after that.

The garage, where all the tools were, was a blue area and very much her husband's territory. This woman had given up her work as a bi-lingual secretary when she had her first child (now aged 5). Her second child, aged 2½ had just started to go to a playgroup, thus giving her some child-free time. She was, however, dubious about her return to the labour market, not because secretarial jobs have become scarce, but because they now demand some knowledge of word processors:

B/6: I mean when I worked it was before the age of word processors..but I've sometimes thought

about trying to keep up to date with word processors, you know, going on a course which would be quite a useful thing to do.

In the meantime she teaches English as a second language on a voluntary basis, one morning a week. As with A/1, but for different reasons, employment opportunities have changed and women like these who are full-time mothers find that the labour market has shifted the jobs they left out of their reach.

B/2, married to a teacher at a boys' grammar school, had also decided to give up her career as a Careers Officer at a Further Education College when she became pregnant. She was asked if the roles within the house had changed since she gave up working full-time:

B/2: Yes..but partly from choice. When we both worked we shared things equally and, even to the cooking, we used to take it in turns to cook. But now when Colin comes home I find it much more relaxing to be able to shut myself away in the kitchen and cook a meal and for him to take over the children...we used to work it so that one cooked and the other washed up, but again, I'm quite happy to wash-up and he can wrestle with them in the bath..by the end of the day I'm quite happy to cope with inanimate objects..that stay put!

For B/2 being at home all day with small children was proving entirely exhausting and when her first child was eighteen months old she was offered some part-time Careers Advisory work back at her old College, which she took:

B/2: At first I thought, I won't be able to, my brain is dead..er..I won't be able to contribute anything and after a couple of weeks it did my confidence such a lot of good..I could think again..there was life beyond the nappy bucket. I hadn't planned to do it at all..I..it was..because I never thought I would go back to my job because I said that the children would come first, but this is a very good compromise.

She can now fit in this job in around her responsibilities for her children and other domestic work. It would seem that once a woman gives up her full-time work, then she will almost inevitably become more involved in domestic tasks, as well as having primary responsibility for child-care. This is particularly likely when her partner is in full-time work and bent on career development.

Most of the women in the A/B categories lived away from their families, but one 48 year old (B/4) lived round the corner from her ailing mother and had two 'children' of 20 and 18 still living at home. She was responsible for all the household work, cleaning, cooking and laundry, as well as visiting and taking care of her mother. B/4 worked on a casual basis for the Post Office when her family were young and then part-time when they were 9 and 11 years old. She is thinking now of increasing her hours:

B/4: Yes, I might go three days, I don't think I'd like to do full-time..well I might do full-time if everything went at once, you know..if the children leave home sort of more or less together, which they could do and my mother, you know..if anything happened to my mother, it could all happen within a very short time, and then I would want to work more, you know..I wouldn't like to be at home..it would be alright if I could do things, if say they..your children got married and had families, and then you start to look after your grandchildren, I don't think I would mind that at all.

This woman was at a very unhappy period in her life and during the interview was often very close to tears. She felt undervalued by her husband and family and also dissatisfied with her own ability to cope:

B/4: I mean, it's often just a flying visit to my Mum's. I ought to spend more time with her but I just don't have the time, just don't have the time at all, I mean..I don't clean as I should do, I don't really get down to anything..I'm just catching the surface of everything..I do try to fulfil every role, but you can't can you?

And yet she is prepared for, even looking forward to, the possibility of the whole cycle repeating itself in terms of her responsibilities to her daughter and her future children.

#### Group C

The two other women who shared domestic responsibility equally with their partners belong in this group, although C1/6 told me that she was the one who 'noticed' the dust and the dirt rather than her husband. It is interesting to note that one of the partners in each of these households had been married before. Both of the males and one of the women had lived alone before the present arrangement, rather than, as in many of the cases under consideration, leaving the family/parental home to get married.

For the rest, it almost went without saying that they were responsible for the housework. This was women's work which they did and with which they occasionally got help from their male partners:

C1/1: Mostly me yes...Gary's not very good, he wasn't brought up to be domesticated..he's more or less useless. He will do it, if I say would you vac. up he will, and he washes up quite often..erm, but there again, he usually washes up the pans before the glasses and things like that [laugh].

C2/1 told me that they shared the housework. I asked about the washing and ironing:

C2/1: I do that..but if there's anything he really wants desparately he'll wash it in the washer..but he's useless at ironing, so he doesn't bother..you've got to do it though haven't you?

Q: What about the cooking?

C2/1: Oh I don't mind doing that..I mean Andrew will make some of his own things sometimes, he'll



make sandwiches for work, and he does that..I don't ask him to, he just does it..I haven't to push him to do anything, he's good like that - he'll get up and vacuum and dust for me..he's good, and I don't think he did it at home..but I just think he sees how much ladies have to do, especially with James [son] and that, and working as well..I've got to clean up all the time after him, so I think Andrew knows that sometimes I do get fed up.

This concept of 'sharing' is interesting. Her husband will wash his own clothes if he is desparate, and make his own sandwiches, but he will also help with her vacuuming and dusting. This reveals the extent to which domestic chores are seen to be women's work and the minimal participation required by her husband in order to qualify as 'good' about the house.

C2/2 also worked in the evening and I asked if her husband did some housework:

C2/2: Well, he washes up after the tea. Well, I don't think he'd ever dream of getting a duster out or anything like that, but, like, he gets the tea ready..well I leave it ready but he sort of sorts the tea out, and then he washes up, gives 'em a bath, puts 'em to bed. So, yes, he does his share, though if I'm at home he wouldn't dream of doing anything. But when I'm out at work really he's got to.

C2/4, at home all day with a small baby, discussed the division of labour in her household:

C2/4: We've had numerous fall-outs over that, because Brian says to me 'I hope you rest during the day' because as soon as he comes home it's..you know..'I'd love a cup of tea' and he doesn't get off his backside from coming home to going to bed. When we first moved in together he did help a lot, he helped me make tea, and on occasion he helped me wash up, but...

There is no doubt at all in this household whose washing up it is; she constantly referred to her partner as helping or not helping her.

In this group there was no real speculation as to how things had become the way they were, this being the 'norm' and the accepted way of living. What did emerge was some dissatisfaction with the role of 'housewife' in terms of the invisibility of the work, its repetitive nature and the fact that it can be undone as soon as the children come home from school:

C1/5: I can work hard all day doing their bedrooms, and then they're like a jumble sale next day..I mean they're not too bad, I must admit, like the eldest lad, he'll come and if there's anything out of place he's tidying up, but that's it..you know..whereas, if you go out and do a job, like I go to my husband, like, you know, he's going abroad and goodness knows what, you can say you've done something..sometimes I think, well, I've done nothing..do you know what I mean?

#### Group D/E

Two women in this group were single, living with their parents and one was a divorcee (E/2) living with her teenage daughters, with occasional visits from her boyfriend. E/2 carried the main responsibility for cleaning, although her daughters did their own laundry and bedrooms. Similarly the single women performed the same tasks.

The other two were both responsible for the household tasks:

D/4: As soon as I come in from work I start on my housework and then I get the tea ready. I don't usually sit down until about eight o'clock, I'm quite busy.

D/1: He does do things..he does, I suppose, most of the cooking, he will help out all the time and he does quite a lot of constant stuff with the girls and things, but it's me who actually carries

the first responsibility for seeing that they've got clean clothes for tomorrow, seeing that that's done..if you like the organisational approach to it..I can say to him, you go and do such and such and he'll do it, but I've got to say it..he won't take control of it. If something needs doing, therefore, I'll go and do it rather than sitting down and asking.

Q: Is that mainly because you're here more than he is?

D/1: Yes. We've talked about..things would have to change if I went into full-time teaching again, that would have to alter, but quite how you shift something like that..you know, I can say to him do such and such and he'll do it, erm..we did have a slight shift recently - apart from doing most of the cooking he actually took over quite a lot of the shopping - they should go hand in hand, obviously, if you know what you're going to cook, then he should go and get the stuff in. We seemed to go through an awful patch of, you know..we've run out of such and such..I didn't know we needed it..you know, erm..but I think it would be something that we would work at very consciously if I got back into full time work. And it wouldn't be easy, especially over areas like washing and ironing, getting stuff ready, are they organised for tomorrow..,erm..I had a go at him recently about hearing the children read..and he just hadn't thought of it. He's quite happy to do it if I say it to him. I carry the awareness and he doesn't, but it would need really working at. Whether I could actually be bothered doing it..if I stayed in the present role, I don't know. Perhaps in niggling little ways as they occur to me, but I wouldn't make a major thing of it I don't think.

For the majority of women the home is first and foremost a workplace and it is therefore often difficult for them to find the time and space within their domestic environment to pursue leisure or non-work activities. They therefore consider 'going out' as a more direct route to 'leisure' and relaxation.

## Going Out

Although this aspect of the use of 'spare time' is peripheral to the main concerns of the study, like domestic labour, it forms part of the context within which the organisation of spare time at home must be placed. The purpose in introducing this topic is to outline the significance of 'outside' leisure, the negotiations which precede and determine these activities and the constraints which might limit the possibility of such leisure. This material has been organised under headings which indicate the different types of outing embarked on by the women, largely defined by other members of the household involved, and the different perceived needs which they are meant to fulfil. These are going out 'as a family', going out with their male partners and going out alone or with friends.

### 'Family outings'

Going on 'outings', especially for those women with young children was of importance in terms of 'doing things as a family', a phrase which came up again and again. It is worth noting that in most cases the women themselves took the responsibility for agitating for and arranging these outings, e.g.:

A/1: They are important to me yes..but I do enjoy them much more than he does certainly as such. We have done a few but we've had very few that have been successful..he has us home again by three [laugh]...I don't think he finds that sort of thing at all relaxing.

B/1: We go out quite often for Sunday lunch as a family..we just decide and then go..I really enjoy that..I usually say the Sunday before 'let's go out next Sunday.

C1/9: We do all sorts of things really..erm we go walking a lot, we like to go into the forests, we go swimming, which is very nice, we like that..

Q: Do you consciously think about doing things together?

C1/9: No, by we I mean the children and myself.

C2/1: If I say I fancy going out, and he says I'm not interested really, well we won't go out. It's both really, unless he really fancies going out, I'll say, we'll go then. It's both of us really.

D/1: Very often the family outings tend to be me. I don't think we do enough of it. I think I'm the one who instigates more of the family oriented stuff. But we do have separate areas of interest, you know.

Some of the women who had young children felt that television and video had taken over precious time which they would rather spend doing things 'as a family', whether it be going out, playing cards or board games, or simply having a conversation, e.g.:

C1/5 I go many days 'it must have been nice in those days when there were no television, and just play cards, sit and talk'..we don't converse like they used to do, even when I were younger, I mean I can remember my Mum and Dad would think nothing of getting ready and going long walks, you don't do that now, well we don't and nobody round here does that I know of.

B/1: They all like the television on so I must..I'm totally ignored.

Q: Do you ever try to say let's not have TV on?

B/1: Yes and I'm very much on my own..but I'm very much a believer in everybody doing what they want to do, I don't feel that I should make people do what I want to do because I feel that's right. I mean if I think that's right it's right for me, not necessarily righty for everybody else in my family..and I just do my own thing, always have.

Q: Do you think they would do other things if it wasn't for the TV?

B/1: Yes, certainly..and that's one reason why we had a video to start with..my husband said, well

we'll get a video and I won't have to stay in and watch all these programmes, I can video them..but it hasn't worked.

C2/4: Sometimes on a Saturday if I'm wanting to go anywhere..the weekends that are free..we'll get up and I'll do what I have to do with the kids and things and he'll sit and watch television [laugh]..I like to be doing something.

Some of the women felt that their partners shared their concern to go on family outings (B/2, C1/1 and D/2). But, like C1/9 above, this belief often concealed differential control of leisure activities. For example, C1/1 and C1/9's family outings involved the pursuit of their husband's hobbies and leisure interests:

C1/1: He's more of an outdoor person than me, and he takes the girls out hiking and things..I go along with him to a certain extent, but sometimes...

C1/9: My husband likes car racing and things like that and we tend to watch a lot of that.

As we have already seen, C1/9 thought of 'we' as herself and her children and, although she obviously wanted to give the impression that they were always together as a family later said:

C1/9: He'll go off and see rallies and things like that and I'll take the children with me and go swimming or whatever I want to do.

In the cases B/6 and C2/4, their partners usually decided if, when and where they would go out and this presented them with difficulties:

B/6: The family drives, well..my husband decides. He looks at the map and says, how about going to Spurn Head, or somewhere..It's often at his instigation at the weekend, he does the driving on those trips, it's more his area. I find that once I've been shopping on a Friday, then he says 'why don't we go for a picnic or something' and I say, 'well, why didn't you say before?..'

C2/4 whose partner's children came at the weekends, reported that he decided where they should go:

C2/4: I mean we do take them, sort of to Roundhay Park or have done. With the better weather coming, we'll probably go off. We'll be going off on Saturday with mine and Sunday with his.

Q: Who decides where to go with them? Is it your choice?

C2/4: Erm..no, it would be his. He's the more..like when we go out for a drink, it's his decision, not mine.

Most of the women quoted above seemed to have an ideal notion of the 'family outing' and were keen to give this impression. This was particularly so in C1/1's case who was quite upset about the length of time she had spent talking about her family's television and video viewing, pointing out that 'we do all sorts of other things, you know':

Q: , What else do you do?

C1/1: What else do we do..well as I say Craig likes to go out and about things like that..we go swimming and, er..Craig and the girls have got a bike as well..he's also into all sorts of daft pastimes on a Sunday afternoon..flying kites when it's windy, things like that..and so we have some barmy times over there..when it's snowing we go sledging and things like that..and we..er..

This image of the 'ideal family', unified in their leisure pursuits, was implicit in much of their conversation, but seemed to be at its most perfect when their male partners were participating fully in the activity.

The two women who were least concerned with projecting this image were A/2 and A/4. I asked A/2 if they had any leisure activities with their children. She replied:

A/2: [long pause] No..[laugh]..erm..we don't appear to go out as a family the way that some people do. We've joined a local sort of sports centre and we go there at weekends and swim and play tennis, that sort of thing, but that's probably the closest we get to an outing with the children altogether. Now and again I'll occasionally, if I'm feeling particularly guilty, or rotten or something, I'll take them out to tea.

A/2 felt guilty about not having sufficient leisure for herself:

A/2: This is making me feel terribly bad because I actually realise that I have very little in the way of leisure, I allow myself very little in the way of leisure.

When asked about going out, A/4 said:

A/4: We go out to supper with friends, take the children for walks occasionally, but John [child] really hates that. We go tobogganing in the snow. Nothing on a regular basis.

Both these women had full-time professional jobs and thereby experienced a blurring between 'leisure' and 'work' and although they felt their family life was extremely important, expressed a sense of autonomy and 'distance' which many of the other women did not have. The women who cared most about 'doing things as a family' were those who were at home full-time, or who felt their family was their main concern in life. There would seem to be a strong identification and self-image linked with being a good mother and facilitating a 'happy' family.

Going out with partner

This varied a great deal and was to a large extent conditioned by economic circumstances and/or the presence of children and therefore the necessity to provide a baby-sitter. For those women who were full-time family managers going out for the evening was an important part of their routine - getting ready to go out often cited as part of the pleasure. However there is a more general feature of



women's leisure apparent here, in that 'going out' was unequivocally defined as leisure:

A/2: I think leisure for me is almost entirely about going out. Working full-time means that when I'm in I'm generally doing the domestics.

This indicates the constraint felt by most women when at home - responsibility for domestic work and demands made on them by children and spouse, as discussed above. Going out meant getting away from these demands and pressures, and a time to relax:

Q: What's your best thing to relax?

C2/4: Going out for a meal, I do like to have a meal by ourselves.

Q: Is that because you don't have to cook the meal?

C2/4: It's not so much the cooking, it's just really I like conversation, I enjoy that rather than sitting and watching television.

Going out for a meal was cited by many of the women as their favourite treat, but for some this was limited to 'special occasions', birthdays, anniversaries and so on. The better-off women went out regularly for meals with their partners and friends, and these outings were often spontaneous and unplanned. This was especially true of those women without children at home. Eating as an event - either out or in - featured quite strongly in their responses and as in C2/4 above, conversation was generally seen as an important feature of the pleasure.

The major obstacles to going out for the evening were economic, the presence of children under 14 and the 'unsociable' working hours of one or other partner. This was the case right across the sample with the men and/or women in almost fifty per cent of households being involved in some work related activity in the evenings. This ranged from vocational evening classes, working late, to evening

jobs in the case of the women and professional work at home to shift work in the case of the men.

All the women with young children were responsible for arranging babysitters and this, in most cases, was an extra expense to be added onto the cost of the evening. The exceptions were those women who had parents living nearby who were usually asked to babysit (mainly C's and D's). Indeed, some of the women didn't like leaving their children with anyone other than a parent or relative, an attitude which put even greater constraint on their freedom to go out:

C1/5: I'd probably go out more, but it means getting my Mum over to baby-sit and I don't like to feel I'm putting on her too much. You know I won't, I mean a lot have children babysitting for them, but my Mum always comes.

C2/2: We are relying on my mother to babysit, as I say, we've only been up here 12 months, so I don't really feel as if I could leave the children with just anybody.

These were not the only obstacles to going out, another being the reluctance of some of the male partners who preferred to stay in and watch television or a video. The women who felt this most sharply were, predictably, those who were full-time mothers/family managers. They felt they needed to get out, to have a change of scene and 'really relax'.

C2/4: When it gets to night time I think, oo, I could really just do with going out, just me and him by ourselves, and he says 'do you really want to go out?' and I say 'no it doesn't matter if you don't want to'. And then I think, well, he's been working and he might be tired so I'll say 'oh no it doesn't matter'. Then he says, 'well if you really want to go I'll go' and that makes me feel guilty, you know.

C1/9: He goes out so much and goes to so many different things, to him its just like being at work, where I think its absolutely fantastic, to me its a break from cooking and everything.

B/1: He's very much a home person, yes he is. We have very different personalities. He's very happy to be sitting at home, I've got to be doing something, I just cannot sit and do nothing, I'm just not that type.

A/3: I like meeting people more than my husband does. He's happy to have a quiet drink, where I'll probably suggest going to see friends and he'll suggest going for a drink. But we're quite happy just to read a book.

The following summarises of the major activities cited by the women when they went out with their partners:

	A/B	C	D/E
Theatre/Opera/Concerts	*****	*	
Cinema	***	*	
Drinking	****	*****	****
Eating	*****	*****	
Visiting	*****	****	*

(Table 1)

#### Going out with Friends

Some fifty per cent of the women who had reluctant partners, or whose partners worked unsociable hours, would go out with female friends, or, in some instances, alone. The following is a breakdown of the kinds of activities involved.

	A/B	C	D/E
Theatre/Opera	**	*	
Sports/Activities	***	***	*
Drinking		**	*
Eating		**	*
Visiting	**	*	

(Table 11)

Going out with friends served different functions. Clearly they were able to indulge in activities which their husbands did not

enjoy, e.g. visits to the theatre, sporting activities, and in some cases, going out for a drink or a meal. But for some of the A/B women it was also significant to maintain some separate interests from their husbands:

B/6: I sing in a choir one evening a week and when we moved in here I looked around for a choir and joined it. I think it's important to keep up some interest, single ones rather than joint ones. That's my night a week, come what may.

Also, some felt strongly about the importance of doing things on their own, in spite of their husband's reluctance:

B/1: I mean sometimes when I go to badminton, I see husbands and wives together and I think, oo that must be nice, but my husband played once or twice, but he didn't enjoy it. But I feel that I'm doing something, you know, that because my husband doesn't like doing something, I'm not thinking, oh well, you know, he doesn't like to do it so that's that. I'm independent.

C1/2: Our social life is quite separate, so I've got to organise something for myself, otherwise I'd be sitting here.

It is important to note that going out with female friends often depended on a degree of financial autonomy and access to transport, as well as the approval of their partners. This was not always forthcoming, especially amongst the C's and D's who were also often limited by income and access to transport. The general rule in these households was that husbands and wives went out together, if at all, or that the husband went out on his own.

Regularity and routine in going out were prominent features in those households with a low budget for leisure spending. Regular visits to 'the club' or to the same pub with the same friends featured here, whereas the higher income groups exhibited much less of a routine and considered spontaneity an important element in their leisure decisions - something they were keen to express:

C1/4: We don't like routine to that measure. There are probably about four of five public houses..erm..we are a member of a country club which is near so if we feel like a dance we go there. Or sometimes on a Sunday we can go for a bar snack, a quiet bar snack and a drink.

C1/1: We go out but we don't go anywhere every week or every month, not regularly.

A/2: A lot of what I do at work and at home is somehow about driving and controlling and sorting and it's important for the leisure to be spontaneous, but involving people and talking, laughing..I like the spontaneity of the jazz concerts, the fact that you never know what will happen, how good it will be, or who will be there..

Having discussed family outings, going out with partners and with friends, what these outings mean to the women and the various constraints involved, I will now turn to the organisation and use of spare time in the home.

### Staying In

#### Spare time at home : Group A

All the women in this category had some paid employment outside the home and were mothers of school-age children. For the full-time workers the notion of home leisure was quite a difficult one to define. In spite of three of them having paid help with the cleaning/ironing, they still had many domestic tasks to perform in the evening and at weekends:

Q: Do you have any spare time when you do something you might do for pleasure?

A/2: Yes, I'm sure I do, but it's difficult to bring it to mind. The notion of leisure is a very difficult one for me to deal with. What do I do? I listen to music when I'm at home, I read..I think I might do the garden, but I

actually never do..erm..

Q: How do you listen to music?

A/2: When the children have gone to bed in the evening, because the house is on three floors and we are able to separate ourselves off, and if James is doing something else and I am pottering below, we've got music on both levels and so I can..I put music on downstairs. Since I've been working full-time I've been aware that I ought to give myself a bit more space..I'll sometimes actually sit down, just sit and listen, but very often I guiltily or puritanically co-ordinate it with something like ironing.

The distinction between what the women would choose to do and what they have to do is important:

A/4: Some of the evening is sometimes taken up with work things that you've got to prepare for the next morning, or the practice, and if there's any time left over, I suppose the two things I would do are watching television, if there's anything on I want to see, or knitting. Erm and various sort of mending activities, but I don't enjoy that, but I class knitting as an activity in itself..it's something I would choose to do and I've usually got something on the go half-knitted.

What is striking overall in this category, and indeed, in some of the others, whether the women are full-time, part-time workers or full-time workers in the home, is the felt need for the women to utilise their spare time, i.e. not to 'waste' time. The times when they had some 'space' in order that they could do something for themselves were not to be squandered on valueless or unproductive activities. This often resulted in maximal use of such time - e.g. knitting (a pleasurable activity for most of the women who chose to do it) would be done whilst watching television. Other activities which filled these spaces were often extensions of their roles as mothers and/or domestic workers. Baking and sewing came into this category, something which is not demanded of them but that they like to do if they have the time.

Television came rather low down the list of priorities in the A category:

A/1: I don't like television very much. I only watch what I want to watch and when the rest of them are watching television and I don't want to watch it I'll go out of the room, or ignore it.

A/4: I like to watch television when I'm washing my hair which takes me about an hour to comb and so I usually try and do that on a Sunday evening when I think there's going to be a film on.

The one activity which all the women in this category reported as very important to them was reading. Unlike listening to the radio, or music, or watching television, this is perhaps an activity which is not so easily combined with domestic responsibilities. As we have noted from two of the women above, the A group lived in larger houses than the rest of the sample, so were able to 'escape' to another room or another 'level' of the house when television was being watched by the other members of the household. This literal space is important in terms of their being able to pursue their reading, something not available to many of the women.

Although this was an important and valued activity for this group, spare time during the day was not generally used for reading even when they were on their own in the house:

Q: Can you tell me the sorts of times you read?

A/1: Usually late evening, I normally work up until ten o'clock, so it would normally be late evening. I never read in the daytime unless I'm ill.

Q: Why is that?

A/1: I think it's always at the bottom of the list - I think I have a slight feeling that I shouldn't be reading during the day and I've always got too much else to do.

A/1 did, however, read a newspaper during the day:

A/1: Yes, I read *The Times*. I usually read it over lunch.

For this woman reading the daily newspaper was an activity which needed no justification, although it was combined with eating lunch. Reading a novel, however, was not considered a legitimate day-time activity, unless illness provided the excuse.

Perhaps the major factor in choosing how to spend 'spare' time was the amount of energy the women had left late in the evening. When tiredness was significant, then television is used as a reason to put up the feet and rest:

A/4: We both watch television if we're fed up; if we're both really exhausted, what you do is you come home, make a gin and tonic and you sit and watch the telly and it's great; and you sit - that's how I think of the telly. It's there to absorb you when you just want to forget.

A/3: If I'm tired I'd probably watch television, or perhaps I'd read if I'm in the middle of a good book. If I'm not tired I do something like baking or sewing.

#### Spare time at home : Group B

In this group there was one full-time mother; the rest were involved in some part-time work outside the home. For two of the women the major obstacle to spare time at home was young children who demanded constant attention:

B/2: One of the things that I find most distressing at having children is the constant needing things to be done for them..the constant interruption. I can never even finish a school text without something happening...it is nice to get out and have a few hours away from that where I can think things through..I find that very peaceful and without interruptions.

Q: Do you find that you need to get out of the house in order to get that?



B/2: Not always, but if I'm in the house I need to be on my own and one of the nicest things that can happen to me is for someone to take the children away for a couple of hours, so that I'm on my own - I find that very relaxing. Just to sit somewhere tidy..you know, you're constantly picking things up; just to have a few hours when I can sit down and not get interrupted and not having to do things. It's lovely [laugh] it doesn't happen very often.

B/6 was asked what she did at home when she had some time to herself, she replied:

B/6: You mean when the children are in bed?

Q: Does spare time only come in the evening?

B/6: Well yes it does. It's only just been the last three weeks that the young one's started playschool when I've had this hour, for example. Otherwise it's not been practical for me to do things..I mean sometimes I would take them into town or something like that, but erm..my leisure is usually in the evening..it's more a case of fitting things in..you know, you've got to do this, that and the other before..especially with picking them up from school now that cuts into the afternoon..erm, yes, it's generally evening time.

When the evening came for both these women, they often felt too tired to 'do' anything with their free time:

B/2: I don't have a lot of time for myself, this was the thing that surprised me erm..when I gave up work I thought one of the advantages, apart from having the children, was that I would have lots more time to do the things I like to do and I was amazed how total having just one child is; it's a real 24 hour a day commitment. I find when I've got time I'm so tired that I'm exhausted trying to do anything.

Q: So do you just sit?

B/2 Mm..[laugh]..and fall asleep. But it's getting easier now..I mean, I really like reading but I'm always so tired..I often fall asleep and I get very frustrated because I feel that the evenings are my time and I don't like wasting them

by falling asleep. Because often I just flop and Colin says 'why don't you go to bed?'. . . you know, the children are settled. . . and I don't WANT just to go to bed because I feel that that's just a waste of my precious time. . . and then 'you'll only fall asleep on the settee'. . . 'I won't' [laugh] and I always do.

Given this woman's energy level and tiredness, which she constantly fought in the hope of salvaging some time for herself in which she could do 'something useful', her evening activities were fairly gentle:

B/2: The first thing I would probably do once the children were settled, and we've got tidied up. . . er. . . is to finish off the paper. That's the first thing, and then possibly do some reading. Letter writing as well, I do quite a lot of correspondence.

B/6 had a similar response to the question of spare time in the evening:

B/6: I occasionally do some singing practice. This doesn't happen very often, but I can't do it during the day because my children tell me to be quiet and in the evening I get the same response from my husband. He plays squash so I usually do it when he's out. . . and then, reading. . . er. . . I must admit, I think this is one of the things I deplore about having children. The days when you actually sat and read a book from cover to cover are really hard to achieve now. . . occasionally I have a reading spell when I tell people to go away until I've finished, and I get it over with in two or three days, but it doesn't happen very often now. . . and then its the television. . . I do watch television in the evening, often I feel I'm too tired to embark on something large, or a project that's going to take a while.

Even when young children were no longer a pressure, the women in the group had a clear idea of the division of the day into day-time = work and evening = leisure:

B/1: I never do any housework in the evening, never. I mean as soon as the children come home at four I stop whatever I've been doing. I mean,

I never knit in the day, I never read books in the day..I just wouldn't think to do anything like that ..er..

She then went on to explain the reason for this more fully:

B/1: I'm just not the sort of person who can sit down..that's why I work at housework. If I was contented and could sit down with a book in the afternoon I would, but I'm not because I've tried it..I've picked up a book in the afternoon and I'm thinking, I haven't done this, and there's that to do..and instead of thinking about what I'm doing - reading my book, I'm nattering inside about things that..you know.. I mean when the children aren't here, it's a perfect opportunity, I've got the house to myself..but I love the house to myself doing my housework and I cannot do housework when there's people in the house, because I've got someone to talk to, I've got somebody to take my interest. And, as I say, I stop at half past three, when I've got the children home, that's me finished then. I'll sit on the settee and maybe daydream for half an hour...

This woman cannot distance herself sufficiently from the demands of 'her' housework to enable her to concentrate on reading a book during the day. She then explains that she really loves having the house to herself to do her housework, although being on her own would also be a perfect opportunity for her to read. She finds it difficult, however, to read in the evening once the family is at home because they all like to watch television in the main living room. As she likes to be with them 'I don't like being on my own, I like to be with everybody', she does her reading for half an hour in bed, before she goes to sleep. B/1 had brought up three children as a full-time mother and is perhaps still feeling the pleasure of having the house to herself - the longed-for state of B/2. However, it does seem that her time is heavily prescribed both during the day and in the evening, when she largely goes along with her family's desire to watch the television.

B/1's children come home from school for lunch, which she prepares for them, and they always switch on the television as soon as they

get home. When asked if she ever watched television during the day, she confirmed watching the lunch-time news with the children, but as for other day-time programmes:

B/1: Very, very rarely..if I'm not well, and I think now..because if I'm in I'm usually doing housework, and I think, now, you could do with just sitting down and forgetting about housework..so I'll sit down and put the television on and hope that something will take my interest.

B/5, an older woman with no children at home, but with a part-time job in a wine-bar, often watched television during the day, but chooses her programmes:

B/5: I have the same routine, it's virtually housework, but I always stop to watch the one o' clock news. And something else I always watch during the day is *Sons & Daughters*, the Australian soap opera thing which I thoroughly enjoy.

This woman also talked about reading:

B/5: I feel very lazy reading, if I read during the day. No, if you weren't here, and I'd done my housework and everything..now I don't feel lazy sat watching television, isn't that strange? I think it's something to do with time, I get lost in a book, there's no way you can get lost in time on television because you always look at the clock and know that this programme's only on for an hour. But with a book, a book can take over, two hours have gone before you realise, so yes, I feel really lazy reading.

Apart from this being an interesting inversion of the dominant values associated with television and reading, as expressed by the women in the A group, this also indicates the usefulness of television's finite and regular programming in the structuring and control of spare-time/work-time in the home. Reading does not have the inbuilt cut-off point, but requires active intervention by the reader to put the book down. As John Ellis notes television demands and gets intermittent, less concentrated attention from the

viewer than, say, cinema (Ellis 1982) but also, in this case, than reading. The point this woman makes also challenges Raymond Williams' notion of 'flow' (Williams 1974) in that the viewer intervenes to interrupt that flow and television programmes are thus used discretely in order to structure domestic routines. It is the intervention of the active viewer that is crucial here.

#### Spare time at home: Group C

Out of this group, four women were in full-time employment outside the home. None had the responsibility of young children, two having no children at all, and the other two with offspring aged over 16. One of the two young women without children was pregnant at the time of our discussion and intended to give up her job as a hairdresser's receptionist in order to become a full-time mother. Out of the fourteen women in this group, eight left school at 15, three at sixteen, two at seventeen and one had gone into higher education at the age of 18. This obviously has a bearing on their eventual occupations. All the women in the this group with children had moved from full-time work in occupations without an easily identifiable career structure (e.g. office work, shop work, textile work) into full-time motherhood. Half the sample had then engaged in part-time work in order to supplement the household income, but there were three full-time mothers in the group. Two of the full-time workers were school teachers; one aged 44 with a grown up family, the other aged 33 with no children. The older woman (C1/7) had worked in an office before having her children, but some years ago had taken a degree as a mature student and had begun a career in teaching. The younger woman (C1/6) intended to continue in her teaching career if and when she had children.

For the women in full-time work, their spare time at home was spent mainly in 'reading', 'sitting' and 'watching television'. The two teachers relished 'peace and quiet' perhaps above anything:

C1/7: When he's [husband] not at home I'll do sewing, I'll get the machine out and sew, just sit and relax, enjoy the peace and quiet. I don't have a radio on, I don't have television on and I enjoy my own company...I perhaps do some washing and a bit of ironing...I just love being on my own having peace and quiet.

C1/6: Sometimes I like to stay in and do nothing and sit and watch telly, and just sit and be a slob for a while.

C1/8 who ran a newsagent's shop was a keen reader:

C1/8: That's where most of my time goes actually, reading. I go to bed about nine o'clock with a cup of coffee and read absolutely anything.

C1/8, however, shared B/5's awareness of the dangers of reading:

C1/8: If I'm feeling sleepy or tired I'll pick up a light romance, a Mills & Boon, something like that, because it's something I can put down. I've just finished reading Harold Robbins' *Man from Xanadu* which was rather difficult to put down and I tend to read then until one or two o'clock in the morning which doesn't do me any good. So, you know, I have to be careful what I read.

The young woman who worked as a hairdresser's receptionist had her day off during the week and 'enjoyed' working in the house with the radio on. She would also watch television - a good film, or a recorded tape of *Dallas* or *Dynasty* - if she had some spare time during the day.

The overall impression given by the women in full-time work is that their work outside the home justified them in treating the domestic environment as a place to relax, and the lack of demands of young children meant that they had a wider range of choices as to what to do with their spare time.

Turning now to the full-time mothers. Because these women did not go out to work, there were no external constraints on their timetabling for the day. It was therefore their own responsibility

to structure their days. In her study of housework, Ann Oakley points out that 'A lack of structure is intrinsic to housework; thus a psychological structure is imported to it. Women enter a form of contract with themselves to be their own bosses, judges and reward givers' (Oakley 1974 p.112). Two of them had very young children - a 6 month old baby (C2/4) and a two year old (C2/5); the other woman's children were at school (C1/5), although her husband worked away for quite long periods. During the discussions about 'spare' time during the day both C1/5 and C2/4 spoke of their feelings of guilt about taking 'time off' their household work:

C1/5: If I sit..my fault is guilt, because I think I shouldn't be doing this, I should be doing so and so, and I do actually feel guilty. Not because anybody's on at me, I feel guilty and I think to myself 'why do you feel guilty' and I just can't..I feel guilty taking any time out of a day for me..do you understand what I mean?.like I'll put..if it's anything for my husband or any of my three kids I will put myself out and do..but myself, I feel guilty, I feel as if I've cheated and taken something that's not mine..you know, I've taken that out of the day and that is not my time. Like, if Megan were to come round and say, do you want to come and watch a video..I would be guilt ridden to watch that video there and then, because I've not built the rest of my day round that.

Q: You couldn't drop everything and go?

C1/5: Well I could, but I'd feel guilty..you know..and I'd come in like a raving lunatic, charging round, as if I've stolen that hour or two hours out of a day..whereas if I knew I was going I could build the day round those two hours. I've got to be really busy in them other hours to give me those two hours, and then I wouldn't feel guilty..but just to go on spec. if I hadn't done what I have to do, I would feel guilty.

This woman used particular television programmes to timetable her day in the house, making sure that she had done enough work to 'earn' *Falcon Crest*.

C1/05: If I was watching television through the day, I think I would feel guilty..I mean it isn't

that my husband's coming home saying..I don't mean for that, I'd just myself feel that I was cheating. I sort of look upon it as a job, you know, it is my work really...like you go out to work, but this is my job and I think if I'm sat I'm not doing my job, that is just in my own mind. If I had television on all day and didn't do anything, I'd feel guilty, it may be silly I don't know, because I don't have to answer to anybody, but..I look upon that hour [Falcon Crest] as a treat..I can be working, and I've got that to look forward to, that hour, to sit down and relax and that hour's mine.

C2/4 had a small baby which imposed its own routine upon her, but she spoke of television watching in similar terms:

C2/4: No, it doesn't go on during the day...I don't know whether it's because I feel guilty, you know, sometimes, I feel as though I should be doing something, I'm not here just to sit about.

Ann Oakley suggests that 'a woman who declares a positive attitude to housework is likely also to have a high specification of standards and routines' (Oakley 1974 p.108). This is certainly true in these two cases. Both spoke of their high standards in regard to housework, which often caused them problems. They were both accused by their partners of doing too much, of being over-fussy about cleanliness and tidiness. C1/5 told me that she was the same on holiday in their caravan; washing every day and so on. Their partners found this irksome and, in fact, C2/4's first marriage had failed as she perceived it, partly because of her attitude to housework. Being 'houseproud', therefore, does not necessarily have positive connotations, but it does produce feelings of guilt and other 'obsessive' traits in the women who have a strong emotional involvement with housework. This is how C1/5 described her role at the beginning of our discussion:

C1/5: It might sound silly, but you know, when people say 'oo, don't you get bored at home?' I don't. Because there's always something to do, you know, I mean, I don't dislike being, you know, a housewife and all that..you know, I've always liked that.



C2/4: For the 11 years I was at home before when my 3 children were little, I enjoyed every minute of it. I didn't want to go out to work, but actually I was more..I was overboard..it used to be a thing with me..I mean the house that I lived in there, you know, there wasn't a thing out of place, it was spotless, no dust anywhere, and it got to be a talking point in the neighbourhood..you know..'God, you wouldn't believe she'd got 3 children'..you know..and I was too much

These two women were both employed in large retail outlets before leaving work to have their children. They had therefore chosen to pursue the 'feminine career'<sup>2</sup> and they both identified closely with their role as housewife/mother. They gained their self-worth from their excellence and their conscientious commitment to their work. The fact that they were often criticised for this, mainly by their partners, but also by neighbours and friends, put them in a rather ambiguous position in relation to their work and self-image. It also quite severely constrained their use of spare time.

The other full-time housewife/mother identified herself much more with her role as mother than that of housewife. She did her household chores with the television on, and didn't worry unduly if they didn't get done. She was a trained nurse and perhaps to some degree she brought this occupational identity to her role as mother.

Guilt can be seen as a severe constraint in the way in which the full-time housewives in my sample felt able to organise their spare time during the day. This, however, usually carries over into the evening period, when her children and male partner come home. She then has to prepare a meal, help with homework, etc. and often feels unable to demand help from her partner because 'he has been out at work all day'. The partner is, under these circumstances, free to relax or, as C2/4 put it 'sit on his backside all night'. She went on:

C2/4: And then, you see, he's bringing the money in..this came up last week, he says 'I'm bringing the money in'..not in so many words, and I just

sat back and thought, well what do I do..you know, he's right, but sometimes I just feel as though he's taking me for granted.

Their financial dependence is something else that these women have to cope with. Their partner's responsibility for providing for the household is used to justify them getting their own way in the evening.

The distinction between obligatory and non-obligatory activities was important in defining the use of spare time at home and the women in this group cited knitting, sewing and baking as activities which they would choose to do for their own pleasure. However, the time to indulge in these activities was not 'freely' available. C2/2 worked as a domestic in her local hospital between 5pm and 8pm and was asked if she watched television on her return from work:

C2/2: If there's something that really appeals to me, then yes, I'll make a point and watch it, but I'd rather be doing something.

Q: Do you feel housework is 'doing something'?

C2/2: No. That's something that's got to be done [laugh]. You don't think about that it's just something that's there, you do it.

Q: But it's different, say, from making clothes for your little girl?

C2/2: Yes, I do that through choice, the housework is there and it's got to be done, and I've got to get that done before I do anything else. There's no way I could settle down to do something else knowing that there's ironing waiting to be done. I've got to get the housework done before I think about doing any sewing, otherwise I just feel guilty.

The routine household tasks have to be completed before she can 'indulge' herself in making clothes for her daughter. Obviously this activity is an extension of her domestic role and makes a contribution to the well being of her child, but what is interesting for our purposes in this section is the way in which she defines and

classifies different kinds of activity - in her terms 'doing something' - this does not include watching television or housework.

C1/4, an older woman with grown up children, had the same attitude towards television:

C1/4: Well, I think I value my time to spend on something else, rather than watching [TV]. I like sewing. I like making my own..an odd skirt, or dress, or something like that.

C1/1, a younger woman with two small children, had to fit her sewing in to the household routine. She was asked when she found the time to sew:

C1/1: I don't know really, there again, if I buy some material and I want to make something it depends how desperately I want to make it as to when I'll fit it in, it's surprising what you can do if you want to do it..I usually sew for the girls, sometimes for me..skirts usually, you make quite a good saving on them.

C2/1 enjoyed baking when she got the time:

C2/1: I do bake..I enjoy baking, but I've got to be on my own because I can't do it with David [son] there because he's..so I wait until David has gone to bed and bake in the afternoon. It's something I don't have to do..only if I've time, but I enjoy it, I like seeing the results. I get pleasure out of that.

Knitting was an activity that was often combined with television watching. The women in this group rarely sat down and watched television in the evening without something to do - knitting, mending, or sometimes a book as well as ironing.

The other activity cited, but only by one third of the sample, was reading. But again, there were problems about reading during the day - feelings of laziness and so on. This was not true for C2/1,

a young woman with a small child, who used Mills & Boon<sup>3</sup> romances to fill in gaps during the day:

C2/1: I read..once I start I don't want to put it down, I'm at it all the time. I can read one in two days, on and off..if David is playing out I can read a book. I'm still into it and I can watch him at the same time.

Q: What stops you reading?

C2/1: David. I've got to stop and make his tea for him, or owt like that. Not because I get bored with it [reading] because I don't normally get bored with it at all. It's normally because I've got to stop to do something..then if I've any spare time I'll go back to it and finish it.

Mainly the women who did read would read in bed at night, sometimes going to bed early if they didn't like what was being watched on television by their partner. Occasionally they would read during the day if they were into a really good book:

C2/3: If I get a book that's...it can really tie me and I can't put it down.

C2/5: Occasionally, if I'm really into a book I will read during the day. But I'd never pick a book up to read to start..you know, I'll be knitting or watching telly.

Spare time at home: Group D/E

In general, the women in this group had greater constraints in terms of finance - two were unemployed - and constraints of household space. E/2 lived with her teenage daughters who she felt restricted her in her choice of what to do in her spare time:

E/2: I suppose really when the girls leave home I shall probably start reading again, but at the moment either they're watching something they want to watch or the other one's got the records on upstairs, so it cancels me out. It's very rare

that I can get one night that I can do what I want.

D/4 also shared her very small maisonette with two teenage daughters:

D/4: Well, I like reading actually, a lot. I'm in the library and I read because I'm not really interested in television. But, like, I wouldn't dream of coming in from work and reading a book [laugh] it's in the evenings when I read.

The evenings, however, were dominated by television and video, so she had to go into another room to read, although she never got away from the noise which she found distracting.

I have discussed, in relation to the C group, the ability of the 'breadwinner' to relax at home after work. Also in an earlier part of this section, their relative autonomy to the domestic environment. D/1 talked about what her partner did when he got home from work, comparing this with her own practice:

D/1: He will immediately make himself a cup of coffee, go and have a fiddle around in the greenhouse, put some music on or go back to the record library. And I'll come in and start making the children their meal.

D/1's partner's greenhouse was his hobby, and many of the men were 'hobbyists' - computers, astronomy, jazz clarinet were cited as well as participation in sports. Cynthia Cockburn points towards hobbies and sports as being an important area for men which is between work and home - between the 'masculine' world and the 'perilously feminine' world of home and family. Occupying this space enables an easier transition between these two worlds. 'For men, the negotiation between work and home is not only a matter of time (as it is for most women), but it is also a matter of reconciling conflicting cultures' (Cockburn 1985 p. 213). It must be noted, however, that this space does not necessarily need to be outside the home. It can be achieved by time spent in front of the

television, in the greenhouse or garage, before fully entering into the domestic world

The values accorded to different activities within the households are often linked to the person executing them. The 'invisible' work which women perform routinely, the recognition of which is often only hers, tends to be undervalued. However, something very interesting happens when men perform domestic tasks. Cooking a meal, for instance, if performed by a man, is usually a highly visible and remarkable event. As we have noted, D/1's partner cooked their meal.

D/1: He'll wait for me to be finished and out of here before he starts our meal. But his immediate thing is always to sit down, to have some relaxing time.

He was not interested in the preparation of 'nursery food' like hamburgers and chips, but enjoyed trying out his skills on more adventurous grown-up food. We have noted that baking was also enjoyed by one of the male partners, his pleasure apparently coming from the fact that he was not expected to know how to do it. When the tasks becomes identified as a male task, then it has a much higher visibility and value in the household, thus confirming Margaret Mead's comment: 'Men may cook or weave or dress dolls or hunt humming birds, but if such activities are appropriate activities of men, then the whole society, men and women alike, votes them important (Mead 1962 157-8).

Male control of space and time within households, regardless of whether they are present or absent, has far reaching consequences for the quantity and quality of spare time of which women can avail themselves.

## Summary

The main purpose of this section has been to outline the context, in terms of domestic labour, outside leisure and the organisation of spare time in the home against which background use of television, the VCR, and the consumption of print based media should be set.

It is clear that, from the women's accounts, they occupy a very different position in and relationship to the domestic environment from their male partners. This is evidenced in the unequal distribution of domestic labour and available spare time in most of the households under consideration. All the men in the study were in full-time employment and appeared to view their time at home as being at their own disposal. This meant that it could legitimately be spent in relaxation or in pursuing work-related matters or hobbies. The legitimacy of such practices appeared to be endorsed by their female partners, but as we have seen, some of the women expressed resentment at this apparent right to time.

For the women with children, whether in full or part-time employment, or fully employed within the home, the domestic environment does not seem to offer this range of opportunity and choice. Once at home there are constant and persistent demands on her time and attention, making it difficult for her to find time to herself or embark on any project requiring long periods of concentration. Indeed, the domestic routines established during the period of maximum child dependency seem to become structural to the extent that the growth and development of the family members depend on their remaining in place. This is particularly the case where the male partner's career has been enabled through this kind of domestic support and servicing.

Many of the women spent quite long period of time in the house on their own. But even during this time they did not feel free of the constraints of their position as wives and mothers. This manifested itself in their feelings of guilt at taking time off

whether it be to read a book or watch television, and many engaged in complicated 'reward' negotiations with themselves in order to justify this 'indulgence'.

Those women in the study who were in a position of economic dependence used this as a justification for their partners having the right to relax in whatever way they chose, and also as an explanation of their own inability to challenge the status quo. This was explicitly stated by some of the women, but for many it was the implicit assumption behind the inevitably unequal access to time and relaxation in the home.

Indeed, the few exceptions to this division of labour along gender lines and consequent restrictions on spare time at home came from those women who were economically independent and who had no children. The combination of these factors seemed to produce the most egalitarian households, and a clearer division between 'work' and 'leisure' for the women involved. In his study *Divisions of Labour*, R. Pahl found that women's employment status far outweighed the significance of social class in determining divisions of labour, (Pahl 1985) and this would certainly seem to be confirmed by the present study. It is worth noting, however, that those women in the sample who were in full-time employment with children and/or those whose household could afford it, would engage other women to clean their house or take care of their children. Although the labour is then displaced onto a paid employee, it is the woman's responsibility to engage and organise such help. Also, as we have seen, economic independence does not necessarily guarantee a release from obligation to household tasks and childcare, or the sharing of these activities with the male partner. This was especially the case with those women with children and older women whose traditional attitudes had been formed under the influence of their parents. Once a woman has children it seems that, under present social arrangements with regard to work and child-care, she is mainly responsible for their care and therefore adjustments must be



made to her life-style rather than to that of her male partner. She may inevitably find herself spending more time in the home, and thus spending more time on household work which is then defined as her responsibility.

With regard to the actual use of spare time, the majority of women with children claimed to be the main instigators behind family outings. The importance of family-based leisure activities was most felt by those women who were full-time mothers, and we have seen that this commitment to the family encroached into their organisation of time in the home. There is a felt need for such women to have time to themselves, but there are also contradictory pressures on them to satisfy their family's requirements before relaxing on their own behalf. They are therefore continually negotiating these contradictory 'pulls' even when their partners and children are not present. Watching television and videos during the day is often bound up with feelings of guilt. Many of the women claimed not to watch television during the day at all, and the majority of those who did would do so by building a favourite programme into their daily routine. In this way television provided a focus which enabled them to achieve a certain distance from the distractions and demands of housework and children.

Tania Modleski has written about women watching television at home. She, speaking of American day-time television, sees a 'fit' between the endless 'flow' of television programming and the endless flow of domestic labour. Furthermore, she suggests, the form of day-time genres assumes a distracted domestic viewer who is constantly 'on call' and unable to devote her total attention to the television set:

The formal properties of daytime television thus accords closely with the rhythms of women's work in the home. Individual programmes like soap operas as well as the flow of various programs and commercials tend to make repetition, interruption and distraction pleasurable.' (Modleski 1983 p 73).

Day-time television reinforces what Modleski refers to as the 'principle of interruptibility' upon which basis the 'housewife' functions. Whilst the evidence of this study supports Modleski's description of the nature of domestic labour and the decentered female subject it inevitably produces, there is no evidence to support the claim of a necessary 'fit' between this social circumstance and the formal properties of day-time television output. Modleski's model of the rhythms of reception(s) tends to leave no space for an active female subject who might wish to resist both flows. The women in the present study switched the television on and stopped working to watch it. Also, the finite time of programmes provided a natural end to their 'time off', compared with, say, reading which tended to result in time slipping away.

