TV TALK IN A LONDON PUNJABI PEER CULTURE

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by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my original research, composition and presentation and has not been submitted to any other university for any other purpose.

Marie Gillespie

DEDICATION

For my mother and father

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how 16-18 year-olds in a London Punjabi peer culture talk about television. Based upon two years ethnographic fieldwork in Southall, west London, it is argued, firstly, that shared experiences of television inform and shape the content and, in some cases, the form of everyday communicative interactions among young people; secondly, that TV is a resource which is mined selectively and used creatively to provide shared but differentiated ways of talking about self, others and their positions in the world; thirdly, that 'TV talk' involves the negotiation of relations within and between parental and peer cultures, the articulation of cultural differences and the expression of aspirations toward cultural change.

The analysis is organised around four TV genres. In the peer culture studied, the ability to discuss TV news is perceived as a function of emergent adulthood. In talking about TV advertisements young people establish, critique and endorse hierarchies of taste and style, for example, in what they drink, eat and wear. TV comedy talk, examined in the wider context of the social functions of humour, brings into the realm of speech that which is seen as 'absurd', 'subversive' and 'unspeakable'. It bears, perhaps, the most impressive witness to the role of TV as an enabler of talk. Finally, in their everyday discussions of the soap opera 'Neighbours', young people draw parallels between gossip and rumour in their local neighbourhood and in the soap.

The essential argument of the thesis is that TV talk, as an integral part of everyday talk, binds people together, contributes to their shared culture and to patterns of sociability, and generates social and collective processes of interpretation and reception beyond the domestic context of viewing. The social reception of TV through shared talk is both a creative act and a manipulated one. It can reflect what is real already; create what is as yet unknown; enable discussion of taboo subjects and make it possible to say what is absurd or unthinkable.

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INTRODUCTION

Although TV is an audio-visual medium, it has been studied primarily with an interest in its visual 'language' and effects. Recent empirical studies have emphasised the importance of locating studies in the private, domestic sphere of consumption. This thesis takes a different perspective. It examines the uses of TV as a resource in collective verbal discourse in the more public context of a peer culture. The reasons for this are primarily ethnographic. In the London Punjabi peer culture studied, talk 'about' TV serves to generate talk about the 'real world' beyond the screen. Whenever young people began talking about TV they soon began to tell the stories of their own lives and to describe their perceptions of the world. This connection is of theoretical significance for three reasons.

Firstly, it highlights the contrast between 'TV consumption' as an activity which takes place in the private, domestic sphere and 'TV reception' as a process which extends into the public sphere and takes place within, and contributes to shaping a definable culture; peer culture in the present case. TV reception involves collective processes of interpretation and the incorporation of shared TV experiences into everyday communicative interactions. TV provides, among other things, narratives which young people use to make sense of self, other and the world. The thesis aims at demonstrating and analysing these collective processes of reception and documenting the insights they offer into the social world of the peer culture under study.

Secondly, this perspective shifts the study of TV from its concentration on the dyad 'screen-viewer', and from reception at the point of delivery, to the communicative interactions among viewers that are shaped by shared experiences of TV. Given the cultural distinctiveness of the subjects of this study and the fact that TV provides one of their most signficant sources of access to the dominant culture, it is a further aim of this thesis to highlight the specific functions of TV talk in the negotiation of three interrelated concerns: the processes of maturation or 'growing up'; the relations between parental and peer cultures; and, perceptions of cultural differences.

Thirdly, the approach adopted allows an ethnographically sensitive appreciation of what hitherto has been conceived as the polarity between TV 'doing things to people' and 'people doing things with TV'. In tracing and documenting the interaction between 'real talk' and 'TV talk', this thesis attempts to provide an alternative approach for resolving this largely ideological dichotomy. In short, this thesis analyses talk 'about' TV as a resource used creatively to provide shared but differentiated ways of talking about self, others and their positions in the world and, thus, as an activity which binds young people together and contributes to shaping their peer culture.

The analysis is based on two years intensive fieldwork involving a survey of 333 young people aged 12-18 in Southall, as well as on participant and non-participant observation and interviews. The chief focus of the study is on the 15-17 year olds, an age group which has received little attention in audience research. Audience research has also neglected culturally distinctive audiences and has tended to focus on adult, female and family audiences.

The analysis is organised around TV genres which helps to highlight the importance of TV as cultural form (Williams, 1975). By examining specific types of TV talk, the different ways in which TV genres address and 'construct' their audiences as citizens, consumers, teenagers and as family and 'community' members can be more effectively demonstrated. Similarly, this approach helps to illustrate the differential competences required in order to engage with distinctive genres and the social functions that genre-related TV talk involves. Four specific Tv genres have been selected for analysis.

TV news plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of the world and ways of talking about it. The ability to talk about TV news is perceived as a function of emergent adulthood and is thus an age-based, rather than a gender-based genre, as it is conventionally conceived in much of the research. The acquisition of competence in discussing TV news involves the ability to situate self and others in different contexts (the local and global, the national and international) and multiple

social categories (in this peer culture, based primarily on age, religion, 'race', class, citizenship and nation). This chapter offers a layered description of how these contexts and categories function as mediating processes in the collective reception of TV news stories. It also demonstrates how TV news talk assists young people in the negotiation and articulation of their 'positions' vis-a-vis the parental culture and British society.

Another popular genre, that of TV ads, is used by informants to learn, distinguish, judge and finally endorse hierarchies of taste and style. These very often differ from those current among the youth's parents and thus entail judgements, and a way of talking about, cultural difference. Thus, 'TV ad talk' is used to clarify distinctions between 'English', 'American' and 'Indian' cultural preferences. Given that youths have little access to experience of at least one, and perhaps two, of these cultures, the effect of 'TV talk' on 'real talk' assumes particular significance. Further, TV talk allows talk which would be otherwise considered naive, or indeed, foolish: unrealistic aspirations, desires and fantasies gain, in TV ad talk, plausibility and credibility.

TV comedy talk enables the absurd, the subversive and the unspeakable to be expressed. Much of the humour appreciated by informants is 'dirty' humour and humour based on the failure of family plans. Given both the limited experience, and limiting social controls they are subject to, 'TV comedy talk' bears perhaps the most impressive witness to the role of TV as an enabler of talk.

Soaps, a highly popular genre in the peer culture described, are used to provide a narrative structure which shapes young people's own storytelling about their exploits and encounters. This can be conceptualised as the interaction between two collective processes of representation. In some cases, this creative use of narrative structures, absorbed from TV and superimposed on personal experience, draws on similarities of form, as well as content. Young people make connections between gossip and rumour in their local neighbourhood and in the soap 'Neighbours'. More widespread though are the linkages

between TV content and real life events involving key sources of social tension: kinship duty, courtship and marriage and the competing demands of family privacy and sociability in the local neighbourhood.

Chapter One situates the peer culture under study in its local context and outlines some of the key demographic, social and cultural features of Southall, the London-Punjabi town, where the fieldwork was conducted. Patterns of media consumption and taste are set in the broader context of leisure activities. Chapter Two presents an account of the fieldwork, including details of my own academic and personal interests. Issues of access, status and role and differences between 'living fieldwork' and 'writing ethnography' are also addressed. Chapter Three relates the present research to audience studies which adopt a broadly ethnographic approach. Through an examination and critique of these studies it highlights some important theoretical and methodological influences on the present study, as well as innovations which have been introduced in an attempt to overcome some of the problems confronted in previous audience studies. Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven constitute the core of the thesis and analyse the four TV genres outlined above.

In the final section, Conclusions, some of the methodological and theoretical issues raised by this study are examined. The bibliography is located at the end of this volume. Appendices to each chapter containing full details of the survey, selected interview transcripts, examples of fieldwork diary and fieldnotes and other documents in support of the thesis are to be found in the accompanying volume.

CHAPTER ONE

SOUTHALL

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Southall is a 'Punjabi town' with a population of some 65,000 situated in the west London borough of Ealing, near Heathrow Airport. Its demographic majority is of South Asian origin, mainly from the Punjab and predominantly of Sikh religion but divided along 'cross-cutting cleavages' (Baumann, 1990) of national, regional, religious, caste and linguistic heritages. From an 'insider's' perspective, Southall is a socially and culturally diverse town, further stratified along socio-economic, occupational, generational and gender lines. However, from an 'outsiders' perspective, Southall is often perceived as a homogenous 'Asian community'. It is seen variously as a rather 'exotic', 'Asian' town, 'famous for silk and spices'; a thriving shopping centre for Indian food, clothes, jewelery, music and videos; a tourist attraction; and a nexus for different religious groups. Southall also has a less exotic image in the eyes of 'outsiders'. It has a history of racial tension precipitated by National Front attacks and followed by 'race' riots (in 1979 and 1981). In the last decade, racism, sectarian politics, local murders, gangs, drug trafficking and a major fraud scandal have featured prominently in local and at times in national media which has tended to over-ride its more exotic image. Most recently, it has appeared in the media as a town severely affected by the collapse of Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI). Less dramatically, it is seen by many west Londoners as a place to avoid, especially at weekends, due to the heavy traffic and crowded pavements of busy shoppers which have earned it the name 'Little India' and 'Chota (little) Punjab'. Thus, contradictory and ambiguous conceptions of Southall prevail.

Much of the academic race relations literature has colluded with media representations and government policies in portraying 'Asians' in Britain as a 'problem' category. The legitimation of state racism in post war Britain has been secured around particular ideological

constructions of south Asian cultures, especially of their family and marriage systems. For long they have been seen to be based upon archaic and traditional customs and practices which are presented as an 'alien' threat to the British way of life. 'Culture-clash', inter-generational conflict, 'arranged marriages' and the dowry system, among other factors, have been identified, paradoxically, as both 'the cause' and 'the problem'. (Ballard, 1979; Parmar, 1981). The widespread use of concepts such as 'ethnic community', 'host society', 'integration' and 'assimilation' have relied on unquestioned assumptions about the mutually exclusive and oppositional nature of 'Asian' and 'British' cultures. The inflexibility of social and cultural boundaries, cultural homogeneity and continuity are frequently emphasised at the expense of a more dynamic conception of the cultural and social processes of change.

In this chapter, and throughout the thesis, it is hoped that a more accurate and precise picture of Southall and of London Punjabis, from the point of view of its young people, will emerge. First, a brief account of the successsive migrations of peoples to Southall will be given in order to appreciate more fully its present demographic structure.

1.1 MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

Southall has attracted migrants in search of work since the begining of this century when local industries began to develop at an accelerated rate, especially from 1900-1930. Increasing demand for labour was satisfied by the migration of workers from Wales, the northern English counties and Ireland, particularly during the Depression years of the 1930s. West Indian migration to Southall began in the late 40's and continued through the 50's and 60's. However, Carribeans, primarily from Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica came in relatively small numbers to Southall (see Census figures below). Young, single males were soon followed by single women and married couples. Children, by and large, remained at home.

Punjabi migration began in the 1950s. Males from the rural villages of the Punjab, predominantly farmers and landowners of the Jat caste of

Sikhs responded to invitations from government and local industries to take up unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in manufacturing industries in Southall. Originally, the intention was to work and return home with substantial savings after a few years. In the early days of settlement, households would consist of, up to a dozen men, inter-related by kinship and village ties and bound together by the processes of chain migration. Paradoxically, the tightening of immigration laws in the 1960s led to a further wave of migration, but this time, of the wives and children of earlier migrants, induced to follow the path of migration and re-constitute their families in Britain. The re-constitution of Punjabi families in Southall proceeded at its fastest rate from the mid to late 1960s as the 'myth of return' faded (Helweg, 1979).

During the same period, Jat Sikh migrants were joined by emigrants from Kenya and later Uganda, fleeing the process of 'Africanization' by which newly independent, East African states replaced the administrative and commercial 'middle-class' of South Asians whom British colonial authorities had recruited there from the early years of the century (Baumann, 1990). Most of these Sikhs were of the castes of Tarkhan and Lohar, carpenters and blacksmiths, who had been shipped to East Africa to build railways and towns earlier this century (Morris, 1968).

A number of factors distinguished East African emigrants from their Jat predecessors. Their shared urban background and professional skills gave them an economic advantage and a greater facility in adapting to life life in Southall (Bhachu, 1985). They emigrated in close-knit family units and were used to living as culturally distinctive 'communities'. This was in contrast to Jat Sikh migrants who had more of the character of individual, 'new frontiersmen' (Aurora, 1967) who, before the arrival of wives and children, had made a superficial attempt to adapt to British working class expectations and lifestyles. The East African cohort of migrants was also characterised by religious diversity. There were sizeable numbers of Muslims and Hindus, alongside the Sikh settlers, who were bound together by shared experiences in East Africa. However, upon their arrival in Southall the East African migrants were subjected to the rather ambiguous welcome by their Jat predecessors who

were undoubtedly disturbed and felt threatened by their presence in such large numbers and the consequences for inflaming racism and competition for jobs. (Bhachu, 1985)

More recent emigrants, and refugees, to Southall have included Tamils, Somalians, Afghanistanis, Iranians and Chinese, albeit in smaller numbers, but they bear witness to the heavily controlled but continuous migration of people to Southall.

In the following section a demographic portrait of Southall is offered drawing upon figures from the 1981 Census (see Appendix 1). This will be followed by a summary of selected data obtained from a survey of 333 young people, aged 12-18 which was conducted as part of the research for this thesis. It will supplement and extend the description of local life and offer a portrait of how young people see themselves in the many cultures of Southall, in their own youth culture and in relation to their parental cultures. Full details of the survey and more extended commentaries on each question can be found in Appendix 1.

1.2 DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF SOUTHALL GLEANED FROM THE 1981 CENSUS

The social and cultural life of Southall cannot be understood by reference to its ethnic composition alone. It can only be appreciated in the context of broader structural features, such as, its age structure, household size, types of housing and occupational profile. The most recent demographic data on Southall is the 1981 Census which is now a decade out of date. Nevertheless, it is fortunate that the sample profile of the Youth Survey (see Appendix 1, section 2.0) and the portrait offered by the census data (especially with regard to the age distribution, the country of origin of its inhabitants and the weighting of socio-economic groups), are revealing of broadly similar demographic patterns.

1.3 POPULATION

In 1981, Southall had an official population of 66,488. This represents a loss of 5.3 per cent compared with the 1971 Census figure of 70,192 which suggests that either more people are moving out of Southall than moving in, or that the death rate exceeds the birth rate. However, Southall is characterised by a relatively high percentage of young people, so the latter suggestion seems unlikely. Of the 66,488 residents 48,381 are aged 16 and over. This means that a remarkably high 27.2% of residents are 16 or younger and 44.3% are under the age of 24. The following table lists Southall's age structure (underlined and in ascending order) together with the comparative figures of the other three sub-areas (Greenford, Acton and Ealing proper which comprise the London borough of Ealing.

1.4 AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SOUTHALL (in bold and underlined) COMPARED WITH EALING'S THREE OTHER SUB AREAS IN ASCENDING ORDER

0-15	16.8%	17.6%	21.6%	**27.2%**
16-24	13.9%	14.6%	16.4%	**17.1%**
25-44	**27.1%**	28.0%	28.1%	29.4%
45-64	**18.7%**	22.0%	22.8%	23.3%
over 65	**9.9%**	13.3%	15.9%	16.4%

This comparison shows that Southall has by far the youngest population in the borough of Ealing and that this difference is all the more pronounced due to the under-representation of people aged 45 and over. Overall, one quarter of Southall's population are of school age and in Northcote ward this figure rises to one third.

A further distinguishing feature of Southall is that it has the highest number of households headed by persons born in the 'New Commonwealth and Pakistan' (NCWP) in the borough.

1.5 PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS HEADED BY PERSONS BORN IN THE NCPW IN THE BOROUGH OF EALING

Ealing proper:	14.0%	Greenford:	14.9%
Acton :	17.5%	**Southall :**	**58.7%**

In Southall itself 57% of the population are U.K. born (and this figure includes the children of NCPW parentage born in the U.K.). The breakdown of NCPW, obtained from the Census Digest is shown in the table below.

1.6. SOUTHALL'S POPULATION BY BIRTHPLACE

Birthplace	Number	%
United Kingdom	37,897	57.0%
NCWP	25,690	38.6%
Eire	1,540	2.3%
Rest of World	713	1.0%
Other Europe	324	0.5%
Other E.C.	245	0.4%
Other Commonwealth	78	0.2%
		100.0%

NCWP breakdown:

NCWP	%
Indian sub-continent	25.9%
East Africa	7.5%
Carribean	2.9%
Far East	1.4%
Other Africa	0.4%
Other	0.5%
	38.6

It is difficult to obtain precise figures relating to country of origin since, for example, East Africans may be of varied background, and also, the figures do not account for the children of people who have emigrated from NCWP and East Africa. However, from the Ward figures for Southall, it is possible to highlight the relative density of U.K. and NCWP born, headed households. Before doing so a brief decription of each ward will be given. (see Appendix pg xviii for ward map)

All wards have between 12-14,000 residents. Northcote is the smallest and most densely populated ward. It contains terraced housing built in the 1920s and 1950s and is the most urban part of 'new' Southall. Glebe ward is twice as large and less densely populated. It contains Edwardian terraced housing and is the most urban part of 'old' Southall. (Southall is divided by a railway line. 'New' Southall is north, and 'old' Southall is south, of the railway line). Mountpleasant has a population density similar to Glebe but contains more expensive semi-detached post-war housing. Waxlow is a predominantly white area and the most affluent ward containing post-war semi-detached and detached housing. Dormers Wells is the largest ward and contains some of Southall's most expensive property alongside two of the largest and most socially deprived council estates in the borough. The Youth survey was conducted in a school in Glebe ward but many respondents live in Northcote.

1.7 WARD PROFILE ACCORDING TO HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH
(figures in percentage of population)

	Dormers Wells	Glebe	Mount Pleasant	Northcote	Waxlow
U.K.	70	49	56	41	70
NCWP	24	48	40	57	23
Eire	3	2	2	0.8	4
Other	3	1.5	2	1.2	3

From these figures it is interesting to note that Waxlow and Dormers Wells have by far the greatest percentage of U.K. born people. Although this cannot be equated with 'ethnic' background, it gives some indication of where most white people live. They are the least densely populated wards, despite Dormers Wells containing the two largest council estates. The most densely populated area, Northcote, (encompassing The Broadway and main shopping area) also has the highest concentration of NCWP headed households in the borough.

Southall has the highest proportion of owner-occupiers (approximately two thirds) and the second lowest proportion of all other types of housing in the borough.

1.8 TYPES OF HOUSING

A=Acton E=Ealing G=Greenford **S=Southall**

Owner-occupied	41.7% A	58.0% E	61.4% G	**66.4% S**
Council-rented	15.0% E	**20.5% S**	22.2% A	29.0% G
Rented-unfurnished	4.8% G	**5.0% S**	10.4% E	12.0% A
Rented-furnished	1.7% G	**4.8% S**	12.1% E	14.2% A
Housing association	1.9% G	**2.0% S**	3.2% E	8.0% A
Rented business	1.1% G	**1.2% S**	1.3% E	1.9% A
Non-permanent	0% A	0% E	0.1% S	0.1% G

The higher proportion of owner-occupiers in Southall can be accounted for by lack of access to council accomodation (especially in the early phases of migration and settlement) and a preference, where possible, for buying the family home, in many cases enabled by the pooling of economic resources in the family.

A comparision of the figures for Ealing and for the four wards of Southall indicates that the largest percentage of owner-occupied housing falls in Glebe and Northcote wards

	Ealing	Northcote	Mount Pleasant	Glebe	Dormers Wells	Waxlow
owner-occupied	57	76	68	70	40	81
council/ housing association	24	9	21	16	53	10
private unfurnished	8	7	6	8	4	6
private furnished	9	8	5	6	3	3

Southall is further distinguished by larger household numbers compared to the rest of the borough

1.9. HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Of 1 person	**15.0% S**	18.2% G	28.8% E	30.1% A
Of 2 persons	**23.6% S**	32.4% A	33.0% E	34.1% G
Of 3-5 persons	33.0% A	34.5% E	43.9% G	**46.0% S**
Of 6 & more	3.8% E	3.8% G	4.6% A	**15.4% S**

S=Southall G=Greenford A=Acton E=Ealing

1.10 ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Of Southall's 66,488 residents, just under half (31,423) were economically active at the time of the census. Of these 61% (19,053) were male and 39% (12,370) were female. Of the women 67% (8,333) were married. Southall has the highest percentage of unemployed people in the borough, particularly of school leaving age.

Total not employed as a percentage of economically active in each age group.

	Southall	Ealing
16-19	22%	17%
20-24	15%	11%
25-49	10%	8%
50-64	10%	7%

It can be seen that school leavers constitute the largest group of unemployed in Southall (22%) followed by the 20-24 year old group (15%) It is likely that official figures underestimate the number of unemployed. Nevertheless, in the 1980s the number of unemployed has risen threefold. The following are figures for the registered unemployed which appeared in the local newspaper (The Informer 12.4.91)

April	1981	-	3,266
July	1988	-	4,126
Feb	1990	-	6,732
Feb	1991	-	9,637

Official statistics on employment and unemployment are problematic. They are calculated on a 10% sample of the economically active which is itself a dubiously calculated figure. The following figures giving a breakdown of the socio-economic groupings in Southall favour the occupation of the male heads of household. However, ethnographic data highlights the ever greater economic role of women in families, many of whom are employed in part-time, low paid jobs in local catering firms, preparing food and in 'sweat' shops, manufacturing clothes. Others work from home and are paid on a piecemeal basis. Many women are paid in cash and are deprived of their statutory employment rights. One of the key local employers is Heathrow Airport and the service industries that have arisen around it. The following table gives some indication of the occupational categories in which people in Southall find themselves.

Socio-economic group (A) % of total economically active (B) % of unemployed (10% sample)

	Dormers Wells		Glebe		Mount Pleasant		Northcote		Waxlow	
	(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)
*1	9	0.4	6	0.4	7	0.4	5	0.3	11	0.1
*2	24	0.5	16	0.3	24	2	13	0.9	32	0.1
*3	16	2	22	2	21	2	20	2	22	1.0
*4	19	0.5	28	2	24	2	35	3	17	0.9
*5	5	1	9	0.1	6	0.5	10	0.6	5	-
*6	10	7	7	6	7	5	9	8	3	2
#(B)/(A)% =	10		11		10		13		6	

* 1=professional and managerial 2= other non manual 3=skilled manual 4= semi-skilled 5=unskilled 6=others

#(B)/(A) %: unemployed as a percentage of economically active

It can be seen that the majority of people in Glebe and Northcote wards, where most 'Asians' live, are employed in semi-skilled and unskilled manual jobs. In contrast, in Waxlow, where more white people live, there is a greater percentage of people employed in professional and managerial jobs.

1.11 SUMMARY OF CENSUS FIGURES

Southall stands out in the London Borough of Ealing as having the youngest population, the highest percentage of NCWP headed households, the highest percentage of owner-occupied type housing, the highest unemployment rate and the highest percentage of people employed in semi-skilled and unskilled employment. Glebe and Northcote wards, where those pariticipating in the Youth Survey live, distinguish themselves in several respects. Not only are these the most densely populated wards in Southall but they also contain the highest proportion of young people and households headed by persons originating from NCWP. These are also the wards where there is the highest owner-occupier type of housing. These are also the most working class wards in that there is a higher percentage of people engaged in semi-skilled and unskilled manual jobs than elsewhere in Southall. Northcote has the highest percentage of unemployed. I should now like to turn to the Youth Survey figures to supplement and elaborate upon these data on Southall.

1.12 RELIGION

That religion is one of the most potent criteria of distinctions among Southall residents will be clear time and again from the figures that follow and throughout the thesis. The balance of religions in the survey are representative of the area (Appendix 1 section 2.3) with Sikhs accounting for just over half the sample (51.3%) whilst Hindus (16.1%) and Muslims (14.9%) are represented in similar numbers. Thus, over 80% of the sample are either Sikh, Hindu or Muslim and just under 20% Christian mixed or other.

The main cleavage among Sikhs, all of whom speak Punjabi, is caste, even though, in principle, Sikhism refuses caste differences. However, among Sikhs in Southall, caste differences have assumed an almost paradoxically greater importance than among Hindu congregations (a religion based upon caste distinctions) where cleavages mainly on the basis of region and, thereby, mother tongue prevail. (Appendix 1 section 2.6). Approximately 65% of Sikh parents worship in gurudwaras mainly frequented by the Jat caste (Havelock Road and Park Avenue); 20% in gurudwaras attended by the Ramgharia castes (Oswald and Clifton Road)and

11% in the Ravi Das gurudwara on Western Road. (Appendix 1, section 2.4) These correspond with the commonly perceived hierarchy of 'high' (Jat) to 'low' (Ravi Das) castes. The proportion of Ramgharia Sikhs (approximately 20%) corresponds to the proportion of Sikhs who have lived in East Africa. However, the presence of East African Sikhs, is represented no more forcefully than the presence of parents born in the U.K. (35%) (Appendix 1, section 2.5).

The main cleavage among Hindus is that of region and language. Just under 50% of all Hindu parents are evidenced as speakers of Punjabi; 35% of Hindi and 15% Gujerati. Very few Southall parents speak Bengali. Among Muslims the main cleavage is that of region, the main distinctions being between Muslims from Pakistan and from the Indian Punjab, East Africa and Mirpur on the Kashmir borders. There are significant internal cleavages between those adults who have lived in the urban centre Lahore and those originating in the more rural Mirpur district of Kashmir (Appendix 1 section 2.6).

The rural or urban background of parents constitutes a more widespread internal division among Southall inhabitants. Although the figures are of somewhat dubious accuracy they give a rough indication, suggesting that 50% of parents come from a village; 32% from a town and 18% from a city (Appendix 1 section 2.7).

1.13 OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Nearly three quarters (71%) of young people claim to aspire to better occupations than their parents; 23% to similar and 4% to lower occupation than their parents. This highlights young people's ambition, which they frequently state, to 'move up'and to 'move out' of Southall. From the tables presented in Appendix 1 section 2.8. it can be seen that the socio-economic groups of parents broadly correspond to the figures in the 1981 Census in that the main occupations for both men and women are in the manual grouping (37%). Fathers are represented more in skilled (20.3%) and semi-skilled (25%) occupations than women. Yet women appear to be employed in more skilled (16%) than semi-skilled jobs (9%). Overall, 37% of mothers are in employment. Despite a relatively low

response rate to the question on occupational aspirations, Engineering, Business and Computing occupations were most popular among boys whereas Air hostessing, Law and Teaching were more popular among girls (Appendix 1, section 2.10)

1.14 HOUSEHOLD SIZE, FAMILY STRUCTURES AND KINSHIP NETWORKS

The survey figures broadly concur with the Census data in identifying relatively large households among Southall's residents even though the data was elicited in quite different ways. In the Youth survey household size was elicited by the number and composition of eating groups and the presence of unmarried brothers and sisters. Nearly one third (27%) of the sample had between 4 and 7 unmarried brothers and sisters. Eating groups of between 4-6 were prevalent among 68% of respondents and between 6-8 among over one third (35%) of the sample (Appendix 1, section 2.11). 1 in 5 respondents had either an aunt or an uncle in their daily eating groups whilst just over 1 in 10 had a grandparent doing so. This would suggest that the prevalence of extended families applies not only to eating patterns of individual households but predominantly to larger patterns of settlement.

The sample reflects the the concentration of relatives living in or near Southall. On average 34% of all respondents have grandparents and 34% have 10 or more cousins living in or near Southall. If one couples density of kin with strong affinities between families due to a range of factors including: shared village or regional background; shared experiences in Southall; same place of worship; same workplace; family 'unions' through marital contracts; familiarity through attendance at celebrations of rites of passage; same street of residence; and children attending the same schools, it becomes clear that Southall retains features of 'village' life in the sense that kinship and social networks are relatively homogenous in a religious and cultural sense. They also consist of a high degree of face to face contact and a low degree of local anonymity. Also, given the density of the population, particularly in Glebe and Northcote wards, in a relatively small geographic area, then living in such close proximity leads to an intensification of

social networks and relations that is quite unique and that has both positive and negative consequences.

1.15 CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS

Southall is an area remarkable, not only for its youthful population and the density and proximity of kinship and friendship networks but also, for its cultural diversity. One of the central aims of this thesis is to examine how young people respond to and negotiate this cultural diversity through their TV talk. However, we need, first of all, to understand young people's criteria of cultural distinctions.

The most significant marker of cultural distinction among young people in Southall is religion (Appendix 1, section 3.1) It is striking that three quarters of all questionnaires contained a classification of cultures by religion, increased further by those responses, mainly from younger children, who name a religious festival or ritual as a marker of cultural distinction. National, regional and sub-cultural labels also serve as markers of cultural distinction. However, while 'Carribean', 'Asian' and 'Indian' are used as blanket terms, they are far less common than distinctions based upon religion.

1.16 'COMMUNITY' COHESION AND DIVISIONS

Southall is seen as a closely-knit 'community' where nearly three quarters of respondents believe that 'nothing can be kept a secret', and where 'everybody watches what everybody else is doing' (Appendix 1, section 3.2). The lack of privacy, anonymity and secrecy in Southall is of far greater concern to young people than its isolation ('ghettoisation') or the perceived inequalities existing within.

Competitiveness and rivalry between families is the obverse side of dense kinship and friendship networks. Living in such close proximity heightens curiosity about family friends and neighbours and intensifies gossip networks. The gossip networks serve as a kind of informal social control, and moral censoring, particularly of gender relations. A girl's reputation must remain 'high' and 'pure' if she is to be married honorably and respectably. Safeguarding family honour, pride and respect

(in Punjabi all three are rendered in the word 'izzat', a concept which combines notions of moral worth and social status) is dependent on the conduct of females in the family.Chastity and moral rectitude are of paramount importance in Southall (most of all when trangressions occur) which further exacerbates rivalries, competitiveness, gossip and rumour.

For daughters, socialising in public is usually subject to tight adult control. The slightest misdemeanor, such as a boy and girl seen talking in public, can be sufficient in some families to cause family rifts and lead to a tightening of control over the daughter's movements. However, young people find many ways of subverting and overcoming parental strictures. As the figures for trips and socialising show, whilst outings 'outside Southall with family' are most frequent, 56% of boys and 48% of girls claimed they had been outside Southall with friends in 'the last month'(Appendix 1, section 3.3). Nevertheless, this leaves a relatively larger percentage of girls who had not been outside Southall with friends. Most girls conduct their lives almost exclusively on either the family or school 'stage' and have very little opportunity for social life beyond these contexts. The figures also point to the greater mobility and freedom of boys to explore the public spheres of social life.

Religion, culture, racism and class, in that order, are seen as major divisive factors among parents and youth. However, the figures suggest that adults are more divided by religion, politics and the media whereas young people are more divided than their elders by racism, competition and fear (Appendix 1, section 3.4).

Surprisingly, what is seen to unite young people most, although by only 14% of respondents, are the gangs. More boys than girls report this to be the case. There are two principle local gangs that have both material and mythical existence. There are a number of commonly held perceptions of the gangs, perpetuated by gossip, rumour and the local press. The two gangs are called the 'Holy Smokes' and the 'Tuti Nans' (various meanings are attributed to the latter name but a prevalent one is 'broken soul').

Stories about the origins of the gangs have taken on mythical dimensions and are as various as the tellers: some draw on classic plotlines from popular Hindi movies which concern family feuds, romance, revenge and the defence of family honour. The gangs are seen to deal with family feuds which originate in the Punjab, especially where the honour of a female member of the family is at stake, but inheritance and land disputes are also common. Sometimes feuds are seen to spiral down across generations and spill into contemporary Southall life.

Many young people see the gangs as part of a wider organisation involved in criminal activities with the bosses 'at the top' engaged in 'hard' drug deals, major fraud and embezzlement. 'The boys at the bottom', on the street level, are seen to deal in petty crime, car theft, robbery and 'soft' drugs. In between, various 'levels' of criminal activities and types of 'protection rackets' are thought to occur. Whether such views are influenced by American mafia films, like 'The Godfather', it is hard to say but the similarities are striking. Younger boys tend to claim membership of a gang by virtue of their bond with, or admiration for, older brothers, cousins and friends who are believed to be 'gang members' and most young people will report either having a family member or knowing someone who is 'in the gangs'.

The gangs are seen to be divided along religious and territorial lines. The 'Holy Smokes' are considered to be a gang of, primarily, Jat Sikhs, many of whom voice support the Khalistan Movement which is fighting for recognition of the Punjab as an independent state. The 'Tuti Nangs' have mostly been seen as a 'mixed gang', and are commonly thought to incorporate 'Asian', white and black youths. The 'Holies' are seen to dominate 'old' Southall and the 'Tutis', the Broadway area, or 'new' Southall,('old' and 'new' Southall being divided by what was formerly called The Great Western Railway). However, there are 'Holies' who live in 'Toots' areas and vice versa, which gives rise to territorial disputes.

In 1988 the local press took up the issue of the gangs and made it a staple storyline over several months (Ealing Gazette from February to

July 1988). Reports of strong arm recruitment tactics in local schools of pupils as young as 11 and 12 and allegations of rape, assault, extortion, fraud, drug dealing, stabbings, shootings and murders were invariably attributed to the gangs. Between 1988-89 a 'moral panic' and outcry occured, not assisted by documentaries such as 'Southall Boys' (Bandung File, Channel 4, 1989) which, using only three case studies, and highly selctive images of Southall boys, proceeded to paint a picture of Southall as being torn apart by gangs, of families and lives being destroyed by them and of a 'community in the grip of fear'. Interestingly enough informants, who one can readily believe to be gang members report that 'the worst of the gang warfare was well over by the time the media got their hands on it'.

The gangs are seen as both a divisive and cohesive force. Cohesive, in the sense that many Sikh boys who are 'into the gangs' appropriate Sikh symbols (the turban, comb, bangle, dagger and short drawers) to create a subversive group identity. They also sport heavy gold jewelry, particularly chains and large earrings. They wear jeans and black leather jackets and 'cruise' in red Ford Capris or Triumph Stags. As a social type those seeking to portray a gang image are quite easily recognisable in Southall - perhaps a form of 'symbolic' resistance to whatever authority requires challenging. The gangs are divisive in that they exacerbate divisions based on religion, political persuasion, caste and territory, among others. They give young males an excuse to indulge in displays of male pride and machismo, as well as, battles of honour and loyalty.

1.18 PARENTAL RULES

Despite the seemingly conspicous existence of gang sub-cultures, parental rules, as reported by respondents in the survey, are widespread. Whether they are actually kept is another question. However, clear gender differences are reported in certain rules set. The most prevalent parental rules for girls concern, 'helping mother', 'housework to share with sisters' and 'boys you should keep away from'. For boys, helping both parents, 'going to worship' and 'going out at night' are more common (Appendix 1, section 3.5). The least regulated areas of

young people's lives are reported to be their viewing of video, TV and reading, although parental censoring of TV and video content shows far greater vigilance on sexually explicit material than on portrayals of violence. Over a third of respondents report rules on attending one's place of worship. Over three quarters of females and just under 60% of male respondents report set times, or an absolute injunction, on going out at night. Among girls, the absolute injunction is twice as prevalent as among boys. There is some evidence that Muslim parents impose both disciplines more widely than Sikh or Hindu parents. It is of interest to compare the rules set by parents on boys and girls 'you should keep away from' with young people's attitudes to courtship and marriage.

1.19 COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

In response to a series of statements culled from ethnographic data, the impression gleaned from the figures is the desire for more 'open' and understanding communication with parents about 'dating'. The majority of respondents agreed that

(i) 'parents should know more about their children 'going out' and be more understanding' (66%)

(ii)'going out' is normal at my age' (58%)

(iii) 'going out does not have to lead to marriage' (56%)

(Appendix 1, section 3.6)

Attitudes to courtship are most certainly influenced by, among other factors, films and TV. As we shall later see, the widespread popularity of the Australian soap 'Neighbours' and other American programmes aimed at teenagers, encourage young people to discuss the issue of dating. In these programmes dating is normative behaviour among teenagers and follows particular conventions and rituals which differ in certain respects from those among British youngsters, (for example, Americans begin dating at a much younger age than their British counterparts with the approval of parents; there are many socially acceptable public places and social spaces where young people can go on date, such as, soda bars and graduation balls; young people 'hang out' in mixed gender groupings to a much greater degree than their British counterparts). However, despite the fact that 58% of respondents consider dating to be

normal at their age, this leaves 42% who disagree with the statement, highlighting one of the many differences between young people.

Three quarters of respondents agreed with the statement that 'people should be free to marry whom they liked'. This reflects the increasing desire and demand on the part of young people to be involved in family decisions about their marriages. Just under half agreed that they would prefer to marry someone of their own culture. Caste, it would seem, is not a very significant factor for most young people in their hypothetical responses to statements on decisions about marital partners. Only 1 in 5 considered that 'people should marry in their own caste'. This response is contradicted by ethnographic data which highlights that, although caste is a taboo topic which is not openly discussed or referred to in the peer culture except among close friends, it is of paramount importance, especially in the eyes of parents, when it actually comes to the moment of arranging marriages.

Many young people experiment with dating their peers and there would appear to be an almost inexorable drive to date people who are not of the same religion or caste whom one cannot marry without a family crisis. Yet the majority of young people, when it comes to the moment of marriage, are reluctant to sacrifice their family for the sake of a romantic relationship and a 'love' marriage, (although the 'Romeo and Juliet' scenario is a narrative deeply engrained in young people's minds). Young people and their families are finding new and creative ways to negotiate marriage arrangements and although one does hear many 'horror' stories about marriage, the system is changing and adpating to new circumstances. Nevertheless, marriage arrangements are, for many young people, and girls in particular, a major source of tension, anxiety and even dread. There is some evidence to suggest that parents from urban areas are more likely to have relaxed attitudes concerning marriage arrangements and to adopt a range of more flexible criteria in selecting suitable partners for their children whereas there is a tendency among rural born parents towards a more strict adherence to the custom of caste endogamy and to traditional practices in marriage arrangements.

1.20 LEISURE, MEDIA, STARS AND STYLE

Leisure pursuits take place predominantly within the domestic sphere and within close range of family surveillance. Clear gender differences in leisure pursuits also emerge. The most common public leisure activities among boys are going to friends' parties, leisure centres, games arcades and going to one's place of worship. Among girls, friend's parties, place of worship and school discos are most commonly reported but to a much lesser extent (Appendix 1, sections 4.0 - 4.1). It may come as a surprise that religious worship should be seen as a leisure activity. This is certainly an attitude which is more common among Hindus and Sikhs than it is among Muslims. The Sikh Gurudwaras and Hindu temples are places where one may go to socialise and to eat as well as to pray and the atmosphere is much less formal than in many Christian places of worship.

Approximately, one third of boys and girls had been to the cinema in the last month. This is a popular leisure pursuit among young people but the figures are complicated by the fact that most girls would have to receive their parents' permission to be able to go to the cinema. Therefore one cannot assess the popularity of the cinema on the basis of these figures alone. In contrast, it is an almost indisputable fact of life that TV viewing is the major private leisure activity.

1.21 MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES IN THE HOME

Over half our respondents have two TV sets in their households and 1 in 5 have three. 88% have a video cassette recorder (VCR); 20% subscribe to cable TV and only 8% have a satellite dish. 91% have a TV set in their main living room, emphasising the central position of TV in family life, and over one quarter have a second TV set in another living room. 47% of households have a TV set in the main bedroom and 42% in a children's bedroom (Appendix 1, section 4.2). In multi-set households, parents have less control over what their children watch and young people have greater freedom, in principle, to watch what they please. Both survey and ethnographic data point to viewing groups being organised principally along the lines of generation and gender.

Approximately, one third of households have a video camera, which reflects the local interest in video filming major rites of passage, celebrations and religious rituals and exchanging tapes among family members across towns and cities (Southall, Birmingham, Leeds, Leicester), as well as across continents (India, Canada and America). The viewing of home videos is a very popular and common leisure pursuit which tends to bridge the generational and gender divide. Wedding videos are among the most popular and it is common for youngsters, girls especially, to use them to identify eligible young males. This activity is not unknown among older women, and sometimes also among boys and men alike. In fieldnotes, several examples of introductions being arranged, subsequent to viewing a wedding video are documented. 'Spotting' someone on the video, 'checking them out', slotting them into a family network and asking questions to a potential 'bachola' (matchmaker) in the discrete circumstances of a family screening, clearly has certain advantages. Weddings are major social occassions where match-making occurs. So viewing the video and discussing potentially eligible candidates is but an extension of activities that occur in weddings.

Computers are also widespread among domestic technologies. 60% of households have a home computer and 50% video games. It would appear that the computers are used mainly for playing games rather than for word processing or other purposes. Three quarters of households have hi-fi stereo systems; 87% of respondents have a walkman and 87% a radio. The local radio station 'Sunrise Radio' can be heard in almost every local shop. A common local tale is that one can hear a whole programme or the same song while walking the length of The Broadway. 'Sunrise' is a station which presents itself as having an 'Asian' identity. It has recently obtained a channel on Astra satellite and is now beaming to 'Asian' households nationwide and across Europe, (in households willing to pay the price of a satellite dish). It is reported in the local press that Sunrise Radio is soon to extend its reach across Europe. (See Appendix pg 227)

1.21 PATTERNS OF VIEWING

The TV genres which are most frequently viewed by the whole family are the news, comedies, crime series and soaps. Pop music is the genre least viewed by the whole family and also the genre which is, above all, preferably watched without parents (Appendix 1, section 4.3 - 4.8) Of all TV genres, the news and comedy are most discussed with parents. (In fact, the news and popular Hindi films on video are most discussed by young people with their parents, see Appendix 1, section 4.14) In terms of actual viewing among young respondents, comedy, cartoons and pop programmes take the lead. Clear gender differences emerge in patterns of viewing. Boys watch more science fiction, science programmes, game shows, documentaries and crime series than girls. Conversely, more girls than boys report watching pop and quiz programmes, soaps, cartoons and children's TV. A comparison of actual and preferred viewing highlights the way in which whilst soaps do not feature prominantly of the lists of TV genres which respondents had 'actually watched', when asked an open-ended question about which programme they most looked forward to watching, 67% named 'Neighbours'.

Figures for channel preferences indicate that 82% of respondents reported their family's preference for BBC1, 75% for ITV and only 16% and 4% respectively for Channel 4 and BBC2. In contrast, a slightly higher percentage of youths reported a preference for the minority channels (20% for Channel 4 and 12% for BBC2) and a lower percentage for BBC and ITV (63% and 44% respectively). This relatively higher figure among young people claiming a preference for the minority channels reflects the success of these channels in targetting teenagers with youth programmes rather than an aspirational tendency to watch more middle-class programmes. (cf the Channel 4 comedy slot on week nights at 6.30 pm). Yet, it is undoubtedly the case that many young people have a greater degree of lingusitic and cultural comptence than their parents which faciliates the comprehension and appreciation minority channel programmes. The most popular of Channel 4's programmes representing or targetted at 'ethnic' minorities is the Cosby Show (84%) and Network East (61%). However, there is little evidence that young people are

drawn toward other programmes specifically targetting 'ethnic' minorities (Appendix 1, section 4.13).

1.23 VIDEO USE

Whilst the thesis does not deal directly with video use, it would be negligent to ignore it all together. Full details of video use, hire, home video libraries and viewing are given in Appendix 1, sections 4.10 - 4.17. Suffice it to highlight a few significant points here. Aproximately half of respondents' families borrow between 1 and 3 videos per week; 21% between 3 and 6 and 10% more than 6. One quarter of the sample claim that they do not watch videos with their family and over a third claim that they watch one or two videos with their family.

Almost 40% of respondents have between 20 and 50 videos in their family video library; 16% have more than 50 and 12% have over 100. The majority of films in respondents video libraries are reported to be Indian (67%) and English films (54%); TV recordings (53%); pop videos (35%) family videos (26%) and religious films (18%). It should be noted that respondents may not have distinguished American from English videos as they may have perceived the question to be about language and not the country in which the videos were produced.

Indian videos are most often watched with the whole family (66%) and most frequently discussed with parents (32%), followed by English (55%) and American (51%) videos which are barely discussed with parents (15% and 10% respectively). Young people are more likely to have seen American blockbuster video films, such as *Police Academy* (83%) and *Beverley Hills Cop* (82%) than either popular or 'high brow' Indian films or, indeed, 'independent' films which represent British Indians (i.e. *My Beautiful Launderette*), although 58% had seen *Gandhi*.

Over one third of respondents view Indian films 'most weekends' and 13% watch them 'most days'. Overall, the figures suggest that 60-70% watch Indian films on a fairly regular basis. However, it is clear that more girls than boys view them which supports the findings of my previous research on family viewing of Hindi films on video (Gillespie, 1989).

Approximately half of respondents find that the films assist them in language learning. Approximately one third enjoy the films, claim they bring the family together and represent Indian life realistically. They are seen as useful for learning about Indian culture and religion but approximately one quarter of respondents find them too slow or too unrealistic in their portrayal of India. However, there are gender differences, too in judgements about Indian films (Appendix 1, section 4.17).

1.24 FAVOURITE STARS

Michael Jackson is the favourite star of nearly a quarter of respondents. Tom Cruise, Madonna and Kylie Minogue receive roughly similar scores at 12% and 13% respectively . Of all the stars cited in this open-ended question 37% are American, 26% are British, 16% are 'Asian' and 8% are Australian (Appendix 1, section 4.18 - 4.19).

1.25 PERSONAL STYLE

The most important quality of personal style and fashion is 'to look cool' (61%); 'to be respectable' (46%); 'to show a bit of class (44%) and 'to stay OK with my parents (40%); 'to look elegant and sophisticated (30%) and 'to respect my culture' (25%). However, among girls 'respecting their culture is more important than among boys (15%), for whom 'looking cool' is of paramount importance (66%) (Appendix 1, section 4.20).

1.26 COUNTRIES YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD MOST LIKE TO VISIT

America is also the country that most young people would like to visit. 45% report America in contrast to 14% Australia, 6% Canada, 5% Europe and 5% India. The best things about America, according to respondents, are the weather, the stars, its size and fashion (Appendix 1, section 4.21 - 4.22).

1.27 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a portrait of Southall using Census figures and data from the Southall youth survey in order to contextualise this study firmly in its social and cultural setting. The Census data

revealed some of Southall's demographic features: its higher than average young population; the high percentage of households headed by persons from the new Commonwealth and Pakistan; the larger than average household sizes; the high percentage of owner-occupied type housing; the high rate of unemployment and the high percentage of people employed in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs.

The sample profile of the Southall youth survey identified similar pattern to the Census data and further highlighted the density of kinship networks in the local area and the high occupational aspirations of young people. The chapter emphasised the cultural heterogeneity of Southall and the importance of religion as a marker of cultural distinction. It examined differences between, as well as within religions, based upon caste, region and language. It identified some cohesive and divisive factors in Southall, from the point of view of young people, and the importance of religion was emphasised as a divisive factor and the gangs as a cohesive factor.

A description of what it is like to live in Southall was given. The central importance for Southall youth of negotiating the relations between parental and peer cultures was highlighted. Their perceptions of Southall, the rules their parents set and their attitudes to courtship and marriage highlight some of the constraints on young people. Yet difference between young people are as important as their similarities. Gender is a chief source of inequality and it is clear that young people differ widely in the degree to which they wish to conform, and actually do conform, to the norms of the parental culture.

TV is the major private leisure activity among young people. Public leisure activities take place within narrowly circumscribed social spaces for most young people, especially girls. Weddings, birthdays and other rites of passage are the main social outings that young people attend with their families. The place of worship is also seen as a social space for leisure. Attendance at friends' parties, leisure centres and discos are secondary forms of leisure activity in terms of their frequency.

Households are well equipped with media technologies, the majority of possessing more than one TV set and 88% having a video cassette recorder. 20% subscribe to cable TV but the take up of satellite dishes has been slow (8%). One in three households has a video camera reflecting the widespread practice of filming family occassions and rites of passage. Social interaction around the viewing of family and wedding videos points to certain culturally distinctive uses of the vcr.

Local media also reflect the cultural distinctiveness of the area. 'Sunrise' radio broadcasts in a range of south Asian languages, but predominantly in Punjabi, and has a rather ubiquitous quality in Southall. A variety of south Asian newspapers are also available, in particular, 'The Punjab Times' and 'Des Pardes' ('Home and Abroad') are produced locally. Popular Hindi films on video and religious and popular music cassettes and compact discs are widely available and played on the streets and in the shops. Posters of Hindi film and pop music stars appear in many shop fronts. These factors are seen to add to Southall's 'exotic' image.

This chapter gives details of family and individual TV viewing patterns and preferences; video use; home video libraries; favourite stars and countries. The juxtaposition of Indian, American and British media enables young people to compare and contrast, judge and evaluate these media on a range of criteria; aesthetic, social and moral. It is clear that American media are considered to be far more appealing and entertaining than either British or Indian media. America is also the country that most young people would like to visit. The implications of these findings will be discussed later. For the moment, having described the 'field', let us now examine the 'fieldwork'.

CHAPTER TWO

FIELDWORK EXPERIENCES

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into five parts. Firstly, it describes how the research evolved from an inter-related set of professional, personal and academic interests; secondly, it explains the choice of ethnography as a methodological and theoretical approach; thirdly, it outlines the progression of the fieldwork in its different phases; fourthly it considers questions of access, role and status and finally, it describes some of the practical and theoretical issues associated with 'living fieldwork' and 'writing ethography'.

2.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

This ethnography is based upon data collected during two years of fieldwork carried out from October 1988 - October 1990. During the period of the fieldwork I lived in Southall, sharing a house with young adults of Punjabi family background. However, my involvement with young people in Southall dates back to the autumn of 1981 when, as a probationary secondary school teacher, I was sent on teaching practice to a local High School. This was in the aftermath of the disturbances, or 'race-riots' as they were termed by the media, which took place in Southall, Brixton and Toxteth in the summer of 1981. Black and 'Asian' youth in these areas were publicly demonstrating against racism, discrimination, heavy policing and SUS (stop under suspician) laws (CCCS, 1982:1-36). This was the 'historical moment' when I entered the 'field' and the period in which my interest in research in Southall began. As part of my teaching degree, a small scale research project was undertaken based on interviews with sixth form students on their perceptions of the disturbances and their relationship to the school, the 'community', the parental culture and British society more generally.

Subsequently I worked in another local High School for a period of four years as a teacher of English as a second language (E.S.L) to young

people who had recently emigrated from the Indian sub-continent. It was in this context that I learned enough Punjabi to conduct everyday casual conversation and began to understand the difficulties faced by teenage emigrants, especially in their marginalisation, physically from the mainstream of the school (we worked in a hut), and from the curriculum (they were withdrawn fron mainstream lessons), but also from their British-born Punjabi peers who tended to reject them as 'pendus' (peasants). During this time I was engaged in a number of small scale research projects aimed at integrating 'E.S.L' students, as they were labelled, into the mainstream of the school and rendering the curriculum accessible to them.

In 1986 I undertook a study of the use of the video cassette recorder (VCR) among families in Southall as part of an M.A in Film and Television Studies for Education at the University of London Institute of Education. This small scale ethnographic study highlighted the use of the VCR among Punjabi families to view popular Hindi movies and the way in which viewing experiences were used in the negotiation of parental and peer cultures. The study pointed to the ways in which new communications technologies are being mobilized for the purposes of maintaining traditions and re-creating cultural and ethnic identities in families in Southall (Gillespie, 1989).

The reasons for my interest in Southall youth are personal as well as academic. I shall outline these personal interests since they have influenced the way in which I have dealt with questions of reflexivity or, the idea that the observer is also part of the observational field and therefore a subject of the research (Woolgar,1988). My parents emigrated from Southern Ireland in the late 1940s and I grew up in a predominantly Irish 'community' in north west London. Although the 'community' was not geographically isolated as Southall is, nevertheless, our social networks consisted almost exclusively of other Irish immigrant families. These social networks developed from shared cultural, religious and occupational backgrounds and interests. Whilst there are obvious differences between Punjabi Sikh and Irish Catholic families in their experiences of migration and settlement, not least the

distinctiveness in terms of skin colour of the former which has made them an easier target for racism, there are some underlying similarities among first generation immigrant parents which I have been able to draw upon in the fieldwork.

The similarities are as follows; first, the central importance of religion in the parental culture as a mode of cognition, a system of beliefs and values and a set of social practices. The existence of God is, for most, self evident and this contrasts sharply with modern secular British values. Secondly, the strength of kinship bonds and close-knit, 'extended' family networks living in close proximity places an importance on family duty and loyalty that tends to over-ride the pursuit of individual self-interest. Again, this contrasts with more geographically dispersed and isolated nuclear British families where, generally speaking, kinship ties tend to be less binding. Thirdly, parents originate predominantly from rural villages where farming is the main occupation. Again this contrasts with modern, urban London life. Fourthly, the experience of being uprooted and separated from close kin and displaced in another, often hostile, culture tends to undermine cultural and family values and can lead to feelings of insecurity and to attempts on the part of parents to safeguard, and even to strengthen adherence to cultural traditions. Fifthly, the family value systems, based upon religious beliefs and practices, place great emphasis on moral values, particularly those associated with gender relations. Both cultures place emphasis upon the chastity of daughters and endogamy. Sixthly, in varying degrees, both cultures have experienced prejudice and discrimination due to their perceived differences from the indigenous population. Finally, upward social mobility, greater affluence and an emphasis on the importance of education is a general pattern among both Irish and Punjabi immigrant families. This often results in a situation where children, born and brought up in the country of settlement are more highly educated than parents which, alongside aspirations toward cultural change can result in internal family cleavages, tension and strain (Ballard, 1982)

Therefore, I did not enter the field as a 'tabula rasa' and the similarities and differences between Punjabi Sikh and Irish Catholic families of immigrant background have influenced the research process and analysis both postively and negatively. Such similarities have helped me in dealing with the problems inherent in learning from and studying a culture different to my own. They have reduced the possibilities of my 'exoticising' or 'tribalising' the 'other' and assisted the processes of reflexivity throughout the research. For example, in collaboratively drawing up family genealogies with Sociology A-level students, similar patterns of 'double-sibling' marriage (i.e. two sisters marrying two brothers and thus consolidating the union of families and property) were identified, as well as the prevalence of disputes about the inheritance of land in the home country and the economic support given to, and expected from, relatives in the country of origin. Such commonalities have greatly facilitated the rapport between students, informants and myself, helping to recognise self in other and vice versa. However, at times I have assumed similarities which subsequently proved to be misleading. For example, I tended to underestimate the pressures upon young people in Southall to renounce their individual goals and ambitions in response to family demands. A further example of being disabused of preconceptions occured when I became aware of the widespread variability between families in the nature of, and adherence to, religious practices and beliefs or cultural traditions, and thus, of the heterogeneity of both parental and peer cultures.

But both the similarities and differences between Punjabi Sikh and Irish Catholic cultures have enabled a progressive critical distancing. This is crucial if one is to overcome the problem of so closely identifying with one's subjects that one runs the risk of projecting one's own concerns onto them and consequently of producing a distorted account. Similarly, there is a danger of defending their values rather than studying them (Woods, 1979). Thus, in dealing with the question of reflexivity, I have drawn upon my own family experiences in the fieldwork and writing stages of this research whilst being aware of the importance of maintaining critical distance.

My academic interests were, therefore, stimulated by my professional experiences as teacher and researcher and by my family's experiences of migration and settlement in Britain. The question of how young people negotiate the relations between parental and peer culture and, by extension, issues of cultural identities, cultural differences, maintenance and change became a central focus of my academic concern. Yet the ramifications of these questions seemed to hinge upon the geographic, social and cultural marginalisation of London Punjabis from mainstream society. It became apparent that, apart from school and the peer culture, the media, and TV in particular, provided young people in Southall with one of the most significant means access to, and sources of information about, British and American (or, as informants say, 'western') culture. Thus, my informal observations suggested that TV might be used in culturally distinctive ways and may even be a significant means of socialisation or enculturation into the values and norms of British and American society.

Having examined the uptake and use of popular Hindi films in the family context it seemed logical to extend these interests to an examination of the uses and interpretations of TV in the peer culture. It was in the context of the peer culture, in the absence of parental constraint, that young people seemed to be most actively engaged in forging for themselves 'new' self-definitions and 'identities'. Dissatisfication with the scale of my study of VCR use precipitated the aim of assessing the typicality of the responses derived from the interviews and to situate the viewing of Hindi films within the broader context of viewing. Therefore, I decided to use a survey to obtain data on patterns of TV consumption which would provide the direction for further ethnographic explorations.

2.2 WHY ETHNOGRAPHY?

One of the central methodological arguments of the thesis is that ethnography can deliver empirically grounded media knowledge in a way that many other, less socially encompassing, methodologies cannot. At the same time, research into media audiences, by adopting an anthropological approach, can generate the kind of ethnographic

knowledge which is usually considered to be the sole preserve of anthropologists.

At the outset the research problem was broadly defined as an investigation into the uses and interpretations of TV among a London Punjabi peer culture. Ethnography offered several methodological and theoretical advantages to the present research which will be elaborated throughout the thesis. For the moment, let us consider its principal advantages.

The 'embeddedness' of TV in everyday life demands research techniques and procedures which are sensitive to the micro-processes of its incorporation into everday life and its appropriation by young people in the more public context of their peer cultures. Drawing upon phenomenological and symbolic interactionist approaches to everday life, Silverstone (1990), argues for a broadly anthropological conception of the TV audience and for a methodological approach which sets the audience for TV in the context of the everyday life.

"Hitherto, what seems substantially absent (in audience research) is a conceptualisation of the TV audience as a social and cultural object (sic) within the complex reality of everyday life. Such a conceptualisation would encourage a view of the audience as embedded both in the macro-environment of political economy and in the micro-world of domestic and daily existence" (1990:4).

It is my conviction that an intimate understanding of young people's lives, their world views, aspirations, feelings and the social and personal tensions which they experience is a pre-requisite to understanding their uses of TV. As Katz and Lazarsfield (1955) noted, an understanding of the use we make of the media must be contextualised by an understanding of the social world through which the media pass. Yet, conversely, young people's uses and interpretations of TV offer valuable insights into their social worlds.

A central aim of this thesis is to understand TV use from the point of view of young people. There is a significant gap in research on young people and TV which foregrounds their uses and interpretations of the programmes they watched. There is also a neglect of older teenagers and an almost exclusive concentration on research into children and TV. In much of this research children have been constructed as a social category, particularly vulnerable to the influences and harmful effects of TV. (Buckingham, 1987)
Experiences as a teacher suggested to me that the uses of TV among 16 year may be not only gender specific but age-specific. It was hoped that the study might offer insights into the processes of maturation and identity formation, particularly complex, and potentially very creative, processes for London Punjabi youth who have so much more to negotiate than young people brought up in a mono-cultural environment. Furthermore, through a more socially encompassing approach to TV use, it was hoped that the research might shed light, in a more precise way, on how TV shapes young people's perceptions of the world and on its ideological role.

The goals of ethnographic research formulated by Malinowski (1964: 24) offered a set of guiding principles which seemed appropriate to the research problem. He categorised these goals under three headings; first, there was the outline of local customs which he called the method of statistical documentation by concrete evidence and which included the collection, through direct questioning, of genealogies, details of technologies, the village census and so on; the second goal was derived from his second principle of method which required the ethnographer to live locally for the purposes of 'the collection of the imponderabilia of actual life and of typical behaviour'. Such data, according to Malinowski, would reveal the minute details of everyday life as it was lived by the people and observed by the ethnographer. The third method required the ethnographer to become competent in the language of the people for the fieldwork involved the recording of everyday speech, magical formulae and myths to be presented as a 'corpus inscriptionum', as documents of 'native' (sic) mentality. These three methods were required in order to achieve the ultimate goal of ethnography 'to grasp

the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of the world'. (1964:25)

Malinowski's goals (despite his ethnocentrism) seemed appropriate to the aims of the research which sought an understanding of TV use from the subjective point of view of young people, in line with phenomenological approaches to the study of human social processes. Yet his overall approach is 'positivist' and 'scientific'. It seemed that the combination of quantitative and qualitative data might help overcome some of the polarities between positivist and interprevist perspectives. Furthermore, the distinguishing features of ethnographic studies, fieldwork based on long-term, participant observation and 'immersion in the field', as well as the priority given to empirical evidence in support of theoretical claims, offered the possibility of generating 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) which might contribute to contemporary debates in media theory. For, although there has been much theoretical debate in recent years on audiences, there has been a lack of empirical research, especially of research which takes full account of the sociological background of the audiences under study. Whilst many academics seem to be talking about ethnographic audience studies, few seemed to be doing them.

Although the specific aim of the research was to study a peer culture, the more general goal was to pursue this is in the context of a local study. The geographical isolation and cultural distinctiveness of Southall in relation to the wider society seemed to lend itself to the holistic aims of ethnography. Moreover, Southall appeared to be fertile territory upon which to explore the articulation of the global and local dynamics of TV consumption. Thus, it is hoped that this study might be able to contribute to debates about contemporary tendencies, on the one hand, toward cultural homogenisation and, on the other, toward fragmentation.

However, some of the enduring problems associated with ethnography have recently been aired by Marcus and Fisher (1986); Murdock (1989); Curran (1990) and Morley (1990). The main criticism is that ethnography fails

to deal adequately with issues of power, economics and historical change due to its preoccupation with portraying the 'native point of view' as richly as possible. The problem, as the above writers see it, is how to represent the embedding of richly described local cultural worlds in larger, impersonal systems of political economy.

In the context of this local study, political economy refers to three spheres. First, the political economy as it is shaped by national and international forces; secondly, the local political economy and thirdly, the political economy of broadcasting. Each of these are seen an interacting and mutually dependent spheres.

The socio-economic status of families in Southall, the constraints upon them and their 'cultural capital' need to be examined alongside other structuring and structural factors such as culture, class, ethnicity, gender and age. Survey data is invaluable in helping to link the material conditions of existence of local families with their consumption and uses of symbolic commodities. Through linking the material and the symbolic spheres it is hoped that this study can begin to address questions of political economy and power relations, especially, the unequal distribution of educational and cultural comptences and capital.