Thus we can see that organisation of spare time in the home is not a straightforward matter for women, and is a crucial influence on their use of television and video as well as other leisure activities.



▲ Daily Herald, 1957

▼ Video Today, 1984

**Enjoy Your  
Home Movies  
on Your Own  
TV.**



### 3 VIEWING CONTEXTS AND RELATED TEXTS

B/5: ..sometimes I'll watch the portable in the kitchen, but it's damned uncomfortable in there.

This chapter will explore different viewing contexts and their associated texts, both broadcast television and video tape rental. The intended context of viewing is an important consideration in determining choice of genre or programme, depending on which household members will be watching and at what time of day or night. The VCR is, in most cases, in the sitting room and is used in conjunction with the 'main', that is, colour TV set. Many households had more than one television, but as second sets were usually small black and white portables in the kitchen or one of the bedrooms, preference was for viewing on the main television set.

It is this one screen, therefore, which forms the focus of television and video viewing for all members of the household and here I shall explore respondent's accounts of the various permutations of household viewing groups and the extent to which there are related genres or programme types for these different contexts. Broadcast television scheduling itself carries implicit assumptions about the nature of the audience at different points during broadcasting hours, and Richard Paterson has suggested that these assumptions are predicated on a model of 'the family' as the 'ideal' viewing unit. (Paterson 1980) The domestic context for television viewing has been, until recently, largely overlooked by television audience studies which have tended in their different ways to assume a direct relationship between viewer and text.<sup>2</sup> One of the early exceptions to this was Dorothy Hobson's work on *Crossroads* and its audience. (Hobson 1982) Her audience research was carried out in her respondents' homes and took into account the domestic constraints involved in women's viewing. But she focussed exclusively on the viewing contexts for that particular soap opera.

What emerges from my broader study is that the domestic context is not unified, but diverse, and that each sub-context often has its own associated texts.

### Group A/B

Table (iii) on the following page is a typology of contexts and related texts, using the respondent's own descriptions which emerged through an analysis of discussions with this sub-group. Each context will be dealt with separately for this group.

#### 1. Family together.

Apart from A/3 and B/1, watching broadcast television in this context was not a regular occurrence, although those women with older children said that their children did watch quite a lot of television. Attention has already been drawn to size of house and availability of extra rooms for alternative activities, and this is obviously pertinent in providing an opportunity for different members of the household to get away from the television if they do not wish to watch. However, A/3 and B/1 said that they watched *EastEnders* 'as a family':

A/3: We watch *EastEnders*, we watch it as a family. It started off with Bryony [daughter] wanting to watch the first episode and it's the first soap opera we've ever watched and we've all got reasonably hooked on it. She sometimes misses it because of her Speech and Drama, but she will catch up on a Sunday.

Q: Are you surprised at your involvement in it?

A/3: No, not really, it's just that we've always avoided something that we've got to watch regularly because we never feel we can have that commitment to television. And if we're not in it doesn't matter, we can pick it up quickly, but I would say it's the one thing we do watch almost religiously if we are in..and I think that's because the children say 'oh, it's half-past seven'..probably..we tend to have had our meal by that time, so it's a convenient time to sit down.

Table (iii)

Context	Film	TV
1, Family together	<i>Superman; Gremlins</i>	<i>EastEnders; Nature; Rolf Harris Cartoons; Great Languages of the World; Shakespeare; Dallas; Dynasty.</i>
2, Children only	<i>Mary Poppins; Star Wars; Bed Knobs &amp; Broomsticks.</i>	<i>EastEnders; children's TV; Dallas; Dynasty; Top of the Pops; The Young Ones; Spitting Images; Grange Hill.</i>
3, Male/Female together	<i>Local Hero; 'quality' films; Burt Reynolds; Casablanca; Inherit the Wind; Company of Wolves.</i>	<i>Paradise Postponed; First Among Equals; Minder; Hill St Blues; Jewel in the Crown; Edge of Darkness; Fawlty Towers; Alas Smith &amp; Jones; MASH; Star Trek; News; Juliet Bravo; The Bill; Coronation Street; Documentaries.</i>
4, Male only	<i>Brazil; horror; cowboys; science fiction; war; spy films</i>	<i>'trash' to relax; News; Sport; Nature; Question Time; Elections; Tomorrow's World; Monty Python; Fawlty Towers.</i>
5, Female only	<i>Woodstock; Slipper &amp; Rose; love stories; weepies; comedy.</i>	<i>EastEnders; Dallas; Dynasty; Princess Daisy; 'quality' plays; Coronation Street; Brookside; A Woman of Substance.</i>

B/1 said that all her family liked *EastEnders*. Did they make a point of sitting down to watch it?

B/1: Yes, because that's the one programme that all the family love. It's the one soap that we all love, so we all sit and watch that.

Q: How did you get into it?

B/1: Well, we just started from the very beginning, it was advertised and we..I mean the children go in for these sort of things. I don't think I watched the first one because I thought it would be *Crossroads* type thing..and just listening to them talk about it, I thought 'oh, I'll watch' and I got into it and I liked it.

Both these women found that they discussed the programme with their families :

A/3: Yes, if there's a topic that we disagree with, or something to discuss within it, yes we do.

Q: Is that during the programme, or after?

A/3: No, usually after it really. In fact, when *Grange Hill* used to be on I used to sit and watch that with the children and we used to talk about that, it was useful for that. The kids used to disagree with what was being said and we'd talk about it.

B/1's discussions tended to be of a more speculative nature as to the outcome of various 'stories':

B/1: Yes, we talk about who the father is..'I think it's so and so'..'oh, no, I don't, I think it's'..you know, that type of thing, yes.

These two women were interviewed in early 1986 when the audience for *EastEnders* was at its peak of 23 million. David Buckingham notes that *EastEnders* aimed to extend the traditional audience for soap opera, in terms of age and also gender, 'which (audience) is weighted towards women and towards the elderly..strong male characters would..serve to bring in male viewers who were traditionally suspicious of the genre.' (Buckingham 1987, p.16).

The broader address of *EastEnders* is reflected in the responses of these two families. I cannot make any kind of generalisation on these two examples, not least because of the fact that *EastEnders* was launched between the two phases of interviewing, and therefore the earlier sample were not viewing it, but in this respect it is interesting to compare B/1's report of her family watching *Dynasty* together:

B/1: Well I'm afraid the women in the family [laugh] really enjoy it, but the men, they watch it, and I think they like it really, but they ..they just make sarky comments all the way through, but they watch it, they wouldn't miss it [laugh].

There is no doubt that both male and female members of this household found pleasure in *Dynasty*, but that they did so from a different viewing perspective. Her husband and son seemed to view with distance and a sense of irony, whereas B/1 and her daughter would seem to be much more closely involved. This will be raised in the following chapter.

A/4 reported that she wanted to watch television with her children for a slightly different reason:

A/4: George [husband] dislikes intensely quiz programmes, and the kids like watching *Masterteam*, it's on at half past five - the smallest child is absolutely hooked on that and I would be happy to just sit and watch it as well, but he really dislikes quiz programmes so I tend not to watch it and talk to him instead. Erm..but other than that I suppose we watch things that we both enjoy watching because it's more of a social event then. Somehow watching television on your own is like going to the cinema on your own, it's not as pleasurable as when you've got someone there to say 'oh', or have a laugh with. That's why I like watching with the children as well, I don't like to think of them on their own.

B/2 also tried to watch childrens' television with her son:

B/2: The BBC programmes for children are on at lunch time and Martin likes to watch those and I like, wherever possible, I try and watch with him, especially



now when he talks a lot about what he sees, and I like to be able to share the experiences.

The films watched in this context were often hired for a children's party, or similar event; a special treat.

## 2. Children alone.

There was an underlying anxiety about television in the households in this group who had young children. For example, B/2 was asked if she organised what her children watched:

B/2: Yes yes. He is very good actually, he will switch off at the end of a programme and..I got quite stropopy about advertising, especially on children's television, and he's marvellous, because he doesn't watch a lot of ITV. I hope it continues..I mean it's hard, it would be much easier just to leave..and I have friends who video all the children's programmes and, you know, great long tapes of *Thomas the Tank Engine*, to keep them quiet.

A/2 had a similar anxiety and didn't like coming home from work to find her children in front of the television:

A/2: I think, why are they not doing something, why aren't they outside if it's nice weather, why aren't they this, that and the other. So the television is something that in my more extreme and stressed moods I threaten to throw out of the window..it is really an object of great revulsion to me..but obviously it's not the thing itself, it's the way in which it's used and the way it throws..our boy, who gets up before the rest of us, has now got into the pattern of getting up - he sleeps on the middle floor and the television's on the middle floor - and he goes in and switches it on and watches it in the morning, and that gets me down too. But James [husband] says, you've got to make a choice here, if he's in front of the telly he is not niggling at us to get up. It's a reasonable trade-off, but I can't reach the point..it still gets to me.

The feeling that their children should be doing something rather than 'just' watching television was a strong one and A/4 felt that her children shouldn't watch a lot of television:

A/4: I think it's important, not because of the content, or any of the issues about television, but because they could be learning to be able to be on their own and to generate their own pleasures. How you generate your own pleasures, how you do things together..and if you give them television, too much access to television, then they never get the opportunities beyond school to do that, I think that's important.

The women with older children didn't have these anxieties, although A/3 gave the impression that this was the result of previous efforts. She had outlined her and her husband's use of television as being very selective. She was asked if that was true of the rest of the family:

A/3: Not the children, no [laugh], but we select for them in a way, not so much now as we used to, but they do watch quite a lot of the soap operas, and we're trying to read, so they tend to go into the playroom, there's another television up there, so they can do that when they want when we don't want it on, it can cause a bit of conflict.

A/1's thirteen year old daughter watched the most television in their household, she liked:

A/1: *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, all those.

Q: Do you ever watch them with her?

A/1: I think I can honestly say I've never sat through an episode of *Dallas* or *Dynasty* or *The Colbys* or *Howards End*, I've just seen bits of them. No, I don't think I've ever sat through one.

Q: Has she talked to you about them?

A/1: A bit. A bit, not a lot.

A/1 showed no concern about either the amount of time her daughter spent watching television, or what she was watching, believing that

she was rational enough to recognise that such programmes were 'ridiculous':

A/1: I think they're a group ethos. I think they do get involved with the characters, although they know it's ridiculous, but most children you ask say because they look very attractive; they like the clothes, the easy life-style and the glamorousness of it..they do get involved with the characters, but it is so ridiculous that they can't always take it seriously - I think they watch it for the glamour of it. They do get involved with the characters, but they know rationally it's ridiculous.

Her sixteen year old son often watched *EastEnders* with her daughter. Was there anything else they watched regularly?

A/1: She's been watching *Dempsey & Makepeace*, but he hasn't watched it regularly. He watches whatever is on television when he wants to watch television. Whereas she watches what she wants to watch when it's on. Totally different; he just uses it to unwind. She's selective, whereas I don't think he is at all. He usually watches just trash to relax - he moves channels to find the trash, but then he's doing very heavy A levels, so he just goes through the channels for the grottiest trash he can find [laugh].

A/3 described her son's viewing in a similar way:

A/3: I think they're reasonably selective erm..if they've got other things to do, like, she's got her music. Andrew's got his O levels this year, so I feel that when he wants to watch television it's his relaxation, it's the thing he enjoys doing apart from..if he's not doing sport, then he's just sort of lying around watching television.

Q: Are you ever concerned about it?

A/3: Not really because he does such a lot of physical things er..and its not all the time, he is quite sensible with it, and his school work - but he breaks up his studying by coming and watching half an hour, so already he's selecting programmes he wants to watch; he's not as indiscriminate as he was.

We can see for these two women that 'serious' school work is used to justify even indiscriminate television watching, and B/4 revealed the same kind of thinking:

B/4: Yes..mm..my son doesn't watch a lot of television at all but, he likes..well he's never in he's never ever in any evening, but he'll watch *The Young Ones* and things like..*Spitting Image*, and those, they both like to watch those and..er..oh, I can't remember some of the things. And the stupid thing as well, they both dash home, at their age, to watch *Grange Hill* [laugh] and that's what I've usually to record, and I hardly dare tell you..*Grange Hill*, twenty and eighteen..if they were unemployed I wouldn't have told you [laugh].

This is an interesting version of the work/television justification, but underlying all the responses is the fact that if their children are usefully employed at other times then they are perfectly justified in watching television.

### 3. Male and female together

Most of the women in this group reported that, in general, they and their husband's shared the same taste in films and television programmes.

B/6: There wouldn't be a big difference, they'd probably be fairly common, except that I would say sport would be added to his. We have a common nucleus, plus sport on his side...we probably both agree on other things.

These films and television programmes were often referred to as being 'good' or of 'quality' as opposed to being 'rubbish' and 'trash'. If we take their stated television selection in Table (iii) above, perhaps the first thing to notice is the predominantly British origin of the programmes. The only American programmes are *Hill Street Blues*, *MASH* and *Star Trek*, all of which have a cult following, with *Hill Street Blues* being referred to as an example of

American 'quality' television. (Feuer et al 1984) B/5 reported on her husband's attitudes towards American and British programmes:

B/5: Bill is certainly not a *Dallas* fan, and there's no way would he sort of sit here and want that on. He doesn't agree with the American soap operas, he quite likes our own, he loves *Coronation Street*, he thinks *Coronation Street's* fabulous, I mean..and *Emmerdale Farm*, he likes anything the British do, he just hates these *Dynasty* and *Dallas* and *Falcon Crest*.

Although B/5 and her husband enjoyed the products of Hollywood, this Britishness also can be seen in some of the film choices, with A/2 comparing them favourably with the American product:

A/2: Well, I think the great saving humour that seems to distinguish a lot of stuff we make from the stuff they make, taking, say, *Letter to Brezhnev*, a wonderful sense of a wry undercurrent throughout that..and that wonderful film, *Local Hero*.

It is also notable that the television programmes which the women chose to mention were in the main prestigious series, and possibly the kinds of programmes with which they would wish to be associated as viewers. Nevertheless, the fact that they chose to mention them as being watched with their partners is significant in itself. The VCR is also used for the recording of series, as A/1 confirmed:

A/1: I like watching things like *Paradise Postponed*, which is quite clever, and since we've had a video, I watch more serials, but I don't particularly like historical serials or soap operas.

Q: Do you find that you look forward to the next episode?

A/1: I suppose if we're really involved in it we do organise the evening so that we've finished at nine o'clock so that we can watch it, yes. If it were just a normal evening, it would be less forward looking and organised, yes, it does make a difference.

The organisation of television and video watching and the forward planning involved was often not achieved by some of the women in

this group. A/2 who is a full-time worker explained that even if she had thought of watching a programme which interested her she hardly ever got around to it. Was this because someone else was watching a different programme?

A/2: It's never that, it's just that I forget, or get a different priority. I watched the television the night before last for the first time in a long time, in weeks I think..quite randomly because I was doing some ironing and I watched the edited highlights of the royal wedding, compulsively and crossly [laugh]..yesterday, and what have I watched before then?..I tried to watch a programme about Colin Davis last Saturday night but failed because somebody came. I try to watch *Hill Street Blues* and I try to watch *Minder*, there are one or two things that I try to watch, but I realise I don't use the opportunities presented by television in any real way.

A/4 was asked if they had watched any serials:

A/4: We followed *Edge of Darkness* when they re-ran it because everyone said we should, and we did once watch a very good one on computing. I can't remember what it was called, it had this fat computer man..we saw the first episode and then watched the rest of it. But because we don't get the *Radio Times*, it is very much pick, and choose, and we don't get a daily paper. We know when the things we like come up, and when films come up [How?] Well, because you remember and you see occasionally we'd look in the SCR at the newspaper to see if there was anything on. But then, of course, there's always the review that you get in *The Observer* - we keep that for a week.

Word of mouth recommendations, and *The Observer* preview served as reminders or indicators as to what was worth watching for A/4. Other women in this group - A/2, B/1, B/4 and B/6 - took very little positive action towards planning their viewing. This is not to say that these women were not 'selective' but that viewing was a very low priority for them, and in all four cases, any planning was done by other members of the household. A/2 and A/4 are full time workers and considered themselves as having very little leisure time. B/6 was at home with two young children and simply didn't

get to see the daily newspaper until after her husband returned home from work. B/1 and B/4 claimed not to be interested in television, and both left it to their families as to how it should be used.

It has been noted that many women in this group shared the same tastes in programmes and films as their male partners. They were asked what happened if there was a conflict of interest in this viewing context, and their replies revealed different kinds of negotiation:

A/4: Well, in any relationship there's a..it's like in rural communities where you help each other - there's a sort of barter system, and you know very well when you are in credit and when you are in debit. In a relationship there's exactly the same thing; if I've watched something I wanted to watch previously, then it's somebody else's choice..and..you know..I mean, not consciously, but unconsciously, you are aware of where you stand.

B/2: Well, occasionally we both want to watch something at the same time. It doesn't often happen because I don't..there are not that many things that I really, really want to watch. What tends to happen..I would say that Colin watches more television than I do, so he usually gives in to me because he says he gets his choice more often..so..there'll be give and take. If it is something I was very keen to see, then he would give way..and, he's different from me actually, he would probably sit and watch it with me.

A/3: Well, we discuss it and decide, or one of us would watch it in black and white, which would normally be Ted, he doesn't mind. But it doesn't happen very often, because we don't watch enough for that conflict to arise. He likes *Monty Python*..I just go to bed when that comes on and *Sportsnight*..he usually watches that with Andrew, [son] so I go off to bed. But, I was going to say, I can do something else when the television's on, if I'm not interested in it, like read, or do some sewing. But he can't have television on as a background, it's either got to be off and reading, or vice versa, he can't have it as background.

The VCR was seldom used to settle conflicts, the favoured option being to view on a portable or simply do something else in the same or another room. The VCR was more commonly used to record

programmes or movies when viewing was not possible at all, and mainly for joint watching. This seems to indicate two things: that incidence of conflict was quite low, with neither partner being sufficiently bothered to get out a tape and record for later private watching; if there is a strong desire to see something then a second television is the preferred alternative.

#### 4. Male only

The way in which male only watching was reported was as much to do with mode and manner of watching as with content. A/2 described her attitude to TV compared with her husband's:

A/2: I'm not, I don't think I am a natural watcher of television, whatever that is. James, by contrast, is one of those people who can fall into the sofa and switch off everything. He'll go into a protracted slump, you know, staring at the thing for the whole evening and that tends to make me cross, because then he is unavailable. It's a way of becoming unavailable..

A/1 reported on her husband's television watching:

A/1: He watches more than me, he watches grotty trash purely to relax in the same sort of way Peter [son] does, but he always watches the news at ten o'clock, and if he misses the news he'll watch *Newsnight*.

It was noted earlier, in Context (2) - Children Only, that A/1 and A/3 reported their sons' viewing behaviour as a relaxing diversion after intense school work, and women's accounts of masculine modes of viewing are often framed in terms of their need to switch off from 'external' pressures of work. A/2, however, believes that it is a way of switching off from the 'internal', domestic pressures also; he makes himself 'unavailable' to others.<sup>3</sup>



For B/5, who shares much of her television/video watching with her husband, it is what he chooses to watch which creates the male only context.

B/5: But of course, he likes the factual side to it and he always watched *World at War*, and erm..he prefers factual things actually to fiction does Bill..whereas I like to be taken out of myself. I mean, I do agree with him that you should see these things to know what's gone on and to understand why they happen, but God, I was a kid growing up during that, I don't want..I feel as if..I don't want Nazi's invading my sitting room again..you know. I really don't. I get so depressed and I don't want Scargill shouting every five minutes either, I know it's happening, but, you see he will sit here and take that all day. Like for General Elections, we're up 'til all hours. We have..list of constituencies from *The 'Telegraph'*, we've probably got them for two years..and he bores me intensely with it all..because he goes overboard, he goes too far, I mean I'm interested, because I stay up and I like to see who's going to win the General Election, but you know by about one o' clock who's going to get in. Well he stays up 'til five o clock in the morning so. No, I won't do that.

There is a 'quality'/'trash' opposition in this group, but here we also evidence of a 'fact'/'fiction' dichotomy which also emerges more significantly in the other groups. Whilst the quality/trash dichotomy brings the genders together, united against mass culture, the fact/fiction dichotomy divides along gender lines. The women in this group whose husbands and sons watch 'trash' do so because they 'deserve' the relaxation and it is therefore justifiable.

##### 5. Female only

In the previous chapter, it was noted that television and video watching was, in general, a low priority activity for the women who had some 'spare' time at home to themselves. Also, that day-time viewing, a time when some of the women were at home alone or with small children, was extremely rare. However, there was some viewing within this context of both video tapes (hired and time-

shift) and broadcast television, and in all cases this was brought about by the women wanting to watch something their male partners did not like. Apart from the women who watched children's television with their young children, B/5 was the only woman who regularly watched recorded tapes and broadcast television, but never a hired tape, during the day. She had a regular date with the one o'clock news and *Sons & Daughters*, then showing at 3.30pm. But she would also sit down and watch recorded tapes, usually from the previous evening's broadcast. Did she do anything else whilst she was watching them?

B/5: Oh no..I settle down with my coffee and..I can't watch anything and not be relaxed, because I'm not watching it..I'm hearing it, but I'm not watching it, so it's something I'm not really interested in. That's what I mean by *Any Questions* [sic] - I don't mind it being on, but I don't want to sit here and avidly watch all these people rabbitting on. I can listen to them in the kitchen whilst I'm making coffee, or doing something.

B/5 has different mode of viewing, depending on what is on the screen:

B/5: No, if he's watching something like that I'll potter around, and maybe do a bit of ironing, and sort of listen, as it were, from the kitchen, but I can't get too involved..I get very bored with it.

At the time of the interview, 2 pm, she was watching a recorded episode of *Dallas*, a repeat of the previous series then being shown as a lead in to a new series. I asked her if she had seen the *Dallas* episodes before?

B/5: No, I haven't, not this last series, no, I don't know what the devil I was watching when that was on. No, I didn't so I couldn't have had my recorder when they were showing that last *Dallas* series, I don't think..that was only last year..I might have gone off it, or there must have been something on the other side..why didn't I record it? I don't know, but Bill is certainly not a *Dallas* fan, and there's no way would he sort of sit here and want that on. He doesn't agree with the American soap operas....

She speculated further as to why she had missed the previous series of *Dallas*:

B/5: I think once you get out of the habit of watching this sort of thing sort of weekly, well then..it's not really important is it?..so maybe that's why I missed *Dallas*...

B/5 indicates the importance of viewing a series, like *Dallas*, routinely and regularly in order to become involved with it, and also the peculiarly unlocatable combination of circumstances which might lead to a lack of engagement. The repeat series had engaged her once more, but she was watching this on time-shift on her own during the day. Thus a pattern and rhythm of viewing is established which fits into her daily routine. Establishing a viewing routine can be difficult for women, especially if there are a number of distractions and calls upon their time. B/4's time was almost totally taken up with servicing and caring for her family and her mother, but she managed to mark out some solitary viewing:

B/4: I do like to see a good film, but I'm not too keen on..you know, I like something based on fact..I like something that I know, you know..I like a good story like, you know..*Woman of Substance*, and that type of thing..I like that type of thing.

Q: Did you manage to watch that?

B/4: Yes, I watched all of that and I really did get absorbed in that because I'd read the book, you know..and erm..and I really enjoyed that, but then I had to come in here and watch it you see [laugh]..but I did enjoy it and I talked my daughter into watching and I think she watched most of it as well.

'In here' was the dining room where the second portable television was kept. She did not watch it on the main colour television in the sitting room, nor did she record it to watch at another time on her own in more comfortable surroundings.

It was noted that B/4 and B/1 showed very little interest in both television (apart from B/1's devotion to *EastEnders*, *Dallas* and

*Dynasty*) and hiring videos, and neither were particularly motivated to create the space to watch something specific. However, B/1's partner was an avid television and video watcher, and was keen to involve her in choice, selection and eventual viewing. She told me that on one occasion he had hired a love story for her:

B/1: *Slipper and the Rose* he got for me on video, but he didn't sit and watch it because it wasn't his cup of tea..he did something else while I watched that - got that one the other day, on the Saturday.

B/1 would always rather be doing something else, other than watching a video. She likes to be with her family and wishes her husband would participate more in their general leisure time. It seems ironic, therefore, that on a Saturday evening she finds herself sitting on her own watching a video hired for her by her husband, while he does something else.

### Group C

The typology outlined in Table (iv) on the following page indicates a far heavier reported use of television and video than group A/B and also a much clearer division of preferred programmes and films along gender lines. With the exception of C1/2, C1/6 and C1/7, there was no reference in this group to 'quality' or 'classics' in descriptions of preferred programmes and films.

#### 1. Family Together

In many of the households, and especially those with children, television is on all the time, even if no-one is watching anything in particular. Children who were out at school had a tendency to switch the television on as soon as they came in and leave it on regardless. However, there were a number of women who made a point of watching specific programmes with their children. Early evening

Table (iv)

Context	Film	TV
1, Family together	<i>Star Wars; Bond; Superman; comedy; Stir Crazy; Animal House; 10; Chitty, Chitty; Bang Bang; Jaws; Blazing Saddles; Walt Disney; ET; Close Encounters..</i>	<i>Countdown; Soap; Auf Weidersehen Pet; Boys from the Blackstuff; Shogun; EastEnders; Blockbusters; Quiz shows; Dallas; Dynasty.</i>
2, Children only	<i>Star Wars; Flash Gordon; Raiders of the Lost Ark.</i>	<i>Children's TV; Top of the Pops; EastEnders Cartoons.</i>
3, Male/Female together	<i>Trading Places; An Officer &amp; a Gentleman; Deer Hunter; Clint Eastwood; Being There; Educating Rita; The Champ; Kramer v Kramer; Comedy; Adult Comedy; Lemon Popsicle;</i>	<i>Fawlty Towers; Open All Hours; Fresh Fields; News; Minder; Wogan; Duty Free; Face the Music; Call My Bluff; The Boat; Brookside; EastEnders; Butterflies; The Gentle Touch; 321; Magnum; Crossroads; Coronation Street; Crimewatch; Documentaries; Dallas; Dynasty; Cagney &amp; Lacey; Starsky &amp; Hutch; The Brief; Travelling Man; The Bill.</i>
4, Male only	<i>Action Adventure; Science Fiction; War; Boxing films; Stallone; Rocky; Horror; Space; Charles Bronson; Cowboys; Close Encounters..</i>	<i>The Young Ones; Benny Hill; Monty Python; The Two Ronnies; Tomorrow's World; Space; Astronomy; American Football; Sport; Business programmes; News; A Team; Boxing; Documentaries.</i>
5, Female only	<i>Evergreen; The Jazz Singer; My Fair Lady; Ellis Island; Mistral's Daughter; Sarah Dane; Princess Daisy; Tootsie; Hollywood Vives; Romance; Tear Jerkers; Who Will Love My Children?; Horror.</i>	<i>Mapp &amp; Lucia; The Thornbirds; Far Pavilions; Dallas; Dynasty; Falcon Crest; Local News; Chat Shows; Cookery; Medical programmes; Return to Eden; Butterflies; Lace; Master of the Game; Al Jolson; Sons &amp; Daughters; Emmerdale Farm; Take the High Road; Gems; Coronation Street; Where There's Life; Quincy; General Hospital; A Woman of Substance.</i>

\* families with teenage + children

\*\*women watching with their children.

Early evening quiz shows were typical programmes which women could share with their children, with participation being an important part of the pleasure:

C1/9: I tend to watch *Blockbusters* with the children. We all sit there trying to answer them...my husband hates it, he's just so anti-television..he thinks there's far more things we could do than watch TV.

C1/5: I used to like that kid's one that was on..*Blockbusters*..we used to watch that together, me and the kids..now I thought that was great, I really did like that..probably because I could answer some of the questions.

C1/2: I like the one with the boxes..its on early in the evening..*Countdown*..I like that..I like trying to do *Countdown* faster than they can..I do it with my daughter sometimes.

These two programmes are broadcast at around 4.30 p.m., and the timing is important in that the women feel that they can sit down and watch something with their children before beginning food preparation for the evening meal. Also their male partners would not normally be at home - although C1/9's partner seems to have some knowledge of the programme. None of these women laid claim to any possible educative function of these programmes - both quizzes are forms of word game, testing knowledge of vocabulary rather than general knowledge - stressing rather the participatory and social nature of the programmes. It was likened to playing a game with their children.

C1/9 told me that one of her daughters had 'got this thing' about *EastEnders*, explaining to me that she liked the tune because they played it at school:

C1/9: She likes the tune, they tend to play all the soap music at school because it's easy to play.

Q: Do you ever watch *EastEnders*?

C1/9: Sometimes. If I'm sat down, I must admit, I'm usually sat down by half past seven, sometimes we do, but sometimes I'm sitting here looking at it and not really seeing it, you know..I like to have at least an hour when I can just do nothing, and sometimes that happens from half-past-seven to half-past-eight..but I'm not really interested in the characters or the stories.

Television here provides a focus for 'doing nothing' even though there is no apparent interest in the actual programme.

In C1/5's household, *Dallas* and *Dynasty* was watched with her daughter, although often the men were present:

C1/5: Well, they stay up later at weekends, and my little girl loves it, *Dynasty* and *Dallas*, she loves it, and she is really involved in it, you know, with me..like, I'll go to her 'where did it end last week?' and she'll tell me..she's really..you know, she's really good company..it's nice having her against them three. They sit and think [sneer]..

Q: Don't the boys watch it then?

C1/5: They watch it, but they have the same attitude as my husband, you see, if you're sat crying, you know..you fill up..but my daughter's really..she loves it, she loves them programmes, she gets right involved in them.

Like B/1 above, this household experience a gender split when watching *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. The reproduction of female viewing pleasures is matched by the reproduction of male derision, but C1/5 seems to relish sharing the pleasure of *Dallas* and *Dynasty* with her daughter, again emphasising the importance of the social nature of watching a programme of this kind. Again we see evidence of the different preferred modes of viewing by men and women. Here is how C1/5 described what happens when her husband rents a 'space' film, or wants to watch a documentary on television:

C1/5: Yes, I sit and watch them..I try to..you know..well, some I get interested in, you know, I mean, erm..but some, if I find boring I'll read, or if he knows I'm going to find it boring and he's at home, he gets them on a Wednesday when I'm out. And, like, if

there's documentaries, he'll go 'I'm glad you're going out tonight because so and so's on - I can have that on without you moaning'. I don't really moan, but I'm bored, and I tend to talk to him when I'm bored, and he goes 'oh, are you not interested? Wait 'til Dallas is on', and stuff like that, you know..but I suppose that's the way that I show that I'm bored, I'll be talking through whatever he's trying to watch.

Both seem to operate a sort of distraction strategy when their partner is watching a programme or film which is involving and pleasurable. The effect of this mode of watching is that the viewer, to use A/2's term, becomes 'unavailable' to her/his partner. Hence, the added pleasure of solidarity of viewing involvement which C1/5 gets from her daughter who, incidentally, is 7 years old.

Watching with children would often be a justification to sit down during the day, and watch a rented movie, as in C2/4's case:

C2/4: Sometimes we watch during the day..I mean Mark was off last week with the strike and his friend came up and I got them two, well he bought one himself and I bought one, and they sat and watched it and then the next day he was nattering me to watch it. It was *Superman*, so I did sit down, and I made the point. I got all my work done, I said 'let me get my work done first and then I'll sit and watch it with you' and I admit, I really enjoyed it ..[laugh].

We have seen from the discussion of the organisation of spare time that C2/4 had strong guilt feelings about watching television during the day, and even here she made sure her work was done before she sat down. Again, the shared character of the viewing context permits self-indulgence; this woman would not dream of hiring and watching a video during the day on her own.

C1/3, who had no guilt feelings about watching videos and television enjoyed watching rented videos with her husband's children because it allowed her to indulge in fantasy

C1/3: I love fantasy things, I love cartoons and Walt Disney things; total fantasy. Children's adventure



stories, because, erm..John has two children from his first marriage and we used to get them films every Saturday when they came, and I was the first one to watch them. They got bored, and I would sit there watching all these knights in shining armour. Fantasy, I love it.

Watching with children provides and justifies different kinds of pleasures. Those women who feel driven by guilt (C1/5 and C2/4) feel justified if they watch something with their children. Pleasure is derived from the social character of the event - these women would not indulge themselves by watching a hired movie alone and, in C1/3's case especially, it provides a licence to watch children's and fantasy genres which she would have difficulty justifying watching alone.

Some of the women in this group had adult children who were still living at home, hence the reported family viewing of 'adult' comedy (C1/8). C1/8 thoroughly enjoyed watching films like *Animal House*, which she thought was a 'riot'. C1/7, however, whose two youngest sons were still living at home, found explicit sexual scenes difficult to watch with them:

C1/7: You know, on movies when they're jumping into bed with each other..I sometimes get a bit hot under the collar, you know..if the lads are there. Sometimes, not all the time. Sometimes I grin and bear it and just sit and watch it..in silence, or I go in there and make a cup of coffee, and Jack (husband) will shout 'oh, Jean, we're getting to the exciting bit now'..you know..so he makes a joke of it, but I think he's trying to ease the situation, rather than ignoring it. He's making a big play of it..making fun of it..I think he does it very well. I think the eldest, if he's at home, he's the one who is most embarrassed, I don't know why..the younger ones don't seem to mind.

This woman's sons also hired 'blue' movies, which will be discussed in their specific viewing contexts, but occasionally she would insist on watching something on television. She gave as examples *The Thornbirds* and *Lace*, both of which she had read. She was asked if her husband watched either of these 'blockbuster' series:

C1/7: Ahem...he watched them both, but only because I was watching them..it's so rare for me to say 'well this is what's on television and we are watching it' and they all said [groan], you know, the lads either disappear or sit and grin and bear it..Jack sat and watched all of them..I think his comments were that..well he wouldn't have chosen to watch those if I hadn't been insistent.

C1/7 lived in a small house with only one living room and, although there was a portable television in the kitchen, this was rarely used for evening viewing. The alternatives to viewing whatever is on are either to 'grin and bear it' or to 'disappear'. These options were taken up by her or by her sons, but her husband seemed to be a constant viewer and something of an 'arbitrator', watching both her choice of programme and her sons' choice of film/programme, and helping her through her embarrassment when necessary. The 'common ground' upon which they were all able to meet was comedy and serials like *Boys from the Blackstuff* and *Auf Weidersehen Pet* which provided suitable content for relaxed joint viewing. Another comedy programme that offered one household relaxed and pleasurable joint viewing was *Soap*:

C1/4: One programme that we all watch together is that *Soap*..it's the only programme that we all three watch together.

This woman, in her early fifties, lived with her 27 year old unemployed son and her husband and their viewing preferences, as we have seen in an earlier section, were often incompatible. We talked about soap operas and the fact that *Soap* is a 'send-up' of the genre. She agreed:

C1/4: Yes, it goes to the other end, to the ridiculous doesn't it..the situations that crop up [laugh], they pack everything in so well don't they? [laugh]..and yet it has a tenderness about it hasn't it?..you know, there are scenes in it that really brought tears to my eyes, it's so tender and so ridiculous,. I don't honestly know anybody else that really likes it, and I say 'oh it's lovely' - they're lovely characters..and yet it's ridiculous, but so loveable at the same time.

Comedy did not always provide the common ground noted here and these differences, particularly across gender, will be dealt with in the appropriate context.

## 2. Children alone.

The relatively few programmes and movies quoted by the women for this viewing context reflects the fact that television is constantly turned on in many of the households while children watch distractedly, but also that viewing is often collective because of the geography of the houses in this group. At the time of C2/2's interview, in the afternoon, the television was on and her four year old child was playing in front of it. Did she worry about what her children watched on television?

C2/2: No because I pick the programmes I know he is going to watch. You know, they don't just watch anything that's on. I mean, I know it's on this afternoon, but it's only sport anyway and he's not really watching it.

C2/5, at home with her two year old daughter always had the television on:

C2/5: I mean, the television's on all the time, even if I'm in the kitchen although I bring my ironing in here and watch it. If I'm in the kitchen baking I'll have the telly on. You know, even for Jenny, [daughter] Jenny likes it, 'cos I don't believe they can watch too much, unless they've something to do, say if she'd some homework, like when she gets older, I don't think it influences them that much the television. I think they're better with something to occupy them rather than nothing at all. I mean she picks things up from the television.

Hiring videos for the family and children only contexts was much more common in this group than in the A/B group and did not need to have the justification of a birthday party. It was seen by many women as an alternative to going out for entertainment, especially during the school holidays, and in general they were much more relaxed in their attitudes towards their children's viewing than

were the women in the A/B group. For them television was an accepted part of the daily routine.

### 3. Male & Female Together

Comparing television choices for this context in the A/B group, we can note the inclusion here (Table iv) of situation comedy, quiz shows and popular American programmes. C1/3 positively preferred American television to British, particularly the police/crime series. During our discussion I asked her if she watched *Hill Street Blues*:

C1/3: No, I don't watch that, it's weird. No, *Starsky and Hutch*, *Cagney and Lacey* and things like that, I like those. The British ones are very weak, the whole programmes are..erm, it's erm..very mundane, sort of getting up, good morning, going to work, and having their coffee, and pick up the 'phone and there's a terrible accident and they're all out..with the American ones it's all 'waahoo' [laugh]..a million things are going on at once. In the British ones there's one thing happening and it comes to the end and that's it. With the American ones there's so many things happening..you get a million stories on one programme.

Energy and pace, plus what she saw as multiple story lines, are the formal elements that C1/3 enjoys in American series and with which British products compare unfavourably. C2/3 gave a list of her favourite programmes which were also predominantly American. Did she prefer the American ones?

C2/3: Yes I do really..[why?] I don't know...I think it's more or less, the only way to put it is how the other half live, you know..if you can imagine that it's true that things like that do happen in places like America, I think..it's knowing what the other part of the world does, you know, things like *Coronation Street*, you can see things like that in the streets round here, you know..it's just a matter of seeing how the other half live.

However, one of the older women in this group did indicate her dislike for American programmes, such as *Dallas*:

C1/4: They always seem to be unnatural somehow to me, their situations. Too glamorous, it's all too glamorous, the women..teethy..they've always got lovely teeth haven't they?..and, somehow, they all look alike to me, probably because of the teeth. They all seem so immaculate and so gorgeous..that's the plot you see, really, isn't it? It's the plots in these things, they're all about women with lots of money..to treat themselves..[tut, tut].

This woman thoroughly disapproved of the hedonistic and glamorous world of *Dallas* yet, paradoxically, this was often cited by devotees as one of the programme's major appeals. This will be explored more fully in the next chapter, but, in relation to the A/B group, it is important to note that this woman does not use terms like 'rubbish' and 'trash' to describe *Dallas*, which would suggest that it was an inferior product of mass culture. Rather, she sees it as 'unnatural', and refuses to accept its particular form of realism and its ideological terrain. The fact that she took such pleasure in *Soap*, which for her had an emotional realism with which she readily engaged, indicates that she is not against American programmes *per se*.

Turning to comedy, C1/1 said that there were certain comedy shows which she simply couldn't watch. Did her husband share her taste in television?

C1/1: Erm..on the whole..er..his sense of humour is not the same as mine, like *The Young Ones*, he likes to watch that, I don't usually watch that, and a few other things as well that he watches..

Q: He likes comedy? [yes, yes] And you tend not to?

C1/1: Er...I do, I mean, I like to laugh, everybody likes to laugh, but not the same things make me laugh that make him laugh..

Q: Can you think of a comedy series that you have enjoyed?

C1/1: Erm..I can't think of one that's running now, although we both like the one that's on last night..erm..that *Fresh Fields* with Anton Rodgers, and whoever..we both like that, and I'm not sure why really..but erm..I erm..I quite like that. I don't think it's..I don't know really, I can watch that, without..and sort of when it's finished I feel as if I've been entertained..you watch some other things and you think..oh, thank God it's finished sort of thing, whereas...and Craig likes much more like your Benny Hill type thing, which I find not that funny.

C2/2 also reported incompatibility in comedy preference:

C2/2: I like comedies, provided they're funny. I used to love to watch *Butterflies*. Derek used to sit there stoney faced, and I was rolling about laughing, that could be me so easily [giggle], that could be true to life.

Hired movies in this context tend towards the male preference, but occasionally films would be chosen which were preferred by the women. C2/2 repeatedly claimed that her husband would 'watch anything' referring to him as a 'telly addict'. Would he watch 'weepies'?

C2/2: He'll sit and laugh at me [laugh]

Q: Would you say that you tend to avoid those films?

C2/2: Well, if he went to pick one he definitely wouldn't pick one of those, but he would get one for me and sit through it laughing at me, you know..

C2/4 described what happened when she and her partner watched *Kramer v Kramer*:

C2/4: We taped *Kramer v Kramer* at Christmas and he watched it and I watched it when I'd just come out of hospital, and at the end I burst into tears - I was heartbroken, and he says 'bloomin' heck..just a film'. He pretends not to enjoy them and I think deep down inside he does.

Many of the women in the sample would otherwise occupy themselves if their partners were watching something which they did not like. For C1/7 this was often the case. She was asked if she found

herself watching a lot of things which she didn't particularly enjoy:

C1/7: Yes, I would say so..which is the reason why I tend to sit in my chair and read..I've got this knack of being able to switch off and get lost in a book.

C1/5: Erm..well..my husband likes space and goodness knows what and things like that...I'm trying to think what the last one was that we got..I just can't remember...

Q: What about if your husband hires his space ones, do you sit and watch them?

C1/5: Yes I do..I try to..you know..well some I get interested in, you know, I mean, erm..but some if I find boring I'll read..

Q: Any other kinds of films that you watch together?

C1/5: I can't think, I'm trying to think..erm..I don't know, he got an awful one, I don't know if it were..oo it wor horrible, skeletons and stuff..erm..you see I don't like anything like that - horrors or anything. I just don't like horror films at all.

C2/2 was asked what happened when her husband was watching a film she didn't like:

C2/2: I don't watch it.

Q: What do you do instead?

C2/2: I could either sew, read, or do my painting - I can always find something to do rather than watching something for the sake of watching. I can switch off from the television.

Three of the women reported that they had watched 'blue' movies with their partners (C1/6, C1/7 and C2/5). C1/7 was asked who hired them:

C1/7: Well, the first we saw was the one my eldest son brought back from Saudi Arabia. I don't think he knows I've seen it though [laugh]. I wouldn't like to watch it when he was there..only just my husband and myself..I'm glad I've seen it but....I must be naive you see, I mean kids today..they get blue movies as well and wait until I've gone to bed you see..now they'll sit and watch one when Jack's here, but not

when I'm here, no..I don't know if it's out of respect to me or..embarrasment, I would certainly be embarrassed and I think they would be as well..so..you see they know a hell of a lot more at nineteen or twenty than I did..it's taken me forty years to see some of it [laugh]..but it sets you off on a different track. I mean before videos came into this household there were 'girlie' magazines, it's just like that really.

C1/6 and C2/5 claimed it was curiosity which led to the choice:

C1/6: Yes, yes, we've hired blue movies before, just to see what they were like, just out of curiosity. I wouldn't go in and hire them again, but we have been and hired one once. I don't think I actually watched it all the way through. Erm..we hired one once to watch with friends, for a laugh.

C2/5: Yes, we've watched a few, just to say we've watched them. But I wouldn't hire one a week, not to that extent. But sometimes we might have one on a Saturday night and I'd watch it, just out of curiosity. I think they're funny.

#### 4. Male only

In the previous contexts for this group, the women, although present when the television or video was on would not necessarily be paying very much attention to the screen. This context, however, features those texts and genres which some of the women had very little interest in, or positively disliked, and would either go to bed or do something in the kitchen when their partners were watching.

Descriptions of the movies in this context were necessarily vague, and respondents often resorted to the categories used by the video library to describe their partners' preferences. There were very few titles they could remember. This also applied to television programmes:

C1/5: ...but, as I say, he does like documentaries and things that are of 'interest' he calls it, you know..so I go 'well of interest to you' [laugh]

Q: What would he call *Dallas* and *Dynasty* then?



C1/5: Rubbish..he says it's stupid, you know, but he likes things that..well things that..oh! I'll tell you..like there was that thing on ..what's it? QE? what's it..that bog man. Now that, he had to sit and watch..now I sat and watched that and was interested, you know, I can get interested in certain things, if it's something that really interests me I can sit and..but he likes anything like that..anything that you're learning from he'll watch. He loves *Tommorrow's World* and things like that, he wouldn't miss, you know, he likes to watch them..and astronomy, anything to do with astronomy he likes, Patrick Moore and that he likes, but I mean, I just don't understand things like that.

This extract reiterates the 'fact'/'fiction' dichotomy noted in the B/5 household, but also the value afforded to male preference for factual programmes compared with the fictional 'rubbish' preferred by the female. This distinction between what is 'serious' and 'silly' determines what is 'worth watching' and is a strong element in the justifiability of the male's programme selection. What is of 'interest' to him is definitionally good. C1/5 was encouraged to talk about her pleasures in *Dallas*, and this will be reported in the following chapter, but her conversation was peppered with comments like 'if my husband could hear me now' and 'it's a good job my husband can't hear this'. She was asked what programmes she liked to watch on television:

C1/5: My husband'd really laugh now..*Dallas* [laugh]. He thinks it's awful, and *Dynasty*; I like things like that, that's sort of, you know..you think..well do people live like that? Them type of programmes..you know, *Falcon Crest* and, you know, things like that.

Throughout the discussion she was clearly suffering from mixed feelings of guilt and pleasure at being given licence to take *Dallas* seriously. C1/05's husband spent a lot of his time at home working on his computer and she spoke of his dedication to this activity:

C1/5: ..you've got to be able to concentrate..I lose concentration, that's it with me..but I go to my husband, it must be really nice to be that involved in something..something to really get interested in that

takes your mind of everything else..he can do that, now I can't and I think, now why can't I do that?

Q: But you can do that. You do it with *Dallas* and *Dynasty*.

C1/5: I do don't I? But they're not important things are they?

Q: Well they're not considered to be important are they?

C1/5: This is it..now, if I put that much effort, like, I go to my son 'if you put that much effort into your school work as you do into playing on the computer, you'd be brilliant' [laugh]..you know, but I suppose I'm the same myself..I want to have something that I'm really involved in, really, you know, like my neighbour on the estate, she's started to try and teach some Pakistani children and the mother English..she says to me 'why don't you..' and I say 'oh, they'd be alright, picking my slang up' [laugh]. But...you know, I've enough on my own without having that. But I'd like to have something that I'm interested in, to achieve something, just to say 'well, I've achieved that'..to myself..it's myself I need to say it to, not everybody else..you know, well, I've achieved it..so how on earth do you go about that?

Now my husband..I don't know, he just seems to be able to turn himself off, I wish I could, because I think that's the way to keep yourself sane, I do honestly sometimes. You see, men can sit down and do their thing and they don't feel guilty.

Her discussion of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, which have low status within the household, soon turns to an assessment of her own self worth and lack of achievement. She is laughed at by her husband and sons for enjoying *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, but these are the programmes which actually enable her to 'switch off'.

C1/1 spoke of gender differences in her household with regard to comedy preferences. She tried to explain:

C1/1: ..Craig likes much more like your Benny Hill type thing which I find not that funny. I just don't find it funny..I think it's a sexual thing where he's always got these birds running around..but I don't know, I think he's a..he reminds me of a dirty old man

in a raincoat..and I think that's what puts me off about him and I suppose that's why you can't accept his comedy. You've got to break that down before you can accept his comedy..and to a man maybe that's not there.

I like John Cleese, we both like John Cleese, erm..but I liked him more in *Fawlty Towers*, where Craig liked him more in *Monty Python*..er..so there again. And Craig likes Ronnie Barker a lot, I..used, well I still do like him in that one he's doing on a Sunday, we usually catch that, the shop one..I preferred him in that one and I don't think Craig did, I think he more prefers him with Ronnie Corbett, and I'm not particularly fond of him in that type of a show.

C1/1 evidently seeks to understand what pleasures certain comedy types have for her husband, compared with her own preferences, but she experiences difficulty. This was echoed by some of the other women. C2/4 was asked if her husband would enjoy a love story:

C2/4: Well, I think he'd watch it and then make fun of it afterwards, but I think he'd probably enjoy it..cos sometimes he'll criticise one programme and then the next minute he's watching it..so..I can't understand it, you know. Like *Blankety Blank*, he reckons he can't stand that programme because of Les Dawson, and yet he'll sit and watch it and laugh his head off.. and I think..'you're not supposed to like it'..,you know. I don't really understand him myself up to now..[laugh]. If he didn't like something he'd say 'I'm not watching this'..we've all been watching something and he's said 'I'm not watching this' and he's turned it over without saying..'do you want to watch it?'..if he didn't like it he wouldn't watch it.

C2/1: I watch all the soap operas..but then again, I don't watch *A Team* or owt like that, that doesn't interest me..Michael [husband] watches that..*Magnum* I'll watch, I quite like that, but *A Team* I'm not interested in at all..gangsters and guns I'm not interested at all, but all the soap operas I'm interested in those..*Coronation Street* and them..I watch quite a lot of telly, during the day, I've always got telly on. I don't like documentaries or owt like that, I don't like *World in Action*.

C1/3: He hires a lot of erm..ooo..what would you call them. Again, new films, but ones I wouldn't want to watch, like erm..boxing films, Al Pacino, tough guy films, like that, that's more his cup of tea. Violent films, action films, something happening all the time.

C2/2: Blood thirsty [laugh]. You know, there's no way he'd record *Coronation Street* or something like that. A film, yes. He tapes a lot of things that he watches and I don't. You know, he watches things when the children have gone to bed and I'm at work.

C1/7 described the kind of programme she preferred compared with her husband and sons:

C1/7: I like the romantic leading up to things, you know, the spoken things between them. I like all of that kind of stuff..they don't seem to..which you get in a book, you get more talk between them, the leading up to it, whereas everything on television seems to be so...everything done for visual effects, of course..there's a difference between..something happening, with the interplay, when you can see something is going to happen..the interchange..it's nice when it is slow and you're saying..oh yes..I knew she'd say that, or I knew it would turn out like that, whereas men, I don't think they're bothered about that, they just sit and watch it and let it all happen.

Her account of the difference between male and female preferences will be explored further in Chapter 4, but there is evidence in all these women's accounts of genuine mystification about the appeal of those so-called male genres which are generally viewed in a male only context.

##### 5. Female only

I have noted the feelings of guilt experienced by some women in this group about watching television and video during the day. For those women at home with young children this would be an obvious time for female only viewing, and viewing with their children did indeed provide an excuse for day-time viewing. Some of the women used broadcast television to actually structure their day, framing it as a reward or indulgence towards which the completion of household tasks would lead. C1/5 regularly watched *Falcon Crest* and I asked if this helped her along with her work:

C1/5: Erm..yes I think you do because you've something to look forward to, it's like a reward at the end of the day, you know..where you're sort of..well I'm doing

this, but I can sit down for an hour..sort of thing..yes, I think it does..because some days you come home and you don't feel like starting anyway, and then you think, oh well, I've got that to look forward to, so therefore you get on with it. Yes, I think it probably does.

C2/1, at home during the day with her small child liked a lot of the day-time soap operas:

C2/1: Yes..*Sons and Daughters*, *Take the High Road*, *Gems*..I've watched it before and I'm seeing it again..but it's because I've nothing to do that I'll watch that telly this aft. it's nice having the video because if I want to go out I can tape things like that..I wouldn't be able to do before. I'd have to stay in.

*Sons and Daughters* was her current favourite and she made sure her domestic routine accommodated its viewing:

C2/1: I get right involved in it, I talk to myself when he's at work. I'm right into it..if I'm going shopping I like to think ooo..mustn't miss *Sons and Daughters*, so I rush home for that.

C1/5 and C2/3 are neighbours and, along with another neighbour regularly rented video tapes which they would view together during the afternoon when spouses and children were at work and school. Here is my discussion with C1/5 about this viewing context:

C1/5: Like sometimes, my neighbour over the road and Megan, if there's anything, like we've just had one in three parts, I've forgotten what they called it..*Evergreen*..that was it, and we'll get things like that and now Megan's on about another one that's in so many parts and, like she'll buy one, I'll buy one and Rita'll buy one..and we'll do it like that if it's anything we really want to watch, we do it like that and sort of, you know, I'll get my work done, we'll have a cup of coffee and watch it one afternoon.

Q: So the three of you sit and watch it together?

C1/5: Yes we do.

Q: Are you always agreed as to what kind of film to get?

C1/5: Yes..we all like the same kind of film really.

Q: Who gets the films?

C1/5: Well I think it's usually Megan who takes time to go looking, you know, she'd probably browse more than me, you know..like if I didn't watch a film it wouldn't bother me type of thing. It's nice, like once you get it, but I wouldn't go probably looking for myself, I think....There again, it's finding time to look for yourself..I think that guilt comes into it again somewhere [laugh]. I know it sounds silly, but you know, there again..and it isn't..because, as I say, my husband, he's away now actually, so it isn't that he's coming home saying 'oh you haven't done so and so'..but I feel the guilt myself..oh, I should have done that..and erm..I just couldn't sit watching a film if everything was piling up.

Q: Do you feel guilty watching the films with your friends?

C1/5: No, because I normally know when we're going to watch them so, I sort of get things done so I can watch them..so I can sit and think, well I deserve to watch this, type of thing..you know, things are done, so, no I don't really, in that way.

Like I sit..my fault is guilt because I think 'I shouldn't be doing this, I should be doing so and so' and I do actually feel guilty, not because anybody's on at me, I feel guilty, you know, and I think to myself 'why do you feel guilty?' ..and I just can't..I feel guilty taking any time out of a day for me..do you understand what I mean?..Like, I'll put, if it's anything for my husband, or any of my three kids, I will put myself out and do..but myself, I feel guilty, I feel as if I've cheated and taken something that's not mine..you know, I've taken that out of the day and that is not my time. Like, if Megan were to come round and say 'Do you want to come and watch a video?' I would be guilt ridden to watch that video there and then, because I've not built the rest of my day round that.

I asked Megan (C2/3) how she went about deciding on the films to get for those afternoon sessions:

C2/3: It's me more often than not that..I'm the one that goes to the video shop more than anybody. I mainly go to return the films that Ian or Matthew's [husband and son] taken out the day before, and I just tend to look round and ask if they've got anything new,

and she'll tell me about them. That's how I got onto this *Evergreen*, and *Sarah Dane*, that was in two parts, and another one..erm..*Mistral's Daughter*, things like that. I like something with a story to it.

Q: When you watch videos with your friends, do you talk about them afterwards.

C2/3: Sometimes we do. There was one that we had..*Evergreen*, there was one of them that I didn't manage to sit down and watch with them, and I did watch that one on my own, then we had a right good talk about it, you know..we do discuss things, we have spoken about it..they usually go to me..'have any new videos come out?' They don't go like I do..and it's usually left to me to get them. Like, she told me last week there's a new one coming out, but we thought we'd wait until next week so that we can sit and watch it without them coming in 'can I have..can I have' it makes it difficult.

I asked her if they watched the movie right through, uninterrupted?

C2/3: Yes, we let it run all the way through..we usually, if it's on an evening, we'll get a bottle of wine out then we don't have to bother to get up and make tea..[laugh].

This viewing context served several different functions for the participants. It assuaged the guilty feelings of C1/5, it provided uninterrupted viewing time and allowed the women to select and watch those genres of films which they were not normally able to watch with their male partners. But there is also a qualitative difference here in that the women feel able to take up the feminine subject positions offered by these texts comfortably and pleasurably together, without fear of the male derision which they and other women reported.

Another female only viewing group was formed by C2/5 and her mother. She was asked if she thought there were films made specially for women:

C2/5: Yes, definitely. Like this new one *Who Will Love My Children*. I can't see any man, well, not very many men, getting any pleasure out of that. I mean...I

watched that round at my Mum's and she asked a few of us if we'd like to watch it and we all just sat and cried. I can't see any man really being interested in that.

The two full-time teachers in this group saw television in this context as a relaxing diversion. C1/6 reported how her reading and viewing habits had changed over the years:

C1/6: I think when I was a student I couldn't read anything for pleasure, and it was very hard, for about two years, it was very hard for me to accept that I wanted to read a book for me rather than for something, for an essay..I'm aware of reading and viewing things, obviously, you know, I can choose now, I can sit and I can watch a trashy, awful movie if I want to, and, like, I taped the American thing which was absolutely dreadful, and I was aware how awful it was, but I taped it and I watched it and I enjoyed it..and I felt no guilt about wasting that time over really a rubbish programme. I have an ability to decide to do things for me rather than have to do things for an essay, for school. I can now have time to do things just for me.

C1/3 enjoyed hiring horror movies, but she also hired other kinds of movies to watch on her own:

C1/3: Oh yes, love stories, sloppy things, anything I could cry over, erm..and a lot of the newer or later films that came out that I'd missed that weren't quite good enough for us to go to the cinema and see. Films like *Tootsie*..now I did see that at the cinema, but I had to see it again, John did not want to see it, he refused to watch it - he sounds a pain doesn't he? [laugh] - erm, *Arthur*..films that I couldn't be bothered to go and see, but I had to see. I'd watch them at home.

#### Group D/E

The viewing choices of this relatively small group of women, six in total, compared with the 10 A/B's and 14 C's, are summarised in Table (v) on page 122. Within this group, two of the households had young children, one woman lived with her husband and grown-up daughters, one divorced woman lived with her teenage daughters and



daughters and occasionally with her boyfriend, and two young women living with their parents. All were council tenants, except D/2 who were council property purchasers.

The contexts which readily accommodated the A/B/C groups were not really flexible enough for the D group, mainly because all but two of the households were made up of adults. However, Table (v) is broadly representative of different contexts as they arose in discussion with the women.

#### 1. Family together.

In the majority of these households the television was on all the time. D/1 said that the television would usually be on by 'news time'. I asked if that was the 6 o'clock news:

D/1: Yes..that's not particularly perhaps to watch the news because..well, that's right, that's why Jim [husband] puts the news on because we've got Teletext, so he'll actually dial up the news when he comes home, I don't, but did while he was away for that fortnight, so I must have missed somebody telling me the news, even if I hadn't read it myself..I'd pick up what was happening in the world then..and TV's on in the background and nobody will start watching it 'til half past seven, my elder daughter's got very much into soap operas, *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*, and if I'm sitting around by that time I'll be half watching it and half reading, or..she always tells you what's going on at the same time..erm..then it'll probably stay on.

Both D/1 and D/2, the households with small children, operated the nine o'clock children's curfew which is assumed by the broadcasting organisations:

D/2: Later on at night our kiddies are in bed and you can sit and watch, because, I mean, they're at it all the time, they're either wanting something or trying to talk to you, so after 9 o'clock type of thing, I try to get them out of the way by then [laugh].

Table (v)

Context	Film	TV
1, Family together	<i>Kramer v Kramer; Champ; Porky's; Police Academy; Rocky; Dirty Harry; Clint Eastwood; Comedy; Walt Disney.</i>	<i>EastEnders; Coronation Street; Dallas; Dynasty</i>
2, Children only	<i>High Society; Musicals; Children's Films; Walt Disney.</i>	<i>EastEnders; Coronation Street; Dallas; Auf Wiedersehen Pet; Top of the Pops; The Young Ones.</i>
3, Male/Female together	<i>Blade Runner; Aliens; Who Will Love My Children? Champ; Horror.</i>	<i>Best Sellers; Sherlock Holmes; Traveling Man; Snooker; Olympics; World Cup; Cricket; Boxing; Faulty Towers.</i>
4, Male only	<i>Cowboys; War; Rocky's; Boxing Films.</i>	<i>Canon &amp; Ball; Motor Cycle Racing; Car Racing; Snooker; Football.</i>
5, Female only	<i>Reds; Tess; Weepies; Richard Gere; Romance; Horror.</i>	<i>Falcon Crest; Sons &amp; Daughters; Dallas; Best Sellers; Coronation Street; Local News; Medical programmes; Lace.</i>

D/1: Well, when the girls go to bed we regard that as our TV time [what time?] That would be, I suppose around about nineish, that sort of thing.

I asked D/1 if all the family watched *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*:

D/1: Yes, yes, I think we'll all probably watch if we're around..we've never got into the American ones, although Jane [daughter] told me the other night that *Dallas* is really good. We've always gone in favour of *Coronation Street*, I think, you know, we probably watched it at school, then not while we were at University and when we were working, then started again perhaps, you know, a couple of years ago. You go into or come out of it.

E/2 and her daughters regularly watched *Crossroads*:

E/2: Yes, it starts with *Crossroads*. Everything.. tea's got to be ready, or it's got to be ready for when *Crossroads* has finished. Everybody watches *Crossroads*, unless, like Mary [daughter], she works Friday night, so we tape it for her. We like it..I don't think it's because it's so good, I think it's sort of, you can't believe what's going to happen next.

D/1 reported a similar kind of attitude towards *EastEnders* when she was asked if it 'hooked' her:

D/1: Well no, well, only in a comic sort of way. Like 'is he going to the wedding or not?'..you know, I couldn't care less [laugh]. I think it's very easy to join in with that..it's more like a joke than anything else the way we watch it..if Jim's been out he'll come in and say to Jane 'well, what happened in *EastEnders* then?'..WELL...[laugh]

Regularity in watching a favourite soap opera, as well as the pleasure of speculation and discussing plots and characters with members of the family, is an important and recognised element of viewing practice. Family viewing of films also often triggered talk and sometimes tears:

D/2: We all watched *Kramer v Kramer* together when it was on at Christmas, on television. We didn't say much, but I found I got more reaction from my eldest daughter, because when we went to bed she says...and I said 'are you thinking that's going to happen to me and your Dad, what's happened on that film?' and she said 'yes, and I don't want it to happen to you'..I came down and told my husband, he said 'oh she's a softy'.. she's not a child to show her feelings, but sometimes the odd thing comes out. I said to her 'oh, we argue, like everybody else, but we're friends soon'. She does notice things like that, whereas, if she sees murder, or anything like that in a film she wouldn't think..but if she hears it on the news, then she does. You know, these children who'd been killed, Jasmin [Beckford] and that, she was asking about that, asking why..eight year old.

E/1: There was a video we got and we all watched it, called *The Champ*, and it's about a boxer who's on his own with a little boy..and he returns to fight for some money for this little boy, and he's in this fight and he gets knocked out and he dies on the table. And then..it was really funny, because we were sat there on the settee and her little boy were on the floor, and he's playing, you know, and he just looked up, and this little boy ran up to his dad, and tears were running..we burst out crying, but we were laughing as well..I like that kind of thing.

E/2 was a horror fan and she described one rare occasion when she had watched a horror film with her daughters and their boyfriends:

E/2: There was a film we watched last year and the girls were here and the boys were here, and we sat watching this film and I was sat at that end, and the lads were here and, right at the very end he propelled himself out of bed, he jumped out of bed. He was supposed to be dead, and all of a sudden, the girl was tidying the covers up, and that, and all of a sudden he was out of bed. Now I knew something was going to happen at the end, it just couldn't possibly end like that. I mean, it was too peaceful an ending, something was obviously going to happen, and I sat there and everybody jumped, they didn't expect that. I killed myself laughing, I thought it was hilarious, but it made them jump - our Mary was frightened to death.

Apart from demonstrating her knowledge of the horror genre, this anecdote indicates the social aspect of watching movies at home and

the cross generational contexts which such occasions provide. This is not always the case. E/2 reported that her daughters often dominated television and the VCR.

E/2: Karen [daughter] tapes *Top of the Pops* and Spandau Ballet and she tapes all things like that, so we don't clash with them, I try and keep out of the way when she's playing that, I mean she plays hers over and over and over again, but I'm never in to tape anything like that for me; country and western - I'm never in and they never think.

D/4 also found difficulty in watching her choice of television programme:

D/4: Well, it's my eldest girl, she watches it more..she puts the TV on when she comes in from work and she watches it all night if she can [laugh]..we often have a barney over the programmes because if you're not careful you miss them..you know..she says 'I want to watch this' and I usually given in, anyway, I think oh..[shrug].

## 2. Children alone.

Of the households with small children, one had a portable television in one of the bedrooms which was used as an alternative set, mainly for children's viewing. This household (D/1) also had a large 'library' of recorded video tapes which the children would use.

In view of the fact that two of the women were young and living with their parents, generational differences emerged more strongly than in the previous groups, focussing mainly on comedy and music and the VCR was used to alleviate this conflict. There were also problems with sexually explicit material, as noted in C1/7's case whose sons rented blue movies. In D/3's case, 21 years old, living with her parents, it was her father who disapproved of 'rude things':

D/3: If my mum wants a video I'll get it for her and we'll sometimes watch it. My Dad's had a few but he didn't like them..he generally has war films and I don't mind them so I'll watch them but he says, if

there's any rude things I want to know..I mean, I'm not bothered with things like that, but I think he is with us all being lasses [laugh]..he gets a bit embarrassed, but I don't blame him, and he told me he'd let me have my video on that condition.

### 3. Male & Female together

Sport was a major category here. Boxing, the World Cup, the Olympic Games, and snooker were all favoured by women in this group, programmes which, in previous groups, only figured in the male alone context:

D/2: He likes the nature ones and sport. I like them as well. My husband isn't keen on football, but we both like rugby and boxing.

D/4: He likes nature, you know, the nature ones, erm..I don't think there are any on just now, but there was one on the other week on one of the sides for about an hour..he watched those, well we both did, we enjoyed them.

The football World Cup was in progress during the time of my interviews, and was referred to by D/1:

D/1: We had problems there. Before it started..look, are we going to get interested in the World Cup or not, because we'll make an effort if we're going to. So, we decided yes, because we'd probably enjoy it in the later stages, and I think the same thing's happened as the computer [laugh]..Jim watches it and I think 'oh, I can't be bothered with this lot'..it'll get more interesting when we get down to fewer teams and I'll sit and read..but..yes..I do tend to get interested, I know from previous times when we get down to the last sixteen or the last eight or something...and I always find there's one team that I want to do well.

Situation comedy was not very significant, compared to group C, although D/4 enjoyed *Auf Weidersehen Pet*. I asked if her husband like to follow serials?

D/4: No I don't think there is much, really, in fact, he goes to sleep actually in the chair [laugh]..he'll

be sitting watching it then he just drops off to sleep..although, I like those *Auf Weidersehen*..I don't class that really, but it is a serial isn't it? I've been watching that, I enjoy that, first and second time, but he thinks it's horrible. I think it's funny, so I watch that.

The films quoted by the group for joint viewing crossed the gender boundaries. D/4 again:

D/4: Yes, yes, we've had one or two..I can't remember the names of them..we watch sort of..what, was it now..er..one of them was Rocky Stallone, and he'd been to Vietnam - that was pretty good..and erm, forget the name of it now..Harry, *Dirty Harry*, Clint Eastwood. I liked them, you know, they were quite good.

D/2 and her husband had watched *Who Will Love My Children?* together:

D/2: He thought it was good, he was sniffing..he was sort of taking the mickey out of me crying to stop himself crying.

D/1 explained the difference between her and her husband's tastes in movies:

D/1: He's much more interested in the techniques, effects, the immediate..what I regard as surface cleverness of the film, rather than story. That's it isn't it? I like the story and he likes the way it's done..yes.

Q: What kinds of films do you mean?

D/1: Yes. Well, I suppose..I mean, thinking about what's on the video list, stuff we've recorded from the TV, that's the same kind of thing..who's..when we come round to wiping things, you know, then it's who's fighting for what..erm..I suppose I tend to like, you know, *Tess*, erm *Reds*, *Dr. Zhivago*, if you like the big..well, often romantic, but not..the big films I like. Jim's very much a special effects man, you know..we've still got *Jaws* when everybody else is bored to tears with it..and *Blade Runner*, *Alien* and all those, that's very much his thing..I might like them when I watch them, but when I'm on my own I wouldn't put one of them on.

Q: When you're watching together, how is the decision made?

D/1: One goes down the list and suggests things that would be OK with them at that time, so you'll make a list of about ten things perhaps, and the other will say yea or nay..now if you're in a terribly different mood, I don't know, sometimes I might go down the list and there's some comedy stuff we've got on erm..perhaps Jim'll say no, let's watch a film..I suppose the comedy tends to be shorter..let's watch one particular thing rather than a few episodes..we sort of approach where we can agree generally, lots of list options for one another.

E/1, who lived with her parents, found it more comfortable to watch movies with her married sister and brother-in-law:

E/1: Sometimes, yes..what we usually do, we [laugh] we don't get blue movies, but they tend to be a bit rude, you know. I mean my Dad wouldn't watch them..so at Pamelas, we'll get a tape and we'll have something like that instead of going out, and I stay there for the night and we watch a couple of films, you know, and we sometimes get blue ones then..if Phillip's in the pub his friends will say, oh we got a good film last night..right, we'll get it. We get a few, but there's some that even Pamela won't watch, so I don't watch them. I don't really like that kind of thing, but, you know, some of them are a bit rude, really humorous, you kind of laugh at it, *Lemon Popsicles*, that kind of thing.

#### 4. Male only

Because of the constitution of households in this group, reported viewing for this context is necessarily thin.

Although the women said that there were differences in preferred programmes and movies, most of them were happy to watch with either their male partners or their fathers. There were times, however, when the married women in this group would go and do something else, or sit and read when they weren't interested in what was being watched:



D/4: If there was something on that, you know, I was interested in I would watch. Then if they had a film I didn't care for, I'd go sit in there and read, you know, I go out of the room and read.

## 5. Female only

Generally this required the women to be alone in the house, either during the day or in the evening. D/2 regularly watched *Falcon Crest* and *Sons and Daughters*. She was asked what her husband thought of the programmes she liked watching:

D/2: Well, the ones I watch in the afternoon, he, you know, thinks they're daft. But when he was unemployed he was sat watching *Sons and Daughters* himself and the odd times he's got home early he's said 'well who's that and what's she doing'..and I say 'oh, you don't like it..'[[laugh].

Q: So he wouldn't get interested in it?

D/2: Yes, but I don't think he'd get like me. But, there again, that's my half hour, like, I bring Laura [daughter] home at about twenty past three, so I have that time 'til four o'clock before I start on the tea, and I try to make that my time. The kids'll go get changed or play out..my eldest daughter, before she went into junior school, she used to like watching *Sons and Daughters* with me, so she tends to tell the others to pack it in..she'll say 'oh, be quiet, we're watching this'..you know.

Television is used by this woman to mark out time for herself during the day, two of the day-time soap operas fitting into her daily schedule of child care.

D/1 found it quite difficult to explain what kind of film she liked watching:

D/1: I find it easier to pick on things that he likes than isolate my own..I do like big stories, I suppose, like *Tess*, *Reds*, *Zhivago*..they cover a wide period of time and a wide range of characters, and I do like romantic stuff if its's well done..erm..and then again, I like what you might describe as quite the opposite, little films about..*Gregory's Girl* and *Electric Horseman*..I mean that was really just Jane Fonda and

Robert Redford, and I got that quite by accident one night and thought it was wonderful and went on about it sufficiently so that Jim watched it and he also enjoyed it, and we overlapped there. But quite what it is about those sorts of films I don't know..characters, good characters, a touch of romance, a touch of humour.

The kinds of films, television programmes and books that women like watching and reading will be explored in the following chapter.

### Summary

Identifying different viewing contexts and related texts for the the three main groups in the sample reveals differences in viewing preference between groups and within the groups as contexts change. By breaking up the notion of a monolithic domestic viewing context, we can also see which members of the household unit have priority at specific times and, by listening to how the women account for this, get an idea of the negotiations involved in establishing viewing choices. An important dimension of this would appear to be the ways in which women from different groups justify other members of the household's claims to the screen.

As far as children's viewing is concerned there is a more consciously expressed effort at control from the A/B Group than the other groups. For these women television did not constitute a problem if it was used by their children selectively or as a means of relaxation after hard work. For Group C, television was, in the main, a much more dominant feature of the household and was more or less accepted as a part of life. Although we have noted that the A/B Group women shared their partner's tastes in films and television, we can also see that some negotiation takes place. Often there is a partner who is somehow in 'credit', and so has earned the choice. This applies to those households throughout the sample where one partner is the dominant viewer. If a preference is expressed by the non-viewing partner, then it is likely that she/he will get her/his way. In the C/D/E groups many of the women

consider their husband's employment as being the only justification necessary for him to take priority over the screen. Many would also put their children's choice before their own; in this way, the women themselves accept a place at the bottom of the viewing hierarchy. While the Male Only viewing context can and does exist when their female partners are at home, for the Female Only context to exist it is usually necessary for the male partner to be absent, either at work or leisure. This means that the women have to select their viewing time carefully, often during the day. However, as we have seen, this is not unproblematic as many feel guilty whilst watching television or video during the day. C1/5's complicated work and reward patterns, which she uses to justify watching a video during the day with her friends, serve to remind us of the ideological constraints under which some women live. This means, of course, that very often women are watching television programmes or movies which they do not enjoy and would not choose to watch themselves.

If we address our attention to the texts associated with the A/B contexts as seen in Table (iii), we can see that there is a preference for 'classics' and prestigious series on television. Also, the idea of British-ness as a sign of quality is important in this group. There is resistance to the products of mass culture and a desire on the part of some of the women to distance themselves from those products. There were, however, two women in this group who liked American serials and series, particularly *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, but faced the derision of their partners and children when they watched these programmes. These two women can be seen as systematic exceptions in this group, systematic in that they both left school at 15, neither of them pursuing higher education nor a career. Their partners, on the other hand, had developed successful careers within their fields.

In Table (iv) and (v) we see much stronger divisions across gender and related texts. Documentaries and current affairs were cited as being enjoyed by male partners and not by women. However,

'factual' programming has a much higher prestige in these households and is automatically taken more seriously. In Table (iv) sport was almost always viewed in a Male Only context, whereas Table (v) shows less of a gender division for this category of programme. The ways in which women in Group C and Group D/E spoke of their partners preferences is revealing in that they tend to reinforce the gender differences and keep the divisions in their place. Partners are mystifyingly involved in politics/space/science/science fiction/action adventure, and so on, because they are men. The statement 'I don't know, what he sees in them' indicates how inscrutable these men can seem in relation to their viewing pleasures. However, this inscrutability extends to their relationship to 'female' genres. The emotional responses which these films and programmes elicit from the men would seem to present difficulties. Various masking strategies are employed; pretending not to be affected and laughing at their partner's tears being two reported in this group. There is a reluctance by men to view such genres and as a result they rarely appear in the male/female viewing contexts.

### Viewing Modes

In the light of this analysis of the different viewing contexts and their associated texts, I will now briefly discuss the 'modality' of viewing associated with the hiring of tapes compared with, on the one hand, broadcast television, and on the other, the cinema.

John Ellis refers to broadcast television as 'intimate and everyday, a part of home life rather than any kind of special event' (Ellis 1982 p. 113). He also argues that broadcast television, in order to address the domestic (and distracted) audience, has developed its own particular form. This, Ellis argues, is a segmental form, made up of very short units which constantly claim the audiences' attention in its endless 'flow'. In its domestic setting

television's regime of viewing is very different from, say, the cinema:

TV does not encourage the same degree of spectator concentration. There is no surrounding darkness, no anonymity of the fellow viewers, no large image, no lack of movement amongst the spectators, no rapt attention..TV is treated casually rather than concentratedly. It is something of a last resort..rather than a special event. (Ellis 1982 p.128)

If we accept Ellis' claims about the nature of broadcast television and its audience, we can see that the use of a VCR for time shifting and the hiring of pre-recorded tapes has the potential to disrupt this endless 'flow'. The user can subvert the schedules imposed by the broadcasting organisations and also potentially alter the regime of viewing. In other words, make television into a special event. B/5, for example, reported that recording off-air and renting a tape made a difference to her mode of viewing:

B/5: Mmm..it's completely different, yes, to television yes..I don't say its different to watching a recording that you've bothered to record from your timer, it's no different to that, but it is different to the television being on and you being..well, I mean, if you've gone to the trouble to record something, then you do it because you want to watch it. Now that is exactly the same as hiring a film. My television can be used, yes, as the radio, just as background, but recording, and hiring, that is different.

The personal investment of time and money and the exercise of 'choice' marked out, for B/5, her viewing of tapes as something of an event compared with the background 'flow' of broadcast television. Many of the women told me that the investment of money in hiring a tape and the exercise of choice had, in the early days of their hiring, made a significant difference to their mode of viewing:

C1/8: Yes, we all watched it then, you know, it was 'C'mon, first film's going on the video' and we all downed tools and watched.

B/1: We tend to sit and watch together if he's hired a video, we start off like that anyway, and if it doesn't catch our interest, slowly but surely we'll drift off...

Most of the women did say that their modes of viewing had altered as the 'novelty' of hiring tapes had worn off, or that the films selected did not appeal to them:

C1/3: At first, we prepared coffees and sandwiches and biscuits and sat there watching from beginning to end.

Q: And that's changed?

C1/3: Oh yes, absolutely. Well, because you can choose what you want. I love horror films, but John won't watch them and he loves those boring war films which I won't watch, so we have our own individual films to buy, which is pleasing in one way, but difficult in another.

C2/3: Well, I would say Melanie's [daughter] the only one who doesn't sit down and watch them all, there's an odd one or two, the horror ones he brings home that..if I'm not doing anything I'll sit and watch it but I don't make a point of..oo..we must watch that, you know, but he does bring a variety home really.

C2/1: One on Saturday..usually one..Michael chooses them..if I know it's that Stallone and Rocky, I'm not interested, I'm not interested in war, so I'll just, I might get a book then and read..I say..'oh I don't want to watch this', so I sit and read and I'm half watching it..I'm not bothered, he's worked all week, so he deserves to doesn't he?

As we saw in Chapter 2, these woman are describing the kinds of viewing modality which many of the women adopt for television even though they are watching a) a movie, which would not generally conform to Ellis's definition of televisual form which, b) has been selected and paid for. In both cases the films belong to genres that do not engage their full attention. However, as C2/3 indicated, if it is a film they really want to see then their

attitude to viewing is very different, particularly if they are alone in the house:

C2/3: A few weeks ago Ian got *Educating Rita*, he got it one night when I was going out, and he'd forgotten I was going out, and I came home from work and watched it in the afternoon. It didn't bother me that I was sat here on my own watching it. Janet had seen it so there was no point in asking anybody else to come..it didn't upset me, just sitting here watching it. I find it quite peaceful actually, I usually put the answering machine on so the 'phone doesn't distract me or anything like that, if there's something I know I really want to watch and get interested in, because I tend to not stop it or pause it when I'm on the phone, then I'm re-winding it, it upsets me.

This woman hired tapes to watch with friends in the neighbourhood - a viewing context which was explored earlier in this chapter - and I asked her if they watched in the same way when they were together:

C2/3: Yes, we let it run all the way through..we usually, if it's on an evening, we'll get a bottle of wine out then we don't have to bother to get up and make tea [laugh].

C2/4 indicated her own difficulty in ignoring distractions. She said that she didn't like television very much. Did she enjoy watching a hired film?

C2/4: Yes, yes I do..if I can sit down and relax and watch it..I find it difficult to do that, I don't know why..

Q: Do you find you're distracted when you're watching it?

C2/4: Well, it's 'will you get up and make me a cup of tea? I'll stop the video' [laugh]..erm..I do like, I don't mind sitting and watching a film but I've got to be in that frame of mind. I've got to be able to know that I can sit down and watch it without being disturbed.

This woman found it very difficult to eliminate the distractions:

C2/4: Like, if he comes in and he's rented a video, straight after tea he wants to put it on. I say 'well, let me finish the washing-up first'. I mean, I just wouldn't enjoy it if I knew it was all to do.

The women were asked how watching a video at home compared with going to the cinema:

C1/3: Well I do prefer going to the cinema because you get a better projection of what you're supposed to be seeing. A film at home, you can turn it off when you want to, and if you're bored you can just turn it off and go make some tea, or whatever, and come back to it. If you're at the pictures you're there and you sit and watch and sit still for an hour and a half. When you're at home you tend to move around a lot and think, this bit's boring, I'll go out, you know..at the cinema it's full attention.

C1/1: I think you..when you're in the cinema you're not in control of the film, you can't stop it to go to the loo or anything like that, so you're not going to maybe spoil the entertainment value of it by doing things like that, and you're not going to stop for a coffee or anything like that, or if the phone rings..so sometimes I think you loose by watching it at home in that respect..but then I don't think there's that many films that it's going to make that much difference to the film anyway..I don't know.

For one household, B/3, the video offered a welcome control over hired movies:

B/3: If there's a lot of sex on films, we..or if we've hired some we've fast forwarded it, you know..

Q: Are you embarrassed?

B/3: I don't see the point of it - everyone knows what goes on, so there's no need to put it on the screen.

Two of the women who enjoyed horror movies would create conditions which were very similar to the cinema in order to maximise their pleasure:



C1/3: I mean, if I know I'm going to watch a really good film that I'd heard about and read about, I'd make sure that John was out in any case - he can't even bear to hear a scream on television because he knows I'll come running in. So I do try to pick a good horror movie when I'm by myself. For some strange reason I turn the lights off, I close the curtains and I scare myself silly [laugh] stupid isn't it?

Q: You get really frightened and lost in...

C1/3: Yes, totally lost, yes.

Q: What about at the cinema watching horror movies, did you feel the same?

C1/3: Yes, but I try to recreate the atmosphere of the cinema, except that I'm by myself...in the cinema even though you give yourself to the screen, there's people around you, but you think you're the only one there, but when there's something really frightening and there's this noise in the background, you realise you are not alone. But, when you're at home and something really frightening happens, it is frightening, more frightening. You tend to look at the doors, opening and things like that. I watch them when he's away at night. Mad..then I can't sleep [laugh] I turn on all the lights.

E/2 also liked horror movies and she watched them late at night:

E/2: I prefer to watch them on my own, all the lights out, nice and quiet and that's it.

However, going to the cinema is not simply about watching a movie, but is a social 'event' and as such was important to C1/5:

C1/5: If there's something going around that they would like to see, and it's one of their birthdays, then that's what we do. OK, you can wait and see it on video, but it's not quite the same; you're taking them out, it's different to having a video at home, isn't it, you're taking them out - it's different..so, if there's been something mentioned they'd like to see, yes, we will take them to the cinema and then take them somewhere for a meal, and do it that way. It's nice, and I think it's a novelty for the children. For myself, if I could go to the pictures or watch on video, I would prefer to stop at home and watch

it, myself, but I think it's just the novelty of going out, and you know, going out as a family..you know.

C1/6 told me that, on visiting friends for the evening, some would hire a video for them all to watch. She did not seem to enjoy this:

C1/6: No, I don't [Why?] I think it spoils your conversation, I don't like..I think it just spoils it altogether. I'd rather go to see them, than go to watch a video in their house.

Q: So would you not go to the cinema with friends?

C1/6: Oh yes. I would do, yes, that's a night out..you'd probably eat afterwards.

### Summary

It is clear that any discussion of viewing modalities must take account of the distinction between use of the VCR as against broadcast television, but also divisions of gender in relation to modes of viewing. It would seem that women are more likely to be 'distracted' viewers, certainly of broadcast television, but also of hired movies. In many cases this distracted mode is the result of their partners watching genres in which they have little or no interest, but there is evidence to suggest that some women find it difficult to devote themselves to the screen at all when surrounded by domesticity. As we saw in Chapter 2, there are exceptions to this especially when women are able to view alone, mostly during the day. This viewing was seen as 'my time' motivated by the desire to 'switch off' domestic demands. This is much less likely if other members of the family are present. In addition, the choice of evening viewing is rarely the woman's, priority being given to partners' and children. Women will therefore find something else to do whilst watching a programme or film which does not really interest them.

David Morley's research confirms this 'female' mode of viewing, and, as Morley also talked to men, it is interesting to note that 'Essentially the men state a clear preference for viewing attentively, in silence, without interruption.' (Morley 1986 p. 150) Many of them spoke with dismay at their partners' tendency to be doing other things whilst the television was on, talking to other members of the family or interrupting them. This would seem to suggest that there is a masculine mode of viewing which is concentrated and single-minded and a feminine mode of viewing which is distracted and lacking in concentration. Unless we situate these viewing modes within the domestic context and the social relations of power which appear to prevail, there is a tendency to fall into an essentialist explanation of male and female behaviour. But in the light of previous discussion in Chapters 2 and 3, with regard to female domestic obligations and the apparent male right to spare time, what is evident here is the difference in position which men and women are able to occupy within these familial arrangements and the relationships of power and authority which exist across gender. Charlotte Brunson suggests that this empirical evidence,

'offers us an image of male viewers trying to masculinise the domestic sphere. This way of watching television, however, seems not so much a masculine mode, but a mode of power. Current arrangements between men and women make it likely that it is men who will occupy this position in the home' (Brunson, quoted in Morley 1986 p. 148)

We can see from evidence reported here that women do take pleasure in adopting the concentrated gaze, viz. C1/3 and E/2 with their horror movies and other accounts of individual viewing and, as we have seen, joint female viewing. We cannot therefore speak of a 'masculine' mode of viewing which is only practised by men, rather we must see particular modes of behaviour as being contingent upon the specific social dynamics which are in operation at the time.

*Romantic videos  
for any woman  
to enjoy  
after a hard day  
in the house.*



#### 4 VIEWING AND READING PREFERENCES

B/5: Ena Sharple's still in Blackpool isn't she?

It is clear from Tables (iii) - (v) in Chapter 3 that male and female reported preferences for films and television programmes are aligned with those popular genres associated with the masculine and feminine within our culture and therefore with men and women in our society. This chapter will look at the ways in which the women expressed their enjoyment in and relationship to the various films and television programmes which have been discussed in the previous chapter. As we saw in Chapter 2, reading was an important activity for many women and their discussions of different genres of text provides a counterpoint to accounts of their engagement with visual media. In this context, albeit to a lesser extent, radio also figures.

It was noted that some of the A/B group women shared their partner's tastes in films and television programmes and, as we shall see, in some cases, reading and viewing preferences, extended beyond 'popular' texts. However, the main focus of this section is on that collection of genres which appear to have particular appeal to the women in the sample. These are often referred to under the umbrella term 'women's genres'; romance, family saga and soap opera. However, it is important to select categories with which to order and analyse women's viewing and reading experiences which will enable differences to emerge as well as the more obvious similarities, and for this reason I have chosen to explore the women's expressed preferences across a range of texts and media under the ordering categories of 'Reading', 'Television Programmes' and 'Films'.

Group A/B

Reading

A/2, and to a lesser extent A/1, were both resistant to television, claiming not to like it very much, but they both said that they read 'extensively':

A/2: Oh, I read very extensively, I've been reading a lot of contemporary novels this year, I've been reading some literary criticism, various essays erm..I read quite a lot of poetry, erm..those are the main areas at the moment.

A/1: Oh, well, I read the newspapers for book reviews, I tend to follow things like the Booker Prize. I also, I'm in with a group of women who exchange books that they buy, so we tend to cross-recommend books; the sort of thing like *Hotel du Lac*, that sort of thing. It's a sort of social activity in a way, although I've always read. Occasionally I read classics again as well. I very very rarely read poetry. I always read novels, or occasionally things to do with work; journals.

They both spoke of their reading pleasures in relation to their own lives:

A/1: It is relaxing because it takes you outside...I'm not going to use the word 'escapist'..it takes you outside of the environment in which you live, and of necessity, well not of necessity, just the way it's worked out..my environment as a child and even my environment now as an adult running a family is very restricting...it's like the armchair traveller, reading, it's the next best thing to doing it yourself..I have very limited contact with people that I can talk to on an intellectual basis, I'm also quite tired so it's hard work to read a philosophical treatise, or a Shakespeare play, or a poem, you don't sit down and relax with something like that, it's a bit too mind bending. I can't read absolute trash of the Georgette Heyer, or whatever the modern equivalent would be. There's this middle market which does make you think, but it isn't so exhausting that when you're tired you can't get through more than two and a

half pages without falling asleep..it pushes you forward, it's well written, because, after all, I was trained.

I asked her if the fictional worlds she entered were quite similar to her own:

A/1: Well, I wouldn't say, the sort of characters, for instance, in Anita Brookner..I suppose it's a middle class world, her world. I didn't like *The Bone People*, that was ghastly..it was so appalling and very slow, I couldn't get into that. I think they are aimed at a specific, when I come to think about it, they are a little bit aimed at..I've never really thought about it..aren't they?..sort of..when you come to think about it, like Margaret Drabble..I mean she's writing for a specific sort of graduate.

In spite of her comment about the books she read having to be 'well written', it would seem that setting and story are crucial to her enjoyment and offered her compensation for what she felt was a very 'circumscribed' environment:

A/1: ..so you're meeting people through the book that are rather like-minded people, who you would be talking to if your environment wasn't circumscribed..that may be what it is..I think all my books are aimed at the glossy middle class graduate market (laugh).

A/2's response indicated the compensatory aspect of reading pleasure, but in terms of formalistic qualities, not those of setting and story, She introduced this topic in the context of an account of the dissatisfactions in her life:

A/2: I have a desire for some kind of order, or some kind of harmony in things at all kinds of levels. And I see that in all sorts of ways in my own life. I feel that at a gross domestic level, I'm always battling for some kind of order, some sort of resolution of Lego with Lego, rather than Lego with marbles. Ironing ironed and garden relatively free from weeds..and at a higher level than that there is something about the need as a family for our potential conflicts of interest to be harmoniously arranged, instead of janglingly at odds, and then, in - yes, I can see that kind of

progression going right up through my thinking about things, wishing that the children, for instance, in the evening were not watching 'Herman' which is a jangling product of a culture which is in many respects extremely alien to them...but there is somewhere a current running through all this that is not actually about a better age, a previous age that is better, but it is about some sort of search for some sort of harmony, and wishing there were more..you know..and seeing that there isn't.

Q: Where does your reading fit into this?

A/2: Well it does. I think that is maybe why I like essays because there is a resolution. I mean, they are not trying to impose a harmony, but there you see a kind of intellectual order, you see clear thinking and some kind of resolution, and it is compact and contained. Also I like reading poems because, although poems are descriptive of any number of emotions and so on, they are complete in themselves and the parts work harmoniously to say whatever it is going to say.

She found her life was full enough of conflict and discord without watching different forms of conflict and violence on television or at the cinema. These two women used their reading as a form of resistance. A/1 to compensate for the boredom of her traditionally feminine role and A/2, who is a working partner and mother, and whose life is spent:

A/2: .. trying endlessly to find a balance between domestic and maternal responsibilities and the demands of work which feels from time to time to be very considerable..and, you know, also dealing with James (partner) and his problems with the practice..all around us we're in some kind of minefield all the time.

The two other women in Group A used different kinds of books depending on their energy level. A/4 would pick up an Agatha Christie novel if she was tired, but said she also read Angela Carter, Timothy Mo, J. G. Farrell and that she read Jane Austen once a year. Much of her reading was associated with her work which occupied most of her time and thought.



B/2 often felt exhausted in the evening and was reading Barbara Taylor Bradford's *Hold the Dream* at the time of the interview:

B/2: It's quite a long novel but it's not taxing..I can read quite a lot of it before I fall asleep. I read *A Woman of Substance*. I certainly read it before it was on television..I think possibly I saw it in a bookshop erm.. and I thought, you know, it's a sort of family saga. I thought I would find it interesting.

Like A/1 her reading could not be 'taxing' as she was usually very tired when free to read, but also she was keen to point out that her choice had not been motivated by the television adaptation of the novel. B/6 told me about her reading which had changed drastically since she had children:

B/6: I suppose I might get hold of the Booker McConnell prize...I don't want to be seen as a person who reads four or five fiction books a year and therefore buys the most obvious ones, but that's often the way it is at the moment.

All the women I have discussed so far in this group expressed their wish to read more for pleasure and all were university educated. However, the books that they did read tended to be those contemporary novels associated with literary prizes and which received wide coverage in the press, radio and television. As B/6 said, they appeared to be the most 'obvious' books to choose to read.

B/1, who left school at 15 and was married at 19, told me that her preferences for fiction had been established in childhood, through popular texts:

B/1: I have a brother, and he used to read *The Eagle*, *The Victor* and I used to read *Judy*, *Schoolfriend*. And then I can remember being hooked on the romances when I got to sort of thirteen, oh, I used to read, oh, such rubbish really when I look, back, but oh, I did enjoy them. Magazines - *True Love* - [sigh] and I used to get really involved with those. I used to cry over some of the stories in them. My daughter has

just been going through a phase of reading some of those books, she's absolutely devoured all of those.

Q: Do you think they taught you anything about relationships, about what to expect?

B/1: More about what you expected than what you got..I mean, the boys weren't reading those, were they? They didn't know how to behave did they [laugh].

B/1 still reads romantic fiction which she reads for half an hour before going to sleep. I asked her if they were long or short books:

B/1: Oh long books, oh yes. Catherine Cookson and I always, I feel bereft when I've finished a book. Oh, I think, oh..I'll have to start another one and I might not like it..I do..mm.

We can see a continuity of fictional genres preferred by B/1, and one which would seem to be carrying through into the next generation via her daughter. Also, there is a continuity in the almost passionate engagement which this woman has with her reading 'devouring' romances as a teenager and feeling 'bereft' at the end of a Cookson historical romance now. B/5 shared B/1's pleasure in Cookson, but not wholeheartedly:

B/5: I love Catherine Cookson, and she's not a particularly good writer, as it were, but she tells a damned good tale.

The importance of a good story was a crucial element in B/5's enjoyment of a book and many of the women spoke of their preference for well developed stories and characters:

B/5: I like the family saga type of thing, you know, *A Woman of Substance*, it's those kind of books I love, you know..the good story, a good tale sort of thing.

## Television

Just as reading was important to many of the women in this group, so television's literary adaptations acquired a status not afforded to many other forms of programming. I asked B/3 if she watched serials:

B/3: It all depends really, if it's based on a good book, we would watch it, like D.H. Lawrence, or something like that.

A/1 spoke about the formal elements of one of her current favourite programmes, *Paradise Postponed*, another 'adaptation', in a positive way:

A/1: Yes, we like the dialogue. It is also..the music is very nice and it's visually very attractive. Yes, I think I would say that, the music is much better than you normally get.

This woman and her family had become, to use her term, 'hooked' on both *Paradise Postponed* and *First Among Equals*, but she pointed out that she had read both the books before watching the serials. This could account for the fact that she and other members of her family took pleasure in how the adaptation had been done:

A/1: What we actually like is some of the wit and the cleverness in the exchanges and some of the speeches that the old man has. And also, there's anticipation because three of us have read the book, so we're watching what's going to come next and we've got involved with the characters as it's gone on. I think it was quite slow starting, but my husband likes that as well.

She compares *First Among Equals* with *Paradise Postponed*, but again refers to the structure of its verbal form:

A/1: I suspect storywise *First Among Equals* is more compelling. I felt with *First Among Equals* when I read the book, it's very piecemeal. It's as if he wrote it on the back of envelopes, lots of exciting little incidents, that somehow hang together as a story, so dramatically its probably more effective. It has all these high drama bits.

*First Among Equals* and *Paradise Postponed* could not be described as 'Literary' - indeed, A/1 read *First Among Equals* when stranded in a Scottish Hotel with nothing to read - but the fact that they were television adaptations from novels seemed to justify her interest in them. She referred to *Paradise Postponed* as 'quite clever' claiming that she didn't like historical serials or soap operas:

A/1: Although *Paradise Postponed* is slightly like a soap opera, but it's a rather classy soap opera.

She did not go into any detail about other television programmes that she herself watched, speaking about her taste more generally for 'quality' plays and films.

Of course, all adaptations do not have the same status. A very popular book and television adaptation which several of the women talked to me about was *The Thorn Birds* by Colleen McCullough. The television adaptation of *The Thorn Birds* was transmitted by the BBC in January 1984. Although it was not being shown at the time of the interviews, it was relatively recent and memorable for those who had watched it. It is worth sketching in the background to the critical debates which were taking place at the time and the way in which this highly popular mini-series became an emblem for 'bad' television. It was derided in the press and also even in parliament as imported commercial trash, and seen as evidence that the BBC was reneging on its public service responsibilities. It happened to coincide with Granada's 'prestigious' adaptation of Paul Scott's novels about the decline of the British Raj *The Jewel in the Crown* which was praised in the press as an example of 'quality' television in the British public service tradition. B/5 had watched the mini-series and read the book twice, before and after the transmission. She told me why she had enjoyed reading the novel:

B/5: Well I thought that was a good book you see. I thought it was well written; that was a woman who knew Australia. God, when she described when she went down to live with Luke in..when she gets

married, I mean, I could feel the flies, I mean the way she described the area.

For B/5 what constitutes 'good writing' is that which constructs a totally believable setting within which the characters and plot are developed. Janice Radway makes a similar point about how women in her study of romance reading required this mimesis: 'The fact that the story is fantastic, however, does not compromise the accuracy of the portrayal of the physical environment within which the idealized characters move' (Radway 1984 p. 109)

I asked her if she had been aware of the criticism surrounding it:

B/5: Oh yes, everybody thought it was awful..Wogan had a go at it and everybody.

Q: What did you think about that when you enjoyed it so much?

B/5: I just tend to ignore them frankly. I mean, the daily paper that we get, *The Daily Telegraph*, I mean, I don't know who their critic is but if he says something is rubbish, you can guarantee I'm going to enjoy it. Or if he says it was absolutely fantastic, and it will be something that to me is a complete bore. The bad crits. don't bother me at all, in fact, sometimes they tend to spur me on to watching..absolutely.

Q: Did you watch *The Jewel in the Crown*?

B/5: Oh yes, we watched that.

Q: Did you enjoy that?

B/5: Well, while I was watching it, yes, I enjoyed it, and at the end of it I thought, 'well, my God, nothing's happened'..I thought it was very, very drawn out. Beautifully acted, now my husband thought that was magic. He really did enjoy it, he thought it was very authentic and..I did. I watched it, I watched every episode..erm, it was a bit slow moving for me.

The adaptation of *The Jewel in the Crown*, which her husband so much enjoyed, did not have an obvious resolution, leaving the central

character with an undecided future, a state of affairs which B/5 found unsatisfactory. In her accounts of the viewing of these two series we can see echoes of the public debates in their household, with the 'public' approval of *The Jewel in the Crown* being confirmed by her husband but not exactly shared by her. I asked B/5 what other programmes her husband liked watching:

B/5: He likes war films, he would have liked to have watched that *McArthur*, but that wouldn't have been of any particular interest to me..no *Washington Behind Closed Doors*, that type of programme, mind you, you see, I liked that also.

Q: Do you think you got different things out of it?