Whilst issues of political economy, ownership and control, production and distribution are crucial determinants of the amount, type and perceived quality of TV that is available, these factors alone neither determine its uses, nor its interpretations and signficance in young people's lives. The operations of ideology, the politics of pleasure and the effects of TV cannot simply be read off the texts produced by multi-national commercial organisations. Such concerns have political and human importance but public and academic debates often assume a top down thrust to the relationship. Ethnography offers the possibility of examining the unintended consequences of the poltical economy of broadcasting from 'bottom up'. (Marcus and Fisher, 1986)

Finally, despite the fact that anthropology has, like sociology, been dogged by forms of dichotomous thinking, especially in the often sterile polarities between positivist and interpretivist perspectives, the 'non-sectarian', integrated model of ethnography proposed by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) offers much of value. Silvermann (1985) succinctly characterises their approach. The programme that they recommend involves 'an iconoclastic appeal' to elements of both positivist and interpretivist paradigms

"They are positivists to the extent that they rightly argue that the function of research, as opposed to journalism, is to develop and test theories. Consequently they are happy to recommend analytical induction and, in certain case, quantification as a means of depicting valid relations between variables. This defines their 'experimentalist mentality' (ibid 18). However, they also make the notion of reflexivity central to their programme. This derives from Schutz and ethnomethodology's observation that common sense is an eradicable basis for any understanding. Consequently they argue that social research is not primarily based upon paradigms but upon refinements of methods used in everday life (ibid:15) As a result, rather than try to eliminate the observer, they aim to make research practices a central topic for investigation" (1985:116)

He points out that what they offer is a 'heady brew' which leads occasionally to inconsistencies which ultimately serve as a useful reminder that the alternative to rigid polarities in social research cannot be that 'anything goes'. In ethnography, as elsewhere, our attempts to describe the social world must be based upon critical analysis which avoids both polarised concepts and 'sloppy' thinking. Thus, my understanding of, and approach to ethnography draws upon this integrated model.

2.3 THE STAGES OF FIELDWORK IN SOUTHALL: AN OVERVIEW

Fieldwork is characterised by a multiplicity of data-gathering strategies, in a variety of contexts, drawing upon the experiences of a wide range of people over a long period of time. Whilst it is possible to categorise the different phases of fieldwork broadly in terms of the

gradual refinement and specification of the research problem, neatly systematic research designs are largely post hoc re-constructions of what, in practice, is a more 'messy' process of piecemeal inductive analysis, reflection and action based upon incoming data. For despite the best efforts at systematic research design, the very nature of ethnographic research, in principle, depends on the ethnographer being surprised (Willis, 1980) at certain moments; following leads that could not have been predicted; assuming roles that could not have been planned; and witnessing events and responses that could not have been foreseen. Nevertheless, one always has a strategic plan, (which may or may not be disrupted at various points in fieldwork), and one gathers data in systematic and rigorous ways. It is through the diligent and painstaking recording of observations in fieldnotes and fieldwork diary that the necessary rigour is achieved.

I shall broadly describe the three stages of fieldwork undertaken in terms of their key foci and activities. It should not be assumed that these stages were in any way mutually exclusive, rather, it is the overlap and, at times, the simultaneity of roles, influences and phases (Baumann, 1988) that characterises fieldwork, especially in urban settings.

2.4 PHASE ONE: GROUNDWORK

In the earliest stages of the research my chief aim was to arrive at a more adequate understanding of the many cultures in Southall. This is often described as 'immersion'. Previous experiences as a teacher had offered some insight into peer cultures but I had little understanding of the internal cleavages, based on religion, caste, region, urbanity in the parental culture. Furthermore, I needed a clearer understanding of key categories and terms, both English and Punjabi, which were in widespread everyday use and some of which were a source of confusion to me. For example, the apparent interchangeability of categories such as 'Asian', 'Indian', 'Punjabi' and 'Sikh' confused me until I began to document their use in specific contexts. Similarly, 'westernised', 'gorified' ('whitened'), 'Bleti' (rich) and 'Anglicised', were all terms used to refer to someone who seemed more British than 'Asian' but again,

in different contexts accompanied by positive or negative connotations. Therefore, the commonsense knowledge gained from seven years teaching locally needed consolidation through more systematic and rigorous documentation and analysis than I had hitherto been able, or capable, of doing.

In the first phase of research the aim was to make friends, to become actively involved with young people and to establish relationships of trust and reciprocity. This was facilitated by teaching in a local High school for several hours per week (which I continued to do throughout the fieldwork). I organised trips and became involved in school projects which provided important background data and helped to situate TV in the broader context of young people's leisure and social lives. Some of these projects were undertaken collaboratively and aimed at exploring perceptions of self, others, cultural differences and Southall through a variety of means; for example, a video project with 14-15 year old students involved them role-playing scenarios they devised which dealt with conflicts of values and beliefs. With A-level Sociology students the family, youth cultures and mass media were studied. With one year vocational students (aged 16-17) in community studies we explored local politics, racism, religion and advertising. In media studies, with one year vocational students we examined different film and TV genres, studied media institutions and industries and they produced videos, radio shows and advertisements. The data and insights arrived at through these projects provided valuable background information to the research.

The central research aim of the first phase was to devise, pilot and administer a large-scale survey among Southall youth in collaboration with a colleague who was also conducting research in Southall. The survey covered many aspects of young people's lives; their family backgrounds, parental employment; kinship and social networks; their perceptions of local cultures; their leisure pusuits, musical tastes and patterns of media consumption. Full details of the survey, (including the construction of the questionnaire, problems of access, administration and analysis of results) are given in Appendix 1. The survey results provided a valuable resource of data which directed

aspects of the research and lent quantitative support to ethnographic description. Census data was also analysed.

2.5. PHASE TWO: IMMERSION

Phase two involved the most intensive participation, observation, and interviewing (in their various forms and combinations), in both parental and peer cultures during the entire period of fieldwork. Alongside this, the analysis, tabulation and cross tabulation of survey results was completed. This was probably the most socially demanding and hectic, emotionally elevating and distressing time of the fieldwork. But through a combination of living and working locally I was able to make friends who taught me to share in the pleasures of Southall life. In the early stages of fieldwork I had kept a low profile and acted, as far as possible, as the unobtrusive observer. However, in this phase, with a more intimate knowledge of informants (through regular outings and trips, visiting homes, participating at birthday parties, discos and weddings) I was able to share their lives in a more genuine way than that of the unobtrusive observer.

There were a number of families who I visited on a regular basis and with whom close and reciprocal relations were established. They were hospitable, warm and friendly and gave freely of their time and experiences. In return, I assisted young people with their school work, arranged family outings and helped parents when I could with administrative and, on several occasions with legal matters. In one family I was adopted as a daughter and sister. (A case study of this family's viewing of the 'Mahabharata' is included in Appendix 2, p132)

A number of young people became key informants as well as close personal friends and we saw each other on a regular basis over a two year period. During this period I conducted more structured and focussed interviews with a wide range of young people on various aspects of their TV viewing. My informants appreciated that I was conducting research into young people and television and willingly tolerated my naive and probing questions and interest in seemingly irrelevant details. The survey results and subsequent interpretations were discussd in informal

conversations and in interviews. The ability of trusted, key informants to recognise themselves, or not as the case may be, in the accounts, analyses and arguments which were progressively being produced from the data has been one of the most important criteria invoked in evaluating and checking my interpretations.

The use of a notebook and audio-tape recorders were eventually considered as part of the proceedings with certain informants who claimed to enjoy the fact that their ideas, views and lives were being taken seriously. But often in more intimate moments of trouble, self-revelation, or gossip neither notebooks nor any recording technologies were used. In such cases I had to rely upon, and indeed develop, my memory to complete my fieldnotes. With a transcribing machine borrowed from the university I was able to make verbatim transcripts of conversations and interviews. Both at school and elsewhere I became known as the 'video person', since for the purposes of teaching and ethnography extensive use was made of the video camera. Numerous times I was called upon to video family occasions: birthday parties, weddings, religious celebrations (such as Diwali and Rakhri) as well as to make video 'letters' to families in the Punjab. These are significant anthropologcal documents which allow insights into family life and rites of passage. Unfortunately, discussion of these cannot be included in the present thesis but they nevertheless contributed important background data.

The audio and video-tape recorder offer easy ways of recording data and when young people become accustomed to their presence, as eventually most did, they soon seem to forget its presence and become more interested in social interaction. However, the most regular means of recording data was through the fieldwork notes and diary. I had to learn how to do these efficiently, effectively and, what proved most difficult in the early stages, regularly. The skills do not simply involve writing a record of a situation or conversation in a straightforward manner. One is involved in a struggle to make sense of the complexity of social interactions and thus inevitably selective processes are involved.

Learning how and what to observe is as much a part of writing fieldnotes as the act of writing itself.

C. Wright Mills (1959) offers useful insights on the importance of keeping a journal in order to keep the sociological imagination fired "[..] you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually examine it and interpret it [..] by keeping an adequate file and thus developing self reflective habits, you learn to keep your inner world awake [..] the file also helps you build up the habit of writing [..] you cannot 'keep your hand in unless you write something at least every week. [..] to maintain a file is to engage in the controlled experience".
(1959: 196-7)

In the early stages of fieldwork, I did not keep a clear distinction between field notes, fieldwork diary and personal diary. Later, seeing the error of my ways, I realised the importance of separating these different accounts. Fieldnotes aim at an accurate and, as far as possible, 'objective' and factual account of specific observations and experiences and follow a thematic or topical categorisation. The fieldwork diary is kept on a daily basis and consists of an account of everyday proceedings and may include personal comments, speculations, working through ideas and themes as well as a lot of seemingly irrelevant observations. The personal diary is important because during intensive bouts of fieldwork one can become so involved, elated, frustrated or annoyed that this allows for an outlet for one's personal emotions and frustrations which might otherwise, and indeed on occasions does, interfere with the fieldwork. (Examples of each are given in Appendix 2, pp 71-132)

Participation in the peer and family cultures of young people encouraged the sharing of feelings and emotions in relaxed gatherings. But alongside the pleasures, inevitably, one also shares in the pain of life. The sudden death of a parent or sibling is deeply disturbing and shocking. Such experiences gave rise to strong friendships which I valued as more than an instrument of ethnography. The ethnographer, on

her first fieldwork experience is involved in a complex and very interactive learning process, not simply in learning the mechanics and techniques of systematic data collection and continued reflection but also in learning how to be an active listener, learning how to share affective experiences, exercising tact, discretion and respect with a degree of self-consciousness that, previously, would have escaped one. The self-reflexive processes involved can equally illuminate, depress, excite, disconcert, inspire, challenge and even transform the fieldworker. Thus, fieldwork is an affective as well as an academic process of engagement; one studies oneself in studying the other. Moreover, keeping a balance between involvement and detachment is not always easy and that, too, has to be learned as a skill and practiced with effort. I emphasise these points not to parade my own subjectivity nor as the basis of spurious claims to ethnographic 'authority' but in an effort to demonstrate to the reader the nature of the fieldwork undertaken so that they may be in a better position to assess the ethnography.

The local peer cultures cannot be studied without first being learned. Therefore, during the period of fieldwork I developed the habit of watching popular programmes in order to understand what young people were talking about without having to constantly intervene for explanations. To the adult outsider, much of their casual everyday conversation, especially about TV, would be unintelligible and seem trivial since so much is taken for granted in terms of information and knowledge. This has posed problems in selecting data which is accessible to the reader without excessively lengthy commentaries, although examples will be given to illustrate the point. Perhaps this is also a reason for the neglect of 'spontaneous' TV talk in audience research, the bulk of which seems to be based on interviews alone. However, it soon became clear that whilst some of this talk is indeed trivial and inconsequential much of it is not. I do not want to over-state the claims concerning the significance of everyday, casual TV talk but the data will demonstrate how frequently such talk involves a genuine, concerted and collective attempt to understand self, others and their positions in the world.

2.6 PHASE THREE: FOCUSSING

This phase was characterised by a dramatic focussing of the research agenda. Not only did the focus shift exclusively to broadcast TV but also to a concern with specific TV genres. Furthermore, since these were the genres that were most routinely and regularly discussed in the peer culture, attention shifted away from domestic consumption to collective and public reception. Since my principal access was to sixth form students, who were also my most articulate informants, the focus of the study further shifted to 16-18 age category. There was also the added advantage of having known many of these students, as their former teacher, for several years.

The third phase of fieldwork concentrated on collecting data on everyday, casual conversations about and discussions of TV. It became necessary to pinpoint relevant sites of interaction more accurately (Murdock, 1989:234). Thus, regular 'observations' of peer talk during morning registration periods in the classroom proved to be a prime site of conversations triggered by the phrase 'did you see...?'. Collective reconstructions of the previous night's viewing offered insights into the ways in which young people mediate their relationships with self, others and the world through a routinised sharing of their interpretations and readings. Such conversations were also conducted during breaks and lunchtime but less reliably so, from a research point of view.

At this time I was also teaching media studies to a class of thirty, 16 year olds most of whom were following a one-year vocational course but several were A-level students. In this context I made more assertive and incisive methodological interventions based on the principles of Action research (Stenhouse et al, 1978) This is a term used to describe a set of research activities in curriculum development with the aim of introducing changes and improvements in pedagogic practice.

Having identified the TV genres most frequently discussed in the peer group through observations (and through the survey substantiated these findings with numerical data on patterns of domestic viewing), it was

possible, on several occasions, to construct situations in the media studies classroom which would generate informal, casual TV talk. A set of open-ended questions were devised to stimulate discussions and help students to articulate their knowledge of these genres. The questions addressed the four key concepts of the media studies syllabus; forms and conventions, representations, audiences and institutions. The same format was used for each genre we studied and questions aimed at eliciting generic knowledge; provoking discussion of the themes found salient; stimulating explorations of different catgories of audiences; inviting judgements, evaluations and interpretations of programmes; examining representations of events and social categories; articulating knowledge of media industries and institutions. This informal group talk was always a preliminary exercise to establish what students already 'knew' about a particular genre and was used as a basis upon which to build the subsequent teaching. The recording of 'spontaneous' group talk in the peer context, (and in the absence of the teacher) also had obvious benefits from a research point of view.

The self-selecting groups were based upon friendship which facilitated ease of communication. They varied in size and gender composition but were invariably segregated by course of study (the vocational and A-level students did not mix freely due to their differential status). Tape recorders were given to each group who would then find a quiet place to conduct these discussions. This proved to be a very successful methodological technique for generating 'naturalistic' talk and simulating everyday TV talk about particular TV genres for a number of reasons.

First, students perceived media studies as a 'fun' subject somewhat on the margins of conventional school subjects. This was because much of the course involved practical and production work using video cameras, photographic equipment, computer art packages and audio-cassettes. We also had access to a TV studio and a sound-recording studio. Students were able to plan and 'star' in their own productions. One third of the class had substantial literacy problems and they claimed that the emphasis on practical work was refreshing. But the course also demanded

the development of analytical skills and the study of popular fiction, TV and film texts which drew upon their existing knowledge and thus developed confidence in students.

Secondly, one of the most distinguishing features of the media studies classroom is that the roles of teacher and student are, to some extent, reversed in that students often possess a great deal more (contemporary) experience of popular texts than the teacher. One of the dilemmas facing teachers of media studies has been to discover what young people already know and understand about the media and then to build upon those experiences and mobilise them in such a way that students acquire conceptual tools, develop critical and analytical skills and media knowledge. Thus, while the teacher may possess the conceptual and analytical tools necessary to channel and activate students' media experiences, their lack of engagement with the texts that students find popular has often proved to be a pedagogic barrier. The approach adopted began with students common-sense understandings of the media and the small group talk was an ideal way of gaining access to them.

Thirdly, an approach which draws upon and validates media knowledge in the school context also serves in some ways to validate the students themselves. It became evident that students enjoyed these discussions and took them seriously. The students who were weak on literacy found it reassuring and somewhat liberating to be able to express their often sophisticated understandings and interpretations orally and have them validated. As Barnes (1975) has pointed out in his survey of secondary school classrooms teachers tend to talk too much and are often insensitive to the effects and significance of the language they use and expect. Furthermore, much learning takes place in small group discussions when young people are left to their own devices. Barnes, focussed on the use of talk - ordinary, undemanding, trivial, 'talk for talks's sake' - in the development of thought. He argues that the problem in secondary school classrooms has been that language is frequently seen as an instrument of teaching and not learning

"Thus the teacher's task should not be to introduce a new set of linguisitc forms, but to help his pupils to use language to organise experience in a new way. Here lies the importance of pupil participation. It is when pupils are required to use language to grapple with new experience or to order old experience in a new way that he is most likely to find it necessary to use language differently. And this will be very different from taking over someone else's language in external imitation of its forms: on the contrary, it is the first step toward new patterns of thinking and feeling and new ways of representing reality to himself [..] it is only when they 'try it out' in reciprocal exchanges so they modify the ways they use language to organize reality that they are able to find new functions for language in thinking and feeling" (1975:60).

In approaching the study of genre, talking as a preliminary exploration of, and a way of mobilising, existing generic knowledge became standard practice in the course. Students were fully aware of the reasons behind this and knew that, at the same time, I was conducting research into young people and TV. In evaluating the role of these discussions in their learning, most students pointed out that they welcomed the space to talk collaboratively and thought it an advantage to work through ideas in preliminary discussions before embarking on more precise analytical or production work. Since these discussions were transcribed speedily, I was able to draw upon them to direct my teaching and build upon their insights and judgements.

The two sites of interaction described above (morning registration period and informal, small group classroom talk) were but two, albeit important, contexts in which talk data were gathered. However, the data presented in the thesis is based on various forms of talk observed, elicited or generated in diverse contexts; sometimes in my presence and, at other times, in my absence; of varying degrees of informality, intimacy, seriousness and enthusiasm; in pairs, small groups and larger groups; among close friends and among rivals; in the classroom, during breaks, after school, in the home, at parties, weddings and outings. In this way it was possible to document spontaneous, genuine, unself-

conscious talk in naturalistic settings and not by interview alone. Yet each of these contexts and the group dynamics involved also require analysis if one is to interpret the talk accurately. Furthermore, there are frequently discrepancies between what people say, what they think and what they do, so the researcher has to find ways of distinguishing these. Key informants can help to interpret talk and behaviour that the researcher finds puzzling or to alert one to alternative explanations of talk that one has no means of knowing about. Cross-checking data helps the researcher gauge the seriousness, veracity, accuracy and plausibility of talk. It also helps to have various kinds of informants and the more they constitute a cross-section the better. As many cross-validating methods as possible were used in interpreting talk.

I did as little talking as I could get away with, being intent as Cicourel (1973) advises on elaborating informants' meanings. Informants' perceptions are not delivered by straightforward questioning and one cannot seek easy answers to research questions by directly probing informants. More obtuse, oblique and subtle methods are required and it is often through observations and discussions of seemingly irrelevant topics that more relevant data are revealed. In some groups certain individuals attempt to dominate or subvert discussions for their own ends. Misrepresentations, lies and ironies can be turned to research advantage as long as they can be recognised. Many of the discussions were seen as 'a laugh' in their own right and laughs were generated through their group talk. In joking relationships facts may suffer some distortion but that is a natural concomitant of humour. But at times, quite piercing insights might be delivered by comic means.

My role in discussions, therefore, involved surrendering the initiative and allowing talk to flow as far as possible without intervention. Woods (1979) in his study of a school culture emphasises the importance of active listening and of collecting examples of what he calls 'naturalistic' or 'behavioural' talk, in other words, talk heard and noted by the researcher in the 'ordinary' course of events
"I was keyed into their (student's) experiences via talk and it was talk

which led to empathy [..] one catches in laughter what is not expressed in words" (1979:267)

Talking in friendship groups put young people at their ease and allowed the bonds between them to surface. It also helped shift the balance of power in their direction. They acted as checks, balances and prompts to each other and so inaccuracies were corrected, incidents and reactions recalled and analysed, statements elaborated upon and disagreements voiced. Students volunteered information in the company of their friends and to each other, rather than to me, in the context of ongoing exchanges that I might otherwise not have been privy to. Clearly, this raises an ethical dilemma and may seem to reduce the research process to nothing more than a form of eavesdropping. However, ethnographic responsibility entails the exercise of the upmost tact and discretion and it is how one uses the information to which one is privy that counts. At other times members of the group prompted each other to tell me things and tried to involve me in their discussions. Such differences were noted and rather than seeking, by one means or another, to eliminate the effects of the researcher, its effects were monitoresd and, as far as possible, brought under control. By sytematically modifying one's role in the field, different kinds of data can be collected in similar contexts, and similar data may be collected in different contexts. This allows one to cross-check and make comparisons which enhance the interpretation of the social processes under study.

2.7 ACCESS, STATUS, ROLES

Unlike most researchers embarking upon fieldwork in a 'strange' place, prior familiarity with the 'field' helped me to overcome initial problems of access. The problem for the present research was to make the familiar 'strange' again. Habitual modes of perception, pre-suppositions and assumptions build up over a period of years into forms of common-sense and 'taken-for-granted' categories, terms and understandings. I had to be mindful, for example, of the dichotomous conceptions of 'Asian' and 'western', parental and peer cultures that characterises many young people's common sense perceptions in an attempt to understand their inter-relationship and overlap. One also had to be sensitive to

the specific local meanings attached to key words such as 'culture', 'community', 'caste' and 'class'. In this sense, the 'field' of enquiry which one seeks access to is already constituted in certain ways through the categories which one thinks with. It is only through rigorous examination of key words and categories that one can hope to overcome some of the difficulties inherent in defining and constituting the field. It was largely through the fieldwork diary, fieldnotes, discussions with key informants and dialogue with colleagues that I was able to refine my understanding of key words and work through some of these problems.

The role of teacher greatly facilitated access to young people in the formal setting of school and classroom, in the informal contexts of the peer culture and also in the family sphere. Through participation in the school context, one assumes a recognized role in the institution, contributes to its function and thus acquires a status appropriate to one's age and social class. This made it easier for young people to situate me in the dual role of teacher and researcher (which I was always open about) despite the fact that varying connotations were applied to the term researcher. Most of the students saw me as a part-time teacher of sociology and media studies who seemed to spend a lot of time 'hanging out', 'chatting' and generally taking a more than usual interest in what they had to say. Some young people found it surprising that an interest should be taken in their views; others found it flattering; others were puzzled as to what purpose the research had but, in general, students were extremely co-operative, willing and supportive of my efforts.

It should be pointed out that whilst prior familiarity with 'the field' posed certain problems, it also brought advantages. Since I had worked in the school prior to undertaking the research, many of the 16 year olds who in the later stages of fieldwork contributed much rich data, had already been known to me since they were 12 years old. Thus, shared past experiences assisted in developing trust and reciprocity and allowed for relaxed, informal and casual social encounters with most young people. Hargreaves (1967) points to the advantages of adopting a

formal role in the field under study, especially in reducing the possibilities of the researcher disturbing 'natural' settings "it permits an easy entrance into the social situation by reducing the resistance of group members; decreases the extent to which the investigation disturbs the 'natural' situation; and permits the investigator to experience and observe the group's norms, values, conflicts and pressures, which (over a long period of time) cannot be hidden from someone playing an in-group role" (1967: 193)

However, in spite of the ease of access which prior familiarity and the adoption of the role of teacher afforded me, there are a number of problems which require consideration. In the next four sections power relations, issues of involvement and detachment, gender and 'race' relations will be examined.

2.8 POWER RELATIONS

Teacher-student relations inevitably involve relations of power, responsibility and ethics. It might be argued that to 'use' students as informants in the pursuit of one's academic goals may lead to the abuse of power, to the relegation of teaching responsibilities in favour of 'doing research' and, thus, to serious ethical problems. Throughout the research I had to remain constantly vigilant of my motivations and conduct in order to fulfill my first and foremost responsibility to students: to create productive learning situations and to teach. 'Action' research, with its aim of effecting improvements in pedagogic practice and learning environments assisted me in overcoming such ethical problems. In fact, in many ways the research worked to the benefit of the students since the systematic attention to, reflection upon and analysis of both their talk and work, contributed to the improvement of my practice, motivated the students and resulted in good exam results.

Nevertheless, the problem of inequitable status and power relations between students and teacher exist, since they are perceived as such by both parties. However, my marginal status in the school enabled me to circumvent some of the deleterious aspects of such power relations. When

students became involved in disputes with authority figures I was often called upon to act as an arbiter, representing or articulating the student's version of an incident. In the eyes of some of the other teachers I was seen as a hopelessly naive defender of recalcitrant rebels (or 'rockveilers', as some of the more aggressively rebellious students were known). This tended to undermine my status with other teachers but enhance it in the eyes of sixth form students among whom I became known as a 'safe' teacher. Yet I was also duped on several occasions into defending the indefensible and labelled a 'soft touch'. However, defending the 'underdog', sympathy, empathy or whatever eventually allowed me free access to the privacy of the sixth form common room during recreations (strictly peer territory) where my presence became accepted and even welcomed despite my howling lack of success at playing pool.

2.9 INVOLVEMENT AND DETACHMENT

A second set of potential problems revolve around questions of involvement and detachment. Woods (1979) is one of many ethnographers to have alerted researchers to this problem

"without the latter he runs the risk of 'going native'; that is, identifying so strongly with members that he finds himself defending their values, rather than studying them [..] the diligent recording of fieldnotes and a generally reflective attitude help to guard against being swamped by the experience"(1979:261)

The researcher therefore tries to combine deep personal involvement with a judicious measure of detachment and, clearly, fieldnotes and field diary are an essential aspect of this. Furthermore, doing fieldwork in close proximity to one's academic base (Southall is 5 miles from Brunel University) means that one engages in dialogue with colleagues which greatly assists the processes of distanciation. However, despite this I did experience role conflict at certain moments. Since most of the time when not teaching (I only taught for 6 hours per week) was spent observing and listening to young people, I sometimes became more personally involved with students than is customary. Sixth form students assigned me with the role of problem-solver or counsellor since, as one

girl put it
"my friend told me to come and talk to you, she says you understand the culture".

Undoubtedly, it was the fieldwork and the constant dialogue with students, where I was continually representing themselves back to themselves, that lead me to be assigned the informal role of student 'agony aunt'. I was often approached as a someone in whom one could confide and to whom one could unload emotional, family, boyfriend or girlfriend problems. This was frequently difficult, upsetting and emotionally draining and, at certain moments, it was difficult to remain the detached researcher. A number of ethical dilemmas were faced when informants confided information which, according to professional codes, should have been reported, but which, out of respect for their request for confidentiality, remained upon my troubled conscience. At other times, having 'hung out' and gone 'cruising' with students at the weekend, I was greeted on the following Monday morning in the corridor with back-slapping familiarity as 'one of the posse' which caused some embarassment in front of colleagues and other students.

2.10 GENDER RELATIONS

A third set of issues revolved around questions of gender. The researcher cannot escape the implications of gender. In the context of field research, Roberts (1981), Golde (1970) and Warren and Ramussen (1977) have highlighted its significance with regard to female researchers. Many female anthropologists working in a society where gender segregation is the norm have described the problems they faced (Pettigrew, 1981). Diamond (1970) used an assistant to interview all males between 20 and 40 to avoid unsavoury sexual overtones. Starr (1982) recommends the use of 'key informants', and of a local field assistant of the opposite gender to gather material or to accompany the ethnographer.

In my own fieldwork, generally speaking, it was much more difficult to establish relaxed and informal social relations with boys than with girls. Relations with most boys were relatively easy on an individual

level or in pairs. However, I found there was often so much competitiveness and rivalry (to be witty, sarcastic or lewd) between boys (especially those concerned to portray a 'macho' image) in larger peer groups that, unless the purpose was to assess the impact of peer pressure on communicative interactions, much of the data gathered needed to be approached with more than a modicum of scepticism. In fact, over the fieldwork period there were several fairly disastrous social encounters between myself and large groups of boys (they gain strength in numbers) which occured mainly on residential school trips. The problem usually emanated from the fact that on residential trips teacher-student roles and discipline are relaxed. In this situation youthful folly and frivolity quickly degenerated into crude sexual innuendo or insult. However, such incidents were exceptional and, fortunately, it was possible to establish close relations with a number of boys who became 'key informants' and who felt able to communicate with an openness and lack of self-consciousness that transcended conventional gender and age boundaries or constraints. A number of former male students also became informal 'field assitants' for short periods, during university and college breaks, accompanying me on visits and outings and generally providing access to areas of male experience that would otherwise have been denied to me as a female researcher. However, despite the fact that it became possible to access male domains of experience, the predominance of girls as subjects and informants should be noted.

2.11 QUESTIONS OF 'ETHNICITY'

My status as a white woman both in terms of how I am perceived and how I perceive my subjects is of central importance to the fieldwork and to the ethnography. It raises issues of 'ethnicity', 'race', 'identity' and 'difference'. I shall deal first with the question of general peceptions of myself as a white women and secondly, with some of the problems inherent in my perceptions of the subjects of this study.

London Punjabis, especially in the parental culture (although it is also common among the young) make the primary distinction between 'gora' (white man), 'gori' (white woman) and 'upni' (ours or 'one of us').

Whilst on the whole congenial relations exist between the minority of local 'whites' and 'Punjabis', there also exists a certain suspicion of whites, especially among those older people who, living in Southall, have had very little direct experience of them. This undoubtedly, in certain contexts, contributed to my status as an outsider. The demands of family privacy coupled with my 'outsider' status prevented easy access to the private, family context, generally speaking, although teacher status facilitated it in other cases.

At times in Southall one becomes highly conscious of being the only white person at a wedding, birthday party or some other social gathering or indeed living on one's street. In Southall minority/majority relations are reversed and the white person is, thus, on the margins. A basic knowledge of Punjabi proved to be an invaluable tool in permitting some communication with older members of the 'community' and women, in particular, which helped alleviate such marginal status. The ability to speak, and more importantly to joke in, albeit limited, Punjabi is seen as a mark of respect and recognition for the 'culture', (as informants would say), which, in turn, tends to make one more acceptable and accepted. Of course, most people assume that one does not understand Punjabi and therefore on several occasions I was aware that my companion at the time would be asked 'who is the white woman?' Sometimes, when appropriate, I would reply in Punjabi, much to their amusement. Adapting to and attempting to overcome one's marginal status was therefore an important step in the fieldwork.

On the whole, access to private, family life was difficult but one cannot simply attribute this to one's colour or 'outsider' status. In fact, it was young people who tended to be the 'gatekeepers' to their own family life and who sought to maintain clear boundaries between parental and peer cultures. This is understandable when one considers both my involvement in the peer culture (and therefore my potential ability to gossip) and the kinds of transgressions of parental norms that regularly take place therein. Furthermore, despite the intimacy of relations with many young people, I was aware of the quite prevalent view that teachers can never really be trusted, especially when it comes

to parents. Certainly, in the school context there are many 'horror' stories of parents being summoned to the school when a girl and boy have been discovered truanting together which has had disastrous consequences, particularly for the girl involved. Teachers have not always been aware of the differential norms regarding gender relations in the parental culture and have frequently mishandled cases to the detriment of pupils.

However, I rarely felt that being white posed problems for the fieldwork among young people. They have such little experience of white people, apart from their teachers and a very small number of white peers, that they are pleased to engage on a more personal footing and to cross conventional boundaries of teacher-student roles out of curiosity about white people. I also used to emphasise my Irish background and many young people asked questions which I would never have thought of asking which encouraged a reciprocity of viewpoints about cultural differences. Yet many 'Asian' colleagues both in the school and academic context have expressed a great deal of scepticism about a white person's ability to understand, appreciate and study 'Asian culture'. Of course this scepticism raises questions about the latent assumptions which I, as a white person, may have of my subjects. One can never claim immunity to ethnocentrism or racism and it is precisely because such assumptions are part of what we take for granted that they are difficult to bring to one's consciousness, let alone eradicate. Indeed, a common critism of ethnographic studies is the tendency to exoticise and/or tribalise the 'other'. One possible (and perhaps partial) solution to these problems presents itself with the notion of reflexivity.

Woolgar, (1988) describes the tendency to exoticise the 'other' in ethnography in the context of a wider discussion about the importance of reflexivity in ethnography. He conceives of varying forms of reflexivity as on a continuum between the ethnomethodological end of the spectrum which proposes a 'constitutive reflexivity'. This denotes a denial of distinction and a strong affirmation of similarity between representation and object (Garfinkle, 1967). The social scientific end of the spectrum which proposes a 'benign introspection' or, more

accurately, a loose 'reflection' upon what we are doing whilst maintaining a clear distinction between representation and object in line with the scientific ethos. For Woolgar, the problem of the relations between observer, observed and representation is as much a matter of textual construction as of one's epistemological suppositions in the process of fieldwork. In critiquing conventional modes of representa[illegible] in ethnogr[illegible]hy he argues that

"The tendency which militates against the view that representation and represented object are essentially similar [..] finds expression in anthropology in the conception of the cultural other as a distinct analytical object. The tribesmen (sic) are assumed to be fundamentally different from us and their actions are to be explained in terms of an alien and exotic culture [..] The distinctiveness of the cultural object is axiomatic to the ethnographer's work and her report must testify to the strangeness of the other [..] her report appears as a merely neutral representation of an actual difference between observer and observed. [..] In an almost paradoxical way the more exotic the native, the more we can depend on the accuracy of the ethnographer's report [...] Conversely, the more familiar the subject (or, the more difficult it is to specify what makes the subject different from us), the less distinctively privileged is the ethnographer's method." (1988:28)

Woolgar argues that the conventions of the realist genre encourage the unproblematic, singular interpretation of text, the unreflexive perception of a reported reality. In other words in the realist genre, the text is a neutral medium for conveying pre-existing facts about the world. He argues that, in developing a critique of representation and of the relationship we assume with our subjects/objects, a clear priority is to play down the exoticism of the other. The familiarity of our subjects/objects, he argues, should be highlighted, at least as a heuristic device, thereby making our own methods seem a little less privileged.

"We should recognise that there are no grounds for assuming the activities of our subjects/objects to be essentially different from our

own; such differences are accomplished through unreflexive observation and research. We should try to recover and sustain the uncertainty which exists in the early stages of ethnographic enquiry, before our construction of text solidifies the concepts and categories that we employ [..] In short, we need to interrogate and find strange the process of representation as we engage in it. This kind of reflexivity is the ethnographer in the text". (1988:28-9)

Woolgar is certainly correct to warn against the dangers of treating the text as a neutral vehicle for recording pre-existing realities and in his emphasis upon playing down exoticism in favour of uncertainty. In dealing with questions of 'race', ethnicity, cultural similarities and differences I have tried to avoid exoticising my subjects and imposing identities and categories upon them. However, what is unclear in his account is how 'reflexive devices' might be used in ethnographic accounts which are more than the kind of overly self-conscious and self-indulgent rhetorical devices that are represented in the book (see pp 1-9 and pp 178-199). Furthermore, whilst embracing the idea of an ethnographically 'open' text, one that refuses 'closure' in the sense of proposing itself as the ultimate authoritative account, how far does one take the principle of uncertainty? Moreover, he dismisses the idea of triangulation as a myth in supposing that different textual elements are equivalent to separate items of evidence that somehow independently converge on some external reality.

In fieldwork and in writing the ethnography I have tried to hold onto the principles of scientific enquiry without fully embracing a positivist stance. As such I have been as much concerned with questions of reliability, validity, veracity and with verification tecniques such as triangulation, cross-referencing and cross-checking informants' accounts as I have with questions of reflexivity and textual construction. Throughout this account of fieldwork I have been concerned to demonstrate to the reader how I have dealt with questions of reflexivity in its various senses in an effort to overcome some of the problems inherent in studying and representing the 'other'. Thus, reflexivity, as I understand it, encompasses a range of meanings and

practices: it is a pre-condition, a component and a result of the interaction between observer and observed; a willingness to probe beyond the level of 'straightforward' interpretation; a tool for improving observational accuracy and an impetus for exploring different ways of asking questions about knowledge practices.

No account of 'living fieldwork' would be complete without some reference to the transition to and subsequent processes of 'writing ethnography'.

2.12 WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY

In this final section I shall briefly highlight three problems confronted in the writing stages . These concern first, the problem of disengagement; secondly, the difficulties of selecting of data; and thirdly problems associated with 'ethnography as a kind of writing' or an academic genre.

2.13 DISENGAGING FROM THE FIELD

Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties facing the fieldworker who remains in the field whilst writing up is that of disengagement. It seems that just as relations have reached a desirable point with informants 'dropping in' to one's home, inviting one to all manner of social gatherings and willingly or unconsciously offering irresistible data, one has to 'cut off'. The temptations to collect 'just another bit of data' are indeed great and yet a clear cut-off point is necessary in order to write.

The shift from the active and socially engaging processes of living fieldwork to the social isolation and domestic confinement of writing require considerable adjustment. It is not simply a social but an affective disengagement which is required and that proves difficult. One's prior availability and the reciprocity involved in fieldwork relations means that one is still called upon and expected to visit, to help out and generally to maintain relations. It is difficult to explain to informants and friends that one has to disengage in order to write. It also raises ethical and moral questions about 'using' people for

one's own academic purposes and then 'dropping' them once the data has been obtained. This puts considerable pressure upon one but the only way I found to deal with it was to try to explain that I had to write and, at the same time, maintain social relations where and when needed. Nevertheless, the writing phase is marked by a dramatic dwindling of one's social activities and interactions compared with fieldwork and with facing responsibilities to friends and informants which accrue from one's former involvement. I found this a particularly difficuclt adjustment to make.

2.14 SELECTING DATA

The second problem faced in withdrawing from the field was the enormous surplus of data collected for the immediate requirements of the thesis. Clearly, this is a short-term problem since the data can later be used. However, it was difficult to exclude some of the richest data collected in order to meet the requirements of writing a thesis. For example, it was difficult to leave aside students' video production work but it must also be added that at the time of writing I am not convinced that I was ready to interpret the data adequately or accurately. Therefore, after mining the data and deciding that young people's talk about TV was a predominant theme and focus, relevant data were then selected from the corpus of data for closer examination and analysis.

The criteria for selecting extracts in my accounts are validity, typicality, relevance and clarity. I have used extensive quotations - the subjects do a great deal of speking for themselves. The themes are theirs and the lingusitic and conceptual categories are theirs.

2.15 ETHNOGRAPHY AS A KIND OF WRITING

The third set of problems concerns the transformation of raw data into ethnographic text. In this brief account I shall highlight some of the problems associated with different perspectives on writing ethnography and attempt to delineate my own approach within this critique.

Broadly speaking three models of ethnographic practice can be identified (Clifford, 1983:141-42): the scientific participant observer model

pioneered by Malinowski; the hermeneutic-interpretive model practiced by Geertz (1973) and a new discursive or dialogical model represented by, among others, Rosaldo (1984) and Rabinow (1977). Malinowski created an image of the fieldworker as a kind of scientist and of ethnography as the report of an extended experiment. Geertz approached his subjects without obvious commitment to any general theory of cultural functioning and privileged the perspective of the 'natives' as opposed to that of the 'scientist' (Geertz, 1979). In recent years American anthropology has not only pursued a highly self-conscious and reflexive mode of thinking but it has also subjugated itself to Literary Theory. Critiques of ethnographic texts, based on an analysis of their rhetoric, attribute epistemological significance to the literary devices used to represent oneself and others. In particular, rhetorical devices, and especially those that obscure authorial invention, are taken to be constitutive of a text's authority, i.e., the basis for warranting claims. This trend can be traced back to Geertz

"self-consciousness about modes of representation (not to speak of experiments with them) has been very lacking in Anthropology". (1973:19)

In his essay 'Thick Description' he makes a number of assertions: that anthropology is what anthropologists do; that what they do is ethnography: and that ethnography is (or at least should be) writing of a very particular sort, namely, an interpretive exercise in 'thick description'. Geertz's criterion of interpetive success is the clarification ethnography offers

"the power of the scientific imagination to bring us in touch with with the lives of strangers" (1973:16)

Jonathan Spencer (1989) raises a number of important criticisms of Geertz's essay. He notes that, for example, Margaret Mead's account of Samoa (1928) was if nothing else 'clear' and that, as such, it corresponds perfectly with Geertz's criterion of interpretive success. The problem, of course, was that the Samoans themselves disagreed with the content of Mead's 'thick description' of their lives (Freeman, 1984).

Some ethnographers (Bloor 1983:156-72) have argued that a crucial test for their accounts is whether the actors whose beliefs and behaviour they purport to represent recognise the validity of those accounts. The aim is therefore to establish a correspondence between the ethnographer's and the members' view of the social world by exploring the extent to which members recognise the validity of those accounts. The value of such a position is that members are included as part of the 'interpretive community'. However, we cannot assume that any actor is a privileged commentator on his or her own actions in the sense that an account of the intentions , motives or beliefs involved are accompanied by a guarantee of their truth. As Schutz (1964) and others have noted, we can only grasp the meaning of our actions retrospectively. Such a process of validation whilst not unproblematic has been important to this ethnography but has been treated, alongside other methods of validation, as yet another valuable source of data and insight.

Secondly, Spencer argues that Geertz himself so often denies the reader any opportunity to assess for themselves the material from which he has constructed his account because of his reluctance to include raw data or to attribute interpretations to informants. Thus, Geertz does not distinguish between description and interpretation and thereby limits the field of interpretation. Ethnography for Geertz is, thus, from notebook to mongraph a seamless web of interpretations
"our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (1973: 9)

The problem, as Spencer points out, is whose interpretation of what? Geertz does not distinguish between his own and his informants' interpretations. In writing this ethnography I have consistently included 'raw data' in the form of verbatim quotes of informants in an attempt to allow the reader to become part of the 'interpretive community'. I have also attempted to keep description and my own interpretations, as far as possible, separate. Description is often thought of as being the opposite of theory; the project of descriptive ethnographies being to circumvent a priori approaches to society and culture. It is true that most ethnographies have been concerned with

producing theory rather than with testing hypotheses. However, for Geertz, theory is in the unhappy position of being relative and confined to individual ethnographies
"Theoretical formulations hover so low over the interpretations they govern that they don't make much sense or hold much interest apart from them" (1973: 25)

Such a position represents the extreme in subjectivist ethnography and does not allow for the generation of theory based on comparative analysis of a range of ethnographies (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Spencer further argues that Geertz's use of literary devices, such as free indirect speech, which effectively efface the difference between observer and observed, is an effect of 'ethnographic naturalism' without which, according to Geertz, ethnography will descend into subjectivity and autobiography. But what is preferable an unchallengeable or a challengeable subjectivity?

Clifford, a student of Geertz, develops some of his pre-occupations and, like many American anthropologists, studies ethnography as a literary genre rather than for information about the particular peoples ethnographers have visited. In his essay on 'Ethnographic Authority', (1983) he examines the historical development of ethnography and concludes with a typology of modes of authority ('experiential, interpretive, dialogic. polyphonic 1983:142)

Authorial voice is deemed integral to the 'proof' a text provides (see, e.g., Clifford's [1983:130] analysis of the Nuer). The authority imputed to certain ethnographies is then called in to question by revealing the implications of certain grammatical devices that they employ - for example, third person constructions that imply an acquaintance with the thoughts of others that the ethnographer cannot have. It is not the theory of culture that is judged inadequate in some specified way but the position from which the ethnographer portrays it. The model for thinking about an ethnography in this way is the critical assessment of a work of fiction (Roth, 1989:557). That is, once the assumption is made that ethnography is not a science, scientific standards are no longer

essential even to the critique of ethnography. Ethnography, thus reconceived, makes self-conscious authorial positioning an authenticating device, a mode of legitimating claims to ethnographic authority (Clifford, 1980:529).

According to Clifford, the Malinowskian model attempts to meld the personal and the scientific: it demands that the fieldworker live among 'natives' and yet be a detached observer of them. This requirement, Clifford insists, represents "an impossible attempt to fuse subjective and objective practices". In contrast, he claims
"The new tendency to name and quote informants more fully and to introduce personal elements into the text is altering ethnography's discursive strategy and model of authority. Much of our knowledge about other cultures must now be seen as contingent, the problematic outcome of intersubjective dialogue, translation and projection" (1986b:109).

What is confusing in Clifford's writings is that he critiques the Malinowskian model in preference for new dialogical models of interpretation and representation, only to re-instate Malinowski's 'partial truths'
"these accounts (Malinowski's) are no longer the story but a story among others" (1986 :109)

Clifford's ideal of ethnographic writing - "a utopia of plural authorship"- is a corrective to ethnographers' alleged insensitivity to their political relations with those they study (e.g. Asad 1973:16-17, 114, 118 and Maquet 1964:54). Polyphony recommends itself not because its epistemological virtues have been established but because it seems to absolve ethnographers of the sins of their past. Domination of the author's voice in their text is equated with colonialism (Asad, 1973:16). The repeated theme in of the essays in 'Writing Culture' is precisely this concern with representations of others as a form of domination. However, as Roth (1989) points out
"This conception of representation, however laudable as a political goal, confuses hoped for antidotes to colonialism with matters of

warrant and proof [...] stylized self-reflection more guarantees authenticity than does a pose of detachment" (1989: 560)

This concern with ethnographic authority is typical of the post-modern turn in American anthropology which seems to have abandoned any consideration of problems of validation. Instead they are subsumed under the rubric of authority, which is itself portrayed as a literary rather than as a practical issue. Any attempt at a literary analysis of ethnographic writing is doomed to falure if, like Marcus, it does not go beyond the formal analysis and comparison of texts to include a consideration of the context and fieldwork involved in their production.

In conclusion: It would seem to me that ethnography is less a prescribed set of methods than an ethos. It is a way of exploring aspects of human, social processes where living in and studying the local world become so intimately linked that it becomes like a 'way of life' in itself. But it is also a cultural practice, essential to anthropology, and as such, an academic discipline which relies on the good will of people to reveal themselves and to be revealed. In this sense it becomes too crude to talk about methods or ethnographic authority and more fruitful to talk of ethnographic responsibility, both human and academic.

CHAPTER THREE

TELEVISION AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND ETHNOGRAPHY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the central concerns throughout the history of TV research has been the presumed power of the media to influence, persuade and inform audiences. Attempts at understanding the role of TV in society and its effects on audiences have shifted focus across different points in the communication process, utilising very different methods of enquiry; from the study of the behavioural effects of TV to an examination of its uses and gratifications; from the study of its ideological role to a concern with audience interpretations in specific social and cultural contexts. Divisions between structuralist and interpretivist perspectives, as well as between quantitatative and qualitative methodologies have resulted in a polemic and fragmented approach to the study of TV and its audiences. Disciplinary boundaries have, until recently, militated against the development of fruitful interdisciplinary enquiry. Thus, traditional models of research have failed to approximate the lived experiences of audiences and to deliver the kinds of insights required to understand the complexities of TV and of its audiences embedded in wider social, political and economic contexts.

In the last decade or so, however, significant advances have been made in qualitatative audience research which have contributed much to our understanding of reception processes, especially in the domestic context of viewing (Hobson, 1980; Morley, 1986). More recently, especially among those working in field of cultural studies, ethnography has been championed as research practice capable of overcoming the impasse of many audience studies (Ang, 1990; Lull, 1990; Morley, 1990). However, despite the widespread interest in ethnography among TV researchers and the proliferation of theoretical writings proposing it as a panacea for audience research, there are few studies which may be genuinely described as ethnographies in the anthropological sense of the term.

One of the central arguments to be elaborated in this chapter is that TV researchers, particularly those working within a cultural studies perspective, have come to claim the legitimatory term 'ethnography' without taking on board what validates it as a genre: fieldwork based upon immersion in a selected 'field' over an extensive period of time. Participant observation, a defining feature of fieldwork, is a way of understanding social life in relational and holistic terms. What are often called ethnographic methods in audience studies can simply be called qualitative methods. Ethnography, strictly speaking, is an academic genre which presents highly detailed empirical data for two, often implicit purposes. One, is the holistic ambition of showing, by means of 'thick description', that there is a complex whole formed by the interaction of various social relations and processes which may be described as 'culture'. The other is that of presenting social theory as emerging, quasi-empirically, from simply 'letting the data speak': the temptation of positivism, as tempting perhaps to media researchers as to anthropologists.

This chapter outlines some of the major theoretical and methodological shifts in emphases that have arisen in TV audience research. It situates the present study in relation to relevant research and argues the case for adopting an ethnographic approach and for a more anthropological conception of TV and its audiences. First, a schematic overview of the dominant research perspectives in audience studies will be outlined. Second, early attempts to apply an ethnographic approach to the study of audiences will be assessed. Third, three conceptualisations of TV audiences will be assessed: audiences as 'interpretive communities', as domestic audiences and as both local and global audiences. Finally, it will be argued that a more fully anthropological conception of audiences and of reception processes leads us to the study of how TV experiences are integrated and embedded in everyday life, not simply at the point of reception in the domestic context, but also in the public sphere where TV talk can be observed to serve certain social functions. The final part of this chapter will examine the nature of 'broadcast talk' and review several audience studies which deal more specifically with TV talk.

3.1 THE PROBLEM OF AUDIENCES

Early research into the effects of TV was based upon behaviouristic assumptions, primarily conducted within the discipline of psycholgy, and often funded by governments, broadcasters and advertisers. The audience was seen as a mass of atomised individuals and as passive receivers of TV's messages. In line with pessimistic 'mass' society theories, the mass audience was seen as manipulable, vulnerable and highly suggestible. A very simplistic, one-way model of communications was employed and the power of the media to influence the audience was greatly overestimated. The results of these early studies were inconclusive and contradictory and little evidence was found for strong, direct or immediate effects. But 'vulgar hypodermism' is rarely found in 'pure' form and some claim that it was never a serious tradition, as such, but has been caricatured (Curran, 1990) in order to present subsequent studies in a more flattering light.

Current work which springs from this tradition has considerably modified the original model by taking into account more complex social and psychological intervening processes. There has been a shift from the study of direct effects to an increasing recognition of a range of intervening variables, (such as, gender, class, age) which mediate the relationship between TV and its audiences. The audience is no longer seen in the singular, as a mass of individuals, but as socially constituted, stratified, shifting and plural. There has been an accompanying shift in the conception of TV's power. TV is no longer seen as determining behaviour, attitudes and beliefs, as reinforcing them. Furthermore, scholars working within 'critical' mass communications perspectives have directed attention away from short-term effects on behaviour to more long-term, ideological effects. In this broadly Marxist perspective, TV functions to legitimate the state and capitalism; to engineer dominant ideologies or hegemony; to suppress oppositional ideas by emphasising consensual values; and to efface the realities of exploitation and inequality.

This brief and schematic outline cannot convey the sophistication of some of the divergent theoretical approaches subsumed under the

'critical research' heading. But it is important to distinguish between 'political economy', 'structuralist' and 'culturalist' perspectives since they embody quite different views of the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure, which includes TV. In other words, the relations between the capitalist ownership and control of media industries, the ideologies which the media are seen to reproduce and how they manufacture consent to the prevailing order, are envisaged quite differently. As a consequence, TV audiences have been seen variously as passive victims of 'false ideology' or as active agents in the struggel for hegmony.

Nevertheless, a number of problems have dogged 'critical' research: first, ideological effects are complex, long-term, diffuse and hard to identify and, therefore, hypotheses in the critical tradition are difficult to substantiate empirically; second, and perhaps for this reason, critical research has tended to concentrate on texts at the expense of audiences. So, while early 'effects' researchers neglected the study of texts since they tended to assume that the 'message' or meaning of a text was unproblematic, synonymous with the producer's intentions and received uniformly, 'critical' researchers have tended to neglect audiences and to assume that ideological 'effects' can be 'read off' from an analysis of content. However, it is important to register differences between the forms of statistical content analysis prevalent in North America and the more sophisticated semiotic approaches which have developed in Europe.

Despite differences between early effects research and the later more 'critical' research, both implicitly assume that the relationship between TV and its audiences can be defined in terms of influence or effect; that meaning is somehow unproblematically contained within the text; and that the message travels in one direction to its audience, which simply has to receive it more or less passively and effortlessly. These basic assumptions have been challenged by 'uses and gratifications' researchers.

In this perspective audiences are seen as active, interactive and selective groups who consume TV for a wide range of purposes and motives. TV is seen to serve certain functions for the audiences and to gratify a number of psycho-social needs: for information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, as well as for entertainment (Mc Quail, 1991). In many respects this approach represented a significant advance on earlier effects research particularly, in its emphasis on intervening variables and differential audience responses according to a range of sociological and psychological factors. However, it has a number of limitations not least as regards the central concept of needs. First, there is the problem of whether such needs as audiences may have pre-exist encounters with TV or are created by it. Second, insufficent attention has been paid to TV texts (in some cases they were seen as almost irrelevant), and their 'openness' and obviousness has been overestimated at the expense of 'preferred' meanings. Third, the social contexts of TV use have not been taken into account. And fourth, much of the research has been overly individualistic, in that differences in response have ultimately been attributed to individual differences in personality.

The problems of conceptualising audiences in their full sociological and cultural complexity and of balancing this with textual and contextual considerations led to the search for more effective ways of generating richer empirical data that might shed light on the twin questions of influence and interpretations.

3.3 'TOWARDS AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF AUDIENCES'?

Morley (1975) was the first scholar, as far as I know, to link ethnography with the study of TV audience reception. He suggested that

"what is needed is a 'cultural map' of the audience so that we can begin to see which classes, sections of classes and sub-groups share which cultural codes and meaning systems, to what extent - so that we can then see how these codes determine the decoding of messages of the media, what degree of 'distance' different sections of the audience have from dominant meanings encoded in the message, and moreover, which sections

of the audience have access to any alternative or oppositional codes or meaning systems?" (1975:12)

In this context, Morley seems to imply that ethnography means the charting of a 'cultural map' of audiences in terms of their position in the class structure; occupational differences; the cultural and socio-linguistic codes and competencies (unevenly distributed by the education system) at their disposal; and also regional, age, gender and ethnic differences.

Morley took his ethnographic cue from the Gigliol (1975), who argues that the relation between languages (and by implication, socio-linguistic codes, sub-cultures and ideologies) and social groups cannot be taken for granted but must be investigated ethnographically. However, in his subsequent research he did not take his theoretical cue from the ethnography of speaking (the comparative analysis of speech events, of their elements and of the functions fulfilled by speech in certain settings) as anthroplogists have developed it from the work of Gumperez and Hymes (1972). His ethnographic intentions were displaced by Hall's model of encoding and decoding (1980) which provided the theoretical framework for his two part study of '<u>The Nationwide Audience</u>'.

This involved, in the first place, a textual analysis of the programme's visual and verbal discourses and modes of address (1978). In the second stage of the research, 29 group interviews were conducted in an institutional setting in which groups drawn from different levels in the education system, and from various occupations, discussed the programme (1980). His methodology aimed at generating group talk about TV following specially arranged screenings. The 'talk' based data, it was assumed, would reveal patterns of variation in interpretations made by his interviewees. In particular, he was interested in forms of interpretive resistance to the 'preferred meanings' which he had identified in his analysis of 'Nationwide'.

'<u>The Nationwide Audience</u>' represented a turning point in audience studies and catalysed vigorous debate among TV researchers (among

others, Wren-Lewis, 1983; Richardson and Corner, 1986; Jordin and Brunt, 1986). But, as Morley himself recognised, there were some important limitations to the study (Morley, 1981:13). Among the issues debated were the following: the problem of the degree to which the text itself determines viewers' interpretations; the salience of 'Nationwide' for his interviewees; the significance of the context in which interviews and, more generally, interpretive activities take place; the problem of how viewers are conceptualised; and the relative merits of group versus individual interviews. Two aspects of this study will be highlighted for their relevance to the present research. The first, concerns Morley's recognition of the collective construction of meaning through talk; the second involves his inclusion of a group of black students which points to the differential interpretations which viewers may construct according to their 'ethnic' or cultural background.

The 'Nationwide' study sought
"to discover how interpretations were collectively constructed through talk and the interchange between respondents in the group situation - rather than to treat individuals as the repositories of a fixed set of individual opinions, isolated from social context' (1980:330).

The aim was to perform a tripartite analysis which would examine first, the mechanisms of 'cultural competencies'; second, the patterns of argumentation; and third, the underlying cognitive or ideological premises which structure the arguments and their logic.

The inclusion of a group of black F.E. students highlighted the differential interpretations that may accord, in part, with viewers' ethnic status
"[..] these groups, not simply by virtue of being black, but by virtue of their insertion in particular cultural/discursive forms, and their rejection of, or exclusion from, others [..] are unable or unwilling to produce 'representations' which correspond to those of the programme, or to make identifications with any of the positions or persons offered through the programme." (1980:143)

Whilst there is a tendency toward a rather mechanistic determination of their reading according to their ethnic status, he notes that this group was so totally alienated from the discourse of 'Nationwide' that their response was, in the first instance, a 'critique of silence', rather than an oppositional reading. According to his analysis, they fail or refuse to engage with the discourse of the programme enough to reconstruct or define it.

The 'Nationwide' study aimed to examine what meanings were produced by viewers, as well as how such meanings become possible by exploring the interpretive resources, competencies and activities of viewers. The goal was to chart differences in interpretive activity and, more ambitiously, to correlate these with wider economic, social and cultural categories. Social structure (especially social class) was perceived, not as external to human social processes, but to be found manifest in language (Bernstein, 1975). Morley had originally hoped that applying insights from the ethnography of speaking to his interviewees' verbal decodings of programmes would translate into an 'ethnography of readings' (1975) and thus assist in the attempt to trace connections between the social position of viewers and their interpretations.

However, since the cognitive activities performed by audiences whilst viewing and interpreting TV texts are not open to empirical investigation, the interview became the method, par excellence, for eliciting viewers' interpretations. As a result of the 'Nationwide' study (and Morley's association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham) the term ethnography came to be associated with the in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview. There was little discussion of what ethnography involves as a research and writing practice or why a conventional qualitative research method, such as the interview, and accounts based upon it, should acquire the status of ethnography. No distinction was made between 'living fieldwork' and 'writing ethnography' and, therefore, the appropriation of the term did not involve a corresponding shift in, or any fundamental re-evaluation of, research practice.

In anthropological fieldwork, the ethnographer places him or herself in the field and participates in the everyday life of her subjects. Now while she may also construct, interfere with and make strategic interventions in the field, both in a physical and conceptual sense, this is a very different kind of research practice to creating an interview situation in an institutional setting with formally or semi-officially ascribed statuses and roles. I do not want to pose the problem in terms of 'artifical' as opposed to 'authentic' contexts or to suggest that the interview, per se, group or individual, is an inappropriate method of data collection. This has to be judged in the light of the aims of specific pieces of research. Clearly, the quality of interviews will depend on many factors but if we are to call a piece of research 'ethnographic' then we have to understand why it is so labelled. Part of the problem seems to lie, not with the researchers themselves, (since Morley would probably be the first to admit that he has been unable to pursue the ethnographic dimension of his research), but with media academics who when reviewing the research in the field and theorising on that basis, (mis)-label studies as ethnographic for reasons which are not always obvious. But we shall return to this point later.

A more fully ethnographic dimension to audience research would understand reception as <u>a social process</u> not as <u>a final product</u> achieved in the interview context. Furthermore, it would take as its aim the study of social groups with an existence independent of the research, without condoning the naturalistic illusion that the research does not intervene in that reality. I want, therefore, to argue that the study of reception processes should not be restricted to the moment of encounter between texts and audiences but should be seen as a more extensive, indefinite set of processes which takes place in different contexts, both in the domestic sphere and in the more public institutional settings of everyday life. In turn, TV texts can be seen to provide the common point of reference, the agenda and object of discussion through which people define themselves in relation to others and interpret the propositional elements of generically structured texts in diverse but socially and culturally patterned ways.

3.3 INTERPRETING TEXTS ALONGSIDE TALK ABOUT TEXTS

Another problem with the use of the interview method in reception research arises from the acknowledgement that, in text-led studies and those studies employing the encoding-decoding model of communication as a theoretical frame, not only does the researcher interpret the TV text but then he or she has to interpret the readings of the audience. The 'Nationwide' study raised the problem of the incommensurability of the two genres of readings: the academic and the 'lay' readings. The problem is that viewers' responses are gauged in relation to the ideological propositions identified by the researcher which they are then seen to accept, reject or negotiate, thus delimiting the range of possible responses. However, the meanings 'encoded' or 'preferred' (if they could be satisfactorily identified) need not be the ones 'decoded'.

The textual determinism of the encoding-decoding model led to a re-appraisal of the question of the location of meanings and a shift toward the idea that meaning was to be located, not within the text, but in its construction by the reader. The view that the text only comes into existence in the process of being 'read' has been proposed in various forms by several scholars (Barthes 1977, Fiske 1985, Bennet, 1987). Others have been more cautious and argued for some more variable degree of textual determinacy through elaborating the importance of distinguishing different 'levels' of meaning, alongside narrative and generic meanings (Corner, 1991). It has been argued that lack of adequate differentiation (between different types of texts and different kinds of meanings) in investigating text-audience relations has often inhibited any real investigative interest in

[..]" either the social causes and consequences of interpreting things differently or in the operation of cultural power through the media. By contrast, I would want to argue that the researching together of interpretive action and textual signification is still the most important thing for audience research to focus on. (Corner, 1991:14)

Corner is correct in arguing the need for differentiation in the analysis of meaning production (even though his ideas about 'levels' of meaning seem fraught with problems). Indeed, his emphasis on the three

related themes of meaning, genre and context remind us of the need to adequately theorise these concepts in audience studies. For the moment suffice it to say that the whole question of textual meanings (and there are multifarious ways of conceiving these, among others, denotative conotative, generic, narrative, ideological) in relation to viewers' meanings (which may not conform to any of the above categories) is plagued by lack of clarity. The meanings of TV texts clearly extend beyond their boundaries and also derive from their institutional and commercial contexts of production, circulation and use. Similarly, audiences create diverse but culturally patterned meanings from the tangled webs of their own experiences which shape and, in turn are conditioned by the TV stories they watch. However, debates continue about whose meanings should take precedence, the viewer's or the researcher's, and, or how to square them?

One line of argument, deriving from a more psychoanalytic approach to questions of interpretation, privileges the academic's reading of the text in uncovering meaning. Feurer (1986) argues that the problem with shifting questions of meaning to the viewer is that meaning becomes endlessly deferred

"the reception theorist is asking us to read [..] the text of the reading formation. [..] In displacing the text onto the audience, the reception theorist constantly risks falling back into an empiricism of the subject, by granting a privileged status to the interpretations of the audience over those of the critic". (1986:15)

In her view, this poses a problem, especially for reception researchers, because since they acknowledge the role of the text in shaping readings, they then either have to read the 'unconscious' of the reader without the advantage of the therapeutic situation, or else, there is a tendency to concentrate upon the conscious or more accessible responses of the audience. This method (the interview privileging the viewer's meanings) does not, according to Feurer, shed any deeper insight into the more subtle and <u>unconscious</u> responses to texts than the more speculative psychoanalytical accounts of texts by film theorists.

In response to this argument, Morley defends the interview method "not simply for the access it gives the researcher to the respondent's <u>conscious</u> opinions and statements but also for the access it gives to the linguistic terms and categories (the 'logical scaffolding' in Wittgenstein's terms) through which respondents construct their worlds and their own understanding of their activities". (1989:25)

Clearly, there are many problems associated with accessing viewers' interpretations of texts. Viewers' talk about what they watch is one of the most valuable sources of evidence that we have at our disposal but such talk cannot be taken at face value. When it comes to children, (and it is mainly children, rather than older teenagers who are the subjects of TV audience studies) there seems to be even greater circumspection about the accuracy, veracity and validity of their TV talk in the interview situation. Buckingham (1989) points to the dangers of adopting a 'realist' approach when interpreting children's talk about TV. He situates his approach within a discourse analysis perspective (Potter and Wetherall, 1987) and argues for an increased attention in qualitative audience research to the context of utterances, to group dynamics and to the performative character of group interview talk.