B/5: Oh yes, I'm sure we did because..now in *The Kennedy's*, I just wanted to see that woman's portrayal of Jackie Kennedy in that, and I thought she was very good, actually, but, of course, he likes the factual side to it and he always watched *World at War* and erm..he prefers factual things actually to fiction does Bill..whereas I like to be taken out of myself.

B/5's response suggests that she and her husband are able to take up and occupy different subject positions in certain of the programmes or films which they watch together, and that those different subject positions confirm his perceived interest in the 'factual' dimension and hers in the emotional and even fantasy elements expressed in her phrase '..I like to be taken out of myself'.

A/3, B/1 and B/5 were the only women in this group who regularly watched soap operas. Some of the women were rather antagonistic towards this genre:. A/1 spoke of television programmes like *Dallas* which, whilst having 'powerful elements of story', nevertheless:

A/2: A lot of my argument about the television is to do with the paucity of human motive which is shown in a lot of the stuff that my daughter will watch..I sometimes think, these people are shown as motivated by greed, lust, envy and the finer kind of gradations of why people behave as they do are hardly ever touched on..and as a kind of

image, you know, of how life is, this is very thin indeed, but presented with a kind of wham, bam...there's so much attention to other kinds of detail.

B/2 told me that she didn't watch soap operas. I asked her if she positively resisted watching them:

B/2: Er..(long pause)..it's hard to say, I think..I think it possibly is a resisting. I feel they might take over, because most of them are on a couple of times a week and always having to watch that. I know I do it with the Archers, but it is on twice, and I'm always doing other things and it fits in with, you know, things that I'm doing at that particular time.

The other young woman at home with children in this group also regularly listened to *The Archers*, again, because it fitted into her daily schedule, but she did not watch any of the television soap operas. B/2 had earlier told me that she was very interested in human relationships and people and I pointed out to her that this was the substance of the genre:

B/2: Yes. I've just seen the illogicality of that..I think it's the constant thing. Every week, Tuesday and Thursday, Monday and Wednesday, or whatever. I feel that you become enmeshed in them..having said that I do watch *Howard's Way*, which is perhaps classed as a soap, but that's only for thirteen weeks or whatever, you see, that's more of a serial, and I know there'll be an end to it. I think the thing with the soap opera is the escapism, going along with what I was saying about it taking over. Some people seem to get so involved, they're almost living the lives of the characters and it's so important waiting for Tuesday night to see what's going to happen next, and I'd rather be living my own life. I don't want to spend all my time just living for half an hour in the evening.

Becoming 'enmeshed' in a long running serial and its alleged 'escapism' is what B/2 is resisting here, with attendant fears of 'addiction'. These fears, also expressed by others in the group (A/1, A/2, B/6), are responses to the very conditions which give

pleasure to others. However, B/1 was conscious of the low status of soap operas and expressed ambiguous feelings about her enjoyment of 'the soaps':

B/1: [laugh]..I'm ashamed to say, I like the soaps, I like the fantasy really, *Dynasty*, *Dallas*, *The Colby's*..

Q: Why are you ashamed to say?

B/1: Well I think..all women say, you know, oh, the soaps..I do like the soaps [laugh] I know I shouldn't, I should watch these intellectual programmes, but I do like the soaps.

As we saw in Chapter 3, definitions of good and bad programmes or films were often framed in terms of male/female preferences, and this undoubtedly has an effect on the pleasures derived from watching those programmes and films which do not have high status within the household. Very often the women themselves will negotiate ways of justifying their own pleasures and explaining the nature of the criticism. In this group this was done mainly by recourse to the story/setting of the narrative; in simple terms, men were said to be uninterested in the typical concerns of soap opera, romance and melodrama. In particular B/1 and B/5 express their pleasure in involvement and becoming 'enmeshed' in 'good' stories, films, series and serials which for them is the main criteria for enjoyment. This is apparent in B/5's responses to my questions about soap operas:

B/5: *Coronation Street*, I mean, I sit down and watch that..after or before we've eaten..we work our way round it.

Q: What did you think about Ken and Dierdrie?

B/5: Oh no. I didn't agree with the outcome of that. I think they should have split up because it's turning out now as the story lines going along, he's fancying his secretary..it's not coming to anything..but he's a bloody liar. Yes, I was very cross with him..he should have said yes, he did fancy her, let's face it, there are two of us..he's not being completely honest with her. I haven't liked that particularly. But even



at the time, even when she married Ken Barlow, I thought, well, they're not alike. This marriage..you know, if it were somebody living on our street that we'd known for a long time and we'd think, oh God, no, I don't given them long.

B/5 first of all indicates her pleasure in regularly sitting down and watching *Coronation Street*. Her response to the question about Ken and Dierdrie has interesting 'slippages' between her recognition of 'the story line' and her exasperation with the character, as if he was someone she knew or who was 'living on our street'. This is less evidence of a confusion between fiction and reality than of her very close involvement with the plots and characters. She is thoroughly 'enmeshed' in her favourite soap opera.

Criteria of realism were applied by B/1 and B/3 in terms of their enjoyment of the soap operas:

B/1: I mean, *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* are really down to earth, aren't they? You can imagine yourself living that type of life, but you couldn't ever imagine yourself living the *Dallas* and the *Dynasty*.

B/3: I don't like American soap operas at all..they just feel like they're so false, not that I've been to America..all beautiful women never a hair out of place, you know, straight teeth, pearly white, just totally unrealistic to what I think it would be in America. I like things which are more down to earth and what appear to be more truthful.

The phrase 'down to earth' is used by both these women to describe the social realism of British soap operas compared with the kind of realism constructed in *Dallas* or *Dynasty* which is rooted in film melodrama. In B/3's response there is some suggestion of a belief that *Dallas* and *Dynasty* set out to represent a 'reality' which she sees as 'America' and which she considers is a false representation, largely based on the improbability of the characters. One of Taylor & Mullen's respondents on visiting America had confirmed

B/3's opinion '...I was expecting to see all these beautiful women walking round with really outrageous clothes wherever I went. But they weren't. They were all fat.' (Taylor & Mullen, 1986 p. 24) All these accounts assume a direct relationship between the 'world out there', whether the East End of London or Dallas, and the world of the fiction.

B/5, however, compares *Dynasty* with *Dallas*:

B/5: *Dynasty* just reminds me of a comic strip, as if they've taken characters, you know, like *Superman*, out of a comic strip and they've put them as human beings on the screen, to me it's no credibility at all. Now I'm willing to believe that there is some credibility in *Dallas*. I've never been to Texas but I think sculduggery business-wise between the oil tycoons..I'm tempted to think that could well go on and that's why I watched it for so long.

Although she begins with a discussion of the formal properties of *Dynasty*, what makes *Dallas* more 'credible' for her is the fact that it relates more to a possible 'real life' in *Dallas*, not because it draws on slightly different modes of representation. However, B/5 did express a liking for elements of the setting of *Dynasty*, as did B/1:

B/5: No. *Dynasty* I've never particularly liked. The plots are very thin. I like the dresses, that's a silly thing to watch for..some of the dresses that Crystal wears I think are absolutely beautiful, that's why I like *Hart to Hart*, because of the gowns and the outfits that Stephanie Powers wears..they're gorgeous aren't they?

B/1: I don't really watch it for the story line..I just love to see the beautiful clothes and the beautiful houses, not really for the story at all.

Many of Ien Ang's respondents spoke of their pleasure in the clothes and the settings of *Dallas* interiors, and she suggests that their awareness of glamorous *mis-en-scene* indicates that her viewers are well aware that they are watching a fictional world and are not

accepting the illusion of reality directly as constructed in the text. (Ang 1985 p.47) This is undoubtedly the case for B/5 above and B/1:

B/1: I think I watch *Dallas* and *Dynasty* because they are so over the top and I probably find them very amusing. I've got a tremendous sense of humour and always want to laugh..you know..this can't be so..you've got to be joking..never a hair out of place, you know.

## Films

Although there was a certain amount of shared preference claimed between male and female, certain differences did emerge in this group. B/3, who claimed that she and her husband generally agreed on what was a good film because of their shared standard of education, said that they liked 'good films' which had 'good producers and good directors'. I asked her what kind of films she liked best:

B/3: Love stories, but mainly the old ones, I prefer the old black and white ones when I can have a good cry..if they've got a nice story to them, I watch them.

Q: Would you say that love stories are good films?

B/3: I wouldn't say they were good, well produced films no. I think it's basically the theme of what's running through. I can't really say I've seen a very well produced weepy love story..as in something like more of your epic films, something like that. It's totally different, but I think it's a totally different audience.

Here she claims that 'women's films' do not qualify for the label 'good' because they are not well produced, but also there is some elision of production value and 'theme' where, according to B/3, the substance of the romantic love story itself automatically excludes the film. For this woman the differences between what men and women like were obvious:

B/3: Obviously a man's not going to like a sappy love story, really..er..and not all women are going to like films with a lot of violence.

A/3 described how she identified with the films she enjoyed:

A/3: I can identify with the emotions in films, emotions that I've come across, or certain situations perhaps. I actually go through the emotions and what is happening. Things you know about.

The emotional world and the world of human relationships was an important source of enjoyment, particularly of films:

B/2: I watched the Sunday Premiere last night *The Love Match*, I enjoyed that, that is the sort of thing that I tend to like, you know, human relationships.

Q: Does your husband like those as well?

B/2: [hesitation]..yes, he likes those as well, but there are also lots more things that he likes that I don't like..the horror things and science fiction that just doesn't ...I'm interested in people..I think that's why I don't like horror films and science fiction, because I can't relate to it at all.

A story must involve character development and exploration of human relationships, and its setting must be 'believable', unlike, according to B/2, science fiction:

B/2: ..and Colin says, well it's his form of escapism..you don't have to believe it can happen. But I like to believe that it could, I suppose, I like historical things as well, because that happened, it's interesting to see how people lived.

B/1 also referred to the substance of movies in order to understand the gendered preferences:

B/1: I don't think there are many men that really like love stories..too sloppy for men on the whole.

Q: Why don't women like things like spy films and those sort of things?

B/1: Basically I think it's because we're not interested in the first place to find out what it's all about..you've got to listen to the dialogue constantly to find out who's doing what and why..I think really women are more for visual..for entertainment, you know..not all women, but I know a lot of women are like that..most women like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, don't they? Men don't..the glamour side, dialogue is secondary really.

Q: Except when it's a love story; the dialogue then becomes quite important doesn't it?

B/1: Yes, it does, yes. it's softer though, somehow, isn't it? It probably pulls on your heart strings a bit, I don't know..I think you can associate with that..I've never been a spy - do you know any spies?

Q: No. But most men don't know any spies either.

B/1: Yes, but underneath..there's a spy trying to get out..[laugh]. I don't know..it's like the cowboy, or the war film. I mean, every man wants to be a hero..would love to be a hero.

Q: And women don't want to be heroes, or heroines?

B/1: No, I think most women want to be...they don't want to be a hero, they want to know the hero [laugh]...

I have quoted our discussion at some length because B/1 suggests that men and women engage with particular kinds of fiction, and have distinct desires which certain fictions gratify. Women, she implies, are able to associate with the emotional and the world of human relationships, whereas men can associate with a world of which they have no direct knowledge. Underlying B/1's talk is the opposition private/female - public/male. The limit of female desire in terms of the public, non-domestic world, is to 'know the hero', not to engage fully in this world as hero.

## Group C

### Reading

64% of women in Group C reported that they read books for pleasure. The frequency of reading varied from 'chain reading' of Mills & Boon to the occasional reading of a recommended book. C2/1's reading of Mills & Boon began in the family home because they were read by her mother and grandmother.

C2/1: I've allus had them, because my mum's allus had them you see, they were always at home..I used to pick them up. Like, my Mum or my Gran have always passed them on.

As we saw in Chapter 2, she is now able to fit her reading into the interstices of her daily routine of domestic work and childcare; Mills & Boon offer a manageable commodity for this purpose.

C2/1: I don't really get the thickish ones, I normally go for the quick ones.

Other women found the very familiarity of the Mills & Boon narratives meant that these books could be easily accommodated, especially if they had very little mental energy left in the evening:

C1/8: If it's the sort of evening where I know I'm a little bit tired and likely to go to sleep fairly quickly I'll take one of those in with me with my coffee because I know I'm not going to be..very rarely anyway..just occasionally you get one that's quite good, but it's very rare. You can pick some books up and within the first half dozen pages you know exactly what's going to happen, you could even write the dialogue yourself.

C2/5: I read those a lot in bed sometimes if you're tired and when I was poorly I read things like that, because it's easier just to, you don't have to take them in to understand them, if you miss a page..well you more or less know what's going to happen. You know what the ending's going to be before you start,

you know. With Mills & Boon you know she's going to end up with the man she hated in the beginning.

As in the previous group, *The Thorn Birds* had been enjoyed by some of the women. This was amongst the relatively small nucleus of texts which emerged throughout my interviews with Group C, commonly known, and certainly marketed as 'best sellers'. Such 'texts' were often consumed by the women across the three different media in which they appear: reading the book, hiring the pre-transmission video tape(s) and viewing on television.

Over half the group had read at least one of these 'best sellers' and would always make a point of viewing the adaptation. This included the two teachers, C1/6 and C1/7, both of whom considered *The Thorn Birds* to be a 'well written' book and one to which they would possibly return. C1/8, an avid reader described her preferences and buying patterns based on knowledge of the author:

C1/8: I like Judith Kranz books ..I wait for her books coming out and I wait for Danielle Steel's as well and I'm always too eager to read them so as soon as they come on the bookshelves I grab them. I always buy paperbacks, well, I've got *Master of the Game* in hardback but I can't really afford them. It's a shame because you can't fill a bookcase with paperbacks like you can with hardbacks can you?

It is worth bearing in mind that these 'best sellers' have a very wide distribution and are available in outlets such as supermarkets and local newsagent's shops, as well as chain stores such as W.H.Smith and Boots. These are the typical retail outlets through which the women purchased their books, rather than specialist book shops. However, in many cases women did not buy books but borrowed them from family or friends and some frequented second-hand bookstalls on local markets. About a quarter of the sample used the Public Library, but out of this only one woman went alone, the rest taking their children and occasionally borrowing a book for themselves.

Although C1/1, C1/3 and C2/3 were not regular readers, on the occasions when they did read a book they found they couldn't put it down:

C1/1: The last book I read from cover to cover was a (laugh) romantic novel that somebody lent me who said it was good..I was carrying it around with me whilst I was doing everything else, you know, go to the loo, take the book with you, sat in the bath with it..as soon as I got up on a morning, you're sat there reading..eating your breakfast. I'm like that if I get into a book, I cannot put it down.

C1/3: Occasionally I read, you know, you cannot read a book for six months and all of a sudden, pick up this book and it's..well, under the desk at work, it's by the 'phone, it's in the bath, it's everywhere you go this particular book, yes.

C2/3: Sometimes..if I'm reading a book and it's really got me really bound to it, yes I can pick it up and read two or three pages, and sit there two hours, and think 'my God, I've not done anything else'..but it's to really get me like that has a book.

I asked C1/1 why she couldn't put the book down:

C1/1: I think it was because I wanted to find out what happened.

Q: Do you think you knew what was going to happen?

C1/1: Well, I suppose you always knew that the heroine was going to have a happy ending, but, how she was going to reach it, it was a different sort of..that was what kept you going through every page.

The romance guarantees the happy ending, but how the heroine gets to that point is sufficient to keep these readers reading. C1/6 made a different point about familiar genres, in particular the historical romance:

C1/6: It's like Catherine Cookson..but you're secure in it somehow..and it's a form of enjoyment that you know what you're going to get out of it.



The 'security' provided by familiarity accounts for the constant returning to favoured authors and genres. C1/8 perhaps expresses most accurately what the majority of women got out of their reading:

C1/8: It's a form of daydreaming I suppose, isn't it, being lifted out of yourself, as I like to be when I watch a film.

What their preferred books seemed to offer was a fairly undemanding entry into a fictional world with a familiar narrative structure. But, on the other hand, as we have seen, these books are capable of demanding attention as well as providing legitimate space for day-dreaming and resistance to the immediate demands of the domestic world. To use C2/3's phrase again, she can get 'really bound into it' to the exclusion of everything else. We will consider the potential for such involvement with reference to this group's television viewing.

### Television

Over 50% of this group followed long running serials or soap operas and over half of these women were avid, if not regular, readers of fiction (C2/1, C2/5, C1/6, C2/3 and C1/3).

Two of the women, C1/6 and C1/9 watched at least one soap opera regularly, but neither considered themselves to be 'involved' in the serials:

C1/6: Now, if I was in, I would watch *Crossroads*, and I would watch *Emmerdale Farm* and *Coronation Street*, and that's about it, but I wouldn't stay in for them and I wouldn't tape them, it's just if I'm not doing anything at the time I watch them. I mean, you can dip in and out of *Crossroads* and those, and it doesn't matter if you haven't watched for months and months.

C1/9, as we saw in the previous chapter, often just happened to find herself sitting down for an hour when her daughter was watching *EastEnders*, but as she said:

C1/9: I'm not really interested in the characters or the stories.

The remaining six women had a much higher level of involvement in and commitment to one or more long running serials (*Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Falcon Crest*) and soap operas (*Emmerdale Farm*, *Coronation Street*, *Brookside*, *Sons & Daughters*), to the extent that they would not miss an episode, most recording it on the VCR if necessary. For these women viewing these serials was an inescapable part of their daily and weekly routine. Like reading habits and preferences, their liking for specific soap operas had been established in early life:

C1/3: I've been watching *Coronation Street* for 20 years. I've grown up with the characters, I mean, I was a little girl when I started watching it, and I've grown up with these particular people who are part of me. I don't sit and think about them all day long, but they are part of my life.

C2/1: I've always kept up to *Emmerdale Farm*..and I'm right happy for Pat because she's pregnant..I love stuff like that..'ooh, she's pregnant'..and Michael thinks I'm silly, but I get right into it like that, you know..it's as if..it's like a mate..

C1/3 and C2/1 had a very strong commitment to *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale Farm* respectively, feeling as if they actually lived with the characters. This echoes the nature of B/5's involvement with *Coronation Street*; their own lives are lived alongside those of the fictional characters. C1/3 talked about the setting of *Coronation Street*:

C1/3: It reminds me of where I used to live when I was a child in that type of area, it was all like that, back to back little houses, it's very real.

This was also noted by C2/3:

C2/3: Things like *Coronation Street*, you can see things like that in the streets round here, you know.

I asked C1/3 if she thought *Coronation Street* still represented reality:

C1/3: Oh yes, it is very real still. Because that's how most people's lives are - very boring, drudgery and dull, it's a bit depressing to watch because it's the truth.

For C1/3 the 'realism' is more to do with the familiarity and predictability of the problems and worries of the characters, aided by the continuity and open endedness of the genre, rather than the setting. C1/4 watched *Emmerdale Farm* twice weekly and she compared it favourably with *Crossroads*:

C1/4: Oh, I like, I think *Emmerdale Farm's* more lifelike, more true to life. I think the characters in *Crossroads* are exaggerated, but *Emmerdale* seems to follow life, to me anyway.

'Realism' was often invoked as an important criteria for enjoyment of the serials. C2/5 watched *Brookside* regularly and compared it with the other British soap operas:

C2/5: It's more realistic. I mean, like Marie when George was sent down, I think anybody else would have just shown her crying, whereas she reacted..and you would do, wouldn't you? In *Brookside*, if a situation..like with Terry and Barry, and then Bobbie, kicked him because he really lost his temper, now you can see a father doing that, really losing his temper and belting him, but I think in the other ones, I don't think they'd have carried it that far, they'd have perhaps said 'Oh, you naughty...' you know..whereas that wouldn't happen.

C1/3 suggested that the characters in *Dallas*, which she watched faithfully, didn't behave like 'real people':

C1/3: They're not real. People couldn't put up with the rubbish they put up with..erm..I mean, it's very difficult to say, because everybody's an individual..I mean, take that Pamela and Bobby, they both love each other so much, but nobody opens their mouths about it. I mean, if I was there, I mean, you know 'listen here..I'm here, and I still love you and I want you as my husband..and that's it'.. and, well, you've got to do that. But I suppose if people did come out and

say things straight away how one would say it, there'd be no series..I suppose, otherwise *Coronation Street* wouldn't have carried on for hundreds of years.

How characters behave in certain situations, measured by what the women themselves thought they would do in similar circumstances, is crucial to the believability of the soap operas, but not necessarily to their enjoyment. I asked C1/5 if she thought that the American serials she watched were like real life:

C1/5: Oh definitely not, no..oh no, definitely..unless it's like that in America..I've no idea, but its definitely not like it is here is it?..well my life..I don't know about yours, but mine isn't, oh no, it's too silly, really, same with them all, but I suppose it's like that if you're rich, I don't know.

Q: Do you ever get cross with it because it's too far fetched?

C1/5: No. I don't think I do, you know. Sometimes I laugh at her in, what's it's name, *Falcon Crest*..the daughter..you know, I find her amusing sometimes, but no..I don't think so, because I think you get really into it and you don't care do you? Like all this swopping about with bringing Miss Ellie back, you know..I think, do they think we're stupid?..I think that is absolutely ridiculous, but you sort of ignore it all, it takes you away for an hour doesn't it? You get that involved..for all you think it's far fetched, like I'm sat there, you know, crying when they're burying Fallon, and I know that she's not dead..because you've read it in the papers.

Here the powerful elements of story in which she becomes involved are strong enough to maintain suspension of disbelief, even to the extent of being able to cope with changes of actor playing the same character. However, she does express her feelings about the producers in making these changes, and what they think about her and other members of the audience. I asked C1/3 if she identified with any of the characters:

C1/3: No. [laugh] ridiculous, no. No I couldn't possibly identify myself with any of them no.

Q: Is it the same with *Coronation Street*?

C1/3: No, no, I'm with them..I get so involved with the story and the characters they play, maybe I do identify myself with some of them, but I don't know which one it is, yes..I feel as if..I don't know, I'm just there.

C2/5 compared soap operas with other forms of television programme:

C2/5: There's no star really in soap operas, they're all there for the same amount of time, there's no one person that holds it up whereas, a lot of the serials, there's a star and it's all about that one person. But in soap operas, well I don't sort of follow one person more than anybody else really.

Involvement would seem to be a combination of story-involvement and character identification. The large number of characters in soap opera, in contrast to other forms of popular television drama, discourages identification with a single character and, together with its multiple story-lines results in what Robert Allen has referred to as '(a) diffusion of interest and identification' (Allen, 1985, p. 94). However, it would seem that knowledge of the characters themselves and their personalities was a crucial part of involvement in the serials. C1/05 told me that she liked the characters:

C1/5: Yes, I think that's what it is with me..for all I think you're supposed not to like J.R., I think you're forced to like him in a lot of ways. I think you get involved with the characters.

Q: What about Alexis?

C1/5: I think she's great. I think you're supposed to hate her aren't you, but she puts the part over so well..really she does..she puts it over so well that you're forced to like her..yes I like her. I think she's something that I think..oh, I'd like to be..she's so strong willed and I'm not, and I think..it must be nice to be so sure of yourself..you know, to be like her, she sort of, you know, takes over, doesn't she? And she's so confident, it must be nice to be like that.

In their study of soap opera viewers, Seiter et al' note that many of their female respondents expressed admiration and affection for the 'villainess' in soap operas. C1/5 admires Alexis and desires to have some of her character traits. She spoke further about the female characters in *Dynasty*:

C1/5: I know Crystal's very placid isn't she?..but she's strong in her own way..and, there again, if you said who do you like best in her and Alexis, I would say Crystal, but yet again, there's that admiration for her..I think some of the things she does is horrible, but, I don't know, you can't help but admire her because she's so strong willed. But, say Crystal and her were having an argument, I'd want Crystal to win..that type of thing...if my husband heard me now he'd think I'm crackers [laugh]..

Q: Well he's not here to listen. Do you think Crystal is always right?..has she got to win?

C1/5: Yes. And, there again, in the newspaper they were saying that she wants to alter her ways and they..you know..I wouldn't like her like that..I wouldn't like her stronger..well, I'm not saying stronger willed because I think she is very strong willed, but I wouldn't like her altering, I think I'd go off her, to me she's alright as she is, because you've got, you know, it's a nice contrast between her and Alexis..one very much up there, and then she's so calm and, nice..so that's alright, just the way it is.

C1/5 expresses her pleasurable involvement in the 'world' of the series. This extends to reports in the press about future developments of the serial, her own knowledge of the characters built up over years of watching and the way in which Crystal and Alexis interact in the narrative.

The four women who were most committed to American long running serials, C1/3, C1/5, C2/3 and C2/5, described them as presenting a world of fantasy:

C2/5: *Dallas* is more 'high faluted', I mean, *Coronation Street*, you can imagine it happening in your own life, but you can't on *Dallas*.

C2/3: Money's no object, they don't think 'oh God, the gas bill's coming next week' or anything like

that..I suppose it's a fantasy world really, you'd like to think you'll one day not have to worry about the next bill that's coming in..you know.

C1/5: I think it's because it's just..you look at these big houses and everything and..going around in these flash cars, I mean, it just takes you away from everyday life..you're in sort of make believe.

C1/3 believed that soap operas were produced for and appealed to women. She was asked why she thought that:

C1/3: Well, it's because, as much as women know it's a fantasy world, men know it's a total load of rubbish. I mean, it is, but men know it. They know that people just don't live the way these particular people are portrayed, it's impossible. It's rubbish for men, fantasy for women, all the soap operas.

Q: Why do you think fantasy is important for women?

C1/3: Erm..it takes..it takes away all the bills and the everyday living away, I mean, everyday living is wonderful by half, but occasionally, you do just want to get away from it all. You can't jump on a jet and go on holiday, so you'll go to another country and watch how they're supposed to live.

Q: Do you think men need fantasy?

C1/3: They need fantasy in a different way, erm, detectives and wars, that's their fantasy world, a tough, strong world..not the sloppy who's fallen in love with whom, who's killed J.R. and..it's rubbish. That's their escape, science fiction is their fantasy.

Did C1/5 think that men needed make believe?

C1/5: Well, if my husband's anything to go by, space, yes..but they don't..I don't think men are as impressed by things like that..my husband isn't, you know, impressed by money and things..no..he likes his space and things like that.

She felt that it was the substance of *Dallas* and *Dynasty* which would not appeal to her husband, which was, as far as she was concerned, 'family life':

C1/5: I don't think I'm interested in their oil wells, I think it's the families that I like it for..to think..oh, you know, his daughter's dead, you know and oh..Crystal's having..yes, I think it's the families, for all it's big and splendid, you can still see family life in it..you get really..you feel for..I think it is the family life that draws you to it, it's not..I'm not interested in them having oil wells and goodness knows what, it is family life.

For C1/5, *Dallas* and *Dynasty* have what Ien Ang has identified as 'emotional realism', which overrides the 'external unrealism' (Ang 1985 p. 47) which C1/5 herself described.

C2/5 also felt that soap operas were for women:

C2/5: I think a lot of story lines in soap operas are very very weak and I think a man needs something to keep his interest more than a woman. That makes a man sound more intelligent, but that's not what I mean. Well, my husband, it's got to be something worth watching before he'll sit down and actually watch it. He won't just watch anything - I'll watch anything. Not with interest, not sit down and really watch it, but I'd watch anything. Andrew wouldn't, he'd rather get up and do something. If it's on, if *Coronation Street's* on he'll watch it, he hates *Crossroads*, he hates *Brookside*, I don't know why because that's the best on. He says he doesn't like them, but then if he misses them he'll say 'what happened so and so..but even then I think, he thinks it's unmanly to watch them, I think so anyway.

C1/5 had similar suspicions:

C1/5: Well, men just aren't interested in that sort of thing are they, and I think that's probably why, you know..I think..and then I think, well would my husband admit it if he did like it?..

C2/5's point that typical story lines were weak and therefore insufficient to hold a man's interest relates to the narrative organisation of much soap opera - very little 'action', no high drama, and multiple plot lines. As observed:



C2/5: You can watch a soap opera for six weeks and you think, well, nothing's happened, and then it suddenly gets interesting.

The willingness of soap opera followers to bear with their favourite, even when nothing seems to be happening, is an important feature of soap viewing. (Brunsdon 1984 p. 86)

Whether their partners would actually admit to enjoying soap operas is another and quite separate point. David Morley notes in his study of *Family Television* that the men he spoke to were reluctant to 'admit' that they enjoyed fiction, claiming rather that they preferred factual television programmes. (Morley 1986 p. 162) Clearly many men do watch and enjoy fiction in different forms, but the fact that they feel they cannot admit to taking pleasure in what is obviously a women's genre is significant in itself. Interestingly, many of these women do not really know what their partners feel about the soaps.

The women took great pleasure in soap operas and the American long running serials, but spoke about them in negative terms such as 'rubbish' 'soppy' 'fantasy' and 'make believe'; comparing them unfavourably in some cases to their husband's fantasy genres. A hard, tough and real world is what men disappear into, rather than into the world of emotion and glamour.

Emotion and glamour were an important attraction of the 'mini-series' which many of the women in this group watched. Those who watched had usually read the book and so were quite often very critical of the adaptation. These criticisms were usually about the selective nature of the adaptation, although this was recognised as inevitable:

C1/3: They miss a lot of the story out...on TV they're jumping all over the place from year to year..in a book you do get a full picture of it all. I mean, they have to do it otherwise it would go on for months.

Also casting of characters where it did not conform to their reading often caused a problem:

C1/7: When I'm reading a book I'm in that world and I imagine how I think the characters are going to look and when they're on television they're completely different from my imagination..that spoils it.

Many of these 'mini-series' are family sagas with a strong female central character whose fortunes are followed throughout the book and, in some cases<sup>2</sup> become part of a series with a generational development of female characters. The combination of a strong female central character, a powerful story focussing on the vicissitudes of family life, as well as setting and costumes combined to form a glamorous *mis-en-scene*, produces a text with very strong appeal to the women in this group. However, two show some sign of distance:

C1/3: The last time I watched something like that on television was *Princess Daisy*. A load of total rubbish, but it was lovely. [laugh].

C1/6: I taped the American thing which was dreadful..*Return to Eden*..it was absolutely dreadful, and I was aware how awful it was, but I taped it and I watched it and enjoyed it..and I felt no guilt about wasting that time over really a rubbish programme.

In this group there is a distinct preference for fiction over non-fiction. C1/3's comment about documentary programmes was typical:

C1/3: They're telling the truth, and the truth to anybody is really pretty depressing...it's like, I don't want to know most of the time, I don't want to know. I mean I do know, but I don't like it to be shoved at me every five seconds. I need the relief of these stupid things, absolutely.

There was also a consensus about the news. Many of the women watched the national news, usually with their male partners, but several said they preferred watching and listening to local news on television and radio.

C1/5: I listen to Radio Aire, I like that. And I do like *Calendar* [local ITV news], because, there again, you recognise places, and things like that, I do tend to watch that.

C1/7: I read the local newspaper for the local news..there's usually something in that I know about..*Calendar's* sometimes on, I think we always catch *News at Ten*. Jack's very keen on the news..I'm not a person to join in a discussion about current affairs ..I'm a very good listener.

C1/6: We have Radio 4 on in the morning, but I like to have it on the local news when I'm going to work. All the incidental things..I read a local paper, but I wouldn't get it every night, I tend to get it at the end of the week.

The liking for local news expressed by C1/5, C1/7 and C1/6 is related to familiarity with the places and events reported. Events which are, in national terms, 'incidental'. C1/7 compares her news consumption with that of her husband, echoing B/5 in the previous section - news and current affairs are not to her liking.

## Film

The importance of films with a 'good story' featuring distinctive characters came through very strongly in this group, whatever the genre. C1/1 compared her preferences with those of her family:

C1/1: I'm in the minority as to what I like. Because Laura, the eldest girl, she's more into *Star Wars*-type films and my husband is as well - he's a big kid at heart when it comes to things like that - and I sort of, I suppose, typical woman, you know..love story thing, or something with a bit of 'go' in it..I like more of a story than a visual impact, but they don't, they like *James Bond* and everything..erm..whereas I'd rather have a story.

Her husband's preferences she saw in terms of action:

C1/1: Oh, the science fiction..action adventure..he's a real..you know, sort of into the Errol Flynn,

swashbuckling, out with the swords, you know, he's not exactly our era is he? But you know, there's nobody..he's more in that field. He'd rather see action than story. He likes to see somebody physically acting, like Rocky films, he thought they were good and things like that..I didn't think they were bad, but, you know, he likes things with action and to see people moving, whereas..I can watch a film where people, if it was a good film about two people just sitting talking, I could watch it, where Craig wouldn't, you know.

C1/7 also spoke of the comparison between her husband and sons' preferences and her own:

C1/7: I like the romantic leading up to things..you know, the spoken things between them. I like all of that kind of stuff..they don't seem to..which you get in a book, you get more talk between them, the leading up to it, whereas everything on television seems to be so..everything done for visual effects, of course..there's a difference between ..something happening, with the interplay, when you can see something is going to happen..the interchange..it's nice when it is slow and you're saying..'oh, yes - I knew she'd say that, or I knew it would turn out like that'..whereas men, I don't think they're bothered about that, they just sit and watch it and let it all happen.

The division along age and gender lines here is quite striking in terms of narrative types. For C1/1 and C1/7 the slow and gradual unfolding of a story was an essential part of the pleasure, whereas their partners and children would sacrifice this for visual impact and action. C1/3 also described her partner's preference in these terms:

C1/3: ..boxing films, Al Pacino, tough guy films, like that..that's more his cup of tea. Violent films, action films, something happening all the time.

The women who watched movies together in the afternoon, noted in Table (iv) of the previous chapter, typically selected romance,

melodrama and the family saga for these viewing sessions which could be freely enjoyed without male 'disapproval'. Having a good cry was an indulgence which some of the women sought, but preferably on their own or with other women. C2/5 watched love stories and 'weepy' ones with her mother and some friends. They had recently watched *Who Will Love My Children?* and I asked her what the film was about:

C2/05: It's about a lady, she's got ten children, she's got cancer and she knows she's dying and she gets a home for all her children, and she lets them go to this home while she's still living and she gets them all in a family. Well, not many men'd want to sit through that. Same as that *Last Snows of Spring*, you know, with the children. It's morbid really to watch.

They had all sat and cried whilst watching this movie. C2/5 and C2/2, both mothers of small children, said that these were the kinds of films which most affected them emotionally. Crucial to their narrative is the fact that the female protagonists invariably have ineffective spouses, usually alcoholics or womanisers. The films present a world of mothers and children, telling stories about the loss of children and/or the loss of a mother. C2/5 felt that this 'reflected' what would happen in real life:

C2/5: I think if anything like that happens the woman has to cope with it...so I think a woman can relate to that situation more than a man.

Specially recommended by *Woman's Own* magazine, *Who Will Love My Children?* was a very popular film with Group C, especially for joint female viewing, and was considered to be of no potential interest to their male partners. C2/1 was an avid reader of romantic fiction and this was also her preferred genre of movies. She could identify her kind of film very quickly from the 'blurb' on the back of the video package:

C2/1: Well when you get a video you can read what it's all about on the back, but I don't know, I can tell right easily. I can pick one up and

just read a couple of lines ...I really know what I'm going for.

She explained to me why she 'wasn't interested' in her husband's preferred genres (war, horror, action adventure):

C2/1: I don't know, I just can't get into it, you know, guns and that..I don't know what it is, I don't know why I don't like 'em..but I don't. I can't get into the story as much as I can get into the other things..probably because I'm not interested..I really like a romance..and I think I'm going to like it, so I'll sit and watch it and I'm more interested in it, but not other stuff.

Like B/1 earlier in this chapter, C2/1 explains that she is not interested in the substance of the male genres and has no expectation of enjoyment, therefore she does not become involved in the narrative. Her anticipation of pleasure in romance and her ability to recognise 'her' genres from the briefest outline, is symptomatic of her selective story competence.

War films were enjoyed by many of the men but this was not always the case, particularly if the movie did not conform to traditional genre conventions. On a rare occasion, C1/4 had selected *The Deer Hunter* from the video library for Sunday evening viewing with her son and her husband, a lover of war films. She told me that her husband had not enjoyed it and I asked her if she knew why:

C1/4: Well [pause] I think he, possibly because, he said, they were all nutters. My husband's the type that if people are different from him - he's a bit dogmatic - if they're different from him, they don't exist, sort of thing..but people are different [laugh]..and I'm sure there must have been loads of instances similar to that, they do exist and they are people and everybody's different aren't they? And probably the film itself upset him because it was slow to start with, and then it was on a cause that he doesn't identify with at all.

Q: What did you think of it?

C1/4: Well I enjoyed it. They were all so lost weren't they? I mean, he didn't enjoy it. It wasn't straightforward enough, you know..I think he was cross at the beginning. It floundered a bit at the beginning and he wanted to be getting on with it [laugh].

For C1/4's husband *The Deer Hunter* did not conform to his expectations of the genre. For C1/4, however, although she too found the film difficult to 'get into', she did become emotionally involved in the story and the characters finding both more 'true to life' than other war films.

In general the women in Group C expressed their dislike of horror movies, often in contrast to their male partners. However, C1/3, as we saw in the previous chapter, took great pleasure in watching this genre, examples of which she hired from the video library and watched when alone as her partner positively disliked them. I asked her if she liked all horror movies:

C1/3: Most of them, yes. I mean, I don't like disgusting bloodthirsty ones. I do like 'ghosty' spooky things. I really frighten myself to death, I do [laugh].

C2/2's husband would often hire horror movies and sometimes she would sit and watch them with him:

C2/2: I think when it's a horror film I prefer something like *The Exorcist* rather than someone chopping people's heads off with an axe - I'm not into that sort of thing, but the more spooky ones - you know, I think 'I'm not going to watch this' and you're there, peeping through your hands. I prefer to go for something more like that.

C2/5's babysitters often hired gory horror movies and she had watched one or two 'out of curiosity'. Did they frightened her?

C2/5: No. Rather than horror, I'd rather watch one of these suspense films. Not gory, you know, the other sort of horror. Not horror, *Frankenstein* horror - it could happen.

The horror films the women preferred had somehow to convince them that this sort of thing 'could happen', as C1/3 explained in her comments on *The Evil Dead* - a then recent and notorious<sup>3</sup> 'splatter' movie:

C1/3: I didn't like that at all. Now John [husband] chose that for me..I watched it and I actually turned that off. I didn't like that at all, it was all that horrible gore. Now I don't like that sort of film, I think that's rubbish. I like to be frightened not sickened. And it's not possible, not possible. People coming back from below and starting hammering on..oh, a joke.

She then went on to give an example of the kind of horror film she really enjoyed:

C1/3: Now, *Amityville Horror*, the first one was a bit boring, but *Amityville Horror II* is excellent. Well I think it is because it's spiritual and supernatural..that's the horror bit I like, the supernatural. When you're not quite too sure..when they smell a smell you think [sniff], yes, that's possible because..I believe in things like that.

Horror movies must be rooted in what are 'believable' situations for the women and all three show a preference for a coherent story, with situational suspense preferred to the special effects of the 'splatter' movies. C1/3 was asked if she knew more or less how the films were going to end:

C1/3: Oh yes [laugh], oh yes, exactly [laughter] and how..that's part of the excitement of it all..

As we have seen, the women in this group responded almost entirely in terms of story, setting and characters to questions about their viewing and reading pleasures, expressing their involvement with characters and with the emotional world of the fiction. To try to explore questions of structure, I asked about the ways in which books and films resolved their narratives. Two of the older women were quite clear on this subject:



C1/8: Erm..I'm one of those terribly uneducated people that can't do with sad endings, or endings left in mid air..I want everything nicely tied up in little pink bows, all at the end with everything sweet and happy.

C1/4: I think really they should have, for me, I feel that they should either make you realise it's going to turn good or turn bad, but some are just left, the ending just chopped, where they ought to sort of have a tail end leading towards one bit or another. Not particularly all the bows all knotted, as though they had been tied up nice, but just so that you could see some way out of it..sometimes a film finishes and it leaves you with your mouth open..I like it a little bit tidier, I like a programme or a film a little bit tidier. I think it's because women have little tidy minds and want to know..[laugh].

Like B/5 in the previous section, these women were dissatisfied with inconclusive endings. It is interesting to note that both C1/8 and C1/4 imply that this need for resolution is somehow an indication of their lack of intellectual capacity.

For those who read romantic fiction, a happy ending was expected. But C2/5 had reservations about this:

C2/5: I think a romantic book has got to have a happy ending really, hasn't it? A love story's a love story. I mean, usually it just ends with them getting married. I mean, if they went on for five years it might not be so happy, but that's how love stories end, with them getting together. So really a love story ends at the beginning, doesn't it?

Q: Do you expect happy endings from other things?

C2/05: Not always. I mean with Mills and Boon you know she's going to end up with the man she hated in the beginning, it's laid on..but, no if they're being realistic they don't always end happily. But a lot of the series on TV, anyway, well, they finish at such a pitch that they know they can come back.

The open-ended nature of many series on television had been recognised by C2/5, and C1/3 and C2/1 told me about soap opera narrative:

C1/3: When you're watching it on Monday, erm. the things they say and the actions we know what's going to really..or think we know what's going to happen on Wednesday, and it does [laugh]..and from Wednesday we know what's going to happen the following Monday. But you have to watch it, just to make sure you're right. There's not a lot of surprises in there.

Q: Is there a difference between the endings?

C1/3: Yes, oh yes. Wednesday's tries to keep you in the lurch for something to happen on Monday..it's usually the big...

C2/1 spoke about her knowledge of story and action, rather than narrative structure, but she recognised the 'cliff hanger'<sup>4</sup> ending which kept her wanting to watch:

C2/1: Oh yes, I'm always saying I know how it's going to turn out..I'll cheat though, I look in *TV Times* and see what's happening for each..but there again, when it's on like, Lynne last week were going with that Andy, and I said, 'oh, she'll end up going with him' and she did..I think..I've watched it for that long I can tell what's going to happen, I can tell what they're going to do..I mean sometimes I don't know, because sometimes they put it in the paper, and that spoils it, you know, you know what's going to happen, but I still watch it, like..and they always end so good one day that you've got to watch it next day to see what happens.

C1/4 said that what she liked about *Emmerdale Farm* was the fact that it never stopped, it just goes on and on:

C1/4: One story ends, but there's always another one, there's probably about three stories going on at once, so as one sort of..as the peak of one story's waning away, another one's coming up.

We can see here that knowledge of narrative structure is there for preferred genres and that this competence brings with it

expectations and pleasures, particularly in the soap opera and romance.

### Group D/E

#### Reading

Three of the women in this group were regular readers. D/1 had recently given up an Open University degree course and was enjoying her relative freedom to read:

D1/1: I've been reading some trashy who-dunnits..I'll more or less go and pick out authors, or go by the reviews on the back cover, pick them up..devour them, about ten a week..they've got to be pretty bad for me to put them down..if I'm into a good book, I'll be reading while I'm cooking, erm..gaps in between anything, while they're eating, before I wash up, erm..constant, and then curl up and carry on with it when I think I've finished for the evening.

Like C/1 and C/3, books can insert themselves into the daily routine, easily picked up and put down throughout the day. E/2 was an avid reader of Mills & Boon:

E/2: Oh, you always know what's going to happen, I mean, once you've read one, they're all exactly the same. I mean, different names, different places - but I like to read them for the places, as well because I think they give you a very good view of places. They're describing a place, and you can really see that place, you know..one or two that I've read have been set in London, places that I have been, you know, and it mentions these streets and it is very good the way it is described. It's not just somebody who's made up a place, that place really exists. When you go to one that is written, say in Australia, you can really visualise it, so you have an idea of what that place looks like.

The importance of setting and the creation of a believable backdrop

to the romance is stressed here, again, confirmed by Janice Radway's study. (Radway 1984) E/2 also told me how she felt when she had finished a book:

E/2: I always hate to come to the end, when it gets to the last couple of pages, and you know very well how it's going to work out. You always know the end, you know how it's going to work out and I hate it coming to the end..I hate coming to the end and I hate starting a new one..I think because you've got into the characters and you feel you know them.

### Television

All the women in this group were regular followers of at least one soap opera or long running serial. Three of them described these programmes in terms of them being 'true to life' or not:

D/3: I think *Brookside*, it seems to be a bit more lifelike than *Coronation Street*, but yet, for round here it, for us, it's not really because they're all in big posh houses and they've all got a bit of money. *Coronation Street*, they're all down to earth, but yet, I haven't seen any houses like that, I suppose there are some, it's too friendly, all the neighbours, going to the pub, they know everybody's business, so I don't really know.

She compared *Brookside* and *Coronation Street* in class terms:

D/3: I suppose it's like different classes, like the middle class in *Brookside*, and the lower classes in *Coronation Street*. I mean, in *Coronation Street* nobody's ever got any money, everybody's a bit skint, but they seem to have in *Brookside* a bit more money, a bit more class..

E/2: *Brookside* annoys me, erm..I don't know whether it's because they seem to be right amateurish, you know..I think *Coronation Street's* being going that long you've got used to the characters and they do what you expect them to do.

I think *Coronation Street* is more like real life...I mean, Brian, he reminds me of a lad I used to work with, he's the same temperament and everything..and, erm..all this silly little petty arguments they have is very true to life, him wanting to do his thing and her wanting to do her thing, not getting together on it, as you do in real life.

For D/3 and E/2 the represented world of the soap opera was immediately comparable with their own experience of life and people. For D/3, neither *Brookside* nor *Coronation Street* conformed with her experience. E/2 could not accept the different style of *Brookside*, which she described as 'amateurish', and suggests that it is the familiarity of *Coronation Street*, along with its resemblance to real life and people she knows, which keeps her watching.

E/1 tackled the question of realism from a different perspective:

E/1: We watch *Emmerdale Farm*..it is realistic, I mean people do it, but, like when they get made they never say anything do they? I mean, like when he had an affair, and she just sat there combing her hair..'well, I don't really want to talk about it'..my God, I'd have bounced him down the stairs by now..

Q: Do you think some soap operas handle that kind of thing more realistically?

E/1: Mmm, yes. I think *Dallas* is a bit more realistic in a glamorous way. Again, I suppose, really, I could understand *Emmerdale*, but it's a bit false in the way they can control themselves..but, I mean, *Dallas* is a bit far fetched because the women just stand around with fancy ball gowns on, but they are realistic in the way they sort of shout and scream at each other, and let their human emotions out. In *Emmerdale*, he says he's off to see his fancy woman and she's there combing her hair in the mirror...like on *Dallas*, Sue Ellen would have tried to shoot him..I do think they're different, that *Dallas* is more real in emotional ways, but I don't live on a farm, but *Emmerdale Farm* is more realistic to me, you know.

As we saw from C1/05's talk about *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, there is a degree of emotional realism operating in the American serials which is absent from the British product, although they have an 'external' reality. E/1 expresses this difference quite clearly above, and in the following account of her relationship to the different programmes:

E/1: You know, I'd probably like to be a bit like Sue Ellen really [laugh], if I had lots of money..I can imagine me expecting the kind of thing she does, but..you know, like, I can still understand everybody in the pub signing a card for Hilda's birthday, do you know what I mean, like all your friends do from college and stuff like that, because that kind of thing's happened to me..so I think, you know, you do set yourself two levels with television and film.

D/3 had very strong feelings about *Dallas* and *Dynasty*:

D/3: No, I don't like them at all, they make me..I can't describe how it makes me feel. All that money and really nice clothes, and they're all beautiful..it doesn't make me angry..I suppose it makes me sick. They've just got it all..and nobody works, they just walk in...

E/2 liked to watch *Dallas* and *Dynasty* for the settings and the latter's idealised relationship between Blake and Crystal:

E/2: I like the clothes they wear and you see some nice things..I mean Blake and Crystal, they seem to have a right nice relationship, you know, and I sit there sometimes and think 'wouldn't it be lovely if it actually worked like that' [laugh]. But it works more like Gail and Brian. That's more true to life than everybody being all lovey dovey, you know..but I do look at it and think it'd be real if life was like that, you know..I mean it's silly..but I watch it, just the same.

D/2 watched *Sons & Daughters* regularly and told me which characters she liked in the programme:

D/2: I like Beryl, she's a home loving person, erm..I like Mat Kennedy, I don't think much to his

acting [laugh]. I like Barbara, she's a strong, dominating person..not too dominating, but she's not the sort of person to be put on. I tend to think I'd like to be a bit more like that. I like her because compared with some of the others, they've always got that 'softy' talk, you know, some of the women on telly, haven't they?

Again, the familiar identification with a powerful female character and and some irritation with the ways in which women are normally portrayed on television. It was for this reason that D/3 had enjoyed *Widows*:

D/3: I just wanted them to get away with the money, and everything to be alright, and Harry Rawlings to be in jail..I thought it was good..I think it was a nice change for it to be women in it because generally it's always fellows isn't it?..in all robberies, it's usually fellows getting away with it.

For E/1, *Coronation Street* offered powerful female characters:

E/1: I think Bet Lynch is powerful, I think she's great, her and Hilda Ogden are my heroes, you know, I think Bet is very powerful, I mean - you look at *Coronation Street* and she is glamorous, isn't she? She's always got hair done up, make up on and big loud earrings.

The preference for strong female characters expressed by these three young working class women and irritation at the 'softy' talk of many women portrayed on television echoes responses noted by Seiter et al in their discussions with soap opera viewers of the same class position. (Seiter et al forthcoming)

## Film

D/1 and her partner watched movies together regularly, either from the video library, or from their own archive. As we saw in an earlier section, their tastes were similar in many respects, but there were certain differences. D/1 was asked what elements of a film she valued more than her husband:

D/1: I do like big stories, I suppose, like *Tess*, *Reds*, *Dr. Zhivago*..they cover a wide period of time and a wide range of characters. And I do like romantic stuff if it's well done..erm..and then again, I like what you might describe as quite the opposite, little films about..*Gregory's Girl* and *Electric Horsman*..but quite what it is about those sort of films, I don't know..characters, good characters, a touch of romance, a touch of humour.