He demonstrates how the children he interviewed drew on a range of discourses which they considered appropriate to the interview in the school setting and to their perception of him as teacher/interviewer. This, he argues, lent their talk a more 'critical' and 'adult' quality than might otherwise have been the case. The performative function of this 'critical discourse' provided a means of refuting what they suspected adults might believe about the influence of TV on them. In adopting this discourse, they were not simply seeking to please or expressing views that they did not really believe, rather, they selected from a range of discourses those they considered most appropriate to the context.

He shows how the existing relationships between the group members and the ways in which these relationships are negotiated and re-defined in the process of verbal interaction are also major determinants of the

meanings produced. Thus, he emphasises how differences between members of socially defined groups (in terms of age, class, ethnicity and gender) need to be taken into account, alongside broader structural factors which should be understood as social relationships which are actualised, or brought into play, in the discourse itself. Thus, neither the meaning of the text nor the social 'positions' and 'identities' of the readers are wholly given but are established and negotiated simultaneously through discourse.

Buckingham raises many pertinent questions especially regarding the contexts of utterances and the often shifting and emergent nature of meanings and social identities in children's group talk. However, the main problem with this approach and with all TV audience research that relies solely on interview methods is that, ulimately, all that one can analyse is their talk in this context. The limitations of his method are further compounded by the fact that he conducted one interview with several groups all of which are unknown to him. Whilst his key argument is that discourse must be seen in context and take account of how subjects perceive those contexts, themselves, each other and the researcher, (see also Seiter, 1990) no amount of contextual consideration in this 'unique' encounter can compensate for the advantages that a more embracing fieldwork experience offers in terms of triangulation: for observing and listening to the same subjects in different contexts and different subjects in similar contexts. Furthermore, while discourse or language is said to embody social structure, no amount of discourse analysis can compete with the use of a variety of methods allowing one to draw upon quantitative data (for example, concerning the social and demographic 'facts' of one's subjects) as well as qualitative or ethnographic data, in order to give a more rounded and richer account of the interplay between social subjects, texts and the contexts in which meanings and uses are produced.

It is with these concerns in mind, that Gray (1986) investigated how the women in her study used the video cassette recorder. In an account of her methodological approach she argues that the ethnographic

interview offers tremendous potential for the study of TV audiences since it can, in principle, situate subjects in their social, cultural and historical contexts and, through the use of open and reflexive practices, allow for contradictions and challenges to theory to emerge. According to Gray, the ethnographic interview is not, contrary to received wisdom, simply unstructured for it, like all interviews, is 'structured' to a greater or lesser extent by many variables in the interview context. Rather, its distinguishing feature is that the researcher goes into the interview with a set of issues but not with questions. The role of the interviewer is, above all, that of active listener, the primary aim being to develop rapport. This is not without its problems and she emphasises the uncertainty, awkardness, unpredictability, riskiness, as well as the potentially explotiative nature of the enterprise, especially in the early stages of interviewing.

She raises the ethical dilemma of using the women in her study, getting them to reveal intimate details of their lives, for her own academic purposes. However, she argues that the advantage of ethnographic research is that the principle of reflexivity means that analysis is part of the research process, not its result, and that the subjectivity of both the researcher and the researched has to be recognised and problematised. In this sense, the relationship should involve a high degree of reciprocity which should involve a 'return' for the women in her study - at the very least, the validation of their own experiences. Implicit in her paper is the idea that what is crucial for the ethnographic interview is time. Taking the necessary time to listen to the women's stories of their own lives, alongside the stories that they consume, re-tell and recreate is a key feature of her methodology and one which apart from validating women's experiences may even be therapeutic. As with my own fieldwork, she found that whenever people (with whom she had established a degree of trust) started talking about their television experiences, they soon began telling the stories of their own lives and relating TV stories to their own and others experiences.

However, in the early stages of interviewing she was concerned about the seeming irrelevance of her subjects' talk to her research interests. Later these fears were alleviated by the recognition that, firstly, the women were telling the stories of their lives and taking control of the interview; secondly, they were revealing their own understanding of their position in the social structure; and thirdly, this more encompassing storytelling of their lives allowed for the inter-relatedness of different areas of their lives to come through. Their talk about TV was therefore not abstracted from the rest of their lives.

Her basic argument is that the ethnographic interview is uniquely well suited to a 'inter/intra' narrative approach to the stories that women tell about their own lives, the TV stories they consume and the 'inner' narratives which they construct to plan their futures, make sense of their present and to hold together the contradictions inherent in their subjectivity

"I would argue that the ethnographic interview [..] offers the potential to facilitate the exploration of the ways in which texts are encountered by specific groups of readers; how they overlap, co-exist, pour in from diverse media, but also how they interact with inner narratives and personal biographies."
(1986:14)

For Gray, it is theories of narrative structure and subjectivity which are most usefully mobilised for the purposes of interpreting the talk of women in her study and of producing an ethnographically rich 'thick description' of her subjects, and this seems to be a valuable approach to the interview method. But the interview is not the only method used in studies with ethnographic intentions. Letters have also been used and this approach raises a further series of questions and problems. I shall now briefly examine the use of letters in Ang's study of 'Dallas' (1985) not so much because it is often misconstrued as an ethnographic study (by, for example, Nightingale, 1989; Curran, 1990) but because it raises further questions of how we conceptualise audiences; in this case as 'interpretive communities'. This notion, borrowed from interpretivist literary theory, has gained widespread currency (Lindloff, 1987; Jensen,

1987; Radway; 1984b; Allen, 1987), and is in need of critical re-appraisal. It also begs the question of whether the sophistication of Ang's analysis and theorising compensates for the inadequacies of her method.

3.4 TV AUDIENCES AS 'INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES'

Several researchers have solicited letters as a means of studying audience responses (e.g. Fiske, 1990) but perhaps the most famous is Ang's study of 'Dallas' viewers (1985). The 42 informants on whom Ang bases her analysis were solicited through a magazine advertisement that began

"I like watching the TV serial 'Dallas', but often get odd reactions to it. Would anyone like to write and tell me why you like watching it too, or dislike it?" (1985:10)

Her respondents represent not only a self-selected group willing to write to a stranger but also, perhaps, those who might be drawn to the 'odd reactions' characterisation. In this context, it might not be unfair to suggest that, in spite of the attempt to seek socially patterned responses, what the analysis in fact represents is an account of individual variations in responses. (Evans, 1990)

Using only one source of data, she has no means of cross-checking or validating her respondents' views. Viewers' letters necessarily decontextualise and distance them from the experience of viewing and talking about viewing and may even distort their representations of selves as viewers. Part of the problem it would seem lies with the conceptualisation of the audience as 'interpretive community' (Fish, 1980). According to Fish, differences in interpretation arise from differences in the assumptions that underlie different 'interpretive communities'. There are no 'textual structures' that exist apart from a particular interpretive strategy which looks for and values them. With Fish the very notion of the text depends upon an interpretive community.

However, because the term 'interpretive community' is imprecise, the concept allows allusion to behaviour as socially situated without, simultaneously, having to identify which sociological variables are relevant or how they relate to

responses, since they are already constituted as a 'community', in this case of Dallas viewers. However, how an interpretive community is formed, sustained or changed is obscure. Furthermore, it is also unclear how an 'interpretive community' differs from constellations of ethnicity, nationality, class, age, gender. In a sense, the concept allows one to gloss over questions of methodology and of systematic research procedures, especially, those concerned with identifying the relationships between patterns of response, on the one hand, and sociological variables on the other.

At the heart of the notion of interpretive communities lies the problem of the duality of audiences; that is, audiences are collectivities formed either in response to particular media, genres or texts or out of independently existing social forces. Often they are inextricably both at the same time (Mc Quail, 1987) Yet this is one of the most important sources of variation in the concept of audiences and the source of alternative theories about audiences. The fact that audiences are both a cause of, and recipients of, a supply of messages raises important questions about the extent to which a particular audience is a social group; the degree and kinds of activity they engage in; the forces which contribute to their formation; and the extent to which TV manipulates its audiences or is responsive to them.

In a study of female romance readers Radway (1984) using an interdisciplinary and ethnographic approach, addresses some of these questions. She sets out to investigate the degree of freedom that audiences demonstrate in their interaction with a particular genre, in this case romantic fiction, and the way cultural forms are embedded in the social life of their users. She aligns herself with researchers in the cultural studies approach, such as Hobson (1982) and Morley (1980). She asserts that meaning is only produced in the act of reading and of interpretation and does not inhere in the text. Although she finds the notion of 'interpretive community' wanting, she does suggest that the romance readers in her study are providing themselves with

"[..] another kind of female community (with similar functions to the older neighbourhood group) capable of rendering the so desperately needed affective support. The community seems not to operate on an immediate local level though there are signs, both in Smithton and nationally, that romance readers are learning the pleasures of regular discussions of books with other women [..] the romance community, then, is not an actual group functioning at the local level. Rather, it is a huge, ill-defined network composed of readers on the one hand, and authors on the other". (1987:96)

Romance readers perceive themselves to be part of a symbolic network or community and, according to Radway, play a significant role in determining the texts produced (through readership panels and exhaustive researching of the market) which, in turn, serve both liberatory as well as compensatory (and ultimately ideological) functions in their lives. She is able to address these and other questions precisely because she takes on board the interplay between institutional, textual and readership issues and brings some sophisticated theoretical insights into her analysis.

More recently the notion has been re-formulated by Thompson (1990) who refers to a 'virtual community of recipients' in a discussion of the forms of mediated interaction established through the everyday appropriation of what he calls 'mediated messages'

"The everyday appropriation of mediated messages establishes what we may describe as a virtual community of recipients who may not interact with one another directly or indirectly but who share the common fact that they receive the same messages and who thereby comprise a collectivity that may be extended across space and time [..] the knowledge that they are not alone in receiving mediated messages [..] may be an integral part of the pleasure and the importance that the reception of messages has for them"
(1990: 318)

Clearly, TV provides certain groups with a 'common' cultural reservoir of experience with which to 'play' (for example soap viewing, pop music, and membership of fan clubs among young people). Indeed, the perception of participating in a shared culture may be as important, if not more so, than the consumption of TV genres or programmes in themselves. The idea of '*imagined communties*' Anderson (1983) formed through communications technologies has been investigated in relation to the construction of national identities. In a rather different vein, Willis (1990) points out (in the introduction to his ambiguously entitled book, '*Common Culture*'), that while 5% of the UK population attend the theatre, opera or ballet, 98% watch TV for on average for over 25 hours per week. He argues that texts contain the raw symbolic material for the reader or viewer's own symbolic work. However, texts must be sufficiently open to allow selection and appropriation to take place and there must be some kind of homology between the symbolic resources and meanings of the text and the values, focal concerns and preoccupations of the receivers. The construction of social and cultural identities and a sense of coherence in young people's lives, he concludes, now takes place in leisure not work, through commodities not political parties, individually not collectively.

These are points to which we shall return time and again throughout the thesis. However, it should be noted that the collective and creative appropriation of TV texts by young people documented in this thesis needs to be considerd alongside the commercial, political and ideological significance of their TV consumption. Ethnography is important because it records some of this complexity without, as Willis puts it, "immediately decanting social experience into larger structural categories" (1990:157). While holding on to a hegemonic perspective, what is needed, he argues, is a set of mid-range concepts with the capacity to embrace the richness of ethnographic data, which no larger perspective can afford to overlook or leave aside.

In an effort to situate audiences within more socially structured and naturalistic contexts, researchers in the last decade or so have turned their attention to applying ethnographic techniques to the domestic

setting and to the uses and interpretations of TV therein. It is to these domestic studies that we now turn our attention.

3.5 DOMESTIC AUDIENCES

The first pioneering study of the way 'housewives' used radio and TV was conducted by Hobson (1980). She was a contemporary of Hall, Willis and Morley at the Birmingham Centre for the study of Contemporary Culture where ethnographic methods were much in vogue though inadequately conceived (a point to which we shall return). She was interested in reception as 'a system of cultural behaviour'. She studied the significance of radio and television in the everyday lives and routines of housewives. Her analysis was based upon observations of mothers in the domestic context, supported by tape recorded interviews with women about their use of the media. This study was more characteristically ethnographic in its combination of interview and observational methods; in the importance it placed upon research in 'naturalistic' contexts; in its emphasis on participation and observation. i.e. viewing TV alongside her subjects and for its concern to study TV use in the wider context of the everyday lives of her subjects. The latter theme she took up in her study of '<u>Crossroads</u>' (1982), the starting point of which was based upon the observation that watching TV is not a separate solitary activity, but is woven into the routine duties and responsibilities of household management.

The importance of the 'Crossroads' study lies in the concern to investigate why this particular genre of programme is found to be pleasurable, particularly by women. She concludes that the narrative style is homologous with the routine, cyclical and interrupted nature of domestic work. The domestic sphere is not, for most women, constituted as a sphere of leisure (as it frequently is for men) but one in which family and domestic obligations take precedence. She highlights the complicated modalities of women's viewing and the ways in which 'Crossroads' raises issues of relevance for women's lives. In this way women were able to appropriate it as part of their cultural capital that they could draw upon to articulate their social relations and identities.

Thus, one of the major preoccupations in audience studies in the 1980s was with questions of the pleasures derived from entertainment genres, especially the soap opera, and particularly for female audiences. Such studies were influenced by theoretical debates about popular culture which themselves have a long history but which in Britain were propelled by, among others, Williams (1965; 1971; 1981) who is considerd to be a founder member of the British 'school' of cultural studies. One of the chief concerns of such audience studies was to study culture as both lived experience and texts, to understand, and in some cases to validate, the pleasures of popular culture. During this time questions of ideology and power were either neglected or ignored in audience studies.

It was the growing recognition of the importance of the gendered nature of TV reception and the importance of the family/domestic setting that led Morley (1986) to conduct interviews with eighteen families (in fact he interviewed married couples only, not the children). Following on from his 'Nationwide' study he wanted to pursue the idea of particular genres appealing to particular publics possessing the appropriate cultural competencies demanded by specific genres. One of the key problems with the Nationwide study was that it was by no means certain that his interview groups would have chosen to watch the programme in the first place. Thus, in the family study we move away from a text-led, encoding-decoding approach, towards an investigation into the social uses of TV. He also shifts from a rather mechanistic and deterministic approach to variations in viewers' readings to the 'search for a method' which might enable him to explore complex social subjects in history and the ways that they inhabit the cultural dimensions of their lives; in other words, the search for a method that might illuminate the dialectic between active human subjects and social determinants as they relate to the cultural sphere.

The attempt to situate TV consumption within domestic routines and rituals and an emphasis on the time-space settings of viewing has recently led to a further, more ambitious study of the micro-sociology of everyday life. This project engages not only with TV but with the

full range of information and communications technologies and attempts to develop appropriate ethnographic procedures for the study of households (see Wallman, 1984). In this study, Silverstone, Morley and Hirsh (1990) adopt a range of research strategies in their study of of the processes and dynamics of

"[..] the relationship of families, media and technologies as systems [..] and their role in integrating or isolating families [...] and in mediating the boundaries between the private and public spheres". (1990:208)

In the first phase of their research, working with four families, they quickly discovered irresolvable limitations in using a participant observation approach, given the time constraints they were working under. They concluded that observation would not provide any systematic analysis of technology and family interaction would not assist them in comparing families and would not enable them to contextualise families historically or geographically.

The second stage of the research took place over a year working with each of sixteen families for a minimum of 6 months, during which 9 visits lasting from 2-6 hours were made which enabled them to note seasonal and household changes. The research involved a preliminary semi-structured interview; limited participant observation; time-use diaries; household maps; network diagrams; family albums; technology lists; personal construct interviews, and after an analysis of media use, household income and expenditure, they conducted a final interview.

The staged and extensive nature of the research design was assisted by ESRC funding and the availablity of three researchers to work on the project (although only one was fulltime) Each of the research inputs served a specific function in the research and also had a secondary, reflexive or triangulatory significance. They provided the 'methodological raft' of the study.

Taking their cue from Maurice Bloch (1977:278, who is actually referring to Malinowski) they see the task of ethnography as that of 'listening to a long conversation'. They describe how

"[..] we too have entered a long conversation, or more precisely into a series of long conversations. These conversations are those that each family in its household constructs for itself as part of its continuing engagement with the world; past, present and future". (1990:204)

Their rationale for using an ethnographic approach is that

"The study of the TV audience had broken down precisely at the point at which it was to be confronted in its social and cultural complexity [..] we wanted, in short, to get to grips with the fine grain of the relations between domestic culture and information and communications technologies. Hence ethnography". (1990: 205)

Their justification for using an ethnographic approach lay in their aim of studying domestic culture in a holistic and detailed way. However, little attention is paid to the texts or genres that are consumed or how they are interpreted. Context is emphasised at the expense of texts. As Corner (1991) points out the problem of context-led studies is that it becomes difficult, if not impossible to research single text-viewer relations. Indeed, these become conceptually displaced by the more general relationship obtaining between TV and home life. Furthermore, the concern for obtaining situated ethnographic data tends to make researchers wary of even limited experimental procedures such as screenings to generate discussions. Now, whilst such generalised information opens up questions of use, especially in showing how the flow of meanings from programmes is rhythmically absorbed and made active within daily conversations, localised moments of signification are ignored and these moments, which turn

"the elements and structures of programmes into sense, are still the nodal points around which the social dynamics of TV operates. An understanding of the scale and subtlety of the 'life-worlds' within

which acts of viewing are set must inform but cannot displace these. This is particularly so where the medium's more direct public knowledge functions, rather than when its breadth of culturally reproductive entertainments, are under scrutiny"
(1991:19)

Corner's point is particularly pertinent for the study of news and current affairs and one only has to look at Philo's research into the TV news (1990) to see how useful experimental procedures can be in shedding light on the specificities of viewers' engagement with particular genres. Yet once again it becomes clear that shifts in emphases invariably mean that one aspect of the communications process tends to get privileged at the expense of others; a focus on pleasure tends to neglect questions of power and ideology; a concern with contexts tends to supplant an interest in texts; a concern with texts tends to displace interest in audience activities and so on. But clearly, any piece of research can only have limted aims and objectives. Still, it would seem that the shifts and breaks in research focus seem to constitute something more akin to paradigm shifts in the Kuhnian sense of the word (1962) than any kind of progressive accumulation of knowledge or insights into audiences in the Popperian conception of 'scientific' knowledge (1963).

It has been obstinately difficult to balance out our concerns with audiences, texts and contexts; with the institutional, political economic and structural forces that come to bear upon these relationships; with the problems of structure, culture, human agency and identities (Murdock, 1989:246). It is a chief contention of the thesis that a fully anthropological conception of ethnography and of TV audiences can, in principle, help to balance out these concerns precisely because it aspires to an integrated conception of social life where all these forces and factors meet in everyday social processes.

The move away from text-based approaches (e.g. Morley, 1986; Gray, 1987; Buckingham 1986) to more audience led-studies and, more specifically, to

the study of the 'cultures' (domestic; female; youth) has added impetus to the increasing importance attached to ethnography within TV audience research. Yet the term itself has received little critical attention. One attempt to outline in more detail and more explicitly what an ethnographic approach might involve is apparent in the work of Lull (1988; 1990).

Lull (1988) argues for the relevance of ethnographic methods in the cross-cultural study of family life and TV. Ethnographic techniques are especially appropriate for the study of communciation processes, he argues, since so many important aspects of routine human interaction cannot be adequately represented with numbers. The collection of essays in '<u>World Families Watching TV</u>', is based upon research using an ethnographic perspective which, he claims, rejects technological or textual determinacy and problematizes the experience of TV audiences within their natural viewing and living environments. In his introduction to the studies, he claims that the validity of the work stems from

"systematic and precise representations and interpretations of family life that are based on concrete empirical realities as best they can be documented in social research". (1988:18)

Their approach, he argues, avoids two common problems in communication research and theory building. First, it avoids accounts that are produced by scholars who have little systematic contact with audiences and who

'end up writing highly stylized, mainly autobiographical or psychoanalytical descriptions, relying on the internal validity of the theroetical 'argument' (which is itself reasoned from a set of fictionalized premises) in the name of 'cultural analyses'. (1988:19)

Second, it avoids 'lifeless, aggregated representations of audiences' supported by 'distant indices and statistical tests of significance' in the name of 'mass communications' research and 'social science'. He claims that the ethnographic approach taken by the contributors

integrates the theoretical reach of cultural theory with the empirical demands of social science.

There is a certain looseness in his application of the term 'ethnographic' to the diverse studies in the collection, which though unified by their presentational format, actually involve wide variations in 'sampling' and research techniques used. These variations can be accounted for by the institutional context of the research, its funding, whether it is individually or collaboratively executed and, crucially, the time available to the researcher. This looseness in the use of the word ethnography is also evident in latest collection, entitled, '<u>Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on TV's Audiences</u>' (1991). Undoubtedly, this was a marketing strategy. But is it correct to label most of the research projects mentioned above as ethnographic and, in any case, does it matter? What purpose, if any, does the conflation of qualitative methods with ethnography serve? I want to suggest that it does matter and with a critical appraisal of some of the literature on this question, I want to suggest some reasons why.

To summarise the main argument so far: much TV reception research that is called ethnographic does not use ethnography in the anthropological sense of the word. By and large it consists of a series of singular, open-ended interviews of the self-report variety, infrequently accompanied by any systematic observation of an anthropological character. Whilst a superficial glance at the anthropological literature may lead to a tenuous identification of qualitative and interpretivist techniques with ethnography, notably the emphasis of gaining the 'native' or 'emic' point of view, (Pike, 1966), the theoretical and methodological import is quite different. Anthropological ethnography requires long-term, immersion and investigation. (18 months is the standard length of fieldwork required to attain this 'emic' point of view and the present thesis is based upon two years fieldwork). The 'native' view envisioned by classical ethnographers is hardly to be grasped through a series of 'depth' interviews or brief periods of observation.

Evans (1990) takes a strong line on what he calls, media interpretivist's 'terminological usurpation' of ethnography which cannot, in his view, be jusitified. He argues that borrowing labels without their accompanying contents is, at best, unimaginative and, at worst, counter-productive for cross-disciplinary amalgamation in social theory construction

"Although translating literally to 'charting or describing of peoples', ethnography's century-long tradition in anthropology reveals certain fundamental 'charting' practices. Despite anthropological debate over 'old' versus 'new' ethnography [..] all methodological versions in anthropology typically emphasize detailed, exhaustive, and often self-reflexive descriptions of long-term (participant-) observation. To direct and substantiate description emanating from such fieldwork, traditional fieldwork also often involves (key-informant) interviewing. In connection to observation and interviewing, seminal (sic) treatises on ethnographic methods also speak of the need for reporting research methods [....] sampling or giving a 'complete survey of the phenomena and not..picking out the singular' (Malinowski, 1964:11) ; replicability or testability of ethnographic statements [..] and valid typology construction [..]" (1990:153)

The concern for 'native' accounts in interpretive approaches to media reception seems, he argues, to derive from anti-structuralist positions seeking evidence opposing theories of hegemony. However, whilst this may be true of some work in the interpretivist perspective, empirical work within cultural studies in the U.K. has usually been committed, in principle, if not in practice, to a melding of structuralist and culturalist perspectives (Willis, 1977). However, as Evans points out, ironically, most anthropologists, stressing the need for the 'native' (sic) point of view (Malinowski, 1964) do so in the interest of structuralist or functionalist theory. For example, Malinowski, who so convincingly argues for this perspective, positions the collection of 'native' statements, third among necessary ethnographic practices: he requires first, 'concrete statistical documentation' of cultural

organisation, and second, the researcher's 'minute, detailed observations of native activity'. (1964:24)

The use and abuse of the term ethnography among academics has been examined by Nightingale (1989). Her attack is based on what she sees as two fundamental contradictions inherent in TV audience research in the cultural studies framework. The first, she argues, stems from the problem of matching two incommensurable sets of readings: the 'disciplined' reading of the researcher and the 'unschooled' reading of the viewer. The second contradiction lies in the descriptive and classificatory work of ethnography and the interpretive work which becomes possible when cultures are seen as metaphors for texts.

This state of affairs represents a 'methodological abyss' which leads her to ask: 'What is 'ethnographic' about ethnographic audience research?' In response to the her question she draws on 5 studies; Nationwide, 1980; Dallas 1985; Eastenders, 1987; A Country Practice 1986; Crossroads, 1982.
She claims these studies, produced by the encoding-decoding model are unfortunately compromised because they are drawing upon interpretive procedures to study texts and descriptive measures only to account for audiences.

Her definition of ethnography is derived from Marcus and Fisher (1986:18) on which basis she argues that the above researchers fail

"[..] to provide an account of an 'other' culture, but in many of them the only contact with the 'other culture' is an interview or letter [..] The relationship between the researcher and researched is foregrounded as problematic once the term ethnography is used to describe it [..] a singular lack of commitment to 'recording' or to the provision of 'descriptive detail [..] [of] where the interview was held [..] what interactions took place" (1989:55)

She concludes that the term ethnographic is used to legitimate the research, to denote its cultural, phenomenal and empirical methods and

to link studies to the academic heritage of cultural studies and to the type of social realist research advocated by Raymond Williams. Whilst her criticisms of the research are to some extent valid they are based upon an entirely false premise since few, if any, of the above researchers would, I believe, call their research ethnographic. So, in fact, she falls prey to assuming that all TV audience research within what she assumes is a coherent British 'school' of cultural studies considers itself as ethnographic. Despite this she is quite right in pointing out that the term is used as a legitimatory device. The widespread mis-use of the term 'ethnographic' in media academic discourse is important, not so much becuase I would wish to argue for some purist or essentialist definition of ethnography, but because it signals a confusion. Now, whether one takes the cynical approach (i.e. such a terminological usurpation serves as a legitimatory device) or a derisory approach (does this really matter?), this confusion has, I believe, served to inhibit discussion of important theoretical and methodological issues. A further problem is that it has led to a very limited understanding and application of ethnography.

Part of the problem would appear to lie with media academics' narrow anthropological frame of reference. It would appear that much recent writing on ethnographic approaches to reception studies (see for example Ang, 1990) takes its ethnographic cue from the writings of interpretive anthropology, particularly the work of Marcus and Fisher (1986) who themselves have very particular ideas about ethnography and whose writings tend to skate around methodological issues, in favour of more theoretical arguments on the cultural and critical role of anthropology in contemporary societies, concerns which are also very close to media academics. As a consequence debates conducted within anthropology, cultural and media studies are meeting on common ground, especially in the light of a growing recognition of the centrality of transnational media systems in contemporary societies. One of the central preoccupations is with the question of how small-scale ethnographies can deal with issues of power, with broader social structural processes and with the inter-connecting spheres of the local and global. It is to these questions that I shall very briefly turn my attention since they

are of direct relevance to the present study, even though in the present thesis, I shall not be able to adequately deal with them, given the need, first of all, to provide an accurate account of the data.

3.6 LOCAL AND GLOBAL AUDIENCES

One of the broader theoretical aims of this study, eventually, will be to relate this locally and culturally specific study to the simultaneous processes of globalisation and localisation; to the political economy of broadcasting; and to the wider structural features shaping the social constitution of this particular audience. This is of particular relevance to audiences in Southall since they have access to TV and films from the Indian sub-continent, as well as to English, American and Australian media which rather complicates the processes of globalisation and localisation.

Ethnography, according to Morley (1991) can help realise such aims "it is precisely through such detailed domestic and local studies that we will most effectively grasp the significance of the processes of globalisation and localisation (or homogenisation and fragmentation) which have been widely identified as central to contemporary (or even post-modern) culture" (1991:1)

However, recent proponents of the 'new ethnography' have been criticised, precisely, for side-stepping or ignoring questions of power and the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources (Murdoch, 1989), and recent empirical audience studies for their 'revivalism masquerading as new and innovatory thought' (Curran, 1990), for their celebration of audience creativity and for the banality (Morris, 1988) of their conclusions, which seem to say no more than that audiences and texts are both complex and contradictory. Yet, drawing upon the work of Bourdieu (1984) Morley argues an empirical point

"[..] the question is one of understanding [..] just how complex and contradictory it is for which types of consumers, in which social positions, in relation to which types of texts or objects. The 'distinctions', in this respect, are all." (1991:3)

The question, according to Morley, becomes one of addressing contextual specificity in relation to broader structural factors and of integrating the vertical dimension of communications (ideology, power and politics) with the horizontal dimension (consumption, uses and functions of TV in everyday life).

In another article championing the usefulness of ethnogrpahy, Ang, (1990) highlights the 'relativising' effects of the 'ethnographic thrust' in audience studies upon the pessimism of the ideological criticism prevalent in the 1970's. However, whilst the validation of popular culture and audience activities has allowed for an increased emphasis on human agency, she argues that we need to recognise the marginality of audience power (De Certeau, 1984: xvii) In her view, a 'critical ethnography' of media audiences needs to highlight the "unrecognized, unconscious and contradictory effectivity of the hegemonic within the popular, the relations of power that are inscribed within the texture of reception practices." (1990:249)

In other words, like Marcus (1986) she argues for 'a more ethnographic sense of the hegmonic', for whilst audiences construct their own meanings and thus their own local cultures and identities, they do so in the face of their reliance on the transnational cultural industries "an ethnographic perspective is ideally suited to developing an awareness of the pertinent asymmetries between production and distribution and consumption, the general and the particular, the global and the local".
(1990:250)

The effects and appropriation of transnational TV by local audiences are not clear but what evidence there is would challenge the cultural homogenisation thesis of writers concerned with the processes of globalisation. One of the chief proponents of the media's role in cultural homogenisation is Meyrowitz (1985) who argues that 'new' media redefine the notion of social position and place, divorcing experience from physical location. According to him, the new media create 'communities' across their spaces of transmission, bringing together

otherwise disparate groups around the 'common experience' of new media. This has the effect of 'relativising' and undermining our sense of place in that the local area no longer occupies centre stage of social life but has been replaced by TV. Thus, experience is unified across global audio-visual spaces and fragmented within particular localities.

However, the evidence presented in this thesis would suggest that, on the contrary, media technologies are contributing to a re-definition of a sense of locality. Furthermore, as Morley (1991) points out, such fragmentation is not a matter of individual differences or choices but of social and cultural determinants which affect the choices, resources and competencies which people have at their disposal. He, too, is sceptical of the ideas of 'placelessness' touted by post-modernist commentators and again returns us to some important empirical questions about how the media shift our everyday understanding of time and place and which media forms influence which people in which ways in their conceptualisations of time and space. Clearly, communications technologies do not have uniform effects on local cultures and as Ferguson (1989) suggests, they may even have the effect of disturbing old certainties with new ambiguities and of enabling absolute values to be relativised.

As we shall see, the use of TV by young people in Southall would certainly tend to support such a view, as would Miller's study of the reception of an American soap by a local audience in Trinidad (1990) In this paper he argues that the local is not to be considered as the source of some kind of 'authentic' cultural identity untouched by the global, rather the local itself may be defined by the appropriation of global cultural resources. Imported TV programmes, rather than having a homogenising effect, may work in varied ways to undermine, unsettle, re-create established and dominant frames of meaning. Chapter 4 of this thesis on soap viewing would provide further evidence for such a proposition. It is also worth noting that Miller only came to study the reception of the American soap The Young and Restless' whilst on fieldwork in Trinidad because it was a daily activity (which he

initially thought interrupted his fieldwork) during which his informants would not talk to him.

Similarly, a local study on the use of the VCR among families in Southall (Gillespie, 1986) pointed to the contradictory consequences of communications technologies. In particular, it highlighted the way in which the consumption of Hindi films served to construct trans-national 'electronic communities' in the Indian diaspora whilst at the same time assisting young people in the negotiation of cultural identities and their parents in re-creating notions of tradition.

As we have seen, many claims are being made on behalf of what ethnography can and should do by its proponents. However, much of this writing is couched in abstract and theoretical terms without the benefit of actual research. It is beyond the scope of the present thesis to link the local and global dimensions of media consumption. However, it is clear that cultural commodities, such as, 'Neighbours', Coca Cola advertisements and a variety of American sitcoms are being appropriated by young people for their own purposes, but it is more difficult to gauge the global dimensions involved in the consumption of such cultural commodities without further research into the economic, political and institutional factors affecting ownership, production, distribution and consumption. Furthermore, whilst, in principle, the aim of linking the local and global dimensions of the consumption of cultural commodities is, indeed, laudable, it does seem to raise the problem of an ever expanding conceptualisation of context. I am not yet convinced that we have the necessary tools, theoretical or methodological for accomplishing such a task. But this is a goal for the future.

Fieldwork guided the present study toward an examination of how TV shapes young people's everyday verbal interactions and how the narratives consumed in the private sphere and re-told in the public space of the peer culture serve certain social functions. The next section will identify certain features of 'Broadcast talk' before reviewing some of the literature which specifically addresses the ways in which viewers talk about TV.

3.7 TV TALK

TV, in representing varieties of socially situated speech, like speech itself, is a nexus between language and the social world. It represents models of speech, portrays patterns of sociable interaction and provides shared resources for speaking. The evidence presented in this thesis would suggest that TV generates different types of talk according to genre. One of the central arguments of the thesis is that through an interactive and productive engagement with TV, young people's TV-generated talk assists them in articulating certain features of their local, social and personal experiences which are of interest, salience or which constitute a source of tension and conflict.

In this section I shall review some of the literature and research which mentions the significance of talking about television. I use the word, 'mention' advisedly since, although most qualitative studies of TV audiences are based on the verbal reports of viewers, obtained predominantly through the interview method, few studies have attempted any systematic study of more 'naturalistic' or spontaneous TV-generated talk. Furthermore, while recent research has been centrally concerned with social relations around viewing in the domestic context few studies have addressed the collective reception of TV which takes place in the various other sites of everyday interactions. The present research aims at documenting the content and, in some cases, the forms of both naturalistic and reported talk about TV in the peer culture under study and the social functions it serves. However, before reviewing the literature and research on TV generated talk, some consideration of the communicative ethos of broadcasting, as outlined by Scannel (1989; 1991) will serve to highlight the nature of broadcast talk and to emphasise how broadcasting functions as a shared cultural resource among audiences and its role in re-articulating the boundaries between the public and private spheres of social life.

3.7 BROADCAST TALK

Scannell (1989) re-evaluates the social role of public service broadcasting against its devaluation in arguments that regard it primarily as a form of social control, cultural standardization or

ideological (mis)- representation. He defends broadcasting as a 'public good' that has contributed, in an *unobtrusive* manner, to the democratisation of everday life in both private and public contexts. Drawing critically upon Habermas' (1989) concept of the public sphere and of 'communicative rationality' he takes from his work two central themes: a historical approach to broadcasting's role in the public sphere, and a concern with the rational character of communication in everyday life.

Broadcasting, according to Scannel, is public in the sense that its output or content constitutes a new kind of public life through representing and re-creating real world events. It is also public in a more minimal sense in that it is both open and accessible to audiences or 'taste publics'

"It is precisely because the public life of broadcasting is accessible to all that it is there to be talked about by all - everyone is entitled to have views and opinions about what they see and hear which is not the case with most other cultural resources". (1989:

Scannel exaggerates the role of broadcasting in contributing to a shared culture and consequently underplays the unequal distribution of cultural capital and, therefore, the distinctions between different sections of the audience in their abilities to comprehend, appreciate and enjoy different types of broadcast output. Clearly, acts of selection from the range of broadcast output are based upon many factors, not least one's cultural capital. Furthermore, with an increasingly de-regulated broadcasting environment and the growth of trans-national media corporations the twin trends towards fragmentation and homogenisation threaten to bring about even wider polarities between different sections of the public in the future. However, his arguments, couched at a high level of generality and derived from an historical perspective, remain pertinent to the present state of broadcasting, even if he does tend to treat broadcast output in an undifferentiated manner. Moreover, as Scannel himself points out, whilst Bourdieu (1984) argues that culture is a kind of capital which serves to maintain social differences, TV and

radio are significantly absent in his empirical research. He takes this to be an indication that social distinctions, maintained by cultural distinctions of particular taste publics, are collapsed in the common cultural domain of broadcasting. In his view, broadcasting can be seen as a common resource that, in principle, excludes none in the sense that even the very young have no difficulty or hesitation in talking about what they have seen (Palmer, 1986; Buckingham 1986).

Broadcasting acts not so much as social cement, but as social lubrication, easing social interaction and sustaining it in countless everday circumstances
"It is perhaps the one thing in the U.K. (apart from the weather) that we all have in common as a topical resource" (1989:155)

It has taken the public into the private sphere and the private into the public. Certain kinds of programmes, like soaps have become ritual social events in which people talk about the programme before, during and after viewing
"Gossip is the life-blood of soaps as it is of ordinary everyday life, 'the living breath of events', [..] Gossip in broadcasting, about broadcasting and in ordinary conversation is the very stuff of broadcasting's inter-connection with so-called private life or of ordinary daily life". (1989:156)
This argument, is supported by the data presented in the chapter on soap opera.

The intersection between public and private forms of talk in and around broadcasting, according to Scannel, points to its communicative ethos which, if seemingly ordinary and trivial, is also relaxed and sociable, shareable and accessible. It is because of broacasting's lack of exclusiveness, the fact that, in principle at least, it is equally talkable about by everyone, that it has, he believes, enhanced the 'reasonable' character and conduct of life in the late 20th century by augmenting claims to communicative entitlement within a pre-supposed framework of communicative rights. In particular, public service broadcasting does so, he argues, through asserting a right to access to

public life, through extending its universes of discourses, through entitling previously excluded 'voices' and through questioning (albeit often in limited ways) those in power. Furthermore, since broadcasters are not able to control the communicative contexts of the reception of their output they have had to take into account the conditions of reception and treat the communication process not as a transmission of content but as a relational process in which how things are said is as important as what is said.

Scannel (1990) outlines how the communciative ethos of broadcasting has shifted from an earlier authoritarian mode to a more populist and democratic style. He argues that broadcasting, in representing public displays of sociability, provides models of appropriate behaviour and encourages relaxed, enjoyable and non-threatening forms of social interaction.

"familiarity is made public and, notably, from the everyday culture of working class rather than middle class life [...] Broadcasting, though obviously a bourgeois institution [...] has had to learn to communicate with everyone by adjusting its style and manner to fit in with the situational proprieties of everyday life and the actual conditions of viewing and listening. In doing this broadcasting has brought the private into the public, re-socialising the public domain, making it a space in which talk for talk's sake, talk for enjoyment, talk as a sociable activity has its place alongside talk that is informative, that is getting its message across that is trying to persuade [...] sociable forms of interaction sustain a world that is, if not more rational in a formal and theoretical sense, altogether more reasonable." (1990: 20-21)

Whilst Scannel stops short of extrapolating from this any statements about the consequences that the more populist and democratic styles of broadcast talk may have had on audiences, he suggests that the study of broadcast talk can reveal much about the quality of public life today as mediated through broadcasting and more generally about the structures of identity, performance and social interaction in today's society. However, he complains that cultural studies in Britain are still

dominated by the encoding-decoding model of communciation and accompanying assumptions about reader-text relations derived from literary studies of written texts. He argues that the combined effect of these positions has been to make it almost impossible to discover talk as an object of study in relation to broadcasting. His main point is that to conceive of programmes as 'texts' and audiences as 'readers' is to mistake the communicative character of most output on radio and TV. In particular, it fails to recognise their 'liveness', their 'embededness' in the 'here and now' (their particularity) and the cardinal importance of audiences and contexts. Broadcasting mediates the public into the private and the private into the public in the manner and style of its performances in a wide range of settings and for correspondingly diverse purposes. How this is achieved, according to Scannel, is to a great extent through broadcast talk in the domestic, private and work places of listening and viewing.

These arguments are, I believe, of major significance for the present thesis. Although one cannot assume a causal relationship between the forms of sociability displayed through broadcast talk and talk generated by experiences of viewing, the data presented in the thesis will demonstrate how the content and even the form of everyday talk and TV talk are intertwined and how they interact in crucial ways, from the most simple and manifest level of borrowing vocabulary, idioms, expressions and manners of speech to the integration of particular forms of speech i.e. real gossip and soap gossip . Furthermore, the parasocial relations of broadcasting and its modes of address and forms of talk are designed to sustain the impression that the audience is present and being spoken to as if directly.(Horton and Worhl, 1986). Thus, a critical examination of broadcasting can proceed more productively when it considers in detail how people talk on TV to absent viewers/listeners and to how they, in turn, talk about what they see and hear. Such a project is beyond the scope of the present thesis but, I would like to suggest, on the basis of data gathered in the peer culture under study, that these, at present, rather tenuous links might deliver fresh insights about the ways in which the public and private, the institutional and interpersonal are routinely mediated through TV.

3.8 MASS COMMUNICATIONS AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

The importance of relating the study of mass communcations to contexts of interpersonal communication has been highlighted by a number of researchers. Bausinger (1984) makes the point that media communication cannot be separated from direct personal communication since the media provide materials for conversation. Blumer (1969) called for empirical research that fuses interpersonal and mass communications rather than considering 'each form or channel... as a distinct influence that can be kept separate and measured in some parallelogram of forces' (1969:187) Hymes (1964), from an anthropological perspective, outlined the importance of considering the multiple hierarchy of relations among messages and contexts in communications research. The qualitative micro-sociological research of Goffman (1959; 1967; 1969) on interpersonal and public communication has influenced several media researchers, for example, Lull (1990) who argues that one of the most promising ways to study mass communications processes is to look at the details of interpersonal interaction.

Whilst a commitment to the integration of research into mass and interpersonal communications has assisted a partial convergence of traditions in communications and media studies, there are a number of factors which have impeded further integration. In brief, these concern the greater commitment on the part of 'critical' and cultural media studies to linking everyday communications to macro social condtions and the positivist, scientific orientation of interpersonal communications research. Despite this there has been a recognition among researchers from diverse perspectives, but particularly from those adopting a uses and gratifications approach, of the importance of talk about media experiences. I shall outline some examples from research on media talk in general before proceeding to an examination of TV talk more particularly.

Lazarsfeld (1940) was one of the first to document how media-derived content makes up some of the substance of everyday conversation. Boskoff (1970) notes the importance of keeping abreast with the media in modern urban societies in order to participate on an equal basis in informal

conversations with relatives, friends and acquaintances. Allen (1982) examines how media content, even of the most serious nature, as it enters the personal networks of everyday conversation, becomes 'play' and often the stuff of subcultures, if enough people participate in the process.

Yet the conversational value of media content is often assumed to be a trivial 'function'. Mendelsohn (1965) sees talking about media as performing a 'simple' and 'socially lubricating' function. Allport (1958) perceives media content as serving, at its most vacuous level as 'phatic discourse' or 'chatter', a device to avoid silence and signify social solidarity. However, from the data presented later, it is clear that for young people of limited social experience, and subjected to limiting social controls, media content plays an often striking role in everyday conversations: acting as a catalyst; providing 'raw' materials; supporting congenial social relations which are neither intimate not entirely impersonal. This relates back to Scannel's analysis of broadcast talk as a 'reasonable' form of sociable interaction oriented toward co-operation and consensuality. It is clear from the data to follow that much media content, especially entertainment and 'light' news, provides palatable topics for such casual sociable interaction.

However, TV talk takes different forms and is not always casual and intermittent but may be on-going and, as we shall see, can extend its narratives and concerns over time, reviewing past media events, evaluating current ones and predicting future developments across a range of genres. Thus TV talk may have a 'currency' and 'up to date' quality as well as a nostalgic or futuristic quality which may serve to bind people over lengthy time frames as well as in more immediate and spontaneous casual interactions.

Allen (1982) highlights how media content can serve to introduce a number of conversational topics, such as social problems, and lead to an airing of social issues. He pays particular attention to language and argues that media content popularizes slang and neologisms, creates catchwords and buzzwords, introduces new words and provides reference

points for simile and metaphor in everyday language. The media can also be socially divisive in re-introducing 'ethnic epithets' and other cultural stereotypes as well as social and political cliches. However, one of his key points is that the extent to which media talk plays a socially cohesive or divisive rôle needs to be examined in specific local, interpersonal communication networks, for it is here, he argues, that the process can be seen in sharpest relief. Furthermore, to separate the two deflects attention away from their complementary effects in structuring interaction. However, he concludes that an influence such as shared media experiences, that initiates, sustains, extends or deepens interpersonal communication, is likely to contribute more to social integration than social conflict. Given that most face to face interaction in the peer culture under study is among friends who have already more or less strong bonds, it is likely then that TV talk serves more of an integrative function than a divisive one. Let us now turn our attention to the research and literature which concerns TV talk.

3.9 RESEARCH ON TV TALK

Few studies devote much attention to the importance of TV talk, but there are some notable exceptions which mainly refer to TV talk in the domestic context at the point of delivery. For example, Lull (1989) highlights the central importance of viewers' conversations about TV in the domestic context in furnishing empirical evidence about the social and cultural consequences of TV.

"TV does not give families something to talk about, it directs their attention toward particular topics [..] the viewing situation is a convenient social setting in which to talk and otherwise communicate. Viewer conversations about programme content are, in my view, one of the most powerful forms of empirical evidence to be considered in any revealing appraisal of the social and cultural aspects of TV. It is through talk about TV that the audience is constituted in certain ways."

(1989:17)

Other researchers have highlighted the importance of family conversations in mediating the reception of TV. Messaris (1983) identifies two types of family conversation which, on the basis of data gathered, can be generalised beyond the domestic context to the peer culture studied. First, 'information-oriented conversations', where an exchange of information about some aspect of the reality which is portrayed or referred to on TV is sought; second, 'behaviour prescription type conversations', where the appropriateness or otherwise of different types of behaviour, as a model for one's own or others' behaviour, is judged. Such conversations, he argues, often act as a supplement to formal education processes, even when the topic is not strictly educational. They may also serve in the regulation of boundaries of authority, protection or competence and can, on occasions, also constitute a source of considerable tension or conflict between participants.

Bryce and Leichter (1983) distinguish between 'embedded verbal mediation' of TV (which facilitates learning from TV content) and 'mediation in non-TV contexts'. They point to the need to broaden our understanding of the family's unintentional mediation of TV. This, they argue, can be best achieved through the use of ethnographic methods to widen the focus of research beyond the viewing context. They identify four types of TV related conversations on the basis of their family based research. In the first, TV is treated as a source of information which can be used to substantiate the accuracy of a statement or provide evidence for an argument. In the second, TV is often referred to by the children either in requests for purchases or in play. In the third, TV is discussed when planning family activities or asking permission to view. Finally, it is used as a point of common reference, for example, when acquaintances are being described by family members with reference to a TV character. They distinguish between the use of TV as a source of information and its referential use in that, in the former, it is called upon as an authority outside the interaction, whereas in the latter, it is used as a source of shared meanings within the interaction.

They point to the contribution that ethnography can make in documenting such everyday interactions. As Leichter points out

"the criticism and appraisal of TV may be so interwoven with other aspects of family discusssion that TV programmes may become the basis for common experiences of family members and become part of their repertoire of personal history" (1979:36-37)

Clearly, this point can be extended to the peer culture and ethnography can become one way of documenting the interweaving of personal biography, family and peer history with shared TV experiences. These shared TV experiences can become part of a family's or peer group's collective memory, sparking the recall of incidents, moments and a range of associations from events to emotions.

A more liberating and subversive function of viewers conversations is proposed by Fiske (1989). In re-examining Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital as a resource which works only for the bourgeoisie (1980) (intelligensia) he argues that 'popular cultural capital' works to enable subordinate groups to become the producers of their own culture, the makers of their own meanings and pleasure. In adapting Barthes' (1977) idea of the 'writerly' text, he describes TV as a 'producerly' text which offers provocative spaces within which viewers can use their already developed competences . Although he does not discuss how viewers accomplish the production of their own meanings it is clear from his account that one of the most powerful ways in which they can do so is through viewer conversations. Drawing upon the work of Katz and Liebes (1985), Fiske emphasises the way in which TV promotes talk and gossip and how the soap opera form enables it to intersect with a variety of oral cultures

"People's talk about TV is not just in response to it but is read back into it: our friend's gossip about a programme influences our reading of it [..] Oral culture is a product of the immediate social formation, so the way TV is talked about provides us with two sorts of clues - clues about how TV is being assimilated into the social formation and how that social formation is read back into the text, and clues about which

meanings offered by the text are being mobilised in this process. This form of intertextual relations is a bridge between the textual and the social, and is a crucial, if methodologically difficult area to study" (1989:66)

Fiske argues and, much of my data would support his claim that "material social experience is made sense of by textualising it, by bringing a culture's discursive resources to bear upon it. [..] reading a social experience parallels reading a text" (1989:65)

He argues that the reading relations of the two are not identical, operating, as they do, in different modalities. The pleasure of playing with the boundaries between representation and the real involves a recognition of their differences as well as their similarities. (A consequence of this may be the preponderance, in this thesis, of statements comparing and contrasting TV worlds with real worlds according to a range of criteria which serve to judge the realism of the TV version). Thus, according to Fiske, whilst textual and social experience are different, the discursive repertoires and competencies that are involved in making sense of each, overlap and inform one another. He goes on to say that these discursive repertoires are also the ones that determine subjectivity

" [..] the subject is an inter-discursive potential. The relations between textual experience, social experience, and subjectivity are perhaps the most methodologically inaccessible; but theoretically and politically, they are among the most important of all" (1989:67)

Whilst, I reserve judgement as to his notions of the formation of subjectivity, his general argument concerning what might be called the mimetic and projective qualities of collective TV reception, as will be seen, are well supported in the data. One aim of the thesis is to examine the extent to which TV talk can be described as genre specific. In the following section I shall focus on soap talk and TV news talk respectively since these are the genres which are covered in the literature and research. Clearly, soaps and news form part of the staple

TV diet of diverse TV audiences: hence the preponderance of these genres in reception studies generally. However, less attention has been paid to advertising and TV comedy.

3.10 SOAP TALK

TV texts not only bring a range of discourses into play but also employ particular ways of speaking. Within the TV system, for example, there is a clear distinction between popular entertainment programmes which work with colloquial and vernacular speech, and news, current affairs and documentary programmes which employ more formal modes of address (a distinction which Scannel neglects in his account referred to earlier). The data presented in this thesis highlights how these differences play a role in cementing affinities between particular audiences and genres. Clearly, this relates to questions of cultural and linguistic competence, as we shall see in the chapters dealing respectively with soaps and news.

On the basis of her participant observation study, Brown (1987:22) argues that one of the prevailing pleasures that women find in soaps is the validation of their own kind of talk. This validation works at two levels: firstly, the programmes use the same form of gossip that the women use among themselves and secondly, they provide material for the small talk that binds their friendships together. Murdoch (1989:245) makes the point that with soaps the pleasures delivered by the discursive register appear to reinforce the pleasures derived from the discourses brought into play within the text. However, with other genres this is not always the case.

Although few studies extend consideration of TV talk beyond the domestic setting, one such recent attempt to do so has been a small scale study conducted by Hobson (1989) She starts with the observation that a large part of the enjoyment which is derived from watching soap operas lies in talking about them with other people. She argues that whilst TV may be viewed in the home, talk about TV also happens some time after the programme has been watched, outside the home with friends at school, work or in leisure. The completion of the process of

communication is extended to the pleasure which is derived from exchanging views and opinions with friends and colleagues about programmes which have been seen.

"Talking about soap operas forms part of the everyday work culture of both men and women. It is fitted around their working time or in their lunch breaks. The process takes the form of storytelling, commenting on the stories, relating the incidents and assessing them for realism, and moving from drama to discussing the incidents which are happening in the 'real' world, as reported by the media" (1989:150)

I would want to add that TV talk is not simply embedded in media talk more generally but involves the discussion of incidents in viewer's own lives. Re-telling soap operas stories does not simply, as Hobson suggests, give viewers the opportunity to be storytellers, but further enables them to extend their repertoires as storytellers and inflect the content and form of their stories in particular ways, according to the generic conventions and forms of sociability or reporting represented therein.

As already noted, one important aspect of TV talk is its role in re-drawing the boundaries between the private and public spheres. Hobson highlights the ways in which women bring the interests and concerns of the private sphere into the public domain and how the fusion between the two characterises their talk. It is often the talk about soaps which determines whether someone will begin watching the soap in the first place. Viewing in the private context shapes patterns of sociability in the public context
"when a storyline is so strong that it is a main topic of conversation it is reason enough to get someone watching so as not to be left out of the conversation"
(1989:161)

Such views are reiterated by informants who claim that, for example, it was the peer pressure that led them to start watching 'Neighbours' in order to participate in everyday conversations. This contributes to a

shared culture and acts as a collective resource through which young people can compare, contrast and judge events and characters in the soap with those in 'real' life. They make assessments about the validity of what happens in the soap and compare it with what characters should have done or what they or others might have done in the same situation. As Hobson argues, because the subject matter of the soap operas is so familiar to the viewers, there can be a free flow of information. Thus it is the interweaving of fiction and real experiences that perhaps most of all characterises the nature of soap talk

"It is the talk about TV programmes and the relating of those programmes to the everyday life of viewers that moves TV into a further dimension from that which ends at the viewing moment. Indeed, talking about TV programmes and what has happened in them is essential in making a programme popular and part of the cultural capital of general discourse" (1989:167)

The collective nature of reception as evidenced in soap talk is also commented upon by Seiter et al (1989)

"What we found in our interviews over and over again was that soap opera texts are the products not of individual and isolated readings but of collective constructions - collaborative readings, as it were, of small social groups such as families and friends [..] it seems then that the soap opera, not least because of the strong need it creates for collaborative readings, has considerable potential for reaching out into the real world of viewers. It enables them to evaluate their own experiences as well as the norms and values they live by in term of the relationship patterns and social blueprints the show presents" (1989:233)

Furthermore, as we shall see in the chapter on soaps, soap talk is a gendered activity largely engaged in by women and girls, although there is some evidence that boys also 'indulge' in such talk but in more secretive ways among themeslves since this is considered as 'sissy' talk. Thorner et al (1983) identify

"[..] recurring patterns which distinguish talk among women from mixed sex and all male groups: mutuality of interaction work (active listening, building on the utterances of others), collaboration rather than competition, flexible leadership rather than the strong dominance patterns found in all-male groups [..] Both interactions - between historical subject and a TV text and between historical subject and her social experience - have to be understood as a site for struggle fought out on the terrain of language and speech practices."
(1983:18)

3.11 TV NEWS TALK

TV news is often seen as a privileged source of information about the world and studies of TV news have tended to focus on its informational and ideological role. Yet there is some evidence to suggest that viewers often have great difficulty in comprehending and even recalling TV news items. Thus, before one can even begin to examine the ideological role of the media it is necessary to understand the processes whereby viewers make sense of the world through TV news. Whilst the production of meaning can have a subjective and idiosyncratic dimension, the foundations of meaning are largely social. Collective interaction, inter-subjectivity, cultural patterns form the basis of much sense-making that we do in everyday life. TV can be seen to play a fundamental role in the organization of collective perception.

Dahlgren (1988) argues that it is more productive to treat TV news as a form of cultural discourse, rather then as information per se. The daily recurrence and readily recognizable features of the programmes serve to link viewers and their everyday worlds to the larger world in a manner which is ritualistic, symbolic and ultimately mythic rather than informational. The process of meaning production is inherently unstable, equivocal, elusive and situational. As Dahlgren points out, context and its appropriate discourses play a large role in structuring and delimiting meaning.

In an exploratory research project, Dahlgren attempts to move beyond the research context which, he argues, produces specific kinds of meaning.

Abandoning more formal research procedures, he adopts more unobtrusive methods to document TV news talk. He does so not in order to distinguish between 'authentic' and 'artificial' meanings, as if research-generated talk about TV news were a distorted or 'impure' version of what viewers 'really' think. Rather, the impetus came from his observation that people talked differently about news according to a change in their definition of the situation. Thus, he distinguishes between 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' talk (Goffman, 1974) or in his own terms, between 'official' versus 'personal' discourse in TV news talk. Official discourse is generated in situations defined somehow as public, in the sense that it mobilises people's role as citizens. Thus he describes how in the research situation his informants talk to him, a professional researcher, about news, information, democracy, the state, everyday life etc; and apparently feel they are 'on stage'.

The 'informal' research, which he conducted by documenting TV news talk in a variety of situations, allowed him to develop a preliminary typology of talk about TV news. Rather than systemise the nature of the situations, he chose to specify the nature of the discourses since they seemed to display more regularity than the situations; each discourse delimiting the range of possible meanings, through not points of view. Thus he presents a series of categories of forms of talk, not people or situations. I shall summarise these as follows

PUBLIC DISCOURSE

1. Incorporated discourse

This is the discourse of the dutiful citizen. One talks about the news broadcast with its own vocabulary and terms - a factual rendering of 'reality' which, at its limits, may involve some criticism but which is not self referential or reflexive.

2. Alternative decoding: re-reading, solipsism

These are rereadings based upon a political interpretation of society significantly at variance with the dominant view conveyed by the news.

3. Media awareness/demystification

This kind of talk renders the intentionality of the programme as a possible object of discussion.

PERSONAL DISCOURSE

Here talk is predicated on an understanding that the speakers are in a setting in which their public role is not required

1. Trivial, personal, random association

Links stories from TV news with one's own realm of experience but is of little or no consequence to other people generally.

2. Modest practicality

This type of talk insists on the use of TV for keeping up with events in everyday life; news is of practical utility as instrumental information rather than as a resource for a person's political role.

3. Political estrangement

This talk acknowledges apathy, lack of involvement or lack of information sufficient to take part in TV news discourse; may be accompanied by irony, humour or cynicism

4. Reflexivity: painful, pleasurable, embarassing

Links personal, public and political; reflexive; may enjoy it but be embarassed since contradicts dutiful citizen social obligation to watch it; may express pain at powerlessness.

Experiences of viewing TV news can be activated in different contexts and thus be given somewhat different meanings by the same person; our sense making may be suitable for the context but, overall, inconsistent with itself. These discourses merge with one another in real life talk. His main point is that TV news for many of us facilitates a plurality of subjectivities which can be mobilized in different settings. This view of an enhanced spectrum of possible meaning production raises ma questions, not least the feasability of researching meaning at all

"it may well be that our only methodological option is to launch ourselves on the path of anthropological thick description of the interface of everday life's many settings with the media environment " (1988:298)

In this chapter it has been argued that anthropology can provide the conceptual tools and a methodological approach for a more fully socially encompassing study of TV audiences which can illuminate the relationship between the private and public, the local and global, as well as the material, symbolic and ideological dimensions of cultural consumption. It is to young people's TV news talk that we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROLE OF TV NEWS IN THE TRANSITION FROM CHILD TO ADULT STATUS IN PUNJABI FAMILIES IN SOUTHALL

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part, (4.1 - 4.4) offers a brief overview of the local and domestic contexts of news consumption. An understanding of these contexts is a necessary since they affect the reception of news stories. A brief account of the cultural diversity of news sources available in Southall is given in order to highlight the way in which local news consumption involves competition between different news media; various news languages (national and discursive) and different types of news stories. Drawing upon survey data, an overview of TV news consumption in the domestic sphere is offered. Young people's comprehension of TV news is assessed and the selective nature of their viewing is examined.

This provides the basis for an exploration of a paradoxical feature of young people's news consumption, namely; why do so many young people watch a genre that they have little liking for, find difficult to understand and do not, in general, enjoy? In offering an explanation I shall focus on two themes; the first relates to the role of TV news in structuring domestic routines and the relationship of work to leisure; the second, concerns young people's perception of news as an adult genre. One of the principal reasons why young people are motivated to watch TV news is because they wish to graduate to adult competence in the genre. Adult competence in news refers to the ability to understand and talk about news events and issues with adults and peers, and in the school context. The central argument of this chapter is that news consumption and news talk is a function of emergent adulthood and, thus, TV news, as far as 16 year olds are concerned, is an age based, rather than a gender based genre, as is commonly assumed.

The second part of the chapter (4.5 - 4.9) elaborates the argument through an examination of what graduating to adult competence in

Southall entails. It highlights young people's perceptions of TV news as a genre and of the culturally specific nature of the processes involved in graduating to adult competence in Southall. Adult competence in Southall involves competence in news from the Indian sub-continent and consequently, an interest in, and an ability to understand, news in Punjabi. Such interest and competence are not always shared by young people. Furthermore, young people are, very often, more competent in understanding Brtish news broadcasts due to their better understanding of English. Thus, the translation of news broadcasts, by young people for their parents and grandparents, is a characteristic feature of news viewing in many families. This confers upon some young people, especially those skilled in speaking Punjabi, a degree of responsibility which facilitates their graduation to adult competence in the genre and, by association, is a marker of their transition to adult status in the family.

The third part of the chapter (4.10 - 4.13) shifts to the public sphere of social interaction. It examines how young people demonstrate their competence in news in their everyday verbal interactions in the peer culture. Through examining young people's engagement with three specific news stories, I aim to demonstrate how young people appropriate and collectively draw upon news stories which assist them in defining 'selves' in relation to 'others'. Participation in a news culture, simultaneously local and global, national and international, is part of a developmental process which concerns the individual's ability to locate self within and across different frames of reference and multiple spheres of existence. It is argued that young people assist each other in this task through the collective processes of reception, demonstrated in their news talk.

By 'news talk', I refer to talk which is, in the first instance, generated by a 'news' story but which may extend beyond the discussion of that particular story itself to other, sometimes related, topics or issues. Thus, TV talk is not always talk about TV news, per se, and it may serve a variety of functions. Young people's TV news talk shifts fluidly from discussion of an event, to the televisual mediation of that

event, to their own lives, to the lives of others. It bears witness to the embededness of TV experiences in everyday life and to the, often, complex negotiations which are performed through news talk. For young people in Southall, these negotations concern, among others, their relationship to 'Indian' and 'British' culture; to the white minority locally and to the white majority nationally; to the dominance of Punjabi Sikh culture locally and to their status as a cultural minority nationally. In the process, ambiguities are played out, contradictions manipulated and alignments are made only to be undone. Such attempts at defining self and other raise questions of cultural, religious and national identities, not as fixed, impermeable or mutually exclusive categories, but, like their talk, as shifting and fluid. For young people, aged sixteen in Southall, these moblile self-definitions are context-bound and, frequently, aimed at reformulating cultural values and expressing aspirations toward cultural change.

4.1 SOURCES OF NEWS

Television is the main source of news about national and international events for young people in Southall. Yet, the range of news stories consumed derive from a variety of media, including local and national press and radio. The widespread availability of news about the Indian subcontinent in a variety of languages (Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu) is a distinguishing feature of local news culture. Parents and children do not always share the same news interests or competencies. Selections between different media, diverse languages, various programmes and types of stories have to be made. Often these decisions are not a matter of individual choice but contingent upon factors in the domestic and local contexts.

The variety and cultural diversity of news sources points to the problem of isolating TV news as a separate category for study. Although, the chapter concerns television news, as we shall see, its relative weight varies according to the type of news story and its salience to the news consumer. Thus, TV plays a more significant role in disseminating national and international news than local news, where the local press, informal communication channels, gossip and rumour are more important

sources of news. A brief outline of the key sources of news available locally will be given in order to situate TV news in the broader context of Southall's 'news culture' before proceeding to a more detailed examination of TV news consumption in particular.

There are a variety of Punjabi newspapers available in Southall but the most popular are the 'Punjab Times', which is perceived as a 'quality' paper, and the more colourful tabloid, 'Des Pardes'. Although both are produced in Southall they are targ etted at a wider Sikh audience. 'Des Pardes' is perceived as a paper which supports the Khalistan movement which seeks to esatablish a separate Punjabi state and, thus, attempts to link and unite Sikhs in the diaspora with such political objectives. These papers are read mainly by adults who are literate in Punjabi. Younger people rarely read them, the exception being child or teenage migrants who are literate in Punjabi or who have some direct experience of India. Navdeep is a good example.
"I was born in the Punjab and I came to this country when I was four and when I was nine I went back and stayed there for another two years and that's really crucial because I really learned a lot [...] I can speak and read Hindi and Punjabi [....] yeah, I read Punjabi newspapers [...] I've always had an interest in what goes on the Punjab [..] I read the Punjab Times it's better than Des Pardes, that's a Khalistani paper, it's more like a tabloid".
(Navdeep, 17 year old, Jat Sikh boy)

Whilst reading Punjabi newspapers is rare among young people, listening to news in Punjabi, Hindi or Urdu on the local radio station, Sunrise Radio, is almost inescapable. It is played in public places everywhere; in most cafe's, restaurants and shops, as well as, in the home. It is especially appreciated by mothers as an accompaniment to their domestic duties and by grandparents, many of whom, also conduct their lives primarily in the domestic sphere. It is targetted at the 'Asian' population living in the West London area. It plays a variety of 'Asian' music; religious, popular, 'Asian Old Gold', Bhangra and Ghazals. It has phone-in programmes everyday, competitions and children's shows. On Sunday afternoons it broadcasts a family phone-in

entitled 'Social introductions' where parents can advertise their 'eligible' sons and daughters on the marriage market. An eight minute news bulletin is broadcast in English every hour and news in Punjabi and Hindi are alternated throughout the day. From 9pm to 10pm every night the Punjabi Magazine is broadcast. Its primary emphasis is on news from the Indian sub-continent, local news stories and news concerning 'Asians' in Britain. It is often referred to by young people as a 'lifeline' or a 'voice' for the parents. Others see it as a further index of their 'ghettoisation' in an 'Asian community' in London.

Most young people do not share their parent's enthusiasm for Sunrise radio in spite of the fact that it is their major source of news from the Indian sub-continent, of local news and of news concerning 'Asians' in Britian. Young people's main interest in radio as a medium is in pop programmes and phone-ins and it is only a matter of contingency that news stories are thereby consumed. A minority of young people claim they prefer radio news because it covers stories that television does not, especially pop news, and because it is brief and accessible. A majority prefer to listen to Capital radio and BBC Radio 1. The Southall Youth Survey figures show that 69% of young people (N=271) reported that they had listened to Capital radio in the week prior to the survey and 55% BBC Radio 1. (N=271). Whilst no figures are available for Sunrise, (since it had not been awarded the local franchise at the time of the survey), the figures for Sina Radio, a local 'Asian' pirate station in operation at that time, and which preceeded Sunrise, indicate a clear lack of interest in it. Only 12% reported having listened to it in the week prior to the survey (N=271). This supports the argument in favour of a general tendency towards the uptake of British as opposed to Indian or Pakistani media among Southall youth. However, it is also clear that whilst few young people would tune into Sunrise Radio voluntarily, many are, in fact, regular listeners due to their parent's interest. A similar pattern can be discerned in the consumption of popular Hindi films, highlighting the difference between actual and preferred listening and viewing. (see Appendix 1, section 4.14 and 4.15)

The main national newspaper which is read by young people and their families is 'The Mirror'. The perceived licentiousness of 'The Sun'' means that it is commonly bought for consumption at school only, especially by boys. The 'quality' press is read by a minority of 'A'level students and would only be available in homes where literacy presents no problem. Tabloid news is seen to be more akin to 'gossip' than 'hard' news and is in fact appreciated because of this. Paramjit, a 16 year old girl summed up this pattern of response appropriately
"I mainly read 'The Sun' for the gossip about stars and different people, as well as for the sports and TV pages, the horoscope, the problem page, the cartoons [..] sometimes we enter competitions".
It would appear that very little 'hard' news is derived from newspapers, although the sensationalist tenor of the tabloids and their headlines, often finds its way into young people's talk. However, if there is a story of particular interest i.e. 'The Thatcher Show Down' (as one girl described it) then the papers will be read more extensively.

'The Recorder' and 'The Leader' are two free local newspapers. They are skimmed by many young people for a variety of reasons. Seema, a 16 year old girl, highlights how these newspapers are not simply read for news stories
"I always flick through the freebies for any news that interests me [..] and to find out what's going on, like if there are any fairs, oh yeah and I always check out what's on TV at the weekend and read my horoscope ".
'The Southall Gazette' gives more in depth coverage of local stories but since the main stories are covered by the 'freebies', there is little interest in purchasing it unless more detailed information is required about a local news story which is of concern or controversial.

If exposure to news stories through the press and radio seems inescapable then the extent of broadcast TV news, equally, gives it an ineluctable quality. The four TV channels combined, broadcast approximately 15 hours of news per day, at times when no exceptional circumstances, such as war, prevail. These figures are even more

arresting when one considers that nearly 10 out of these 15 hours are broadcast on BBC 1 and ITV, the channels most regularly viewed in Southall homes. Survey figures indicate that 84% of young people report their family's preference for BBC1, 75% for ITV, 16% for Channel 4 and 6% for BBC2 (N=188) (see Appendix 1 section 4.9)) The sheer quantity of hours devoted to news and the positioning of news bulletins in the schedules, and as we shall see parental interest in the news,would seem to suggest that it would be difficult for most young people to avoid some news consumption unless one made a willfull and conscious effort to do so.

4.2 NEWSVIEWING IN SOUTHALL FAMILES: SURVEY RESULTS

The Southall Youth Survey reveals the unexpected result that, of all genres listed, news was reported to be the genre 'most frequently watched with the whole family' and also the genre 'most frequently discussed with parents'. (Appendix 1, section 4.4 and 4.5) The results of fieldwork suggested that most young people find news 'boring' and appear to be more interested in fictional and entertainment programmes. Certainly, their informal talk reveals more enthusiasm in talking about, for example, 'Neighbours' or comedy programmes. However, this is also partly due to their greater competence in talking about entertainment programmes than news.

In the Southall Survey, (see Appendix 1, section 4.3) 76% of young people (N=194-217) reported that the genre they most frequently watched with their family was news, followed by comedy (74%), crime (56%) and soaps (54%). However, whilst news appears to be a family genre 'par excellence', its closest counterpart, current affairs, is the genre that is least likely to be viewed by the family together (20%). This is partly due to the high level of linguistic competence required in order to follow the complicated modes of exposition and argument, the language register, mode of address and the detail and the depth of information which characterise most current affairs programmes. The preference for entertainment and fictional TV genres is another important factor.

A further anomaly occurs when one compares the above figures for family viewing, in general, with actual viewing in the week prior to the survey. Thus, while 76% report that news is the primary family genre only 64% (N=194) reported that they had 'actually watched' the news in the last week as compared with 78% a comedy programme, 72% a cartoon, 71% a pop programme, 69% a children's programme, 65% a game show, 64% a crime series and 59% a soap. This suggests that young people view many programmes independently of their parents. Such a claim is supported by further data on the number of TV sets in the home (see Appendix 1, section 4.2) It may also be that young people overestimate their family's news viewing given the widespread view that it is important to watch the news. The figures may also reflect the fact that these data were collected in the summer months of June and July, when young people watch less television. A lack of interest in any particular news story, at the time, might be an added factor. However, in spite of the fact that only 64% of respondents report watching the news in the week prior to the survey, it is patently clear that news is the genre which is discussed with parents more than any other. 43% of respondents reported that they discussed the news bulletin with parents. This is a significant figure when compared with other genres, all of which score well below 20% .

There were no notable gender differences in news viewing in the family, (Appendix 1, section 4.5), in fact, a slightly higher number of girls report viewing news with their family (77%) than boys (73%). It could be argued that this is because girls spend more time at home rather than because of their interest in news. There is no evidence in the data to suggest that girls are any the less interested in TV news or are less competent in their talk about it. The only gender difference to emerge is that girls and boys enjoy different types of news stories; girls tend to relate to news stories with a human interest and boys to sports stories. But news viewing is neither a priority nor a preference among young people. What, then, is the explanation for its primacy as a family genre which, more than any other genre, provokes discussion among parents and children?

4.3 DOMESTIC ROUTINES AND PROGRAMMING CONTINGENCIES

News consumption is related to a number of factors in the domestic context; the relationship between work and leisure (Lodziac, 1986: 128-155); domestic routines (Patterson, 1981); parental interest in the news (Morley, 1986); the coming together of the family at certain moments in the day and the contingencies of scheduling. One of the most frequently repeated comments made by young informants is that they will watch news 'if it's on'. Given the prevalence and positioning of news in the schedules and its perceived importance for parents and older siblings the chances of TV news 'being on' at certain specified times of the day or evening are high.

The main news bulletins are scheduled according to normative assumptions about family life and domestic routines such as getting up, eating, returning from work and relaxation. Thus watching news is associated with mealtimes
" I always watch Breakfast news while I'm eating my cereal"
(Amar, 16 year old girl)
"I usually catch the 1pm headlines and if there are any interesting stories I can go back to school and tell my friends"
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

But 'catching' the news is also a function of parents interest in news "my dad's obssessed with the news, he watches it three or four times a day [..] when he comes home he eats and then sits down to watch the 9pm news so if we want to watch our programmes we have to go upstairs but we usually stay downstairs together".
(Dalvinder, 16 year old girl)

Many young people claim that the extended evening bulletins mark the only time of the day when they can be with their fathers and so the desire to be together, in some cases, over-rides individual preferences. For others, whose fathers and/or mothers are on shift work, (and in Southall many are) it may be Breakfast News or Lunchtime news which marks the family's being together. The day's events in the personal and working or school lives can be discussed alongside 'news'

events.
"You'll just sit around together and you've got your own gossip and that and then something comes on the news and you might say, 'agh! that's bad innit?', and you might have a little discussion or dad might say look, you've got to be careful these days, people are getting attacked and murdered, there are bad people around"
(Amrit, 16 year old girl)

Thus news, at whatever hour, may serve to mark a time of togetherness and incidental communication in the family day and to enhance the routines and rituals of family life
"It has really become part of our family timetable to watch the news, just like having lunch"
(Farzana, 16 year old girl)

But newsviewing is not simply related to parental interest and domestic routines it is also very much a product of the contingencies of programming. Thus, for example, those who go home for lunch invariably catch the headlines because the school lunch hour coincides with the start of the popular soap, 'Home and Away', which is followed by 'ITV Regional News' (12.55 pm) and 'BBC 1 News Headlines (1pm). Similarly, upon returning from school, many watch Children's BBC which is interrupted by 'Newsround', a ten minute children's news broadcast. 'Neighbours' starts at 5.35pm and is followed by the 6 O'Clock news on BBC1. Many young people will catch the news headlines before turning over to watch 'Home and Away' at 6.05pm. Amarjit's comments are typical of the way many young people talk about the contingent nature of their newsviewing "I don't watch it (news) regularly, but I'll watch it if it's on, I only watch Newsround before another children's programmes comes or sometimes the 6pm headlines in between 'Home and Away' and 'Neighbours'".

It is clear that the establishment of news viewing as a domestic ritual varies from household to household as does the extent and frequency of young people's viewing. Yet this only partly accounts for why young people report watching so much of a genre which they apparently have

little liking for. It does not explain their often expressed reluctance to watch TV news. In order to explain this we need to consider what their comprehension of TV news, in its various forms, might be.

4.4 COMPREHENSION OF TV NEWS

Young people's comprehension of TV news will obviously vary according to age, language competence, the type of news story and the perceived salience of specific items. But despite such variations, the general observation can be made that their comprehension of the main TV bulletins is limited, especially where political and economic news is concerned. Given the often extensive coverage of political and economic issues in the main evening bulletins, it becomes easier to understand young people's reluctance to view bulletins which are mainly targetted at the adult working population. The extended evening news bulletins are seen as an adult genre based on adult discourse. The vocabulary, the mode of address, language register, the assumption of knowledge, the length and detail of items and the bulletins are factors which are seen to exclude young people.

Most 16 year olds in Southall do not possess the necessary linguistic and 'cultural competence' which would enable them to understand the political and economic information disseminated in news bulletins. This can be explained partly by the limited nature of political and economic education in schools. For, unlike in other other subjects, like geography for example, school knowledge and 'news' knowledge do not support and complement each other in matters political and economic. The extended international and national news bulletins are seen to assume too much knowledge on the part of the viewer

"I hate it when they expect you to know things already, like the dollar is weaker than the pound and the pfennig has gone up so much and all that crap, I don't know what they're talking about"

(Brijesh, 16 year old boy)

While many adult viewers may share such frustrating incomprehension, young people tend to perceive this as an excluding factor. They do not feel themselves to be competent in what is perceived as primarily an

adult, middle-class genre which deals with information which they find difficult to understand or process.

One of the most typical criticisms directed at TV news is that it is very lengthy and detailed. Not only is the subject matter of most news items in the evening bulletins difficult to understand but it uses a mode of address which young people associate with adults

"News gets boring when they use big words"

(Amrit, 16 year old girl)

"What I hate most is when they make a boring subject very long, like politics, even if you wanted to, you just can't follow"

(Farzana, 16 year old girl)

"it goes on and on, especially Channel 4 News, that gets on my nerves [..] it's almost as bad as your parents going on and on"

(Daljit, 16 year old girl)

'Going on and on' is a phrase commonly used to describe how adults address young people. It is associated with the verbal exercise of control and authority and equated with 'being nagged', 'being told off', 'being told what to do' and 'getting bored' by adult talk. This type of adult speech is seen to reinforce their position as 'children', subject to adult authority and in need of adult protection and guidance. Young people, though accustomed to this mode of address, may also be quite resistant to it because it is seen, by some, to subordinate them into an inferior position where they are expected to bow to adult authority.

Thus, limited comprehension, the middle-class language register, accent and speech patterns, alongside the authoritative modes of address employed are factors which make young people reluctant to watch TV news. However, young people in Southall do 'watch' news but they do so in highly selective ways. We shall now examine the processes of selection and the types of news programmes which are found to be accessible.

4.5 SELECTION IN NEWSVIEWING

Familiarity with the format of the evening bulletins assists young people in selecting which items they wish to pay attention to

"the stories are grouped, so that you know roughly where they come, they

tell you in the headlines [..] so if there's anything you wanna watch you sort of roughly know when it'll come up [..] you also know that the sport and weather news comes last, so you can switch over or just sit there and do your homework until something interesting comes on.[..] I'm really only interested in sports news"
(Brijesh, 16 year old boy)

Whilst most young people do not feel themselves to be fully competent in the genre of news, they show resourcefulness in finding a route through the main evening bulletin in ways which satisfy their own interests. The information-seeking strategies, the skills of selecting or rendering redundant certain types of information can be regarded as a type of TV news competence which allows them some control over their viewing. Competence in news at this age means that one can conveniently ignore what is inaccessible or too demanding but equally develop ways of locating the information they want. Thus far we have considered only the main evening bulletins. Let us now examine how these selective viewing strategies are applied to different types of news bulletin

Clear distinctions are made between different styles of TV news broadcasts as well as between different story types and modes of address in young people's discussion of news. Thus, 'TVAM' and 'Breakfast News' are preferred for their more informal mode of address and relaxed presentation
"It's less formal and boring than the BBC who do it as if they are at a counter or office desk talking to a customer"
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)
"I like TVAM best cos the breaks come quicker"
(Farida, 16 year old girl)

TVAM news is interspersed with horoscopes, cookery tips, Aerobics exercises, interviews and the 'hard' news is kept to a minimum. The presenters are seated on comfortable armchairs, in casual clothing and adopt a cheerful and light-hearted manner, relegating 'serious' news to a subordinate position. The convivality and sociability in their manner of addressing the audience are also commented upon. (cf Scannel,1991)

Thus, breakfast news, rather like the tabloids is seen a hybrid form, a type of 'info-tainment', and consequently as more accessible. The shorter 5 minute bulletins which give the headlines are also popular. They are seen as 'adult' news but brief and to the point
"I usually end up watching some news everyday even if its only the headlines or the weather just to get an idea of what's going on"
(Amrit, 16 year old girl)

Similarly, regional news broadcasts (BBC South East and Thames News' are considered to be easier to understand since they involve issues of more direct concern to everday life. It is above all the crime and human interest stories which are found to be engaging although issues of local government and politics are also seen to be relevant
"we always watch BBC South East cos then you get to know what things happen around you [..] crimes [...] people having to wait a long time to get a bed in hospital [...]
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)
Furthermore, events in Southall intermittently appear on Regional news broadcasts and when this occurs an enormous amount of interest is shown which, as we shall see, is subsequently evident in young people's talk.

However, perhaps the most popular form of news for many young people is BBC1's 'Newsround' for children. This is a more palatable five or ten minute news bulletin which is conveniently 'sandwiched' between popular children's programmes. It contains no more than 4-5 news items, the issues and language are simplified, the mode of address is friendly, the politics of situations are clothed as human interest stories and the last item is usually light hearted. Kulbir sums up its appeal
"The 9pm and 10pm news are a bit serious, they don't have funny stories at the end, you know, 'dead donkeys', that's what they're called, innit? they don't have dead donkeys, right, but Newsround does"
(Kulbir, 16 year old boy)

But attitudes to 'Newsround' are ambiguous among 16 year olds, especially those who wish to dissociate themselves from children's programmes. One's viewing of 'Newsround' can become the butt of peer

humour
"oh he's still into 'Playschool' and 'Newsround', aren't you Rajesh?"
(Kulbir, 16, year old boy)
This playful jibe is tantamount to taunting someone for still being in 'nappies' but demonstrates that by the age of 16 young people wish to distinguish themselves by professing more 'grown-up' tastes in viewing
"I should think all of us must have watched 'Newsround' but now I've changed I don't bother with those programmes anymore. Now I'll just sit down and watch the 9pm news
(Onray, 16 year old boy)

This is quite a typical reaction among 16 year old boys who feel that 'Newsround' is childish and wish to move on to more 'adult' news broadcasts. The assertion of self-confident maturity is made through the rejection of children's programmes and a claim to adult-viewer status. Thus, watching the 9 o'clock news and being able to talk about it approximates one's tastes and viewing behaviour to that of an adult's and, consequently, one can acquire status among peers and recognition among adults. However, it may be that many more 16 year olds watch 'Newsround' than would care to admit. This is suggested by interviews with a number of girls who are less embarrassed about admitting to the pleasures of children's programmes
"I still watch Children's BBC cos I feel it gives me a break from the hectic life you lead and you feel like a little kid again and laugh instead of having to face the responsibilities and hard work that you've got to do, being a 16 year old adult, it sort of gives you a break from it.
(Amrit, 16 year old girl)

So whilst many would say that their viewing of 'Newsround' is dictated by their younger siblings viewing of children's programmes, it seems that some 16 year olds like to retreat into the childhood world constructed by Children's programmes; a world that seems less stressed and more light-hearted, less chaotic and more reassuring than the world as it is constructed and represented in the evening news bulletins. 'Newsround' provides young people with insights into that adult and

public world but it is careful not to disturb or distresss young people too much. This highlights the disjuncture, common at this age between intellectual and emotional maturity. For although 16 year olds may want to be treated like adults and given the freedom that adults seem to enjoy they are not always prepared for the responsibilities of sustaining what are seen as adult attitudes and conduct.

A further point of interest which Amrit makes concerns her self-perception as a 16 year old 'adult' with responsibilities. This is partly due to the fact that she is the eldest daughter and thus assumes a greater share of family duty than her younger siblings. But it is also related to culturally distinctive definitions of the child-adult dichotomy which does not recognise the concept of adolescence in the same way as British families. According to many parents whose youth was spent in rural Punjab, by the age of 16 one has reached puberty and is therefore potentially marriageable. Thus, a lengthy period of transition, of experimentation and of rebelliousness is not in many parents eyes the norm. But this is a point which will be elaborated later.

The highly selective nature of young people's news viewing means that Breakfast news, the shorter 5 minute bulletins, regional news programmes and especially 'Newsround' are the 'initiation ground' from which any subsequent enagagement with TV news develops. Whilst much political and economic news is not easily understood, it is not always ignored because being able to understand and talk about the 'news' is perceived to be an important marker of adult behaviour. Adults' greater experience of, and knowledge about, the world of public affairs is seen to be manifest in their interest and competence in news as a genre. As 16 year olds in Southall they find themselves on the threshold of this adult world and there is a keen desire among many young people to acquire the freedom and status associated with having crossed that threshold. One way in which this can be done publicly and privately is by graduating to adult competence in news. This is achieved by demonstrating an understanding of news through being able to discuss it.

4.6 GRADUATING TO ADULT COMPETENCE IN NEWS :

TV news encourages young people with the promise of being like an adult, of being able to talk like an adult about the world of public affairs with some degree of confidence and competence. Since TV news is one of the chief means whereby young people gain access to the world of 'real' events beyond their own immediate or local experiences, no matter how boring one may find specific bulletins, great significance is attached to TV news as a source of knowledge about the world as well as to being able to talk in an 'adult' way about it. Why should this be so? In order to understand its importance in the eyes of young people we need to examine their perceptions of TV news more closely. In the more focussed interviews, more than fifty 16 year olds were asked to imagine what their lives would be like without TV news. Although a hypothetical question, the responses given were nevertheless revealing. Here are some of the patterns which emerged

"we'd be ignorant, there would be just a lot of gossip"
(Daljit, 16 year old girl)

"something really small would take on great importance"
(Amarjit, 16 year old girl)

"there would be chaos, you wouldn't know what was going on in other countries as well as your own. If there were a disaster you wouldn't be able to raise money to help people [..]
(Kuldip, 16 year old boy)

According to respondents, news is seen as the inverse of gossip.It serves a 'relativising' function. Without news people would remain isolated in their own communities. The implication is that participation in news culture makes one a 'citizen of the world', a member of the 'global village'. The world would become more local and fragmented. People would be unconnected to the wider world. Whilst it would be a mistake to read too much into these statements, speculative as they are, they are suggestive of how TV news is seen to serve the function of linking people in the world. There is a clear notion among young people that as one gets older one becomes more involved with the world beyond one's immediate family and friends and that TV news provides a bridge to

the international and global dimensions of everyday life within which young people attempt to situate themselves.

Many of the 16 year old informants recognise and emphasise the social and political functions of news. Implicit in the following statements are notions of participation in the 'democratic' process, legal rights and one's obligations as a citizen. Again these are all concepts associated with adult status

"we would feel left out of decisions made by the government also certain people might not know that certain policies exist or that they had certain rights and as you get older it becomes more important to know about all these things"
(Ravinder, 16 year old girl)

"if new laws were passed you wouldn't know about them and then you could be breaking the law without realising"
(Kulbir, 16 year old boy)

Furthermore, notions of 'political freedom', 'democracy' and 'equal rights' are emphasised

"seeing West and East Germany being set free from the Berlin Wall encourages other people to see that it is wrong to divide a country [..] in South Africa blacks and whites are separated [..] but we all know that this is a load of rubbish but watching it on the news helps you to realise it [..] most people think it's important to be democratic to have equal rights "
(Ranjit, 16 year old girl)

Another common perception of TV news is that one acquires cultural capital through viewing

'It's basic general knowledge if you know things you are considered clever"
(Onray, 16 year old boy)

Language learning is seen as a useful outcome of their newsviewing

"you learn to cuss (curse) people in a witty way [..] the latest thing is watching how all these M.P'S cuss each other and have slanging matches in The Commons [..] you learn how to insult someone in a clever way [..] that really makes us all laugh cos they're adults acting like

kids
(Amerjit, 16 year old girl)
Whereas when young people talk about news they often feel themselves to be 'kids' acting like or mimicking adults
"You feel kind of grown up when you talk about the news, you know, it's serious, and you have to take some things seriously, but a lot of the time we just muck about, laugh and joke so talking about news is a way of growing up almost, you can't laugh about murder or war, you know what I mean"
(Sangita, 16 year old girl)

The sophistication of the 'adult' language of TV news serves as a kind of linguistic role model for young people who like to imitate, ridicule and learn from the speech patterns of certain individuals but also, they claim that they pick up vocabulary, idioms and ways of expressing ideas that helps their language development
"like often you know we might have a good idea but we've got a childish and babyish language, whereas if we decorated our ideas with more fancy words we'd make more of an impression [..] when you watch the news you get amazed at all the big words they use but you get a sense of how they are supposed to be used and that gives you another approach it sort of helps you to express yourself"
(Herjinder, 16 year old girl)

Therefore, TV news is seen as a key source of information about the world, a necessary connection to the world and a modern pre-requisite to functioning as a 'world' and a 'national' citizen. From a young person's point of view one's limited experience of the world and increasing curiosity about it can find expression in a desire to become competent in the news genre, to increase one's awareness of, and ability to talk about, the world in which one lives, in spite of the difficulties and boredom often associated with the task.

Amerjit - Being able to discuss the news is like a way of socialising with your friends
Herjinder - and in some subjects teachers expect you to know about

current affairs and if you don't you can get 'shamed up' and appear stupid in front of the whole class

Amerjit - that's right, if you can discuss the news, you think, I'm brainy, sort of intellectual

Herjinder - but it's also that you wanna understand the world

Amerjit - it depends how much your friends discuss it. We do, a lot, so that puts pressure on you to watch because you wanna be part of the discussion

Herjinder - and when you discuss the news with your friends it sort of gives you a buzz, you get attention from your friends and they also sit there nodding and it makes you feel grown up that you're not just a school kid, you feel grown up cos you know whats happening around you
you're not just sticking with your comics and girl's magazines [..] but it has to be a subject that everyone else is discussing, not only our group, but you know everywhere

A number of themes emerge from this brief dialogue betwen Herjinder and Amerjit, who are both academically orientated A level students; TV news provides a common ground for social interaction; it's content can be appropriated as general knowedge; the ability to talk about news confers status upon one; how much one discusses news at school will depend on teacher's expectations; subject demands and peer pressure; talking about news also involves a genuine desire to understand the adult world surrounding one; talking about news makes one feel 'grown-up' and the topic of news talk must seen to be part of a collective, public, adult discourse.

However, for most adolescents, whilst news is seen as an important part of growing up, not only is competence in talking about it differentially distributed, but also, there is some ambiguity attached to this desire to become competent in the genre because the world, as constructed by TV news, is not a safe or secure place but one full of threats, misfortune and disasters which could strike at any moment. TV news plays upon fundamental anxieties about one's security in the world and thus

frequently evokes fear. (Smith, 1985) However, this fear is temporarily dissolved at the end of each bulletin by its formal conventions, notably the requisite light-hearted closing sequence, which 'returns' viewers to the relative safety of own homes, thereby engendering an attitude of relief because, at least, no such disasters have, as yet, befallen the viewer's life

"To each and everyone of us TV news is <u>an important part of growing up</u> without it [...] we wouldn't be aware of our surroundings [...] we wouldn't know about the terrible things that happen people in poor countries [..] we should be grateful for our lives [..] it's my link up to the world"

(Gita, 16 year old girl)

Gita's view is typical of many young people in Southall whose views could be summed up thus; Terrible things happen, usually to others. Knowing about them is important. We should be grateful that they don't happen to us. Knowing about terrible things is part of growing up, part of an adult world which parents usually want to protect their children from. This, again highlights the disjuncture between intellectual and emotional maturity in adolescence for while young people are eager to comprehend news they may not always have the emotional resources to cope with the (adult) human failure and tragedy typically involved in many news stories.

Furthermore, parents and elders usually attempt restrict their children's access to the world of adults, especially their private (sexual)world. Punjabi parents, like others, want their children to retain 'childlike purity and innocence' until they are of an age when wordly, adult matters can be comprehended. In many parent's eyes, TV already gives young people too much insight into the world of adults. Yet, most consider it important for their children to watch the news in order to extend their general knowledge and thus benefit their education. At the same time, one of the most consistent patterns to emerge in the data on news viewing in the family, is the way parents use the situation to warn their children of the terrible dangers and threats that may confront them. Parents, especially those from small rural villages, do not always find it easy to adapt to the anonymity and the

perceived dangers and insecurity of modern urban living. Some become excessively protective of their children and use news stories as a weapon to justify confining their movements and controlling their behaviour. Certainly, fears of violent attack on one's person or property are intense and it is more than likely that such news stories encourage people toward fearful domestic confinement. The ideological and social control functions of TV news should be registered alongside the more creative aspects of young people's uses of it.

Many parents expect their children to have reached a stage of maturity by the age of 16 and to be able to demonstrate that in the speech and conduct. This is especially the case among parents who have emigrated directly from the Punjab, (as opposed to those who came to Britain via East Africa; See Appendix 1, section 2.4-2.7) who, unlike their British counterparts, have no distinctive notion of 'adolescence'. Adolescence is a typically western construction which is partly linked to psychologistic ideas about age and development, as well as being a cultural category, exploited by an ever more lucrative teenage market. So while young people feel themselves to be part of a teenage or adolescent culture, most Punjabi parents operate on a child-adult dichotomy, prevalent in the Punjab and associated with rites of passage signalling the marriageability of one's off-spring. In the parent's view children should be protected from the pain and suffering in the world and thus from death, disasters, crime and other threats which might frighten them unecessarily at an early age. But from the age at which they become potentially marriageable (which varies according to gender, educational aspiration and parent's urbanity) there are pressures upon young people to gain recognition and acquire adult status in the parental culture. However, this is not simply a question of one's eligibility it is also very much dependent upon one's ability to communicate with adults. One way of doing this is to adopt an interest in watching and discussing the news with adults.

One becomes 'initiated' into parental and adult circles if one acquires the status of being 'jost'. According to my informants, this word has a number of connotations; principally, it is a means of gaining respect in

adult company by being 'quick', 'showing wit', 'getting your point of view across', 'being able to talk well and fit in with everybody', 'having gift of the gab', 'being able to talk well in Punjabi and in English', 'Knowing when to be serious and when to joke', 'knowing how to talk to elders' 'being informed and able to express what you know in an adult way' and 'being able to answer adult questions safely without causing an argument'. If a young person is 'jost' adults respond and include them in adult circles, they are given added responsibility and become involved in decision making in the family. Thus 'to be 'jost' means that one has acquired honorary adult status; one has internalised the cultural conventions of how to address one's elders; one has acquired competence in Punjabi and English and can therefore act as an interlocutor, mediator and even arbiter of family and other 'adult' matters; one is esteemed to have acquired sufficent knowledge of the world (or British society) to be useful; one's knowledge and experience can be collectively drawn upon in decision making and opinion formation and finally,one has learned a certain amount of discretion in presenting one's views.

By watching the news with parents and being able to discuss it with them a young person shows intitiative and demonstrates to their parents that they want to be treated more like an adult. Thus the ability to discuss news with parents is an indication of 'jost', or at the very least an attempt to acquire 'jost' status.
"By watching the news, your parents know that you've gone through a stage, that you can talk in an adult way, you watch them talking about the news in an adult way and then you begin to fit in you don't seem like an outsider any more"
(Pervinder, 16 year old girl)

The counterpart of 'jost' is 'siani', which is also a way of gaining adult recognition, if not status. According to my informants, 'Siani' means 'wise', 'sensible', 'straight' (in the sense of conventional and conformist) 'quiet', 'reserved', 'modest'. If one is 'siani' one gains acceptance in adult circles. One may prevail over adult discussions and one may be invited to contribute if one's communicative skills are

developed. As someone intitated into adult circles one is expected to observe and learn. Whilst some informants see 'jost' as a male mode of conduct and communication and 'siani' as female, this is by no means the case in practice. (Indeed there are a variety of ways of using these words which do not all concur). Many females are much more skilled in Punjabi than the males by virtue of their greater exposure to it, and use of it, in the domestic, female context. (The 'confinement' of many mothers in the domestic sphere means that in many cases they have not had the opportunity to learn English to any great degree). Therefore, there are many 15-16 year old girls who claim to have acquired 'jost' status and who are commonly integrated into.adult company.

Despite this, norms and conventions associated with speech and verbal interaction are to some extent gender bound. For example a boy who is 'jost' will know that with adult women his verbal interaction should consist of jovial, witty and humourous banter. However, this would be deemed a most inappropriate mode of address in the presence of an adult male where talk should be more serious and worldly. Similarly there are pressures in some families for girls to be 'siani' , restrained in the verbal interaction. Yet, one's position in the family hierarchy may also affect one's 'jost' postion. Eldest sons and daughters tend to be more likely to achieve 'jost' status but if one does not develop the necessary communicative skills then that status will be denied. But whatever, variations between families, the fact remains that most young people wish to achieve 'jost' status, or at least the recognition that they are no longer a child, in the family. Knowledge of, and ability to talk about, news is one, among many, means of acquiring that status. Therefore, increased news viewing around the age of 16 , or at least the desire to be able to talk about news with some confidence, can be seen as a function of emergent adulthood.

4.7 COMPLICATIONS IN GRADUATING TO ADULT NEWS

For young people in Southall, graduating to adult competence in news is characterised by a negotiation of the relations between parental and peer culture; of their relationship to their parent's country of birth and their position in British society. However, interest and competence

in news about the Indian sub-continent differs in the parental and peer cultures. We shall deal first with questions of interest and secondly with questions of competence.

4.8 PARENTAL INTEREST IN NEWS FROM THE INDIAN SUB CONTINENT

The widespread availability of news about the Indian sub-continent in Southall enables parents to maintain their interest in events in their country of birth. The advent of Sunrise radio has allowed daily access to news in Punjabi. The priority and sense of urgency given to news about India in the parental culture is reiterated by many informants "my parents are mainly interested in things that happen back home like floods and rioting and V P Singh and how they wanna build a mandir near a mosque"
(Kulbir, 16 year old boy)

"My dad watches the news anyway but my mum only really likes to watch it if there's going to be some news about India"
(Amrit, 16 year old girl)

The strength of feeling involved in hearing 'news from back home' should not be underestimated for it is seen by many parents to be a link to their 'country's roots'. Feelings of attachment to India and nostalgia remain strong despite settlement in Britain
"my parents are very up to date with news from India, my dad even buys the Indian newspapers, to them it's like a link up to their country's roots"
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

Every young person I interviewed or spoke casually to about news, reiterated the importance of 'news from back home' to their parents. Mothers are particularly avid fans of Sunrise radio
"my mum listens to Sunrise all the time it's a good thing for her because she doesn't understand English very well and she gets a chance to hear the news in Punjabi about India and about here"
(Ranjit, 16 year old girl)

Not only is it a link to 'back home' but many parents have relatives there and when there are disturbances fears about their safety can lead to more intensive news consumption
"Like the main disaster area is in New Delhi and I've got my mum's sister who lives there and recently we heard that my uncle and my cousin didn't come home and my aunt was really scared [..] but they were safe [..] when she wrote and told us we were really scared for them [..] so when things like that happen you want to know what's going on there"
(Amrit, 16 year old girl)

Young people with relatives under threat in the Punjab are also very concerned about events there and recognise the value of Sunrise radio
"it (Sunrise) does report on India, on every issue, there's fighting going on now in New Delhi, there's a curfew [..] it's a very dangerous place at the moment, there are killings[..] my mum's brother got kidnapped and he still hasn't been found, he was one of the main men in the village [..] he's got 5 sons and that [..]
(Abjinder, 17 year old boy)

Therefore, many parents have very good reasons for maintaining an interest in news from the Indian sub-continent. Young people's commitment to an interest in Indian news is more ambiguous.

4.9 YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTEREST IN NEWS FROM THE INDIAN SUB CONTINENT

A young person's interest in news from the Indian sub-continent is shaped by several key factors. Interest is likely to be higher when one has direct experience of the country through having lived there, through repeated or extended visits. It will also vary according to one's competence in one's parent's language, religion and culture. Parental encouragement to engage with news from the Indian sub-continent, (for whatever reason i.e. maintaining links with country of origin, fear of deportation) is also likely to increase a young person's interest. Having close relatives who live there and who may be affected by political and religious conflicts, one's perception of India and affective links to it are further factors. However, the type of news story, its topicality and currency in everyday local discourse may be

just as important a factor as any of the aforementioned in generating an interest in news from the Indian sub-continent.

Many young people express some interest in news from their parents place of birth and acknowledge their sentiments of attachment to India. Some see it as a second home and others as a place they may one day have to go back to

"Yes, I do have an interest in news from India because India is also my home [..]"

(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

"Yes I have an interest [...] even though I'm British I still care about what happens in India"

(Surinder, 16 year old girl)

"Yes I have a lot of interest in news from India and Pakistan because I think it's important for people to know what is happening in countries that they or their parents came from because you never know, one day you might have to go back there"

(Farzana, 16 year old girl)

Also, some parents try to foster an interest in news from India in their children, as they do in the values and traditions of their 'culture'. But for those parents who experienced expulsion from East Africa, the fear of being repatriated one day remains and seems to heighten an interest in Indian news. This is hardly surprising since as 'twice migrant' (Bhachu, 1985) they are at two steps removed from the Punjab compared with those who emigrated directly and tend to maintain closer links with family in the Punjab. East African Sikhs are more urbanised, educated and middle class than their rural Punjabi counterparts which would suggest greater cultural competence in the news genre.

The following exchange highlights the contradictory and ambiguous attitudes to Indian news among this group of 16 year olds. Both Tejinder's and Dalvinder's parents are East African Sikhs and their comments are quite typical of children from 'twice-migrant' families where their parents' experiences of deportation remain stark

Tejinder - my parents get annoyed if I don't take an interest in Indian

news, they say, 'what will happen if you get chucked out of this country and you have to go there', they go, 'it's interesting watch it!' but I can't really be bothered

Inderjeet - My parents don't really say that to me

Amrit - mine do too, but I don't have an interest in news from India, my parents do [..] I do have some concerns 'cos I've got relatives living there [..] you want them to be safe but other than that I don't really care

Dalvinder - I don't know anyone who lives there, I've never had any contact with them so I don't care what happens there [..] I don't feel that India is a part of me

Onray - yes, actually it's pointless knowing about something there when you're here

Chorus - yeah

Onray - But in a way it's O.K knowing about political issues down there, and the state the country is in but what's really important to you is what happens here, it's here that counts

Amrit - But what happens there can affect what happens here, take the Khalistani issue

Inderjeet - People are taking it to extremes here and there, it makes me sick, they're always fighting about land or religion, the only reason I'd watch news about India is if I were going on holiday there, just to see if it was safe enough

Tejinder - I don't have any interest in news from India, it doesn't affect me but if something important was happening I'd want to know about it [..] I was born in Britain and I've lived here all my life so what happens here in Britain does concern me.

Thus, news issues which are important and at stake for parents are not always so with their children some of whom feel that events in India have little relevance to their lives here and indeed express a desire to move away from such parental preoccupations and live more fully in British society. Many young people feel themselves to be doubly sheltered by the parental culture, not only in the sense of living in a Punjabi town where exposure to the wider white society is extremely

limited, but also, in that many parents wish to curtail the influence of white society on their children. Therefore, among certain young people, the greater the pressure from the parental culture to maintain an interest in Indian affairs and culture, the greater the tendency toward 'westernisation'.

However, it is also clear in the above exchange that the juxtaposition of here and there as both unrelated and as inter-related is a source of tension for young people. For whilst they may not see India as a part of themselves or their lives, events in India can have direct effects and repercussions on local life. The prevalence of negative attitudes toward India among some young people is considered by child-migrants, such as Navdeep, to be based on a lack of experience and knowledge about the country

"see a lot of people don't want anything to do with India, they think Indians are all 'pendus' (pejorative for peasants) they don't really understand that India is a big country and you do get the poor but there's a lot more to it [...] I really learned a lot there [...] I really picked up the whole image of the language, religion and culture and if you don't know the place you don't see how brilliant life can be there [..] I wouldn't mind living there one day"
(Navdeep, 17 year old Jat Sikh boy)

But interest is not the only factor involved. Also important are competence in understanding and talking about different news stories in the parental and peer cultures and the complications of graduating to adult competence in Southall.

4.10 THE CONSTITUENTS OF ADULT COMPETENCE IN NEWS IN SOUTHALL

In Southall, adult competence in news includes an interest in, and an ability to talk about, news about the Indian sub-continent. In this respect, parental interest and competence is high whereas it is low among their children. This is because many young people do not possess the linguistic skills required in order to understand and discuss the news in Punjabi, Hindi or Urdu. They may find it difficult to understand the Punjabi news broadcasts on Sunrise Radio and may be insufficiently literate to understand the Punjabi press which forms a central part of

their parents news consumption. The situation is commonly reversed when it comes to British TV news because young people are, very often, more competent than their parents in understanding and discussing news in English. Thus, young people often already posses a degree of 'adult' competence in British news which excels that of their parents.

As a consequence of this, translation of British TV news for parents and grandparents, by young people, is a characteristic feature of news viewing in many families. This allows them to demonstrate varying degrees of competence in adult news and assist them in acquiring 'jost' status

Rajesh - mostly we watch the news in silence unless I have to explain to my mum

Kulbir - yeah, that's what I have to do with the 9pm news, my parents aren't there so I have to sit with my grandparents and explain it to them, what's happening and that

Amrit - yeah, sometimes I have to interpret for my mum, like she can understand it but sometimes they use big words and things

Grandparents and mothers are most often mentioned in this connection "my dad watches the news 3 or 4 times a day [..] he tries to encourage me to watch the news - and he does - but he thinks I don't watch it - but I do [..] upstairs, otherwise my mum keeps asking me to translate" (Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

However, translating the news for one's father is by no means rare "my dad, he's 50, and he makes a lot of valid points but he doesn't know how to put them across in English so then he starts going on in Punjabi [..] but like my brother he doesn't have adult language in Punjabi so he'll call me down and I'll try to put across in the simplest and clearest way what my brother is trying to say [..] you see to have language in adult way matters a lot whether they see you as a 'jost' kid [..] a 'jost' kid will know the language [..] if they ask you something then you'll be able to answer and then go on and tell them more [..] (Herjinder, 16 year old girl)

Translation can be a difficult and annoying aspect of newsviewing for young people

"I have to translate the news for my mum when she doesn't understand it and this makes me angry cos it's hard to translate the news back in Punjabi"

(Surinder, 16 year old girl)

"The moment he (dad) sees Asians on the TV, not on Eastenders, he wants us to watch, he calls us down and we've GOT TO watch it and even if you're in the bath or something he'll start shouting "there's something on about India and I don't understand it, come down! - there are a lot of Indians in this country who don't understand the news, even though they've been here quite a long time"

(Diljit, 17 year old boy)

Child and teenage migrants will be much more competent in Punjabi and may as a consequence find it relatively easier to integrate themselves into adult circles. They maintain much closer links with family in India and by extension sustain an interest in news from the Indian sub-continent. However, they will also have a much less firm grasp of the stories and issues in British news bulletins than their peers who were born and brought up here and experience more difficulty in talking about news in English. This puts them at a disadvantage to a 'jost kid' who finds him or herself in a rather powerfully strategic position; as an intimate in adult circles in which one learns and where one's views are taken into account in decision making and opinion formation, and, as one who is, in principle, in a position to teach parents and mediate competing cultural values. Discussion of news in the parental culture involves being able to summarise and even translate the key points of a news story, engaging in dialogue with adults, forming opinions, taking a stand on issues, and even challenging and attempting to change parental or adult views. This makes a young person feel 'grown up'.

The following section examines how young people demonstrate their competence in news in the peer culture in relation to three specific

news events: a local murder; the resignation of Margaret Thatcher and The Gulf war.

4.11 DEMONSTRATING COMPETENCE IN NEWS TALK

The central aim of this section is to show how TV news stories are used collectively by young people to articulate their positions in relation to news events. TV mediates events but awareness of the mediated nature of news events varies. The social and cultural backgrounds of young people, among other contextual factors, in turn, mediate reception processes. Therefore, in this section, a layered description of the different kinds of mediations taking place around particular news stories will be offered.

During fieldwork in Southall, three news stories, in particular, were extensively discussed by young people locally. This was evidenced by observations of their informal talk and substantiated with statistical evidence (see Appendix 4 p166) and later, with more focussed interviews. These stories provide 'case studies' of local, national and international news stories. A substantial body of data was collected on these news stories going beyond the limits of this thesis. Selected transcripts of informal discussions are provided in Appendix 4 p177.

The following analysis is based on appoximately 23 hours of taped conversations and interviews, most of which were later transcribed, and from observations, fieldnotes and field diaries. It sheds some light on the kinds of negotations that are performed through news talk, especially those which involve attempts to define and situate self in relation to significant 'others' and the world. In what follows, summaries are presented of some of the recurrent themes and patterns of responses to these events in young people's 'news talk'.

4.12 LOCAL CRIME: THE MURDER OF KULDIP SEKHON

In this section it is argued that TV plays a minimal role in representing and generating talk about major local news stories. This study suggests that local news items are mediated much more powerfully through local press, radio, gossip, rumour, as well as by Southall's

news culture and history. Sixteen year olds have 'entered' this history at a particular conjuncture which differs from that of their parents and of local activists. This, it is argued, partly accounts for their different responses to the murder in question. It will also become clear that responses to the murder itself and to its various representations are so integrated in their verbal interaction that it becomes difficult, and in an ethnographic study perhaps undesirable, to separate them. It is argued that when TV does represent a local event, a greater degree of critical distance on the part of young viewers is in evidence because the proximity of the event combines with alternative sources of information to provide competing accounts of the same event. This in turn leads to a focussing of news talk on how TV news represents Southall and how local activists used TV to bring a local crime to the public's attention.

Local crimes are a perennial topic of conversation among young and old alike. They are all the more threatening because they are close to home. Young people try to make sense of local crimes, such as murders, by attempting to establish patterns of similarity and difference between one murder and another and by attempting to accomodate local murders into their own constructions of Southall's news history. Perceptions of that history vary according to one's age. Thus, for the adult generations, their first experiences of Southall 'hitting the news headlines' concerned the 'racially motivated' murders of Gurdip Singh Chaggar (June 1976) and Blair Peach (April 1979), National Front attacks (1979), 'race riots' and the policing of youth (1981) During the 1970's experiences of racism and racial violence were prevalent and had the effect, at least symbolically, of uniting local people and forging a sense of 'community'. (See Appendix pp 205 - 227)

However, for 16 year olds, these 'local news stories', are passed down orally and remain distant from everyday experiences. In fact, many sixteen year olds have little or no knowledge of their existence. In Southall most young people have little direct experience of racism, except perhaps when venturing outside Southall. Awareness of racism in the wider society exists but to widely varying degrees. Racism is not,

for most, an everday reality, as it is for, say, Bengalis in Tower Hamlets where Asians are in a minority.

For most 16 year olds in Southall, one of their first major engagements with TV news came with the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar by Hindus (1984) and the assination of Indira Gandhi (1986). This is the centre of the Sikh religion and the most sacred place of worship for Sikhs. These events had marked repercussions for young people

Seema - We started watching the news at the time of the storming of the Golden temple and the assination of Indira Gandhi
Monica - Everybody watched the news at that time, I remember it so clearly, everyone was glued to their sets, we were only about 8 or 9 years old at the time
Inderjeet - that's right, but it was horrible, it was, like all our parents lot, like they forgot they were all Indians and that they spoke the same language
Monica - that they had things in common and that
Inderjeet - they started causing trouble with each other
Seema - and then it got into the schools, the Khalistan thing, like you've got Sikhs and Hindus at school and it was like people going overboard
Monica - people started making their own gangs, little kids, you know it was unbelievable, shouting Khalistani slogans
Seema - it went on for quite a long time, in fact, it's still here
Inderjeet - it made you sort of realise that religion can be a bad thing sometimes
Seema - people should keep it in their homes and in the gurudwaras not bring it to school

In a town where Hindus and Sikhs had co-existed peaceably, under the umbrella of an 'Asian' identity, these events threatened to drive a rift between Hindus and Sikhs. This was found to be particularly threatening among young people who, in the school context, had friendly relations with each other and who witnessed how the religious politics of the parental culture could interfere with their peer relations. Thus, much

of their formative news talk involved a negotiation of the problem of religious sectarianism in the local culture rather than of racism and racial violence. (Appendix 4, pp 172-181)

It is in the light of this news history of Southall that the murder of a local cab driver must be seen. It re-awakened many fears among adults which were not exactly shared by young people. Memories of earlier murders (Gurdeep Singh Chaggar and Blair Peach, in particular) ran deep and fears of a revival of racist attacks among adult sections of the 'community' were intense. The murder itself was particularly vicious and much discussion focussed upon this. Kuldip Sekhon was stabbed 56 times by a young white man for no obvious reason. He was a respectable Sikh, a family man with 5 daughters. The fact that he had five daughters was considered to augment the tragedy; how would his widow cope with bringing them up and performing her parental duty of marrying her daughters with respect and therefore with dowry? (see Appendix 4,181-192)

The murder took place on 11 November 1989 but due to protracted autopsies, his funeral did not take place until 31 January 1990
A local activist group organised a support campaign for the family. They networked with other political groups nationwide and sought to bring this murder to the public's attention as a symbol of all racist murders. Through a multi-media campaign they kept the murder alive in the memory of local people. Feelings came to a head when, nearly three months after the murder, after extensive post-mortem examinations, Kuldip Sekhon's funeral was arranged. The local activist group wanted to make this a public and media event that would pierce the conscience of the nation and demonstrate local outrage at what they were convinced was a racist murder. (Appendix 4, pp 207; 211)

The body was brought to the local community centre where it was exposed to a full hall of some 500 people who were present to pay their last respects. The full horror of the murder was revealed as a procession of people glanced at the corpse amidst the camera crews of the various news media. Later, a funeral procession through the streets of Southall combined with a peaceful protest march. Yet for many young

people the contradiction between the funeral procession and a politcal protest march was too much to bear.

The funeral and protest march was broadcast on BBC 1 South East and Thames Regional news on the evening of the funeral. Given the time lag between the murder and funeral, most young people, through informal communication channels, had already formulated opinions and responses to the murder. However, direct experience of the funeral combined with the TV news and other media coverage to launch considerable debate on the following day among young people at school. Comparisons were made between the BBC and ITV portrayal of the event and this was linked to representations of Southall on TV news more generally. This is an extract from a discussion between two Sikh girls and a boy, all 16 year olds on the following morning

Dalvinder - the BBC news, sort of, put across that it was a racist murder and that everyone in Southall is up in arms about all the racist murders that happen here but that's a bit misleading isn't it, cos it's the first one that's happened here for years, I mean murders happen everwhere but they really blow it up when its an Asian community

Amrit - but it's always the same whenever Southall comes on the news it's always about racism, it's as if anyone in Southall could be murdered, like Southall's a really dangerous place to live

Onray - I hate the way they always show crowds of people marching on the street with banners and protesting and

Amrit - yeah, did you see all the people pushing and shoving to get into the Dominion Centre? they sort of portray people like 'pendus' (peasants) and they go hundreds of people 'flooding' the streets, and 'angry crowds' it's like they have no respect for the man or his family, it's like Asian people are always causing trouble

Dalvinder - but the ITV they presented it like it was cos he was a cab driver and that, you know, it's cab drivers who are at risk cos they drive around alone all the time

Amrit - but they still showed all the people protesting and marching

Onray - and all the bloody police, that's another thing, whenever Southall is in the news there's always van loads of police around as if any moment there's going to be trouble, I mean, it was the man's funeral

Amrit - he should have been shown more respect

Dalvinder - but it's like the Southall Monitoring Group were speaking on behalf of all people in Southall and really that's biased

Onray - well they've done a lot of the campaigning and it was them who invited the BBC to come along in the first place

Dalvinder - how do you know?

Onray - Jsbinda told me cos she was involved in the campaign

Dalvinder - I feel really sorry for the man and his family but I think they've blown it up out of all proportions

Onray - it's just like re-awakening old wounds

Amrit - but there'll be a white backlash I bet you

Onray - not round here but in places like Greenford maybe

Many of the points raised in the above extract were repeated in other discussions. In the first instance, many young people were ambivalent about the alleged racist motives behind the murder. Many claimed to be unconvinced, unlike their elders that the murderer's motivation was wholly racist. This was one of the main points of contention in their discussions. While some agreed that racism may have been an element to the murder, they were extremely wary of what they saw as the 'media hype' surrounding the funeral. Not that they remained unmoved by the murder, but many argued that Mr. Sekhon should be given due respect and that his murder should not exploited for political purposes. They saw it as a deliberate attempt to 're-awaken past wounds', which would serve little purpose, except possibly a white backlash, targetted at 'Asians' living in white areas.

Racist murders are seen to be a relatively rare phenomoenon. For most young people the central tragedy was murder. Many pointed to the other local murders; that of Pushpa Bhatti, a woman who was murdered in

Southall Park; and that of Surinder Gill, a wealthy businessman. They asked why their more politically active elders did not respond in the same way to these murders? The answer they received was that these were not racist murders. And so many young people concluded that among the more politically-active members of the 'community', murder is only worth protesting about if it had racist motivations, whereas for many young people, with little experience of racism, a murder is a murder. Most young people remained sceptical of any direct racist motivation on the part of the murderer as this exchange between two 16 year old Sikh boys demonstrates

Navdeep - they think it was a racist murder but no-one knows for sure, O.K., the guy has a record of involvement with the National front

Amandeep - he was supposed to have told his girlfriend the day of the murder that he was going to 'kill a paki'

Navdeep - he was also out of his mind on drugs [..]

Amandeep - no-one really knows for sure and that's why they've made such a big thing of it

Navdeep - I think it's the same thing that happened ten years ago, you know, those two murders, Chaggar and what's his name Blair Peach [..]
it brings it all back and everyone remembers, it all happens again and it's always the same issue, racism, that's what gets people up in arms, they've made it into a huge media event but I think religious conflict in Southall is a more serious issue but Southall only ever gets on the news when it's to do with racism, crime or the gangs

The murder of Kuldip Sekhon was, for many young people, their first encounter with the possibility of a racially motivated murder on their doorsteps and as such was a very disturbing experience. Once again Southall was in the news. Whilst some used the situation to vent their feelings about racism, most recoiled from the vociferousness of adult campaigners, who unlike 16 year olds today had spent their youth

fighting racism on the streets of Southall. The following exchange between two 16 year old Sikh boys highlights a common pattern of response

Kuldip - Because they can't proove everday racism, people cover it up, so if something major like this happens, they try to cover the rest of the issues around it, they bring the media into it, and in doing that they tend to blow it right out of proportion

Talvinder- really I suppose they've made a martyr of Kuldip Sekhon [..] he now symbolises all racist murders.

Obviously, this was a very traumatic event and it is not possible, here, to do justice to the depth of feeling, the range of viewpoints and the strength of opinions involved, nor to the political and moral integrity of most adults and young people alike in their discussions. But what I have tried to characterise is a pattern of reaction among many young people locally. However, what this discussion has tried to bring out is how this murder forced young people to confront the problem of racism from the point of view of their parents and the political campaigners involved. In doing so, they articulated their own positions in relation to Southall's news history at the particular conjuncture in which they were in. For many young people it is religious sectarianism and the rising tide of fundamentalism among certain elements of local culture which seems to pose more of a threat than racism. But perhaps there is also an element of hope in taking such a position, for they, undoubtedly, want to look forward, not back, to an adult life in Britain unmarred by racism. (see Appendix 4 p. 181; 214; 220)

4.13 NATIONAL POLITICS: MARGARET THATCHER'S RESIGNATION

In this section it is argued that the introduction of the poll tax and Margaret Thatcher's resignation, more than any other issue at the time of fieldwork, encouraged young people to articulate a sense of their

family's 'class' or socio-economic position in British society and by association their party political allegiances.

The priority given to Margaret Thatcher's resignation as a news item would come as no surprise to anybody familar with the serious hardship that the poll tax brought for many Punjabi families locally. In fact, 'Asian' households throughout Britain were severely affected by it because of the prevalence of relatively large households. In the Southall survey 35% of young Sikhs (N= 194) had grandparents living in Southall or nearby which gives some indication of the number of three generation households locally. 70% of respondents have between 4 and 6 people eating in their homes and 18% between 7 and 10. Furthermore, the convention that sons bring their wives to live in the parental home means that there are likely to be more adults in Southall households liable to pay the poll tax. (see Appendix 1, section 2.11-2.12)

To clarify the picture, in one informant's household five adults became eligible to pay the local poll tax, increasing their liability form £265 to £1,820 - a £1,555 increase. It is not hard to see why the news of Mrs. Thatcher's resignation was welcomed. For most, it meant not simply an end to her 'reign' as prime minister but above all the possibility of the abolition of the poll tax.

The poll tax generated much local discussion and resentment among young and old alike since it's effects on the household budget were marked in many families as this exchange between three 16 year old girls highlights

Amrita - everyone's really pissed off with the poll tax
five people in my family have to pay it, it's
crazy, where do they think we get the money from?

Perminder - everyone's complaining about it, and cussin it down
[..] and when it comes on the news, my parents tell
us to shut up and listen, everyone goes quiet, [..]
it's not just people in Southall
who are complaining, though, look at all those

peole who smashed the place up in London

Amrita - yeah, but Asians are more badly affected because we've got larger families

Baljit - even little kids know about it, like my little brother he wants a new pair of trainers but my parents can't afford them and he keeps saying 'come on mum?' and she says, "look at the poll tax we have to pay, that's why we can't afford it".

Many young people claim that their parents relied on them to translate the news about the poll tax, to explain the situation to them and to deal with the Community Charge forms. Thus, families where a young person's linguistic competence outweighs that of their parents, they often become involved in the administration of family finances. Certainly, many young people have such 'adult' concerns thrust upon them at an earlier age than might their white counterparts.

Brijesh - you see your parents rely on you to help them with things like the poll tax, they find it very confusing and they need help to fill in the forms,

Rajesh - yeah, so you automatically become involved in discussing these things with them [..]

Kulbir - yeah, when it comes on the news you have to explain it to them [..] you know, sometimes you sort of feel protective toward your parents

Southall is also, traditionally, a Labour voting area where a certain amount of antipathy to the Conservative government is not uncommon. Margaret Thatcher's resignation offered the hope that at the next elections, the Labour government might win. Southall has, tradtionally, been a Labour stronghold and there is a conviction that a Labour government would provide better public services and are more sympathetic to the concerns of 'Asians' in Britain, (such as, immigration control and racism) and that generally they support the poorer sections of the

society better than the Conservatives. Thus, party political affinities also mediates young people's reception of such news stories.

But economic reasons alone are insufficient to explain the widespread interest in and jubilation about Mrs. Thatcher's resignation. Needless to say, the 'Leadership Battle' itself was a compelling story and most informants' accounts and re-constructions focus on the 'show down' or 'shaming up' of a woman with power. There was a certain amount of gloating over her fall from exalted heights; intrigue at the conspiratorial conduct of her cabinet colleagues and amusement at what was perceived as her public shaming. But this was matched by an equally firm admiration for the 'dignity' of her departure, particularly among girls. Indeed, many girls, despite a loathing and resentment for her policies, argued that they saw in her a powerful symbol of a woman who had succeeded in a 'Man's world' and expressed great respect for her strength of character and leadership.

For these reasons it is clear how Mrs. Thatcher's resignation came to be among the most discussed in the parental and peer culture in 1990. Across the transcriptions, it becomes clear, that news bulletins are collectively drawn upon for the purposes of transforming news material into a story. The rhetoric and sensationalist language of the bulletins is often incorporated into young people's speech patterns. Thus in re-telling the story of the fall of a powerful leader from exalted heights, character traits are identified, the motivations of 'actors' are debated, ongoing judgements about events and actions are made and speculations about future developments are proposed. In brief, young people become actively involved in narrational processes which become manifest in their talk. And since, as they themselves point out, several interpretations of the story are always possible, one has to bring one's subjective viewpoints to the act of interpretation. In the retelling of news stories this frequently means articulating a political viewpoint and having political views is associated with being 'grown up' and being able to take a stand on issues of public importance. Young people's political views are often very much influenced by those of their parents and by the socio-economic circumstances in which they find themselves

Gita - she has ruled our country ever since I can remember and I'm so glad that I won't hear her nasty voice and see her ugly mug on TV any more, that's the best news of all

Saira - she was such a strong leader, she had the power to shatter people, look how she behaved in parliament, she could cuss people down, I suppose that's why she was called the Iron Lady

Gita - that's true but she took her power too far

Surinder - my family hate her

Saira - since the poll tax everyone has had problems with money

Gita - we've all been affected in one way by her cruelness and greediness

Saira - she was a strong woman but she was uncontrollable

Surinder - if she didn't resign, she would have taken shame, she would have been badly shamed

Gita - I think she was badly shamed up anyway, she came out on the steps and said she was gonna stay put and the next day bang she's gone

The poll tax issue encouraged 'news talk' which led young people to assess their socio-economic status , and by extension, their class position in British society. As 16 and 17 year olds they are well aware that they will, in the not too distant future, have the right to vote and this acts as a further incentive to involve oneself in political news talk.

Paramjit - I'm glad she's gone [..] she did the worst thing she could possibly have done and that is bring in the poll tax.

Ranjit - Most of us just about manage to pay the mortgage [..] her policies have affected me, like in school, there's not enough books to go round they've affected my family cos now four people have to pay the poll tax and we're skint, they have

affected my dad cos he has had to wait so long for his operation

Farzana - that's right! I mean, it's all right for the well off innit but it's difficult for the working class

Paramjit - yeah, but anyone would think she was the bloody queen of England the way she behaves, like when she starts mouthing off, you'd think she could never do anything wrong

Ranjit - I tell you one thing, I'm not voting for any bloody conservative when I'm 18, I'd rather vote for the Raving Monster Loony Party

The poll tax and Margaret Thatcher's resignation, more than any other issues at the time of fieldwork, encouraged young people to articulate a sense of their family's 'class' or socio-economic position in British society and by association their party political allegiances. Whilst these are clearly not uniform, the majority of my informants consider their families and themselves to be working class and supporters of the Labour Party. But such judgments are usually made when they compare themselves to white people, for it is really only in the British context that the word, 'class', with its typically British connotations, has any meaning to local people. By working class young people mean several things; their parents are employed in low paid, manual or semi skilled jobs; they are not very wealthy; they vote Labour; they are not 'posh', they do not speak, (as do newsreaders, Mrs Thatcher and The Queen whom they mimick with merciless humour), in received pronounciation; their parents are not highly educated and most are unlikely to go onto Higher education and will be at work by age 18.