D/1: Does Jim make any comments whilst you're watching one of your favourites?

D/1: Well...*Tess* drives him mad, but I'm sure Hardy drives a lot of people mad [laugh]..this self-destruction that goes on all the time..erm..I don't know. He doesn't make comments particularly, perhaps they are quite romantic films I like, are they...quite slushy?

I asked if the kinds of films her husband liked had a lot of characters, extended time-span, etc.:

D/1: No. He's much more interested in the techniques, effects, the immediate..what I regard as surface cleverness of the film, rather than story. That's it, isn't it? I like the story and he likes the way it's done..yes, that's true of..

Q: Are the films he likes fast paced?

D/1: Not all of them, not really, they might vary in pace a lot, which mine don't necessarily. Pace of a film is not really something I particularly notice. If it's caught you up sufficiently, I will get very involved with the story and very involved with the characters, in a way that Jim won't. We're exactly the same in our fiction as well, er..I can't..he's always been very much into science fiction, and the thing I can't get into when I read science fiction is that they've got peculiar names, that they aren't characters, that the world they're set in is of primary importance, and they're secondary. I like it the other way round, and I think probably the same is true of films.

We see here the gender differences in this household in terms of the valuing of the story and the characters as against 'techniques,



effects or surface cleverness' of the film. D/1's comparison with fiction is also interesting in that it reveals her need for involvement with identifiable characters and their motives, whereas this is not of primary importance for her husband.

E/2 was a horror movie fan, and D/2 found herself watching this genre with her husband:

D/2: I tend to find some of these he's got are a bit..really..I don't actually like these cannibal ones..I like them to have more suspense in it.. you know, it sort of keeps you sat on the edge a bit, you know.

E/2: I don't particularly like them to be..I mean, you get a lot of these really bloodthirsty ones, and there's nothing to them, if you know what I mean. There's plenty of blood, but that's about all there is to them, it seems to spoil them really. I like them more spooky.

The two horror movie viewers in Group C also shared this preference for suspense and the more 'spooky' films over the bloodthirsty 'splatter' movies. E/2's male partner shared the same dislike of horror spooks as C1/3's partner:

E/2: I like to watch his face when he watches them, it's a comedy when he watches them..he really gets frightened. He doesn't like the supernatural..I think he's scared of it.

Q: Do you believe in it?

E/2: No, I don't think so..I think probably like in *The Howling*, there was a lot..there were scenes where somebody's walking through the woods and, you know, there is somebody behind you..they never show you anybody. Now that really makes his hair stand on end, and I get a right kick out of that, because I think that's hilarious.. you know, I mean, I can sit there and I'm just waiting for somebody to pounce, you know, probably to see if it will make me jump, because I know it's only a made up character...he seems to take it right seriously. It's always something I'm watching, not something that's actually happening.

Q: Don't they ever really frighten you?

E/2: There is one that really has frightened me..I can't remember what it's called. I've got it on tape, and I will watch that, over and over again..it's one, you don't see anything at all..it's four people who went to this big house, and the house was possessed..it was really frightening..and that really made me go cold, every time things started happening, I went cold all over, and that is the only film that has ever done that to me..but I will watch it..now Barry [boyfriend] wouldn't like it at all.

E/2's knowledge of the genre is used, in the main, to distance herself from its emotional and fearful aspects. Her boyfriend, on the other hand, 'seems to take it right seriously' because he becomes totally involved in the story. However, E/2 was emotionally affected by romance and love stories and liked to watch love stories:

E/2: *Love Story*..I've seen that about half a dozen times, I think it's just as good, no matter how many times you watch it - it can still make you cry. Men find them soppy don't they? I think probably because they're frightened that they might actually feel some little bit of sympathy or feeling..men don't like to show their emotions very much do they?

### Summary

E/2's final observation would find its echo in many of the households in the sample. Women from all three groups suggested that not only did their partners keep their emotions close to their chests, but that they positively disliked films and programmes which foregrounded emotional life. Their ways of dealing with such texts when they did encounter them ranged from laughter and derision at their partner's emotional responses to denial and suppression of their own emotions and feelings. The kinds of films and programmes which they liked were more likely to involve physical action than emotional interaction. In Group C we can see the strongest example of this gender division, although it is present right across

the sample, and while this might be confirmation of fairly predictable male and female genre preferences, what is more significant is the way in which the women themselves spoke about the different genres. Time and again they used derogatory terms to describe 'female' genres, terms not used in their descriptions of their partner's preferences. Using the women's own observations, we can see an emerging set of opposing descriptions of male and female genres respectively:

'Male' genres

'Female' genres

hard

soft

tough

soppy

real

fantasy

serious

silly

factual

fictional

We noted that women who had attained higher education tended to have similar tastes to their partners. Their descriptions threw up another set of oppositions which are not apportioned to specific genres but are expressions of a more general stress on 'culture':

Positive evaluation

Negative evaluation

classics

popular

quality

trash

important

trivial

British

American

The women with most formal education tended to associate themselves and their partners with cultural products of positive value, distancing themselves from what they saw as 'low culture'. However, in households where tastes were not shared, positive descriptions were more likely to be used by women in relation to their male partner's preferences, and negative ones in relation to their own. Women with higher education tend to take up a position

in relation to popular texts which is shared by their male partners, but not by the other women in the group. The example of soap opera preferences shows this most clearly. With the exception of A/3 and B/1, which households watched *EastEnders*, and B/5 and her partner who both watched *Coronation Street*, the majority of men seemed to dislike or expressed their dislike for soap operas, particularly the American products. Almost all the 'educated' women shared this dislike, many making a point of distancing themselves from these programmes. Within the different household cultures, therefore, we can see dominant cultural values reflected in definitions of cultural products, and also a clustering of positive evaluations around male preferred texts.

Education is a major factor in the different preferences expressed by the women. However, what all the women in the sample took pleasure in was a text which foregrounded personal relationships, believable characters and a strong story. These elements which constituted an enjoyable text featured throughout the sample, regardless of education, with women often comparing this taste with their partner's preference for action and 'effects'. It is useful to summarise these responses in terms of theme:

Male	Female
heroic	romantic
public	domestic
societal	familial
physical	emotional

Obviously the above divisions relate to traditional male and female genres, but it is important to bear in mind that these preferences cross traditional boundaries. Thus, if a war film deals with the emotions of its characters - for example, *The Deer Hunter* - then, as we saw in C1/4's case, she became engaged in its fictional world. Similarly with the horror genre. Science fiction perhaps

epitomises a male genre where special effects dominate the product and where, in books, setting was more important than character. As B/5 said 'it leaves me cold'. Being able to relate to characters and identify with the emotions and situations in which they found themselves was crucial to enjoyment. This need to identify with a text was common to all the women, but differed in degree. It can range from a matter of simple recognition of character-types or familiarity with their predicaments to a feeling of actually being one of the characters, as we saw in some accounts of the pleasures of soap opera.

It is worth examining this relationship to the text more closely as, once again, education becomes a strong determining factor. Those women in the sample who had a higher standard of education tended to distance themselves from texts, or certainly expressed a desire to do so. This emerged most clearly in discussions about soap operas and serials in general; these women feared 'addiction' and didn't like the idea of becoming 'hooked' on serials, especially on television. They also considered the term 'escape' to be pejorative when applied to reading or viewing and would not use it to describe their use of texts. It is this same group of women who hired movies from the video library and read the contents of the Booker prize short-list from a position founded on externally validated knowledge. In effect, from a position of control. This control of reader over text was enabled by a 'space' which had been created by public critical discourse, allowing the reader to distance herself from the text. It was essential to maintain this distance and not become, in B/3's words, 'enmeshed in it'. For most of the remaining women it was the power of the text to involve and 'enmesh' them which marked it out as pleasurable. As C1/5 said of *Dynasty* 'it takes you away for an hour, doesn't it, you get that involved' and C1/3 used the expression 'you give yourself to the screen'. Soap operas were enjoyed because you had to watch them, because you had become one of them and because they went on forever. There was an apparent need to relate directly to the 'what' of the

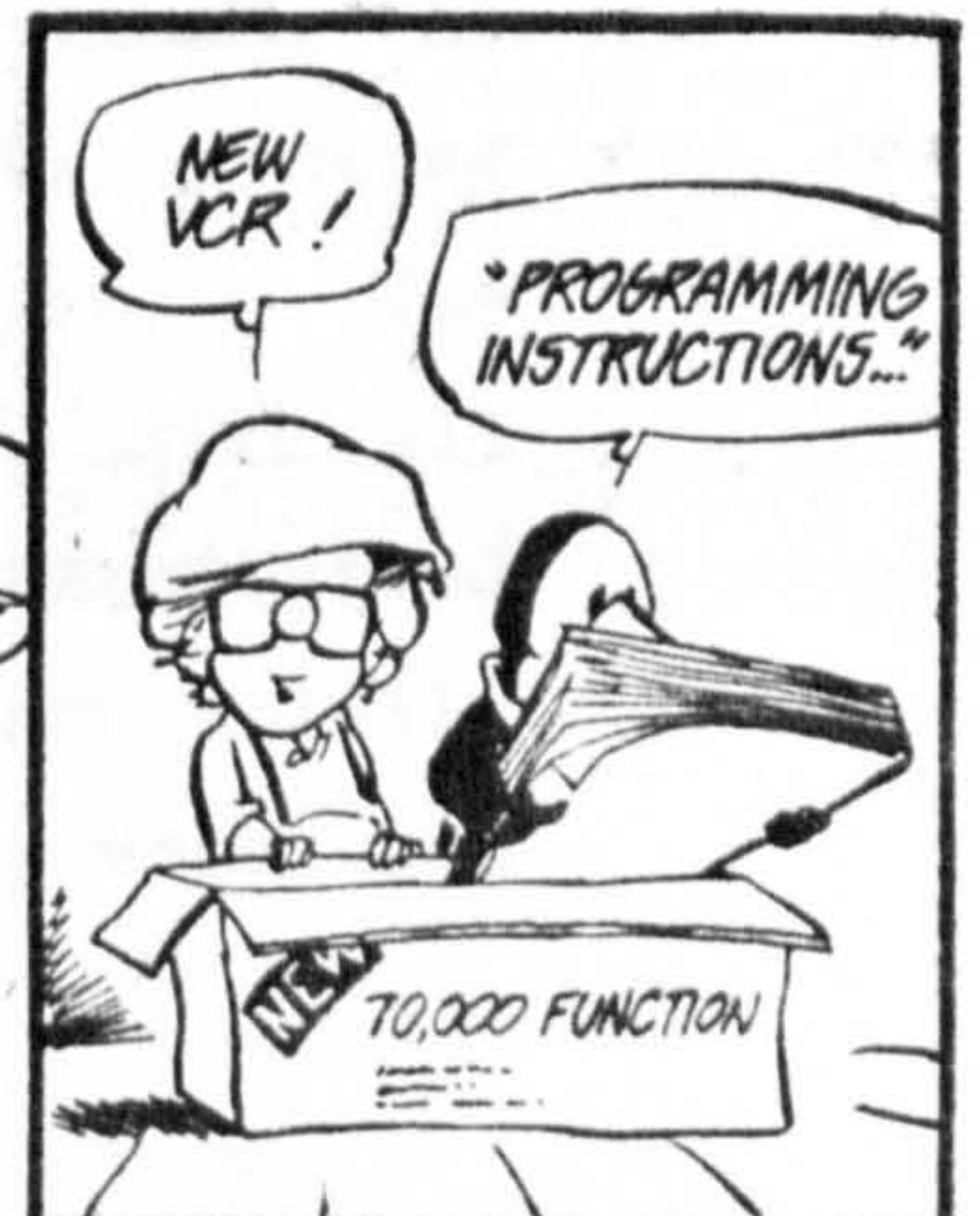
fictional world and texts which encouraged and permitted this direct access were pleasurable.

**Sayings of the week**

**HE'S the only one who knows how to work the video.—The Queen, on Prince Andrew.**

**BLOOM COUNTY**

**by Berke Breathed**



## 5 TECHNOLOGY IN THE DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT

C1/8: Once I learned how to put a plug on, now there's nobody else puts a plug on in this house but me..

It is obvious from the interview material that women have an uneven knowledge of the workings of the video recorder and this section will begin by exploring the processes whereby they actually gained the knowledge and skill required to use the recorders. Very few of the women learnt how to operate the video recorders on their own; this generally means that whatever knowledge they have has been mediated mainly through their male partners. This in many cases relates back to decisions about the purchase or rental of the VCR;

C1/1: We got an instruction book but he had a rough idea anyway, he was probably more familiar with it anyway because until we'd started looking he'd been the one who was up on them, as it were.

The decision making process is referred to later in this chapter, but it is important to note here that the five women who were most at ease with the operation of the video recorder were either instigators of the acquisition or, in one case, already familiar with the machine before the current domestic arrangement began.

When acquiring new pieces of domestic technology there are, under current consumer supply practices, two main channels through which user information is gained. The first is that the person who delivers the machine will set up the VCR, tune it to the existing TV set and, perhaps, run through the operating procedure. The second is the 'manual' or instruction booklet provided with all machines. The former is usually a quick 'run down' given at speed and not sufficient in itself for the user to become totally competent. The latter, of course, is a permanent source which can



be referred to when necessary as the user develops her or his competence.

The majority of women interviewed said that their partners had initially studied the manual of instructions and learnt how to operate the video recorder.

C1/5: Well when we got it my husband read the instructions and, you know, he told me.

C2/1: Michael used to work it at first, he got the knack of it great, he knows how to do it.

A/4: He learnt, then showed me...I mean because he bought it.

This in turn led to the men operating the recorder more often and on a regular basis, thereby becoming familiar with the various modes of operation and gradually reducing the necessity for consulting the manual. The women, on the other hand, did not use the machine regularly enough to become familiar with it and had to consult the manual if they were to use the recorder, particularly for setting the timer switch for pre-recording.

A/4: I can programme the video - I need the handbook because I don't do it very often..

A/2: I can put the tape in, switch it on and find the bit without having to consult the manual, but it is the pre-programming to make it come on at certain times, on which channel and so forth, I don't have the facility to do that, I haven't done it frequently enough to know how to do it without consulting the manual.

D/1: Jim can set the timer, but I have to look it up in the book...and whereas I can do it I always have to check back in the book..so I suppose most of the time he does that. When he's away I cope with it perfectly well.

Many of the women felt inadequate because of their lack of knowledge and some explained this in terms of not being technically minded;

B/1: I don't even know how to work the thing properly ...I mean I'll try if I'm desperate, I'll press every button and I'll eventually get on what I want, but I'm certainly not...I'm not machine minded really.

B/6: I do feel its passed me by this technological revolution

C1/3: He does the recording for me. The first video we had I could do it myself, it was just very basic, but as we progressed it got very complicated and I still to this day can't work out the timer, it's just a joke, I'm not very good at that sort of thing.

Some insisted in a self-deprecating way that it was their own fault through sheer laziness, or not having bothered to learn;

B/4: Well I still have to think about the video. Mainly my own fault because I haven't bothered to do it often enough and bothered to look in the instruction book...the timing bit I haven't bothered with, because, then again I don't say that I couldn't do it because there aren't many things I can't do if I put my mind to it..I just haven't bothered, you know, there's always somebody here to do it and, then again, its just pure laziness and apathy because, you know there'll come a time when I probably may want to use it then I'll have to learn how to do it.

A/1: I operate it to record when I'm there. I'm not very good at programming it, in fact I tend not to. But it's never really arisen much. I suppose its laziness, I ought to learn how to programme it but I never need to do it; I suppose if I did I'd sit down and learn to do it, but I've never actually needed to.

It must be noted that a stated lack of enthusiasm for television and video in many cases accounted for a disinclination to become more familiar with the technicalities of the machine. Those women who were keen television viewers made it their business to get to know how to operate the machine, even though the knowledge was mediated by their male partners;

B/5: He was the one who read the book and found out how it worked.

But B/5 soon familiarised herself with the operation of all aspects, including the timer, so that she could record programmes of interest when her husband was away.

For one woman there was more at stake. Her male partner assumed not just knowledge, but control over the video so that her son (not his child) had to ask him to record things on his behalf. She and her son took steps to alter this situation;

C2/4: I've just learnt. Me and Mark [son] did it last week together, we got the book out, but right from us having it we've never sat down and done it. We fathomed it out between us. Because sometimes Mark feels he wants to record something and Brian'll [partner] say you can't do it...and he wants to tape things for himself.

Other reasons given for not having gained the knowledge were more complex and were much more to do with the division of labour in the home and appropriate 'territories' mapped out across gender. Two of the older women had been quite calculating in their maintenance of 'ignorance', based on years of practical experience;

Q: What about setting the timer?

C1/8: Oh no, I haven't got a clue, no. If there's anything I want recording I ask one of the boys to do it for me. This is sheer laziness I must admit because I don't read the instructions. When I'm reading the instructions it will not go through, its like a knitting pattern or a sewing pattern, I just cannot get it through into my thick skull, but the minute I start and work with it, then I carry on quite happily just looking at the directions as I go on...but to sit and read it, you know, you've to do this and do that, and hold this button when you're pressing that [shaking head]

Q: So you're not...

C1/8: No, I'm not going to try. No. Once I learned how to put a plug on, now there's nobody else puts a plug on in this house but me..so [laugh]..there's method, oh yes.

The second woman, in her fifties, living with her husband and grown up son could use the video to put a tape in, play it back and rewind it, but, when it came to the timer switch:

C1/4: I have been explained to very quickly, and I've looked at the instructions [giggle] I am what I am, I'm termed as being a bit thick..it took me a long time to learn to drive [laugh] and it takes a long time for things to sink in. But on top of that I really don't want to be taught how to do it, really deep down, I know that, because if so it will be my job to deal with it..that's the truth.

Some of the younger women also had their reasons for not operating certain parts of the video and one, referring to it as her husband's 'preserve', said:

B/6: Roger uses it more than I do, in fact I'd probably be hard pressed to actually work it myself, I've always left it I must admit to him.

Q: Have you ever set the timer?

B/6: No, I don't think I have, no.

Q: Has there not been an occasion when you've needed it?

B/6: No, because I would say to him, I'm going to be out tomorrow night, could you set it up..a weak and feeble woman [laugh]..I have put it on for the children sometimes, not the timer, but I can put a disc [sic] in and turn it on.

Q: Did you make a conscious decision not to learn?

B/6: I don't know, really, I mean I'm sure I could if I read it up and did it but erm..I suppose I have consciously decided in effect.

Q: You said earlier that it was Roger's preserve, is that why you don't..

B/6: Erm..no, I didn't mean, you know, that he would be cross or anything if I did, I just meant, you know, traditionally it has been his affair, the technicalities of it.

Tradition, custom, and practice, already established as family routines before the arrival of the video recorder, obviously play an important part in the division of labour, especially where there are children in the household:

Q: Who decides normally whether you're going to record something?

C1/1: I would say Craig because he's usually the one that gets around to doing the actual setting it up, if its going to be a setting the timer up job and what have you. Although I must admit that I often say tape that, tape this so I suppose really, it seems that he does it more because he actually gets the job of doing the setting up.

Q: Is that because you can't do it?

C1/1: No, I can do it, but I usually find that its one of those jobs that he's capable of doing and he can be getting on with that whilst I'm doing something else that he's not capable of doing..usually if we're going out I'm usually brushing hair and putting bobbles in and saying 'Set that up' and we're sort of rushing out and I say 'Oh, I want to watch that, set that up' and, erm.. although he has just about mastered putting bobbles in [laugh].

It would seem that there are decisions made by the women, either consciously or subconsciously, to remain in ignorance of the workings of the VCR, so that it is their husband/partner's job to set up the timer. This, of course, has the function of a 'service' for the household unit - timing an off-air recording for joint watching, and the more calculatedly ignorant women had perhaps recognised this latent servicing element and resisted it in view of their already heavily committed domestic servicing roles. One woman had learnt her lesson with the plug (as we have heard) but the other, interestingly, had learnt hers through knowing how to erect

the screen for the showing of home movies, which was her job every Christmas and some Sundays:

C1/4: All this time and I'm just learning. I had to set it all up, I had to put the screen up[laugh] we'd say on a Sunday night 'we haven't seen any films for a long time' and he'd say 'get it all set up' [laugh] you see my reluctance [pointing to the video].

For those women who have not made a conscious decision to remain in ignorance, but for whom it simply 'just happened' or 'there's always someone there to do it for me' this has negative repercussions. It means that they never get to use the recorder, or not often enough to become familiar with it, relying on their partners or their children to set it for them. The same 'effect' is produced by both strategies: the women remain ignorant. What is important, though, is that they feel, or are made to feel, stupid because of their lack of knowledge in this area. What can be accounted for in terms of material restriction - having particular domestic duties to perform rather than being able to sit down and study an instruction manual and its application - is then turned back on the women, often in their own consciousness, as a presumed basic inability to 'understand' technical things. For three of the women I talked to, the same was true of the home computer:

D/1: When we first got the computer and we were all learning to play with it and fiddling, I had much less time and everybody got computer literate, they were all much more adept at it much more quickly than me and I got really left behind and I felt really pissed off with it. They had all this time and they can now play the games and Jim's got into the first stages of programming. They left me way behind so that I couldn't really appreciate it and enjoy it and I was very much aware at the time that I resented that and that it was purely a time thing.

She has recognised that whilst her family were 'free' to devote themselves to playing with the computer, she had other calls on her

time which placed her on the margins of the learning process. She goes on:

D/1: I keep thinking I'll set it up again now I've got some more time when this work finishes, but I probably won't because the initial impetus has gone..the novelty has worn off for everybody else..it would be a very deliberate thing for me to settle down to do it and anyway nobody else would be interested now [laugh] so I'd just be doing it for myself..and I think that happens perhaps in other areas because I feel I've got less time or I'm doing something else or I've got other responsibilities..I'll get left behind, or I'll simply 'agree' rather than 'suggest' sort of thing.

It is also interesting to note her prediction about her future use of the computer when she may have more time. The likelihood is that she will not learn how to use it because it would be, in her words 'doing it for myself'. This relates to the discussion in Chapter 2 about reluctance to indulge in activities which are motivated by self-interest. Another woman was very keen to learn how to operate the computer; her husband used it a lot 'as a computer, not just for games'. I asked her if she had tried to learn:

C1/5: When we first got it and that yes..but I find that if things don't go in straight away I lose interest, there seems to be such a lot to take in, like I sat reading some of the books, he has a lot of books on it, some very basic ones, but I think..I'm alright so far, then you get... mindst you, you've always got other things on your mind what we're going to have for tea and things like that..you've got to be able to concentrate..I lose concentration that's it with me..but I go to my husband, it must be really nice to be that involved in something..something to really get interested in that takes your mind of every thing else..he can do that, now I can't and I think, now why can't I do that?

These two men were 'hobbyists' and were envied by their wives for their ability to 'switch off' from the daily routine and

concentrate on their chosen pastime. Although the first speaker is quite aware that it is lack of time which prevents her from engaging fully with the computer, the latter fails to make the connection between the many and frequent demands made upon her time and her inability to concentrate, simply believing that her husband is much more clever than she is. What is important to note in both cases is the significance given to those particular activities chosen by their male partners. This is not a simple matter of available time, but of the right to time which is claimed by the men, as if what they are doing is significant by virtue of the fact that they are doing it. This has been explored in Chapter 2 because it obviously has far reaching implications for the organisation of domestic life, but here we can see that this claim to time and how it is spent gives the male of the household the opportunity to become techno-literate much more quickly and effectively than his female partner.

The third woman in a home-computer owning household had managed to familiarise herself with the computer. She did not have children and she and her husband had decided to 'learn together', but in order to do so she had to overcome certain barriers:

C1/3: Well I hated it at first, I didn't even want to turn it on. I thought, No. This is far too advanced for me, I don't know what it does and I don't want it to do anything. I was frightened of the computer because everybody was saying women can't pick up computers as easily as men and children.

She had overcome these prejudices and found she 'had a brain' after all, although her husband had enabled her to 'find' it;

C1/3: He's a very clever person and he educates me in silly little things. I mean, I left school at fifteen and I didn't have a full education because my parents weren't interested in me having one, they wanted me to get married and that was it. But John's educated me, and I have got a brain..it sounds terrible doesn't it? People say, oh, women haven't got brains, well they have,



they're just not allowed to put them to use properly, and I have got one.

This 'mastering' of the computer had given her confidence to find out how to work the video, but again she blames her lack of knowledge on 'laziness':

C1/3: It was just laziness, like the computer, you know, there were too many knobs and too many... it's one of these complicated ones and I couldn't be bothered learning how to do it, I was depending on him to do it, like at first I was depending on him to play with the computer. That's his. But now I can do it..so if I can do acomputer I can certainly do a video, my God.

This women performs complex ideological work in order to explain her relationship to technology. She recognises the social constraints which agencies like the family and education place on women, but ultimately the blame rests upon her own personal 'laziness'. Her husband, although he had a very similar education to her, is seen by her as naturally more intelligent and inhabiting a world of knowledge which he is able to offer her through an educative process. C1/5 had a very similar attitude towards her own background and her male partner, although he did not perform the same educative role:

C1/5: I left school and went to work in Boots..and I was only young when I met my husband..and I just wanted to get married and have children, that was my only aim in life..I mean it didn't seem important if I did anything. But then when you've got them you think oh, I wish I could do something..just to say, I've done that. Like, I keep telling my husband that I'm going to write a book, so buy me a typewriter. He says just get a word processor and goodness knows what, and a printer...but whether or not I will do..I might do.

Q: And what about the computer, would you think about learning how to use that.

C1/5: I would like to really I think, just to say, well yes I can do it..I don't mean just for playing games..I mean as a computer..yes because

there again I can say well I can do that..I think I get riled at it because I can't..I think oooo I wish I could and then I could speak more on a level with my husband..you know I could, you know, converse with him and be on his level type of thing...mindst you, I suppose I haven't sat and read like he has, he reads hours, you know, about goodness knows what.

This woman, a self defined full-time housewife, implicitly suggests the way in which women are ideologically placed by the notion of the 'feminine career', and its limitations; her ambitions to write a childrens' book were not to seek external recognition necessarily, but to show her family that she could do something too. Her aspirations in this respect have been deflected onto the necessity for her to learn how to operate a word processor, but furthermore, to break into the masculine world of the computer and the 'knowledge' which she sees her husband as possessing. This woman goes into the library with her children and sees childrens' books and thinks to herself, 'I could write something better than that', but at home the possibility of her writing a book is, paradoxically, undermined by her ignorance of computer technology. This particular kind of technology therefore is used in these two homes as a symbol of technological and intellectual ability. Indisputably male territory to which women can only gain entry via their husband.

One of the 'calculated ignorance' strategists referring to the more mundane example of changing a plug claimed that this kind of technical knowledge 'makes the men feel superior' and she, for one, was willing to be complicit in this state of affairs. Although less explicit, both C1/3 and C1/5 do not in any way seriously challenge that male superiority.

Although, as reported earlier, the majority of the women did not operate the timer functions on the video, the reasons they gave for this and its implications are complex and far reaching. I have discussed the right to time, but it is also clear that the 'cleverness' or 'superior knowledge' which the males are able to

accrue enables them to maintain their position of authority and superiority in the eyes of many of the women.

Most VCRs and many television receivers are supplied with a 'remote control' unit which facilitates the changing of channels and the operation of record and playback of the VCR from 'the comfort of your own armchair' (Sony VCR manual). Indeed, compact disc players and other video/sound systems are now also supplied with this facility. The remote control unit itself assumes a single viewer/controller, but very often, of course, several members of the household will be watching television or video at the same time. The majority of my respondents reported that, if they were in the television room, then the male members of the household, either father or son, would invariably hold the remote control:

C1/3: Oh, he has that - I never know what I'm watching half the time, we'll be watching one thing, then he flicks over to something else, it drives me mad.

A/2: Yes now this is interesting, when we sit down to watch the video with some specific programme in mind that we know is on the video, James tends to have the remote control, and I spit with rage at his flicking from thing to thing instead of locating on what it was we wanted to watch.

A/1: Well, it tends to be Peter [son] who grabs it; I never do that, it usually tends to be Peter or Phillip, [husband] not me who operates it. But, I mean, there's a wail of protest if someone's watching something [laugh].

C1/6: Tony [husband] likes to play with it, he likes to sit and play flicking around from channel to channel.

This male domination of the remote control unit has also been noted by Dave Morley in his study of families in London's East End and observed by Peter Collett when he video taped households watching television.' This obviously has ramifications for control over the

the selection of material to be viewed, a topic already discussed in Chapter 3.

What of the women who did regularly operate the video recorder? One of these, a young woman teacher married to an often out of work actor, had already owned a video recorder when living alone. She therefore was quite at ease with all functions of the recorder, and often used VCRs in connection with her work. However, even her case is not straightforward;

Q: Who sets the pre-recorder?

C1/6: Well, whoever's in [If you're both in?] I'd probably let Tony do it. I mean if he was upstairs, I'd do it, but if he was in the same room as me I'd probably say 'do that'. I can do it, but I'd rather sit and watch him do it, in the same way that I would always sit in the passenger seat of the car, because I'd much rather be driven, and I would sit in a chair and say 'would you get me a drink'. I like to have things done for me.

This partnership was unusual in the sample in that she was the main regular earner. C1/6 and her husband 'shared' most household tasks; shopping, cooking and washing, but in fact, because of his irregular employment he did most of the domestic work. However, she shows her desire to maintain some distinction, or 'return' to more traditional male/female roles where he does things for her. But this could well be the effects of a rather complicated 'barter' system within which she was usually in credit because her full time work enabled him to pursue his rather uncertain career.

Of the four other video competent women, two were unmarried women living with their parents (D/3 and E/1) who had been the instigators behind the video rental - here age is an important factor.

E/1: My Dad won't touch it at all, he gets me to set the timer for him...I think he's scared of blowing himself up, he goes mad if I ask him to touch it.

One was a divorcee living with her grown up daughters and occasionally her boyfriend. She did, however, admit to not using the timer switch very often although she did know how to operate it;

E/2: I'm good at fiddling, I didn't look at the book, I just worked it out as it came, I'm quite good at fiddling like that.

The young full-time married mother, C2/5, was totally in command of the video recorder. In fact, before beginning our discussions she set the timer to record a programme she would be missing because I was there. Her husband never used the video;

C1/5: Occasionally he'll say will you record something if he knows its on, but that is sort of my department [pointing to the video] is the television and the video.

Q: How did you learn how to do it?

C1/5: Well the man who brought it showed me, but it didn't really sink in I don't suppose, and then I learnt from the book. Andrew still can't operate the timer and everything, but its just because he hasn't sat down and worked it out, he just leaves it to me, it's easy.

Here we have a male partner who makes no claims to technical knowledge of the VCR and his partner experienced no difficulty in studying and applying the manual to the operating procedures.

Very few women experienced any kind of 'block' with, say, the hi-fi or cassette players, and many of them used these machines quite often. Those women who used them very regularly expressed a keen enjoyment in listening to music, some taping off the radio, others playing records or tapes during the day or if they were on their own in the house in the evening. The pleasure that these women gained from listening to music seems to have been a motivating factor in learning how to operate the equipment, but in general they considered hi-fi's and cassette players to be much easier to use than the VCR.

C2/1: Well we've always had one [cassette player] at home.. its just the video

B/1: I make up a tape for myself with the songs that I like. Usually on a Sunday when the Top Twenty's on, I record the songs that I like.

We have already noted that this woman (B/1) does not work the video and is 'not that interested really' in recording off television, but will regularly record music onto a sound tape. She often sits in the same room as the family whilst they are watching television:

B/1: No, I never sit anywhere else. I always sit where the television is..I can read, or I put a record or tape on and sit with the headphones on and totally ignore the lot of them [laugh] I sit and listen to music.

However, some of the women experienced difficulties with the more technologically advanced pieces of entertainment equipment in their houses, often referring to these as 'gadgets':

C1/7: We've got so many gadgets in this house you see..so many radios, computer radios where you punch a thing in and it goes to the station, but I live with it and, well, I feel as if its nothing to do with me. Not that I'm frightened of it, I think being in an all male household it's rubbed off, I carry a screwdriver, I can fix plugs and if anything's broken I can do it. But I don't know whether its easier not to do things yourself, or whether I see men doing it so much, messing about with the electrical things, soldering irons and that. And I think I could do it just as good as they can..I think I could work all these radios and things, and do the timer on the video.

This woman is a teacher in a large inner city middle school where she regularly operates a VCR and tape cassettes as part of her job. At home, living with her two grown up sons and husband she feels as if 'its nothing to do with me' and, indeed, doesn't work the timer on the video recorder. She realises, of course, that she can, or could do it, but within the household there seems to be an assumption about what men do which is carried over into practice.

This is confirmed by Cynthia Cockburn's research in which she notes that some women who work with technology and/or 'tools' in paid work outside the home relinquish this expertise to their male partners in the home. (Cockburn 1985, p.219).

Many of the households had more than one television set. The 'main' colour television and VCR were mostly in the sitting room with portables in either the kitchen or bedroom. Some of these 'second' televisions were complicated and also presented problems in their operation;

D/1: The TV in our bedroom is one of these really complicated things which is TV, radio, cassette player and an alarm thing in it..I don't know how to switch the TV on its got so many knobs and things on it, and its also got a peculiar switch whereby it'll switch off after an hour and I'm forever in the middle of watching something and it goes off..you've to get out of bed and work out how to switch it back on again...its probably because I've never bothered to say, look just show me how to do this...erm.. then on the occasions that you have to do it, I'll fiddle around and not remember what I've done the next time... I'm the same with the alarm clock, setting it or changing the setting..you see I haven't done it that number of times that I can remember..I think it is the number of times you do it.

It appears that older pieces of equipment and perhaps those with which the women were familiar before their current domestic circumstances, present no problem in terms of operation. Added to this are motivational factors, such as, wanting to record music, or, in some specific circumstances, wanting to record TV programmes off air, which will be sufficient reason for the women to become familiar with the machines, and to use them regularly enough to achieve ease of operation. On the other hand, the newer and, almost by definition, more 'complicated' or technologically advanced pieces of entertainment equipment tend to be off-putting for women and they are largely the 'preserve' of the adult male or children of

the household. In some of the households there is a reproduction of 'appropriate' tasks with the children:

Q: What about your children, how do they use the video recorder?

B/1: Erm..my son, erm..well if his dad is out on business and can't get back for a certain programme, I mean, he knows it all, he's been primed..so when father's not there my son takes over.

Q: What about the girls?

B/1: My youngest daughter definitely not, but my eldest daughter, yes, she knows how to work it, yes, but there again if she wants anything recording she'll ask her brother, you know, she won't be bothered. If he's not here she'll do it, but she'll say to him 'will you record so and so' if he's in.

These women, of course, routinely operate quite sophisticated pieces of technology in the course of their domestic work: washing machines, cookers, micro-waves, food mixers, sewing machines, etc. Almost all the women were perfectly at ease with these machines and most registered surprise when they were referred to as technology. The one exception to this was a woman in Group A who had adopted a 'Luddite' attitude towards technology in general and resisted what she saw as the pressure to technologise the home. She believed this to be 'technology for its own sake' and, rather than simplifying households tasks it had the effect of making them much more complicated. However, the rest of the women did not appear to share this view and when new equipment had been purchased they had read through manuals and instruction books and had quickly become familiar users. In the majority of cases, their male partners had not staked their claim to this knowledge, leaving the women to work things out 'for themselves'. This is important for two main reasons. Firstly, it is an indication of assumptions about appropriate 'female' technology and secondly, when knowledge or expertise is not rendered 'masculine' then the women appear to have a less problematic relationship with technology.



We noted that the video recorder timer switch seemed to present the biggest difficulties for the women, although many of their cookers also had a time-setting function. The women used this facility without difficulty, but very few of the men could operate the cooker timer, e.g.:

Q: Do you have technology in your kitchen?

B/6: Mmm..well..yees..

Q: Does your cooker have a timer?

B/6: Yes, it does, I'm quite happy with that.

Q: Does your husband operate the cooker timer?

B/6: Only the minute timer, not the pre-set timer..he uses it so he doesn't forget something that's on, but if we were going out and I was putting something in the oven to cook for when we got back, that would be my job.

D/1: He can't set the timer on the cooker [laugh] its disgusting.

A/1: When I went away we discovered that my husband didn't know how to operate the timer on the oven.

This is a glaring example of the gendered division of labour which has nothing to do with technological competence but everything to do with social use. However, it goes further than this in that the fact that the men cannot work the cooker timer is not seen by the women as evidence of their technological incompetence in the way they are often made to feel incompetent, or feel themselves to be inadequate, if they cannot operate the video timer. It seems that womens' technical competences are rendered invisible with the invisibility of their domestic work. A/1 for example, argues that it is her husband's lack of time which leads to his lack of expertise in the kitchen, whereas she felt that her own lack of expertise with the video recorder was due to her laziness, or 'natural' lack of technical competence.

## Decisions to have a VCR

As already indicated in this chapter, the decision-making processes which led to the rental/purchase of a VCR are of interest, partly, as we have seen, because it is the instigator who is more likely to have a knowledge of the workings of the VCR, but also because he/she also has a vested interest in demonstrating the value and usefulness of the machine, thereby justifying the decision. To look at the kinds of negotiations which preceded the acquisition of the VCR, and the positions taken by the various actors involved, is to place the women's uses of and attitudes to the VCR within a particular context.

### Group A/B

For the two women at the 'top' of the sample the decision to buy the VCR was their husbands' but, in both cases, this was because there was, as A/2 put it, some 'daft money' available. Here is A/1's account of the background to the purchase:

A/1: We don't make decisions in a very organised way we tend to make spontaneous decisions. My husband earned a bit of extra money and we decided that we'd spend it on that for Christmas. So it was really like most of our decisions are, fairly spontaneous.

Q: You got it at Christmas-time?

A/1: Yes, we got it just before Christmas..but we've just bought a CD player and we did that spontaneously, nothing to do with Christmas. I suppose its a privileged thing to be able to do in this world. But we do tend to do it spontaneously rather than sort of plan things. We have a sort of feeling that grows up..we'd like this thing..and when there seems to be enough..we tend to buy it but it's not rigorously planned.

Whilst A/1 implied that the decision to buy the VCR at Christmas was coincidental, as we shall see this is a popular time for VCR

acquisition. However, A/1 distances herself from the Christmas-factor and reveals her rationalisation of the purchase of entertainment hardware. She implies freedom of individual choice; in her words, a spontaneous purchase, rather than something thought through and planned. In this way the desire for consumer durables is made to seem a 'natural' phenomenon, one which is in their control and does not appear to be imposed from outside, e.g. advertising, friends, etc.

More specifically, her husband bought the machine, and:

A/1: Well, my husband tends to mostly operate it anyway, still. I don't know why, but it just tends to be he does.

A/2 reported a similar pattern of events, from decision to purchase, to use:

A/2: James was working in the University and he was the University's 1% cut and he was paid off in effect, he got redundancy pay, and this resulted in everybody getting redundancy presents. Including the second house in the country and including this new television and the video..it was..you know..there was suddenly some daft money and, you know..it was his choice to buy it, it wouldn't have entered into my scheme of things.

Q: Can you remember the early days of having it, how it was used?

A/2: I don't know that I can really.

Q: Who works it?

A/2: He does, did and does..I can, but I don't and I mean my competence with it is, I have to refer to the manual all the time, I can't remember how to do it.

The A/3 household had come to a joint decision to rent their video at Christmas time. This acted as a stimulus in speeding up their decision to rent because of the 'good films' on at that time which they anticipated recording. A/4's husband, on the other hand, had

a work-related reason for the purchase of the VCR, but, as she pointed out, her house is full of 'gadgets'

A/4: We've got several tape recorders, we've got an early Sinclair computer and a later Sinclair computer, certainly a wireless for each room..it's just that we've always had video recorders before anybody else had video recorders..the only thing we haven't got is a compact disc player..but that's just because we'd just bought a whole new stereo system. But we bought a video recorder. We were working for the Open University at the time and he made this great case that we really needed a video recorder so we could watch our programmes, and we didn't watch many OU programmes.

At another point in the interview I asked her why they had got the video, she replied:

A/4: Because George loves gadgets. He bought it, I wouldn't have bought it, but then he buys all those things. I buy silly things.

Q: You buy silly things?

A/4: Well sometimes. I like buying furniture we probably don't need, he likes buying gadgets - he bought the micro-wave for the kitchen..I would choose to spend money on furniture, on the house and on the garden - what he thinks of as being very sensible things, but it's just as silly as buying gadgets, it's just what you choose to spend money on.

For three of the B women, the reasons for the decision to purchase the VCR had resulted in the women being marginal to its use. B/4 and B/1 were 'not interested' in getting a video, although their husbands and family were very keen. B/1 felt that her husband and family were already watching too much television :

Q: Were you in favour of getting the video?

B/1: No. I was dead against it until The Royal Wedding. That's where I slipped up you see. I said I would love that, you know, for posterity, to have..and he said, right..I'll go and get a

video recorder and you shall have it [laugh] and that's what he did.

Q: And have you still got it?

B/1: Yes, I have and I haven't watched it since, but it's there.

B/1 hardly ever records things - 'I don't even know how to work the thing properly' - and whilst her husband's case for getting the video was that he would be able to record things and therefore go out more with her, this hadn't actually happened. In effect, he has ended up watching more:

B/1: Well because he records..there's always something on the other side he wants to watch, so he'll watch one channel, record the other side, and then he has a backlog of things that he's got to sit and watch, so even when..like Monday night is very bad on television, there's nothing really on, but he's got a backlog of stuff that he wants to watch, so...

Similarly, B/4, whose teen-age children were the main instigators of the purchase, rarely uses the video recorder and is not interested in its use.

The prime motivation for B/6's purchase of a video recorder was the purchase of a video camera to record their children:

B/6: Roger had been toying with the idea of getting a camera for some while and eventually we bought it to coincide with the second daughter..so..that was the incidental reason for it, although I suppose we do use the video for recording.

Whilst they did use the video, as we have seen in the previous chapter, B/6 did not feel it was 'her territory' - her husband operated the camera and tended to dominate the use of the video recorder.

B/3 who had a very young baby reported that they had got the video because they couldn't go out as much as they used to and that this had been a joint decision.

B/5 was very keen to get a video and its purchase was part of a bargain:

B/5: We needed a new television and my husband said, right, we'll have one with Teletext. I said, well, if you're having your Teletext, I'm having a video.

Q: Why did you want a video?

B/5: Well, because of the things he used to watch. Say, for instance, *Match of the Day* on a Saturday night, well, there could be, as I recall, *Tales of the Unexpected* on the other side which I enjoyed, but because I got my own way so much during the week, I thought, well it's only fair to let him watch *Match of the Day* in colour. Now, I would either take the television up to bed in the winter, or I'd go in the kitchen and watch..and it's damned uncomfortable in the kitchen and I don't always particularly want to be in bed. You know, watching television, particularly because I fall asleep, you know, if I take the television to bed I've really..it's got to be really something special that keeps me awake to watch it, so that's the reason I wanted a video.

B/5 is a keen video user and so is her husband, although he was not in favour of having a VCR; his reaction to her wanting a video was 'you watch enough rubbish already', associating the VCR with entertainment as against 'his' Teletext, the provider of information

#### Group C

Over half of the women in this group reported that their husband's had decided to buy/rent the VCR, e.g.:

C2/2: It was my husband really wanted it in the first place. I honestly didn't think we'd watch it. I mean we do. But all the time I thought, oh we don't really need one.

Three of these were nominally 'bought for the children at Christmas', but since eight of the households in group C had young children, it is not surprising that economic factors and lack of freedom to go out were motivating elements in this group:

C2/4: He bought a video because we couldn't afford to go to the pictures. It was expensive when there's five of us going.

The other factor for two of the women was the fact that they worked in the evening and it meant that they didn't miss their favourite programmes (soap opera):

C2/1: He decided he wanted a video, he's wanted one since a couple of year ago and I said no..I'm not interested. But then when I started on in the evenings..he says well, we can get one now because then I can tape *Coronation Street* for when I'm at work..so I wouldn't be without it now.

C2/5 was the instigator of the purchase of the VCR, but this came about when she had to go to work in the evenings:

C2/5: I went back to work, er, about 14 months since and I got it for that really because I'm an avid soap opera fan, and I didn't want to..I only worked two nights a week, but I didn't want to miss everything so with the added income I decided to get a video.

The acquisition of VCR's by friends and colleagues was an important additional factor behind the decisions in this group. VCR-related talk became a feature at work, in the neighbourhood and at social gatherings and in this way information about the advantages of the VCR is shared and non-owners can rapidly be persuaded to become owners:

C2/04: Well, they were all getting them where he works, and he thought it would be a good idea.

C1/05: I think Megan was the first to get one round here and, you know..well that persuaded us really. Most people have got 'em now.

Of the others in this group three said that their grown-up sons or daughters had initiated the acquisition of the VCR and two declared that it had been a joint decision to purchase the machine. These were C1/3 and C1/6 - full-time workers, married but with no children.

#### Group D/E

Two of the women in this group were under 21 and living with their parents. Although one had a job, working in a supermarket, and the other was unemployed, they both had a very limited amount of money to spend on 'going out' and lived in an area which, as far as they were concerned, offered very little in the way of entertainment. D/3, the one in employment said:

D/3: There's nothing to do..I think it's with not many of us having much money and it costing so much to go out, I think that's the reason. I don't go out during the week, unless it's a special occasion, I mean there's not much going off, except pubs that are open..it's a shame though because we're only twenty one and we've no life. Really.

E/01, unemployed, was also short of cash and both these women went to the cinema very infrequently:

E/1: I think I've been once so far this year. I went about twice last year. It's only if there's a film that I really want to watch and usually my sister goes with me because we both like the same kind of films, but normally we can get a video and watch it at home, all the family can watch it together.

D/3: Sometimes, on Monday nights we'll go 'cos it's only a pound in for any age, and if there's a decent film on we'll go, but there haven't been many films. We go see cartoons and weepies, that's all we do. I sometimes take my sister, or sometimes go with people from work if they want to go see it as well.



The main reason given by D/3 for renting a VCR was that there was nothing good on television during the week when she had to stay in:

D/3: My life's more or less come home, have my tea, watch television and go to bed about nine o'clock and I was just getting fed up and all my friends, well some of my friends at work have got videos and they were saying, oh I watched so and so video this week, and it was really good and I thought, well if they're watching all them films and there's nothing on television, I might get one.

Again this is evidence, as in the previous group, of peer group pressure to acquire a VCR. However, she found hiring films from the video library often beyond her means:

D/3: I haven't watched one for a while, it's just a matter of going down and getting one, I'm a bit skint you see..they cost a pound to one pound fifty; it isn't much, but with me going out on Saturday and Sunday and spending more money than what I intended..I haven't been able to afford one and my dinners at work has cost me a bit more, and I've got some new things, new clothes, there are a few new films, but not many that interest me, so I think that's the reason.

Unlike D/3, E/1 found that there were lots of programmes on television that interested her and that she wanted to record. Her married sister and brother both had a VCR and she found she was constantly asking them to record things for her. She therefore managed to persuade her father to rent a machine:

E/1: Well, my brother had his video for about a year and a half, and my sister had had hers for nearly a year and I had some tapes at her house, you see, and I used to ring her up and say..oh quick, you know, put the tape in, I want this taping and..I don't know, I think my Dad got fed up with the 'phone bill and I kept saying, you know, it's wonderful, you'll be able to sit here with all your cowboy films on a Saturday..so I kind of persuaded my Dad to get it.

Both these women were the dominant users in the household and both claimed to use it more for hiring films than recording off-air.

D/2 reported that they wanted a VCR mainly for recording:

D/2: The Olympics were coming on and I was working in the evening, and my husband would tape things we could watch together when I came home.

Q: Can you remember who's idea it was to get the video?

D/2: Well, my husband had seen one and we talked about it and said, yes..when they first came out we said, no..because what was the point if you wanted to watch something, if you were out you'd stop in and watch it, if you really wanted to watch it..but then I started working evenings and he found out what it was like looking after three kids [laugh] that clinched it.

E/2, a casual worker, living with her two teenage daughters reported:

E/2: I think it was the fact that the girls were always going over to Mary's boyfriends to watch films over there, erm..and coming up to Christmas, that sort of thing..they were keen on it and it was them who bought all the tapes when we got it..then it died off then it went back to Mum.

### Summary

It would seem that class and education are not significant variables in attitudes towards technology in the home. Gender is the key determinant in the use of and expertise in specific pieces of domestic equipment. This in turn can be seen to relate to the gendered division of labour within the home and its associated technology.

Jonathan Gershuny has created an index showing the extent to which different pieces of domestic technology are used by women and men. (Gershuny 1982) Using time-budget survey data he found that the

men in his study mainly used equipment like electric drills and electric saws to perform one-off jobs with a highly visible end product. The women used technology for the execution of day to day chores, the end products of which are usually immediately consumed, such as the cooker, the washing machine, the iron, etc. Also, Gershuny notes that the more 'hi-tech' a device is, the more likely it is to be male dominated in its use. His study indicates that entertainment technology falls within a neutral cluster, being neither female nor male specific. Unfortunately, he does not include the VCR amongst this equipment, but we can see that most of the women in the study do not feel proficient in the operation of the VCR, and in particular with the time-switch for pre-setting recordings.