The table in Appendix 1, section 2.9 indicates parental employment patterns in Southall. Just under 40% of fathers and mothers are employed in manual labour in local industries. Males are more highly represented in skilled and semi-skilled jobs than women (45% and compared with 26%). But the overall pattern would suggest that a majority of parents are employed in low paid, traditionally 'working class' jobs.

But, in fact, it is debatable how meaningful conventional notions of class are to families in Southall. A sense of being working class is modulated by many factors, three of which are outstanding in importance; the local Punjabi social hierarchy which is founded on caste rather than class and which combines notions of 'purity' with one's designated status and occupation in life; the opportunities opened up to many youngsters by their family's thriving and successful businesses; the strong tendency toward upward mobility among 'Asians' generally and the high level of aspiration among young 'Asians' in particular. 71.62% of young people have occupational aspirations above their parent's occupational status; 23.65% the same and 4.73% lower. (see Appendix 1, section 2.8)

It was thus the poll tax and Mrs. Thatcher's resignation which, perhaps more than any other news event, encouraged young people to articulate their positions with regards to the Conservative government of the day and, in a majority of cases, to confirm the allegiance to Labour party politics, traditionally held by their parents. (see Appendix 4 p.190)

4.14 GLOBAL ISSUES: THE GULF WAR

The Gulf War constituted the most intense televisual experience of war in the lifetime of young people in Southall. For them, it highlighted the contradiction of being addressed by the news media as part of the British public and nation and, at the same time, of having their national status and loyalty to the British nation questioned. During and after the war the British media devoted enormous attention to the responses of Muslims in Britain to the war, in particular, to the question of their supposed divided loyalties, a question which forms part of a more pervasive, racist discourse in British society . Many young Sikhs and Hindus saw themselves as implicated in this attempt to undermine their status in Britain, being aware of the fact that religious differences between them are often collapsed in favour of a 'racial' definition, epitomised in the prevalent term of abuse, 'paki'. Thus, the news media set an agenda which was taken up by young people and which led them to define themselves in relation to a series of

perceived 'others', identified in religious, national, 'racial' and age categories.

In this section, the collective negotiation of these issues by young people is examined. It will cover the following issues; features of TV's representations of the war; young people's initial responses to the outbreak of war and to the images of 'spectacular destruction; their awareness of censorship and propaganda; gender specific types of identification with war reporters and military personnel; the importance of parent's political culture in mediating responses to the war and young people's shifting allegiances according to their varying perceptions of the opponents in the war. It is argued that their cultural and religious backgrounds enables them to consider a wider range of points of view than might expected from their white counterparts (see Appendix 4, p 192)

4.15 TELEVISION, THE GULF WAR AND THE 'GLOBAL CULTURE OF DISTANCE'

On the basis of the data to be presented, it will be argued, that the juxtaposition of the notions of the 'global village' (Mc Luhan, 1964) with that of the 'culture of distance' (Williams, 1989) highlights two fundamental paradoxes inherent in young people's consumption of war in TV news format and in their subsequent talk; namely, proximity and distance, involvement and detachment.

The term global village refers to "the world, in reference to its apparent smallness, due to improved communications and the way in which changes in one area are likely to affect the rest of the world" (Chambers dictionary) . The term is based on the observation that experience or what we take for experience is increasingly indirect and mediated and that whether by chance or design more people receive a 'similar' version of the world.

The 'culture of distance' is a term coined by Raymond Williams in his assessment of the problems of TV's representation of the Falklands War.

The central technical claim of TV, he argues, is that it can show us

distant events, yet, in most everyday TV, distance is not a leading factor. Thus, the war may be physically distant on earth but it is physically close to the lens. We, therefore, 'consume war' at a very safe distance, in the security of our homes. The very precise images of what, he calls, 'these wars of distance' are already built into the culture. According to Williams

"In every games arcade we can press buttons and see conventionally destructive flashes on targets [..] what difference is represented when the flash of a hit can be remembered to contain and to be destroying a man?" (1989:15)

He wonders whether the representation of spectacular destruction may already, in many minds, may have blurred the difference between the exercise and the actuality, between the rehearsal and the act

"For it is one of the corroding indulgences of the culture of distance that to the spectator the effect, at least, offers to be the same" (1989: 16)

The twin notions of the global village and the culture of distance elucidates the contradictory pressures of involvement and detachment, proximity and distance, threat and security which characterises young people's talk about the Gulf war as a TV 'experience'. Let us now examine these contradictions more closely on the basis of the data.

One of the most immediate and obvious effects of the outbreak of the Gulf war was the change in personal and domestic routines. Many young people claimed that they and their families were glued to their TV set during the first week of the war. There was very little chance that young people could, or indeed did, escape its coverage. However, within a week or ten days, a widespread shift in attitude occured. The war, it was claimed, had become 'boring'. Some complained that some of their favourite programmes, like 'Home and Away' and 'Allo Allo', were cut in favour of war coverage. Others felt that the TV coverage was excessive and that the war was dominating their lives. Frequent complaints included 'it's boring now', 'it's stale and repetetive' and 'it's going on for too long'. The initial sense of close involvement with the war

seems to have been a function of the perceived threat that it posed to young people and the possible consequences it might have on their own lives.

4.16 'I DON'T WANT TO DIE YOUNG'

War provokes fear, especially fear of death. To many young people in Southall the initial allied attacks led to anxieties that the war might spread to Britain . "Will there be a world war?", "Will they throw bombs at us in Southall?", were fears that some young people expressed. Some were confused as to whether it was a nuclear war and young Muslims felt particularly threatened

'Most Muslims don't like the war, mosques are being attacked, our religion is being attacked in Britain, they're not only destroying a country but also the world- all of them - all these nuclear war planes that they're hitting is, in the end, going to destroy the world - it's frightening - I don't want to die young - in the end they're probably going to destroy everyone [..] sometimes I have a feeling that I'm going to die cos it's just possible that they shoot something over here or in the middle of the core of the earth and they might just destroy us all"
(Adnam, 15 year old Muslim boy)

It is the younger teenagers who understood least and who were most frightened by the outbreak of war in the Gulf, as Adnam's apocalyptic vision of a nuclear war demonstrates. Some claimed that they were having bad dreams and one girl confused the sound of a local factory siren with a warning of a bomb attack. The sound of low flying planes descending on Heathrow, to some, began to sound threatening.

Older teenagers did not talk about their own fears of death but about the death of others, the human tragedy of war. Many express a 'common humanity' with the victims of war

"those people out there who are dying, they are ordinary people, like us, they are mother and fathers, sons and daughters, you feel for them whether they're Muslims or Christians, black or white, I mean, they're all human beings'
(Rajinder, 16 year old Sikh girl).

Others take a more long term view of the consequences of the war especially in breeding hatred in the world
"this war is never going to end when Iraqui children grow up without their fathers and they ask their mothers, 'where's dad?' and she says, 'he was killed by Americans', what kind of hatred will that breed in their hearts? This war will never end"
(Reena, 16 year old girl)

Thus, for many young people, the outbreak of war played upon fundamental fears of death and anxieties about the growth of hatred in the world, a world that they would have to grow up into, but which is, from their point of view, already 'spoiled' by adults who cannot settle their differences and have to resort to war
"we're young and we have open minds, older people tend to have tunnel vision and have fixed ideas [...] after all it's men who starts wars"
(Kashif, 16 year old boy)

Differences between people were ignored in favour of a global human perspective, framed by a discourse of Human Rights
"thousands of pounds are being spent on destroying buildings, innocent people are being killed and innocent people have their rights too, they have a right to live [..] they should have their rights protected [..] husbands are supporting it but who's going to support their wives and their kids if they die? [..] what kind of world will young people grow up into? the world is being spoilt for the younger generations by these people [...] and it's always men isn't it who cause wars?"
(Gita, 16 year old Hindu girl)

The economic as well as the human consequences of war were discussed, not simply in terms of the rise in the price of petrol, but also on local employment. As Heathrow airport is one of the main local employers, within a month of the outbreak of war, hundreds of parents were made redundant, or had their hours reduced, which increased financial stress at home. Security at the airport tightened dramatically and parents brought home news about armed police on patrol which heightened tension at work. Fears of 'terrorist' attacks at the

airport, and elsewhere, were rife, and many young people expressed fears about their parents' safety. Clearly, the local repercussions of such a devasting global event also serve to mediate responses to the war and its representations; to bring it closer to home and to remind young people of the interdependence of the local and global spheres

4.17 THE SEDUCTION OF IMAGES OF 'SPECTACULAR DESTRUCTION'

If fear of death and the human consequences of war characterised initial responses to the war, this was counterbalanced by the seductive and compelling imagery of warfare. This was especially the case among certain boys who expressed a fascination with war technology, a fascination which boys comics and 'war' videos have partly created and heavily exploited. During the first week of the war, it was quite common to hear boys engaged in an enthusiastic debate about the relative merits of scud missiles, interceptors, patriots and 'precision' bombing. As one boy retorted, with dispassionate aplomb, to his friend's comment that the war was getting boring

"No way man, the war's all right, all right as long as the blowing up and killing goes on [..]"

(Sandeep, 15 year old boy)

However, this kind of 'Gung Ho' attitude may be more a product of rivalry among boys wishing to present a 'macho' image than to any insensitivity to the casualties of war. Despite this, many boys did become intrigued by the images of 'spectacular destruction'. For example, one girl complained that she had not seen her boyfriend since the outbreak of the war since

"he doesn't come to school any more, he just stays at home, glued to the set, and his mates go round and they sit there all day waiting for another scud missile attack. I think there's something gross about that myself [..] and now all he talks about when he phones is scud missiles, interceptors and all that. I don't know what he's going on about half the time"

(Perminder, 16 year old girl)

However, as the war continued, familiarity with images 'spectacular destruction' either led to boredom or to contempt. One pattern of response was to curtail or to avoid watching the news
"I stopped watching the news about a week ago because I found I was getting a kind of thrill out of watching all the bombings and frustrated when there was nothing 'exciting' on and I thought that was a bit sick [..] I'm anti-war really"
(Hersh, 16 year old Hindu boy)
Few young people sustained their initial involvement in watching the war and, after about two weeks, the 'topic' dropped in popularity to the bottom of the conversational agenda among a majority of young people.

The data would tend to support Williams' arguments about the 'culture of distance' in which 'wars of distance' and the very precise images of 'spectacular destruction', of 'flashes on targets', are so pervasive as to counteract, and even undermine, our awareness of the human cost and tragedy of war. Certainly, 16 year old boys in Southall, socialised into a video culture of Rambo and other 'male' targetted genres, consume more 'war' based videos and video games than girls. Without speculating or imputing effects, it is clear that when viewing violent and war videos with mixed gender groups, boys display their fascination with images of military destruction and appear to be far more seduced by warfare than girls. This is evident in their talk. In contrast, clear distinctions are made between the images of war in news reports and video films by some girls
'It's just like a film (the TV coverage) but we know this is real, in films war is glorified but here it's not [..] if anything watching the Gulf war has shown me that being a soldier is not glamourous or fun, it's a job in which people get paid to kill others'
(Kamalpreet, 16 year old girl'

Certainly, it was easy in the early days of the war to ignore the human casualties of war since the visual emphasis in news reports was on the military technology but this fact did not go unnoticed
"All you see are scud missiles flying around in the sky and interceptors colliding in space it makes it out like it's star wars, you never see

anyone being killed, just buildings being destroyed, it's as if this was a war without human beings"
(Navdeep, 16 year old boy)

Further, gender differences in 'involvement' with the war arise when one examines the patterns of identification with the 'characters' engaged in fighting and reporting the war. Certainly, nobody identified with 'war leaders'. Boys identified most with the pilots returning from 'sorties'. These were the heroes. In their talk they express sympathy with them because of the dangers they faced; they talked at length about their comments upon returning from a sortie; they discussed the terror and thrill of conducting a 'sortie'; they admired their bravery. Their accounts of the war were seen to be more authentic than any other
"they're not exactly gonna make it up are they?"
(Kamaldeep, 15 year old boy)

Those subscribing to Cable TV (20% (N=217) see Appendix 1, section 4.2) considered that they were better served by it than by the four main channels. Cable News Network (CNN) coverage of the war was considered far superior partly because of the courage that reporters showed (CNN reporters had easier access than others) and partly because, at least at the outbreak of the war, footage was thought to be neither edited nor censored
"I was watching the football when the news flash came on so I switched to CNN immediately. I watched it all night and it was uncensored and uncut whereas ITV kept going back to the studio to their own issues and commentators [,,] the actual reporters in the hotels in Baghdad were describing it, as it happened, it was amazing, it was like being there yourself, you know [..] you could see a reporter sitting there, sweating, going "phew that was really close", then he'd duck and go 'sshh! there's another coming !"[..] it was live and you know that went on for two days and I watched most of it, but then they started censoring it [..] that was really good coverage [..] that's the only news programme I watch now [..] it shows you everything" (Abjinder, 16 year old boy)

The above extract highlights the power of 'live' TV coverage to bring 'wars of distance' close to the viewer, to create a sense of simultaneity and the illusion of being there. CNN's coverage, thus, generated a greater feeling of proximity than any other news channel achieved. The identification with the reporters, as witnesses and narrators of the war is clear. Also, the idea that, as a cable subscriber, one is given privileged insight into the war, is apparent.

For girls, the point of identification was Kate Adie. She was admired as a heroine, a woman at 'war', willing to brave danger so that the viewers 'back home' could be informed
"I think Kate Adie's great, stuck in that army hut with her camaouflage uniform, it must be rough for her but I think she's a really good reporter [..] she seems to get to the bottom of what's going on [..] I bet a lot of the soldiers fancy her"
(Gurinder, 16 year old girl)

The nurses were a further point of identification for many girls
"Humara keeps saying that she wants to go there as a nurse and we tease her that she only wants to go for all the dishy soldiers [..] I would go not for the soldiers but to help people [..] I would, I really would like to go"
(Baljit 17 year old girl)

The images of war and the language of war entered into young people's everyday conversations. A whole new set of vocabulary was acquired and Gulf jokes did not take long to circulate (see Appendix on Comedy chapter). Humour is a way of dissipating the anxiety and tension which some young people feel but do not like to admit. One 16 year old girl suffering from an outbreak of acne was approached by a boy who commented "that's a pretty bad scud attack on your face"
She slapped his face.

The casual and light hearted manner of speaking about the war which characterised some young people's 'Gulf talk' can be explained by the competitive style of interaction among male peers. 'Scoring a point'

takes precedence over any more serious discussion of the issues. Although some enjoy pointing out the ironies inherent in the situation
"Britain built all these bunkers for Iraq and now (laughs) they can't even blow up their own bunkers"
(Jagjit, 15 year old boy)

4.18 PERCEPTIONS OF CENSORSHIP AND PROPAGANDA

Far from taking an uncritical view of TV's coverage of the war, most young people who were interviewed seem to adhere to a conspiracy theory of the media. The most common refrain across all the discussions is that the news is biased
"It only shows you one side of the story, it makes out that everything that the allies do is right"
(Herjinder, 16 year old girl)

The news coverage of the Gulf, because it is censored on both sides is seen as propaganda, a form of manipulation which can brainwash and mislead people.
"A lot of my friends they just believe what they see in the news but if you didn't question the news it could brainwash you, I mean how do we really know what's going on? How do we know that the government isn't misleading us [..] they said that the allied attacks had 80% 'success rate', now they're saying that 80% 'found their target' but didn't necessarily bomb them, so that's the news misleading people innit?"
(Navdeep, 16 year old boy)

Others commented upon the prevalence of images of blood-soaked Israeli casualties and the absence of images of Iraqui casualties; on the abundance of images of 'successful' allied attacks but the absence of 'successful' Iraqui attacks; on the primacy given to justifying the allied intervention as legitimate but the lack of attention given to Saddam Hussein's point of view; on the portrayal of American war leaders as heroes and of Saddam Hussein as a villain, 'a Hitler', as 'The Bastard of Baghdad', labels, circulated by the tabloid press
"I limit myself to news about the war because I know there's a lot of

propaganda and that it's not really truthful [..] the MOD has issued a 32 point plan for censoring news"

But most young people realised that the war was censored on both sides and that TV's coverage of the war is selective, biased and partial. Various reasons were examined to explain the partiality of the coverage; for the sake of national security; to keep up public morale; to sell newspapers and fill air time; to avoid a public backlash by those who have relatives risking their lives and fighting out there and to reinforce public opinion that the allies are right

Reena - But the public have a right to know!

Kashif - isn't there a higher right for social order

Chokker - truth is not possible in war, look what happened in America when the public found out what was going on in Vietnam they freaked out!

The realisation of the fact that truth is the first casualty of war was fairly widespread among young people. Most realised that truth is filtered and that news, 'like a poem' has to be interpreted. Critical distance is also apparent in comments on the portrayal of the Iraqui people

"it's as if the ordinary Iraqui people have no dignity they are not given the dignity of human beings and that's not right, that makes me feel sad because it's as if their lives are worth nothing but the life of one British soldier is precious"

(Navdeep, 16 year old boy)

Many questioned the legitimacy of the war and the justifications of the allied interventions given in the news media

"Kuwait stole Iraqui oil during the Iran /Iraq war and so they owed Saddam Hussein money which he was entitled to".

(Saira, 16 year old Muslim girl)

Others take a more historical view and claim that it was the West which drew up the boundaries in the Middle East after the second world war and that Kuwait once belonged to Iraq. Others considered that the allied

attacks on Iraq were not justified because it was an Arab problem and should have been sorted out by Arabs. Many speculate as to whether America (and America is cited rather than the Allies) would have acted if India had invaded Pakistan. Indeed, the American presence in the Middle East was seen to be motivated by their desire to protect their interests in oil.

"If India invaded Pakistan would the Americans send all those troops in? no way! it all comes down to oil, power and money, that's why the Americans are there and I don't think money is worth one human life"
(Reena, 16 year old girl)

The argument that the American presence in the Middle East is justified as an act of retaliation against Iraq's violation of the UN agreement or in order to protect the Human Rights of Kuwaitis was given short shrift by many

"they (Americans) don't really care about the people or the Human rights, there were no Human Rights in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia has been condemned by Amnesty International for torture and in Kuwait only 7% of the population have been allowed to vote [..] I think they should have Human Rights and that those people should not be killed because they happen to live in a certain country"
(Hersh, 17 year old boy)

The notion of Human Rights returns repeatedly in discussions. Doubtless, this has something to do with the fact that at age 15 in this school all students undergo a course on Human Rights in their Humanities lessons. Thus a conception of Human Rights combined with a widespread condemnation of war, per se, by most young people, in some discussions, priveleges the human consequences of war. Those who give their full support to the allies are seen to have derived all their views, exclusively, from the media and because they have no alternative source of information they are seen to be victims of propaganda

"(among my friends) the one's who think America are right are the ones who've been watching the news and taken it for granted, they've taken all their views from there and been influenced by it quite a lot so they're not really thinking for themselves and they havent got any other

news or views to compare it with, they just soak up the propaganda"
(Abjinder, 17 year old boy)

It would be difficult to make a general statement about whether young people in Southall are more influenced by the media or by their parents on the issue of the Gulf War but it would seem that in families where parents do hold strong political opinions and where news is regularly and conscientiously followed, the influence of parent's opinions is significant.

4.19 MEDIATING FACTORS IN THE RECEPTION OF GULF NEWS; PARENT'S POLITICAL CULTURE

Young people derive their views from their parents as well as from the media but the views of some parents do not coincide with the dominant views circulated by the British media which supported and justified the Allied attacks. Many Indian parents' views on the war are premised on sharp distinction between the East and the West and there is a strong tendency to take an anti-American stance
"I get quite a lot from my parents [..] they have lived through past experiences and they know for a fact that there is a divide between East and west, so when we listen to them we get their image as well so we think within that frame as well and I believe that they've gone there just to show western superiority [..] America provided a lot of aid to Pakistan, and that's why a lot of Indians are suspicious of America. I believe that Pakistan are puppets of America [..]
(Navdeep, 17 year old boy)

It is partly through news viewing in the family that young people gain insight into their parent's political attitudes since in this context, responses to news items, involve the expression of political opinions. It is in this context that some young people have become aware of their parents anti-American sentiments
"My dad over-reacts to everything on the news, especially Indian politics [..] he keeps going on that the British are making all this propaganda about Russia cos, you know, India is an ally of Russia"
(Nirmal, 18 year old boy)

It would appear that historically, Indians have had closer allegiances politically with Russia than with America
"[..] Our dads are anti-American because of the way they dominate the world and think they own the world. They think they are the world's policeman and on they have their own theories about why America is involved in the Middle east and, like in the Pakistan-Indian border dispute, America is supplying Pakistan with weapons, they seem to have a lot of proof so they believe it [..] they say the Americans are evil[..] watching the news with my dad, it's a one way slag off of America
(Shelley, 18 year old Hindu boy)

Therefore it is perhaps not surprising that many young people in Southall take a more critical approach to the western media's portrayal of the war than might their white counterparts since their parent's past experiences of colonialism, the struggle for independence, migration and settlement will have sensitised them politically in ways which differ markedly from the average member of the British public.

Similarly, although many young people do not actively support Saddam Hussein, they try to understand his point of view and hold more nuanced political views than they otherwise might. Some hold him in some esteem for standing up to the powerful forces of the West which are seen to dominate the world
"In a way Saddam Hussein has already won the war, I watched it on TV and this is word for word, "He has done the impossible, he has stood up to the West- and in most Arab's eyes that means he has won"
(Reena, 16 year old girl)
"some of my friends respect Saddam Hussein for standing up to America and Britain whereas others think they are the most powerful forces so <u>we</u> can't stand up to them"
(Navdeep, 17 year old boy)

4.20 "WHO ARE WE?" QUESTIONS OF RELIGIOUS, NATIONAL AND 'RACIAL' IDENTITIES

One of the most persistently surprising aspects of the discussions held by young people in the first weeks of the Gulf War is the constant

shifting of categories to describe the adversaries. The opponents on either side of the equation vary; at one moment the war is seen to be a confrontation between the Middle East and America; at other times it is seen to be Christians against Muslims; at times it is seen as white people against 'Asians'; East versus West; Arabs against the Allies or blacks against whites. In their discussions young people take up a variety of positions, moving across and between these categories

The multiplicity of points of view and the contradictions between them are most acute for young Muslims

"My mother is on Saddam Hussein's side, like she preaches that Islam is behind Saddam Hussein and she is behind Islam. It's like here (school) I almost live in both worlds, here, it's like our side and then I go home and and it's like Saddam Hussein is Nawab (prince) and stuff. At home I have to keep the family order so I can't exactly have opposing views to my parents, like showing them opposing views and when I go to a highly English area, I have to keep social order, you know, whatever the public view is, you might have your own views but you can't express them as well. I might say I'm for Saddam Hussein and then 4,000 English people will come down on me[..]

(Kashif, 16 year old Muslim boy)

The transcripts in Appendix 4, 192 highlights the ambivalence that many young Muslims felt at the time of the war. Kashif articulates the nature of the contradictions experienced by many

"[..] what is a British Muslim? is he more British or more Muslim? you can't exactly have an equal choice of both, it's difficult to say but I think I'm more westernised, I wouldn't say I'm British because we're in two societies at the same time, one is Islamic society, but not to the true extent, and the other is westernised society, but bearing away from it. If you look at the small things in these societies they are totally different like your behaviour and role"

(Kashif, 16 year old Muslim boy)

Kashif is both 'westernised' and Muslim in varying degrees in different situations. He shifts his position according to context in order, as he

says to keep both the family order, based upon Islam, and the social order, based upon western views. Trying to cope with the variety of roles he has to play and the expectations demanded of him is assisted by the distinction he makes between his public and private self. In front of his father he will confirm his role as a 'pure Muslim' in order to avoid conflict and resentment. His parents would not easily accept his claim to being an atheist. Similarly, at school he finds that he takes the allies side

"Like here when I say 'we' I mean the allies but at home I say 'them'".
(Kashif, 16 year old Muslim boy)

The shifting of 'position' according to different contexts is commonplace but when young people talk among themselves, they feel at liberty to express themselves more freely and fully.

Many young people in Southall felt threatened by the rise in racist attacks against Muslims and 'Asians'more generally

"didn't you hear that Sikhs were attacked in Chicago, Sikhs were attacked! Sikhs were threatened because people thought they were Iraquis, we're all pakis as far as some people are concerned".
(Anopama, 16 year old Sikh girl)

The rise in attacks on 'Asians' made young people aware that some of the more ignorant members of the public conflate Iraquis with Asians due to skin colour.This is then interpreted to mean that this war could be seen as a 'race' war between whites and brown people

"some people don't make distinctions they just say we're all black it's like two different races fighting against each other but America doesn't want to admit it they just cover it up"
(Herjinder, 16 year old Sikh girl)

This line of argument leads some to identify with a non specified Arab position

"the Americans think we're all inferior in the Middle East if you go down to the basics, are we inferior?"
(Sandhyia, 16 year old Sikh girl)

The war provoked a heightened sense of vulnerability to racist attack and to the threats posed to young people's religious identity, as well as, their nationality and citizenship status. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the scars of experiencing partition in India, expulsion from East Africa, racism in Britain, remain and make many parents highly sensitive to the vulnerability of their religious or national status in a country. This sense of vulnerability is evidenced in the following exchange

Anopama - Doesn't this Iraqui war seem like a 'race' war?
(chorus of yeah)
it's like two different races fighting against eachother but America just doesn't want to admit it, they cover it up

Reena - what if there's a huge backlash here?

Anopama - if the war started here where would we fit in? we call ourselves British

Reena - no one cares if we're British or about where we come from, we're just all coloured

Herjinder - we're not British and we're not Indian if you went to live in India you wouldn't fit in there

Anopama - we can't fit in, we can't, if I'm here I'm a Paki and there I'm a gora (white person) in my jeans, innit?

Herjinder - we can't think their way, there are a lot of differences between east and west

Anopama - we can take the best of both worlds but if there was a rift between India and England where would we fit in?

Reena - we think west laws here in school and we go home and they inflict east laws on us there

Anopama - when Saddam Hussein calls for a holy war where does that leave us Sikhs and Hindus?

War can do much to unsettle and disturb one's sense of security and belonging but the heightened sense of vulnerability and insecurity that the war provoked is revealing of deeper ambiguities concerning how one defines oneself in relation to significant 'others'. The contradiction between being addressed by the news media as a member of the British

public was severely undermined by the rise in racist attacks around Britain and the widespread questioning of Muslims' sense of loyalty to Britain and to the allies during the war. Their TV experience of the war also heightened their awareness of how they are perceived by some members of the British public and this, in turn, generated debate about the vulnerability of their position in Britain; about the difficulties of 'fitting in' in both India and Britain. As a result of these discussions carried out informally in the school context, members of the sixth from proceeded to organise a debate involving the three Southall sixth forms. The motion posed was 'This house is British'. The final vote was 32 to 31 in favour!

CHAPTER FIVE

'TV AD TALK' AS A MEANS OF DISTINGUISHING HIERARCHIES OF TASTE AND STYLE IN THE PEER CULTURE.

5.0 INTRODUCTION

Much of the research into young people and advertising has attempted to assess the potentially harmful effects it may have on them (Palmer et al, 1980). The underlying assumption which informs this research is that advertising is a 'hidden persuader' (Packard, 1957). Advertising is seen to be intrinsically dishonest and deceptive and to have the power to stimulate 'false needs', either for specific products or for consumer goods, and consumerism, more generally. The view that young people are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to the persuasive powers of advertising characterises much of the research and public debate on this subject (Young, 1986). The discussion of advertising in this thesis does not try to refute the idea that advertising has effects since, clearly, an entire industry is based upon this premise. Rather, it is argued that the effects of advertising, per se, are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to prove. TV advertising cannot be isolated from the broader social and cultural contexts in which advertisements are viewed and discussed. Yet, few studies have attempted to investigate the relationship between young people and TV advertising in the context of other social relationships. It is the aim of this chapter to attempt such an analysis from the point of view of young people themselves.

Three key propositions are elaborated in this chapter:
First, talking about TV ads, and the products they promote, serves to identify, distinguish, critique and endorse hierarchies of taste and style in the local and peer cultures under study. The peer culture is thus a culture in which, from a position of limited consumer power, young people attempt to construct self and group definitions at the most fundamental level through articulating preferences and distinctions in what they eat, drink, wear and the products that they use on a daily basis. As Bourdieu (1984) has demonstrated
"Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects,

classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed [...] art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences" (1984:6).

The data to be presented in this chapter attests to the success of advertisers in targetting and reaching the teenage consumers in Southall. Through their talk about TV advertisements, it is clear that the majority of young people in Southall are, in many respects, no different to youths elsewhere in Britain in the sense that they are consuming the same advertisements and consider themselves to be part of a wider teenage cultural scene, dominated by American popular music, style and fashion. TV advertisements are consumed literally and culturally; buying a product also means buying into an image, an identity, a fantasy, a feeling and even, as we shall see in the case of the Coca Cola advertisements, an ideology - an ideology of an American teenage lifestyle and of America itself. Arguably, America, as experienced through the media has itself become the prime object of consumption, a symbol of pleasure (Frith, 1989; Webster, 1988)

Not only do Southall youth generally find the advertisements targetted at teenagers appealing but they recognise that they are being addressed and positioned as teenager consumers in an international youth market. However, they are not simply 'victims' of the American teenage market, they are also producers of the their own youth cultures which are, in certain respects, locally and culturally specific. As members of a cultural minority in Britain, they also consume Indian advertisements and products which leads us to the second proposition.

'TV ad talk' becomes a means of talking about cultural differences and can be used to clarify distinctions between 'American', 'Indian' and 'British' consumer preferences. This is achieved through the comparisons of American, Indian and English ads in peer discussions. Aesthetic judgements about cultural differences in advertising style and

techniques are also made. However, the hierarchies of taste and style which are endorsed in the parental culture differ markedly from those in the peer culture. Thus, 'TV ad talk' in the peer culture often constitutes a cross-fire of judgements through which young people define themselves and their tastes and preferences in relation to, and frequently in opposition to, those of their parents.

The third proposition advanced in this chapter is that 'TV ad talk' allows for talk that would otherwise appear utopian: unrealistic aspirations and desires and fantasies gain varying degrees of plausibility and credibility. This is partly due to the fantasies and promises inherent in advertisements themselves. Thus, ad talk often reproduces the discourse of advertsing itself; how easy life would be <u>if</u> one used this product; how successful, popular or beautiful one would be <u>if</u> one bought this product. This underlines the way in ads are perceived as not only selling a product but a set of associated values or qualities which are somehow 'magically' transferred to or conferred upon the consumer (Williams, 1980). TV advertisements can be seen to function as myths providing people with simple stories and explanations through which ideals and values are communicated and through which people can organise their thoughts and experiences and come to make sense of the world they live in.

However, clear differences emerge in how TV advertisements are talked about by 16-year olds in Southall, not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of differences in 'cultural competence'. Thus, low educational achievers and teenage migrants will tend to interpret TV advertisements more literally than their more academic counterparts. The latter prefer ads which challenge the viewer's ability to spot cultural references and enigmas and which flatter their intelligence in appreciating what they see as more subtle and sophisticated forms of humour. They also pay more attention to the formal and stylistic features of TV advertisements, as well as to their persuasive strategies while their less academic conterparts focus their discussions more on the product itself.
(see appendix 5 pp 255 for an example of TV ad talk among A-level students)

The chapter is divided into five parts. The first part presents a brief summary of the results of a mini-survey of 70 sixteen year olds which provides background information on their engagement with TV advertisements. The survey was useful in identifying the categories of TV advertisements which young people claim to find most salient and thus helped to organise and structure the data in the rest of this chapter. These categories are: ads for food, soft drinks, jeans, trainers, face, hair and body products. It is worthy of note that all these categories relate to products which most young people can afford. Furthermore, they concern the body whether defined in terms of its physical requirements or social presentation (Bourdieu, 1984:192-3).

The second part explores the cultural specificities of young people's engagement with food ads. The appeal of fast food ads, such as those for Mac Donald's and Pizza Hut, is examined in the context of the local 'teenage scene' and youth leisure activities. The interest in ads for frozen, and especially microwavable fast foods, is situated in the context of local and domestic food consumption.

In the third part on soft drinks ads, the appeal of the Coca Cola ads is examined in relation to young people's perceptions of an 'ideal' American teenage lifestyle. This is contrasted by their ad talk concerning a soft drink ad targetted at 'Asians' on British television.

The fourth part examines 'ad talk' about jeans and trainers. It highlights the incorporation of Black American 'street culture' into local style and fashion. It presents a typology of distinctions in local style and fashion, gleaned from informant's 'TV ad talk' about Levi Jeans and LA gear trainers.

The fifth part focusses on talk about products for hair, face and body and highlights teenagers pre-occupation with their physical appearance and the criteria which they invoke to judge their own and other's attractiveness. Skin colour emerges as a particulalry important factor in this respect.

5.1 ADVERTISING SURVEY RESULTS

In this section the key results of the survey on advertising are highlighted and interpreted in the light of ethnographic data. A full account of the survey, including figures, can be found in Appendix 5. This section forms a backdrop against which the later ethnographic data may be more clearly assessed.

Among the youths who participated in the survey, TV ads are seen more as a form of entertainment than as a means of persuasion or information. Despite this, the primary functions of advertising to persuade consumers to buy products and to inform them of the existence of 'new' products, are recognized. A majority of young people enjoy discussing TV advertisements but they are discussed and enjoyed more among peers than in the family context. More girls report that they discuss ads with their friends than do boys. Yet, just under half of all respondents claim that they find most ads boring and hardly ever discuss them. Just under 40% claim that when the ads come on they usually go and get something to eat or drink. This would suggest a high degree of selectivity in the ads they like and pay attention to.

Young people may at times influence their parent's consumer decisions, especially those who act as 'mediators' of white British culture for their parents. Thus, if an everday household product has a tempting advertisement, over a third of respondents claim they will ask their parents to buy it but this is reported as more common among girls than boys. Mothers are seen to be more prone to buy certain products because of an TV advertisement than fathers. However, young people consider themselves to be more motivated by ads into purchasing products than their parents. Just over half of all respondents report that they have bought a product because of the ad, but more females do so than males (see Appendix 5, Table 5.6. 5.7 and 5.8).

The majority of young people claim that they take most notice of ads with good music, a funny storyline and attractive characters. Other criteria, identified by less than half of respondents, include; 'a good slogan', 'ads showing products I would like to have' and 'ads which show

products which relate to my dreams'. The least important criteria of interest are reported to be; 'ads which relate to my ambitions', 'ads with young people in them', 'ads with a lifestyle that appeals to me', 'ads showing things I can afford', and, least of all, 'ads that are honest' (see Appendix 5, Table 5.10 p 232)

Music and humour are, therefore, the elements found most appealing in a TV advertisement. In recent years, the use of songs from the 1960's and 1970's in TV advertising has led to their re-launch by record companies and their success in the popular music charts. The lyrics, tunes, humorous catch-phrases and storylines which become integrated into peer talk are an important part of young people's engagment with TV ads. Advertising agencies conduct exhaustive research on their advertisements prior to broadcasting them. Feedback from viewer panels has undoubtedly contributed to the widespread use of humour and more subtle forms of persuasion in many advertisements.

The most popular categories of ads among both boys and girls are those for soft drinks and food. Thereafter, striking gender differences emerge; boys state a preference for ads for beer, Electricity Shares, British Satellite Broadcasting and Hamlet cigars. These advertisements are appealing to boys because they combine popular soundtracks with humourous storylines. The most popular advertisement of all among girls is the ad for LA Gear trainers, which 'stars' Michael Jackson, followed by those for Gillette and Levi 501 jeans. All these ads feature male characters whom the girls find attractive. The attractiveness of male characters in ads is one of the most prominent criteria of appeal for girls regardless of the product in question (see Appendix 5, Tables 5.20/21 and 5.30 pp 234-36 ; 239)

Thus, the majority of ads which are found to be appealing are ads for products aimed at satisfying body requirements in a biological or social sense. Girls appear to be more susceptible to TV advertisements than boys if one takes their significantly higher response rate to the questionnaire and their more enthusiastic talk about ads as an index. The majority of girls consider that advertisements for soft drinks,

jeans, trainers, face, hair and body products are targetted at them compared with significantly fewer boys.

It may be that the comparatively low response rate among boys, rather than reflecting any entrenched gender differences in perceptions of ads, is more a reflection of their reluctance to express enthusiasm, in the peer context, for fear of appearing 'uncool'. It may also be that they do not wish to portray themselves as susceptible to TV advertisements. However, among girls it seems to be quite acceptable to exhibit enthusiasm and express admiration for the advertisements and the male characters in them. Such gender differences in forms of expressiveness may extend into survey context where, despite the fact that the questionnaires were completed individually, and mostly in silence, in the sixth form common room, the pressures of conformity to peer group norms (i.e. acting or being 'cool') prevails.

Washing powder advertisements appear to be the least favoured among girls and, to a lesser extent, among boys (see Appendix 5, Table 5.4c, p 242) There is a strong tendency among girls to reject the gender stereotyping in these ads and to use them, especially in mixed gender discussions, to drive home a point to the boys about the inequalities of domestic duties in their homes (see transcripts Appendix 5 The advertisements for Radon washing powder are much maligned due to what is seen as the very banal and direct selling techniques which are found to be unsophisticated and unsubtle and therefore to insult the viewer's intelligence. However, it is also recognised by some informants that this is the mark of their success. The following extract from a discussion between two boys highlights typical reactions to the Radon ads. It also indicates an understanding of the way advertisements generally 'work' better when they employ subtle persuasive techniques and he suggests they may act on one's 'unconscious' mind. Yet this is counterbalanced by the next statement which attributes a predominantly informative role to advertising

"The Radon ads use reverse psychology techniques, the ads are so bad that everyone starts talking about how bad they are and that sort of gets the product into people's minds [..] ads aren't supposed to act on

your conscience - is that how you say it - your conscious mind- they're supposed to act in a more indirect sort of way - they're not necessarily putting a strong message across but just letting you know the product is there on the shelves'
(Nirmal, 16 year old boy)

Finally, in general, boys have much greater spending power and receive more pocket money than girls (see Appendix 5, Tables 5.70; 5.80; 5.90) This is partly due to the differential treatment and higher status of boys in most Punjabi families and partly due to the fact that boys live and socialise to a much greater extent in public than girls and so require more financial resources to do so. Boys are allowed more freedom and have greater opportunities for pursuing part-time employment and are, therefore, able to earn more outside the home than girls (see Appendix 1, section 3.5). Though boys and girls compete with each other for status through their consumption practices, such gender differences in available resources and access to public life generally put girls at a disadvantage as consumers compared with their male peers.

5.2 FAST AND FROZEN FOOD CULTURE

TV advertisements generate talk about the basic structure of material existence. Food is a basic human requirement and a fundamental aspect of material culture. According to Bourdieu (1984:79) taste in food is the archetype of all tastes. It is also one of the most significant markers of ethnic or cultural difference in plural societies. In their talk about and stimulated by food ads, young people provide an account of their tastes and preferences in food and consider a range of factors affecting their food consumption; cultural differences in what one eats, religious restrictions on foods, health factors, norms associating 'slimness' with attractiveness and financial constraints. They also highlight the impact of domestic technologies, for example, the microwave and fridge freezer, on their food consumption and the way in which these have stimulated the purchase of pre-packaged foods.

Several themes emerge in young people's 'ad talk' about food products; the negotiation of their diet with parents; parental attempts to control

their diet; statements about their own food preferences, as well as aesthetic judgements about cultural differences in advertising style. Through their ad talk an image emerges of how they behave, and would like to behave, as consumers and how their consumption is seen as one means of defining self in relation to others; their parents, peers and the wider society. Through their 'ad talk' about food we gain insight into the local and cultural specificities of their food consumption. It is to the local context that we now turn our attention.

One of the most obvious consequences of the migration and settlement of South Asians in Britain has been the widespread growth of Indian restaurants across the country. This provides a nice example of how white people have adapted their eating habits and routines to the presence of South Asian families in Britain. Southall is the major Indian food production and shopping centre in Britain. The majority of local retail outlets are owned and mangaged by Indians who sell Indian food products. There are also a plethora of local cafes and restaurants which service the local population. However, there are no major national supermarkets chains or fast food outlets. Thus, the availability of certain types of English food products is limited. If one wants a pizza or a Mac Donald's hamburger one is obliged to travel to one of the adjacent towns. This is a both a source of complaint and an opportunity for escape from Southall among local youngsters since going to the cinema and having a pizza or a Mac Donald's is part of the teenage leisure 'scene'.

The public and private consumption of 'English' or 'American' food is not simply part of the teenage scene but also a way of feeling part of the wider society and culture. It is also a means of distinguishing oneself from those who are seen to eat 'only' Indian food. TV advertisements are the main source of information about 'new' food products on the market, food products which are not always available locally. Food advertisements are seen to be, in the first instance informative, rather than persuasive, since they give young people and their parents some insight into the range of food products available in the wider society.

However, the majority of the young people in this study eat Indian food in their homes on a daily basis. The school is required to provide Indian and Halal food for pupils but, ironically, it is the white staff who consume it avidly, much to the amusement of the young people who consider it to be of poor quality. Students who eat in the canteen prefer, what they refer to as, 'English' food which consists of chip and beans, pizzas, sausages or fritters. Some go to the local shop and buy a can of Coke and a packet of crisps, others go to the local Tandoori cafe, 'Rita's (a 'hang-out' for teenagers). Some get fish and chips whilst a small number spend their dinnner money in the games arcades. Approximately, £1- £2 is spent, per day, on lunch by most young people who do not receive 'free lunches' or return home for lunch. The arrangements made for lunch not only act as a means of organising peer group relations during the lunch hour but is also provides an indication of one's consumer 'power' or lack of it, as well as, a way of distinguishing 'cultural' tastes in food.

'English' food (not of the school canteen variety) is found to be very appealing to young people in Southall

"when I was younger it was like a delicacy having English food, you just never had it and you didn't really know what it was and you felt you were missing out on something [..] then I went on a school trip [..] I was glad to get home for some home cooking"

(Nirmal, 16 year old boy)

There is a tendency in the peer context for young people to protest a dislike of Indian food. However, the protest may be a way of appearing 'westernised' by procaliming a preference for 'English' food. Alternatively, it can be a way of expressing resistance to parental attempts to control their diet and a complaint about what they see as the lack of variety in their day to day food consumption, rather than a distaste for Indian food, per se. In the following exchange, a group of 16 year old girls discuss the special appeal of the Mac Donald's ads and express resentment at their parents attempts to control their diet

Amrit - the thing is mum and dad only (words underlined are their emphases) cook Indian food

Dalvinder - I don't like Indian food very much

Tejinder - especially not 365 days a year

Dalvinder - then it gets disgusting, it's like we have to have Indian food we have it every lunchtime and again in the evening but we have to have it in the family

Tejinder - with your mum and dad you have to sit down and eat chapatis, you have to if you don't you get into trouble and they start giving you a lecture 'Oh! you're turning English, you're not Indian and stuff like that

Dalvinder - and if you don't eat your dal (lentils) they give you a lecture on the poor, starving people in Ethiopia [..] but you can parcel my food to them, give me a Mc Donald's any day

Me - why?

Dalvinder- I don't know 'cos it makes your day', it's just a feeling you get, 'it makes your day'

Tejinder - it makes your mouth water

Thus, the negotiation of what one eats is but another facet of the way young people negotiate their relationship not only to their parent's culture but to their parent's attempts to control their behaviour. The compulsion expressed in the repeated and heavily emphasised phrase 'have to have' is suggestive of the rebellious attitude toward such control which may only be expressed in the peer context and rarely, if ever, at home. But there is a double edge to the resentment expressed here. On the one hand, their appreciation of 'English' food is seen by their parents as one further index of their 'westernisation' but most parents try to retain some control over how far their children become 'westernised'. On the other hand, Indian food is an important and distinctive aspect of Indian culture and to rebel, or show a dislike or, a distaste for Indian food is implicitly perceived, by some parents, to be a rebellion against 'the culture'.

The solution to the problem of eating Indian food everyday is, for some, provided by fast foods such as Mac Donald's hamburgers. When asked why Mac Donald's hamburger's are considerd so appealing, the response was formulated by the slogan, 'it makes your day' and followed by, 'it's just a feeling you get', an example of the way in which 'ad speak' becomes integrated into everday verbal intercourse. The nature of the 'feeling' becomes apparent later in this discussion when notions of 'freedom', 'choice' and financial independence are related to the ability to eat what you want. But the 'feeling' is also associated with a trip to Mac Donald's and with capturing a moment of 'freedom' outside Southall; freedom from the watchful eye of the parental culture and freedom to participate on the 'teenage scene'. The Mac Donald's in the adjacent town, Hounslow, is a place where boys and girls can safely meet; where courting rituals are conducted discretely. On several occasions I have accompanied informants to Mac Donald's only to find that large groups of Southall 'escapees' have occupied the entire upstairs section.

Dalvinder - It's good to get out of Southall, go down Hounslow with me mates and sit in MacDonald's, get a Big Mac and a coke
Amrit - yeah, and have a good gossip
Dalvinder - and check out the guys (giggling)
Amrit - and get checked out by the guys

Mac Donald's and Pizza Hut are considered to be the cheapest and the 'best' of fast foods. In a survey of 240 young Asians in West London, (40% of whom were from Southall) after the cinema, (69%) 'Burger Bars' (46%) was the most regularly frequented of places (Channel A, 1991). So, whilst there is a culturally specific angle to young people's engagement with fast food ads, the apparent rejection of Indian food by many young people in the peer culture can be seen as a gesture, as a way of exerting one's independence, social and cultural, from parental control. Moreover, choosing what one eats, or does not eat, can also be seen as an attempt to exert some control over one's own body. At age 16 one's body in many respects seems to be beyond one's control. Rapid and often

sudden physical and hormonal changes can be quite difficult to deal with and some young people respond by trying to gain more control over what they eat. Girls, in particular, but by no means exclusively, are under considerable peer and media pressure to look slim. The most current word is 'fit'. While the word 'fit' applies to both genders, for boys, it generally implies muscular fitness whereas for girls it implies slimness. Distinguishing oneself by having a 'slim', 'fit' body is an important marker of attractiveness.

Dieting is very common among 16 year old girls and cases of anorexia nervosa are not uncommon in this age group, highlighting the more acute attempts to control the body. Fasting, for religious reasons is also common among girls who may fast up to two days a week, especially when they are 'petitioning God' for a special request. However, fasting may be a more acceptable excuse to give parents for dieting. Indian food is seen to be fattening due to the amount of 'ghee' (purified butter) added to curries. This is often associated with 'village' or 'pendu' (peasant) food which is seen to be 'filling' and fattening' (Bourdieu, 1984:190).

Therefore, it is not difficult to see the appeal of certain low fat, 'fast' foods among girls and in some cases, also among their mothers
"I tell my mum not to put so much ghee in the food but my dad likes it like that [..] my mum's been influenced by some of the fast food ads and so have I, like the one for Birds Eye 'Healthy Options', it's low calorie food, when you see that you just run round to your local shop to buy it and you can just stuff in the microwave when you can't be bothered to cook"
(Inderjeet, 16 year old girl)

Invariably then, 'English' food means 'fast', 'convenience', 'frozen' or 'junk' food and parents try to discourage their children from eating it as it is considered to be unhealthy and unwholesome. Parents, too, have their hierarchy of values attached to different foods which they try to foster or impose upon their children
"my mum goes (Indian accent) 'it's good for you dal (lentils) go on eat up' and when you go to the doctor he says, 'eat dal, saag (spinach),

subji (vegetables) and roti (wheat bread) like a good girl' (Indian accent)[..] my mum's always on about saag and how good it is for you, they think if you don't eat Indian food that you'll fall into bad health"
(Baljit, 17 year old girl)

There are even more forceful, financial reasons why some parents encourage their children to eat Indian food
"Indian food works out much cheaper, you just buy a big bag of dal (lentils) some vegetables [..] we only have meat at the weekends [...] you can't have English food, like pizzas and frozen foods everday cos that works out too expensive compared to Indian food"
(Perminder, 16 year old girl)

Financial constraints will obviously affect the diet that young people have and this acts as a marker of social difference.In low income households it is not unusual that lentils (dal), mixed vegetable curry (subji) and hot unleavened bread (roti) is the staple daily diet. Thus, many households are vegetarian not simply due to religious reasons (a greater degree of spiritual 'purity' and religiosity is associated with vegetarians among Punjabi Sikhs and Hindus) but because meat is simply too expensive and considered to be a luxury for special occasions. In low income households, it is extremely unlikely that convenience foods would be bought. In contrast, young vegetarians, where income will permit, are easily seduced by TV food advertisements into buying frozen vegetarian foods.

Religious restrictions on pork for Muslims and beef for Hindus and Sikhs means that neither of these meats can be bought locally. Yet many youngsters transgress religious taboos in consuming fast foods; Hindus break religious restrictions in eating a Mac Donald's beefburger and Muslims do likewise when they select a 'Spicy Sausage' pizza from Pizza Hut, (spicy and 'hot' foods are well liked by most young people). Thus, participation in a 'fast food teenage scene', in some cases, threatens parental religious rules. Young people sometimes use these taboos in an act of defiance against their parents. Moreover, peer pressures may be

exerted in order to encourage transgression which poses a serious moral dilemma for some.

We can now better situate the appeal of fast food advertisements. In particular, the ads for Mac Donald's and Pizza Hut are not so much admired as advertisements (since they are seen to be targetted at a younger population) but are described as salivatory, 'they make your mouth water', and informative, especially when there is a special offer
"Pizza Hut ads are good especially when there's a special offer like Pizza for two at £5.95 d-e-f-i-n-i-t-e-l-y (as said in the ad) and when the ad comes on I go to dad, 'come on dad lets go and get one!' and sometimes at the weekend we do"
(Kulbir, 16 year old girl)

Fish and chips and Kentucky Fried Chicken are enjoyed as a 'treat' by some families to accompany a video at the weekend. Many interviewees reported that they had some form of take away English food at least once a week to break with habit
"yeah, we like to do that too at the weekend, you know, get fish and chips or something and watch a video"
(Amrita, 16 year old girl)

However, probably the most significant changes in eating habits, routines and arrangements have occured as a result of the widespread take-up of the microwave oven and deep-freezer among Asian families. Microwave ovens are very popular among 'Asian' familes and were common in high income households even a decade ago. For those households who have a deep freezer and a microwave oven and can afford fast food, then the ads for convenience foods have great attraction
"you don't have to have Indian food [..] your freezer's full with whatever you want"
(Gurinder, 16 year old girl)

There is the further appeal of exercising some control not only over what you eat but also, in some cases, of avoiding parents at meal times and establishing more independent eating habits.

Perminder - I'm going to try 'Napolena' you can make your own pizza, it's just a pizza base and then you add your own topping

Nirmal - I don't eat with my parents anymore, I eat later especially now that I'm studying for exams, like sometimes I'll sit with them, but I eat when I like now

Paramjit - yeah I think the microwave is a real advantage, you don't have to spend much time cooking, you can eat when you want [..] and best of all it means that my lazy brother even manages to throw something in and sort his own food out and that's saying something"

Nevertheless, despite such claims, it would be misleading the reader to give an impression of gastronomically autonomous teenagers. Financial constraints will, in many cases, over-ride the appeals of fast foods in terms of the convenience, flexibility and variety they offer. It is also clear that status in the peer culture is gained from talking about independence in one's food consumption; in demonstrating a knowledge of 'English' fast foods and by association of English culture and in distinguishing oneself and one's family in socio-economic terms (i.e. between those who can and cannot afford such foods). Thus, it can be seen why talking about fast foods ads should have particular appeal to youngsters in Southall who want to vary their diet, learn about English foods and experiment with the 'latest' food products on the market.

Being able to discuss and exchange views on the 'latest' food products on the market is also a marker of being up-to-date and adventurous with one's food tastes. However, frozen Indian foods are not generally appreciated because the standards of home cooking are so much better "have you seen the one for English made Indian food, we've tried the dal (lentils) but theres a weird taste to it, I think it could be the preservatives"
(Gurinder, 16 year old girl)

Despite the popularity of fast foods there is usually some resistance on the part of mothers to them as they consider home cooking to be of better quality and taste and more healthy

Baljit - when these ads come on my mum always goes 'I can make it better anyway

Gurinder - mum's answer to everything 'home-made's best'

There is a high degree of sensitivity towards the stereotypical portrayal of Indian people in some ads and what is perceived as an attempt by the advertisers to sell 'frozen Indian culture'. But such sensitivity is not shared or recognised by all, as is evident in the following discussion between two 16 year old boys

Nirmal - Have you seen the Indian couple doing a British ad you know, these fast foods

Ranjit - oh, you mean English made Indian food

Nirmal - yeah

Ranjit - but they're really westernised, they're not like traditional Indians

Nirmal - they are, I think it's quite patronising in fact, they, like sell a different culture and say "Ah.. it's so sweet!", it's like frozen Indian culture

Ranjit - (laughs) what do you mean patronising?

Nirmal - the ad is patronising cos they only use Indian people for these types of product

Ranjit - But in one way they're just trying to get their point across that, hey! this is Indian food

Nirmal - but they stereotype them [..] they all have accents

Ranjit - but most of them do speak with accents

Nirmal - not all of them, you don't speak with an accent do you? but you were born here

Ranjit - yeah but what about the Findus punchline? (laughing)

Nirmal - oh yeah

Ranjit - when the wife brings the pudding to her husband and he goes (Indian accent) what's that dear? and she says (Indian accent) oh! it's spotted Dick [..] (laughs)

Nirmal - but it's taking the piss it shows that Indians
don't know the English language or their food!

Thus, it can be seen that quite different readings are be made of the same ad. Ranjit finds the couple both westernised and amusing and is little concerned about stereotypical portrayals. He quite readily accepts that many Indian people speak with accents and it does not bother him that they should be represented as such. Nirmal, on the other hand, shows concern about how Indians only advertise Indian products on British TV; they are portrayed as ignorant of the English language and of English foods. To many young people such representations of Asians are seen as an indication of their 'foreign' status
"they make us out to be more foreign than we actually are as if we are not part of their culture but we are [..] "
(Jasbinder, 16 year old girl)

In the focussed interviews on food ads, discussions invariably turned toward the advertisements on Channel 4, targetted at 'Asian' audiences. The advertisements for Tilda Basmati rice which were broadcast regularly at that time were critically referred to across many of the interviews for their lack of sophistication
"some Indian ads are so stupid like the Tilda rice one, it's so embarassing, they act like morons [..] they're making mountains out of the rice and you think Oh my God! why are they making mountains out of molehills, it's only chol (rice)
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

Stylistically, this ad is not appreciated nor are others in the Tilda series. The product is given central importance in the ad and this is considered to be an unsophisticated and unsubtle persuasive tecnique. Further complaints were made about the voice-over in Indian accent. Ads which are more enigmatic, witty and which play on the viewer's knowledge are preferred. According to informants, these ads imply a 'stupid' or 'ignorant' viewer who has to be persuaded using more blatant and direct selling techniques.
"the family, they're all in the kitchen eating rice and the mother is

going in an Indian accent, "is it good?" and the kids go "yes mummy it's good" and she goes "is it really good?" and they go "yes mummy it's really good" [..] it's really theatrical [..]it's like Punch and Judy, they're so unsophisticated those ads
(Karim, 18 year old boy)

The fact that these advertisements are aimed at the adult 'Asian' viewer who may well appreciate them and that different strategies would be adopted if the target audience were young Asians, is ignored. Yet, implicity, in distinguishing between styles of advertising, they are defining their own aesthetic tastes against those of their parents. However, in spite of critical protestations, the detail and accuracy of recall of these advertisements is a measure of their attentiveness to them. Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that there are cultural differences in the recall of ads. To give one example, in a group discussion among four girls, three of whom were Sikh and one white, differences in the details mentioned were clear. The white girl recalled the mountain of rice and the phrase 'grown on the foothills of the Himalayas'. The geographic origins of the rice was found most salient. This detail was ignored by the Sikh girls (and, moreover, in all other discussions which I observed about this ad). In contrast, girls tend to pick out details such as the name of the film star, (Lalita Ahmed) and try to solve any 'teasers' planted in the advertisement i.e. the name of the film the family are watching; the precise moment of the film as it appears on the advertisements, the words of the film song, the actors names appearing in the film and so on.

Clearly, the advertising strategies used will depend upon the target market. The Tilda rice and Rubicon ads are aimed at 'Asian' adult women, (since it is assumed that they are the ones who generally buy the rice), therefore there is no reason why young people should find them appealing. Yet, most young people are highly critical of all ads targetted at the parental culture and in being so critical, they are distinguishing themselves and their tastes from those of their parents. However, the fact that there are so few representations of 'Asians' on

British television generates increased sensitivity to those that do appear. But what kinds of representations of 'Asians' would young people consider appropriate? Are they simply knocking everything Indian for the sake of it or to impress peers with 'showmanship' talk? Is there a confusion about how they see themselves and how they would like to see themselves being portrayed? Ultimately, it is difficult to find any satisfactory answers to these questions since undoubtedly all of these factors play some part in their responses to the Indian food ads. Perhaps, living in Southall and being isolated, or at least distanced, from the wider society and culture also enhances young people's sense of difference and their senstivity to media representations of Asians. As one boy put it

"Southall is the strong hold of 'Asian' culture in Britain [..] white culture, for us, is in the TV box".
(Manjit, 17 year old boy)

This discussion of ads related to convenience foods highlights the culturally distinctive nature of the world in which young people in Southall live. It also emphasises the role of TV in mediating British culture and, as we shall see in the case of the Coca Cola ads, American culture.

5.3 'YOU CAN'T BEAT THE FEELING': COCA COLA ADS AS A SYMBOL OF AN 'IDEAL' AMERICAN TEENAGE LIFESTYLE

One of the most popular series of advertisements among young people in Southall are those for Coca Cola. Over the years, the accompanying songs have reached the top of the charts and entered every young person's repertoire of media knowledge. Coke songs and slogans are familiar to all and few would be unable to recite them at request. They are seen to convey a 'feeling' which is captured in the slogan

"I love the Coke ads, I don't know why, there's just something about them, they're just good, more lively, teenagers jumping around and having a laugh [..]...I don't know (laughs) you just can't beat the feeling"
(Dalvinder, 16 year old girl)

The slogan 'you can't beat the feeling' is a 'catch-phrase' which has entered everyday life locally and its very ambiguity, (i.e. feeling as both an emotional and a physical state), is the source of many a double-entendre in exchanges, especially between boys and girls. The tensions inherent in that ambiguity, seem to capture something of the nature of the emotional charge attached to that period of youth referred to as adolescence. The advertisements represent a seductive teenage world and lifestyle to which many young people aspire.

Discussions of the Coke advertisements generate statements about the 'feeling' they convey. It is an imagined or projected feeling of participating, albeit vicariously, in an idealised teenage lifestyle where young people sing, dance, have fun, socialise, fall in love, gain friends, status and popularity. The following extract is based on a taped discussion between two 16 year old vocational students in which they discuss their favourite advertisements and why they like them. It captures the utopian quality of the Coke advertisements

Sameera - My favourite ads are the Coca Cola ads, they're American ads, I prefer American ads, I don't know why but <u>I could watch them over and over again</u> without getting bored [..] I like them cos <u>I just love</u>

drinking Coca Cola, [..] I enjoy listening to the music and [..] I think the characters are fantastic. Every time I see the ad I always feel tempted to go out and buy it, even when I go out shopping, I always buy Coke cos, well, I love the ad [...]

Sukhi - Yeah, they're really happy and active cos they mix pop songs with kids in America, you know, the sun's always shining and everyone is smiling and it gives the impression of being free.
The music and song puts more energy into it and like each line of the song is backed up with dancing, sports and fun [..] "You can't beat the feeling!"

Sameera - yeah, and all races seem to get on well their roles aren't changed around because of the colour of their skin. There are no signs of people being angry [..]

Sukhi - They have a very tempting way of selling coke [..] you know the one where the guy is sweating, he's thirsty as anything but he drinks it very slowly, taking his time as if it's something precious.

Sameera - Yeah, it's like after a hard day's work he's rewarded with a refreshing coke. The little droplets of water on the bottle glisten and sort of add to the temptation.

Sukhi - after watching the ad you think "oh yeah, next time I need a cool drink, I'll have a coke"

Sameera - [...] then there's a boy and girl about to kiss but then, just as their lips are about to meet another shot comes [..]

The preference for American advertisements is stated without offering any explicit reasons, although, the chain of associations in the exchange implies that it is based on the attractiveness of the American teenage lifestyle portrayed. The feelings ascribed to the young people are conflated with the advertisement and the product; thus, coke

drinkers are seen to be 'happy', 'active', 'kids in America' where 'the sun is always shining' - everyone is 'happy' and 'free' where 'all races get on' and there are 'no signs of anger'.

'TV ad talk' is clearly influenced by the discourse of advertising itself which relates products to myths, dreams, fantasies, emotions, rewards and promises in order to sell products. Advertisements are the most condensed of all TV narratives but in order to be 'read', symbolic associations have to be made by viewers. These associations become evident in their 'ad talk' which takes on some of the persuasive rhetoric of the advertisements themselves.

The use of the word temptation is repeated in several different contexts highlighting an awareness of the persuasive techniques used. Sameera claims that when she sees the advertisement she is tempted to go out and buy a Coke because she loves the advertisement and she loves drinking Coke. Sukhi adds that the way 'they' sell coke is tempting. On a hot day one can be tempted to buy a Coke to satisfy one's thirst. The droplets of water on the bottle glisten and add to the temptation. Then Sameera introduces the idea of being rewarded with a Coke after a hard day's work, thus making the connection with Coke drinking and leisure. Finally, the temptation of a kiss appears only to disappear before one's eyes at the very end of the advertisement. In this account, thirst and desire are connected, thirst is satisfied by a Coke but desire, as represented by the promise of a kiss, is left to the imaginative fulfillment.

It is perhaps significant that the very first reason Sameera gives for liking the ads is that she loves drinking Coke but she later claims that she buys Coke because she loves the ad. This suggests that the experienced Coke drinker is already assured of the pleasures of its consumption since they are already known. Coke advertisements, by reinforcing brand awareness serve to defend its share of the soft drinks market. Furthermore, by placing the product within an idealised world of teenagers, free from parental and other constraints, a utopian vision of

a teenage lifestyle is represented. The plausibility of the lifestyle and idyllic relationships is not questioned.

The following exchange by two 16 year old vocational students highlights the way in which the Coke advertisements lead some young people to engage in talk that would otherwise appear foolish or utopian. At certain moments in the exchange the girls also appear to take the representation of this teenage lifestyle for reality and display somewhat less critical distance than the previous couple. This highlights the differentially distributed cultural competencies in 'reading' advertisements.

Gurvinder - it makes you think that if you drink Coke that you will be popular and loved by people you didn't even know existed

Gita - innit, it's like everyone cares about each other, their relationships are simple, they all get on life is peaceful and full of fun so enjoy it while you can

Gurvinder - they all socialise together, boys and girls, everyone loves each other and if you buy Coke it makes you feel that you could be happy and free like them

Gita - But I don't think the ads influence us to buy it most of us buy it anyway

Gurvinder - and old people won't be influenced because they think that soft drinks are bad for you anyway

Gita - but I think you are supposed to value the feeling that you get after drinking it, you know (sings) 'you can't beat the feeling' and for such a small cost

Gurvinder - the music is great as well and goes with the feeling

According to the above exchange, the consumption of Coke promises happiness, love, friendship, freedom and popularity. Realtionships are

uncomplicated, (unlike in real life); young people simply care for each other and everyone loves one another and socialises together (unlike in the peer culture where peer group boundaries are strong); life is fun and free (a teenage dream). The fact they do not feel themselves to be influenced by the advertisements suggests that perhaps they have already been successful since these girls buy Coke in any case. Finally, teenage tastes are distinguished from those of older people who, they believe, find the drink unhealthy.

Discussions of Coke advertisements invariably lead to a consideration of what it is like to be a teenager in America, articulated against a background of what it is to be a teenager in Southall. The most consistent word used to describe American teenagers is 'free'. They are seen to have much greater freedom; freedom to do what they want and to participate in 'fun' activities; freedom from parental constraint and, especially, freedom to have boyfriends and girlfriends. This emphasis on freedom appears to be over-stated but when considered against the background of social constraints that girls, especially, live under, it becomes easier to appreciate.

Perceptions of American 'kids' obviously derive from a variety of media sources but the Coke advertisements have undoubtedly played a formative influence in shaping perceptions of an idealised teenage lifestyle. The following exchange took place while discussing the Coke advertisements and highlights the rosy image of American 'kids' which is presented in them and also in popular American college films and TV series like 'Beverley Hills High 9021' which, as the title suggests, is based on the recreational pursuits of Beverley Hills High School teenagers.

Gurinder - American kids..they're <u>ideal</u>,
Baljit - they're really <u>good looking</u>
Perminder - they all drink <u>coke</u> and drive <u>fast cars</u>, like in Beverley Hills 9021, the girls are so <u>pretty</u>
Amrita - Brandon is so <u>cute</u>
Gurinder - so's Dhillon he's <u>r-e-e-a-a-l-ly nice</u>

Baljit - they're <u>free</u>

Perminder - all <u>rich</u> they've got <u>massive huge houses</u> and they all dress <u>smart</u> and they've got <u>wicked cars</u>

Gurinder - they've got <u>more things to do</u> as well

Amritah - they're all <u>sunbaked</u> aren't they

Baljit - they're always going to <u>pool parties</u>

Perminder - they're all <u>healthy</u>

Baljit - like the coke ads <u>make you think</u> they're free and have lots of <u>fun</u> and they have

Gurinder - <u>boyfriends</u> (All laugh)

The 'idealisation' of American youth in the Coke ads is recognised by Baljit to be a constructed image but the others talk about the representation as if it were 'the real thing' (Ewan, 1976:143,189). This representation of American kids as rich and above all free (to have boyfriends) contrasts sharply with the lives of these girls who consider themselves neither as rich nor as free to have boyfriends. Thus, the Coke advertisements and other media sources enable girls to fantasize about what life might feel like as an attractive teenager in Beverley Hills. Whilst the idea of teenage freedom is a recurent theme when Coke ads are discussed the darker side of the American way of life is also strongly marked in young people's minds

"American kids have more freedom [..] to rebel AND WIN, you know, like in films like Dirty Dancing [..] they rebel AND the family stays together but, over here, if you rebel against your family, you're out on your own, parents won't tolerate certain things [..] they have more freedom they also have more of a drug problem, more violence and there's more of a colour problem there as well [..] the hispanics and blacks are stuck in ghettos and slums [..] even though they're American they're not integrated"

(Karim, 19 year old boy)

The impression of 'racial harmony', as apparent in the Coke advertisements, seems to be contradicted by other images available of 'ghetto' life and 'racial conflict'. Nevertheless, Coke and Pepsi are favourite drinks among young people, locally, and are associated with a

'cool', 'safe' image. In one of the local Punjabi cafes, 'Rita's', (which is a 'hang out' for many young people in the lunch hour), as one enters, one is often struck by the sight of red cans of Coke on almost every table. Often, that is all that is on the table because eating 'out' is expensive (compared to school dinners or home lunches) and most youngsters can only afford a samosa (an Indian snack) and a can of coke.

No other drink has quite the 'cool image' of Coke. The Pepsi advertisements are considered to be very attractive because they use famous stars like Michael Jackson, Tina Turner and Madonna but most prefer the taste of Coke and find Pepsi sweeter.
"I think they spend more money on the Pepsi ads but Coke ads are more for the common people and, cos they're young people,you can sort of relate to them"
(Amrita, 17 year old girl)

The idea that Coke is for the 'common' people is not elaborated upon but may have to do with the way a multi-cultural market is targetted or a perception of Coke being a drink consumed by young people in all parts of the world. Nevertheless, this kind of distinction appears to be based upon assumptions about Pepsi consumers as inferred from the expensive advertisements.

It is precisely because other drinks are not seen to have a 'cool' image that they are rejected. For example, a company called Rubicon produce exotic 'tropical' drinks, like mango juice or passion fruit, but although the taste is considered good the image of the can is seen to lack style
"I like the taste of the mango juice but the can is so awful you wouldn't be seen dead with it, it's so badly designed [..] I hate it, it's so uncool"
(Monica, 17 year old girl)

Not only is the can 'uncool' but the advert itself which is targetted at adult 'Asians' is seen by many to portray 'Asian' families as 'stupid'

"I hate that Rubicon one you know the one where there's this Indian family; Mum, dad and the two kids, the kids are so cute,I think they're gore (white kids) and they're all in the kitchen watching a Hindi film and the husband goes to his wife "have you got any mango juice?" and they're all really engrossed in the film so they ignore him then he goes dancing round the kitchen to the fridge and gets out the Mango juice and starts singing [..] the bit in the film where Rajesh Kanna takes her to a hut [..] and the tune to the ad is the same as in the actual film, you know, it goes 'Rubicon must have some' they're so stupid though I hate the way they do that it makes Indian people look really stupid"
(Gurinder, 16 year old girl)

Therefore, if a drink does not have the right kind of image, inspite of tasting good, there are many who will not buy it. Although no Indian ads were mentioned in the survey, in every group discussion and interview, they were brought up in a critical or humourous light, juxtaposed to ads which were found to be more sophisticated. The consistent denigration of Indian advertisements across the interviews stands in sharp contrast to those targetted at 'teenagers' which are found to be appealing.

In their ad talk about soft drinks young people establish hierarchies of consumer taste and style in sharp contrast to those which exist in the parental culture. The stylistic qualities and persuasive techniques of ads targetted at the parental generation are seen to be 'unsophisticated'. The representation of the 'Asian' family is considered to be demeaning. The father, dancing and singing around the kitchen, is perceived as 'stupid'. Many young people who discussed this advertisement showed concern that it would just reinforce negative stereotypes of Asians. They argue that because there are so few representations of Asian families on British TV, those that do appear, have greater representational power. Yet, implicit in their ad talk are a series of unanswered questions; how should an Indian father behave and act? what should an Asian family look like? why are the children found to be cute because 'gore' ('white')? It is paradoxical that recall of Indian ads is commonly good, detailed and accurate despite their lack of appeal. For example, Gurinder shows remarkable ease and spontaneity

in re-constructing the Rubicon advertisements in impeccable detail and makes evident her knowledge of the film as well. This suggests that awareness of the advertisements is high. However, to admit liking the Rubicon ad would be as 'uncool' as being seeing carrying the can. It may be that one would get a different reaction to these ads if young people were discussing them in the domestic context.

In juxtaposing Rubicon and Coke in discussions about soft drinks advertisements young people are drawing connections between texts which are incomparable in certain crucial ways; they ignore the fact that the Rubicon advertisements are targetted at the adult 'Asian' consumer, whereas those for Coca Cola are aimed specifically at teenagers. However, as young 'Asians' they feel themselves to be implicated in these advertisements and are critical of the way adult 'Asians' are invariably portrayed as having Indian accents. As young people born and brought up in Britain, without Indian accents for the most part, they often express aspirations toward a greater acceptance within mainstream British society from which they are to a large extent cut off in Southall. Representations which emphasise the 'foreigness' of 'Asians' are seen to exclude them from society; a feeling which they already have vis-a-vis their geographic isolation. Such concerns over-ride the fact that the family watching a popular Hindi movie in this advertisement and the playful behaviour of the father are features of the ad which make it attractive to the parental culture. Yet, for young people, it is a further marker of their difference and constitutes a denigration of 'Asians' as 'stupid'.

It is perhaps because of the high sensitivity toward what young people consider as inappropriate representations of 'Asians' on mainstream British TV that they draw so readily on Indian advertisements and use them as an object of humour and ridicule in the peer group. In doing so they are implicitly seeking alternative portrayals. In the process they are also demarcating boundaries of taste and style, both material and aesthetic, between the parental and peer cultures.

5.4 AD TALK ABOUT JEANS AND TRAINERS: CONSTRUCTING HIERARCHIES OF STYLE AND FASHION

Advertisements for jeans and trainers are among the most popular of TV ads among girls. The labels referred to in the survey are predominantly Levis 501 jeans and LA Gear trainers. 71% of girls mention either or both in the survey whilst only 8% of boys do so. How can this gender difference in appeal for ads for 'unisex' items of clothing and footwear which target a mixed gender audience be explained? The key explanation which both boys and girls have offered concern the male characters advertising these two brands who are found to be attractive to girls. Boys, on the other hand, seem to be reluctant to admit to finding these advertisements appealing even though their consumption practices indicate that they find the products so. Several explanations are possible; boys may find the male characters in these advertisements inappropriate models of masculinity since they are white and often feminised or, they may be reluctant to express admiration for male characters as this can be seen to undermine their own notions of masculinity.

At the time of the survey LA Gear was the only sports company to launch a major television advertising campaign and this of course accounts for its currency and popularity at the time. The LA Gear ad appeared on screens for several weeks at times when young viewers were most likely to be watching. It generated a great deal of enthusistic talk among girls and to a much lesser extent among boys. However, one boy who found the LA Gear advertisements appealing decided to write an essay on it for a Media Studies assignment. He summed up the appeal of the ad as follows "The ad is a joy to watch [..] the way LA Gear want people to greet this ad is sort of like the power of Michael Jackson combined with the magic of LA Gear captured momentarily in a few moments of bliss"
(for full transcript see Appendix 5 ; p 257)

Other manufacturers of trainers like Nike, Reebok and British Knights have, according to my informants, run smaller campaigns on TV. However, sports advertising is confined mainly to magazines and billboard posters. TV campaigns are expensive and young people claim that companies do not need to advertise on TV because sportswear has become street fashion and what kids wear is more determined by what other kids

are wearing than by advertising. In Southall, black youth play an important role in setting the trends for local fashion.

Black American 'street culture' is a dominant force in popular youth cultures in Britain today not only in terms of music, rap and dance crazes but also in 'street' fashion and style. Sportswear, (trainers, shell suits, track suits) has become the popular 'street uniform' of local youngsters. The label that one wears is of paramount importance. A new, gleaming, pristine pair of trainers can set the family income back by some £80 and three months later they will be worn out. The inbuilt obsolescence of trainers and clothing places considerable financial pressures on families. £80 may constitute the larger part of a family's weekly income and so cheaper and 'inferior' labels have to be purchased. Peer pressure means the demand for trainers is high. Old, shabby, dirty trainers can lead to mocking and bullying in schools and accusations that one's family is poor and cannot afford the labels which are 'de rigeur'. The wearing of sportswear is important for peer group membership; being one of the 'gang'; being accepted and if one does not have the 'real' thing or the 'right' label one may be ridiculed. Trainers are heavily promoted by famous sports and pop stars such as Michael Jackson and John McEnroe and there is a huge overspill of sports and fitness commodities into fashion. Thus, the labels that one wears is an important marker of social status and difference.

Similarly, a pair of jeans is part of every young person's wardrobe and the label is of great importance. Levi 501, Chipie, Pepe, Chevignon are all American labels in jeans and jackets. A 'puffy' Chipie jacket can cost up to £300 in the U.K. and many youths have become reluctant to wear their jackets in the street for fear of being accosted. Despite the fact that most young people consider themselves to more influenced by their peers in matters of dress and clothing, it is indisputably the case that cross-media advertising plays a crucial role in shaping teenage consumer culture and in making material values important. Opportunistic advertising which extends across the worlds of sports, music, fashion on film, TV, pop videos, radio, in magazines and on

billboards shapes consumer choices and places enormous pressure on young people and their parents.

The cultural importance attached to clothes and the social and symbolic meanings they involve, both to the individual and to the peer group, raise important questions about the criteria of group membership and group identity. But there is also a hidden agenda. Parents worry about the influence of black, working class, street culture on their children. They worry that their children will get caught up in it. Black, American street culture is seen to set the trends for local fashion through the intermediary of Afro-Carribean youth who are the local fashion trend-setters.

Afro-Carribean youth have high status among Punjabi youth in Southall. They are seen to be subject to less parental control and to have greater mobility to socialise outside and thus to 'bring fashion back into Southall'. They are seen as 'honorary Americans'; 'cool', 'tough', 'street-wise, city kids', not easily put down, proud and fit. They have a strong, assertive image which some Southall boys admire, particularly those who wish to be associated with 'The Gangs' or a gang image which is itself linked to a train of associations:- America, Hip Hop, House and Reggae music, West Indians and 'soft' drugs. The speech patterns, idioms and slang of Afro-Carribean youth are incorporated into the everyday peer language. However, Indian boys do not directly imitate West Indians but incorporate and appropriate elements of a 'Black Culture' in highly selective and idiosyncratic ways. The appeal of black youth culture to London-Punjabis obviously varies but one girl summed up her feelings thus,
"I listen to reggae and soul music but my mum hates it if we start enthusing about black singers on Top of the Pops, you know saying he's gorgeous and that, so we play our feelings down we don't show her how much we like the black guys cos she worries we'll (me and my sister) will get mixed up with them [..]the parents think that to marry a black person is worse than marrying a gore (a white person) and you know some Asians want to be white, I don't know why, but if I had the choice I'd

be black"
(Sewanti, 16 year old Hindu girl)

However, the majority of young people, although they may want to 'look' black they would not wish to 'be' black since they are all too aware of the discrimination that black people face. Also, as we have seen, attitudes to blacks in the parental culture are stereotypical and often highly racist. Parents do not wish their children to associate with blacks. The pressures of endogamy are one of the most powerful forces affecting cross-cultural relations in Southall. Most youngsters do not socialise very much outside Southall and beyond the watchful eye of parents. However, those young people who do socialise outside Southall consider that Southall kids are 'behind' the times in terms of fashion. Whether one is seen to be fashionable 'outside' Southall is one of the key criteria for gauging the acceptability of one's 'style'.

Ad talk about trainers and jeans leads to talk about style and fashion more generally which then involves making often finely grained distinctions of taste in clothes. In discussing the Levi 501 ads and LA Gear trainer ads, one group of A level students unwittingly set about constructing a hierarchy of style types in which they situated the type of people who would wear these products. The idenitifed five categories of local style and situated the labels of various items of clothing and footwear therein. In a series of follow-up interviews among final year A-level students broadly agreed with the typology and added their own comments. Later, in observations of the sixth form peer culture the following hierarchy of style and fashion was found to be a significant organising feature of peer status. It should be acknowledged that the typology was gleaned from ad talk among A-level students who, in terms of educational and cultural capital, are in a higher position of status and power than their less academic counterparts. At the 'bottom' of the hierarchy is 'pendu' (peasant) fashion and at the top 'classy'. It is important to note that the A-level students position themselves at the top of the hierarchy among the 'classies'. The typology is represented in the terms that the students themselves used.

A TYPOLOGY OF SOUTHALL FASHION AND STYLE

PENDUS - originally means 'peasant' and is used to refer to an 'unclassy import' and is associated with 'new arrivals' from India who try to imitate English fashion but cannot. Pendus are seen to be 'out of place' in peer culture, their taste in fashion and style belong in the parental culture and the connotations of the word extend to 'backward', 'traditional', 'uncool', 'thick', 'uncouth', 'lacking style'. It is usually child and teenage migrants who are denigrated as 'pendus'. The caricature of a male 'pendu' is someone who wears flairs, huge shirt collars and platform boots. His female counterpart wears white stilletoes and shiny, satin blouses worn outside pencil thin skirts.

The term has now been transferred to peers who do not try follow the fashion; those who are a modern version of their parents and those who 'play safe' to please parents
"they wear what they can get away with in the eyes of parents without completely selling out to them, they try their best not to look out of it, they wear cheap jeans and lacy jumpers in horrible colours' "
(Anopama, 16 year old girl)

'Pendus' shop in Southall in shops like 'Mahlis' on the Broadway and buy cheap clothes. They can be seen wearing stone washed, bleached jeans and jackets, checked shirts, trainers from Woolworths and cheap, straight jeans (for example, a local label called Farah). They buy their tracksuits from cheap local markets. The girls wear 'jutiya' or sandals bought from local shoe shops and the boys wear trainers with trousers (rather than jeans)
"ugh! no-one else would dream of doing that !"
(Amrita, 16 year old girl)

Pendus wear 'nasty jumpers with patterns on them' that they buy on the stalls on the high street or in the market.
"The girls wear 'Goti' (cardigans) which are either really long or like the one in the ad that comes on Hindi films, you know where there is this fat woman waddling through Southall Park and there's this man

chasing her and she's scared cos she thinks he's after her so she runs faster and hides behind a tree and eventually he catches up with her and says 'I love your goti where did you buy it?' and she takes him to the shop on the Broadway and it's the most disgusting cardigan, pink with beads and pearls on it everywhere"
(Gurinder, 16 year old girl)

SOUTHALL FASHION

These young people 'try to keep up with fashions' but they wear cheaper vesions of the latest styles or what is referred to as 'normal fashion'. They do not shop in Southall but go to cheap shops in adjacent towns such as Ealing, like 'Mark One' and 'Best Sellers'. The girls buy blouses with large lacey collars with double breasted fronts and cheap imitations of baggy trousers. The boys buy clothes in the 'down-market' High Street department stores (such as C+A) which sell cheap versions of expensive clothes
"but you can tell the difference"
(Amrita, 16 year old girl)

The girls have masses of permed hair, baggy jeans, dyed hennaed hair. The Southalli's, as they are called by some, try to appear 'westernised' but display a lack of fashion awareness and consumer power.

ACID HOUSE STYLE (ENGLISH/WHITE)

These young people wear colourful, hooded tops, baggy track suit bottoms and massive, bulging trainers. They look 'trendy' in Southall but not outside. The girls wear Ali Baba trousers which are very colouful and baggy but tight at the ankle with buttons. They buy their clothes in markets and cheap shops in Ealing and Hounslow.
"Acid is just baggy clothes, not really caring what you look like, just feeling comfortable, it's like casual wear"
(Onray, 17 year old boy)
At the time of fieldwork the 'Acid' house fashion was on the wane and those who continued to present themselves in this style were ridiculed by the more fashion conscious youths as being 'behind' current trends. Keeping up-to-date, or indeed ahead of the fashion, is an important

criteria of peer group status.

HIP HOP (AMERICAN/BLACK)

The hierarchy of style and fashion which operates in the peer group is organised around different labels. Showing the label is a means of self definition as 'cool', fashionable, trendy and affluent. Great emphasis is placed on self-display in the peer culture. These people wear 'smart', 'trendy' clothes with expensive labels. They wear LA Gear or Feila trainers which are suede and cost from £50-£80 a pair. They wear puffy jackets, Levi 501's or Chipie, baggy jeans. They buy their clothes in 'town' (central London) or at expensive 'classified' (i.e. which sell expensive labels) shops. They look good outside Southall, a key criterion of style and fashion.

"Like Acid and Hip-Hop are two dance crazes so if they're dance crazes people wanna dance, be comfortable and look good at the same time but in Southall people are into Hip Hop more than Acid, Acid's like for kids, it's not that cool, you see a lot of little white kids running round acid-style but the cool dudes go for Hip Hop"
(Abjinder, 17 year old boy)

'CLASSY' FASHION

These people shop outside Southall usually in Central London and buy expensive labels. People who wear 501's and LA Gear would also fall into this category but it is emphasised that it is not one article of clothing that matters but an overall 'look'

"some people think that just by wearing LA Gear they look 'cool' but they don't cos its everything, their whole appearance that counts"
(Kulbir, 16 year old girl)

Girls shop at the more upmarket retail outlets such as Miss Selfridge, Snob, River Island and Principles and they buy their shoes in Dolcis. Boys shop at Pie Squared, Whack and Oaklands. These are all 'up-market' shops in Ealing or Hounslow, the two nearest towns. Where one shops is as important as the labels that one displays.

Hair style is also very important as part of the overall 'look' or 'image'. Hair among young London Punjabis is an important symbol of one's relationship to Sikhism and by extension can be an outward manifestation of conformity to the parental culture. Although, cutting one's hair in the Sikh religion is, strictly speaking, taboo many young people are cutting their hair, discarding the turban and long plaits. The pressures within the peer group to conform to the latest hair styles are strong and a major family dispute can ensue if a boy or girl defies the parent's wishes and gets their hair cut. It is a major symbolic act of rebellion.

Boys shave their hair along the sides above their ears in line with black street style but how one shaves is as important as the fact of shaving
'shaved lines are out'
(Dilraj, 16 year old boy)

Girls wear their hair long and permed or well cut bobs although
'perms are now on their way out'
(Amrita, 16 year old girl)

These young people always look classy and do not necesarily need to follow the latest fashion slavishly.
"If you go to the right shops it doesn't really matter what your idea of fashion is you'll get the right gear you don't have to follow the fashion in every detail".
(Jasbinder, 16 year old girl)

The clothes they buy are always expensive and well cut and although they are always fashionable, individual style is also seen as important
"if someone else has got what you're wearing you don't want to wear it any more".
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

These people are more individualist in their style of dress they wear what they want and what they like. They read fashion magazines. Girls

read 'Just 17' and 'More' while boys 'GQ' and 'Arena'. They get their ideas for fashion from watching what other people wear and magazines rather than from television although there are some role models to be found in pop stars but sometimes whilst their style might be admired it might be too 'way out' or 'zany' to try out oneself
'I really like those lycra hot pants and ski pants, but you could never wear those kinds of clingy clothes around Southall because you'd get leers and cut eyes [..] any way they make my legs look too skinny".
(Kulbir, 16 year old girl)

The 'classies' have individual style because they know how to mix and match their clothes. They look original and wear their clothes well. Some examples of combinations would be
"white massive jeans, B.K. Boots and a cropped jumper for everday wear or for a disco at the Hippodrome, a tight black velvet dress".
(Gurinder, 16 year old girl)

In spite of the fact that Hippodrome discos are for an 'Asian' audience, Indian clothes would be 'out of place' although at one stage 'patiala' or very baggy 'Salwar'(trousers) held tighly round the lower knee and ankle were commonly worn. Salwar Kameez (Punjabi traditional dress) would only be worn at family occasions such as weddings and evening parties with relatives i.e. where Indian clothes would be 'in place'.

It is now perhaps easier to situate the relative significance of LA Gear and Levi 501's in defining a certain style type. Expensive labels are a status symbol and young people claim to be able to tell 'how much a person is worth', (with the implication that this is not just clothes-wise) by the labels that they wear. Obviously, these categories are not rigid or exhaustive. For example, clothing in the latter two categories may be classy but 'posh', or 'smart', or 'scruffy', or 'sporty' or 'casual' and many young people shift from one to the other frequently, playing with their image and appearance.

The classy category is not perceived as such by everyboy who would prefer to discriminate within it and identify a 'Casual/Sporty' type

"I'd say I'm a casual sporty type [..] that's all I can take (referring to his overweight) but look what I'm wearing Levi's 501's, they cost around £30 and Adidas top and this actual tracksuit costs £90 and my trainers are Condors, an American make, they're worth £60 .... I'm not dressed up cheaply but I don't really call that 'classy fashion" (Abjinder, 17 year old boy)

A certain flexibility in mixing and matching styles does exist for example, a liking for Heavy metal music has driven one boy to play around with his image in an unusual way; leather jacket, flat cap with Guns of the Roses badge (a heavy metal band), 501 jeans and a pair of black studded suede LA Gear trainers. He is the 'laughing stock' of his peers who mock his studded LA Gear/Michael Jackson trainers alongside his preference for Heavy Metal music.

Another category and one which is fairly widespread among boys who wish to present a 'hard' image associated with membership of a gang (often fictional or claimed membership) transforms the symbolism of Sikhism to represent a special type of machismo. These are sometimes known as 'Holies' (after the gang Holy Smoke') and consist of boys from the Jat caste (landowners/farmers) who form the majority group among Sikhs in Southall. In the Punjab the Jat caste are 'highest' in the social structure. Notions of 'purity' are also attached to this 'high' status. Certain boys attempt to assert male pride, machismo and Jat supremacy through their appearance.

"we associate certain people with particular types of habits and particular styles, for example, at Southall college and at school you'll see guys with black leather jackets, several gold earrings, tight Lois trousers, Adidas 'Gazelle' trainers and an attitude problem [..] they are influenced by western culture but they're more strong in their Indian background cos they've got big 'karas' (a bracelet and one of the 5 symbols of Sikhism)[..] some still wear turbans [..] they wear a lot of gold, Indian gold, it's different to English gold, often you'll see a large Khalsa (Sikh brotherhood) pendant around their necks [..] they like to drive round in red Ford Capris or Cortinas [..] their hair is

short in the front but long at the back [..] they trade on their image as 'pure' in the Jat sense, tough and macho [..] but you'll rarely see one alone [..] they go round in groups of 5 or 6 and act tough but if you see them when they're alone they're like chickens some of them" (Manjit, 17 year old Ramgharia boy)

This style-type assembles a complex set of different cultural styles, codes and symbols which signify locally specific meanings. It would be impossible for a person, unfamiliar with the Sikh religion and with the position of Jats in Southall to 'read' these signs. Clearly, TV advertising plays a role in contributing to young people's overall ideas of fashion but it is the power of images and styles accrued across a range of media and interest domains that needs to be more closely examined. The scope of this thesis does not allow an exploration of the crucial role of music, dance, sport and related advertising in identifying, establishing and endorsing hierarchies of taste and style. But it is the cross media and inter-textual circulation of images, sounds and narratives which are targetted at the teenage consumer that makes for what is arguably one of the most lucrative markets in most western societies. The global and mass markets, nevertheless, are being appropriated and incorporated into local cultures in specific ways. As we have seen complex symbolic constructions and presentations of self and group are made through hair, clothes, trainers and comportment.

5.5 AD TALK ABOUT FACE, BODY AND HAIR PRODUCTS

Distinctions of taste in advertisements are made not only upon cultural and aesthetic grounds but also according to gender. 41% of girls mention advertisements for hair, face or body products among their favourite advertisememts whilst no boys do so. (see Appendix 5.1 for survey results). Interestingly, 31% of the girls mention the advertisements for Gillette's 'new' line of shaving gel and razors, ads which are typically assumed to be targetted at males. However, like the Levi jeans and LA Gear advertisements, the presence of a very attractive male character is offered as the explanation for its popularity. Males claim not be interested in the ad but all the boys I interviewd used Gillette. Can we advance any explanation for this apparent paradox?

The following account is exerpted from an interview with a 17 year-old boy called Abi whose views are fairly typical. He makes the point that one does not necesarily buy a product because one likes the ad and, in the same way, one does not stop buying a product because one dislikes the ad. However, if girls and women find an advertisement appealing, he claims, it may have an indirect influence over male consumers, although he rejects the idea that he, personally, would be influenced. Yet, as we shall see, his account then becomes quite ambivalent for he reports that he uses Gillette Shaving Gel and that he has always used Gillette products. He goes on to say that recently, he bought the gel but picked up the gel <u>quickly</u>, without reflection, because he needed some shaving foam. Finally he admits that Gillette sounds better and has added class which tends to 'rub off' on its user.

"which of the guys says I use Gillette to shave? they're not saying I use Gillette cos I like the ad [..] they're just saying oh God! turn it over on the other side, whereas girls would think, 'Oh! he's all right' [..] but I don't think the advertisers have got it wrong because most guys are a bit lazy, they don't want to shave and the women say, 'sharpen up a bit and shave', and they're trying to tell you that your man can look as good as this [..] and if you think about it, the influence of women on men is quite high [..] I use Gillette, it's nothing to do with the ad [..] I just picked up the gel quickly at the chemist. I just buy it as a product [..] I suppose I do go for the big name things [..] at the end of the day, Gillette sounds much better [..] <u>see what I mean it gets to you</u>, you have to have a named product, it's a bit of class rubbed in as well, I suppose it rubs off on you as well cos people like to be seen using classy products"
(Abjinder, 17 year old boy)

Thus, according to Abjinder's speculations, it may be that the <u>advert</u> in appealing to women makes the <u>product</u> more attractive to men. Adverts and products are not necessarily synonomous and, as Abi points out, one does not have to like an ad or find it entertaining to buy a product. However, he acknowledges that one can distinguish oneself in 'classiness' through the use of a product.

Since face, hair and body products are within the range of goods which young people can afford and are often seen to be targetted at the teenage audience, their interest level in them seems to be quite high. Even though males do not mention this type of advertisement in the survey, we cannot take that as evidence for their lack of interest in such products. Interview data is more useful here in highlighting the discretion and sensitivity with which discussions about personal appearance may take at the age of 16. The initial hypothesis was that perhaps boys did not buy such products for themselves, perhaps leaving it to their mothers or sisters. However, after further investigations with boys who were willing to talk openly about such issues (to a female researcher) went against this
"yeah of course I buy my own deodorant, I have done for a while [..] you need strong soaps and deodorants at that age (16) cos your hormones are working overtime [..] you tend to sweat a hell of a lot [..] bloody hell you sweat ! and then you get spots and you try to control them [..] we all used to buy products like Biactol, Clearasil, oh yeah, and Oxy 10"
(Nirmal, 18 year old boy)

Ads for Spot creams and lotions appear commonly in ad talk.These ads are seen to play upon the insecurities of teenagers such as body odours, acne and personal appearance more generally
"they're kind of psychological [..] cos they're showing a girl with a bucket over her head and how you feel when you go to a party with a face full of spots, and like when you use Oxy 10 they imply you won't need the bucket and that girls will fall at your feet"
(Manjit 17, year old boy)

Such advertisements, although humorous in content, strike a raw or sensitive nerve in some teenagers. One of the ads most commonly referred to in the interviews and written scripts, especially by girls, is the Clearasil ad which works on the 'before-after' principle suggesting that a young person's life can be transformed by consuming a product
"have you seen the Clearasil ad? the girl's really spotty and she's a Heavy Metal fan dancing to music, her hair is all over the place, her room's a mess and she holds a mirror to her face and it cracks. Her

sister, who's really pretty gives her Clearasil. The next scene is where her sister goes to her bedroom and she's transformed into this beauty and her room's tidy and she's playing soft romantic Marvin Gaye music and she's dancing with her boyfriend and the camera focusses on her as she admires her face [..] teenage girls are likely to go out and buy Clearasil after seeing this [..] this is something a lot of girl's think is real"
(Balbir, 16 year old girl)

The pressures upon teenagers to distinguish themselves according to conventionally accepted standards and criteria of beauty (i.e. a blemish free and fair complexion) can pose problems for 'Asian' teenagers who are sensitive about their skin colour. It is, after all, skin colour which distinguishes London Punjabis most obviously from their white peers. Many young people are also well aware of the fact that it is an aspect of their appearance that has been subject to racist abuse. Furthermore, an important criterion of beauty in the parental and peer culture alike is 'fairness' of skin. Indian face and beauty manufacturers play upon such prejudices by manufacturing a wide range creams an lotions aimed at lightening and even bleaching the skin. Such advertisements commonly interrupt Hindi videos and discussions of face products often highlight the importance, to girls, of being fair skinned.

Jasbinder - I hate those ones for moisturising cream 'Fair and Lovely' and they say it makes you whiter and whiter and then I think how stupid I don't want to get like that
Gurinder - yeah it's true these Indian ads are always going on about how to be white and everything white skin, white teeth
Amrita - and there's this ad for Vico Ayureval it stinks my mum has got that but it doesn't work [..] it's meant to make your skin smooth and fair
Gurinder - you know my sister bought that and you know what it

is? it's bleach! because she tried it on her face
she came out in a rash

Fairness of skin is considered to be a sign of beauty. Often when young people describe a person one of the first traits they will refer to is whether the person is 'fair' or 'dark'. 'Dark- skinned' people are considered 'unattractive' and even of 'low caste'. Dark facial hair is not regarded favourably and bleaching products are often used in an attempt to disguise dark hair on the upper lip or on the side of the face. Similarly, facial scrubs are used in the hope of obtaining a blemish-free, fair complexion. Few direct references are made to such products in the data but have been culled from more informal and intimate discussions.

Hair products, like shampoo and gels, are comonly referred to and are recognised as having a much more direct impact on consumer purchases. More people seem to freely admit, or are more aware of being influenced, to buy hair products because of ads than almost any other product apart from chocolate. The reason for this is not clear but it may have something to do with the importance of hair being not only a criterion of beauty but also an important facet of one's image. The appeal of the hair ads is usually related to the shine, thickness and quality of the hair

Dalvinder - I like the Timotee and Silkience ads, it's the hair it's so lovely and soft and shiny .. I did buy Timotee after seeing the ad but now I like it

Tejinder - I bought it cos of the ads too but I don't like it so I stopped using it

This demonstrates that although an ad may intitially be persuasive consumers may try a product and drop it. This is also true for Indian hair ads

Amrita - have you seen the one Amla Oil for hair? my mum saw that hair ad and like I'm always complaining that my

hair is dry especially since my perm and my mum went
out and bought it for me [..] it works as well [..]
it's green and it stinks but it does work it makes
your hair shiny and a bit greasy

The dominant image of femininity, and increasingly of masculinity, in advertising today is that of the beauty-attractiveness-fashion-style ideal. Teenagers' pre-occupation with all these elements of personal appearance make them an 'easy' target for advertisers of beauty products. Girls and boys compete with and among each other to attain recognition and status as an attractive person. In the peer culture, attractive girls and boys acquire very high status since they are admired, desired and envied. The message of advertising for young people, frequently, is that to be happy, popular and liked you have to be, above all,'attractive', especially to the opposite sex. By consuming beauty products, young people hope to attain some degree of attractiveness. This can, at times, pose problems for young people who do not feel that they match the criteria of beauty and attractiveness which are, to some extent, culturally specific. Exposure to popular Indian and Pakistani media provides young people in Southall with alternative models and standards of beauty. Despite this, the denigration of popular Indian culture among some young people, may lead them to reject such models and to seek alternatives.

5.6 CONCLUSIONS

Many young people believe that consuming commodities gives them a social identity - an identity which marks them as an insider to one group and an outsider to others. Advertising reinforces the social and cultural differences that are created by the unequal distribution of material resources and of educational and cultural 'capital'. However, the construction of social identities involves both creative, as well as manipulative processes. Consumer goods acquire personal and social meanings, are appropriated by consumers in local cultures and often serve certain social and symbolic functions. Advertisements may provide a 'magic' and offer momentary solutions to our perceived problems but not wothout some social cost. Raymond Williams sums it up thus (1980:

191)
"Fantasy seems to be validated at a personal level but only at the cost of preserving the general unreality which it obscures; the real failures of society [..] if the meanings and values generally operative in a society give no answers to, no means of negotiating, problems of death, loneliness, frustration, the need for identity and respect, then the magic system must come, mixing its charms and expedients with reality in easily available forms and binding the weakness to the condition which has created it".

Advertising offers utopian, fantastical and magical ideas and solutions to everyday problems and issues. It serves to socialise young people as consumers; consumers who are ever desirous to consume but rarely satisfied by their consumption, at least not for very long. It further serves to lock young people into the economic system by constantly presenting them with 'novel' consumer goods which they want or think they need. But advertising is also appreciated as a creative and expressive medium and as a form of entertainment which young people, in their turn, use in creative and expressive ways to define self in relation to others.

Let us now turn our attention to the ways in which TV comedy addresses young people as teenagers and family members and examine how young people talk about the comedy programmes they like.

CHAPTER SIX

TV COMEDY AND JOKING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PEER GROUP

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Comedy is the most popular TV genre among young people if one takes actual viewing figures as an indicator. 78% of the young people surveyed (N=217) reported that they had watched a comedy programme in the week prior to the survey (see Appendix A, section 4.3). After news, it is the genre which they claim to watch most often with the family. However, only 19% discuss comedy programmes with parents and 43% would prefer to watch without older people. These figures provide the starting point for this chapter which examines the ways in which young people talk about TV comedy. The key propositions in this chapter are as follows:

Popular TV comedy programmes provide a shared experience and a collective resource of comic narratives and material which young people selectively mine and re-create in their everyday verbal discourse. This use of TV material can only be appreciated within the broader context of joking relationships which form a key feature of the peer culture and which serve certain social functions.

The hierarchy of status and respect within Punjabi families, based on age, means that joking relationships between parents and children are limited. Furthermore, since much of the humour in the peer context is described as 'dirty' humour, it is not shared with parents and thus, joking relationships and the re-telling of TV comic narratives is type of verbal discourse which is almost exclusively peer oriented. Given the limited experiences and limiting social controls which young people are subject to, TV 'comedy talk' bears impressive witness to the role of TV as an enabler of talk.

Joking relationships play a central role in the peer culture; 'having a laugh', 'joking around', 'teasing', 'taking the piss' is, according to informants, one of the key differences between young and old. Older people are seen to have more responsibilities, anxieties and worries

which makes them 'serious'. It will be argued that humour is one way in which young people negotiate some of the key tensions in their own lives, especially those which relate to sex and to family problems. Humour plays as an important role in assisting the transition from child to adult knowledge and status and in relieving some of the personal and social tensions inherent in this process. It is the 'unspeakable', the incongruous, the ridiculous and the absurd that TV comedy talk and joking relationship render utterable.

This chapter will first examine the social functions of humour in the peer culture. Secondly, it will outline young people's classifications of how events, statements or actions achieve comic status. Thirdly, it will highlight differences in comic techniques as identified by informants. These will be illustrated through their TV comedy talk. Fourthly, it will explore the key objects of humour in their talk which concern sex and family problems. Finally, it will give an account of young people's perceptions of cultural differences in comic material through a comparison of Indian, English and American comedies.

6.1 THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS JOKING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PEERS

The ability to make people laugh can be one of the most creative acts of human imagination and one which is highly valued for the pleasures it brings. Theories of humour since the time of Aristotle have differed on many points but most seem to agree that humour is based on some form of degradation since one usually laughs at a thing, a person or a group of people as well as laughing with others. Joking relationships have a tripartite structure involving the comic source, the receiver and the object of laughter (Koestler, 1964:27-51) Humour serves to define group boundaries incorporating some as insiders and others as outsiders. Joking relationships are a way of managing potentially difficult alliances but they also flourish in 'safe' areas of social relations (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952).

In the peer culture under study, joking relationships are perceived of as an important criteria of group membership. Being a 'fun' person is associated with the ability to make people laugh and with being of a

happy, light-hearted disposition. This is not always easy during adolescence when one has to deal with unsettling emotional and physical changes. The pressures to participate in joking relationships are often intense and can serve to mask as well as relieve underlying personal and social tensions

"There's a lot of pressure to 'fit in' [..] being seen as a 'fun' person is really important [..] feeling confident at an age when all sorts of questions need to be answered is difficult [...] joking acts as a sort of bridge between real feelings and fun "

(Gurinder, 16 year old girl)

Young people develop ways of telling funny stories and ways of presenting jokes in order to gain status and acceptance in their peer group. Among intimate friends, joking, teasing and comic insult is 'safe'. Joking partners are licensed to revile, abuse and insult each other without loss of face. This is particularly true with intimate friends and cousins where a high degree of verbal abuse is acceptable. In this context, teasing symbolises potential closeness or even exclusiveness. It may also test and affirm social relationships combining friendliness with a degree of aggression. Humour may also be used to tell a truth that would be unspeakable, difficult or impossible to deal with directly. It is not only important to examine who jokes with whom and in what context but also how jokes are told

"It's the way you tell them, I mean, you can say, guess what!, this and that but they still don't laugh and like you get people who just sit there telling a joke or a funny story and they're the centre of attention and you think, 'Oh! my God! that was hilarious!".

(Pervinder, 16 year old girl)

Young people can gain enormous status as a 'fun' person by being a good comic raconteur, demonstrating wit and being quick in repartee. According to informants, they can use humour to attract attention, to display their intelligence or knowledge, (usually about sex in the absence of experience), to make a serious point, to criticise someone, to provoke a confrontation through comic insult and to relieve the tension of a disagreement. More status is acquired by those who can tell

an 'original' or 'new' joke or jokes which test intelligence. The following extract, from an interview, describes a joke told by a 16 year old boy to a group of female friends. It was widely circulated among sixth formers at school

"like some jokes they might be dirty but they're really clever, you have to think about them - take the one Nims told us the other day - it was really filthy but clever - he goes 'have you ever had a wet pussy around your neck?' and we go, 'No!' and he goes, 'you must have! how were you born?' and we all sat there and had to think about it and then we got it - but you have to use your intelligence to get it"

(Gurjit, 16 year old girl)

Cross-gender 'dirty' joke-telling is only acceptable if the friends are on intimate terms and trust and respect each other

"it depends on who's telling the joke [..] Abi can get away with it [..] but Gursh can't - he makes a fool of himself when he tells dirty jokes - we laugh <u>at</u> him really".

(Amrita, 16 year old girl)

It would appear that among 16 year old boys and girls who are close friends, few barriers to conversation and joking exist. Around the age of 16 interest, curiosity and talking about sex increases

"Before, we never used to say anything personal to boys but now if it's a joke about tampax or sex or anything we just come out with it - you know about personal assets and stuff, it's like we're all equal now, you can just say it and get away with it"

(Seema, 16 year old girl)

Most joking relationships were observed in the sixth form block, a designated space for study and recreation dominated by a pool table, free from teacher surveillance. Many spontaneous humorous interactions, often with sexual innuendo, take place around the pool table. The following is an example of how girls, who are denied full access to the table because it is dominated and controlled by boys, find a way of retaliating through joking. A group of girls are waiting to play pool

while the boys are monopolising the table. One of the players pots the white ball

"Where's the white ball?", he exclaims
"There's no white balls around here", interjects one of the girls
"There's no-one with any balls around here at all", retorts her friend.

The girls burst out laughing whilst the boys are rendered speechless. This is a typical example of the types of comic insult and exchange that takes place in the peer context. The first interjection is a direct reference to the colour of the boy's testicles and the second an assault on their masculinity. Through joking in this way, they are also transgressing the norms of propriety between boys and girls established in the parental culture.

Comic insult among girls is also common as in this exchange between two sixteen year olds.
Sangita - what's happened your hair?
Talvinder- what's wrong with it?
Sangita - have you been plugged into a socket?
Talvinder- get lost!
Sangita - Curly's getting angry
Talvinder- Silly cow!
Sangita - I'm only joking, can't you take a joke?

Personalized comic insult about one's appearance is taken with extreme sensitivity. There are countless examples across the data where jokes about any kind of physical deformity, inelegance, unattractiveness or personal idiosyncracy serve either to release the tensions by open acknowledgement (as for example with nicknames, the blackest boy in the school was nick-named 'chalky' and the fattest 'slim') or serve as a form of bullying which can be very painful to the person concerned (as for example one low caste, dark-skinned girl suffering from excema was nicknamed 'crusty' - she left the sixth from after three months). The cruelty of young people's humour should not be ignored especially where

it is directed against those occupying a low position in the peer status hierarchy.

There is considerable peer pressure to laugh at jokes in order to 'fit in' or not to appear 'dumb', especially about sexual matters. Often boys play upon girl's lack of knowledge of sexual terms
"Sometimes I don't get jokes, especially rude ones, but I just laugh anyway cos otherwise you feel a bit stupid - like the other day Raj told this joke about nuts he goes, "what do you call nuts on the wall? walnuts. What do you call nuts on a chest? chestnuts. What do you call nuts on a chin? a blow-job". I didn't get it but I did laugh [..] later Gurjit told me what a blow-job was"
(Baljit, 16 year old girl)

Many girls have confided that it is largely through 'dirty'jokes and through films and TV that they acquire vocabulary relating to sexual matters and, as a consequence, gain knowledge about sex and the adult world. It is rare that parents discuss 'the facts of life' with their children and,indeed, some are opposed to its teaching in schools. Furthermore, sex education takes place within the confines of Biology lessons in mixed gender groupings and is either considered embarrassing or ridiculous. Thus 'dirty' jokes serve as a kind of informal sex education among peers.

Whilst most young people in Southall are sensitised to jokes about Indians and 'pakis' on TV comedy programmes (e.g Bernard Manning) they are far from taboo in the peer culture (see Appendix 6 on the jokes in circulation at the time of fieldwork). Jokes using nationality, region or religion as their butt are commonly told but these are only acceptable if the person is of the same group or if they are intimate friends. Thus, among Punjabi Sikh youths many of their jokes are directed against Pakistani Muslims, Gujerati Hindus, Bengalis and Blacks. They play upon a range of stereotypes which serve to re-inforce the religious and regional boundaries that are a more predominant feature of the parental than the peer culture. This is one way in which parents are seen to deal with their fears that their daughters or sons

may opt for a 'transgressive' inter-marriage with any of these groups
"[..] Also in marriage you have to get married to the same caste and those jokes (about Pakistanis and Blacks) reinforce stereotypes about other castes so there won't be any different caste marriages [..] that's probably why parents tell those jokes"
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

However, any of these jokes, told by a white outsider, would become offensive and would be perceived as racist. The same joke told by different people in a different context can acquire a very different set of meanings
"If an Asian tells an Asian joke nobody gets put down"
(Sukhvinder, 16 year old girl)
"we all (among friends) laugh at anything as long as it's funny, we don't really care if it's sexist or racist'
(Ravinder, 16 year old boy)

Similarly, jokes considered to be sexist, 'dirty' and targetted at girls or women may be told by girls in female but not in male company. However, boys often use sexist and 'dirty' jokes to 'wind up' girls.
"Most offensive jokes are about women, 'dirty' jokes about sex and you think, where do they (the boys) get them from? "
(Parween, 16 year old girl)

However, boys do not take sexist jokes as seriously as girls
"it's school boy humour [..] but if you know the girls well sometimes for a laugh you might tell a really sexist or dirty joke and they'll go "agh!, that's really sexist!" and, you know, you just can't be bothered. Everyone knows it's a joke. I mean, if you start taking jokes seriously there's no hope for you, is there? But there again, you could say Bernard Manning is a racist and a sexist cos of the jokes he tells. I don't laugh but I don't find them personally offensive like some people do"
(Ranjit, 16 year old boy)

One of the most common ways of evoking laughter among male peers is to use Punjabi swear words to insult girls. Most of these are based upon accusations of sexual promiscuity or a perceived 'perversity'. In the school context, the use of Punjabi swear words is also a forceful weapon by which some young people attempt to redress the imbalance of power between teachers and pupils. A brief witty remark or insult in Punjabi, aimed at an uncomprehending white teacher, can bring an entire class to its knees with laughter.

Many arguments and fights at school are intitated by ritual exchanges of abuse in Punjabi rather than in English. An interesting cultural cross-over has occured whereby 'cussin out' or ritual abuse in public, common among Carribeans, has been taken on by local youth in Punjabi. This may be friendly or aggressive 'cussing'
"We do that a lot, just walk into the class and start cussing each other, just for the sake of it [..] cussing your mother's father, cussing each other's families but no-one takes it seriously, usually"
(Jaspal, 16 year old boy)

A common aggressive insult in Punjabi concerns fornication with a person's mother or comments about her private parts. Whilst this causes hilarity and great laughter among those delivering the insult, it may provoke outrage in the person on the receiving end. To insult a mother, or indeed any female member of the family in this way, is considered to be one of the greatest insults of all.
"This bloke, right, he'd say to me as he was about to leave, right, he'd say, "see you! and, by the way, tell your mother she was great last night!" and you'd think, 'God! I want to kill him!'. Some boys are like that, whenever they joke, they swear at your mother [..] well it brings out the most reaction because it sort of attacks the closest bond".
(Ravinder, 16 year old boy)

'Cussing out' is less common among girls but it does occur, especially in disputes over boys and when a girl's reputation or her family has been insulted. This is one of the most common causes of physical fights between boys and girls alike. When girls fight, they tend to do so very

dramatically. Crowds of young people gather around the fighting couple, cheering and jeering the fight which is often accompanied by the most feline pulling of hair and scratching of faces.

American films, particularly those starring American Black actors, such as Eddie Murphy and Richard Pryor, are also a common source of swear words which may be manipulated for the purposes of joking and or insulting one's peers. Boys acquire a 'cool', macho image and status by imitating the comic gestures and swear words of their favourite comic stars (e.g. 'you motherfucker', 'Kiss my butt', 'fuckface'). American comedy videos, rated 18, probably provide one of the most important source of 'dirty' comic material for boys.

Competence in joke telling and joke reception is thus, a very important aspect of social interaction in the peer group. There is a fine line between joking and insulting which requires sensitive negotiation if disputes and physical fights are not to ensue. This necessarily brief outline of joking relationships among peers sets the context for the following account of how TV comedy material is integrated into everyday joking relationships. But before we proceed it is necessary to clarify the use of terms in the following account.

Comedy is an aesthetic term which historically has meant a dramatic piece which evokes laughter and has a happy ending. Here, we refer specifically to TV comedy as a genre with specific forms of narrative organisation, forms of joking, identification and pleasure. In the following account, informants refer mainly to situation comedy, (although sometimes variety shows and stand-up comedy acts are referenced). TV sitcoms typically contain a small number of characters 'stuck with each other' at home in the family, at work or in some other 'bounded' situation (Eaton, 1981). Whilst joking and humour are not confined to TV sitcoms, it is the exclusive and particular weight given to these elements which defines the characteristics of the genre (Neale, 1980).

Situation comedies position audiences, not in suspense as in the thriller, but in anticipation of amusement and laughter. Whilst bearing some similarities to listening to jokes, it is usually the situations and the characters that are found comic. The tensions of the narrative to which viewers respond revolve around the economy or wit with which two or more discourses are brought together in the narrative. The pleasure of TV sitcoms is linked to the release of that tension through laughter. The tension and suspense of situation comedy is produced through a particular organization of narrative time, for example, through the anticipation of the inevitable and circular forms of narrative which return us to the basic problematic of the family or characters in question at the end of each episode (Woolacott, 1982).

By 'comic' we refer to events, statements, actions which cause or which are meant to cause laughter. It can refer to the various forms of comedy, their intentions or effects but also to 'real' events. In their 'comedy talk' informants re-tell comic moments from their favourite TV sitcoms. They also re-tell and re-create jokes, wisecracks and gags which play upon surprise, ineptitude, frustration and failure. All these share certain ways of undermining expectations, playing with logic, conventions and meanings through the application of certain principles of temporal articulation or timing (Neale, 1990). Young people require some degree of skill in joke-telling to perform and acquire status among peers. The re-telling of comic material from TV is one way of acquiring and practicising such skills.

Humour is a cognitive experience which has characteristic physiological and emotional by-products. According to Chambers dictionary, humour is 'a mental quality which apprehends and delights in the ludicrous and mirthful'. Young people distinguish themselves from adults not only by their more vivacious sense of humour but also by the different things they laugh at among peers. Across the observational and interview data on young people's TV comedy talk certain patterns emerge in the ways that young people classify different types comic material. It is to these that we now turn our attention.

6.2 THE CLASSIFICATION OF COMIC MATERIAL BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people make four key classifications of how events, statements or actions can achieve comic status. These classifications are based on very different criteria.

Firstly, young people distinguish between various comic techniques, from purely visual (slapstick, impersonation, caricature, role reversals) to more language based techniques (jokes, wit, puns, repartee, satire).

Secondly, they differentiate between what they perceive as the objects of humour. In this chapter we shall deal with their comedy talk about sex and about the family. (The upper classes, religion, race, caste and deformity feature more prominently in their joking relationships which do not use TV as a source of material. (See Appendix 6;263 for jokes in circulation at the time of fieldwork)

Thirdly, they identify cultural differences in comic material, in particular, between Indian, American and English comedies.

Finally, they make judgements about the realism or anti-realism of different comedy programmes. Issues of realism will not be dealt with separately but will be included across the chapter where relevant.

These classifications of comic material are, therefore, by no means mutually exclusive. On the contrary, what is considered to be 'really funny' tends to cross-cut two, three or even all four classifications. In this chapter these classifications are presented with examples of comedy talk which are taken from observational, interview and classroom data.

6.3 THE TECHNIQUES OF COMEDY:

One of the primary distinctions of comic material by young people in Southall is between visual and verbal comedy; the former is seen as comedy which can be enjoyed and discussed with both parents and peers whereas the latter is seen to exclude many parents. The comic moments of visual humour in popular TV comedies can be re-told with relative ease

and enjoyed again with peers whereas verbal humour requires greater language competence to comprehend and later to recall and re-tell.

What young people describe as visual humour is more commonly known as slapstick. It is based on the practical joke, the unexpected intervention of 'fate', (for example, in the form of a banana skin), rendering the comic character both the perpetrator and victim of preposterous incidents and accidents. Gigantic efforts are made for diminuitive accomplishments. The repetition of accidents and catchphrases, a typical convention of slapstick, decreases surprise but increases dramatic tension. By definition visual humour requires no language input, it is direct and leaves nothing to be guessed.

This type of humour is most enjoyed by young people with their parents because there it is easy to understand or as one respondent put it 'you don't have to understand it'. It is immediately accessible, instantly intelligible and full of powerfully marked actions designed to produce an immediate audience effect (Neale, 1990:20-21).

One of the most prominent examples of visual comedy discussed by informants at the time of fieldwork was '<u>Some Mother's Do Have 'Em</u>'. This is a British family-based sitcom starring Frank Spence who, alongside Lenny Henry, was reported to be one of the most popular male comediens among 16 year olds.
"I watch it with my mum cos in most funny scenes he doesn't speak that's the reason why the family like it cos there's not much English in it. My friends like it too cos a lot of the jokes from it you can tell, not proper jokes, you can talk about it with parents and friends"
(Gita, 16 year old girl)

He is seen to hurtle through life from one catastrophe to another and from one indignity to another
"It was so funny when he went on his honeymoon [..] he's lying in bed with his wife, just about to, you know what, and suddenly the bed crashes through the ceiling into the hotel reception and he goes "Oooh!

look what I've done now!"
(Farzana, 16 year old girl)

The catchphrases he repeatedly uses are re-cycled in peer talk where his 'camp' behaviour and manner of speech are imitated. Phrases such as, "Betty's having a baby!" and "Ooh! look what I've done now" are applied to different real-life situations by both boys and girls in order to generate laughter. His appearance and mannerisms are a source of both amusement and aggravation. But some young people enjoy imitating him "the way he dresses up with that cap and raincoat and the way he talks, he's so funny but he gets you so aggravated as well cos of the really stupid things he does, he makes you want to kill yourself he's so annoyingly funny [..] Harvey does a good 'take-off' of him"
(Manjit, 16 year old boy)

Although, the comedy is seen to be based primarily on visual humour it also contains elements of exaggeration and role- reversal. The most typical comments concern that fact that, though a man, he behaves like a child (i.e. he has a childlike innocence, gullibility and naivety) and though a man behaves more like a woman (i.e. he adopts stereotypically feminine sensibilities and talks 'camp'). Laughter is provoked by the subversion of conventional ideas about adult and masculine behaviour which are both a source of amusement and ridicule. He is a classic anti-hero
"Everything he touches turns to disaster, he's no good as a husband or as a father [..] he's no good at anything really"
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

Part of the pleasure derived from this series is that it can be shared with parents. It is visual, 'safe' and allows the family to laugh at the incompetence of the comic character as well as sympathise with the successive catastrophes that plague his family life.

The other outstanding example of visual comedy that young people discussed at the time of fieldwork was 'You've Been Framed'. In this programme mem bers of the audience send in 'funny' clips from their

family videos. Again, this is enormously popular with both parents and children because it is both visual and 'safe'
"We all sit round waiting for it to come on 'cos we know we'll have a laugh and it's good 'cos mum can understand too"
(Rajinder, 16 year old boy)

It's popularity is not confined to the home but is carried to school where during the winter season it was one of the most popular topics of conversation among peers on Monday mornings. This is partly a result of scheduling in that it appeared on Sunday evenings throughout the winter season (1990-91) and thus (alongside '<u>Only Fools and Horses</u>') was a topic of animated conversation which, according to many, helped them face the 'pain' of Monday mornings.

Observations during Monday morning registration periods highlight the way in which the comic moments of the previous night's programme are re-told. The re-telling triggers visual memory and what was laughed at during viewing can then be laughed at again with friends, as in the following extract from a conversation among three 16 year old girls

Gurjit - did you see the one where the baby was trying to pour water in to the pool and he threw the bucket of water at himself
(chorus of laughter)
the expression on his face!

Balbir - and the (laughs) the little Japanese children running round and round (laughs) playing rounders and then they have to run a straight race
(all in hysterics)
and (laughing) they're so dizzy they can't run straight

Parmjit - they go zig-zagging all over the field
(laughing continues)

Balbir - and the one where they're getting married and the bloke dozes off at the altar and they can't wake

him up (laughing continues)

Gurji - and the one where the little boys sticks his finger up the groom's bum at the altar just as he says 'I do!' (all laughing)

Baljit - and what about the one where the priest pats the boy on his head and gets his hands all sticky with hair gel and has to wipe his hands on his thingy [..]

Such re-telling of comic scenes can be fairly lengthy and is often accompanied with uncontrolled fits of laughter. Interview data about the programme emphasises how, despite the anticipation of the inevitable, it is the 'unexpected' and 'surprise' elements of 'real life' situations which provokes laughter as they collectively remember wigs falling off, people falling into rivers and 'catastrophes' at family occassions. This, too is an English comedy whose target is very often the failure of family plans since the majority of 'funny clips' are drawn from home-made family videos where, for example, the exalted occassion of a wedding can momentarily become a great farce.

In families where parents understand and speak little English the obvious preference is for more visual forms of comedy since a high degree of linguistic competence and a familiarity with the cultural references is needed to understand more complex verbal techniques of comedy, such as, satire, the pun or witty exchange. This is not of course to imply that all parents are limited in the understanding of English but obviously, in many homes, language is a barrier to comprehension and enjoyment. However, few programmes rely exclusively on visual humour and most involve a variety of techniques both visual and verbal. However, the more visual the humour, the more parents are seen to engage with it. This helps explain the widespread popularity of cartoons, like 'Tom and Jerry', among Punjabi families in Southall. In the survey, cartoons come second after comedy in 'actual' viewing behaviour. (78% of respondents reported 'actually' having watched a comedy programme and 72% a cartoon in the week preceeding the survey See Appendix 1 section 4.3)

Moreover, teenagers claim they watch cartoons because their younger siblings enjoy them but they are also seen as a way of relaxing and relieving the stress of a 'hard day at school'. Many 16 year olds like to retreat into a childhood world, constructed for them by TV (as was argued in the chapter on news) since many find the strains of 'acting grown up', 'being cool' and 'showing parents that you can cope independently', a little strenuous. The 'transitional' nature of adolesence is frequently referred to in this way. Sixteen year olds still enjoy childhood pleasures despite eager attempts in other situations to appear 'grown up'. Cartoons are a genre of visual humour, par excellence, associated with childhood.

British 'stand-up' and 'alternative' comediens such as Ben Elton and French and Saunders are rarely discussed by informants, (except perhaps by final year A-level students). This is because their performance is more verbal, their delivery faster and the humour dependent on social, cultural and political knowledge. In contrast, programmes such as 'Spitting Image', are enjoyed and discussed for the pleasures of seeing, usually 'dignified', national figures, (such as Margaret Thatcher and the Royal Family, in particular), appearing wildly exaggerrated, distorted and being ridiculed. The episode following Mrs. Thatcher's resignation was much discussed in recreation the following day as the following extract from a conversation between two boys reveals

Kulbir - did you see 'Spitting Image' last night? wicked
Rajesh - yeah man, it was wicked! Thatcher in
the coffin
(both laughing)
Kulbir - that was safe man! serves her right
Rajesh - I was surprised they got away with that, innit, making
out she was dead and that
Kulbir - they made out like it was a horror movie
Rajesh - well she's been a non-stop horror movie for the last
ten years man, innit?

Thus TV Comedy talk can be used to express opinions on serious issues, in this case to voice an opinion about Mrs. Thatcher's 'reign' as prime minister and the licence that comedy producers have in Britain. The parodic and satiric elements of the programme become integrated into the talk of these boys and thus shape their verbal expression. For whilst they are ostensibly talking about the programme, they are also passing judgements, expressing opinions and making their own jokes drawing on their shared experiences of the programme.

It is worth mentioning here that the most common examples of visual humour which young people discuss come, not from broadcast TV, but are derived from popular Hindi cinema. We shall return to the question of visual humour later, when examining the cultural differences in comic material as perceived by informants. We shall now turn to the objects of humour in TV comedies which young people commonly laugh at and discuss.

6.4 THE OBJECTS OF HUMOUR

The 'objects' of laughter which have emerged in young people's TV Comedy talk point to some of the underlying personal and social tensions in their lives which are difficult to talk about and approach directly. TV Comedy talk, as an element of joking relationships, is one way of broaching the taboo or unspeakable. In this section we shall examine the objects of humour which respondents describe as being about sex and about the family. The objects of humour which young people have identified through their talk are also very much a product of the generic conventions of TV sitcoms in which discourses of sexuality, family and class are played off against one another in the context of a familiar 'comic' world. In the next two sections, TV comedy talk about sex and about the family will be examined. For the purposes of analysis they will be examined separately but they are obviously related and certain themes, particularly issues around courtship, cross-cut these domains. Comedy talk about class features less prominently in everyday discussions and therefore will not be dealt with in this section. Before we proceed however, a few preliminary points to clarify the terms and the arguments are necessary.