Advertisements for domestic and entertainment technology often imply a male or female operative through both visual and textual codes. Early advertisements for the VCR stressed its 'hi-tech' nature, were very rarely seen in a domestic setting, and emphasised technical complexity in its use and operation. In an interview during August 1987 with Mastercare Ltd., a follow-up service agency for VCR's, I discovered that a very high percentage of call-outs for engineers resulted from malfunctions of timer mechanisms, largely due to user error. This led to design changes and a number of campaigns stressing the simplicity rather than the complexity of time-switch mechanisms and, significantly, women were often represented as operatives in these advertisements. Conversely, micro-wave cookers have been marketed on their simplicity, but here the operatives are male: 'so simple even men can use it!' (Hitachi advertisement, 1987).

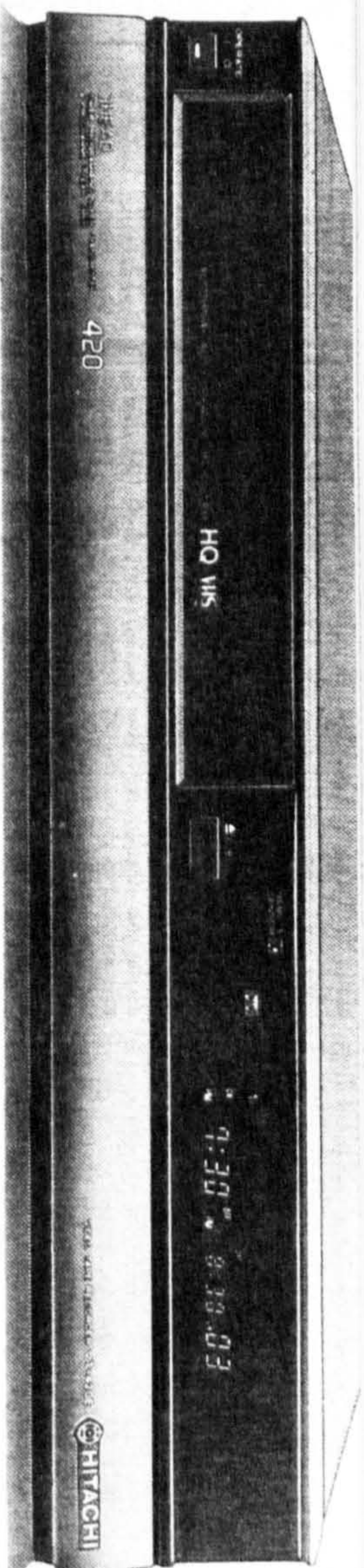
The ways in which consumers are addressed through advertisements on television, in the press, and in magazines would seem to have an 'effect' in terms of the assumed knowledge and use of specific pieces of equipment in the home. This places women at a disadvantage with regard to use of the VCR, and those members of the

The Hitachi Autosensor  
So simple even men can use it.



COOKING HAS NEVER BEEN SIMPLER. JUST POP THE FOOD IN, SELECT ONE OF THE AUTOSENSOR SETTINGS, PRESS START AND SIT BACK. NO NEED TO WORK OUT TIMINGS, NO NEED TO WEIGH ANYTHING. THE HITACHI AUTOSENSOR DOES IT ALL FOR YOU. WITH SIMPLY PERFECT RESULTS.

*...better buy Hitachi.*



## MADDE EVEN SIMPLER.

Take the principle of the traditional bookmark, apply it to video recording and you have just one of the brilliant ideas that make the new Hitachi video range with transmitter so advanced yet so simple to use.

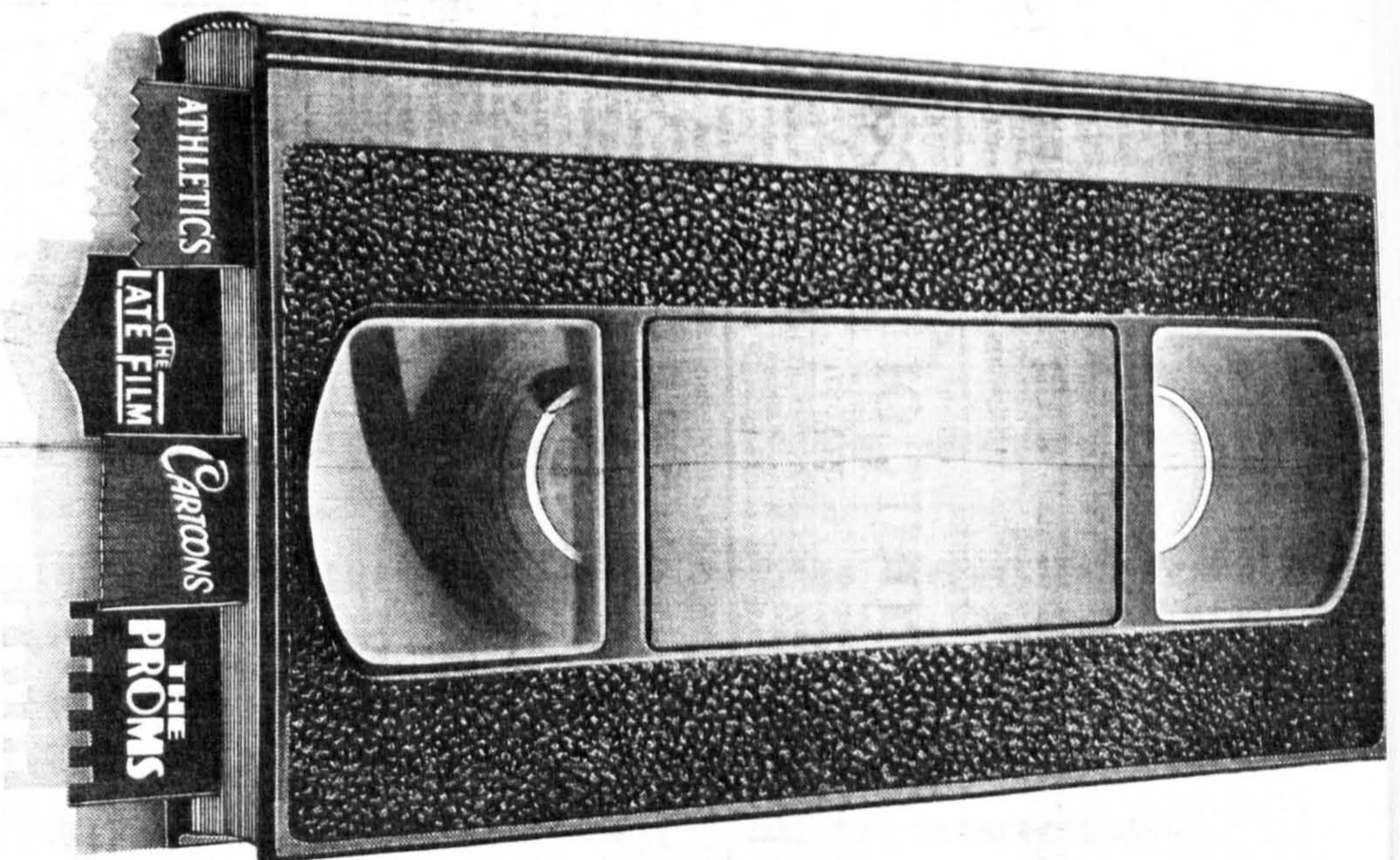
**Armchair programming with the Hitachi Transmitter.** The Transmitter hand unit gives you every facility by remote control... even programming.

**Super Indexer.** Every time you press the record button on the Transmitter, an 'electronic' bookmark is transmitted onto the tape.

Simply tap in your instructions into the transmitter, check each step on the visual display unit, then just point and press to transmit them to the recorder's memory.

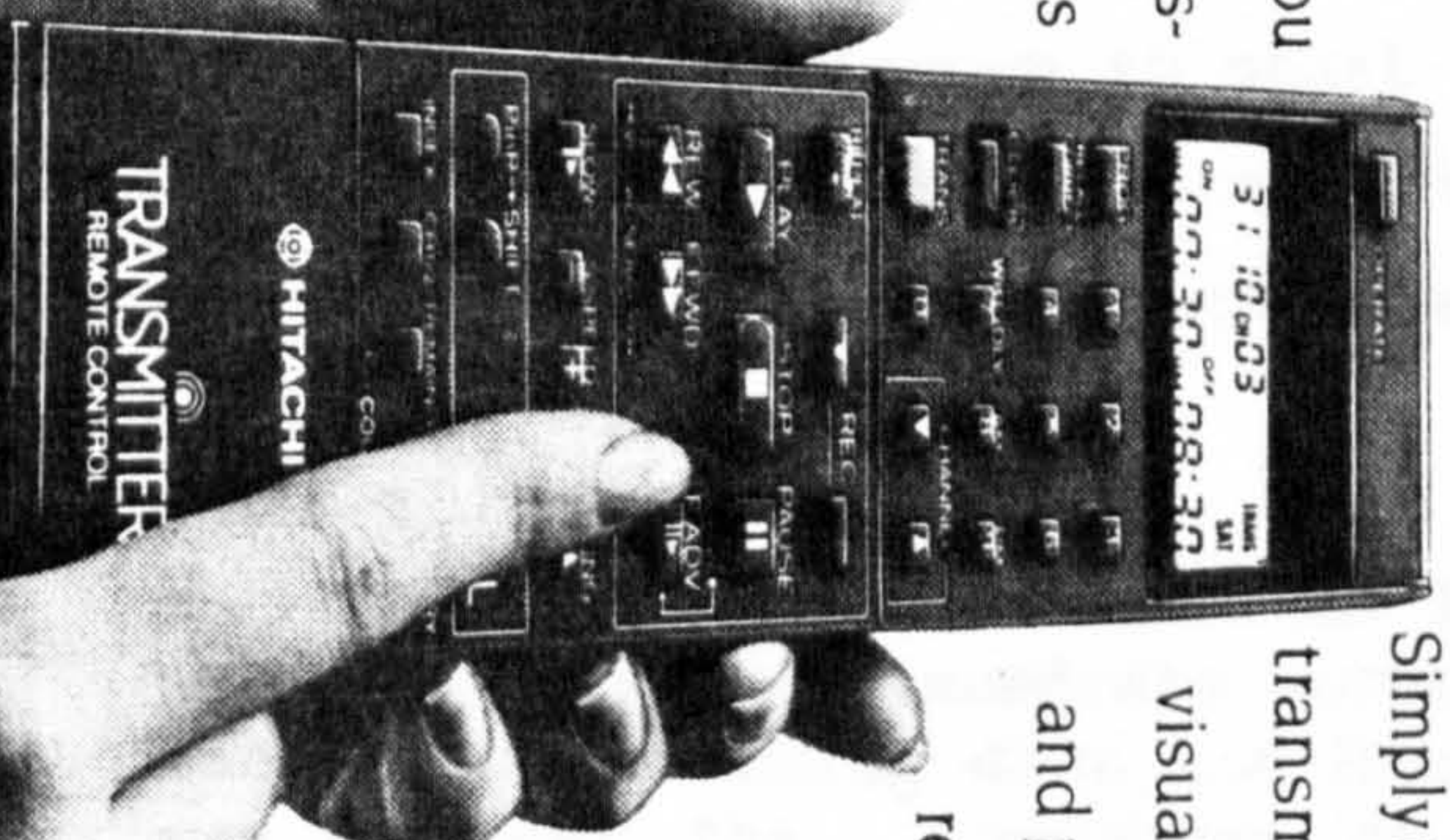
So when you want to find a recording in the middle of a 3-hour tape, Super Indexer runs at 40 times normal speed to the start of each programme, automatically.

Total remote control video. Lay back and think of Hitachi. For more information on the Hitachi video range and the name of your nearest dealer ring 01-200 0200.



# A SIMPLE IDEA.

...*better buy Hitachi.*



 HITACHI

household who have time to become VCR competent tend to dominate its use.

The majority of the women, were persuaded into the purchase or rental of the VCR by their partners. This makes sense given gender specific concepts of 'spare time' in the home and the targetting of advertising campaigns. The men were looking towards further home entertainment and leisure provision for which the women themselves could see no need. Their spare time is limited, and the VCR is conceived as needing time for its use. It is interesting, however, that some of the men managed to persuade their reluctant partners by convincing them that they did have a need for the VCR. Consent was also often won by virtue of an 'event'. Christmas was the most common, but public events such as a royal wedding and the Olympics were also cited as key factors in the eventual decision.

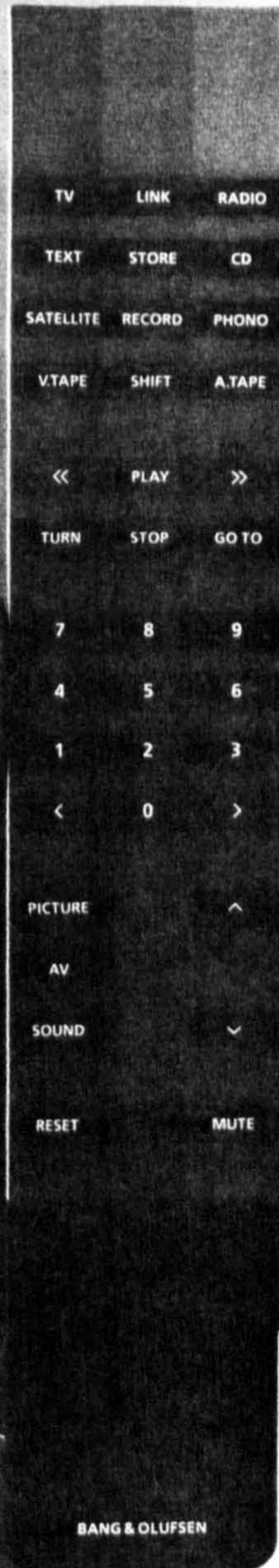
There is also evidence, particularly in the C/D/E groups, of access to a VCR becoming the norm in social and work groups and an important part of conversational currency. In the A/B Groups this dimension was not explicitly stated. However, the fact that available disposable income is spent on the VCR, rather than on any other product or service, indicates their awareness of the product. Simon Frith has plotted the consumer's gradual approach to this moment of acquisition:

We read of new devices that cost huge amounts of money and seem to have no immediate purpose; we follow reports of the prices coming down and domestic value going up; we see or hear the machines at work for richer or more foolish friends; we find ourselves thinking one day 'if only I could do that', and then the price or rental costs suddenly seem right, we get the equipment for ourselves and soon can't live without it. (Frith 1988 p 91)

It is the case, however, that for some of the households the VCR was seen as a 'necessity', mainly because of lack of disposable income for trips to the cinema, and/or because of the presence of children.

There is thus a marked difference between households in the A group, for whom the VCR was thought of as an indulgence or 'impulse' buy, the purchase of which was made possible by available 'extra' cash, and the C/D/E households for whom the purchase/rent of a VCR was a major item to be carefully considered and 'planned'.

Radio on.  
Desert Island Discs.  
Radio off.  
CD on.  
Ride of the Valkyrie.  
CD (quickly) off.  
Phono on.  
Tina Turner.  
Phono (later) off.  
Video on.  
Annie Hall.  
Video (much later) off.  
TV on.  
Darts Championship.  
turn over...





## 6 THE VCR : TIME-SHIFT

A/2: I think when we did attempt to watch Laurence Olivier's *King Lear* we watched that at a fairly fast pace [laugh] edited highlights..[laugh]

All the households in the sample had access to a VCR. About two thirds had purchased a machine, the rest paid a monthly rental. Although there were rented machines in each of the categories, they tended to cluster in the lower income group; for example, out of the 6 households in the D/E group, only one machine had been purchased. Over half the households had owned/rented a VCR for more than two years at the time of the interviews. With the exception of two women all my respondents were interviewed at home and in all those cases the VCR was installed in the main living room of the house along with the colour television. Similarly, over half the sample had a second television, usually a portable black and white set kept in the kitchen or the bedroom. At the time of the interviews, four households also had a home computer.

There are two major uses to which a VCR can be put: recording from broadcast/narrowcast television for viewing at a different time, commonly known as time-shifting; playing pre-recorded tapes. This chapter deals with time-shifting and the organisation of off-air recordings.

### Recording Off-air - Time shift.

This application is obviously intimately bound up with broadcast television which makes it necessary to examine the ways in which television figures within the cultures of the different households, and how the women themselves feel about television, as such considerations have a direct bearing on VCR use. A commitment to television viewing as a valued and pleasurable activity is often a

prerequisite of regular time-shifting and, as we have already seen, this commitment was not shared by all the women. Whilst our major concern is with the way in which the women themselves use the VCR, we will also report on their accounts of how other members of the household use this facility.

#### Group A/B

Without exception the A women regarded television as a 'last resort' activity which came fairly well down on their list of priorities of things to do. A/1 told me about their viewing habits:

A/1: He [husband] finds serious programmes disappointing...virtually given up watching them..we only watch television sometimes about three hours a week, if that..in fact some weeks we don't watch it that.

At another point in the interview, however, she distanced herself from the rest of the family's viewing habits:

A/1: I don't like television very much. I only watch what I want to watch and when the rest of them are watching television and I don't want to watch it I'll go out of the room, or ignore it.

Some of the women in this group tended to watch television when they were too tired to do anything else:

A/4: We both watch television if we're fed up; if we're both really exhausted, what you do is you come home, make a gin and tonic and you sit and watch the telly and it's great; and you sit - that's how I think of the telly. It's there to absorb you when you just want to forget.

A/3: If I'm tired I'd probably watch television.

All the women in this group claimed that their use of the time-shift facility was to record distinctive programmes or films, commonly referred to as 'classics' or 'quality' products. This often posed the problem of finding time to watch:

A/1: Well, you do end up of course with a lot of unwatched videos..er..we watch when we have a spare evening and there's nothing going on and you look through what you've got, that's how it happens. For example, I'm still..it was on about a month since, a play called *Death is Part of the Process*, I'm still waiting to watch the second half of that which I'll watch on my own because my husband won't be interested. So I'm waiting for an evening when he's not in to watch that..I'll probably watch that on Friday evening.

Q: Do you generally find it difficult to keep up with tapes?

A/1: It depends how committed we are, we got quite committed to *Blott on the Landscape*, but I think what happens is, that if you're out and you miss an episode, if you watch it when you come in at half past eleven, say, then you watch it..you see *Blott on the Landscape* was on on a Wednesday, and I'm out that night..so he recorded it and we watched it together at half past eleven. But if we didn't do that, it then becomes difficult to fit that episode in, if you don't instantly watch it, then you often lose the serial. You see, quite often I read the book and then it doesn't matter if I miss an episode. I've read the book for all the serials I've watched.

We can see from A/1's description two distinct functions of time-shifting; short term and medium term (there is also a long term function, archiving, with which will be dealt with later in this chapter). These different functions are distinguished by the perceived pressure to view. The short term function reflects the viewer's desire to keep up with a serial or series, and thus viewing is necessary before the next episode otherwise, as A/1 reports 'you often lose the serial'. A/1's example of recording a one-off play is a medium term operation where pressure to view is less acute and the replay can be fitted in when she has some spare-time and when her husband is out of the house. This medium term function tends to create its own pressure made manifest in the 'unwatched tapes' which pile up as evidence of intentions not achieved.

For A/2 the original motive for purchasing a VCR was medium term use:

A/2 The aim is, and it's been reasonably well achieved, the aim is to use the video to assemble some stuff that you want to watch, and then watch it, set aside an evening and watch it and in the winter particularly we got quite close to doing that.

But A/2 went on to say:

A/2: How it was used originally...the view was that a vast library of pirated films was going to be built up from TV and watched, that was planned at the outset, but it became rather random very rapidly thereafter.

This was partly due to the time factor:

A/2: I think there comes a point where there is more to be watched than time to watch it and there doesn't seem to be much point in going on recording them.

I asked A/2 if she had recorded anything other than films:

A/2: Mmm..we have recorded..we gather up..things that I like watching are *Minder* and *Hill Street Blues* and stuff, we'll generally record those and watch them later..erm..odd bits of documentaries, erm..sporting things sometimes..less so this year, but in previous years we've recorded the cricket highlights, you know..they tend to be on late in the evening, and watch them the following day..erm..erm..I can't think of precise instances.

Q: Have you recorded serials?

A/2: We did erm..record *The Jewel in the Crown* I think and watched that later, but I haven't watched any series. Sarah, my daughter, records..what is it she watches?..*EastEnders*, I think, and watches that, but we haven't gathered up a whole series, we're not systematic really.

A/4 stated that the short term function was hardly ever used, not even for her beloved *Star Trek*:

A/4: I mean, if we go out, well we miss it, and very rarely do we record something, certainly I wouldn't record *Star Trek* if I was going out. I might record a film I particularly wanted to watch.

She did, however, record *Star Trek* if she was in, because at that time she would be putting the children to bed - she would then watch it later the same evening. Again, major use was as a medium term source of films and some work-related documentary programmes, recorded via the timer if they were out.

Across Group A the dominant pattern is of medium term viewing, but this is often not actually achieved. There was also a distinct bias towards what were described as 'quality' programmes and films as well as educational material recorded for their children. We will return to this topic in the section dealing with long term archiving of tapes.

Three of the women in Group B seemed to be on the margins of the household's television/video decision-making processes. For B/1 this appeared to be a positive choice. She was asked if she ever recorded things:

B/1: Never, No. I'm not that inclined, or that interested really..there aren't many programmes that interest me really that's why I've never involved myself in it really.

B/1's husband was a very keen television watcher and used the VCR as an extension of television, recording one programme whilst watching another and consequently watching more television than before. He would plan very carefully:

Q: Is he very methodical about it?

B/1: Yes.

Q: He records things and then watches them?

B/1: Yes, definitely..I mean he might have them for a very long time, but he'll always watch them.

B/1 reported that, in fact, her husband watched more television as a result of having the VCR. As we have seen elsewhere, she begrudged it and felt that it 'kept them in' more than she would like.

For B/4 and B/6 the marginality was more by default than a positive decision, mainly due to lack of planning. B/4 was asked if there were any programmes which she watched:

B/4: No, no not really, no..I wouldn't stop what I was doing, I miss an awful lot of things, erm..simply because I happen to be upstairs and get carried away and I come down and whatever it is is on or my husband has been watching..I don't really..well I don't look through the books to see what's on, so if I find out later I'm a little bit annoyed and it's a case of 'why didn't you remind me, I should have watched this' you know, erm..and he says 'well the books are there you know..you choose your programmes'. This is why we have the other television, you know, so that we can each watch what we want or record something, but then again, the recording part ..it's finding time to watch it when you've recorded it and that can cause problems, you know.

B/4 records for her children. Did she ever recorded anything for herself?

B/4: No not really for myself, it's mostly for..I might put it on for the children really.

She said that her eighteen year old daughter used the video recorder most mainly because she was out of the house a lot:

B/4: I would say my daughter really, you know, she's out a lot and er..she's ..it's always lit up when she's gone out, you know..she's always put something on to record.

Q: When does she watch the tapes?

B/4: It's usually late, and to everybody's annoyance, she manages to watch what she's recorded, yes.

B/4's lack of opportunity to plan an evening's viewing for herself meant that she tended to 'watch what's on':

B/4: Well, it's on on an evening, but I wouldn't say that I really watch. I can't really concentrate. I haven't a lot of power of concentration, the slightest thing distracts me, you know..I could do to take a little television and go up into my own bedroom if I really want to watch something, you know..that would be the only way to do it because if one of them comes in with a boyfriend or girlfriend, that's it, you know..because I'm not one that..I'm very easily distracted and erm..so I suppose out of a full evening I don't really watch, to actually say I watch and devour much more than an hour of it really.

As we have seen in an earlier section, this woman serviced her husband and family and her sick mother, leaving little or no time for herself. This is reflected in her inability to engage with both television and the VCR, although she does engage with the VCR on her children's behalf, offering them yet another domestic service.

Household B/6's motivation for purchasing the VCR was for video camera use, but she reported that they did use it for some off-air recording, mainly for short term viewing:

B/6: If I'm out on a Wednesday at choir rehearsal, then he'll record *NASH* so that when I come in we'll sit down and see it..that's a short term thing.

She, like the women in Group A was aware of the danger of amassing a large number of unwatched video tapes:

B/6: We try, if we do record things, we do try to see them very soon, otherwise it gets silly and you haven't got the time to watch the programme..I mean if you haven't got time to watch them in the

first place you probably haven't got time to watch the recording.

However, they did record some things when they were out:

B/6: He will sometimes record some sports events and things like that if he's going to be out..we will record, again episodes, if we've been watching a series and we're going to be out at the theatre one evening and it's cutting across, we'll record that, again, to catch up with before the following episode comes on television.

If there was a programme on early in the evening which her husband enjoyed he or she would record that to watch later the same evening

B/6: Things like *Tomorrow's World*..he likes that..if I'm here I'll watch it, but I probably wouldn't pre-record that, but he would..then he can sit down and watch it at leisure..or any early evening things..some of the nature programmes too.

Q: Would you record a programme if your husband wasn't there?

B/6: If I felt very strongly about it. I probably wouldn't bother..I'd probably try to manage with half an eye on it.

Q: Is that because it's just for you? Would it be different if it was a joint thing?

B/6: Well, if it was the reverse, say it just happened to be that he had a squash game on a Wednesday and I was here, then I probably would make the effort if it was something like *MASH*. I would record it and we'd watch it together in the same way. I suppose there must be a few programmes that I feel strongly enough about to record, but they don't spring to mind at the moment..you know, perhaps a one off thing.

They sometimes used the VCR to record something on one channel whilst watching another, but this did not happen very often. Like B/4, this woman was not really aware of what was on television, so she rarely planned what she was going to watch:



B/6: We don't buy the *Radio Times*, you see, and I don't know what's on television until the evening because we don't get the paper in the morning. I see it when he comes home from work at night, then the first chance I get in the evening I'll sit down and skim through the paper, and look at the television page, so really unless its something regularly that's coming up I don't decide until I'm there, really.

B/3, a young woman at home with a small baby, reported that their main reason for buying the VCR was to hire movies. I asked if they recorded a lot of television:

B/3: Not really, no. It all depends. It's mainly sport, like the match on Wednesday - he wanted it recording because he was at work at 4 o'clock. We'd record that..erm..or if there's a programme we both want to watch on one side, or we'll both want to watch something on another side, we will in fact record it.

Her husband would set the timer on the only occasion that they went out during the week:

B/3: Sunday's as a general rule because there's usually something on and I go up to my mum and dad's and just in case they haven't got the programme on there, we'd record it. We recorded that Michael Wood programme about Greece..it's usually things like that. We've recorded *QED*, the second or third one about the man in the bog they found, it's mainly that sort of thing.

Q: Do you ever record serials?

B/3: No. No. Well, it just depends. If it was something, like, based on a book, like the D.H. Lawrence, or something like that, we would actually record that, but other serials like *The Practice* and that type of thing we don't. You can pick it up anyway, even if you miss one.

Again, B/3's was mainly short term use for off-air recording. They spent a lot of time at home watching television in the evenings and tended to view the recorded tape straight away. They had only two

tapes so didn't, in fact, keep any programmes for medium term viewing.

Out of this group, only B/5 was a self-defined television enthusiast. She was asked if she decided what she wanted to record:

B/5: You mean in *Radio* and *TV Times*?..oh yes, absolutely. Yes, we both go through the motions, you know, every night, looking. This is why we buy them.

She and her husband recorded things for each other when one was at work, and knew what the other would like:

B/5: I mean, I'll record *Coronation Street* for him today and Robin Day's *Any Questions* [sic] tomorrow night because, I mean, he's out and he won't be able to see them.

B/5, who was fifty, had been a keen cinema-goer in the past - 'I've queued for hours at cinemas' - and this had left her with an affection for the films of that period. Her husband recorded them for her when they were on television and she was out at work:

B/5: Well, you see, weekends I work on Saturday lunch time and my husband takes the dogs on a Saturday and erm, if there's been a good film on, because my favourite era for films were obviously the thirties and forties, I mean rather forties and early fifties, and the Bette Davies films I can see them over and over again, and they do quite good ones on Channel 4 and BBC 2 on a Saturday afternoon. If there's anything worth watching he'll have recorded it and whilst he's out in the garden I'll sit here with my feet up and a coffee and watch what's been recorded in the afternoon.

They often recorded late films for viewing on a Sunday afternoon as well as keeping up with their favourite series and serials. She was asked if having the video had changed things:

B/5: Oh it has absolutely, I mean we spend a lot more time actually viewing.

She was one of the few women in the entire sample who felt very easy about watching a tape during the afternoon; in fact, she was watching a recording of *Dallas* when I arrived for the interview. She would quite often settle down with her coffee and watch something she had recorded the previous evening:

B/5: I think that's one good thing about the machine, if you do want an early night and yet there's something on television that you feel you don't want to miss, well you can record it. The only thing I don't like on the machine is if anything's happened. I like to come down. Now, I'm not an early riser, but when the Brighton bomb..Bill watches Breakfast TV whilst he's having his breakfast and he said 'come on for God's sake get up'..so things like that I wouldn't have liked him to have recorded it for me to watch two hours later, I do like to watch that whilst it's actually happening.

Q: Anything else like that?

B/5: Well certainly elections, by-elections, this kind of thing..I like it as it's happening. It wouldn't be the same if I know about it and watching it three hours later, no.

Here even short term recording will not do, and real-time viewing is preferred.

### Group C

Compared with the A's and B's, television is in general a more prominent feature of household culture in the C group. It is watched more and, whilst eight out of the fourteen women expressed concern about television and, in some cases, the amount of viewing-time spent by their partners and/or children, four were television fans who made regular use of the VCR. Of the concerned women, C1/1's comments were typical:

C1/1: As in most households, I think, TV goes on whether anybody's watching it or not. Like it was on when you came, it was the girls who'd put it on, they'd been home for lunch and it was still going, you know, and it gets put on and it gets

left on, and as to whether you're actually watching it, I would dispute whether you're watching it, but it's on, you know..

It does annoy me sometimes when, like you leave it on and nobody's particularly watching it and it's just a distraction from other things..you know, that you could be doing..like playing cards or anything like that..but even then it usually gets left on and then it becomes a disturbance really.

C1/1 felt that people 'dwell on television too much':

C1/1: I mean we've dwelt on it all this time and really I don't think that it's half as erm..influential as people would like to think.

This attitude was shared by C1/2 and she had taken some action to counteract the prominence of television:

C1/2: I don't think it should be important, I got my husband to agree to buy a small one because, the size makes it the centre of the room which I don't think it ought to be and if it's there everybody's going to press the button, but if it's smaller you wouldn't notice it so much - you would talk more.

Television, then for these women, distracted their families from what were seen to be more desirable activities. The amount of time their partner's spent in front of the television was also a problem for some of the women, but this was usually justified by reference to work and his consequent need to relax.

C2/4: Brian likes television and this is what I think sometimes - am I selfish because he likes to relax with the paper and watch television and that is his leisure when he comes home, and I'm wanting to switch it off.[laugh].

C2/2: But he's the kind of person, when he gets in from work, I mean I'm not knocking him, he does help, but he's got to be sat down in front of the television. That's his relaxation really.

C1/4: You know, after tea, he seems to come in really tired, the strain of driving long distance,

and he sits in his chair and he'll watch. He turns the box on and that's it.

We discussed in Chapter 2 the ways in which the women prefer to spend their spare time and how, for some, television is a fairly low priority. That certainly applies to several of the women in this group. Predictably, the women who were most vehemently against television, saw the VCR as a further, and often powerful, consumer of their families' time. However, this was not always the case:

C1/1: I think it [the VCR] makes you more selective. I think, if anything, the video has awakened us to the fact that no more can you watch as much rubbish as you did before..because you don't have to watch that rubbish..at least it's easier to watch something else than it is to turn it off altogether. I think since we've had the video it's harder to watch rubbish..maybe that's the wrong word, but what you don't want to watch..so maybe it'll work the other way round, make people watch less.

C1/4, whose husband dominated the television during the evening effectively preventing her and her son from watching the kinds of programmes they liked, observed:

C1/4: He'll move it from programme to programme and that's where we find the use of the video because, erm, if there's something I don't like and he does - he gets his way unfortunately with the television you know [pause] - and Geoffrey [son] or myself will set the video up to record, mostly travel things, we like travel and documentary type programmes you see.

Turning to the television enthusiasts, what is notable about these women, compared to the others in the group, is that they have little or no guilty feelings about television watching, although C1/3 did express a little fear about her viewing:

C1/3: I can't possibly say, right it's two o' clock, turn the television on, I've got too many things to do during the daytime, I couldn't, couldn't do it to myself, that would be a total addict [laugh] I'm about three quarters of the way there [laugh]

She did say, however, that she would watch a tape during the day:

C1/3: If I'd been out while *Dallas* or *Dynasty* was on and I'd taped it and left it 'til the next day, then I would watch it, yes, definitely.

All these women watched television during the day, mainly soap opera, and they would often record such material if they had to be out of the house. This was particularly true of C2/1 and C2/5 whose use of the VCR tended to be for short term viewing: keeping up with serials and recording the occasional film. This was partly because of the small number of tapes they owned (two and four respectively), an important factor differentiating short/medium/long term usage. C1/3 and C2/3 made short and medium term use of the VCR, although C2/3 only had three tapes:

C2/3: We tape a lot of soaps, like *Dynasty* and *Dallas*. And if there's any films come on, I tend to tape a lot of films..more for rainy days when the kids are off school and that, films, like *Blazing Saddles*, that's just been on, I taped that for the kids to watch when they're off school.

C1/3 and her partner were avid users of the VCR for time-shift and she used it as a fail-safe device whilst watching her favourite soap opera:

C1/3: I sit and watch it (*Coronation Street*) and record it in case there were any interruptions. So I have a tape in just in case. Somebody always phones up, guaranteed. I used to take the phone off the hook.

When they were both watching television in the evening, they would automatically put a tape in:

C1/3: Well, the funny thing about our video, we tend to watch it as..we tend to watch something on television and record it as we're watching it. Whatever it is. We put a tape in, just in case..erm..if there's some film on and they don't describe them correctly in the papers, it can be fantastic and they'll say its rubbish, we will turn on that film and record it and start watching it, and watch it all the way through. If it's

rubbish, we just go over it again, otherwise we keep it.

When they went out for the evening, which was quite often, they would plan what they were going to record:

C1/3: Yes. If we're going out we work out what to record. If it's a *Dynasty* night or a *Dallas* night or *Coronation Street* night, it will be recorded for me and anything on that side before and after, for three hours, it will be recorded round there. If that's not on he can watch whatever he wants and record whatever he wants. It sounds very selfish, but as long as I watch my *Dynasty*, *Dallas* and *Coronation Street*, I'm a happy person. They're my three main things to watch, mustn't miss them.

C2/3 used the time-shift regularly:

C2/3: Well I usually find that most programmes..you always get a set of good programmes on each side so you have to tape one side and watch the other one and then either save up for weekends or afternoons if there's nothing on, and then watch what I've taped. Every Saturday we tape BBC more or less 6 o'clock until..depending on what's on, but we tend to watch ITV.

Q: Is that why you decided to get a video?

C2/3: Well no, because we bought it for Melanie and Matthew for Christmas, but she's not a great one for watching TV, but Matthew is. If he never puts another video in there he's had his money's worth out of it..but we do tape an awful lot, I mean if we go out we set the video, if we go on holiday we tape programmes, well, we usually move the video, but we have a thing with the neighbours going and, like, if Janet is away I tape for her and if I'm away she tapes for me.

Q: What about day to day recording, who decides what to record?

C2/3: Well, we sort of decide jointly, really, it's usually me that does all the recording, like something came on last night and he [husband] was out and I taped it. I thought he might like to watch it. He didn't ask me to. I tend to tape

things like that..if it's something that he may like to watch...because he's like Matthew with the video, he goes potty with it when he's home..watching it's his way of relaxing is that, takes his mind of anything..but..I don't know, it's a joint thing what we record and that. If we're stumped, if we're going out and, like, with neighbours again, we tend to tape one side and they'll tape the other side, and we do things like that, we do that an awful lot..in fact we don't know which tapes belong to who at the moment.

C2/1 and C2/5 used the VCR to record programmes when one or other was at work. C2/1 herself worked in the evenings and her husband recorded *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale Farm* for her:

C2/1: Like, he taped me *Coronation Street* the other night, I watched it this morning and that'll be it, he'll rub it off tonight and tape me *Emmerdale Farm*.

Q: Do you tape films?

C2/1: Erm..we taped that Michael Caine that was on last week, and that *Dutch Girls*, that was on, but I wouldn't say we tape as many films as we do soap operas that I miss when I'm at work..that's what we use it for..it's great..something to look forward to when you get home.

C2/5's husband worked shifts and she recorded programmes for him which she knew he wouldn't want to miss:

C2/5: When Andrew goes to work on a night and, well, say, last night, *The Bill* was on, well it's no good me watching it. I'll tape it and watch it with him later in a morning, or in an afternoon, so I tend to go to bed and curl up with a book.

The recorder was also used for individual viewing, rather than joint viewing:

C2/5: I record films, a lot of the TV serials. I don't record as much now *Dallas* and *Coronation Street* when I'm in, but I have to record *Brookside* because he won't let me watch it when he's here [laugh]. Anything like that, anything after nine



o'clock we record that. We use it..I bet we use it every day just about.

I recorded *Master of the Game*, it was on a Sunday wasn't it, and it was a Bond film on the other side, so we watched the Bond film and recorded it, and then I watched it on a Monday when Andrew was working.

Q: Is there anything that your husband likes that you don't want to watch?

C2/5: SPORT..I record racing for him, or if there was a documentary about a sportsman, you know, sometimes they have these interviews..racing people and all those sort of things. Andrew'd like anything like that, so I'd record that for him.

We have seen that C1/3 and C2/3 planned their recording and this was also true of C2/5:

Q: Do you sit down each day and decide what you're going to record?

C2/5: Well I know really

Q: Do you take *TV Times* or *The Radio Times*?

C2/5: No. I see what's on telly in a morning on the Teletext and I record if I'm out in the day. I think afternoon programmes are as good as evening ones and, like I'm out tonight and I know *Dallas* is on because it's on every Wednesday, so I shall ask him to record it, I don't really sit down and say what I want, I know what I want recording.

It was very rare that tapes went unwatched in this group. C2/5 was asked if they had recorded programmes that they never got around to watching:

C2/5: Occasionally, yes. Like, we've recorded *The Travelling Man*, there've been two episodes and we still haven't watched them and there's another one on tonight. I mean, I've had time to watch it but, as you can see, the state of the house at the moment, Andrew hasn't..so if it ever got that I needed the tape, I'd say 'oh well, you're just not

going to have time now to watch' and then I'd wipe it off, but if it were something ..but if it was the third one and we'd watched two, if we'd got into it, I wouldn't have done, but you see we haven't seen it at all. I mean, we might not, we might catch up and get round to watching it.

Q: Did you watch as much television before you had the video?

C2/5: Yes, but you'd just have to watch what was on at the time. My telly's on all day, from about 7 in the morning 'till about 10 at night.

These women were quite methodical about their taping and viewing and knew what was on each of the tapes. They were enthusiastic about television and about the time-shift facility which the VCR provided and they had a commitment to off-air recording which was not shared to the same extent by other women in the group. C2/5 used the time-shift function herself but C2/1 relied on her husband to record things for her and C2/3, who found herself in the house more than the rest of her family, tended to use the manual record function.

As we have seen in the case of C1/4, the VCR can be used to resolve or avoid potential conflict. This, in her case, meant that her husband got his own way with the television viewing in the evening, but she and her son were able to record programmes which they wanted to watch on another channel. Some women used the VCR to tape programmes which they knew their partners, and sometimes their children, would not want to watch. For example:

C1/6: I tape, sort of the medical things, you know, the womens' things that have been on, operations and things like that, and the AIDS programme and things like that, I will watch when he isn't in because he won't want to watch them.

She also recorded films off-air:

C1/6: I like the old black and white ones. I watched last weekend, *The Bursten Rebellion*, the one about the schoolteacher. I like them about true stories, I would tape something, a film that was basically true, and then I would watch it

during the day, whilst I was ironing or something like that.

Q: Is that because you wouldn't feel happy just sitting and watch it?

C1/6: No. It's just that I think it's a useful time, a couple of hours, I might as well be doing something else whilst a film's on which doesn't take all your..so I might as well use that time and kill two birds with one stone, and then I can sit down and enjoy something else and do nothing.

Her husband also taped films and programmes to watch after she had gone to bed, and she sometimes asked him to tape particular late night programmes which she would view at another time.

For some women the VCR was used to allow them to watch a favoured programme 'in peace' at some quiet time. C1/5 often taped *Falcon Crest* if she couldn't watch it during the day. When did she actually watch it?

C1/5: Erm..well I can't watch it when I come home because I'm busy with kiddies, plus, you can't relax if they're in and out, do you know what I mean? I feel as if I've been cheated of that hour if they're in and out..can I have this..so, I'd probably watch it when I come back from swimming at about eleven o'clock, because, as I say, we go for a drink and I'd just sit and watch it then. I like to tape *Dallas* because I go out about quarter past eight, so I tape that you see.

Q: So when do you watch *Dallas* then?

C1/5: Well, there again, well I wouldn't have time to..I'd either watch, say, I'd been to Leeds, I'd watch one at night when I come home, and one the next morning. I'd wash up, and, you know, just sort of tidy round and I'd watch it then, for the simple reason if you don't they tape over it [laugh]..you know, if you leave the tapes there you end up with kiddies' programmes or something on and they tape over them, so I do try and watch them as soon as possible, for that reason, otherwise they just go.

Time-shifting Dallas presented some problems for C1/5. It meant that, until she had seen it, she couldn't talk about it to her neighbours who watched it:

C1/5: Well, like, we'll go out on a morning and we'll say..like if I haven't managed to watch it it's 'don't tell me..don't tell me what's happened..I haven't watched it'..or we might go 'oh, what do you think? Oh..' yes we do.

A very important part of the pleasure of TV serials is the gossip about them the following day. Whilst VCR time-shifting allows more convenient and sometimes more pleasurable private viewing of these serials, it means sacrificing the shared experience of viewing at a regular time of day.

C2/4 did not feel that the VCR had enabled them to settle disputes about watching:

C2/4: No, not really, it's added to it because sometimes I feel as if I'm saying to them [her children] 'you can't record it' and there's no apparent reason, it's just because Brian doesn't want them to.

Q: Do you ever tape anything?

C2/4: No, no. I suppose if there was something on that I'd like I probably would, but without sounding too..if the children wanted to tape something in preference I'd let them have it, it's not that important..it's more important for them than it is to me. You know, I wouldn't insist on watching something if they wanted to watch..but Brian would and has done.

Q: Does he tape things?

C2/4: Yes, mainly late at night, if there's a film he wants to watch..he'll tape it, he taped the football on Sunday because his two little ones were here and he can't sit down and watch it. Boxing, he tapes that.

The VCR was a site of conflict in this household and its use was controlled by the adult male.

Most women with young children in this group reported that they recorded films and cartoons for them to watch. Indeed, for some women, this was the only use they made of the off-air recording facility, never recording anything for themselves. This is partly because it is in their interests to keep their children entertained, but also because they had very little spare time even to watch television, let alone a recording.

#### Group D/E

One of the women in this group said that she thought they watched too much television, which she compared with other home leisure activities:

D/2: We play monopoly, kiddies' games, sometimes dominoes, sometimes on our own or with them. I suppose in a way I do watch too much TV because it's there, you know..like normally we live in the other room..and we're decorating in there and moved the telly in here, and we've said, the difference from not having a telly there..you know, it's there and you switch it on.

All of the women in this group were council tenants and lived in relatively small houses or flats. Lack of space and the sheer presence of the television in the main living room meant that, as D/2 indicates, television tended to be on because usually someone in the household wanted to watch.

D/1: I think very often it's treated like a lot of people treat the radio, it's on in the background, erm..I don't put it on, I was aware of that when Jim was away for a fortnight, Jim's the one who switches it on, even the children won't actually put it on when they come home - they don't like the children's programmes much - but by news time I suppose it's always on..and then it won't be switched off whether there's anybody watching it or not, it'll be on in the background.

Unlike women in Group A, who live in much larger houses, it was difficult to 'escape' television. However, two of the D/E households had a portable television in one of the bedrooms. For the other women in this group the presence of only one TV set caused conflicts, mainly cross-generational, and for E/1, living with her parents, the VCR performed a useful function:

E/1: I tape comedy..I like *Auf Weidersehen Pet* and *The Young Ones*, erm..my mum and dad can't stand em..my sister and brother like them, but they don't..you see I think it's because they're so much older than me, they don't see how it can be funny, they don't see how *The Young Ones* can be funny at all..you try to watch it and my dad'll fall asleep and start snoring, you know, and my mum's sat there knitting away and [sigh], I think 'forget it - I'll tape it and watch it when I'm on my own'.

This young woman also recorded popular music programmes, for much the same reason:

E/1: I usually tape *Oxford Road Show*, or *The Tube*. My mum, you know, she says 'oh God, this loud music, it's disgusting'..so I tape that, then when they're not in I watch it myself - *Top of the Pops*, pop type of programmes.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, D/3's major motivation for renting a VCR was to hire movies; consequently she recorded very little broadcast television:

D/3: I won't tape serials, *Coronation Street* or anything like that because I just watch them when they're on, if there's nowt on..I think if it's just something special that's not been on before, or a film that I haven't seen and I wouldn't mind seeing, but it's not often I..Oh, I might tape *The Old Grey Whistle Test* and *Top of the Pops*, but I never watch them afterwards because normally I'm watching them..but just in case my friend 'phones up when they're on.

D/4, a 48 year old with two teenage daughters explained who watched most television in the house:

D/4: Well, it's my eldest girl, she watches it more..she puts the TV on when she comes in from work and she watches it all night if she can [laugh]. We often have a barney over the programmes, because if you're not careful you miss them..you know..she says 'I want to watch this' and I usually give in anyway, I think oh..[shrug].

Q: What about recording something you wanted to watch?

D/4: Well, my daughter has done for us, we would do but we haven't done lately..we haven't had it for long, but yes, we would, we'd ask her to record it yes.

Like D/3, this woman's daughter had rented the VCR herself, mainly, according to her mother, for hiring tapes, and this was the dominant use. E/2, who also lived with her teenage daughters, used the VCR to pre-empt conflict:

E/2: If the girls are in and they're watching something and there's something on the other side I want to watch, I can tape it and watch it when they're out, or when the TV's gone off.

She found the VCR extremely useful in extending her viewing time:

E/2: I'm not one for going to bed at night, now if there's two films on, I'll tape one, that means when the television goes off I can sit up and watch another one. It can be two or three o'clock in the morning before I go to bed. So I can sit up instead of having to go to bed.

D/2, who at the time of the interview had just been made redundant from her evening job as a packer, used to watch recorded tapes when she got home after her shift:

D/2: Yes..when I got home..you sort of, when you're at work you feel tired then you come home about ten at night you seem to need an hour to unwind..it's usually twelve o'clock before we went to bed.

D/1's household were keen 'archivers', the subject of the next section, and as a result they mainly used the VCR to record films. However, there was a difference between her attitude to recording and her partner's:

Q: Do you think about what to record:

D/1: No, I'll be aware of what's on and if I do want and know I want to watch something again a few times, I will record..I don't know, almost every film that Jim's interested in if he wants to watch it once he wants to watch it again, so we record it, whereas it's got to be something a bit special for me to watch it.

Q: What about tapes you don't intend to keep?

D/1: We use bits on the end of films..there's usually an hour, an hour and a half at the end for episodes. If you're going to miss something or other, record it, or if it's too late for the girls, record it and it'll be wiped within a week or a few days, we've occasionally got to the stage where you've got piles of stuff you're waiting to watch [laugh] and you can't find the time to watch things, but we tend not to be..that doesn't happen very often..it's very much a short-term thing.

Q: What are the main reasons for recording off TV?

D/1: The main reason is that either or both of us are going to be out, and I'd have to include the girls in that as well, if it was on too late and they wanted to see it, erm..or if there was a clash of opinion about what we were going to watch, we'd record the other side..and that's all very much stuff that would then get wiped within a day or so. Now, that could be simply an interesting *Horizon* programme, or I think I can remember occasionally recording an episode of *Coronation Street*..we don't, I think, record many programmes..apart from 'classic' TV, and I think we treated *I Claudius* very much like a film. We've got something like the last ten episodes still on tape..erm..

Q: When you say 'classic' TV, what do you mean?

D/1: Well, big productions like that. But also things like *Fawlty Towers*, erm..oh, stuff that you



would perhaps think about getting out on video anyway.

### Tape Management & Archiving (Long term recording).

This section will consider those households in which the video recorder is used to build up a 'library' or archive of tapes. In this connection we will report on the number of 'blank' tapes and their distribution between members of the households and seek to establish which member(s) of the household are responsible for archiving as well as what is recorded on these tapes and the circumstances under which they are watched.

#### Group A/B

None of the women in this group had their own tape for recording off air, although their children usually did:

A/1: The children have a tape each.

Q: Do you have a tape?

A/1: Well, my husband and I just swap the others, we share the others out, and I mean, if they've run out of their tapes, they'd use one of ours, and then we'd use one of theirs. It's not a rigid thing, but they have a tape each and if they want to record something and we've put something on it, well that's our tough luck.

The actual number of tapes in Group A/B ranged from two to thirty, with eight or nine being the most common number. The number of tapes in a household is an indication of intended use of the VCR. Thus, the household with thirty tapes had originally planned on building up a library of good films, rather than using the VCR to time-shift. A/2 observed that the system had broken down:

A/2: I think we must have about thirty tapes, but it's virtually impossible to tell what's on them. There's horrible, scruffy-looking, crossed-out,

you know..James's capacity to maintain the system over any length of time has long since collapsed. He knows little bits of what's on what tapes..the kids have tapes and they know what's on theirs. The early tapes are all beautifully recorded, you know, full of Marx Brothers films, and things like that and they're still there.

There is no doubt that this woman's partner is responsible for the archiving of tapes in this household and this is not surprising given that it was his decision to purchase the VCR. However, B/5, who instigated the purchase of their VCR, when asked which of them knew most about the content of their tapes, said:

B/5: Oddly enough, my husband. Yes, because, this is what I mean, he didn't want the video, but he's the one that is really in charge of it

We saw earlier that B/1's husband is methodical about recording off-air and watching the tapes, and B/6's husband also organised the 'spare' tapes for off-air recording use. B/1 and B/5 found that their husbands were much more keen on re-watching films than they were. I asked B/1 if she kept movies on tape:

B/1: erm..I don't think we've got any recorded that I..for me. Because, there again, I don't like to see anything twice - I know I watched *Gremlins* twice, but once I know what's coming you've lost my interest, it's got to be an element of surprise to keep my interest going. Whereas, my husband can watch a film over and over again and love it every time he sees it. And I go, 'how can you? You know what's coming next?'

B/5 reported that her husband had kept a recording of *Casablanca*. What kinds of things did she keep?

B/5: Well I don't. Now this is where it's come into its own for Bill. I have recorded things to keep, then I've thought 'oh no, this is silly'. But we've got *Flight of the Condor* - that three hour documentary - now that again is Bill's. And we've got a Spencer Tracy film, we both like that one - *Inherit the Wind*. I have recorded things - I've kept *The Sound of Music*, actually, because I think Emma, my grand daughter will like that..I sort of recorded *Funny Girl* to keep, but I've let

that go now. I tend to think 'oh yes, I definitely want to keep that' and then it becomes unimportant because there's something else I prefer, and I haven't got a spare tape. I think 'oh well, that can go, I'm going to record this' - but certainly those three things will be there forever.

Two of the three things that will be 'there forever' - *Casablanca* and *Flight of the Condor*, belong to her husband and she must be flexible with her tapes if she runs out of recording space. She also seemed to be less keen on archiving in general than he was. I asked her how often they watched *Casablanca*:

B/5: Well, frankly, I'm sick of watching it. I mean, yes my husband does, he really thinks it's marvellous. In fact, he went to the cinema a couple of years ago - they had *The Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca* on, he paid money to go and see them again, you know, which, well..I thought that was ludicrous. But, however, yes, I ...I think 'oh no, I just can't watch it, not again'..then Bill's getting quite involved in it, and yes I do watch it.

We have seen that, much to their dismay, B/1's and B/5's husbands will watch a film over and over again, whereas they were much less enthusiastic. This was also the case with B/3 and A/1, but their partners agreed:

B/3: We've just got two tapes and we just keep going over. We don't keep anything. No. Once we've seen it we can remember what happened, so we don't really want to..we only need to see a film for the first five minutes and we know we've seen it and we know exactly what goes on, so really it spoils it then.

A/1 had recorded some of the Shakespeare plays recently produced for television and was asked why she kept them:

A/1: I suppose I keep them because I think the children might want them, but I also have a feeling that they're less..it's coming to me to think that they're actually less successful kept than music because the interpretation actually begins to bore you after a couple of scenes.

Although it is the play, it's not the same as reading the play. You feel limited by the visual pictures much more, so that we actually have discussed whether they are worth keeping because it isn't the same as a piece of music. My husband agrees - he thinks that visual things you tire of more quickly.

Although the reasons given for questioning the value of keeping tapes are different, there is, in this group, a general feeling of not wanting to watch films or programmes repeatedly. This could also account for the relatively few purchased films in the entire sample.

A/1 and A/2 recorded Shakespeare productions, and kept them, but often these went unwatched:

A/2: I remember for a long time we had Laurence Olivier as *King Lear*, taking up one and a half hours of tape time and there was a sort of puritanical feeling that it ought to be watched, and it eventually gave place to something else, I forget what. And also we had a recording of Glenn Gould, the Carnegie pianist, which also hung around unwatched for a very long time.

A/1: I think we haven't watched *Cymbeline* again, to be honest - we've watched *Macbeth* a lot, but I suspect that's because Peter was doing it for O level and we've watched *Love's Labours Lost* more, perhaps because it's lighter, or perhaps because I know it better. But I didn't keep *Hamlet* and regretted it.

A/2 said that she and her husband had attempted to watch *King Lear*, using the fast-forward mode on the VCR:

A/2: I think when we did attempt to watch Laurence Olivier's *King Lear* we watched that at a fairly fast pace [laugh]..edited high-lights..[laugh].

Items considered to be of cultural value should be recorded, but they often led to feelings of guilt if they were not watched. B/6 and her husband were creating their own tape of *MASH* 'highlights'

for archiving, and had considered doing the same with *Fawlty Towers*, two programmes they considered to be television 'classics', whilst B/4 and her husband kept work-related architecture and design programmes or series. All the women in this group who had young children tended to record programmes or films for them which would be kept until the children themselves tired of them.

### Group C

Quite a high percentage (42%) of this group made no long-term recording for archiving. This was mainly because of economic restrictions on the number of available tapes. The major exceptions to this were two households who had some twenty-five tapes each. Both these households (C1/3 and C1/8) had a fairly high disposable income; the first was a young couple who both worked full time and the second a widow whose grown up children lived with her, three of whom were in employment. Of the other women in this group, four had no idea how many tapes were in the household, and of the rest the average number of tapes was five.

Dealing with households C1/3 and C1/8 first, C1/3 was asked what kinds of things they kept long-term:

C1/3: Most of them are movies and there's a couple of tapes that have got bits of everything on, bits of this and that. Old films, very old films, you know, Bing Crosby films - I love those. A lot of musical shows and things, big ones, what's his name?..Frank Sinatra, any of the shows he was on. We were making our own tape of all the big stars, the big, big stars, old stars and we were combining tapes to keep forever, until I went over them.

Q: Oh..accidentally?

C1/3 Yes, [laugh] we'd been doing it for two and a half years, and we had a fabulous tape set up and I went over it with *Coronation Street* [sigh..laugh].

Compiling special tapes as referred to by C1/03 is unusual in the sample, although B/6 spoke of their *NASH* tape for which they were making a selection of their favourite episodes. This kind of selective recording produces more 'personalised' archive material.

Whilst C1/3 is a fan of TV and films, her attitude to re-watching films is different to that of her husband:

C1/3: Films John records..erm..like *The Godfather* and all the larger films. I mean, we've still got them, he would watch them a million times [laugh] when I was out [laugh], he'd watch them over and over again, certain films he can watch a million times - ridiculous.

Q: Are there any films you can watch again?

C1/3: Erm yes..erm..not a million times - about two or three times I could watch them. But, hang on..*Superman* - *Superman*, I could watch all day, he's my hero, I love him [laugh].

C1/8, who ran a newsagent's shop used her stored tapes to pass the time when the shop was quiet:

C1/8: Very convenient. I must agree, it's very convenient..erm..it's nice to be able to pick up a film, pop it in the video and have it on in here and, sort of lunch time, we have an hour and a half for lunch, so if it goes on when we first start lunch and carries on afterwards, it doesn't really matter, because when we open the shop at half past two we're never busy 'til the kids come at quarter past three, so we've usually time to watch whatever you want..including my video of Neil Diamond [laugh].

This woman had already mentioned her passion for Neil Diamond and had purchased a copy of *The Jazz Singer* when they first bought the VCR. She observed that their use of the VCR had changed:

C1/8: We used to get films from the video library at first because we hadn't got a stock of things that you wanted to watch again and again. Er..we have one or two things that we won't ever wipe off..erm.. I've got Al Jolson in *The Jolson Story* and *Jolson Sings Again* and those are two that I

won't ever wipe off because I don't think they'll ever be on the television again. Erm..my boys are very much into, not martial arts, it's a different kind of thing it's called Akido - it's something rather special I believe so they wanted Shogun, so that's all on video and that won't be wiped off. Then something, a rather light-hearted programme, but we think it's lovely, it was a play, a Play for Today on BBC and they did one and not long afterwards they did a follow up to it and it's called *Dominic Hyde*, and that won't ever be wiped off I don't think, because we loved the story and the music particularly is very good. So, those are the things that won't be wiped off. Then, er..what else have we got, oh, *Mame*, the musical *Mame*, that's something that we all seem to like to pick up..er..so that might not be wiped off for quite a while, but apart from that we swop and..

What is worth noting here is the way in which some of the archived tapes seem to be enjoyed by all the family, and the favourites were often watched on the rare times when the family were all in together. C1/7, also a woman with a grown up family still at home, spoke of their archiving of *The Boys from the Blackstuff*:

C1/7 Yes, we've got *Boys from the Blackstuff* which is fabulous. Jack's [husband] got almost every opera that's been on the television, he's a great fan and we can't stand opera..so he has taped all the operas and then when he's in on his own, quiet, he watches them. We all thought *Boys from the Blackstuff* was marvellous.

Q: How often do you watch that?

C1/7: I would say we've watched it four times..we watched it when it was actually on, taping it at the same time..when my sister and her husband came over from York, they don't watch much television, and they hadn't seen it and they thought it was great, so they watched a couple of episodes. Then my eldest son came back from Saudi Arabia for Christmas and he watched the whole thing, but I think the favourite episode was where there was a funeral..he died and they ended up in the pub and they all have this sing song and it ends up with them flying through the window..we watch that a lot more than the others.

Clearly there is a tendency to ritualise the viewing of favourite tapes, at Christmas and other times when the family are at home together. However, as C1/7 has indicated, tapes can also be archived for individual viewing when an enthusiasm is not shared. C1/2's husband had an enthusiasm for boxing which she did not share. She began by reporting how many tapes they have:

C1/2: Lots..we usually have a few..which someone has taped something, they haven't written what is on. They probably have watched it or they have not.. but you're allowed to tape on any of those, and it's too bad..the ones in the boxes belong to my husband they're boxing..he keeps those, the big fights, he has them all.

Q: Do you keep any movies on tape?

C1/2: I think he's got about three which he might watch again..if I see something once I don't really want to watch it again.

The boxed tapes belonging to her husband were kept separately, and had a permanence which the other tapes did not, but apart from these C1/2 had very little knowledge of what the tapes contained.

The women with younger children said that their archiving was mainly films or programmes for the children who also had their own tapes for recording purposes. C1/5 said they had twelve tapes, but that three of those belonged to her three children. She was asked whether they archived any tapes:

C1/5: Well, this is the problem, they tend to tape on, and then you can't..they want things, like they've got the tapes of their own, and on each of them there's something they want to keep, so therefore if there's another thing that's going to be a film or anything, they can't get it on there, so they've got *Kelly's Heroes*, *Sinbad* - I've just taped over that 'cos they've had it three years..they've got *Star Wars*, *Mary Poppins* is on the little girl's tape..erm..I don't know what's on Micahel's..oh I think it was that one that's just been on with Burt Reynolds - *Cannonball* - and on Richard's there's one of them *Temple of Doom* ones..erm..and then one's my husband's with space and all sorts of bits on, you



know, he's intersted in..he likes computer programmes, and anything like that.

Q: What about you, do you keep any films or anything like that?

C1/5: No, I can't say I have, no..they'd probably tape over mine anyway [laugh], no I don't. My husband's got *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which he won't let me tape over, he likes anything like that and erm..he's got bits of documentaries and things on..he likes anything like that..space..anything like that..but, as I say, I haven't got anything that..all mine I tape over, I tape anything, because it's mostly serials, you see.

Q: Do you ever record a film from TV?

C1/5: Erm..there again, mostly it's for..if the kiddies want to watch it..it's for them rather than for me..I wouldn't really think of recording something for myself.

A similar use was reported by C2/2:

C2/2: We keep the childrens' ones. I've kept one that I taped about twelve months since - *My Fair Lady* - that's the only one that I've taped and kept. Course, many a time Derek'll say 'oh, you don't watch it, might as well tape over it' - I said 'you're not'.

This family purchased their tapes on family shopping expeditions, but C2/4, whose children and partner were constantly at odds over the VCR, had a problem about this:

C2/4: At Christmas, Brian bought four for Chistmas.

Q: Do the children have their own tapes?

C2/4: No..not really, we got two tapes free with the video and I think those are really for the children. He more or less lets them do what they like on those..but now they've got films on..they keep saying when they get some money saved up they're going to buy their own then they can tape what they like.

Q: Have you ever thought of buying blank tapes?

C2/4: [laughing] I never have any money [laugh] I have no spare cash for blank tapes..as much as I would like to buy them something, my money's tied up.

C2/4's partner's desire to archive certain of his films caused conflict between him and her children, she finding herself in the middle of the dispute:

C2/4: You know, there's no tape and they say 'well, why can't we tape over that film, we've seen it two or three times'..a couple of films we'd had them for months and months and we'd only watched them once or twice and, you know, they kept saying 'can we tape over it' and he'd say 'no it's a good film we'll keep that'. But, as I say, at Christmas we bought four new tapes so we're not too bad now, but he'll say..I mean, my friends, they've got twenty-odd tapes, I feel as if I'm saying no to them all the time and I think 'why have we got the damned thing if they can't tape things. It's as if Brian can't be bothered sometimes, it isn't that he doesn't want them to have it on, it's too much trouble, and that's why I think Mark, last week, wanted to know how to time it because he feels that if he could time it he could do it without Brian knowing..you know, not deceiving or anything like that, but just so he wouldn't have to ask him.

Here control is exercised over other members of the household by the person who purchases blank tapes for recording and determines how those tapes should be used. In this way archiving uses up tape-time and severely restricts the range of choices available to other members of the household. C2/4 herself had no financial means of increasing the availability of tape-time for her children.

Apart from C1/3 whose archiving practices I discussed at the beginning of this section, the rest of the women did not consider themselves responsible for tape management, and/or archiving. For two of the households, the only tapes that were archived were 'home videos' - records of a wedding and, in one case, old home movies transferred onto video. These were usually viewed at Christmas

time or when various different members of the family got together at other times.

#### Group D/E

One household in this group had around fifty tapes and were serious archivers, mainly of movies, although the dominant user was the adult male. D/1 was asked which tapes they watched a lot:

D/1: I'll get the list [laugh]..it's a thing as well where, our films..because there are a lot, the girls get to see them as well, then all of a sudden it becomes 'ours'..the girls get addicted to them..*High Society* was originally mine and now I'm quite happy to wipe it, I've seen it so many times, but the girls won't wipe it. Erm..*Network*, I think is mine and that's been on for ages, *Klute*..that's my great favourite, and that's been on almost since we've had the video. *Reds*..there's stuff on here that's ancient, and it's Jim. *Close Encounters*..*Jaws*, *The Duellists*, and we've got so many of them, we don't watch them very often, but he'd never dream of wiping them.

I asked if there was any problem in getting 'her' films recorded for the archive:

D/1: Oh, there's no problem, because I think Jim's the main user, so if I say I want something or other, that's fine. Yes, if I actually stick to something, then we definitely have it..I don't feel the same need to record that Jim does. As long as I can watch it there and then, that's fine. I mean, I wouldn't record all the Ealing comedies and Jim does..I would make sure that I saw it. Now, on the other hand, knowing that he's going to record it, I think, no I won't bother. Almost every film that Jim's interested in, if he wants to watch it once he wants to watch it again, so we record it, whereas it's got to be a bit special for me to watch it.

Q: Does he ever wipe off the films he's recorded for himself?

D/1: Yes, it's..this is very delicate..because I'm not..if I've seen it a few times, then I'm quite willing to wipe it with several exceptions, probably half a dozen exceptions..whereas Jim won't wipe for ages and ages, the girls seem to be taking the same tendencies as him I think, we've now got 50 videos.

D/1 reiterates what many of the women in the sample said about their husband's desire to record, archive and re-view films. This is partly due to the fact that many of the men establish themselves as the dominant users of the VCR, that they generally have more time in the home to watch films and tape and also that they consider their choice of films as superior to those that their partners would choose.

For the rest of the D/E group, archiving was not a regular practice, mainly due to shortage of tapes. However, E/1 told me that she did keep certain recordings off-air:

E/1: I keep things like *Tube Special* and *Midsummer Night's Tube*. Well, I taped that and you got, like a programme made up of bits..well I taped them bits that I wanted, you know what I mean, I keep that. I tape pop concerts.

D/2 and E/2 said they did very little archiving, whilst D/3 and D/4 never kept tapes for long-term use.

### Summary

50% of the sample had a problem with setting time aside either to watch tapes or to plan recordings. This was in part due to a declared lack of interest in either television, the VCR, or both. However, recording off-air requires some forethought and planning in order to establish the time of the programme to be recorded and, if necessary, setting the timer, as well as locating a suitable tape. Quite simply, many of the women felt that they did not have the time

during their day to indulge in this planning for themselves, although some would record programmes for either their partners or their children. A small number of women did not get access to the programme schedules until early evening when their partners came home with their only newspaper. 23% of the households took *Radio Times* and/or *TV Times* regularly. Other members of the household with access to schedules and the time and inclination to plan ahead would therefore tend to get their way with TV and video choice.

On the occasions when women did make recordings, many of which were serials, these often had to be viewed during the day when the house was empty because of lack of opportunity to view in the evening. We have seen that a very important part of the pleasure of TV serials is to gossip about them the following day. Whilst VCR time-shifting allows more convenient and sometimes more pleasurable private viewing of these serials, it means sacrificing the shared experience of viewing at a regular time of day. Colin McCabe suggests that 'much of television's appeal springs from the fact that viewers know they are watching what others are watching' (McCabe 1988 p.31), but he does not take time-shifting into account, a practice which shatters this viewing 'community'. Viewing has to be carefully organised, as we have seen, in order to keep up with a serial, but also in order to keep up with TV related talk. The regularity and immediacy of long-running serials like *Dallas* or *EastEnders* exert a particular kind of pressure on the time-shifter. This draws our attention to the appropriateness, or otherwise, of time-shifting for particular types of product'. We noted that B/05 felt it necessary to view live events and televised disasters 'as they happen' and we could tentatively suggest here that catastrophes, for example, the Brighton Bomb, the Iranian Embassy siege and the sinking of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*, all of which appeared on 'live' television, operate, in effect, as an open text. That is, the outcome is unknown, both to the broadcaster and the viewers; we are literally watching in suspense together. Christine Geraghty, writing about long running serials and soap operas, suggests that one of their distinctive features is that 'the

everyday quality of narrative time and events, all encourage us to believe that this is a narrative whose future is not yet written' (Geraghty 1981 p.11). This is not to suggest that there is any confusion in the minds of the viewers between a soap opera and the 'live' coverage of an event, but it would seem that the soap opera's organisation of time and the way in which it presents itself as having an unwritten future, its 'here and now' quality, interpellates the viewer in similar ways.

We noted that watching video tapes during the day was often due to absolute necessity and, in fact, C1/5 claimed that she felt less guilty watching 'real' time television than she did when watching a video tape. The television is transmitting whether she decides to watch or not, but the use of a video tape implies a guilty decision to view which is totally in her control. This would seem to be an important difference between the experience of broadcast television and time-shift video tapes for women at home during the day.

Ever since Peter Fiddick's confessions in *The Guardian* to recording programmes he felt he ought to watch and then never getting around to actually watching them, it has been a commonly held belief that, in general, people do not watch their recorded tapes. However, on the evidence of this sample of women, it should be noted that this is true only of the middle class households, some of whom did report this kind of behaviour. Indeed, they claimed to record 'classic' television, concerts and productions of Shakespeare, some of which they had never watched. Conversely, most of the C, D and E households did, in fact, watch what they recorded and very few indulged in the doubtful luxury of accumulating self-improving videos which they felt they ought to watch.

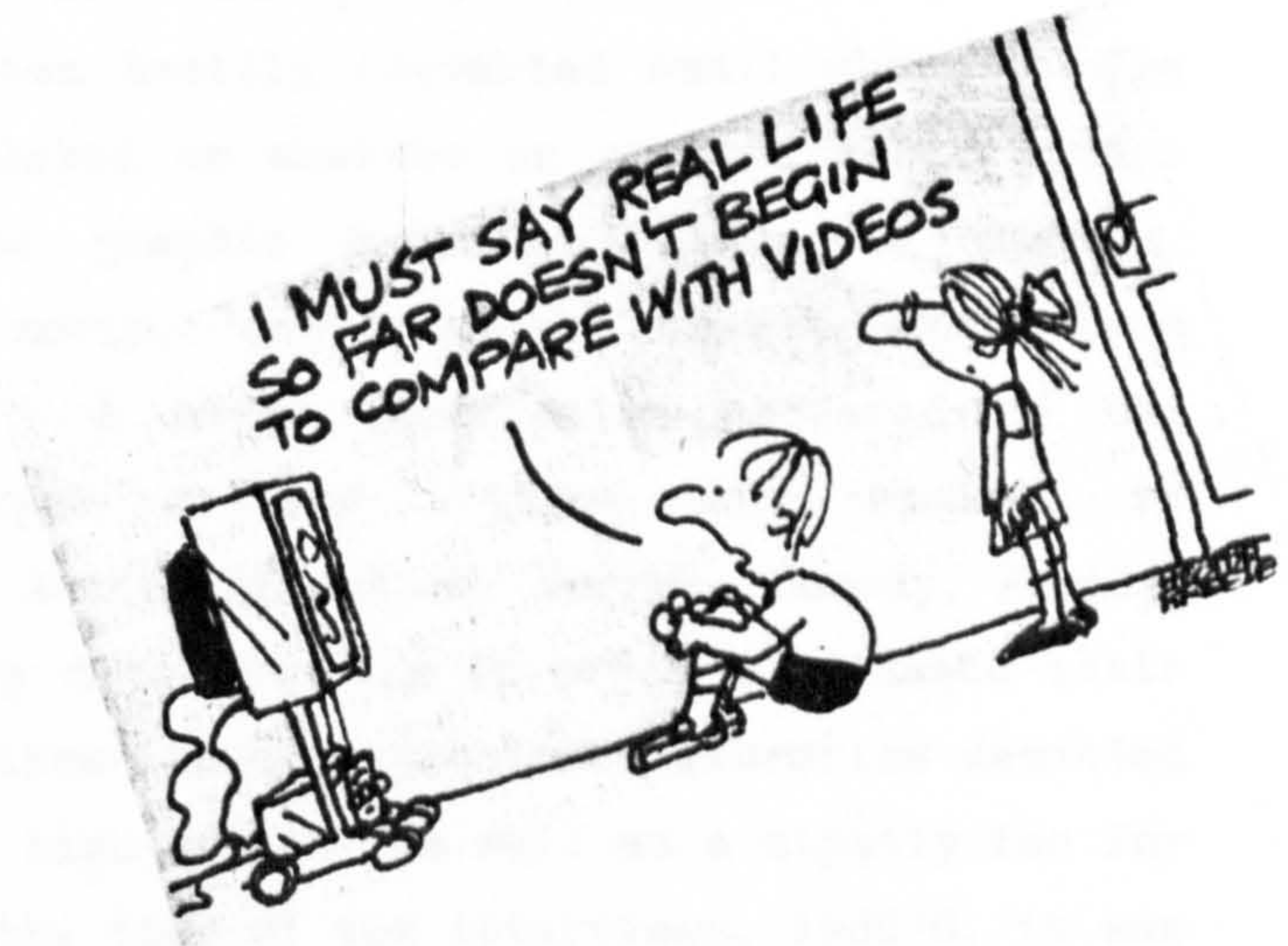
It can be seen that the distribution of tapes within the households tended to favour children and partners, with very few of the women owning a tape of their own or archived tapes for themselves. The organisation and maintenance of an archive would seem to be a predominantly male and middle class activity. The limit which

economic circumstances place on the number of tapes is significant here, but the gendered nature of this practice requires some examination. Obviously the question of available time as well as inclination is important, but some of the women reported their partner's concern to re-view tapes, especially movies. The women themselves did not share this preference. The whole concept of an archive is based on the assumption that there will be more than one viewing of the product, something that would appear to be a predominantly male activity. Even those women who did have archived films of their own, e.g. C1/3 and D/1, reported that they were much more prepared to 'wipe' than their partners. In D/1's case there was a distinct reluctance by her partner to wipe anything once it had been recorded. A significant number of the women reported that their children of both genders would constantly return to a familiar text in rather the same way. This, of course, can partly be accounted for in terms of available time to indulge in this re-viewing, but this is not a sufficient explanation. It does seem to be evidence also of their pleasure in the film as a film, rather than simply as a vehicle for narrative. As we have seen in Chapter 4, story was an extremely important textual element for women. Once this is known, there seems little point in re-engaging with the text.

P. Sheen

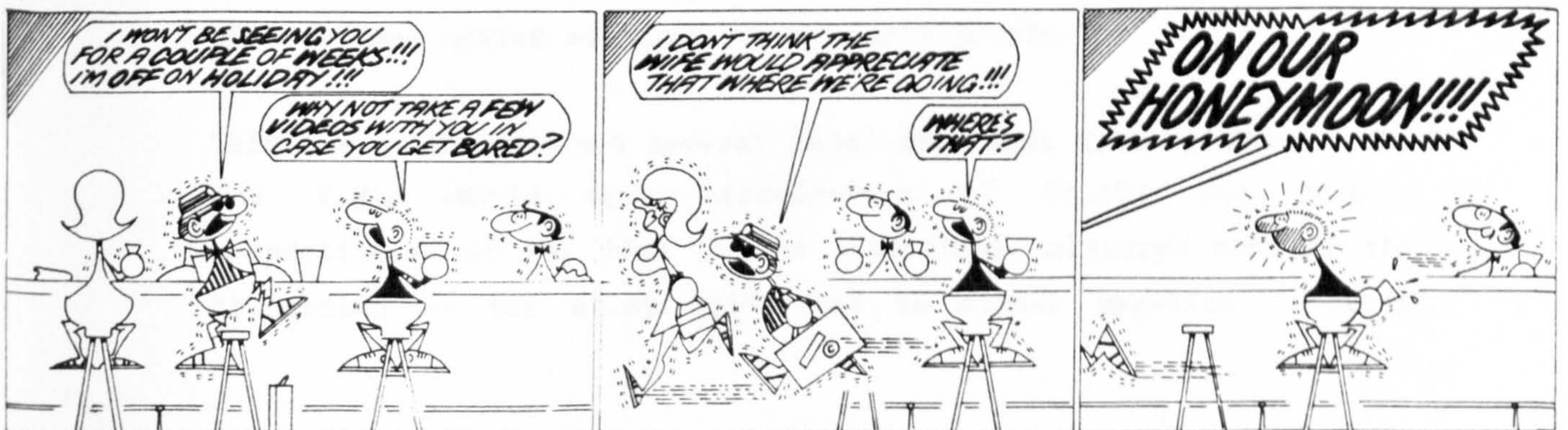


" FLYBYNIGHT ENTERPRISES VIDEO CLUB SPEAKING "



## Monty Video

by George Robinson





7 THE VCR: HIRING TAPES

C2/03: I know the girl - she comes into the shop where I work, and she goes to me 'oh, there's a new "three parter" coming out'

The second major use for the domestic VCR is playing pre-recorded tapes, other than off-air recordings, purchased or hired from a video rental outlet. The majority of the tapes available for purchase and/or hire are movies. 'Movies' in this context include films made specially for video distribution, films made for TV, both British and American, as well as 'feature' films produced primarily for the cinema. In Britain during the early 1980s, the beginning of the consumer boom in domestic VCR ownership/rental, one feature of almost every high street was a new phenomenon known as the 'video library'. These were often hastily converted small shops. The tapes were boxed and displayed on shelves or stands, their covers took their references and graphic artwork from movie posters, showing the title of the movie, 'eye-catching' images, and, where appropriate, its 'stars'. A brief description appeared on the reverse. In the larger outlets tapes were shelved in 'categories': for example, Action/Adventure, Horror, Comedy, Family, Adult, etc. In these early days, usually in order to finance their purchase of new material, these under-capitalised libraries demanded a membership fee, often as high as £40, as well as a nightly fee for the hiring of tapes. At the time of the interviews, 1985/6, it was possible to join a video library free of charge; and pay a nightly rental fee of £1.00-£1/50 per tape, although the purchase price of pre-recorded movies averaged around forty pounds.'

This new market spawned several magazines, most notably *Video Today* and *Video World* with circulations of 37,473 and 30,000, respectively, at the time of the interviews, although none of the households in the study subscribed to either magazine. Both

magazines were consumer orientated, with features and lists of new software as well as information on hardware, and both attracted advertisers from both areas.

The video industry, and this term is used to describe the distributors and retailers of pre-recorded tapes for purchase or hire, has experienced major change. Many of the smaller outlets have gone by the board, forced out by the larger and well-established distributors who moved in once the market had been tested. The industry has established its own quasi-professional organisations in order to protect itself against 'video piracy' (the illegal copying of films for distribution) and to professionalise and improve its image, which has not been good. The 'moral panic'<sup>2</sup> which resulted in the Video Recordings Bill of 1984, providing for every film on hire to be censored for home viewing, had a devastating effect on the public image of the video libraries. This was fuelled enthusiastically by the popular press. On 1 September 1982 the *Sun* carried the headline 'Fury over video nasties' and referred to the video distributors and retailers as 'the merchants of menace' who were threatening the well-being of our children.

This was the general climate of public debate around the video industry at the time of my interviews, a period when the term 'video nasty' had become commonplace. The project was interested in the general use which the women made of video libraries and went far beyond concerns about the so-called, and rather hazily defined, 'video nasties'. This term was not introduced into the discussions by the interviewer, allowing the women themselves bring it up, should they see fit. Surprisingly few did, but some talked of their worries about their children's viewing of 'unsuitable' video tapes and their attempts at control. As it was the intention to allow the women themselves to raise issues which they felt to be of importance this was then taken up and discussed.

In order to explore this aspect of VCR use, we will first deal with visits to the video library and the women's impressions of these outlets, and then detail who hires the films and with what frequency. The second section deals with the kinds of tapes that are hired, and for whom, and what the women feel about these choices.

### The Video Library

#### Group A/B

In general, tape-hire was not a regular feature of VCR use in this group. However all the women had, at some time, been into a video library. For B/1 and B/4, these were confusing places:

B/1: Well..I mean..I can look at titles and they mean absolutely nothing to me..the title gives nothing away, whereas my husband will say..'oh yes, that's supposed to be very good', or 'that's not'..it's just water over my head really.

B/4 reported that she had never hired a film, but had been into the video library a few times to take her daughter's tapes back. I asked her what she thought of it:

B/4: What did I think of it?..pause..it didn't have much impact, I'm afraid. I wasn't terribly, you know, I wasn't sufficiently interested to even look if there was anything I wanted.

Like B/1 she had no interest in the films and also no knowledge of current titles. B/1 was asked what struck her first when she went in:

B/1: Well, just looking at the titles really..

Q: Are they divided up?

B/1: Yes..children's movies, horror, sex lot, cowboy-type...

Q: Which did you go to first?

B/1: I think I went to light entertainment, or classics, *The Sound of Music*, musicals...

Q: Would you go in and hire a film for yourself?

B/1: No, I shouldn't think so [laugh]..I mean I can always think of something else to do.

Although B/1 did have a car, lack of transport prevented two of the women in this group going to the video library alone. B/3's husband was sometimes away on business. Would she hire a video for herself on these occasions?

B/3: No... Because I can't get..well I suppose I could, but it's at Dewsbury you see, which is three or four miles..I mean if I asked him he would get me one and then he'd take it back, but it would mean we would have it for two or three days, which is really defeating the object of hiring one.

B/5 spoke of her favourite category in the video shop:

B/5: I like a good melodrama, but they don't put them in terms of that. I don't like science fiction..I can't..it leaves me cold, it's not my cup of tea at all..war films, I'm not keen on..No. A good fictional romance I enjoy.

She said that if there wasn't much on television and she and her husband were up-to-date with viewing their recorded tapes, they would go down to the corner shop together to choose a video. I asked her if the selection was wide or limited:

B/5: Well, limited, for what I want it is, yes it is. But he's very good with me, he knows the kind of films I like, he's never gone wrong yet..we get a lot of milk..if I run out of milk or whatever, Bill - I don't drive you see - but he goes down in the car so we've been a customer in the shop and he knows Bill, and he'll say 'your wife will like this film'..and Bill will often on a Monday night or Tuesday night when I'm working for instance, this Monday night he went out and got *Fawlty Towers*, 'cos he knows that I wouldn't want to sit there for an hour and a half and watch it.

This is a good example of casual video rental - purchasing essential food supplies from the corner shop leads to renting a video. In these circumstances customers' tastes become known to the shop owner/manager who recommends appropriate titles.

B/6 had been to their video library once, with her husband. Were there a lot of films she would have liked to have watched?

B/6: No, not a lot, a few. I suppose we are aware of films coming out on release and think we'd like to see that..but we never actually get to the cinema. So maybe in a couple of years, when they get into the video shop..I missed *Out of Africa* which I can see myself getting..something like that.

#### Group C

All the women in this group had been into a video library, but mostly these visits were with either partner, children, or both. C1/1's use of the video library was fairly typical of those households with young children:

C1/1: We all go together, usually on Sunday and take it back Monday..erm..sometimes the girls will have some money of their own and we let them choose one of their own and then we choose one that's not suitable for them to watch. Other times we get something that's suitable for everybody to watch.

The women were asked to describe their video shop and C1/1 said that the tapes were displayed in sections. Which section would she go to?

C1/1: erm..me personally?..erm I don't know, really,..they don't always categorise videos in a very good way, do they?...there again, I'd probably go for the newer films and see what they had there and then probably move on erm..I don't know how they do it..I'm trying to think..they sort of put the children's section separate, don't they?..and then there's comedy..but they're

not..films seem to overlap a lot more than books in that respect don't they?..and erm..I'd probably move on to the comedy and then the romance and work my way lastly to the science fiction.

C1/7 and C2/2s first impressions of their video libraries were rather similar:

C1/7: I vaguely remember all these horror things and ghost things, like *Halloween*, and I'm not interested in those..like *Earthquake*; there was very little that attracted me.

C2/2: They hadn't many that appealed to me [laugh]..you know, all this blood and guts and everything which I'm not really into.

C2/4 was much more interested when she first went into the video library, but became worried after they had hired a few tapes:

C2/4: Erm..when I first went in well..again, there were five of us and we were just looking for a film..I was quite taken up with it..I was a bit worried about whether the films were suitable for the children..because one or two we've had out have been a little bit near the knuckle and they're not small children, we're quite open about things, but sometimes when they're swearing..I cringe..and one or two we've had out that's looked really good when we've got them home they've been swearing..so really when I was in the video shop..the first time we went in I wasn't really worried about that, but after we'd had one or two out..after that it made me a bit wary of what we were getting out. I usually read a bit of the story on the back, and keep away from 18 ones - I'll go up to 15. You see they're all mixed up really..and sometimes the labels come off.

C1/5 shared C2/2's worries about the suitability of video tapes available for children's viewing. She accompanies her children when hiring videos, as she said, 'we mainly hire for the kiddies'. She was asked if she looked around the shop when she went in with them:

C1/5: Yes, I normally do - like, if I go up with them all, they're generally showing me films anyway that are way out of what they should have - you know, 'cheeky' ones and..and I go NO, definitely not..NO. You know, I just won't..I don't know, you don't know if you're doing right or not - I've no idea..I'm not prudish with them by any means, but I don't think a lot of this violence is..I mean I know they see it on television, but not like..I was adamant that they weren't going to have that *Exorcist* - I wasn't going to go up to the video shop and get them that, you know..to me it's an X and that's why it's an X - because it's not fit for them to see - so I was mean and horrible [laugh].

This woman's husband spends long periods away from home and she is very conscious of her role as a single-parent on these occasions. The question of parental control of viewing is interesting in all its aspects, but here we can see that the video outlets present these women with an often bewildering range of 'titles' which they feel they have to assess and, to a certain extent, censor. As we have seen, the women themselves often have no knowledge of current titles and the kinds of films the video shops offer. As C1/5 said, her children know more about this than she does:

C1/5: Well, they normally have an idea what they want. I mean this goes on from school, you know..they might be with a child at school who's watched something and, of course, they want to watch it - you know, some ideas they get..

Q: So do you tend to get films that you think will be suitable for them?

C1/5: Well..I tend to want them to want films...but, I don't know, it's probably the day and age..that they are mixing with kids whose parents tend to let them have...it's very difficulty, actually.

The films she 'wants them to want' are, presumably, those films which are addressed to children, but in the open displays of many video outlets children obviously feel themselves addressed by other genres. To what degree this is a result of peer group pressure is

not clear, but whatever the various causes are, she, for one, finds it inappropriate and is uncertain as to how it should be dealt with.

Some women were more confident in their dealings with the video library and this was largely because of their wider knowledge of films. This could be general knowledge of genres as well as an awareness of new films in circulation. C2/3 was a regular user of video libraries, and she was asked how many she belonged to:

C2/3: Well, I thought I was a member of five, but I've just been told one of them's been pulled down..four. We use three of them regularly, the other one, we joined it more for convenience, it's up at the garage, you know..for the long hours that they were open basically. I think we've only had two films from there, but we use the others regularly.

Q: Can you tell me how the films are laid out in the video shops?

C2/3: Well they're not, really, they're all mixed up. That was the only good thing about the garage because they have a shelf for horrors, thrillers, the dramas and children's..they were all separate, but if you go..mind you one of them they have a computer and if you do ask for..a particular film that you know what you want..it gets mind boggling..you go downstairs and there's shelves and shelves of films..you're looking for something and you don't see it because there's so many that you've looked at. Matthew [son] and myself the other day, we were looking for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and one that he wanted, and they were both there, but they were tucked away, it took us ages to find them.

Q: So when you go to hire a film, do you generally know what it is you want?

C2/3: Well I do, if I go hire one..one I go to..I know the girl - she comes into the shop where I work, and she goes to me 'oh there's a new three-parter coming out', and things like that, and she'll tell me briefly what it's about - whether she thinks I'll enjoy it or not. But that particular video shop it is the only one that keeps like all the Warners films separate, all the other ones are mixed up but all the Warner ones are together. Ian [husband] tends to go for



those, I'm not saying he doesn't get the other ones, but he'll look through those first to see if there's anything he'd like.

Although she referred to the video shops as 'mind-boggling', she often knew which films she wanted and, although her son was the same age as one of C1/5's children, there was no mention of the problems of censorship which emerged in C1/5's talk. Again, like B/5, she and her tastes were well-known enough for the assistant in the shop to alert her to new titles.

C2/5, who, as the only driver in the household and the dominant VCR user, always went to hire movies:

C2/5: I was surprised at the amount of films that they had for rental.

Q: Were they the kinds of films that you were interested in?

C2/5: Yes. They've got some that I'd never watch, that I'd never think about watching, but there's a lot we watched, at first, when we first got it, we hired one every day.

I asked C1/3 what her first impressions of the video library were:

C1/3: Oh, it was wonderful [laugh] absolutely wonderful.

Q: I always find there are masses of tapes..

C1/3: Oh, yes..very confusing. I find that now because I've seen them all, and I think, which one haven't I seen. But at first I knew exactly what I wanted to watch. I knew straight away what I wanted.

Q: How did you know that?

C1/3: Well, because I wanted to watch a lot of nasty horror films [laugh] so I just dived into the horror movies, you know..it was wonderful [laugh].

Q: Do you think the video shops have a wide choice?

C1/3: Oh they do cater for all, absolutely, because if I was one for sloppy stories, my eyes would aim at that section.

#### Group D/E

Three of the women in this group visited their video shops regularly. D/3 was a member of five, but tended to use only two. I asked her how she went about choosing a film:

D/3: Well, in most of them they give you a booklet and give you an idea what films they've got. I look at it - but they've got them all up on shelves and you just look for them.

Q: Are they all mixed up on the shelves?

D/3: No, they're under, features, comedies, musicals and things like that. But I tend to go for all the films I've missed since I was at school..then people tell me things that were good and I go for them as well.

E/2s video outlet, at the local garage, had just closed down, so she was feeling the lack of availability of videos. She did not have transport and was unable to travel any further afield to hire tapes. She, like C1/3 had a liking for the 'horror' genre and had found a plentiful supply of films at her video shop.

D/1s household belonged to six video 'clubs' and she would quite often go to the video library to hire a film for joint watching, either with all the family or with her husband. She generally knew which film(s) she was looking for before she went:

D/1: It tends to go that, about every few months, there'll be a batch of videos come out that we want to see because we don't go to the cinema any more. I'm always saying, let's go see such and such..'oh no, we'll wait until it comes out on video', he says..I would like to go see *Room with a View*, but then when I think of how much it's going to cost the pair of us, I think, well it'll be out in a few months, I might as well wait..so

consequently, about every four to six months or so, you're aware there's a whole batch come out which you wanted to see at the pictures and which are waiting. The girls had a video out recently for them and whilst I was in there, you know, I found *Purple Rose of Cairo*, a list of them I wanted to see..so I know when the World Cup finishes we'll be off to the video, getting out one or two a week until we've seen them all.

Q: Do you ever go to the video library not knowing [Yes]..what happens then?

D/1: I'll just look everywhere and wait for various things to jump up at me and I'll think, oh yes..like old films that I fancy seeing again, or something I enjoyed..or something I was vaguely interested in and hadn't taken out..it could be something fresh, or it could be something I'd seen before and just fancied seeing again. I would just go along the shelves.

Q: Do any of them organise the films on display?

D/1: Some do, and some are hopeless..well I suppose in general they're all hopeless really, er..no, it's very much a question of looking...they have very loose areas, you know, comedy, horror, but I mean the main bulk of films you might be interested in don't come under those categories, you know..they're just films [laugh].

#### Who hires and with what frequency

Although almost all the women had been to a video library and had watched rented movies, there were many times when they watched movies on video which had not been their own choice. In recognising that they are involved in the hiring of videos, we must not overlook the fact that often their choices were conditioned by the fact that they were selecting films for their children, films which they could watch with their partner, or simply going along with the majority decision. On other occasions their partners selected the tapes alone, either because they were keen viewers, the video shop is on their way home from work, or that they had money to spend on videos. Such films are often not enjoyed by the women.

Group A/B:

A/1 was asked under what circumstances a movie might be hired:

A/1: We would do it if we thought we were going to have an evening in and we'd exhausted what we had, but we wanted to watch. Or more often it is I myself who hires them if my husband's away. I quite often hire one if he's away and watch it.

This woman was keen on cinema and was often the instigator of visits to the cinema with her husband. However, this was not possible very often because of their work and so she would catch up with films she had missed when he was away. This was a planned event and she knew in advance which film she wanted. For A/4, this forward planning was not part of her routine:

A/4: Well, I might hire a movie, but it's something you don't think about until you sit and realise there isn't one on TV, then it's too late, you see.

B/1's husband was an avid video fan and hired every week, mainly at the weekends. B/1, as we have seen, would never hire anything for herself and wasn't very interested. Her husband was apparently keen for her to become involved in watching videos with him, to the extent of pressing her to choose a title:

B/1: My husband does try very hard, I mean I am terrible, I really am..he'll say 'what do you want to see, what would you like, what shall I get for you?'..and I'll say..'well'... I'm not up..you see he's so up-to-date on things, he's read all the papers, he's seen all the film things, he seems to know what's going on, what's the latest films. I know nothing because I'm not interested in that area, so erm..he'll say..'you might like so and so, and so and so', I say 'well get that then' and he'll get it and he'll say 'do you like it?' and I say [shrugs..laugh]..he does so want me to watch these things..erm..but no.

B/3, whose husband generally chose the videos they hired, said that her husband was the one who knew about films:

B/3: We've seen a few films. My husband usually reads *The Sunday Times* write up, that's where he gets all the gen from.

The knowledge which their husbands had gained about films, their awareness of new titles, and whether they are 'good' or not, places them in the position of 'experts' and therefore the most obvious person to select the tapes. A/1, on the other hand, kept herself up-to-date with current films and was able, as a result, to exercise her own choice in hiring.

A/4 was asked if they had ever hired a movie to watch:

A/4: Yes. I think about three, ever. That's only because in the past year a video shop has just opened up around the corner so I could hire them.

Q: What kind of circumstances might you hire one?

A/4: Well..if it was a Saturday and there was nothing on we might hire one, or, I mean..George [husband] hired *Brazil* because he went into the shop to buy something - it's a computer and video shop, and he saw *Brazil*, and brought it home. I wouldn't have hired it.

Apart from B/1 and B/5 households, this group did not hire very frequently and even B/5 told me how their pattern of VCR use had changed:

B/5: We use it a lot, oh, absolutely..the films from the library have worn off because there's only so many, erm, films out at one given time and we only like certain films anyway..now that has certainly worn off, we don't rent as many films as we did, but the machine now is probably being used more.

For B/3, their hiring had also become less frequent, although this was their main reason for purchasing the VCR:

B/3: We hired videos until we found they were coming on the television at Christmas, or whatever..erm..we used to get one every Friday

night to watch instead of going out, and then we got we'd either been to the cinema and seen them when we were courting that had come onto a video, or else when we'd been married..now we seem to have seen them all, and they're coming onto the television - so we just wait until they come onto the television.

B/3 indicates a fairly critical period of time when movies can be hired, that is, between exhibition, when it might have been seen at the cinema, and their transmission on broadcast television. A/1 and B/6 made similar points when they talked about hiring films for their children:

A/1: I mean there's only a limited market in things like *Star Wars*..*Superman* has been on TV, we have hired those before they were on television, but there's only a limited range of those.

B/6: Fairly early on, when we first had it [VCR], we thought, oh yes, now we've got the video we'll be able to go out and get films and I think it was a Bank Holiday weekend and we went out and got this film, only to find it was shown on the Monday on television [laugh].

They have all identified the critical gap between exhibition and transmission and recognised that this eventually this leads to a decline in tape hiring. Their perception of this particular use of the VCR is stimulated by 'cinema' and the films which are, in general, defined as mainstream, a point which has been discussed.

#### Group C:

Although most of the households in this group hired tapes on a regular basis, only three of the women, claimed to hire tapes for themselves. The majority of the tapes, therefore, were hired either for family viewing or hired by the male partner for 'adult' viewing. C1/1's family went to the video library together and I asked her what kind of films they hired:

C1/1: Not usually the ones I want [laugh]..my vote's usually cast way down the list.

Q: It's rarely your choice?

C1/1: Well usually when I choose one it turns out to be a flop anyway [laugh]. They say 'who chose this?'...ME [laugh].

The 'flop factor' was a very significant element in the reluctance of some of the women in imposing their choice on their partners and families. C1/4 spoke about the kinds of films that were mostly hired in her household:

C1/4: Oh, well, they do tend to be war - back to the war - which isn't always received well from the other person in the family. You know..it's time we let it die sort of thing, you know.

Q: Whose main selection is that?

C1/4: Fathers..~~mm~~..~~mm~~.

She was asked if she had ever chosen a film herself. Whilst she had never selected one to watch on her own, she had chosen, from the video library's list of tapes, a film to watch with her husband and son on their regular Sunday evening viewing session. I asked her what she had chosen:

C1/4: *The Deer Hunter*, and that turned out to be a war film as well [laugh]..but it was all the awards it was bringing..I thought, well, it must be good for something.

Ironically, this woman had inadvertently chosen a film about war, a genre of films which she did not enjoy and which dominated her husband's selection of tapes for hire. But, as we saw in Chapter 4, the double irony was that her husband did not enjoy the film, and the fact that her choice had been a 'flop' as far as her husband was concerned had undermined her confidence in attempting to assert her choice again.

C1/7 was simply outnumbered in her household of four men. I asked

if she had been to hire a tape for herself:

C1/7: I've only been about twice..[why?].I'm not a very dominant person really. I tend to watch what they choose rather than impose my choice on them, because with me being the only female in the house and there's four giants around you, their choice isn't really mine..what I choose they wouldn't watch.

This recognition was shared by many of the women; i.e. their choice would not be popular with the rest of the family. And, like C1/7, most were prepared to go along with their husband's or family's selection:

C2/2: Well, there's not really many that I would say 'yes, we'll go and get that'. Occasionally I pick a few, but more often than not Derek'll say 'shall we get so and so?'. 'well, if you want'..'cos, I mean, I know he's going to watch it more than I am anyway.

C2/1: It's normally Michael that gets tapes and I'm not..you know, I'm not bothered..I'll watch it but I'm not..I won't say 'oh, I'll get this one'..I don't really pick them, he does..and he likes all war and horrors..he'll sit and watch ones about prisons, and war and blood, he's not fussy...I'm not bothered, he's worked all week, so he deserves it doesn't he?

As we have already seen, the fact that husbands 'work all week' is used as a justification for them getting their own way in their leisure time; here this extends to their selection of videos for joint viewing.

For the small number of women who hired tapes for themselves there was still an awareness of 'their' choice not being shared by their partners, and vice versa, with significant differences as to what kinds of films are given priority for joint viewing:

C2/5: I don't like science fiction and I don't like cowboys.



Q: Do you ever hire those kinds of film?

C2/5: Not science fiction, but a cowboy - if it were for Andrew, not for myself.

Q: Would you watch it?

C2/5: No - it might be on, but I wouldn't particularly watch it.

Q: What kind of film would you both like, what would you choose?

C2/5: Comedy, Action Adventure, all of the popular ones, like the *Rocky's*, something like that - we've watched those.

Q: Are there films that you enjoy more than your husband?

C2/5: Oh, absolutely..love stories and things like that..erm..these weepy ones, you know, things like that *Last Snows of Spring*, things like that.