Young people use a very broad definition of sex. It includes a wide range of meanings and phenomena which may be referenced either implicitly or explicitly, for example, from references to 'private' body parts or functions, to the sexual act itself; from dating as a preliminary to sexual experience, to childbirth as its consequence; from visual depictions of sexual precocity or provocativeness, to the language of sex. Thus, it encompasses meanings, not all of which are directly about sex but which connected with the whole domain of gender and sexual distinctions, characteristics or activities, more generally. It is in this very broad sense of the word that the following discussion about sexual humour takes place.

Whilst much comedy talk involves some kind of reference to sex, the object of laughter is not sex itself (however defined) but the idea of it, in a context rendered ridiculous, incongruous or absurd in some manner. What is a potentially serious subject which is difficult to talk

about and constitutes a source of personal and social tension among peers, is transformed by humour into an acceptable, shared peer discourse. Furthermore, since this kind of talk is taboo with parents, it is pleasurable because forbidden and because it represents a (temporary) distancing from parental norms and values in a 'safe' context.

Similarly, it is not the family, per se, which is the object of laughter but the idea of the family as the basis of all planning and order which is subverted in TV sitcoms. Family problems, again a source of social tension and a taboo topic of conversation, (one does not usually talk about one's own family problems in the peer context as this would be to dishonour one's family) are rendered absurd or tackled indirectly and playfully through humour. In certain family-based sitcoms moral values, social codes and behavioural norms are examined in a humorous and light-hearted way and so it becomes possible for young people to see how TV families resolve their problems. Again, serious issues are explored and social and personal tensions relieved through comedy.

6.5 TV COMEDY TALK ABOUT SEX

Humour which is seen to have as its object sexual matters is the most prevalent type of humour in the peer context. In this section I shall argue that TV acts as a resource providing comic material which can be used in peer contests in which competing claims to knowledge about sexuality, in the absence of experience are advanced. It is also a means of discovering information about sexual matters in a way which may be less threatening and certainly more amusing than other means. Informants claim that 'sexual' humour is a way of relieving some of the tensions involved in dealing with one's own growing awareness of sex, one's emergent sexuality and gender relations more generally.

TV comedies in which sexual matters are dealt with directly are viewed alone or with older siblings. It is strictly taboo to watch comedies which make overt reference to sex in the presence of parents and elders. This accounts for the fact that although 74% of respondents claim that comedy is a genre most often watched with the whole family 43% report

that they prefer to watch comedy programmes alone. The 74% are referring to 'safe' comedies which are described as either 'innocent' or 'visual' or those where references to sex and sexuality are passed in innuendo and with an implicitness that parents may not pick up upon (See Appendix 1 section 4.3).

While, in the parental context sexual humour is seen as 'dirty' a change of context is sufficient to cause a switch in attitude. 'Dirty' humour among intimate friends is not only permissable but desireable 'fun', as the following discussion among three 16 year old girls highlights

Dalvinder - I get a kick out of dirty jokes but I don't think that my parents do (laughing)
Inderjeet - If my parents ever found out the kind of jokes that I laugh at .....oh boy!
Kamalpreet- some of the stuff they don't think you know about especially stuff about sex and all that
Inderjeet - but you know a lot more than they do often
Kamalpreet- they'd be really shocked at the things we laugh at
Seema - my mum tells me quite a lot of dirty jokes and they're really quite filthy and funny as well but she tells them to me in her own language [..] you can't really translate them.

Clearly there are a number of dynamics going on; if young people laugh at 'dirty' jokes in front of their parents not only would they show disrespect but also they would show their knowledge of sexual matters. Demonstrating such knowledge is equated with a loss of innocence and purity. Furthermore, for parents and children, the sharing 'dirty' humour is taboo because neither want to be reminded of the fact of their own sexuality and procreative powers in each other's presence.

One does not wish to portray 'Asian' parents as excessively 'prudish'. Certainly, Seema's mother is obviously sufficiently trusting of her daughter to share 'filthy' jokes with her. Yet this is the exception rather than the rule. Also, while it is probably true that white

teenagers are just as reluctant to view 'dirty' humour in the presence of their parents, Punjabi parents are more 'strict' in their attitudes toward sexuality and morality than are the majority of their whte counterparts.

For 'Asian' parents sex has its 'proper' place within a the legitimate confines of marriage. Since family 'izzat' is dependent on girls' 'purity' and 'chastity', parental regulation of daughters is generally stricter than among white or black families. Thus, the regulation of viewing, especially of visual depictions of sex, is also greater than might be expected among white families.
"Most Indian parents are less liberal than white parents and have been brought up with a different sense of morality and humour [..] they wouldn't laugh at really dirty jokes like we do [..] they have a deep feeling that they need to keep their children safe from the world's realities and that they must keep them pure for as long as possible [..]I don't know if all parents are like this no matter where they are brought up"
(Nirmal, 18 year old boy)

In spite of this, TV, film and video have given the present generation of young people much greater access to representations of sexual behaviour than any previous generation. The pirating and exchange of 18-rated and 'blue' movies is commonplace among boys and, to a lesser extent, among girls. This has undoubtedly affected knowledge of, and even attitudes to sex, and this is most clearly manifest in young people's talk. It should be noted that video films are probabaly the major source of comic and 'dirty' material and that the extracts from the data that follow are relatively 'mild' in comparison with data which I have collected on video talk.

Knowledge about sex, in the absence of experience, confers status among peers. Indeed much re-telling of sexual humour from TV, and sexual jokes more generally, involves contests of competing claims to knowledge about sex. This is especially true in the mixed gender situation where such joking may range from a mild, lascivious tease to outright insult. For

the moment let us concentrate on the types of comic stories, based on shared TV comedy viewing experiences, that are re-told in the peer context. I have chosen examples from that data for their typicality and illustrative qualities.

'My Two Dads' is a very popular American comedy series based on the life of Nicole, a teenage girl, who lives with her two dads because her mother died without revealing the identity of the true father. In one episode which was much discussed among girls, Nicole comes home to find one of her dads in bed with a woman. The following day, she goes to school and boasts about her father's sexual prowess in order to gain attention and status from her friends. Her dad realises that he has set her a bad example. Both dads are worried about their influence on her since as 'single' men they are always looking for partners but failing to find them. Nicole herself has a several suitors who she dates intermittently. In the following extract, from a conversation about this episode, between four girls it becomes clear that it is Nicole's flirting and boasting behaviour that causes concern for Farzana and Gita, in contrast to the more humorous attitudes of Rita and Surinder. Their discussion raises the problem of how teenagers use adults that they admire as role models. However, the examples of behaviour adults offer are not always appropriate.

Farzana - did you see 'My Two Dads' last night?
All - yeah
Gita - it was brilliant
Surinder- when she comes home and finds her dad in bed with that woman (all laugh)
Farzana - she shouldn't have gone and told all her mates at school
Rita - why not?
Farzana - She's showing off and boasting about it and acting that way herself, going out with guys and really flaunting herself. She just tries to copy that women her dad was with
Rita - so what?

Farzana - like there's plenty of girls who do that
in this school. It would be all right if they
went out and kept it a secret but they show off [..]

Gita - she's a right flirt. Did you see that mini skirt she
was wearing, revealing everything? I'm not surprised
the boys were after her like sniffing dogs

Surinder- sometimes boys want too much (giggling)

Farzana - that would put me off from going out with boys
it always causes trouble

Rita - well, it's the kind of trouble I like (laughing)

Gita - she's just been influenced by her dad

Farzana - but he's set her a bad example

Rita - but she gets all the guys excited (laughing)

Surinder- they're so funny when they all start trying to copy
her dad

Gita - when they all turn up at the same time at her house
wearing the same jumper as him (all laughing)
that cracked me up man!

What is a potentially serious situation - being reminded of one's parent's sexuality and of the unimaginable fact that one is the product of one's parent's participation the sexual act - is transformed by humour. Yet, the father's behaviour is not discussed. It is the precocity of teenage dating behaviour and the young characters' attempts at impersonating adults which is mocked and ridiculed. Different judgements are made about Nicole's behaviour which are revealing of different values and attitudes toward dating and what is considered to be 'appropriate' conduct for females (see Appendix 1, section 3.5). Nicole's behaviour is compared with the conduct of certain female peers at school and held in disdain by two of the girls but admired by the others. These differences of opinion subside with the punchline or narrative closure which ridicules Nicole's young suitors for copying her father's style of dress in an attempt to woe Nicole. The potential conflict between these girls, caused by differences in attitudes to dating, is relieived through humour.

Whilst the object of humour is seen to be the imitative behaviour of teenagers, it is closely linked with the failure of family plans, for whilst both dads try to do everything possible to bring their daughter up correctly, their own self interest often conflicts with the interests of being a 'good' father and family man, especially where sexuality is concerned.

'Only Fools and Horses' is one of the most popular of British sitcoms among young people in Southall. It is based on two brothers, Del Boy and Rodney, who live with their great uncle and Del's girlfriend, Rachel. This is an English Sitcom where working class colloquialisms and cockney slang have great appeal. Phrases like 'You plonker Rodney!' and 'Lovely Jubly!' have entered into everyday local usage among young people. The final episode of the series (Sunday 10th March 1991) in which Rachel gives birth was considered to be the 'funniest' in the series. It became an animated topic of conversation among young people during their recreation periods for days after.

Del Boy, the central comic character of the series was present at the birth rendering it a comic extravaganza. The birth scene was faithfully re-created by several different groups of young people, both male and female, with a high degree of consistency in the comic moments which were recounted. The following informal conversation between three girls gives an indication how young people discussed the comic portrayal of the birth

Jasbinder - Did you see 'Only Fools and Horses' last night?
All - (enthusiastically) yeah
Jasbinder - like, she's giving birth and she's
lying there, right, with her legs wide open and the
doctor's examining her and (laughs) his wig falls
onto her, (giggling) private bits (all laugh)
then she's holding Del's hand, right, and he starts
screaming
Amrita - yeah (laughing)
Jasbinder - And like they're all waiting for what the hell's

going on
(all laughing)

Jasbinder - and he goes, 'did you feel pain?' and she goes, 'yeah' and then he goes, 'good, now you know what I'm going through'

Amrita - and what about the bit when she's had the baby Rodney comes out and he thinks it's going to be a demon cos he had that dream and there's a a full moon and he goes, 'what is it? and Del goes, 'It's a baby' and Rodney goes, 'No! I mean is it a girl or a boy?' so he says 'it's a boy and he's got a big one so he's not gonna be shy to go into the showers at school' (all laugh)

Baljit - and the bit when they're all about to come in and see the baby and she's lying there with her legs wide open and he looks at her and he goes 'shut your legs, love, you might get a draft'
(all laugh)

Laughter is generated by these scenes, and in their re-telling, by rendering the birth scene absurd. It combines techniques of visual humour (the wig and Rachel's posture) with witty exchanges between the characters It further involves exaggeration (Del's pain is nothing compared with Rachel's) and irony (he is ostensibly concerned that Rachel will get a draft but really concerned about her undignified posture, made even more ironic by his own lack of dignity i.e. as anti-hero).

This type of humour is strictly for peer consumption and re-telling. As one girl put it
"I knew that Rachel was going to give birth in the last episode and that they would make it really funny so I decided to go upstairs and watch it alone because then I could laugh more freely [..] I wouldn't have to hold the laughter in"
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

This extract highlights how, inspite of the fact that all present had actually seen the episode, much pleasure is derived from its re-telling. Young peole select the comic moments from an episode and re-tell them as jokes with an accuracy for detail and a comic timing which is most impressive and which bears witness to the the kind of attention with which such programmes are viewed. Several informants described how they make a conscious effort to remember the jokes from TV comedies because they know that the programme will be discussed and they want to impress their peers and gain attention for a while by showing their skill in memorizing, re-telling and even improvising upon the comic narratives. Whilst there is no overt competition between these girls it is clear that the ability to recount comic events successfully is valued and confers status.

Thus far, I have taken examples from conversations between girls. It should be pointed out that as a female researcher it was difficult to access boy's humour because, in their eyes, telling me 'dirty' jokes would show disrespect to a teacher and as many boys pointed out
"the kind of things we like to laugh about are really really dirty [..]
we wouldn't say them in front of girls, well most girls"
(Rajinder, 16 year old boy)

However, one comedy programme which was much discussed among male peers was '<u>The Lenny Henry Christmas Show</u>'. Lenny Henry, a black, west London comedy artist, is one of the most popular comediens among young people in Southall. They claim that his appeal is heightened by the fact that they have grown up with him and become familiar with his style of humour which is based on caricature and impersonation. It is his skillful impersonations, especially his facial expressions and different manners of talking which are found most funny.

<u>The Lenny Henry Christmas Show</u> was broadcast in a very late night slot (midnight) signalling that the humour may be 'offensive' to some. Boys tend to be late night viewers, at least, more so than girls. Late night viewing means the increased likelihood of what are, euphemistically, labelled 'adult scenes' by the boys. Few of the girls had watched this

programme. I knew that this had been one of the most popular programmes over the Christmas period among boys from their TV diaries but upon returning to school discussions about it were con fined to the peer group. Therefore, I had to rely on interview data to glean what was being discussed among the boys.

It was primarily Lenny Henry's impersonations of two popular black singers, (Michael Jackson and Luther Van Dross) which dominated their discussions. The combination of visual humour (centred around his penis), the accurate impersonation of the speech patterns and the exaggeration of sterotypes were found appealing

Naser - It was so funny the way he took off Michael Jackson's dance routines
Rajinder - he kept grabbing his balls (laughter)
Naser - when he goes 'Do you think my skin is too black?' (impersonating him)
Rajinder - he keeps getting his skin whitened
Naser - he picks that girl from the audience and takes her on stage (laughing) and a pink satin bed appears (laughing) too much guy! I was cracking up
Rajinder - and the music
Naser - and he lies on it with her singing and jumping up and down
Rajinder - and then he grabs his teddy bear instead of her
Naser - I would have grabbed her

It is recognised that Lenny Henry is trying to 'knock' the stereotypical 'sexy' black singer by exaggerating the stereotype. This is found to be acceptable since he is black himself. It is known that he refuses to tell racist jokes and that although he bases his humour on black people, he does so in a way that is not 'hurtful' to them. He is seen to use humour to deal with serious issues

Naser - he's taking the piss out of Luther Van Dross and other macho, soul singers, you know, shirt buttons undone, hairy chest, platform shoes and the wiggling

hips and like he's putting across that
they're just wet

Rajinder - Yeah, and people like Michael Jackson who are
ashamed of the colour of their skin, he takes the piss out of
him

Naser - In a way, even though he's dead funny,
he does put across serious points, like he can take
the piss out of black people cos he's black but it's
funny, it's not racist

Another example of the way boys use sexual humour is reported by two 16 year old girls who felt both embarassed and undermined by the exchange they describe below

Daljit - the boys were on about 'Hale and Pace' and there
was this one sketch with something long in it.
I thought it was a hair curler or something and
it was a vibrator. Then, when I said I thought it
was an electric toothbrush they all started cracking
up and Jayan goes to Abi,
"She thought it was a toothbrush!" and they both start
laughing at me then Abi goes
"that's probabably what she uses"

Herjinder - yeah, they do that and if you say you don't know
what it means they laugh at you, we didn't even know what a
vibrator was

Daljit - it was so embarrassing when we found out
and all their jokes are about women's private parts
but then again (laughing) if they're about men's personal
parts we tell them

Herjinder - like the one Judge told the other day about a man
with a penis growing out of his forehead and
the doctor told him he was gonna be blind soon
because the balls would cover his eyes

It is clear that in venturing into sexual humour we are encroaching the most private, and normally secret, domain of peer culture - one which usually excludes adults. Despite gender differences in the uses and extent of 'dirty' humour one thing that is shared is its use to provoke connflict and to release tension. Restrictions on girl's behaviour in the home and on the streets means that school is the only territory where boys and girls can mix freely and without parental surveillance. Thus, tight control of gender relations makes dating difficult, except in the school context, where the constant alignment and rupture of romantic relationships creates an atmosphere fraught with tension and curiosity about sex. It should be remembered that for many girls, especially those who do not go on to higher education, marriage is imminent and the desire to know and understand what marriage involves is strong. However, such joking is both pleasurable and informative and constitutes an important aspect of 'growing up'. We shall now turn our attention to comedy talk which has as its object the family.

6.6 TV COMEDY TALK ABOUT FAMILIES

In this section young people's talk about family-based sitcoms will be examined some of the major themes and preoccupations of this talk discussed. I shall use examples of talk about 'The Cosby Show', 'My Two Dads' and 'Only Fools and Horses' since these are among the most popular series and therefore the most discussed. 'The Cosby Show' and 'My Two Dads' are similar in that the families both contain teenagers, although the first is a conventional family set-up whereas the second is very unconventional. 'Only Fools and Horses' is also unconventional in that it is a household consisting of male adults, two brothers and a great uncle. However, the kind of talk generated by these sitcoms is similar in that it is not simply concerned with the re-telling of comic moments but has a serious edge to it.

These sitcoms share some of the conventions of the soap, particularly, in representing the everyday lives of families and family relationships. As such they extend the range and repertoire of fictional families which young people have at their disposal for storytelling and imaginative purposes. In their TV talk young people use these families to compare

and contrast, judge and evaluate their own families and, even, to imagine what their own family life should, might or could be like. As the next chapter demonstrates, this is similar to how young people use soaps to talk directly or indirectly about their own family lives. These sitcoms, in representing the everyday lives of families, seem to elicit judgements about realism in ways similar to the soap.

However, there are also key differences. Sitcoms conform to the series format (as opposed to the serial format of soaps) and consequently, a resolution in the form of a happy ending is required at the end of each episode, even though certain problems are structured into the series and recur with each episode. Scheming and plotting are primary motivations for comic narratives but motivations which are invariably subverted by accident, coincidence, misunderstanding or ignorance. Thus the failure of plans and in this case of family plans is a key feature of the humour generated by family based sitcoms.

When young people refer to family comedy the prime example in their minds is 'The Cosby Show', a black American sitcom centred around family relationships. The family in 'The Cosby Show', the Huxtables, is middle-class but the programme centres on the ordinary misunderstandings, conflicts, and routines of everyday domestic existence. The happy ending which involves the resolution of conflict exists alongside and in combination with other key conventions, such as the consistent generation of laughter through the multuiple use of gag, funny lines and funny situations and the representation of everyday day life. In this respect The Cosby Show comes close to the soap genre. (Neale, 1990:12)

The most strikingly consistent remark that is made by young people is that in this sitcom, family problems are successfully resolved through humour. It is seen as an ideal yet real family, real in the sense that we are witness to their everday lives and they, like most families, have problems and conflicts. Yet, it is seen as unreal in that their problems are always successfully resolved at the end of each episode through humour, unlike in soaps.

"they're a really fun family and you can associate with the ups and downs they go through, they're like any family really but they don't have slanging matches like most families, they always sort their problems out in a humourous way, in a way they're a kind of ideal family"
(Farzana, 16 year old girl)

'The Cosby Show' is seen as educational, not in the conventional sense, but in the way it fosters in young people an awareness of the skills of problem-solving and communicating effectively with parents. This is a theme that recurs throughout young people's comedy and soap talk. Watching how families communicate with eachother provides models against which young people evaluate and, at times try to improve upon, the communicative patterns in their own families
"it shows you how to communicate with your parents but they make it seem so easy. I try to talk openly with my parents and discuss things but sometimes you just come up against a brick wall and if you try to be funny they just don't get your sense of humour. Young people know about comedy cos they use that type of language [..] it's as if only young people know about being in their teens [..] my parents don't really know what I laugh at"
(Gita, 16 year old girl)

One of the most talked about episodes in the recent series revolved around the problem of dating. When the daughter deceives her parents by dating a boy, instead of going to a friend's house, her younger sister spills the beans to her parents through her naivety. The parents decide to wait up until the daughter returns. Since they are sleepy, they place the sofa right in front of the door in order to confront her upon returning home. Once discovered in her deception, she is humiliated but in a humourous manner. Later, the father demands to see the boy and through humour gets the message across that parents have to make rules. They do not mind the fact that they are dating eachother but they do make rules about how often they see each other and about times for coming home. The following extract, from an informal discussion between

five girls, highlight the way they compare their own families with the Huxtables

Farida - the parents are so understanding
Gurjit - and they make sense, you understand why they make the rules they do
Sita - and they help you to see that you have to learn to give and take with parents
Ranjit - they don't help me talk to my parents
Farida - Maybe it's because of YOUR attitude to them, if you're bitchy with them then they'll be like that with you
Gurjit - I agree I think it does get the message across
Kamal - it's because it's about everyday life it's not fantasised, like some comedies are like based on unrealistic things
Ranjit - it's all right if you've got parents like Cosby but mine don't have a sense of humour about these things

Comparisons are made between young people's own families and the Huxtables, especially in the way parents and children communicate. Parents, on the whole, are seen not to have a sense of humour, at least, not about the issue of dating. So whilst young people may relate to the fact that parents have to make rules, the issue of dating is simply a taboo topic in the family. Furthermore, most parents are not like Mr.Cosby who has the ability to regulate his children's behaviour through humour.

Discussions of this particular episode among the above group of girls led onto the question of how, as daughters, they communicated with their own fathers. It would appear that the more 'traditional' the family, the more distanced father and daughter relationships tend to be. Many girls claim that they would not share jokes and laugh with their fathers. The exceptions, as explained to me by this group, are families who have been brought closer through sharing problems or where the father has more contact, through work, with white society and so, it is claimed, has a

better understanding of the way his children think and feel, (the implication being the more 'westernised the father, the more relaxed he will be in his attitudes).

A further point which has arisen in many discussions is that some girls upon reaching their late teens are actively discouraged from laughing in the family, especially in front of relatives
"my father is always telling me I shouldn't laugh and giggle so much he says I'm not a child anymore and expects me to behave in a more grown-up manner and be more serious he says its degrading for a girl of my age to be seen laughing [..] they treat you as a child a lot of the time and then they also expect you to behave as an adult."
(Amrita, 17 year old girl)

This may have to do with the absence of any clear or distinctive notion of adolescence in the parental culture, (referred to in the chapter on news). A girl age 17 would, in many parents eyes, be considered of marriageable age and thus considered 'mature'. Manifestations of laughter and giggling are considered inappropriate to her age and family status and are frowned upon. The kind of joking relationship that Cosby has with his daughters would be considered inappropriate in many families. However, despite the distance that informants claim exists in the more traditional families between daughters and fathers, there are exceptions, as when the eldest daughter almost takes over the role of wife. This occurs in families where the mother is not literate or fluent in English and therefore faces difficulties in coping with the everyday management of household administration and finances. In such families, the eldest daughter or son is better able to deal with such matters and plays an active role in family decision-making. However, despite a close relationship and strong dependence on the daughter, a joking relationship with the father would still be seen as inappropriate.

The discussion about the episode of '<u>The Cosby Show</u>' and how he dealt with his daughter's deception through humour, spontaneously led onto an examination of the girl's own relationships with their fathers and to father-daughter relationships in Southall more generally. This was

enabled by the 'safe' context since all the girls were intimate,friendly and unconstrained by my presence. The discussion points to the way in which family comedies are subjected to quite complex evaluations of realism whereby different criteria of realism are invoked in attempts compare and contrast family life off and on screen. Whilst many may find similarities with their own families in the everyday realities and problems that are faced by large families, differences in cultural norms and values means that the nature of the problems, the modes of communication and means of solving problems, are perceived as very different. This is very similar to the arguments to be made in the next chapter on soaps which points to structural similarites of 'community' life, particularly proximity of kin and density of gossip networks, but to significant differences in the underlying values and norms governing relationships and in the substance, content and style of everday family life.

In another much talked about episode of 'The Cosby Show', the youngest daughter complains that her older brother, sister and friends at school are allowed to stay up much later than her to watch TV. There are several arguments about this until she persuades her dad to let her stay up late, or so she thinks. She sits up with him for several nights watching all her favourite programmes and acquires status at school because she is able to inform her classmates about late night shows. However, after a few days, she is unable to stay awake at school. Her work suffers, the teacher complains but the father now forces her to sit up with him watching TV until she reaches a point of total exhaustion. In the end she sees the error of her ways and the logic of her parent's rules. The following extract is taken from a conversation in a group of 16 year olds boys

Rajesh - it's good the way they let her find out for herself
Kulbir - yeah they weren't just nagging her into following their rules
Brijesh- and Old Cosby is so funny when he's forcing her to stay up and she can't keep her eyes open
Brijesh - and when she falls asleep at school

Kulbir - yeah that's what I do
Brijesh - we all do
Kulbir - school's the best time to catch up on your sleep
(all laugh)

Whilst parental regulation of TV viewing is reported to be minimal among the older teenagers, it is nevertheless a familiar aspect of family life (see Appendix 1, section 3.5 on parental rules about TV viewing). This episode is found to be amusing because Cosby reverses his role from the controlling to the uncontrolling parent. In this situation his younger daughter is left the freedom to discover the errors of her ways and is led to self-regulation. Thus through role-reversal and the exaggeration of a familiar family situation, family problems are solved. It would appear that the central character of Cosby is always the winnner - parents are always right, but some are more right than others. He manages to confront the family problems and put a moral lesson across though humour.

"they don't deny their problems they bring them out in the open [..] Cosby is mainly about family relationships"
(Seema, 16 year old girl)

In another much talked about episode, Cosby has less success with his 6 month old grandchildren. Thus, while winning the major battles with his kids, Cosby himself is also at times the object of laughter. The episode revolves around a night out to see a Michael Jackson concert. The grandfather has procured tickets from his old friend, Michael Jackson's father. Much of the humour in this episode is based on role reversals of young and old.

Paramjit - the grandfather's like a teenager, like the way he keeps using trendy language like, 'chill out man'
Amar - the little girl and her boyfriend are only about 8 years old but it's funny when he starts acting jealous cos he can't go to the concert and he says, 'well when you're out with Michael Jackson, I'll be

on my honeymoon with Witney Huston', and she just looks at him as if he's crazy and says 'get real!'

Abida - and the twin's dad, he's really wet innit?

Paramjit - he's a bit of a wimp

Abida - he goes all soft and soppy cos he doesn't want to leave the twins for a few hours because he doesn't want to leave his babies, he's like a possessive mother

Amar - I really liked that bit where old Cosby is left babysitting the twins and like he's talking to them as if they could understand every word he's saying he's so funny, he's acting like a real child, but they don't take any notice of him [..] he doesn't get his own way like he usually does

One cannot underestimate the comic nature of Cosby himself whose facial expressions and mannerisms are a key source of laughter. The American slang has great appeal for young people in Southall where, as we have seen in the previous chapter on advertising, black, American, 'street' culture is very popular. Many of the expressions and slang words are picked up and used regularly. The role-reversals and witty exchanges are the key source of humour; the grandfather talking like a teenager; the eight year olds talking like 'grown-ups', the father of the twins behaving like a mother and Cosby himself acting like a child.

However, although the humour is based on deviations from social and cultural norms, there often seems to be an element of uncertainty as to whether 'real' American families behave like this
"I don't know if they are a typical American family [..] well they're black for a start [..] I don't know any real American families [..] but they're very open and they have a lot of fun [..] they seem sort of true to life except no family goes round cracking jokes all the time and acting daft like they do"
(Rajinder, 16 year old boy)

In the absence of direct experience young people can only draw on their knowledge of American families from other TV programmes and films. This is evident in the way they talk about 'My Two Dads'. The following account is an extract from an informal discussion held in class about the series where a group of girls were discussing the previous night's episode. One girl in the group had never seen the programme and so they set about explaining the series

Farzana - It's based on the girl's relationship with her two dads, they're struggling to bring her up correctly but they've got different ideas about how to bring her up

Gita - yeah, like Joey is relaxed and free and easy and understands teenagers but Michael is a more serious, business man, like you'll never see him in casual clothes

Farzana - he wants the best for his little girl and he's <u>planning her future</u> and he's more strict

Surinder- Nicole she's pretty and has two boyfriends fighting over her

Saira - and there's always a love problem involved and when she wants to talk about a problem she always goes to the lawyer woman who lives in the same block

Ranjit - why doesn't she go straight to her dads?

Farzana - what if her dad is the problem?

Gita - you see you always need a third person to talk to

Saira - and they live above a restaurant and that's where all the socialising and gossip goes on

Gita - and the two dads and girl are always getting into trouble and they have to sort their problems out by doing stupid thing, every episode has a different problem

Farzana - and like the characters are very funny and the roles they play are like possessive dads who want the best for their little girl but something always goes wrong

Gita - yeah, like if Joey wants to date a woman secretly he gets found out and if Nicole wants to date one of the boys she too gets found out

Saira - their plans always go wrong but in a funny way.

Farzana - but because they love her so much both dads are even willing to sacrifice their reputation for her

Surinder- and like, even though this type of family is not like an 'olden days family' it's good because families are changing. It's also good because it's realistic in the way she talks to her parents and how the lawyer gives her advice.

Farzana - It puts a moral message across in a subtle and tactful way.

Gita - but If it were two mothers it would be stereotyped because women are supoosed to be caring and understanding.

Surinder - you do sort of compare it it with your own dad like when he helps her with her with things

Judgements about the realism of the family life are not straightforward. Nicole is seen as a realistic character. She is 15 years old, goes to college and her everday life, problems and goals are, in many respects, similar to those of girls in Southall, despite the fact that relatively few openly 'date' boys and certainly would never bring the issue up with their parents. Yet, the family set up is considered unorthordox compared to familes in Southall but is seen to be the type of family one might find in America. It is seen as a 'modern' family and insight into how such families function is appreciated because, as many young people recognise, families are changing. Certainly families in Southall are experiencing quite dramatic and fundamental changes in structure, organisation, norms and values. It is likely that some young people are uncertain of how such changes will affect their own and future families. TV families extend the range and repertoire of families which they have at their disposal for the purposes of discussion. In their TV talk they can use these families to compare and contrast, judge and evaluate and even re-imagine how they might wish their future families to be.

The differences in attitude between the two dads with regard to how they should bring up their daughter, ('free and easy' or 'strict'), is something which young people relate to very well, and is seen to represent different types of families. In fact, often the first criteria upon which families are judged by young people, is by the strict/easy-going distinction which is further associated with the traditional/westernised opposition. Furthermore, it is related to gender distinctions since girls are usually brought up 'strict' whereas boys tend to be given more 'freedom'. This is also seen to represent tendencies in families where the father may be strict but the mother may be more lenient with her children or vice versa. Such differences create conflict which, in TV Sitcoms, can be resolved, or at least tolerated, through humour but it is realised that, of course, this is not the case in real life. The conflict between the parents, who do not always get things right, gives Nicole space to play one off against the other, which is recognised as a familiar strategy among young people. Furthermore, young people get great pleasure in seeing parents and adults get things wrong or making fools of themselves.

Both fathers attempt to plan the life of their daughter but their plans are either subverted by Nicole and her friends or, in some other way, they go wrong. However, the problems are not ignored. This is an important statement, not simply because it recurs very frequently across the data, but also because it is linked to a broader concern that many young people acknowledge about communication with parents. In many families it is not only differential competence in English and Punjabi that constructs barriers to effective communication but emergent differences in opinions, attitudes and in certain norms and values which pose obstacles. It would appear that in certain cases that this leads to a situation where problems are either concealed, ignored, repressed or avoided and finding a way to openly communicate with parents is often difficult. In sitcoms like '<u>The Cosby Show</u>' and '<u>My Two Dads</u>', generic conventions demand a new set of problems in each episode which are eventually contained or resolved through humour. Thus, at the end of each episode the family is returned to a state of stability, despite their problems, which is reassuring.

However, a dominant theme in such family-based sitcoms is the contradiction between the family as the basis of all planning and the family as the runiation of all planning. For example, Michael tries to compensate for the Joey's failures (i.e. being caught in bed by his daughter) but only serves to make matters worse (i.e. he ends up encouraging Nicole's friends to imitate his negative qualities). A third party is usually required to intervene and ensure the successful resolution of conflicts. In 'My Two Dads' this is accomplished through the advice given by the woman lawyer who acts as a surrogate mother figure in this untypical family set up which again subverts social conventions.

A remarkable trait of both fathers, in the eyes of informants, is that they are willing to sacrifice their reputations in order to satisfy the interests of their daughters. This highlights the cultural specificity of young people's responses to the programme since I suspect that a white teenager would probably not comment upon this. The fact that a father would sacrifice his reputation for his daughter is a reversal of the values and norms of Punjabi Sikh families. Since, as we shall see in the next chapter, family honour and respect are the fundamental principles upon which family life is based and would never be sacrificed for a daughter.

A further demonstration of how young people's TV comedy talk is preoccupied with the failure of family plans is drawn from 'Only Fools and Horses'. Although Del is the central comic character, his younger brother Rodney is integral to the series as a foil to Del. The brothers are different in every way and it is their differences which lead to conflict and provide a key source of humour in the series. Del is in his 40's whereas Rodney is in his late 20's; Del is uneducated and is a small time dealer/crook whilst Rodney is educated and works in computers; Del is a dreamer but Rodney has more realistic goals in life which he tends to live up to; Del's 'get rich quick ideas' always fail and Rodney is there to help him pick up the pieces. Del handles stolen goods and operates on the fringes of the law in the local black market trying to 'flog' everything from faulty car phones to inflatable, life-

size dolls. He wants to be a millionaire and he is always waiting for a lucky break but it never comes. He tries to act like a 'big man' with status, money and influence but people always see through him.

One of the most popular episodes was the Christmas special 1989. Del fills in a competition on the back of a packet of cornflakes to win a free holiday for the family on behalf of Rodney who he pretends he is 16 years old. When Del finds out that Rodney has won they are all delighted. Rodney and his girlfriend think they are going to accompany Del but when they get to their destination in Spain, Rodney discovers that Del has lied to him and that he has to pretend to be 16 years old. Suddenly, the roles are changed. Cassandra and Del are to act as parents and Rodney as their child in order to satisfy the rules of the competition. From this moment the episode is a riot of comic moments. Some claim they discussed this episode with friends intermittently for weeks after. The following is a short extract from a longer discussion about the programme which took place upon return to school after the Christmas break. It highlights the way in which all their plans fail but how humour saves the day

Diljit - Del stitches Rodney up badly, innit?

Kamaljit- d'you remember the bit where he has to go ice-skating with all the little kids and he keeps falling over

Diljit - no, the best bit was when he had to go to the disco and he gets so pissed off with that weirdo girl (laughing) who keeps hanging around him and asking him if he's a Bros fan

Mohinder- I liked the bit where Rodney, like he's really throwing a wobbler and he sneaks into Cassandra's room, you know, and he lights up a fag and pours himself a big glass of whisky and he's lying all over the sofa kissing Cassandra with a fag in his hand and all that and Del arrives with that old bossy bag, what's it yeah, the holiday organiser (laughing) and Del drags him off like a kid and he

has to go back to the disco [..] the look on the old bag's face, she thought Rodney was kissing his mum (all laughing)

Diljit - but the end's brilliant when he wins all that money and Del's going "luvley jubbly! I'm a millionaire at last

Mohinder- yeah and he can't have it cos Rodney shows them his passport and Del goes, "you plonker Rodney!" (laughing)

These are just some of the 'comic moments' that young people remember and re-tell using the catch-phrases and mannerisms of speech of the characters. Whatever plans they make as individuals and as a family are doomed to failure. The end of each episode returns to the uneasy equilibrium of living with failure.

Diljit - All the situations are so funny and the charcaters are so well formed, you get to know them, they reflect real life situations but, like, exaggerated

Mohinder-It's mainly the character of Del, he's a stereotype Eastender, he's thick but sort of innocent and naive you don't just laugh at him because you sympathise with him

Diljit - yeah, it's a bit tragic, he never gets where he wants to be and I suppose everybody can identify with that

Mohinder-It's more than comedy, it's drama and comedy - it's everything

Part of the pleasure of '<u>Only Fools and Horses</u>' is an identification with the working class lifestyle, London accents, slang, idioms and repartee of the characters.
"we can fit into their humour, we know what their jokes are about, they use the same type of language as us, parent's can't get into that type of humour they see us laughing and they ask 'what are you laughing at?' they don't understand it, they don't know about the humour of the young

nowadays [..] I feel as if my parents are still in the dark ages"
(Satinder, 16 year old girl)

In this section we have examined the objects of humour which provoke laughter among young people in Southall. In doing so I have tried to show how sexual humour alongside humour based on the failure of family plans are key themes in their Tv comedy talk. I further pointed out that humour based on 'race', religion, caste and deformity are significant objects of derision in the peer context but, for obvious reasons not represented on tv to any great extent. The appendix attached will give an idea of the jokes currently in circulation among young people in Southall which should shed further light on the different forms of humour which teenagers engage in.

It should also be apparent by now that the inter-relationships between the four classifications of humour are as significant as the classifications in themselves. However, it is useful for the purposes of analysis to draw together some general points concerning distinctions in types of humour according to culture.

6.7 PERCEIVED CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN INDIAN, ENGLISH AND AMERICAN COMEDIES

When young people make judgements about differences between Indian, English and American comedy they are not comparing like with like but drawing distinctions between very different forms of comedy. By Indian comedy they refer to the comic conventions of popular Hindi films on video whereas by American and English comedy they refer, not only to films on video and at the cinema, but also to Broadcast TV comedy. To complicate matters even further when, as we shall see, young people denigrate Indian comedy they are making judgements about the culturally distinctive aesthetic conventions of the genre of Hindi films, its narrational style and its modes of realism and anti-realism, its comic techniques and objects. The table below outlines the key oppositions which young people construct in making such judgements. English comedy is situated alongside American comedy but differences between the two are also highlighted.

INDIAN COMEDY		ENGLISH/AMERICAN COMEDY
visual	-	verbal
unrealistic	-	realistic
implausible	-	believable
unsophisticated	-	clever
a narrative deviation	-	integral to narrative
'clean'	-	'dirty'
unintentionally funny	-	intentionally funny
covers limited area of social life	-	covers all aspects of life

As a genre, Hindi films are mocked and ridiculed by many young people (Gillespie, 1989). The comic conventions are considered to be unsophisticated and implausible. One of the key reasons why they have become objects to laugh at among young people is due to their lack of realism. One would have to be a 'pendu' (peasant) to admit to liking them and that would be to deprecate oneself
"I mean they're really stupid, really ridiculous, how unrealistic! but they do make me laugh [..] they're stupidly funny, not intentionally funny"
(Ranjit, 16 year old girl)

Typically what is scorned is the hero or villain's death throes "like, you'll get this guy and after being beaten up, after running through fire, his legs blazing, he'll jump off a cliff and then, when most people would be unconscious or dead, he gives a really long speech before dying. Now I reckon that's funny, it's not meant to be but I crack up man, I just crack"
(Chokkar, 17 year old boy)

If one asks any young person what they find funny about Indian films they will be able to give a lengthy list of examples of what they don't like but find funny. I have collected a stock of examples but to cite just a few;

Unintentionally funny scenes

- a man jumping out of a high window and landing on his feet without any injuries
- an argument between a drunk husband and his wife
- fight scenes where the soundtrack is 'out of sync' with the action
- action scenes which are implausible
- the portrayal of women

Intentionally funny scenes which are found ridiculous

- If one person falls in a queue, they all fall
- someone getting chased by a dog
- someone falling in mud
- a wife chasing her husband with a rolling pin
- the portrayal of the village idiot
- a man chasing a girl around a rose garden

This type of humour is enjoyed almost exclusively by parents. The visual comedy or slapstick is a source of great pleasure for parents but young people, in the peer context, generally laugh AT the films themselves. "your parents are sitting there laughing their heads off and you think, hang on, have I missed something? you just don't find it funny but they find a woman chasing her husband round the kitchen with a rolling pin hilarious...it's so stupid"
(Inderjeet, 16 year old girl)

It should be noted that for many parents, born and brought up in India, their early experiences of cinema would have included the films of Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy, masters of visual comedy. Not only are these artists greatly appreciated but also they have had a considerable impact on Indian Cinema itself where their comic

techniques, predominantly slapstick, are to be seen incorporated into Hindi films.

The anti-realism, lack of plausibility and exaggerration which serves no comic effect is seen to address a less sophisticated audience
"they take the piss out of you these films do [..] you would have to be stupid to believe them [..] all you can do is laugh at them, they're so thick".
(Ranjit, 16 year old girl)

They are seen to insult the intelligence of the spectator and are greeted with mocking laughter in the peer context and with more subdued criticism in the parental context, for to openly laugh at what parents find amusing would be to engender hostility and disrespect.

The films are also considered to be excessively melodramatic and the perceived exaggeration of emotion is seen as laughably unrealistic and thus becomes a target of humour and something to mimick. We can usefully refer to Neale's arguments about why some audiences find Victorian melodrama amusing as opposed to tragic
"[..] plausibility is always relative to a culture's social and aesthetic norms. These norms are subject to variation and change, which is one reason why what one age or culture finds plausible another may find unconvincing. It is therefore why 'old' horror movies and 'old' melodramas may be found funny by contemporary audiences [..] when conventions change, helping thereby to establish new regimes and standards of plausibility, films using outmoded conventions can appear precisely absurd"
(Neale, 1990:70)

Parents, for example, who are accustomed to viewing Indian films, will be familiar with a different set of cultural codes for the depiction of romance and sexuality. Censorship in India has meant that the first screen kiss did not take place until 1984. Despite this, images of 'sexuality' are powerful by suggestion in the parent's eyes but thought of as hilarious by young people due to the paradox of their exaggerrated

yet concealed nature
"You see this woman with huge breasts heaving up and down, she's breathing heavily and starry eyed as if she's having an orgasm(...) but you don't even see them kiss properly it's so ridiculous [..] we have a good laugh at them"
(Perminder, 16 year old girl)

A more recent English comedy programme, 'The Real Mc Coy', produced by young black and 'Asian' writers and actors, was much discussed among young people at school
"What they do is to take the mickey out of Black and Asian families [..] they also take the piss out of Hindi films you know the way that the guy always wears white trousers and he lies on the grass and he's singing to her and she changes her sari every few seconds and even though they're using a soundtrack all they do is say 'I love you' [..] all they ever sing about is love, it's just fantasy but the way they take the piss is really funny they pick out all the stupid things"
(Pratibha, 16 year old girl)

Thus differences in aesthetic and cultural norms helps explain why the films are found to be ludicrous and thus become objects of laughter in themselves. But it does not provide a full explanation for we need to ask why young people in Southall when talking about TV comedy raise the issue of Indian comedy in the first place? Why do they construct these oppositions between Indian media and Western media, of which America is seen as a limit case?

America, to young people in Southall represents the ultimate 'western' way of life. 'Westernized' is a key term used locally to describe someone who has successfully adapted to the British way of life. For young people it has largely positive connotations. (see Appendix 1, sections 4.13-4.22 on culturally distinctive choices in media and for perceptions of America) Much of the pop music they listen to, their style and fashion, their slang derives from black American culture. Though blacks are a marginalized group in America, they are seen to be commercially and economically successful, especially in the pop and

youth scene. Youngsters in Southall have been brought up on steady stream of black American dance and music crazes (from body-popping to hip-hop), they have taken up graffiti and most of their favourite singers and bands are American.

This also raises the question of the dominance of American media markets which is in clear evidence but whether media imperialism implies some form of cultural imperialism or domination is beyond the scope of the present thesis and would require an examination of the wider processes involved in the appropriation of 'cultural heritages'. Nevertheless, it is clear that American media and youth cultures serves as a kind of aspirational goal among many young people which is closely related to perceptions of the American way of life as 'affluent', 'free' and 'fun'. Its relative 'distance' may be appealing (i.e it is not British and it is not Indian culture) for young people seeking alternatives to the oppostional model of cultures prevalent in Southall.

6.8 BRITISH AND AMERICAN COMEDIES

Although British comedies are popular, young people watch more American comedy programmes simply because there are available in greater supply on our screens. It is cheaper for TV companies to 'buy-in' American series than to produce indigeneous comedy. Furthermore, there are more American comedies which directly target the teenage audience. In one exchange between a boy and girl, both 16 years-old, they make comparisons

Nirmal - British comedies are witty, they're more intelligent and sophisticated than Indian comedy

Amrita - we are more familiar with the British way of life and so we feel more comfortable with English and American humour

Nirmal - yeah but some (young) people like to see themselves as intelligent and they want to associate themselves with a more intelligent type of humour especially humour that uses a sophisticated language

American humour is appreciated because it deals more openly with sex, teenage problems, communicating with parents

"American comedy is funnier than English comedy, they've got a funnier way of saying things, they cover more areas of life than Indian or English programmes [..] the young people over there seem to be so free, they have more freedom to enjoy themselves and have fun than we do that's partly the reason that some American comedies are more popular [..] Americans are so relaxed"
(Amar, 16 year old girl)

At the time of fieldwork, Channel 4 broadcast a comedy slot every night during the week from 6.00-6.30 which was very popular and which may partly account for the high figures for comedy viewing. Also, every evening across the channels, there are at least two or three American comedy programmes to select from. Black American comedy is particularly popular as we have seen with 'The Cosby Show' but also 'Different World', 'Fresh Prince of Belle Air' and 'No Problems'. Other popular American programmes are 'The Wonder Years', 'Cheers', 'The Golden Girls', 'Who's the Boss?', 'Roseanne' and 'Kate and Allie'. TV is but one source of American comedy for young people who are avid video viewers. It is of interest that in a mini-survey among thirty media students about their favourite comedy videos/films all but one ('A Fish Called Wanda') was American.

One of the themes in American comedies in the last year has been the reversal of conjugal roles and a pre-occupation with father - child relationships; thus for example 'Three Men and a Baby' and the sequel 'Three Men and a Little Lady' have proved to be very popular among girls. The farce of seeing three inexperienced men cope with a baby is the cause of much laughter and discussion. However, boys tend to appreciate the films of Eddie Murphy and Richard Pryor more. This is especially due to the swearing which is found hilarious. Terms of abuse which are found to be 'cool' or funny' are easily appropriated by boys in the friendly/abusive interchanges that characterise much of their social interaction, (for example, in their informal greeting and parting exchanges "Yo Man!" is commonly used accompanied by hand clapping). The

quick banter and repartee which young people engage in is reminisecent of the slang, swear words and idioms of Black American street culture which circulate across a range of media including TV comedies, films and pop music. For example words and phrases like 'fuck-face', 'motherfucker', 'arse-licker', 'kiss-my-butt!' have all entered into everday parlance among boys. This kind of 'humour' is seen to be realistic and based on everyday life
"it's the way we really speak to each other, you know, when there are no adults around"
(Naser, 16 year old boy)

English comedies on TV are considered to be more restrained than American comedies. They use less swear words, less 'blue' and 'dirty' jokes. At the time of field work the most popular English comedies were 'Only Fools and Horses', 'You've Been Framed' repeats of 'Some Mothers Do Have 'Em' and 'Mr. Bean'. The latter two are primarily visual humour and the former is targetted at the mainstream popular audience and thus presents no difficulties in comprehension.

This above outline of perceived cultural differences in comic material points to the distinctive reservoirs of cultural knowledge that young people in Southall bring to their understanding and interpretations of different genres. As with the news and advertising comparisons and contrasts are made between at both a formal and substantive level. We shall now turn our attention to young people's soap talk and the parallels they make between gossip in the soaps and in Southall.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOAP VIEWING, GOSSIP AND RUMOUR

7.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part examines the popularity of 'Neighbours' among young people and the domestic context of viewing. It proposes that viewing is an agonistic ritual because parents' and young people's value judgements in real life, and about screen life, differ. Viewing is characterised by both intimacy and censure. It can lead to intimate talk, especially with mothers, but it can also encourage young people to challenge parental values and this often results in censorious talk on the part of parents who seek to exploit the situation for didactic purposes.

The second part takes an orthodox substantivist approach and examines what young people say about the substance or content of what they watch. In their soap talk they discuss three central and inter-related concerns of their own lives which also happen to form the basis of the soap 'Neighbours'. The issues they discuss are family and kinship relations, romance and courtship rituals and neighbourly relations in the 'community'. Young people use 'Neighbours' to compare and contrast their own social world with the social world represented in the soap. It is the productive tension between perceived similarities and diffferences that assists them in negotiating the relations between parental and peer cultures and in articulating their own emergent system of norms and values.

However, whilst the substantivist approach is of interest in that it highlights their culturally distinctive engagement with 'Neighbours', it is limited in its results. It also fails to explain why young people find talking about soaps so satisfying and attractive, it underplays the sophistication of their competence in the genre and further runs the risk 'ethnicising' them.

The <u>third part</u> adopts a formalist approach. This offers much that the substantivist approach does not. It avoids the construction of an 'Asian' - 'British' cultural dichotomy and instead centres on a homology between soap gossip and gossip in Southall. Gossip, a widespread form of talk in Southall's parental and youth cultures alike, (and in close-knit 'communities' elsewhere), is turned into rumour through processes similar to those of story construction. Gossip consists of fragments of information exchanged among intimates. A rumour establishes a socially sanctioned version of an event, or a narrative, through collective processes of verification. The transformation of gossip into rumour is a key feature of family, peer and neighbourly engagement in talk. In a similar way, soap talk, which my informants often associate and even equate with gossip, allows for this transformation into socially sanctioned rumours. 'What one has seen' is transformed in shared soap gossip into 'what really happened'.

Soap operas are seen to be based on gossip, not only in their storylines and in the stereotypical gossip character but also in the kind of talk that is subsequently generated by the narrational strategies of the continous text. Soap talk is further fuelled by the gossip networks propagated by the tabloid press which plays with the double existence of the characters in the text and with the actors outside the text. In the case of 'Neighbours', certain actors like Jason Donovan, Kylie Minogue and Craig Mc Loughlin are also pop stars and their star images are circulated across textual and generic boundaries which serves to enhance their star status. Gossip, within the text, generated by the text and circulated across a variety of media texts, is integrated into young people's everyday verbal discourse much of which is also based on this style of talk which they refer to as gossip.

Thus, young people's everday verbal discourse is informed in significant ways by their soap viewing not simply in its content but also in its form. This offers an explanation to something that puzzled me for a long time during fieldwork; that is the way that young people move so fluidly and unself-consciously between soap talk and real talk. The two are inextricably linked and, to the outsider, often indistinguishable. The

formalist approach offers more penetrating insights into young people's engagement with 'Neighbours'. Furthermore, it is a link which, as I shall demonstrate, young people themselves make, rather than a link which is an artefact of the research. In order to contextualise these arguments let us first examine the popularity of 'Neighbours' and some characteristic features of the domestic contexts in which it is viewed.

7.1 THE POPULARITY OF SOAPS AND OF 'NEIGHBOURS'

Soap opera viewing in Southall families would appear to be marked more by involvement in the experience rather than by its extent. In the youth survey soap operas were reported to be the genre most often viewed with the family after news (78%) comedy (74%) and crime (56%). While 54% of respondents report that they often watch soaps with their families just under 60% claim to have done so in the previous week. It is likely that some under-reporting of viewing occured since the survey was conducted in the summer (1989) when outdoor activites, especially among boys, take precedence (See Appendix 1, section 4.3)

'Neighbours' was the most popular soap among the majority of young people in Southall at the time of the survey and there is little evidence that its popularity has waned since then. In a mini-survey on soaps 63% of eighty 16 year olds claim it is their favourite soap and 67% as the soap that they 'most looked forward to watching'. 54% reported that it is also the soap that most other members of their families watched regularly. My fieldwork would suggest its even greater popularity with the younger age range and among girls. The other soaps currently broadcast received comparatively low scores; Home and Away 18%; Dallas 14% and Eastenders 6% . (For results of mini-survey see Appendix 7 p 276)

The main reasons given for its popularity by 16 year olds are as follows; the emphasis on teenage problems, especially with regards family and romantic relationships; the privileging of young people's point of view; the freedom and fun that young people appear to enjoy; their assertiveness and the relative control they exercise over decisions about their lives; the attractiveness and independence of their favourite characters; their humour and way of talking; and the

sunny climate and outdoor style of life. However, we need to look beyond what young people say about why they like 'Neighbours' if we are to understand their engagement with it and how viewing is incorporated into the rythmns of domestic life.

7.2 'NEIGHBOURS' AND THE SCHEDULING OF DOMESTIC LIFE

Viewing 'Neighbours' is a daily activity in most households as such it plays a role in the scheduling of domestic life. The fact that it is broadcast at 5.35pm has probabaly contributed to its acquiring a loyal audience. Activities after school and work are, in many families, strictly gender bound with boys participating in activities outside their home and on the streets whilst girls tend to remain in the home. Most daughters, especially the older ones, are obliged to do domestic chores such as washing up, hoovering and preparing the food for supper upon returning from school. 74% of girls (N= 313) reported that their parents set rules about helping mother as compared with only 49% of boys (See Appendix 1, section 2.9).

The daughter's share of domestic chores is much greater in households where

a) the mother is employed outside the home (40% report that their mothers are employed outside the home predominantly in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, N=382).

b) there are more male than female siblings

c) gender roles are prescribed by traditional Punjabi norms where housework is a family duty e.g. it is a sign of respect to prepare and serve food to one's father and male siblings.

Thus, in many families, parent's expectations about their daughter's participation in domestic and household duties is high and constitutes a key source of tension for girls, especially those who have high educational aspirations. Often the competing demands of domestic and school work place great strain on girls. Watching 'Neighbours' provides a break, a space in the day where one can relax after school and household chores. For girls, it is often asssociated with the completion of, or a break from, domestic or school duties

"I rush home at 3.30pm and do the hoovering and wash the dishes from breakfast and then start preparing dinner but I'll finish at 5.30 and then I like to sit down and have my tea <u>properly</u> and watch 'Neighbours'" (Malati, 15 year old girl)

The use of the word 'properly' suggests that these are acts which are performed simultaneously as a pleasurable everyday habit, synonomous with entertainment and relaxation
"it's like a slot in your life, like, first you do housework or your homework and then at 5.35 everything stops while you watch it [..] it's like a break in the day, you can forget you worries and relax"
(Inderjeet, 16 years, female)

Neighbour's theme tune is a call to gather around the set
"it's like your brain knows it's time to watch it and your eyes start shifting to the clock and you're saying 5 minutes left and then you hear 'Neighbours' and rush down stairs but if you're over (late) all hell breaks out and you say 'stuff the cooking man!'"
(Amrit, 16 year old girl)

Soap viewing serves to organise and routinise domestic time for daughters, younger siblings and mothers since they are most likely to be at home at that time. Furthermore, girls tend not to go out after school. 47% of females reported that they did not go out in the evening as compared with 23% of boys ((See Appendix 1, section 3.5) Younger siblings are more controlled in their movements especially in street play since many parents are fearful of the dangers of, amongst other things, traffic.

Viewing with siblings and mother is by far the most common arrangement. 76% of respondents (N=80) view their favourite soap with younger brothers and sisters and 34% with older siblings. 30% view with their mother but it should be noted that the incidence of viewing with mother is more than three times higher among girls (45%) than among boys (13%), a point to which we shall return. In contrast, 19% of our sample watch with their fathers and 19% with cousins. (see Appendix 7 p 276)

It would appear that most mothers condone their children's regular viewing of 'Neighbours' because, from their point of view, it is a time structured into the day that they know their kids will be, if not always quiet, at least settled down in front of the TV.
"It keeps little children out of mischief, take my little brother, when 'Neighbours' comes on he goes all quiet and he really gets into it and my mum wonders why it's all gone quiet of a sudden and then she sits there with him, they're bound to sit down sometimes.."
(Kulbir, 16 year old male)

Kulbir recognises that mothers need a rest from domestic chores and enjoy to sit with their children in a calm atmosphere
"you know little kids they give parents a headache and that's the only time they get to relax when 'Neighbours' or some other of their programmes is on and they sit down and watch it [..] slowly they get into it as well and then they look forward to watching it every day".
(Rajesh 16 year old male)

What might start out as a way of relaxing with her children becomes, for some mothers, regular viewing and an opportunity to communicate with her kids
"mums watch it cos they wanna see why their kids are stuck to the TV, they don't go out that much and they're always doing housework, so when the kids come in, it's a way they can socialise with their kids, innit, they have to."
(Naser, 16 year old boy)

7.3 VIEWING AS INTIMACY

It is apparent that the 30% of respondents who usually watch 'Neighbours' with their mothers value the way in which the shared experience of viewing can generate a sense of intimacy. Also, the fact that 45% of girls watch it with their mothers seems to support other data which points to the way in which 'Neighbours' draws the females in the family together in a way that other programmes do not. But clearly, intimacy may be heightened by the act of sharing an experience independently of what is shared, although what is shared can become a

pretext for intimacy. More girls report this to be the case than boys. The following is a taped conversation between two 16 year old girls on their soap viewing

Dalvinder - the children are quiet for a change and it gives them (mums) a break from doing housework, it brings you close

Inderjeet - but they're just sitting there they're not doing anything

Dalvinder - they're doing it together, sometimes they might talk

Inderjeet - but it doesn't bring you closer

Dalvinder - it does! like if I'm sitting there, next to my mum and we start discussing 'Neighbours', I feel slightly closer to her and it's like a family programme, if you watch it alone it's not the same

Whether or not the shared experience of 'Neighbours' does generate intimacy with mothers will be dependent on family relationships. Given that some mothers understand and speak very little English, it may be the calm or intimate viewing situation, more than the text which is shared and appreciated. Family relationships are expressed through the type of programmes that certain members of the family watch, or do not watch, together. The formation of family sub-groups around the TV set is not simply contingent upon some notion of individual taste or preference but may be motivated by the desire to be together.

Some mothers use the situation for didactic purposes and this is often interpreted as her way of showing her children that she cares and feels protective toward them

"mum likes to tell me things, like the other day when that guy nicked Jim's car, they hadn't checked out his past before they employed him and if they had they would have known he was a thief [..] so mum tells me to be careful who I hang round with, she tells me about the type of friends I should and shouldn't have, how I can make the best of my life here

[..] it sort of shows you that she cares."
(Gita, 16 year old female)

It may well be that one aspect of the pleasure of 'Neighbours' is precisely the anticipation of intimacy and closeness with mother. It is as though in certain families viewing 'Neighbours' becomes like a kind of inner sanctum in the family, a private, secure, familar social space that you share with younger siblings and mother but one which is not devoid of tensions and contradictions.

7.4 A CASE STUDY OF VIEWING AS INTIMACY

Observations in one family would certainly confirm the pleasures of intimacy associated with soaps. Malati is a 15 year old Hindu girl with two younger and four older siblings. Her mother watches 'Neighbours' and 'Home and Away' with her children most days. She likes 'Neighbours' but does not understand most of the dialogue. She pieces the storyline together from the images, sometimes, with hilarious consequences. Her children are very amused by her interpretations of the storylines and tease her in the most affectionate of manners, hugging her and stroking her arm. When this family watches 'Neighbours' there is usually a great deal of physical contact; stroking hair, massaging feet and snuggling together on the sofa. Thus physical intimacy accompanies the involvement with characters on screen who are also living out their family relationships.

This sense of intimacy is heightened by passing moral judgements on the characters. One of the most popular storylines at the time of fieldwork was the love triangle between Henry and Bronwyn, (who were dating), and Mike (who was trying to date Bronwyn and was making advances to her behind Henry's back). Mike and Bronwyn's deceitful behaviour over several episodes provoked many outbursts of moral indignation especially as they feel very affectionately toward Henry. (He is the pop star, Craig Mc Loughlin)

Ranjit - Mike's a user, he's just using Bronwyn to get back at Jane

Lipi - Bronwyn's a user too because she's just using Mike to get her exams

Malati - it makes you sick though to see Mike crawling around after Bronwyn behind Henry's back, he's got no shame, how can anybody do that?

Mother - Mike no good! no good! rubbish!

Malati's mother does not object to her children watching 'Neighbours' even though she does not like to see young people kissing on screen and when such scenes appear she will shout "no good! no good! rubbish!". She surprised me one day when Mike and Bronwyn were shown kissing on the screen and she made no comment at all and the children teased her saying "no good! no good! rubbish!" She turned to her eldest daughter and said in Hindi
"look! this is probably going on in our own family and in other families in Southall but we don't know about it".

At that time the family were experiencing problems with the eldest son, Dilip (18 years old). He spent no time with his family and only came home to sleep. He had lost his job and he gave no information about where he went or how he spent his days. The eldest son enjoys high status in Sikh and Hindu familis. He is second to his father in the family hierarchy since it is commonly assumed that eventually, he will take over as head of household and secure his parent's lives in later years. In many families, the eldest son therefore enjoys privileges that his siblings do not. He is allowed a great deal of freedom, often to the annoyance of their female siblings, and 'bad' behaviour may even be tolerated.

The mother suspected that her son was either involved in the 'gangs' or had a girlfriend. Her suspicions were based on information gleaned from her participation in gossip networks through which all forms of 'aberrant' behaviour and misdemenours are communicated. 'Neighbours' functions as a kind of extension to these gossip networks in that it gives her some idea about what goes on in a teenage culture of which she has no experience, and elements of which, she positively disapproves.

The mother's suspicions were later confirmed when her son brought home his Sikh girlfriend (16 years old) who had just run away from home. She protested her love for Dilip and he did likewise. Her parents had discovered about their relationship through a gossiping 'auntie' (a respectful term for any older women who is a friend of the family). This had provoked a family uproar and her parents had forbidden her to see him or to talk to him. They would never agree to their marriage since her family is Sikh and his Hindu. She was distraught. I am not arguing that 'Neighbours' planted the seeds of suspicion in her mind, but watching what young people 'get up to' on soap helped to prepare her for certain eventualities. To her children, 'Neighbours' offered examples of how people deal with such family crises. It should be remembered that many families have no experience of dealing with such problems since these are seen as 'new' patterns of behaviour emerging in the British context (although they are by no means uncommon in cities like Bombay). The older sisters in the family actually admitted that they drew on problem solving strategies (i.e. 'let's sit down and talk about this honestly and openly') from 'Neighbours' in dealing with the problem. They returned the girl to her parents and openly discussed the situation with them.

The younger members of the family do not feel that 'Neighbours' relates to their lives personally
"'Neighbours' doesn't really relate to our lives cos it shows us thing that we are not allowed to do, like all that teenage romance [..] it doesn't encourage us but it must do some boys and girls [..] you know it's like some of them think they have to have a boyfriend and if you have one you're up in the air but if you're not into that, they think you're at the bottom of the sea".
(Malati, 16 year old girl)

The mother in this family uses the viewing situation to get closer to her children, to share the pleasure of viewing and to foster her more traditional values in her youngest children. She uses examples of teenage romance on 'Neighbours' and the experiences of her eldest son to point out the pitfalls of such relationships. Parallels between the

domestic lives of families on and off screen link the two. We, as viewers, are given privileged insight into the private domestic space of families. Given that viewers have up to 5 years viewing experience, many feel they get to know the characters more than their own neighbours, and in some cases, more than their own families. We follow the ups and downs in their lives parallel to our own and in viewing 'Neighbours' with family members, the atmosphere of intimacy on screen and around the set can bring one in closer contact with family members.