Q: So would you watch those on your own?

C2/5: Yes, I'd watch those on my own, or with my mum or something like that.

C1/3's partner did not like her favoured genre - horror - so she tended to watch those on her own, either when he was away or after he had gone to bed. What kinds of films did her husband like to hire?

C1/3: He hires a lot of erm..ooo..what would you call them? Again, new films, but ones I wouldn't want to watch, like, erm..boxing films, Al Pacino, tough guy films, like that..that's more his cup of tea. Violent films, action films, something happening all the time.

Q: So, what happens on a Saturday evening? Whose tape gets watched?

C1/3: Both of them - I will watch his..just in case I'm missing anything, so his goes on first. Then I watch my horror movie after he's gone to bed.

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, C2/3 used the video library regularly and I asked her if she thought she hired a lot of films:

C2/3: Yes..more when my husband's at home, he's the one that goes and thinks nothing of getting four or five at a time. If he's home on a Saturday, he'll probably go and get four, even through the week, on a night, if there's nothing on the TV he wants to watch, he'll go and get 3 or 4 videos, he does more hiring. I mean we have had them over this last weekend, about 5 or 6, but we get more when Ian's [husband] at home, I mean he's the one that goes up and he's stupid with them to an extent. Sometimes we get them and we don't really have time to sit down and watch them all..we do hire quite a lot of films.

Q: What kind of films does he bring?

C2/3: Well, a variety really..he brings a lot of horror, he likes horror and so does Matthew [son], but he doesn't bring all horror, he looks for things that he thinks I might enjoy watching..you know..he brings a..what I call a family film, and if he sees a tear jerker..I'm into them..I like to be depressed..but he does, he brings a variety home. He's not one for westerns a great deal, but he goes for anything else.

Although her husband brought her 'tear jerkers', this woman regularly hired 'tear jerkers' and 'family sagas', or 'three parters' to watch with female friends during the day, when their husbands and children were out, thus ensuring that they could watch without interruption or distraction.

Most women in this group reported that their households hired fairly regularly, but for some, frequency of hiring had declined as the 'novelty' had worn off. However, hiring tapes was still a significant option for an evening's entertainment, particularly at weekends, and especially for those households who had small children and/or limited disposable income.

Group D/E

I asked D/1 who normally hired the videos:

D/1: That's purely a matter of convenience. It'll be decided beforehand what we're going to have, and I'll probably go and get it because I've got the car. We both know what films we're interested in, what got good reviews, or had been recommended, or what we're just plain interested in. There maybe a preference somewhere along the line..and, you know, that's more your's than mine type of thing..erm..if we become aware of it, we'll compensate..you pick one for tonight.

As we have seen earlier, D/1's hiring pattern tended to be very much movie driven - a batch of films come out which they wanted to see and they would work their way through them, rather than hiring regularly at weekends.

D/2 said that they hired a film about once a fortnight and that they all went to the video shop together to choose. She was asked which film they had last watched together:

D/2: Erm...[long pause]..*Who Will Love My Children?*..my husband brought that home for me, one of his mates at work had told him it was a bit of a weepy one [laugh]...and he likes horror ones.

As we have already seen, D/3 hires movies when she can afford to, but E/1, who is unemployed has to rely on watching tapes hired by her married sister and brother - she finds renting tapes beyond her means.

### What is hired

In the last section we touched upon the kinds of tapes which were hired. This is obviously closely linked with the person who actually does the hiring, but we will now go into the actual selection in more detail. This section will examine how the women approach the selection of films, particularly for 'adult' viewing, and the terms they used to describe this. As we have seen, some video libraries displayed their tapes under categories, and these category headings informed some of the discussion about films. The

concept of genre is obviously of relevance here. Neale suggests that genres are 'systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject' (Neale 1980 p.19), and we can see the home video market as opening up new demands for popular genres. But the video library is a particularly interesting site for the circulation of meanings around genres and we are more specifically concerned with the ways in which the women use their knowledge of different genres in their selection of tapes. Andrew Tudor reminds us that 'a genre exists in the conceptions of its audience as much as in the artefacts of which it is apparently composed'<sup>3</sup>.

The first point to make about genre as a criterion for selection is that one group of women (Group 1) implicitly rejected it. This group does not include those women who were generally ignorant of film culture (B/1, B/4 and C1/9) who, as we have seen had very little interest in watching movies at all. Andrew Tudor suggests that within mainstream film criticism genres, as opposed to film 'movements', 'as part of popular cinema, belong to mass culture' (Tudor 1974 p. 182) and it is this assumption which the women in Group 1 seem to be making. They do not compare popular genres displayed in the video library under appropriate headings with the so-called 'art' films which have been organised by film historians into 'movements', but with the named film of which they have heard and about which they have read. John Ellis, in analysing the distinctiveness of cinema and broadcast television, indicates that cinema marketing sells the 'single film in its uniqueness' (Ellis 1982 p. 25) and it is this notion of the 'unique' text which we will now extend to the organisation of movies in the video libraries and the perceptions of Group 1 about the kinds of films they would select. The 'unique' text is such by virtue of the fact that it has already stimulated critical acclaim and been established as a text of 'value' and therefore worth watching, the kind of text that A/1 referred to as a 'quality' film:

A/1: Well, I want to hire 'The Spiderwoman' because I haven't seen it, but it depends at that

moment in time..a lot of the ones you want to see aren't available on video of course, and it depends what's come out of the, what I would call quality films, that I would like to see. I've missed, for example, and I think it is on video now, *Letter to Brezhnev*, and I would quite like to see that.

Q: So you tend to hire films that you've read or heard about?

A/1: Oh yes. I would never hire a film I didn't really know.

C1/2, whose husband and daughter tended to dominate the television and VCR, had a similar response:

C1/2: I don't hire films, my husband does sometimes, and my daughter does..I don't really, unless there's something particular that has been advertised that I was interested in..I don't go to the shop..I don't ask for anything in particular unless I've read about something and I'm interested in it.

Three of the women in this group seemed to suggest that the kinds of films which they would choose didn't fit into any particular genre or category, and it seems that certain video libraries have created their own hierarchy of texts, reflected in the display lay-out, and the price:

C1/7: There were these horror things - I didn't need to have looked at those, they were on a separate rack - and I went straight away to..it's about a year since I've been..there's these films that you have to pay extra for...Warner Brothers videos, those are more my choice I think..I looked there, I think I chose those.

C1/6: They do have some decent films, yes..there are the obvious new ones that are in the window that are advertised, I would go for one of those if there was something I hadn't seen. I wouldn't go in and just choose from a section, no.

The 'Warner Brothers' and newer films are usually separated out from the rest of the stock, even if the tapes are not displayed in

sections, but the point is that these women have got some knowledge of the film itself as a 'unique' text which they would not, themselves, see as belonging to any specific genre. D/1 expressed this feeling in an interesting way:

D/1: They have very loose areas, you know, comedy, horror, but I mean the main bulk of films you might be interested in don't come under those categories, you know..they're just films [laugh].

'They're just films' would seem to express most clearly what these women would see as their choice, critically acclaimed 'unique' texts, which do not belong with the popular genres that constitute the rest of the video library stock. The 'unique' text also tends to eliminate the significance of gender differences in the viewing subjects. With the exception of C1/7, who was, as she put it, 'outnumbered' by adult males with a penchant for horror and pornographic movies, all the women in Group 1 claimed that their partners had similar tastes in films to them. They would sit down and watch a 'unique' text together. This is not to say that their tastes in films were totally shared. Some partners enjoyed genres traditionally associated with a male audience; for example, science fiction, a preference not shared by their female partners. However, there was a tendency for them to agree on the quality of the canon of 'unique' films. A/1 told me that she and her husband enjoyed watching 'quality' films and D/1's partner shared her tastes:

D/1: We both know what films we're interested in, what got good reviews or had been recommended, or what we're just plain interested in. There may be a preference somewhere along the line..and, you know..that's more yours than mine type of thing..erm..if we become aware of it we'll compensate..you pick one for tonight. In general we tend to be pretty much wanting the same sort of things.

These women's selection of films was much more narrowly prescribed than those women who had a relatively open approach to the video library and what it had to offer.

Just as the notion of a 'quality' film seemed to minimise gender differences in the viewing groups in Group 1 households, categorisation of films into genres by the Group 2 women whose responses I now wish to consider seemed to highlight gender differences. The women often used genre categories when speaking about their male partners' hiring preferences:

B/1: Horror [laugh], but I don't watch those because I hate horror, I can't bear horror; but, there again, my husband likes it and my two older children like it so..they all watch that.

Q: What kind of film might he get for you?

B/1: Erm..well, I liked *On Golden Pond*, I loved that, that type of film, you see I hate horror, I hate cowboys and he loves space, science fiction. Well, I can't get involved in science fiction..he gets the odd war one, but I find that quite depressing really, I don't like to watch that sort of thing..I'm very flippant I think, with my..I like things that make me laugh, that are funny..I like comedies or a good love story.

Several of the women told me what their partner's selected from the video library:

C1/1 Oh, the science fiction..action adventure..he'd rather see action than story.

C1/4: Well they do tend to be war..

C1/5: Erm..well my husband likes space and goodness knows what and things like that.

C2/1: he likes all war and horrors..he'll sit and watch ones about prisons, and war and blood, he's not fussy.

C2/2: If I say he'll watch anything, I'm not far wrong [laugh] Erm..as I say, bloodthirsty ones, horror films, space, you know.

Not only did the women refer to their husband's preferences in terms of genre, but to their own also, often using rather pejorative terms, such as 'tear jerker':

C2/5: Love stories and things like ..erm..these weepy ones, you know.

D/2: Erm..[long pause].. *Who Will Love My Children?*..my husband brought that home for me, one of his mates at work had told him it was a bit of a weepy one [laugh].

D/3: I think I would go for weepies first, then comedies.

C2/1 was asked how she went about selecting films within her favourite genre of romance:

C2/1: Well, when you get a video you can read what it's all about on the back, but..I don't know..I can tell right easily. I can pick one up and just read a couple of lines and say 'no, I don't want that'..and I just don't bother with it, but I can pick one up and straight away..if it appeals to me, I say 'right, I'll have that one'.

Q: How many video libraries do you belong to?

C2/1: Two..they're sort of all named..action and stuff..I always seem to know where mine are.

C1/3 had a similar approach to her selection at the video library:

C1/3: You know, it's like choosing a book - with any particular type of book that you like you go to a library you tend to go for the section you want.

As we have noted, it was the 'unique' texts chosen by Group 1 in this section that provided for joint male/female viewing. In Group 2 the presence of particular 'stars' was both a criteria for selection, and a guarantee of suitability for joint viewing:

C1/5: I'm trying to think what the last one was that we got..I just can't remember..it might have been a Clint Eastwood because I like Clint Eastwood films and so does my husband..now we do tend to get any of his that are out, we've had most of his, *Firefox* and things like that, we've had quite a few of his..I like that type of film.



C1/9: He likes Michael Caine, he thinks he's a good actor and he thinks he's a very serious actor..and he doesn't seem to get into movies that are really too make believe..He'd probably watch anything with him in.

C2/5: If I'm going I've usually in mind what I want. You know, what sort of film I want, er..I suppose if I didn't know what I wanted and I've no idea and I saw, say a Clint Eastwood film that I'd never heard anything about, I would Clint Eastwood because we like him. Or Sylvester Stallone..mind you, I once got caught - I got a Sylvester Stallone and it was a dirty one..[laugh].

But also some male 'stars' were chosen, especially by the younger women, because of their admiration for them. Richard Gere was favoured, and his films not necessarily enjoyed by their male partners:

C1/1: Oh, I liked him in *Officer and a Gentleman*..oh I liked that..that was a romantic film ..you know, you're sat there and you're her and you're being swept off your feet..you know, and very nice..carried away

Q: Did your husband enjoy that one?

C1/1: No..no..he thought it was a load of rubbish.

Another star, Al Pacino, was very popular with the men, but the women were often not keen. B/3s husband had hired a film for her one evening when he had to be out 'on business' and I asked her what it was:

B/3: *Scarface*..well I just didn't like it at all..he didn't think it would be as bad as what it was..it had Al Pacino in it..but it's like reading the precis of a book isn't it? I don't think he watched it until the end.

No female 'stars' were mentioned by the women either in terms of selection or description of films which had been hired.

## Summary

It is clear that those women who had any interest at all in the hiring of video tapes approached their selection of movies with certain preconceptions. These can be ordered into two main categories: that of the 'unique' text with a strong 'narrative image' which has successfully marked it out from the popular genres of mass culture; and that based on generic familiarity which, conversely, tends to locate films in their similarity rather than in terms of their distinctive difference from other texts. Familiarity is an important element in the use of genre as a criteria for selection, as it provides a set of expectations about the film. But, of course, those women who select the 'unique' text are also very familiar with its narrative image which has been constructed and circulated through various media. They will know the 'history' of the making of the film, any literary connections which it has, the actors, the director and, in many cases, the context of its making. This is a different kind of knowledge from generic knowledge, and it creates for the spectator a 'distance' from the text which already has been given the stamp of critical acclaim and 'quality'.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the marketing of 'blockbuster' films, especially those addressed to the child audience, creates a certain kind of 'unique' text which would determine choice for renting right across my sample. But, in general, there is a real distinction between those women who, like A/1, would not hire a film of which they did not already have some knowledge, and those who would select a film because it belonged to a specific and favourite generic category.

If we look more closely at those women who used the 'unique' text criteria and, incidentally who also referred to 'classic' and 'quality' television, we will see that they are spread across the sample:

A/1, A/2, A/4, B/2, B/3, B/6, C1/2, C1/6, C1/7 and D/1

However, what they have in common is higher education, a point already discussed in Chapter 4, which sets them apart from the rest of the women in the sample. Furthermore, the majority claimed that their partners shared their tastes in these 'quality' products, although there is evidence of tolerance, rather than a positive shared pleasure, in some of their statements. The fact that these women claimed a consensus of taste and standard with their husbands with regard to these products is significant and indicates their access to cultural capital provided by their education. It is also an indication that, in these cases, higher education has blurred gender categories in terms of cultural appreciation, with the emphasis on shared individual tastes rather than differences.

The women who used generic categories for their own selection and who referred to their partner's generic tastes as being very different clustered in the C group. Here we see the strongest evidence of gendered preferences for particular kinds of cultural products which is reflected in the different preferences for hired movies. The use of 'stars' as criteria hovers somewhere in between these two strategies, but stars themselves are potent signifiers operating within the pre-film world, setting up predisposition and anticipation in the potential spectator.<sup>5</sup> We noted that only male stars were mentioned by the women. It would be naive and simplistic to equate this directly with a gendered audience in which the female section were being ill-served - some of the women, as we have noted, expressed their liking for some male stars - but what it does indicate is that the films they remember watching with their male partners, and which they would select for joint viewing, are identified with the male star.

There is evidence in the accounts of an unwillingness on the part of the women to impose their choice on the rest of the household. As we have seen, on the reported occasions when the women have chosen movies, they have not been seen as a success by their partners and children; this 'flop factor' has further undermined these attempts. As we saw in Chapter 3 the consequence of this is

that women often find themselves watching movies which they do not like in order to avoid conflict and the disapproval of her husband and family.

## 8 GENDER AND CLASS IN THE HOUSEHOLD

The ethnography which forms the main body of this thesis has been organised so as to cover as comprehensively as possible those factors which have a bearing on women's use of the VCR. This includes the domestic division of labour, organisation of and differential access to spare time, technology in the domestic environment, as well as the more immediately related activities of television and VCR viewing. It is now necessary to reflect on this description of household cultures in order to extend our understanding of them in terms of the wider social structure. This is not, and cannot be, a 'conclusion' in the conventional sense; but will raise questions for further work in the area. An important part of this enterprise has been to mobilise available theories insofar as they appeared to have explanatory power. In the event, however, the interview data has revealed weaknesses and limitations in some theories which could not account for the kinds of social and cultural patterns which emerged.

At the most general theoretical level the tendency toward exclusiveness of some theories proved unproductive. Theoretical accounts of society and its subjects often engender an either/or dualism which even the briefest excursion into the 'real' world of human practice will begin to challenge. For example, in relation to social structure, theories of capitalism and of patriarchy, with their often opposing concepts of class and gender, have been twin contenders in the debates around marxism and feminism. In terms of the constitution of the subject, however, especially in relation to reading and viewing, the division has been one of psychological versus social. The focus here has been on how gendered subjectivity is achieved and to what extent this can account for differences in viewing pleasures between men and women. This conceptual configuration of class and gender, psychic and social provides us with an interconnecting network whose combined elements will help account for what appears to be the overarching concern of

this study; the ways in which symbolic life and gender interact within the domestic sphere. In this context it is important to ask how certain cultural competencies are distributed through divisions of gender, as well as about the more material aspects of household culture such as the division of labour and the designation of 'appropriate' gender roles. However, it is also clear that class is an important factor, albeit not consistently so, in influencing the social activities which concern this study. It should therefore be possible to suggest some areas of women's lives where gender and class intersect and make some judgment as to their relative significance.

All this is somewhat complicated by the fact that this study addresses diverse topics. Questions such as 'who does the washing up?', on the one hand, and 'what is it that you like about *Dynasty?*', on the other, are obviously dealing with very different kinds of human activity and experience. It is necessary therefore to make some more systematic distinction between the two areas of concern. Michele Barrett has identified two levels which exist within what Mary McIntosh refers to as the 'family household': (Barrett, 1980)

household structure: housework, childcare and the economic system of production.

family ideology: the 'naturalisation' of the family organised around male breadwinner and dependent wife and children. This also functions in producing, among other things, gendered individuals. (ibid p.204)

This is a useful distinction, but not quite sufficient for our purposes; both categories need to be extended. In considering household structure we need also to consider the organisation of spare time, the gendered use of technology, and male/female 'territories' in the household geography. This will be examined here

under the heading of 'Domestic Social Environment' The category 'family ideology' also needs to be extended to cover the whole cultural sphere of the household. Barrett points out that:

'The family' provides the nexus for the various themes - romantic love; feminine nurturance, maternalism, self-sacrifice; masculine protection and financial support - that characterize our conception of gender and sexuality' (ibid 1980 p.205)

What this study has examined is how such themes as these are mobilised and circulate within the family life of the women interviewed and in their preferred popular genres. We have seen from the ethnography that, to use another of Barrett's terms, the 'ideology of familialism' frames many of the women's lives to a greater or lesser degree and has profound effects at the material level of daily activities. However, there are other ideologies at work which inflect 'familialism' in different ways depending on other sources of subjectivity, such as class and education. These factors will be examined under the general heading 'Domestic Cultural Environment'.

#### Domestic Social Environment

Although three-quarters of the sample had paid work outside the home, few were in full-time employment; the majority therefore were to some extent dependent on the male salary. It is in this area of the social environment, seen in the domestic division of labour, in apparent gender differences in the right to spare time within the routine of the household, in the use of gender specific household technology, and in the existence of 'pink' and 'blue' territories that the women have most in common. Although class and education were significant in terms of the ways in which the women accounted for their domestic position, they were not significant to the extent that almost all the women claimed major responsibility for domestic work and child care. Where class, and particularly education,

becomes significant is in determining the extent to which the women can distance themselves sufficiently to reflect on their position and to recognise that this is not necessarily the only way of living. Most of the women in the lower education group seemed to accept the traditional division of labour as the 'norm' and felt themselves lucky if their husbands 'helped' with the housework. However, in the higher education group, although the women recognised their 'traditional' roles as roles, they felt unable to change them since the household structures depended on everyone knowing their place and performing their role.

A combination of female employment outside the home and absence of children led to the most egalitarian households, but if this situation was changed (for example, by the birth of children) the balance tended to shift towards a more 'traditional' division of labour. In this event the probability for women right across the sample is that adjustments would have to be made to their lives, either by them giving up work or by employing someone to take care of the children and/or clean the house. In these cases the women were responsible for the recruitment of domestic help. Once a woman is at home with small children, whatever her education or social background, it seems inevitable that she will be involved in domestic labour and that this will become the pattern for the future of the household. Her domestic role then becomes a constraint on her availability for any future paid employment, which is most likely to be part-time or work which offers her the flexibility necessary to fulfil her child-care and domestic responsibilities. This was true of 46% of the women in paid employment

Feminists have considered 'the family' to be one of the major sites of women's oppression and have explored the institution from a number of different perspectives. These are usefully identified by Chris Weedon as liberal-feminist, radical-feminist and socialist feminist approaches. (Weedon 1987 p.16) The liberal-feminist position sees the family as a universal norm, and the appropriate response to its oppressive character lies in equality of



opportunity: of women's right to choose to have children and to the provision of child-care facilities. This approach focuses on the creation of material circumstances conducive to the individual's right to be self-determining, regardless of gender. The radical-feminist position argues that there is an essentially female consciousness and culture, biologically determined, which is oppressed by patriarchy in general and the family in particular. The 'life-giving' qualities which men lack, according to this theory, can only be developed and allowed to flourish outside the 'male' structures in a separate 'female' world. The individualism of liberal feminism and the essentialism of radical feminism are challenged by the third perspective, socialist-feminism, which begins from the Marxist assumption that human beings are socially and historically produced. Patriarchy is not a straightforward universal but takes historically variable forms. This position seeks to investigate the interrelation between the oppressive structures of capitalism, patriarchy and racism as they focus in the family. Whilst taking account of the psychological dimensions of gender, socialist-feminists insist on locating it historically, thus resisting the universalising inclinations of many psychoanalytic approaches. The family and its typical gender relations must therefore be seen in relation to the wider structure of society, a structure which would require transformation if women and men were to be released from the conjoint oppression of capitalism and patriarchy. Weedon argues that none of these feminist accounts attempt to explain what she sees as the crucial aspect of women's oppression; their seeming complicity in that process. It is clear from my interview material that many women had seen little or no alternative to marriage and family life, but, significantly, also had desired this 'goal' of the feminine career. Furthermore, there were many examples of female deferral to male authority, particularly in relation to viewing choices, and of female self-sacrifice with regard to the needs of other members of the family. Weedon suggests that:

In order to understand why women so willingly take on the role of wife and mother, we need a theory of the

relationship between subjectivity and meaning, meaning and social value, the range of possible *normal* subject positions open to women, and the power and powerlessness invested in them. (original emphasis) (ibid p. 18/19)

This conceptualisation in terms of the range of subject positions available to women is important in that it encourages us to investigate differences between women within patriarchy, but also lays emphasis on the social construction of subjectivity through a variety of discourses which, in turn, exist within relationships of power. Whilst Weedon's poststructuralist feminism breaks with the individualism of liberal humanist feminism and the essentialism of radical feminism, the break she makes with socialist and marxist feminism runs the risk of losing sight of the economic and material factors which contribute to sexual divisions in our society. Barrett criticises such theories of discourse where 'men and women themselves represent discursive categories in which differences are produced' and suggests that:

Masculinity and femininity obviously are categories of meaning in one sense, but men and women occupy positions in the division of labour and class structure which, although not pre-given, are historically concrete and identifiable. (Barrett 1980 p.253)

Weedon, however, clearly believes that the subject is the product of discourse when she points out:

A poststructuralist position on subjectivity and consciousness relativizes the individual's sense of herself by making it an effect of discourse which is open to continuous redefinition and which is constantly slipping' (Weedon 1987 p. 106)

Positions of femininity and masculinity are never inevitable, but, according to Weedon, men and women are 'not the mere objects of language, but the sites of discursive struggle, a struggle which takes place in the consciousness of the individual.' (ibid p.106) The individual, in this formulation, is not merely a product of discourse, but has a potentially active role in resisting the interpellation of particular discourses. What is not clear from

poststructuralist feminism is why specific discourses combine together to produce different feminine subject positions within our society, and what particular combination of circumstances might lead to resistance to one or other of the discourses. Theories of language and discourse are not sufficient in themselves to explain the 'complicity' of the women interviewed in this study. Whilst the role of ideology is obviously crucial, the consequences of their positions within the division of labour and the class structure cannot simply be explained away by reference to discourse. An over-emphasis on the ideological and the construction of subjects through discourse is criticised by Michele Barrett, although she also argues that:

It is only through an analysis of ideology and its role in the construction of gendered subjectivity that we can account for the desires of women as well as men to reproduce the very familial structures by which we are oppressed' (Barrett 1980 p. 251)

However, Barrett also insists that the meaning of gender within our society is in many important aspects related to a household structure and division of labour which in turn occupies a particular place in the relations of production. For this reason, she argues, the ideology of gender does have a material base, and she points to the impossibility of seeing economic and ideological categories as distinct and exclusive.

An important dimension of household structure for this study relates to leisure. In our discussion of the organisation of spare time in the home it was noted that most of the males of the households seemed able to claim their 'own time' once at home. This was often justified in terms of their being the major earner, but even where both partners worked the man was more likely to be able to relax at home whereas his female partner would have to engage in domestic labour. Many of the women reported that they found it difficult, if not impossible, to justify taking time out to do something for themselves, and that if they did sit down during

the day and read or watch television they were constantly haunted by the unfinished tasks with which they were surrounded. Thus, as well as being responsible for household work, the women are continually guiltily conscious of their responsibilities, a fact which often mitigated against their becoming involved in leisure activities which required concentration. The men in the study, however, appeared to be able to 'switch off' from the domestic environment and pursue their hobbies and leisure activities.

Differential distribution of time available in the household for leisure activities would seem to be a crucial factor in understanding VCR use. As we have seen, the decision to purchase or rent a VCR was mainly the prerogative of the adult male, although he often had to win the consent of his female partner for this investment. The reasons for this can be seen as a combination of the masculine address of VCR advertising, the relative freedom of male leisure time in the home, and male economic power. However, the consequence is that the male of the household quickly becomes adept in the operation of the machine and from this position of knowledge can command some control over its use. Those members of the household who have few obligatory duties in the home, both adult and children, are likely to have time to spend in watching material and planning ahead for recording and hiring of video tapes. Many of the women, however, considered television and video to be a 'last resort' leisure activity. For them leisure and the opportunity to relax was identified with 'going out' as this provided essential distance from domestic duties and obligations which were always present at home. These women often spoke of television and video with resentment, as if they considered them an intrusion into 'family life' and a distraction from more 'appropriate' uses of leisure time. Women from different social positions across the sample described their partner's use of television as a way of 'switching off' from domestic life, the TV screen legitimating non-communication within the household. We can see, therefore, that the men and women in the sample take up very different positions in relation to their domestic environment.

Men are able to be singular, remote, and maintain a relatively autonomous position, whereas women's experience is more likely to be non-unified and fragmented, in which they are continually responding to the demands of others, their attention always available for someone or something else. If, as this research suggests, this is a consistent difference between men and women within the domestic context, it is important to find some way of accounting for this naturalised pattern.

This can be approached through Nancy Chodorow's object-relations theory of gendered subjectivity (Chodorow 1978) which has been used by Tania Modleski and Janice Radway to account for the particular appeal of women's genres and their structures of identification. (Modleski 1982; Radway 1984) Radway has also used Chodorow's theory in suggesting that women consume popular romantic fiction as an act of resistance to the patriarchal family within which they are positioned as wives and mothers. However, Chodorow usefully relates her psychoanalytic account of gender reproduction to a sociological account of the sex-gender system<sup>2</sup> and in particular to the kind of family unit in which the majority of my sample live. Her sub-section on 'Family and Economy' begins thus:

Women's relatedness and men's denial of relation and categorical self-definition are appropriate to women's and men's differential participation in nonfamilial production and familial reproduction. (Chodorow 1978 p.178)

In our society, she notes, women's roles are basically familial and concerned with the personal, while men's roles are not defined by the familial but by what they do. Women are located first in the sex-gender system, men first in the organization of production. While many men do live in families and are fathers, they are not primarily defined by this fact. The very existence of the phrases 'family man' and 'career woman', which define those who transgress these traditional divisions, indicates how deeply rooted these assumptions are in our society. Within the sex-gender system of

contemporary capitalism, the role of wife/mother draws on women's subjectivity in specific ways:

The activities of wife/mother have a nonbounded quality. They consist..of diffuse obligations. Women's activities in the home involve continuous connection to and concern about children and attunement to adult masculine needs, both of which require connection to, rather than separateness from, others. (ibid p. 179)

Converseley, Chodorow notes, work in the labour force, i.e., 'men's work' is 'likely to be contractual, to be more specifically delimited, and to contain a notion of defined progression and product' (ibid p. 179). The particular value of Chodorow's theory is that she begins with a psychoanalytic account of the construction of gendered subjectivity within 'the family' but she then relates it to the wider structures of capitalism and patriarchy. This is obviously important in understanding the sexual division of labour in the home, and it is clear that, for many of the women in this study their concern for the needs of their children and male partners extends into leisure time. Chapter 3 outlines the social organisation of different viewing contexts, revealing that women are most likely to defer to their partner's or childrens' choices of viewing material both for broadcast tv and hired tapes. Different positions within the household occupied by men and women have their effect in relation to modality of viewing. As we saw, the male is able to 'switch off' and view in a concentrated mode, and, as Morley's work shows, prefers to view in this way. Many of the women in this study viewed distractedly, often knitting or sewing while they were watching television and video.

Time-shifting created some problems for the women in terms of when to watch a recording - often determined both by limited tape availability and a tendency for the rest of the household to record over any tape which happened to be around. But there was also a felt pressure to view when the material was an episode of a long running serial, such as *Dallas*, a pressure which became acute when there was a risk of missing neighbourhood or workplace gossip, or

worse, of story developments being revealed prior to viewing. For these reasons some of the women were forced into watching late at night or early morning. For those who were 'guilty viewers', especially during the day, recorded tapes seemed to compound the guilt. C1/5 reported less guilt watching broadcast television as against pre-recorded tapes, either time-shift or hired, the implication being that the choice of watching tapes was hers entirely, whereas scheduled broadcasters have taken 'responsibility' out of her hands by transmitting programmes at particular times. The time-shift facility was used for individual viewing by all members of the households where particular tastes were not shared, but the occasions when women organised this kind of viewing for themselves seemed to be infrequent.

Accumulation of large numbers of tapes occurred across the whole sample, but this was, in general, a male practice, both in terms of responsibility for organising the collection and re-viewing tapes. This male activity, as has been noted, was often mystifying to their female partners, who preferred not to see a film repeatedly. Their commonly articulated reason was that once the conclusion of the narrative was known then there was little point in watching a film again. However, there were exceptions to this. Re-viewing of favourite horror movies was noted, but in general this was practiced by viewing 'fans'. Secondly, some re-viewing of favourite tapes as a collective family enterprise was reported.

In terms of use of leisure time, the one area where women did take the initiative was in instigating 'family outings'. Many men appeared either to positively dislike these outings or simply didn't think about them and had to be persuaded into them by their partners. The women who were most keen were those who identified most fully with their roles as wives and mothers, but this also extended to women who worked outside the home. Images of the 'ideal' family saturate a wide range of media output and Clarke and Critcher note that these images are both encountered during leisure time and are about leisure:

As the family, together or separately, relax and enjoy themselves they will soon encounter distortions of their own images, as others would like them to be..(Clarke & Critcher 1985 p.166)

Again, women's familial work takes the form of reproducing 'the family' symbolically through supposedly unifying leisure activities.

We can see from the ethnography that women are 'positioned' in the domestic environment and that this has profound effects on their use of spare time as well as on their viewing of television and video. Those women with children who were full-time family managers often had difficulty in carving out any spare time for themselves, and when they did were often guiltily conscious of this 'indulgence'. However, even women who worked outside the home and those who had time on their own in the home rarely used that time to pursue their own activities, such as reading or viewing. This sample of women were almost all living in a particular kind of domestic unit; with male partners in full employment, and with children. It appears that the kinds of female and male subjectivities which this particular living unit engenders are continually reproduced across the different rituals of domestic work and leisure.

#### Domestic Cultural Environment

The importance of perceptions of VCRs as complex technology emerged from the interviews, which raises questions about prevailing gender divisions in the acquisition of technological knowledge. The low reported use of the VCR does not represent a straightforward lack of competence on the part of the women. After all, domestic technology presents few problems for women, who quickly become adept at using cookers, washing machines, sewing machines, etc. Some of the women claimed to be generally resistant to technology, dismissing the VCR as yet another 'gadget' in the household. Some were simply not interested in television and, therefore, in video. In some cases



there was also an element of 'calculated ignorance' whereby women resisted becoming involved in the VCR simply to avoid yet another domestic servicing function.

This rather complicated web of cultural and social factors serves to indicate the kinds of negotiations which women are likely to be involved in, often from an already determined position, in order to establish their relationship with this particular item of entertainment technology. Their male partners and children would seem to have a much more direct and less conditional relationship with the machine. The 'territories' so often marked out through the domestic division of labour - 'pink' kitchen and 'blue' garage - are further established through ideologies of technological competence. With the increased technologisation of the sitting room, particularly in relation to leisure and entertainment, this potentially neutral area of relaxation is also becoming 'colour coded'.

VCR operating modes, for example, can be appropriately colour-coded; the 'record', 'rewind' and 'play' modes are generally lilac, but the timer switch is nearly always blue, with women having to depend on their male partners or their children to set the timer for them. The blueness of the timer is exceeded only by the deep indigo of the remote control which in all cases was held by the male partner. This observation was also confirmed by David Morley and Peter Collett. (Morley 1986; Collett 1986)

The VCR obviously offers potential for expanded cultural consumption. In this context it is important to establish the cultural preferences and competencies which the women bring to their use of the video recorder, and their expressed preferences for specific kinds of cultural products need to be understood in relation to a wider social and cultural environment. It is clear that it is in the area of cultural preference and competence that major differences emerge between the women, thereby blurring the more distinct gender divisions manifest in other areas of daily

life. The most important differentiating factor in expressed cultural preference is higher education, which is, in turn, significantly associated with class. In David Morley's study of East End families, he found that those women in his sample who had engaged in higher education - two were mature students at the time of the interviews - or who had a higher educational standard than their husbands, were exceptions to the perceived pattern of gendered programme-type preferences. These differences were expressed in terms of a liking for factual programmes, in one case, and in the others a dislike of soap operas. Both these stated preferences were in direct contrast to the rest of the sample, but as Morley suggests:

..the exceptions to the rule are themselves systematic. This occurs only where the wife, by virtue of educational background, is in the dominant position in terms of cultural capital. (Morley 1986 p.163)

Only one woman in my sample (C1/7) was in this position, and her education had distanced her taste from that of her husband and sons. The rest of the 'educated' women were with partners whose standard of education was the same if not higher than their own. These women claim to have similar preferences in programmes and films to their partners, and the majority of them are keen to distance themselves from soap opera, particularly American products. It would seem, then, that access to cultural capital through education produces an alliance of male/female preferences for 'quality' texts while also placing women in that group in alliance with men in the lower education group in their shared dislike for soap opera. It is important not to take these apparent alliances at face value, and during the interviews I explored the specific pleasures and displeasures which particular texts or genres offered to the women. It is clear from the interview material that women in the higher education group had a stated preference for 'quality' products which they shared with their male partners. However, it also appears that the texts which gave most pleasure to these women, whether novels, films or television programmes, shared certain

essential elements. These were expressed as follows; a strong story line, well developed characters and, a 'believable' setting. In many cases, the women insisted that their partners did not require these particular elements to find a text pleasurable. Science fiction was given by some of these women as an example of a 'male' genre which did not fulfil their criteria for enjoyment and none of the women expressed a liking for this genre. The reasons given by two of the 'educated' women focussed on the lack of developed characters in the genre:

B/2: '...I'm interested in people..I think that's why I don't like horror films and science fiction, because I can't relate to it at all'.

D/1 goes further in her description of the viewing of films in general with her partner:

D/1: 'If it's caught you up sufficiently, I will get very involved with the story and very involved with the characters in a way that Jim won't...

What B/1 and D/1 express is their desire for a certain form of 'emotional realism' in their preferred genres as well as the portrayal of a particular kind of world with which they feel familiar. Science fiction does have strong story lines, developed characters and is 'believable' to its consumers, but the women were not 'convinced' by these texts and took no pleasure in them. Their criticisms of this and other male genres are evidence of a lack of the reading competence and genre familiarity required in order to 'make sense' of the text.

In Chodorow's terms, these women require identification with characters, emotions and human relationships in their consumption of fiction in a way that they feel their partners do not. Educated women share the same cultural capital as their partners and this produces a desire for texts with a high cultural evaluation. This can be explained through their access to education, and indirectly in class terms. However, the 'complex, relational self' of the

feminine subject as it is produced within the patriarchal family is expressed through their desire for connectedness and emotional identification with a text, and therefore must be understood in relation to gender. In B/2's case the contradiction that this particular subject position produces is evidenced in her reluctance to become involved in soap opera. Although she recognises that the genre foregrounds human relationships and as such would appeal to her 'relational self', its low cultural evaluation means that she cannot, given her cultural capital, comfortably engage with this genre. This is further compounded by the fact that she considers television itself to be of low cultural status, but does listen to *The Archers*, the Radio 4 soap.

Turning to the other 'alliance' we see that dislike for soap opera is shared by the 'educated' women in the group and almost all the male partners. This suggests that the women in the higher education group have more in common with men, regardless of class, than they have with the rest of the women. However, if we explore the reasons for disliking soap opera we see that the situation is again more complex. The men in David Morley's study, none of whom had engaged in higher education, claimed, in general, not to like fiction, regarding its consumption as a 'feminising' activity, and many saved their most dismissive remarks for soap opera. The 'educated' women's dislike for soap opera is not primarily because it is a 'female genre', but because it is perceived as having low cultural value. Both want to distance themselves from the product because it challenges an important element of their subjectivity. For the men, their masculine subjectivity resists involvement in the emotional world demanded by soap opera. For the women, access to education and cultural capital has constructed a subjectivity which places itself at a distance from the products of low culture. To use Bourdieu's term, they have achieved an 'aesthetic disposition' which, as he argues, is based on the adoption of an individual position of distanced objectivity with regard to cultural products. Thus, in the hiring of tapes and the criteria used for selection, we can see that educational/cultural capital becomes a factor in

explaining differences between the women. The 'educated' women used their notion of a 'unique' text as the major criterion, whereas the other women would opt for a favoured genre irrespective of their knowledge of the particular film. The educated women who rejected soap opera spoke of the dangers of 'addiction' and the risks of becoming 'enmeshed' to the extent that soap operas might 'take over your life'. These are very telling phrases, indicating their reluctance to 'lose themselves' in a popular text. To do so would represent a challenge to the 'self-control' essential to the 'aesthetic disposition' as outlined by Bourdieu, and upon which their education insists.

As I suggested in the Summary of Chapter 4, those women who had not been the subjects of higher education saw the possibilities of abandonment to a text not as a danger but as an essential part of the pleasure - 'I like to be taken out of myself' as B/5 put it. Many similar expressions, indicating their much more direct involvement with the text, echoed Bourdieu's description of the 'popular aesthetic' as marked by 'the desire to enter into the game, identifying with the characters' joys and sufferings..' (Bourdieu 1980 p238). Bourdieu equates the popular aesthetic with the working class, but it is clear that in relation to different popular genres gender differences are also significant. Working class men do not share their female partner's enthusiasm for soap opera, romance, family saga, etc., and conversely, those popular genres enjoyed by men - action/adventure, war, science fiction, spy thrillers, etc. - do not pleasurably engage the women in this group. For working class women, or at least for those with no higher education, their relational selves are not compromised by their engagement with preferred cultural products. The working class male, however, may be the self-less subject of the popular aesthetic, but he is the 'separate self' of the masculine subject. His position is therefore contradictory in this respect, as is the educated female position. However, his 'masculine' preferences give him cultural power over his female partner. The strongest gender/genre division emerged in the C Group, and particularly in

those households where both partners had a low standard of education. But even in this group, the female preferred genres were considered by both women and men to be of a lower order than the male preferred genres, which texts would always take priority for shared viewing. The tensions in the woman's position, therefore, result from the low cultural value which her preferences carry, both publicly and domestically. We can see that the least contradictory subject is the educated/middle class male whose sense of self-control marks his masculine subjectivity and his aesthetic disposition.

The social and cultural aspects of the domestic environments within which the VCR takes its place are crucial to an understanding of the determining factors surrounding women's reported use of the machine and the opportunities for and choice of viewing material. The implications of this study are that new entertainment equipment enters the existing household structures and familial ideology, and these structures and traditions, particularly in relation to gender, become encoded in the new technology both in terms of its physical use and choice of software. Theories of the construction of gendered subjectivity within specific social contexts, and of the acquisition of unequally distributed cultural capital, enable us to shed some light on the operation of gender and class in the daily routines of domestic work and leisure.

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APPENDIX A

Dear

I am currently carrying out some research into women and leisure in the home and wondered if you would be willing to help me.

I would like to interview you at home, if possible, and will telephone you to discuss this possibility. I will, of course, understand if you do not wish to become involved but look forward to speaking to you in the near future.

Thanking you for your attention

Yours sincerely

Ann Gray

Researcher

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following is a list of the main topics of interest which were explored having been developed after two pilot interviews. They were not necessarily raised in this order as the interviews took the form of 'discussions' and particular areas of interest were explored as they were raised by the respondents. Nevertheless, all these topics were raised during each interview.

My procedure was to establish contact in the first instance by letter (Appendix A). This was then followed up by a telephone call to establish willingness to co-operate, brief biographical details and, if appropriate, to arrange an appointment for interview.

---

#### 1. General Information

This was used as a 'warm-up', re-confirming what I already knew, and establishing the interview situation.

#### 2. Domestic Labour

What is the division of labour in the household?

Who uses what technology in the household

#### 3. General Family and Individual Leisure Patterns

Women's attitudes to their own leisure, both



outside and inside the home;

When they consider their leisure-time begins -  
is it secondary to other demands?

How their conception of their own leisure  
compares with their conception of their partner's  
leisure.

How women use their spare time at home.

How important is television.

#### 4. Use of the VCR

Why and when was the VCR acquired?

What kinds of negotiations were involved?

Recording from broadcast TV:

What is recorded?

When/if is it watched - is it kept?

Who selects what to record?

How does time-shift affect viewing of  
on-air TV - does it extend it or  
replace programmes?

Is time-shift used when they are out of  
the house; when watching something else;  
inconvenient time to watch off-air?

Hiring of tapes:

Use of the video library;

Who selects and how has this pattern come about?

When are the tapes watched;

Is it a different viewing experience?

Does the family watch together?

Do people come and watch with you?

What are the alternative choices of activity?

## 5. Pleasures and Preferences

Discussion would be developed around the following points:

Preferred TV programmes and films. Reasons for preference

Reading preferences; where and when does reading take place?.

How do films/TV programmes differ from each other?

Can you watch your favourite film/ TV programme with your male partner? Does he enjoy them too?

What kinds of things do you both like?

Are there things you read or watch which you know he wouldn't like? And vice versa?

What does he like and what do you think of it?

How do you think others would describe, say, soap opera or romantic fiction?

How do films and books usually end? Are they usually satisfactory?

Explore knowledge of preferred genre characteristics.

## NOTES:

### *Introduction.*

1. Time budget studies have shown that women are responsible for most of the household work, especially that of a routine nature, see, for example, Pahl, R. 1985. An ethnographic study (Hunt, P. 1980) reaches the same conclusion.
2. Green, Hebron and Woodward 1985a and 1985 b; Deem, 1986; Dixey & Talbot, 1982; Stanley, L. 1980; Griffin, 1981, 1985.
3. This is discussed in Deem 1985, McIntosh 1981 and Roberts 1981 and Stanley, 1980.
4. For summaries of this tradition see Klapper 1960; Halloran 1965 and Weiss, 1969.
5. See, for example, Lundberg and Hulten, 1968; McQuail, Blumler and Brown, 1972; Rosengren and Windahl, 1972; Katz, Gurevitch and Haas 1973, and for an overview of the approach see Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1974 in the volume Blumler and Katz 1974.
6. See Women's Studies Group, 1978 and Hall et al, 1980 for papers exploring these areas.
7. This term was first used by Sean Cubitt, in Masterman, 1984, p. 46.
8. Lull, 1980. Morley also draws on the work of Goodman, 1983; Brodie and Stoneman 1983 and Lindlof and Traudt, 1983 all of whom are concerned with the role of television in family interaction.
9. This term was used by Stuart Hall in Hall et al 1980 and he notes that 'screen theory' draws extensively on French theoretical writing across a number of fields: 'film theory (early semiotics, the work of Christian Metz, the debates between the journals *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Cinetique*), the theory of ideology (Althusser), the psychoanalytic writings of the Lacan group, and recent theories of language and discourse (Julia Kristeva, the 'Tel Quel' group, Foucault)' (ibid p.157) Hall also notes the influence of the critique of 'realism' on this body of work.
10. Hall (ibid) notes that the visual analogies in the work of Freud and Lacan (e.g. the 'mirror phase', voyeurism, scopophilia, Lacan's work on the 'look' and the 'gaze') lend themselves to the application

of the relationship between the spectator and visual media.

11. Brunsdon 'Text and Audience' in Seiter et al (forthcoming).
12. Chodorow, quoted in Radway 1984, p. 94.
13. See Cockburn, 1983 and 1985. In the latter text she addresses questions of domestic technology. Also, Zimmerman, 1986 who raises the issue, but mainly in relation to domestic labour. I have not been able to explore this subject in depth as domestic technology was to have been the subject of complementary and concurrent D.Phil research which was not developed.

### *1. Method and Sample*

1. See Gray (1987).
2. Morley, however, set out to interview families together. Although aware of the problems of individual interviews, e.g. respondents' freedom to say what they choose without fear of contradiction from others and to tell me what they think I want to hear, nevertheless I would argue that these personal accounts are significant in themselves and that the extended interview/discussion allows for contradictions to emerge and for questions to be approached in different ways. See Gray (1988).
3. For discussions of feminist research methods see Roberts, 1981; McRobbie, 1982; Stanley and Wise, 1983; and Bell and Roberts, 1984.
4. This point is made in Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983.
5. This has often taken the form of an attack on all theory as being a masculine form of discourse and therefore its application to the understanding of women's expression of their experience maintains male dominance over women and suppresses the 'feminine'. Examples of this approach in the U.S.A. are Daly, 1979 and Griffin, 1981 and in the work of French feminists, Kristeva, 1974b; Irigaray, 1977; and Cixous, 1981. For a critique of this position see Segal, 1988.
6. The IBA, 1988, estimates that nearly 7 out of 10 people with children have now acquired a VCR, and they indicate that penetration since 1980 has occurred most rapidly and extensively amongst this group.

## **2. Organisation of Spare Time**

1. I am grateful to Cynthia Cockburn for this idea which she shared at a seminar at the University of York in June 1985.
2. This term was used by McRobbie(1982b) to describe the 'ideal career' for women which progressed through romance to marriage and family.
2. I am following the women in using 'Mills & Boon' as a generic term for short romantic novels.

## **3. Viewing Contexts and Related Texts.**

1. I am using this term with reference to books, TV programmes and movies.
2. The exceptions to this are Morley, 1986 and Collett, 1986
3. This point is also made by Bausinger in relation to male use of TV where switching on does not mean "'I would like to watch this', but rather 'I would like to see and hear nothing' or 'I don't want to talk to anybody'" (Bausinger, 1984 p.344).

## **4. Viewing and Reading Preferences**

1. Seiter et al 'Towards an ethnography of Soap Opera Viewers' in Seiter et al (eds). forthcoming.
2. Barbara Taylor-Bradford *A Woman of Substance* and *Hold the Dream* are examples of this generic sub-category.
3. A video retailer of *The Evil Dead* was prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act in Leeds in 1984.
4. The distinctive narrative structure of soap opera is outlined by Geraghty, 1981.

## **5. Technology in the Domestic Environment**

1. Collett's research involved the placing of a video camera into a specially design TV cabinet which began to record when the TV was switched on. The recordings made showed that the remote control

was often held by males and occasionally there were physical attempts by other members of the family to gain possession.

#### 6. *The VCR: Time-shift*

1. Sean Cubitt has suggested that with advent of the domestic VCR, television has entered the age of mechanical reproduction. What is lost is the 'aura' of television's 'live-ness' and this 'takes issue with the presence of television' (Cubitt, 1988, p. 79).

#### 7. *The VCR: Hiring Tapes*

1. The market for pre-recorded tapes has now increased dramatically, according to the British Video Association quoted in *The Guardian*: 'The sale of pre-recorded video cassettes, almost unknown in this country five or six years ago, has reached around £250 million a year. Forecasts suggest that 25 or 30 million units will be sold in 1989 compared with just a million in 1985' *The Guardian* 11.3.89.
2. For a discussion of the 'video nasties' moral panic see, Petley, 1984 Kuhn 1984 and see also Barker, 1984.
3. Tudor, 1989, p.6.
4. Although these 'unique' films are set apart from popular genres as far as the women are concerned this should not disguise the fact, that as Tudor (1974) suggests, 'their social dynamics are similar to those of genres. They develop a particular cultural pattern and an audience educated in their special characteristics.' (Ibid p. 181).
5. Ellis, 1982, speaking of cinema, says: 'Stars have a similar function in the film industry to the creation of a 'narrative image': they provide a foreknowledge of the fiction, an invitation to cinema.' (ibid. p. 91), and we can see that their function has been transferred to the selection of video tapes.

## **8. Gender & Class in the Household.**

1. McIntosh (1979) defines this as a system in which 'a number of people are expected to be dependent on the wages of a few adult members, primarily of the husband and father who is a 'breadwinner', and in which they are all dependent for cleaning, food preparation and so forth on unpaid work chiefly done by the wife and mother'. (Burman 1979 p.155).
2. The sex-gender system is defined by Gayle Rubin as 'a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner' (Rubin, 1975).



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