7.5 VIEWING AS CENSURE

Viewing 'Neighbours' with parents is an agonistic ritual. It may just as easily lead to argument and censure as to intimacy. Viewing with mothers also means that translation is often necessary which some find tedious and difficult

"I watch it with my mum, I have to tell her what's happening which is really hard to explain in Punjabi and she wants to know if its suitable for us which really gets on my nerves though I know she's right in her sense of thinking." (Gurvinder, female, 16)

Some girls claim that they find it very difficult to communicate with their mothers as they simply do not understand young people's values

"I don't really like watching 'Neighbours' with my mum cos you might start off O.K. but as soon as she sees something she doesn't like she's off [...] she'll start on you don't do this and don't do that and I'll start arguing with her [...] and we might end up not speaking for three days over something which I think is quite trivial"

(Amrit, 16 year old girl)

Older boys tend to have more distanced and detached relationships with their mothers than do females and although they recognise that programmes like 'Neighbours' bring some members of the family together they use terms like 'friendly' as opposed to 'close'.

"When they sit down in front of the TV together... like 'Neighbours' it covers the same age group as her kids so mothers can see what sort of problems kids might be going through and when something exciting comes on their mothers join in and they go, 'don't do that, right!' and you

come, sort of, more friendly with your mother"
(Ravinder, 16 year old boy)

Soap viewing can also alert parents to some of the traps their children might fall into. Boys tend to emphasise the disciplinary and surveillance uses mothers may sometimes make of the programme but also how soaps can provide role models not only for children but for parents. This is evidenced in the following exchange between two 16 year old boys

Naser - yeah, it shows what kind of bad things kids get up to in school, like spending money in arcades and nicking things and running away from home

Rajinder - and it tells them, you shouldn't treat your kids like Hilary does, you shouldn't shout at them too much

Naser - yeah, and you should keep an eye on them

Rajinder - like, you shouldn't let your kids run free and do anything they fancy, cos they often wanna do things behind their backs

Rajinder - yeah once when that arcade thing came on my mum became a bit suspicious, she thought I did that which I don't but she thought that

Naser - yeah she'd be worried you'd be playing

Rajinder - I got nagged for weeks about that, you know, it put me off watching

Some young people do complain that their mothers, especially those who understand and speak very little English and who are relatively unfamiliar with soaps like 'Neighbours' and the associated conventions of realism, tend to take events and actions on the screen literally. For example, Rajinder's mother remained convinced that her son was playing the machines in games arcades. To her, this would constitute gambling and as a Sikh this would not only go against her religion but would be seen as 'spoiling' her son (in a moral sense) as well as being a waste of money.

Moral issues feature prominently in family discussions about soaps. In some families the channel is switched as soon as kissing or any kind of sexual innuendo appears on screen and it is often the child rather than the parent who quickly grasps the remote control in order to avoid a row "my dad forces me, well, they understand fairly good English and they draw me to watch the news and now I've got quite interested but he doesn't like us watching 'Neighbours' [..] when I see kissing scenes with Scott and Charlene..I myself get the remote control and put it on the other side if my father is there [..] you have to"
(Mohinderpal, 17 year old Sikh boy)

To watch a 'kissing scene' in the presence of parents would prove to be too embarrassing
"cos what I've been learned is not to watch things like that [..] but those things are more on TV so you can't help watching it [..] I don't mind if its just my brothers and sisters and even my mum, she doesn't really mind, well she pretends not to notice, but never in front of my father [..] but I do get embarassed if it gets carried away".

In this family the mother is more relaxed in her attitudes because she has, he claims, 'grown up' alongside her children. Being closer to them she is much more in tune with their interests and tastes and has grown to like what her children watch or, at any rate, to like watching with her children. Such proximity and closeness to mothers stands in sharp contrast to the distance which often seems to characterise relationships with fathers. This pattern is reported by boys and girls alike.

Diljit, a 17 year old Sikh boy comments upon how his father expects his children to speak Punjabi at home and when they speak in English together he blames the television for influencing them to become 'more English'. He also believes that his children will eventually copy the behaviour they watch on screen
"He repeats himself over and over again [..] if someone's arguing on 'Neighbours' he'll say, 'do you have to watch people arguing?' and then he'll say, 'see! you're using the same words to argue with your brothers and sisters!' and then he thinks we're copying them."

But often it is the mother who intercedes on her children's behalf and tries to make peace in the family
"then my mum says, 'leave them and let them watch' and no matter how many times we watch it, he'll still say it and if he sees someone kissing, he'll throw a fit and say, 'is this what you're here for?'"

Such behaviour on screen, according to the father, poses a real threat to the maintenance of his value system which would prohibit boys and girls socialising and condemn with outrage any kissing before marriage. But to young people such views represent an ideal world of values which, for most, does not have the same relevance to them as to their father. The father believes that by witnessing such behaviour, his children will imitate it.

Diljit vehemently rejects his father's view of the imitative effects of soaps as absurd but he does admire the way in which young people in 'Neighbours' assert themselves to their elders
"If there are arguments in 'Neighbours' with parents and that then I'll sit there and get even more involved [..] I'll sit there thinking, yeah I should have done that [..] I should learn to talk back to my dad, but, you know, it's very bad to show disrespect like that to your father, [..] we're not allowed to talk back and argue with elders but it's good to see how someone else can".

However, disputes in 'Neighbours' are not seen to have effects upon behaviour but upon mood
"when they argue and then everything gets resolved, I think, I wish that would happen here [..] and like if I'm angry and fuming about something and there's an argument and everything gets resolved I'll start calming down".
(Mohinderpal, 16 year old boy)
The therapeutic effects of the mildly cathartic narrative resolutions that take place within the continous narratives are often commented upon. Throughout the data there are numerous references to the calming effect of soap viewing.

Although many parents feel that their values are undermined by soaps like 'Neighbours', they can exploit the situation to reinforce traditonal norms and values or to re-negotiate them with their children. Similarly, their children may challenge or affirm parental values around the television set. Television as an object and a social experience is embedded in family life and beyond. In using and interpreting soaps young people are constantly comparing and contrasting their own social worlds with those on the screen. At the same time they are extending and transforming their everday experiences and verbal interactions. Soap talk and real talk are woven together to tell a tale about their lives. It is to the question of soap talk that we now turn our attention.

7.6 A SUBSTANTIVIST APPROACH

Talk about the content of soaps allows young people to negotiate 'what is' and 'what ought to be' in their own social lives and in the soap world. In this section we shall examine the gendered nature of soap talk and its functions before proceeding to the key areas of concern expresseed in this type of talk; family and kinship; romance and courtship rituals and neighbourly relations in the 'community'.

7.7 SOAP TALK AMONG PEERS AS A GENDERED ACTIVITY

We have seen how, in the domestic context viewing, 'Neighbours' may lead to intimate and to censorious talk. Most young people claim that they can talk more openly and freely with their friends than with parents "you're just more relaxed, you can say what you want, you can swear and use your own language, you can be more yourself and say what you really feel"
(Inderjeet, 16 year old girl)

Talking about soaps is seen as important, especially for girls, as it allows them to talk about their own problems, either directly or indirectly, through a particular character or situation. However, a sense of family loyalty would inhibit most young people from talking about their own family problems (except perhaps with the most intimate of friends) and so often soap talk may function as a veiled discussion of private, family tensions. The key emphasis of such talk seems to be

on how problems get solved
"In school or at home we often have teenage problems which relate to our soap [..] but you don't talk about your own family except to really close friends maybe [..] by talking to friends you come to an understanding [..] you can think back to what a character did and see if they did things the right way [..] we discuss the problems and how they get solved"
(Gita, 16 year old girl)

Soap talk is also seen as a way of bonding friendship since in discussing the problems that characters face and how effectively they deal with them one is indirectly giving expression to norms and values, through the concrete experiences of others, whereas more direct or abstract expression of norms would be difficult
"It's important to talk about soaps and share those experiences with friends because your friends get to know you better they can understand what you're views are, how you think, what you believe, what you're having difficulties in and what your weaknesses are, you get closer"
(Gurvinder, 16 year old girl)

It also allows girls to discuss a range of topics, such as, the attractiveness of certain male characters which would be taboo in parent's company
"After watching 'Neighbours' we always talk about it the next day at school we talk about the sexy male charcaters like Henry and his muscles and other things like how stupid Bronwyn is for not speaking properly to Henry [..] most of the things we talk about we wouldn't discuss with our parents for obvious reasons"
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

Whilst many boys are keen viewers of 'Neighbours', they tend not to discuss the programme, at least not with girls
"you don't really know what boys are really like, they don't discuss 'Neighbours', they think it's a cissie drama, they discuss computers, the latest films, video piracy, sport and boring stuff like that, they

don't like discussing relationships"
(Saira, 16 year old girl)

Soap talk is a much more dominant feature of female than male discourse and for girls who have little direct access to people outside their kinship and peer networks, soaps are seen to provide an extension to their immediate social experience
"some girls, especially those who lead sheltered lives are always talking about soaps and they're always talking in that kind of soap style, you know, 'Oh dear what's the matter? do you want to talk about it? can I help you? [..] they want to talk problems [..] for those girls, who don't do much else, soaps are really important"
(Meena, 16 year old girl)

Whilst boys, among themselves, talk about 'Neighbours' they will tend to talk more about the amusing incidents, the gags, and repeat funny lines, rather than engage in the more problem-solving talk of their female counterparts. In this sense, soap talk can be seen as a gender specific way of engaging with the dilemmas facing characters in the soap.

Girls may also identify with the situation in which particular characters finds themselves
"Discussing 'Neighbours' with friends can be important at times because sometimes you feel as if you are in the same position as a certain character and have to stick up for yourself and say what you think"
(Reena, 16 year old girl)

The relationship between viewers and texts is often conceived of as one whereby the text offers certain 'positions' for the viewer to identify with
"viewers may identify with certain characters, seeing themselves in that character's shoes; they may regard them as a role model, imitating that character's behaviour in order to gain some of the rewards which that character is shown to enjoy; or they may recognise some aspects of a character as being similar to a significant person in their own lives

engaging im what Horton and Wohl term 'parasocial interaction', watching the action as if playing the opposite character, as if the character were interacting with them directly".
(Livingstone, 1990)

Identification is generally seen as a one way process whereby the viewers either project themselves onto characters or into situations or where, in the reverse case, the text, its characters and situations are appropriated and used in mimetic or imitative fashion. The data on soap talk and 'real' talk would suggest that these two processes are related to eachother in a much more reciprocal and socially complex way. It may even be that identification is most strong when these processes are simultaneous.

However, the word which informants most commonly use to describe their relationship to the text is 'association', not identification. They claim that they 'associate' themselves and or their friends with characters, situations, feelings, and problems. They link and connect aspects of the social world of 'Neighbours' with their own and attempt to accomodate and integrate their perceptions of the soap world into their own and vice versa.

Rather than engage in debates as to the relative importance of the text or the viewer in determining meanings, such a dichotomous conception is best transcended by an approach which examines the interaction between the two. The creation of meaning through the interaction of texts and readers is best conceived of as a process of negotiation and even struggle. These processes of negotiation which are manifest in young people's soap talk are of central concern here. Talk about their substantive viewing allows for the negotiation of what is and what ought to be both in their own social lives and in the soap world. This is partly a product of the continous soap text which refuses closure and allows viewers to adopt a 'wandering' point of view. As Allen (1985) indicates
"the perspectival openess of the contemporary soap opera diegesis enables it to accomodate a far greater range of "neogotiated" readings

than other, more normatively determinant forms of fictive narratives. Furthermore, this openess helps account for the broadening of the soap audience in recent years to include more men, adolescents and college students [..] becoming a competent reader [..] requires a unique investment of the readers time and psychic energy [ ] watching soap operas is a social act as well as an engagement with narrative text" (1985:147-8).

It is precisely because viewing 'Neighbours' is a socially shared act and experience that young people can draw upon it collectively to make sense of their own lives. Yet the talk arising from their 'substantive' viewing whilst recognising certain similarities tends to emphasise differences between the soap world and their own cultural experience. As I shall later demonstrate, the parallels between the soap world and the social world of Southall lie not on the basis of content or substance but on the more formal characteristics of narration and narrative structure.

Three sets of relationships dominate young people's talk about their 'substantive' viewing; family and kinship relations; romance and courtship rituals; neighbourly relations in the 'community'. In exploring these relationships in 'Neighbours' young people are actively and creatively negotiating the most important sources of social tensions in their lives, for within and across these domains, generational, gender and cultural differences are being explored. I shall examine each in turn although it is the overlapping and competing demands of each which drive the narratives of their own lives and also of soap narratives.

7.8 NEGOTIATIONS: FAMILY AND KINSHIP RELATIONS

The conventional soap opera is a genre primarily based on the private, everyday lives of families and kinship relations. Set in a specific local area, the relationships which drive the narrative also extend to neighbours and the social networks which individuals and families find themselves involved in. As such soap operas represent a part of the wider society in microcosm and act as a symbolic parallel to the

everyday life of its viewers in which a fine web of intricate and complex family and local relationships are woven together. It is the proximity of people's lives; their closeness in time, place and relationships which generates narrative conflict and movement.

In certain respects, the soap opera embodies many of the characteristics of local life in Southall; the central importance of the family; a density of kin in a small geographically bounded area; a high degree of face to face contact, (a 'knowable community') and a distinctive sense of local identity. Similarly, it is the proximity and contiguity of family, kin, neighbours and friends which generates much of what is distinctive to social life in Southall.

Whilst young people's own families and those in their social networks provide their primary frame of reference about family life, soap families not only extend but offer alternative sets of families as reference groups by which young people can compare and contrast, judge and evaluate and, in some cases, attempt to critique and transform aspects of their own family life.

Migration and settlement in Britain has meant that Punjabi families are undergoing significant changes in their economic, social, and moral environments. Punjabi family life is recognised by young people to be based upon sets of norms and values; duties and responsibilities; roles and expectations and rules and regulations which differ in certain fundamental respects from white families. In some families these are being revised whilst in others there is an attempt to maintain more or less strict adherence to traditional family norms and values. Thus, parents differ markedly in the degree of conformity to traditional values they expect of, and attempt to impose upon, their children. Conversely, young people vary considerably in the degree and in the nature of the rebelliousness or conformity they express verbally and or in their behaviour.

However, inspite of change and adaptation, certain fundamental features of kinship organisation prevail, albeit in modified form, in conjunction

with particular sets of norms and values. The very high density of kin living in Southall is a distinctive feature of local life. In the youth survey, 34% of respondents reported more than 10 cousins living in or near Southall. 36% of Sikh respondents reported grandparents living in or near Southall. Over one third of households have between 6 and 8 people eating together (See Appendix 1, section 2.12). These figures indicate a tendency toward larger households and the existence of three generational households in just over one third of cases. Furthermore, the very high density of kin ensures that the principles of binding reciprocity, respect and co-operation (rather than self interest) prevail, even though families are breaking into smaller household units. (see Kinship diagrams Appendix 7 pp 286-88)

The relative complexity of kinship ties (compared with white families) is evident in the extensive kinship terminology which young people have at their disposal and which they use to delineate, with precision, an individual's position in the family (ie 'didi' is a term of address to an older sister), as well as differences between maternal and paternal kin (cha cha is a term of reference for one's mother's brother and mama for one's father's brother). This has consequences for their perceptions of kinship relations in 'Neighbours'. The very sophisticated competence and speed in defining kinship relations with precision assists them in understanding soap families. One group of girls constructed a kinship and household diagram for 'Neighbours' with an ease and depth of background information and knowledge about the families which would surprise most anthropologists. (see 'Neighbours' kinship diagram (Appendix 7 p.285)

Young people's competence in matters of kinship also extends to a sophisticated understanding of the central values upon which family life is founded among Punabi Sikhs. These are encapsulated in the terms honour/respect (or 'izzat') and the reverse, shame (or 'Beizzit'). The term 'izzat', cannot be simply translated in English, for it is difficult to convey the depth of meaning and range of connotations that the term represents to a Punjabi Sikh parent. Embedded within the term are a cluster of religious, moral and social meanings; the sanctity of

family life is linked to the associated values of family honour, respect and kinship duty. These safeguard a family's internal, moral integrity. There is a further social dimension to the term. If the sanctity of the family is maintained through upholding these values, a family will have a good reputation in the community and consequently, respectability. Shame then, is the reverse of 'izzat'.

We shall return to a further discussion of these values later. For the moment suffice it to say that in Punjabi families individual needs or desires are subordinated to the demands of family honour or 'izzat'. Many young people find themselves in a position where, at home, parents claim the superiority of Punjabi cultural traditions and family values over English or 'western' ways. At school or when viewing 'Neighbours', they claim that individual self determination and personal 'freedom' is encouraged. Whilst most parents and children alike are sceptical of the wholesale adoption of western ways, clearly norms and values; duties and responsibilities; roles and expectations; rules and regulations as far as young people are concerned, are up for negotiation. 'Soap talk' is one of the means whereby such issues are negotiated.

Soap talk further allows young people and their parents to discuss changes in gender roles within the family. Approximately 40% of mothers are now in paid employment outside the home, predominantly in manual work, in local industries. Only 28% (N=263) define themselves as 'housewives'. In theory, at least, this has allowed greater financial independence for women and in some families served to challenge traditional domestic roles. However, it is clear from both quantitative and qualitiative data that conventional expectations prevail and that women and girls are burdened with an unequal share of domestic duties. Furthermore, women are over-represented in low paid, part-time labour, often without the benefits of a contract. Those mothers who are in full-time employment often do gruelling amounts of overtime to supplement the household income and are, in some families, the main breadwinners.

All these factors, moral, economic and social exert pressures on families. There are marked variations in the ways which different

families respond to and deal with challenges to traditional family norms and values. Yet at age 16 the family and wider kin are the primary source of love and affection, as well as of control and constraint in one's life. Young people have to develop verbal bargaining skills if they are to assert their individual needs on the family stage and if they are to ensure some involvement in decision making about their lives with regard to their future especially in the spheres of education, work and marriage.

Many girls consider that family honour or 'izzat' restricts young people from asserting and expressing themselves openly as this militates against the primary virtues of respect and obedience to one's elders.
"It drowns your own sense of identity, you can't do what you want, you always have to think of your family honour [..] you are supposed to be modest, simple, reserved [..] you're not supposed to wear make-up and you should cover your legs and above all you shouldn't talk back to older people"
(Lukhbir, 16 year old Sikh girl)

In 'Neighbours' young people, especially girls, are seen to exercise considerably more freedom and control over their lives than do young people Southall. Therefore, one of the most attractive features of 'Neighbours' to young people is watching how young people assert themselves, especially verbally, to their parents and elders. The favourite characters like Bronwyn and Henry, for example, are admired because they are good 'backchatters', or because they know how to stand up for themselves and what they believe in. Thus, watching how young people negotiate their family relationships is a key attraction of 'Neighbours'.

Gender roles within the family are of major concern to many girls and although families vary considerably in the restrictions they impose on girls it is a widely held view that double standards exist
"you can see that families in 'Neighbours' are more flexible, they do things together as a family, they don't expect that girls should stay at home and do housework and cooking, boys and girls are allowed to mix

much more freely [..] Indian families do go out together to eat and that but most of us can only get out with the family, they can't go out with their mates like the boys do [..] boys live on the outside and girls on the inside" (Amrit, 16 year old girl)

In making judgements about soap families in their everyday interactions at home and at school young people are giving indirect expressions to norms associated with family life.
For example, the Robinson family is seen as ideal in the sense that they are loyal and supportive yet offer their younger members independence, space and privacy
'they stick by eachother as a family and always support eachother through bad moments [..] they trust each other and if they have a problem they don't try to avoid it, they sit down and talk about it logically and reasonably and try to sort it out together, they don't end up rowing [..] there's a great family bond between them all "
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl

Paramjit's view of the Robinson family is typical. It is above all effective communication in the family which is valued and which ensures the bonds of love and loyalty. The soap's matriarch and grandmother character, Helen Robinson, also adds to the perceived success of this family's relationships. She is seen to have a unique ablity to listen to and to understand people, including teenagers and their problems. She is everyone's ideal 'agony aunt'. She is caring and understanding and she offers realistic, sound advice. She is able to help young and old people sort out their problems.

Trust between parents and children is an area of key concern to many girls. Even a slight aberration in behaviour may, in some families, incur a breakdown of trust on the part of parents. Open and honest communication may also lead to a breakdown of trust or to parent's becoming suspicious that their daughter or son is getting 'spoilt' (in the sense of 'tainted') and this may lead to even tighter control and regulation of their daughter's movements and communication with friends. But some girls claim that they, too, have reasons to lack trust in their

parents. In some cases, the discovery of a romantic liaison, may lead parents to quickly arrange a marriage without involving their daughter in the decision making. The issue of open, truthful communication and trust between parents and children recurs frequently in soap and real talk.

The Ramsey/Bishop household is admired for being a fun family, mainly because of Henry, who is the key young comic character in the soap. He is seen to be given support and independence
"they have a nice open atmosphere in their house, they're funny, I like the way Henry picks on Harold (his stepfather) and the way Madge and Harold argue, they always stand by each other but they let their kids stand up on their own two feet., like when Henry has problems they let him discover for himself how hard it is to do certain things like get a good job [..] I like how they all get on"
(Kamaljit, 16 year old girl)

The Mangles are seen as less successful
"it's a small family so it's not interesting, Joe is crafty and not that respectable they're rough-going family, they use a lot more slang, they don't have people round for dinner parties and that, like the Robinsons, they treat each other as strangers, not as a family, they're not organised and they're hopeless with housework, they also interfere with others when no-one wants them to get involved"
(Amar, 16 year old girl)

But Hilary's household is seen as the least successful of all and she is despised as the major gossip character
"I hate Hilary because she's always bossing Matt and Sharon, she never lets them do what they want, she rules their lives and expects them to take orders [..] she makes everyone lives hell[..] she's a really bitchy gossip[...] she spoils teenager's fun [..] Her way of being a mother is no good! she never listens and you can't tell her anything, she's not to be trusted"
Farzana, 16 year old girl)

It is clear from these comments that young people are using these families to articulate their own emergent norms and values and indirectly comment upon their own families. But while they use white families in 'Neighbours' to judge their own, the reverse case is also true.

Given the limited access to 'white' families the viewing of soaps enables young people some, albeit fictional, insight into them. It is frequently commented upon that the Robinson household is an extended family consisting of three generations. It is also seen to share some similarities with Southall families in that they have kinship links with two other households in the same street
"it's an extended family, they've got Helen living with them and then there's Paul who lives in the same road and Hilary, who's Jim's cousin sister in the same road [..] it's a bit like our family"
(Baljit, 16 year old Sikh girl)

However, this is as far as the perceived similarity goes. Their sophisticated understanding of kinship ties draws their attention to what most regard as the highly unconventional constitution of most household arrangements where, either through death, divorce or re-marriage, most are 're-constituted' families. (See Neighbours Kinship chart) The following comments were exerpted from their informal talk while constructing the kinship diagram for 'Neighbours'
"we have bigger families than they do and our households aren't shared like theirs, ours are strictly for family [..] there isn't as much divorce and single parent families [..] there's no swapping around of households like Bronwyn does, she's lived in nearly every household in the street [..] there's no lodgers or people being adopted who come to live with you"
(Baljit, 16 year old girl)

Sharing one's house with people other than kin by blood or by marriage is considered most unusual. Taking in lodgers, especially those who have lived in the same street would be considered highly risky especially in safeguarding family honour and protecting the family from revelations

about their private internal affairs, an important point to which we shall soon return.

Families in 'Neighbours' are seen to be 'white' rather than Australian.
"All families in 'Neighbours' are white, I don't really see them as Australian"
(Anopama, 16 year old sikh girl)

Students readily admit that they know little or nothing about white families and as Anopama reported
"We don't know nothing about white families [..] except the Robinsons", (bursting into laughter)
When I asked her why she laughed, she said
"cos they're not real, they're only a soap family [..] we probably have very stereotyped ideas, it makes you realise what sheltered lives we lead"
(Anopama, 16 year old girl)

Indeed many young people claim they get most of their ideas of 'white' family life from soaps like 'Neighbours'
"We get more ideas about white families from TV than we do from our own experience so its helpful to see how they live and relate to one another because you get to know the characters in their family situation"
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

Viewing the private life of 'white' families is seen to serve a useful function
"if we didn't see white families on TV, like in 'Neighbours', we'd probably be even more suspicious of white people even more cos we don't know what they're really like and we don't chat to them [..] and we'd think they were all racist to us but when you see families like the Robinsons you think, oh my God! they're just like us, they love one another and they look after their children and they're not as bad as, er... um ... some Indian people think they are"
(Mohinderpal, 16 year old boy)

But 'Neighbours' also encourages slightly over-inflated ideas about the 'freedom' that white young people have

"they've got more freedom than us, they can go out and stay out until a reasonable time, families seem to care less about what others think of them [..] they don't have arranged marriages and it's like 'dating is the norm [..] it seems so strange to us that a girl could bring home her boyfriend and sit round the table and eat with her parents [..] and that her parents would approve!"

(Rashpal, 16 year old Sikh girl)

Let us now turn to issues of romance and courtship rituals

7.9 NEGOTIATIONS: ROMANCE AND COURTSHIP RITUALS

Teenage romance is central to many of the narrative strands in 'Neighbours' and to young people's soap talk and 'real talk', yet it is taboo in the parental culture. 58% of young people consider that 'dating is normal at my age' (n=186) whilst 40% report that 'dating is not normal in my culture and I respect that'. 67% consider that if young people date 'parents should know about it but be more understanding' whilst 31% consider that 'going out is all right as long as you keep it a secret'. Only 10% report that their parents think that 'going out' is normal at my age'(See Appendix 1, section 3.6)

Of course this raises the question of what is meant by 'dating' or 'going out'. Since dating is conducted primarily within the limits of school life it may simply mean that there is a mutual acknowledgement of attraction which may not progress much beyond fleeting but longing glances in the school corridors. But many 'couples' establish themselves as 'steady' boyfriend and girlfriend and by doing so, acquire considerable status. Despite this one of the major causes of friction in the peer culture are romantic liaisons that are constantly breaking up and being re-made. But 'steadies' take time off school to meet in the park, to go to the cinema or to attend an afternoon Bhangra disco in London. Generally speaking dating couples are extremely resourceful in subverting parental strictures. Increasingly, young people are dating at

an early stage (i.e. 12 years old) and it is gaining widespread acceptance in the peer culture.

Young people use soap operas like 'Neighbours' to work through some of the tensions that arise from their 'illicit' relationships and from their attempts to keep them hidden from the family. They keenly observe how romantic relationships are conducted on screen and eagerly follow the ups and downs of courting couples and associated rituals of gift exchange, holding hands, kissing etc. They pay special attention to the language of romance and the conventions associated with declarations of feelings.

The relationship between Henry and Bronwyn was a focal point of interest at the time of fieldwork. Henry is one of the most popular characters of the soap, due to his perceived attractiveness, comical nature and pop star status. Familiarity with romantic narratives is evidenced in their discussions of Henry and Bronwyn's relationship. Their talk focussed on the nature of the obstacle between the couple and speculations about how they would overcome their problems. Ongoing judgements on the courting couple are made and there is a belief that they can overcome their problems and establish an enduring bond
'In spite of their ups and downs Henry and Bronwyn are made for one another but with the Mike situation you learn from them that relationships are not easy and why sometimes sacrifices have to be made' (Saira, 16 year old girl)

A successful relationship is equated with the notion of endurance and this is attributed to skill in sorting out problems, the ability to communciate and compromise and to keep respect for one another rather than argue.

One of the least successful relationships was seen to be that between Jane and Des primarily due to their age difference
"he's well into his thirties and she only just twenty and she wants to work and to share housework but he wants a wife who will stay at home and cook and look after his child but Jane can never be a proper mother

to that child because it's not hers"
(Gita, 16 year old girl)

Work is also seen as another reason which can interfere with relationships
"Paul always puts his work before Gail [..] he's too ambitious and neglects Gail and makes her unhappy"
(Amrit, 16 year old girl)

But the problem remains that most girls are not permitted to have boyfirends
"Girls in 'Neighbours' are allowed to have boyfriends and have a good time whereas us Asian girls aren't allowed to be this independent so we seek it out in someone else. It's an asset, you know, to 'go-out' with someone, it looks good, some girls like to pretend they are someone else but it doesn't really work [..] but we like the independence that girls have because they are free and can do what they want"
(Paramjit, 16 year old girl)

Diljit, a 16 year old Sikh boy, like many of his peers, studies how romantic relationships are conducted by observing couples on the screen "When I was going out with Ruby and I used to see someone like Charlene and Scott (on Neighbours), I used to daydream off, especially when they were talking about what they'd been doing and then I just used to look at them and think to myself 'How can I improve?' (Laughing) I used to do that [...] like when hes talking and turns round and says something like (laughing) 'I love you' and I'd just imagine saying it and think, what do we talk about when we're togther? is there any way of improving? and you just think that by looking you might be able to get better at it [...] and maybe you think what are these two doing wrong? [...] In a way I think soaps are good for you [...] but it depends what you take from them"
(Diljit, 16 year old boy)

Young people's observations of courting couples and courtship rituals are later included in intimate talk among close friends about their own

relationships and their dating peers. Couples on and off screen are compared and contrasted for their suitability and success or lack of it. But even in the peer context, it is the girl's behaviour which is most closely scrutinised. If a girl is seen to flirt 'excessively', wear too much make-up or short skirts or, if she deceives a boy by 'two-timing', then she will soon acquire the label 'slag'. In contrast, there is no such equivalent term available for boy, except perhaps a 'stud' which has more favourable connotations. Thus, despite the rising incidence of perceived 'dating', double standards plague the peer culture.

Family norms dictate close sibling relationships and the protective role of older brothers towards their sisters is encouraged through the ritual of 'rakri'. This is a family ceremony where a sister ties a bracelet of coloured thread on her brother as a mark of respect, love and devotion. In return the brother offers a gift, usually of money, to his sisters. Among young people in Southall, this ritual is often extended to close male or female friends, who one wishes to adopt as a brother or sister. It is the brother's duty to protect and safeguard his sister's reputation. So while a boy might date a girl freely, he is often involved in the control of his sister's relationships and may even forbid her to date.
We shall return to questions of romance and courtship rituals later in considering the issue of marriage arrangements. Let us now move onto an examination of how neighbourly and community relations are percived in 'Neighbours' and in Southall.

7. 10 NEIGHBOURLY AND 'COMMUNITY' RELATIONS

Young people compare and contrast neighbourly relations in Southall with those in 'Neighbours'. They do so by juxtaposing notions of 'how things are' and 'how they ought to be'. The theme tune below suggests an 'ideal' mode of conduct and when it is sung by young people it is done so with ironic intent.

"Neighbours, everybody needs good neighbours
With a little understanding you can make a perfect plan

Neighbours are there for one another
Thats why good neighbours become good friends"

Neighbours everybody needs good neighbours
just a friendly word each morning makes a better day
neighbours, should be there for one another
Thats why good neighbours become good friends"

However, the 'ideal' implicit in the theme tune is constantly threatened by feuds between neighbours in the narrative. Moreover, the narrative in order to continue, actually depends on an interminable succession of misunderstandings and conflicts between neighbours.

Rajesh and Kulbir are 16 year old boys. They both watch 'Neighbours' regularly. They compare what they see as a rosy state of affairs on Ramsey Street to their own experiences of neighbours. The following extract is taken from a taped conversation they had about soaps

Rajesh - it's like living in a dream, innit? because everyone gets on so well together'

Kulbir - Everything happens in Ramsey St. (the street where 'Neighbours' is set)

Rajesh - it's an ideal way of living innit? cos all the neighbours get on and that, they get on really well and they're always there when you need them - take my Neighbours for a start, I don't know when man, we ain't spoken to them since I don't know when man, them on the right hand side, we spoke to them when we moved in but we ain't spoken to them since, they're stuck up and that innit?

Kulbir - it's like where I live innit?

Rajesh - In Ramsey St. that's how you wanna be innit

Kulbir - yeah but look at it, it's a closed street, it's a dead end street innit?

Rajesh - yeah

Kulbir - well I got cousins living in a dead end street and they don't get on with their neighbours the way they

show it

Rajesh - yeah but it's just fiction innit? who gets on with their neighbours that way, tell me?

Kulbir - nobody

Rajesh - exactly!

A straight comparison between neighbourly relations in the soap and in their own lives is made and the ideal nature of neighbourly relations in the soap is dismissed as 'fiction'. They do not mention the conflict and misunderstandings which propel the narrative forward although they must be aware of them. This might be due to the high incidence of short term conflicts which get more or less speedily resolved compared to the relatively fewer long-term conflicts which remain unresolved for months or years.

By contrast, in real life and in Southall, neighbours are not seen to get on well. They may be 'stuck up' or they may, just as likely be excluded from domestic and family intimacies. This is certainly not unique to Southall. (According to Social Trends 1990, 82% of the British population claim they would not have moved into their home if they had known who their neighbours were). The contrast between how things are and how one would like them to be is evident when Rajesh comments 'Ramsey street is how you want to be' but neighbourly intimacy and support in times of trouble could militate against the primary value of family honour. This is also apparent in an exchange between Camila and Sukhi both 16 years old girls. However there is a reversal of the previous situation. In this case it is not the neighbours who are 'stuck up' but the family who need to protect themselves from gossip and interference.

The following exchange took place in an informal group discussion in a media studies lesson while watching the title sequence of Neighbour's. Camila's dislike of her own neighbours becomes apparent but, like many exchanges, it begins in earnest only to end in farce:

The girls are singing along to the theme tune as the title sequence appears on screen, 'Neighbours, everybody needs good neighbours'

Camila - but oh my god! neighbours gossip! my neighbours are horrible, they're always looking out the window watching what we're doing, they're Mangles (a term used to refer to a gossip)

(Theme tune: "Neighbours should be there for one another" over a shot of all the neighbours around the Ramsey's swimming pool)

Sukhi - yeah, real neighbours don't always get on so well, I mean what do neighbours share?

Camila - swimming pools!... even their knickers! (raucous laughter)

Whilst this last comment is an obvious send up, a way of gaining attention and esteem among friends whose main preoccupation is 'having a laugh', the point is clear that real neighbours are more likely to gossip about you than share things and thus do not behave in the ideal way portrayed in the title sequence.

'Neighbours' offers models of and opportunities for talking about the tensions which exist between families and their neighbours. The delicate balance between privacy and sociability is a tension that requires working through by neighbours and friends in any local area but it is a tension which takes culturally distinctive hues in Southall, where there is a high premium on privacy and where gossip poses a threat.

In 'Neighbours', as in Southall, the notion of 'community' is often used to express a range of meanings; from a sense of 'belonging' and loyalty to a place to the sharing of similar backgrounds and values; from the sense of a shared social and geographic boundary to a distinctiveness from other local areas. However, notions of 'community' are highly ambiguous and largely mythical since cross-cutting differences and internal cleavages of gender, generation, status and, crucial in

Southall religion, are more significant markers of daily life than is any notion of a unified 'community'. Indeed, the term is usually invoked when inhabitants feel some threat from the outside. In such cases the sense of 'community' is strengthened and for a short while differences are forgotten.

Whilst individuals may consider themselves to be part of a community, and many young people in Southall do, the immediate social environment of families is perhaps best considered not as the local area in which they live but in the network of actual social relations which they maintain both within and outside the local area. The high density of kin living locally and the closely knit nature of the social networks form the basis of the communications networks that exist.

Social ties may be strong, as well as highly competitive, between families who attend the same place of worship; the same place of work; with families of one's school friends and with families formerly from the same village in India and who are treated 'like kin', ostensibly, although relations are not subject to the same binding obligations of unrestricted reciprocity.

'we stay close to families who have come from the same village in India , if you can imagine these families lived together for hundreds and hundreds of years and often have the same ancestors going way back, they used to do the same jobs, they were the same caste they shared their experiences over time and that makes you very close and that closeness usually continues in England they are more like real neighbours but they don't live next door'
(Gurinder, 17 year old Jat Sikh girl)

In the parental culture the ideals of community and neighbourly relations are founded upon village life in India where historical, regional, religious and caste similarities forge a very deep sense of belonging. Whilst these relations have most certainly been idealised in 'exile' and through the kind of nostalgia Hindi films propagate, (where village life is represented as 'morally pure' in contrast to the corruption of city life), it is clear that such 'ideals' are rarely

obtainable in the urban context of Southall. There is nevertheless an attempt to maintain village ties where they exist.

In some ways the social networks of certain families in Southall bear some residual features of those in Punjab villages where component families are so closley connected and related within the local group that they are clearly marked off from external relationships. Privacy in such networks is difficult because it is not something that has been valued or even experienced traditionally but rather, has become an imperative as a result of migration and settlement. If one adds to this the general lack of individual privacy which is a feature of the extended families then one can begin to imagine how families encapsulated within activities known to so many cannot escape the informal sanctions of gossip and public opinion

Ballard, (1982) makes a similar point in discussing 'second generation' South Asian British youth

"Although everyone accepts that family loyalties should be sustained, the value of participation in more far flung social networks of extra-familial kinship is looked upon with increasing scepticism, especially since they tend to generate a suffocating traffic of gossip and scandal [..] Children may successfully conceal a good deal from their parents, but the scandalous exposure of a secret romance can force even the most tolerant parents into hasty and ill-advised action. Parents from rural backgrounds, may find it exceedingly difficult to to make adequte decisions about their children's marriages. Some parents are frannkly bewildered by their children's behaviour and attitudes, and assume that all change necessarily indicates a weakening of loyalty to the family. As a result they may so pester their children about their alleged Anglicization that their concern becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Ballard, 1982:196)

(For an example of how young people integrate local concerns in their soap video productions see Appendix 290 - 330)

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Families in Neighbours, due to the close knit social networks which, as in Southall, mirror the communication networks, cannot escape gossip. Gossip is then a central feature of daily life in soaps and in Southall. Let us now clarify what young people in Southall mean when they refer to gossip and describe its formation, its incidence, its relationship to rumour and its social repercusssions.

7.11 A FORMALIST APPROACH

The formal approach adopted in the next section is based on the connections that young people make between soap gossip and Southall gossip. Despite the fact that talking about real people and soap characters is not the same, the homolgy is based upon the form of the talk, or rather the processes involved in collective story construction. Shared experiences of soaps involves young people in replicating the narrational processes in their talk. This is paralleled with processes of transforming gossip into rumour. I shall describe these processes in the parental and peer cultures before demonstraing how soap talk is regarded as the equivalent of gossip in that frgaments of information (gossip) are transformed into a narrative (a rumour).

7.12 GOSSIP AND RUMOUR IN SOUTHALL

Gossip and rumour are seen as one of the biggest threats to a young person's freedom and to family honour (or 'izzat') in Southall. Gossip in the parental culture is seen to be more pernicious, malicious and harmful than among peers since it usually has more far reaching and dangerous consequences for young people. It is very rare that peer gossip will be revealed to parents because complicity among youth is high. One of the most consistent condemnations of Southall concerns the pervasiveness of gossip and the instrumental role it plays in the control of social, and in particular, of gender relations.

In most of the relevant literature, gossip and rumour are frequently conflated and whilst they share certain similarities there are important distinctions to be made. These will be elaborated throughout this final section. For the moment suffice it to say that gossip is private information exchanged by a small group of intimate friends. It usually

concerns the private traits or conduct of individuals and their violations of social or moral norms. On the contrary, _a_ rumour is public knowledge which, as a result of various collective interpretive procedures, constitutes a socially sanctioned version of an event or incident. _A_ rumour is a whole story rather than fragments of information (gossip) and as such has much wider currency and is circulated among a greater number of people than gossip.

It is of interest that academic work on gossip and rumour tend to arise in local studies, particularly ethnographies. Least the reader think gossip is a peculiar feature of the Punjabi community in Southall, it is worth briefly highlighting a few studies where gossip is examined. Blumenthal (1932) recognises it as a characteristic feature of small town life (in this case in Chicago) and draws up a typology of different types of gossip. Bott (1957) highlights the importance of gossip among women in families with close-knit social networks and segregated conjugal roles. She describes the pressures upon women to conform to local standards and to participate in gossip networks if they wish to reap the rewards of companionship. She concludes that gossip is one of the chief means whereby norms are stated, tested and affirmed.

Paine (1967, 1968) considers gossip to be an informal and indirect sanction which is employed where the risks of open or formal attack are too high. Evans-Pritchard (1937) in his ethnography of the Azande describes how situations of ignorance or uncertainty produce tensions or suspense which may result in gossip. He demonstrates how merely believing in witchcraft creates anxieties which are periodically discharged as gossip and accusations. Cohen (1980, 1982) links carnival with gossip among Afro-Carribeans in Notting Hill and argues that it is a means by which individuals and groups may 'contest territory' in physical and social space.

Festinger et al (1948) suggest that rumours are propagated when individuals pass on stories which enable them to express anxieties that might otherwide remain unacknowledged. Leinhardt (1975) proposes that 'fantastic' rumours are necesary to resolve complexities in public

feeling that cannot be readily articulated at a more thoughtful level. Firth's research among the Tikopia (1956) led him to suggest that certain types of rumour serve as social instruments by which individuals or groups attempt to improve their status. Smith (1985) sees rumour it as a process of negotiating shared meanings rather than a product of social organisation. Shibutani (1966) is one of the few academics to distinguish gossip and rumour. He does so by alluding to their different temporal and spatial patterns and to the larger number of people involved in rumour but his concern is primarily with rumour. He regards rumour as 'a recurrent form of communication through which men (sic) caught together in an ambiguous situation attempt to construct a meaningful interpretation of it by pooling their intellectual resources'.(1966:17)

Let us now turn to the specificites of gossip in Southall. Some young people see gossip as resulting from the closely knit kinship and social networks. One of the survey questions asked respondents to agree or disagree with list of statements about Southall. The statements were culled from young people's typical comments about Southall. 74% agreed that 'Nothing can be kept secret in Southall' (n=179) 69% agreed that 'Everybody watches what everybody else is doing' and 35% agreed that 'Southall is too isolated, it's like an island'. These are particularly telling results for the other statements were affirmed by less than one third of respondents. The figures support much of the qualitative data where young people complain bitterly about the close surveillance they feel themselves to be subjected to in public life in Southall.

For many young people gossip is seen as a means by which parents compete for public recognition of their family honour or 'izzat'. In the following exchange between two 16 year old boys in an informal school context this is made clear. They are discussing their families and Southall

Devinder - Indian culture
Malkit - yeah
Devinder - Indian culture, I'll tell you what Indian

culture is, it's respect, respect
and more respect

Malkit - (laughing) that's true and it's even worse in Southall because you're surrounded with different er ... not different religions, mostly Sikhs [..] but Sikh families ...it's kinda like there's more tension between them to keep respect

Devinder - I think Southall is just one big gossip, I mean you can't even ....I mean you might not even know the woman but it could be your mum's, friend's, sister's, daughter's, friend's, friend and by the time you've got back home, you don't know how it's got back home but you walk in the door and your mum says 'where have you been? Someone told your auntie that you've been flirting with girls on your own!' and I just wanna laugh but it makes you really angry to why they're saying it and it's even worse for girls.

Malkit - and it's always the same woman, not a man

Devinder - and when you watch a soap you think of that woman and when you think of a soap you think of that woman and that's why you begin to hate that person in the soap, like when they show Mrs. Mangle and Madge is having a go at her and then I think of this aunt on my road that I really hate cos she's an old gossip and it makes you feel good and you wish you could have a go at her yourself.

The intensity of young people's association of soaps with Southall and with gossip is perhaps most forcefully demonstrated by their appropriation of the Mrs. Mangle metaphor. Mrs. Mangle was the key gossip character in 'Neighbours'. She is seen to embody everything that

one would despise in a neighbour. She gossips. She has no sense of loyalty. She talks behind people's backs with malicious intent. She is an interfering busybody who twists and distorts events in order to put people down. While purporting to uphold the moral values of the community, she shows a prurient interest in any aberration of social or moral codes of behaviour.

Among young people the term 'Mangle' has entered into everyday usage as a term of abuse for anyone who gossips. "Oh! she's a right Mangle!" can be heard commonly, even though she no longer actually appears in the soap. One year after her departure (and replacement by Hilary as the gossip character), the term still has wide currency. Her character has taken on almost mythical proportions. She is the 'evil eye' and the 'maligning mouth'.

The appropriation of the Mangle metaphor is revealing of the specifically local response to 'Neighbours' where the anxieties of young people are projected onto the Mangle character as the embodiment of the significant threat that gossip poses to their lives. The threat of having a gossip interfere in one's life is most acutely felt by girls since family honour or 'izzat' ultimately depends on the chastity of daughters. As Diljit put it

"Girls are the heart of a family's respect'

(Diljit, 16 year old Jat Sikh boy)

One of the primary duties of parents is to marry their daughters respectably. A girl's reputation has to be impeccable if she is to be married honourably. However, her reputation can be seriously damaged if she is known to have a boyfriend or, in some cases, if she is merely seen 'hanging around', 'chatting' or flirting with boys on the High Street or elsewhere in public. Gossip in the parental culture is usually exchanged by women about girls. A girl's reputation may be speedily sullied by a casual aside 'Kuria bar fediya' (literally, 'a girl walking outside') or 'awaara gardi' (meaning girls going out and doing bad things, hanging around with boys, smoking or drinking).

To summarise: one of the principal values which motivates norms of behaviour among Punjabi Sikh families in Southall is 'izzat' or family honour/respect. The parental generation continue to strive to safeguard and maintain their 'izzat'. Due to the high density of Sikhs living locally and the challenges to traditional norms and values that have arisen through migration and settlement in Britain, competition between families for respect and respectability is high. A family's respect depends ultimately on the chastity of its daughters and their honourable marriage to someone of the same caste. The Punjabi marriage system is one of 'wife-givers', rather than of 'wife-takers'. The young bride is 'given' to her husband's family and she has rights to dowry wealth. This places very heavy financial pressures, especially upon low income families. This system places power in the hands of the boy's family rather than the girl's.

This sytem has meant that for centuries in the Punjab, unmarried girls are prohibited or at least restricted from freely associating in public with boys who are not kin by blood or marriage. Settlement in Southall and exposure to British and American norms associated with courtship and marriage has meant that such prohibitions are not easily maintained. The perceived permissiveness and moral laxness of 'western' values with regard to gender relations and sexual relationships are felt by many parents to be extremely threatening. In representing modes of behaviour deemed permissive, television and soaps like 'Neighbours' are also seen as threatening and as potential enticements, to be avoided at all costs.

But 'transgressions' increasingly occur which place great strain on family life and in some cases a tightening of restrictions. Such stress and strain is further heightened by the difficulties of controlling information about private family matters or about one's children's misdemenours.
Gossip about transgressions of norms poses a major threat to families. Gossip serves a number of quite significant social functions. These functions are essentially those of social control because in concerning itself principally with violations of moral codes it is a means whereby norms are reinforced. Furthermore, it helps defines status relations,

establishes various degrees of closeness and distance among people and draws boundaries between insiders and outsiders

7.13 GOSSIP IN THE PEER CULTURE

Gossip never gives the whole story only fragments and thus, like narration in soap operas creates information gaps which recipients are more or less desirous to fill in. Recipients of gossip hear fragments of information from a limited or one sided perspective and they are usually little concerned about the plausibility, accuracy or veracity of the statements or propositions which they hear and in the absence of additional information verification procedures are difficult.

Gossip is seen as a gender specific way of talking for whilst boys may gossip, girls are seen to be better at it and to take it much further than boys in that it is often turned into 'bitching' and it spreads much more. According to boys and girls, male talk is only intimate among very close friends and does not spread beyond an immediate, close-knit circle of friends.

As one girl comments
"girls tend to take gossip much further than boys, we really bitch behind eachother's backs, but then when we see eachother we go, 'Oh! hi! how are you' [..] the boys tell us off and say we take it too far, you know, we'll keep going on about it, repeating it, exaggerating it or adding to it"
(Amerjit, 16 year old girl)

Boys claim they do not gossip
"we only talk about boys who get on our nerves otherwise we ignore them [..] when there's friction, you know, like someone bad mouthing someone behind their back, we are more likely to confront the person, girls wouldn't they'd just gossip or bitch"
(Hamdeep, 16 year old boy)

In one peer network, comprising approximately fifty, 16 year olds, which I have studied closely, the six main frienship groupings are typically

segregated along gender lines, year group and course of study (these were all A level students) except for one which is mixed as it contains 3 dating couples. Within each group there exists a similar pattern; a core intimate group, usually with highest status members, comprising anything from two to four people and peripheral groupings of two or three members around them.

In several of the groups there is an outsider who has low status but, nevertheless, attaches herself to the group. This person, feeling at times outcast and seeking attachment, moves more freely than the others between and across groups. They are generally disliked and seen as 'stirrers' and 'spies' since they are in a position to overhear, eavesdrop and abuse private information about others. This person is seen as the 'chuggli' (a gossip). She transgresses the boundaries of loyalty in relaying information across groups. In doing so she hopes to acquire (momentary) status by being privvy to knowledge that no-one else in a particular group has. Whilst she is a useful source of gossip she is much maligned. Gossip causes trouble between the different groups vying for status, recognition, admiration and popularity.

Several informants talked of an almost compulsive urge to enjoy the momentary prestige and excitement that the revelation of 'juicy gossip' brings but the thrill brings little enduring satisfaction

Amrit - sometimes you just wanna let it out, you have to tell someone you just can't keep it to yourself [..] like if something happens I've just got to tell Dally (her best friend) and I'll say don't tell anyone [..] but then I won't be able to keep it to myself so I'll tell Sanjeeb and within no time I've told ten people and to each one I've said 'don't tell anyone else but....' [..] I don't know it's just the excitement that you know something that the others don't [..] I suppose it puts you in a position of power because you've got to be the first to tell

Dally - but you lose that power once you've told them

Amrit - yeah that's true, the power and the excitement only lasts for a few short seconds

Dally - you not only lose your power but that other person loses their trust

In the peer culture both boys and girls are the subject of gossip and the key subject is romance and 'dating'
"it's mainly about who fancies who, who's going out with who, the problems that they have, how far they go, you know what I mean, who's about to break up, who's just broken up, what people are wearing, how they do their hair, who's getting drunk, bunking, rucking, who's a slag and who's a sap, who's got shamed up [..] you know, that sort of thing (Bupinder, 16 year old girl)

Among young people there are ambiguous attitudes and feelings toward gossip depending on whether it is harmless, idle chatter or malicious. In this necessarily brief summary of gossip in the peer culture it is clear that rather than being idle frivolous talk, gossip is defined as an 'everyday', gendered way of talking.

7.14 RUMOUR FORMATION

Many young people distinguish between gossip and rumour mainly by virtue of the fact that gossip is seen as private talk and rumour as a story for public consumption. A rumour is gossip transformed into a narrative by story-telling processes. These processes involve the social construction and dissemination of a narrative in a specific communication network through a variety of verification procedures. These are filtering processes which involve the levelling of detail by ommission and, conversly, the sharpening of detail by selective retention (Firth, 1956). Thus, through a social and cultural process of assimilation, an incident is converted into narrative material for more general transmission.

Rumour is gossip made public. It is less easily confined and controlled since verification procedures have attributed the story with some legitimacy and authority but not with an author. Whilst the author of gossip is known rumour is characterised by authorial anonymity since it is a social construction. Thus, there is a dissociation between the speaker and the message such that, subsequently, the speaker cannot be held responsible for the story. A rumour is openly and freely discussed without reservation and without the kind of intensity of confidentaility that accompanies gossip. No trust or loyalty is required on the part of the speaker who is therefore free to spread it.

"a rumour is common knowledge, it's,.. er, how would you say it, it's an unproven story but you don't care because everyone wants to believe it, in any case it's hard to prove or deny [..] Take the rumour about Ruby and William, I mean the whole school the whole of Southall knew about that. It all started when she bunked school for a week, people started saying she'd left home and runaway with William and when she didn't come to school for two months it seemed true cos no-one saw him either, then some said that she was living at his house and some said that she's got sent down India [..] you know, her parents are really religious and strict and that's happened quite a few girls round here [..] then the rumour went round that she was pregnant, but no-one really knew and then there was talk of an abortion, even her best friends were discussing her pregnancy, which I thought was really bad, anyway, the rumour ended when she came back to school a few months later, but no-one really ever knew if it was true or not, although everyone suspected that she had an abortion, she's living back at home now."
(Bupinder, 16 year old girl)

What starts as gossip leaves information gaps which are later progressively filled through the acquisition of new information and incoming clues which spark off new hypotheses which are later confirmed, rejected or held in suspense. Red herrings may be introduced which may divert attention. Similarly, time gaps in the acquistion of new information cause delay and during this period the basic elements of the story may be embellished, exaggerated or distorted depending on the

moral or affective investment of those participating in the construction of the rumour. There is a tendency to speculate and elaborate a rumour (especially when faced with scepticism) until it acquires some narrative coherence and plausibility and to assimilate fragments according to an established narrative theme. Young people often use either previous rumours or soap narratives as models. In Southall these are mainly rumours of girls running away from home, rumours about girls dating or marrying a boy of different religion, caste or colour and rumours about pregnancy and abortion.

Note that several versions of the Ruby-William rumour prevailed for a while until one version gained widespread credence. Even though it was perceived that the rumour ended upon their return to school, talking about the rumour did not end because inspite of the ascendance of a priveleged version there remained a margin of doubt that allowed for continued speculation. Such rumours become part of peer folklore and are resurrected whenever gossip starts about someone else's misdemenours. Thus, past rumours and soap storylines provide a narrative framework through which subsequent rumours may be interpreted.

It is the people with privileged knowledge, (i.e. the girl's sister and her friends) who talk confidentially to others who may then be pressurised to tell other intimate friends or who may voluntarily proffer such secrets. Such insiders are instrumental in generating the gossip in the first instance, and in supporting the verification and assimilation procedures which follow. In this case, harmless gossip about truanting was transformed into a rumour which later became one of the biggest scandals of the year in the peer culture. This particular rumour also formed the narrative of one group's own soap production in Media Studies. Ruby's sister, Bally, was a member of the group that produced a soap closing sequence which was entitled 'Freedom At Last'. Ruby played herself and although the rumour was never openly referred to in either the planning or during the production, all involved, including myself, shared a public secret. The perfect irony of their own 'real-life' fiction was to transform a scandalous rumour into a triumph of

freedom where the courting couple triumphantly escape the strictures of gossip and parental control by running away.

Gossip about transgressions of norms poses a major threat to families and this explains why the issue of gossip is so prominent in the lives of young people locally and why it is so central, especially for girls, to their engagement with the soap genre. But if gossip is a threat it is also an activity, a way of communicating which is indulged in and enjoyed by many and which varies from idle, harmless chatter about people to the spreading of scandal and slanderous rumour. Not only are soaps seen to base their storylines on gossip but the narrative becomes a generator of gossip. This can be explained by specifically textual features of the soap genre to which we now turn our attention.

SOAP NARRATION AS GOSSIP

Narration is the process whereby story material is selected, arranged and represented in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on the perceiver of narratives. A narrative or story is the product of such processes. The distinction between the story that is represented and the actual represenatation of it goes back to Aristotle's Poetics it was most fully theorised by Russian Formalists who used the terms fabula and syuzhet. According to Formalist theory, the fabula (sometimes translated as the story) is the imaginary construct we create progresssively and retroactively .

"It is a pattern which perceivers of narratives create through assumptions and inferences [..] the developing result of picking up narrative clues, applying schemata, framing and testing hypotheses. The viewer builds the fabula on the basis of prototype schemata (identifiable types of persons, actions and locations), template schemata (principally the canonic story format which briefly involves; setting plus charcaters - goals - attempts - outcome - resolution) and procedural
schemata (a search for appropriate motivations and relations of causality, time and space. To the extent that these processes are intersubjective, so is the fabula that is created. In principle viewers

will agree either about what the story is or upon what factors render it ambiguous" (Bordwell, 1985:49)

The fabula/suyzhet distinction is relevant to our discussion of soaps and gossip in a number of ways; first in focussing our attention on the processes of narration, unlike many other theories of narrative, we are equally concerned with the cognitive and inter-subjective activities of the viewers during and after viewing, especially in the verbal discourse that the soap generates; secondly, the processes involved in converting gossip into rumour, previously described are very much akin to the processes of narration which involve a range of activities directed at the construction of a coherent story out of the fragments of information available. This provides an explanation as to why the teenage viewers identification with the soap 'Neighbours' is more an identification with the processes of narration and with gossip than with particular characters per se, as is conventionally perceived. Thirdly, the cognitive processes described above when applied to the continuous narration of the soap genre find expression in the verbal discourse which young people perceive as a form of storytelling which signified to them by the term gossip.

The experience of viewing 'Neighbours' is seen to be similar to hearing gossip. 'Neighbours', like most other soaps, privileges verbal over visual discourse. The low production values, cheap sets and naturalistic camera techniques do not make it visually exciting in the way that soaps such as Dallas are. Furthermore, low budget soaps like 'Neighbours' bear the remnants of their generic origins in radio where the emphasis on dialogue was seen to be compatible with the housewife pursuing her domestic chores whilst listening. Thus, apart from a few attractive characters in whom teenagers find some visual pleasure, the key engagement with 'Neighbours' is with the dialogue.

Given the proximity, intimacy and intensity of family and neighbourly relations in 'Neighbours', much of the dialogue involves private, intimate talk between family, friends and neighbours, very often about other people, behind their backs. The complex interweaving of different

storylines in the continous narrative depends on a constant succession of revelations about the secrets lives of characters, past and present and invites speculation about their futures. For young people in Southall, this way of talking is equated with gossip. In the following spontaneous exchange about soaps, in a classroom setting, four girls and one boy, all aged 16, discuss gossip in soaps and in their own communication.

Inderjeet - All soaps are really bitchy, it's just like talking behind someone's back

Onray - yeah there's a lot of spite in soaps

Dalvinder - But isn't that what we do in real life?

Onray - what?

Dalvinder - talk about people behind their back

Inderjeet - not as much as they do in soaps

Dalvinder - come off it! we do!

Inderjeet - but they base their storylines on it

Dalvinder - we might not do it straight but you can't say we don't do it

Talvinder - we all do, everyone does

Amrit - I gossip

Dalvinder - I spend my time gossiping, you can't say that you don't talk about somebody, even if someone is there in the room, you still talk about them behind their back, even if you're not saying anything bad about them, just general conversation, you're still talking about someone else, it's just a way of socialising

Amrit - like when you get together with your mates and you say, 'wanna hear the latest?

Talvinder - AND gain attention for a while

Inderjeet - You can even make it up and gain attention

Dalvinder - valid point!

The definitions of gossip presented here confirm those made by different students earlier and indeed elsewhere in my fieldwork. The transition

from talking about soap gossip to real gossip is made with relative ease while discriminating between gossip which is malign and that which is harmless. This exchange demonstrates the formal and homologous parallels which these young people make between soap gossip and real gossip. For them, it is not simply that soap characters gossip, as they do, but that soap storylines are based on it, as are many of the stories that they construct in course of their every day lives.

Soaps are characterised by oral forms of storytelling, defined by specific time structures, which fragment narration across a longer time frame than is the case in any other genre and thus extend suspense and heighten curiosity over days rather than hours. This bears similarities to the stories which are constructed by young people through fragments of gossip which accumulate on a daily basis and often acquire the currency of rumour or news.

This relates to one of the most important features of soap narration which is the way in which knowledge and information is distributed between the characters in the diagesis and between characters and viewers. Soap viewers are placed in a paradoxical postion for whilst their motivation to continue viewing is maintained by their curiosity, (vital information is withheld, during any one episode and in the cliff-hanger endings), they are also placed in a privileged position of knowledge which results in their always knowing more than certain of the characters. Viewer, like the recipients of gossip, are in possession of secret knowledge that is shared and this in turn catalyses further speculation about how a character will react when they discover. Buckingham (1987) points out that, 'the pleasure of gossip about soap opera is the pleasure of sharing secrets to which only a select few are privy'. (1987:64) He argues that identification is with the processes of narration; what is revealed by the programme is in itself a source of great fascination, but it is the process of revelation, both within the narrative and in its subsequent reconstruction in discussion, which constitutes much of the pleasure.

What Barthes (1974) refers to as the hermeneutic code, involves the establishement and resolution of questions and enigmas and the delicate balance between denying viewers information and revealing it. In soaps, multiple enigmas are initiated, developed and resolved at different rates and so viewer's curiosity is in a constant state of arousal. Curiosity is partially appeased by the information to which the viewer has privieleged access. As with gossip, we are told the intimate secrets of a characters' lives, we know which other characters share this information but we also know that those wishing to conceal their secrets are unaware that we are privvy to this knowledge. This places viewers in a position of power in that they know something others do not know but also in a position of powerlessness in that they are unable to use this knowedge, unlike with real life gossip, to intervene in the course of events.

Viwers' activities involve the processing and manipulation of information in a way that differs markedly from other texts. The continuous narrative means that regular viewers are in possession of a great deal more knowledge about characters and past events than in any other genre. In the case of 'Coronation Street', it may stretch back 25 years but the broadcast life of 'Neighbours' in Britain is 5 years old and thus, many 16 year old viewers will have watched 'Neighbours' on a daily basis (on weekdays) for nearly one third of their lives. It is not surprising therefore that young people learn to live with television families, like The Robinsons, The Bishops and The Mangles almost as extensions of their own lives.

The range and depth of background information which viewers accrue over the years facilitates the cognitive and verbal activities during and after viewing. Buckingham (1987) summarises these as follows recollecting past events that we have seen; imagining past events that we have not seen; formulating hypotheses about future events; testing these hypotheses in the light of new information; making inferences in order to explainactions and events; processing new information; developing or consolidating our knowledge of characters and judging these characters and their relationships.

All these cognitive activities which take place while viewing form the basis of the verbal discourse in which young people engage in both the domestic and peer contexts. These are very similar to the processes, referred to earlier, that gossip has to undergo in order to become rumour; put simply, the levelling of detail by selection and the sharpening of detail by ommission. Moreover, the characters of the soaps are themselves involved in these processes of story construction and evaluation. The cross-cutting connections between the large number of characters populating the dense social networks of soaps offers multiple perspectives to viewers which require consideration in making their judgements of any particular scenario. The cliff-hanger endings and the suspense that is generally created through the processes of narration further encourage speculative talk about characters and their relationships.

Thus, it can be seen how young people make this connection between soaps and gossip and how identification is with the processes of narration rather than with any individual character.

We shall now turn our attention to the conclusions of this study.

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hitherto overlooked. A more anthropological conception of TV audiences and an emphasis on the relational dimensions of TV culture provide empirical evidence which can illuminate the dialectic between the material and symbolic, the public and private, and the local and global dimensions of cultural consumption.

Census and survey data were useful in identifying local demographic and cultural patterns which were then integrated with ethnographic data on TV talk. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods helped to overcome the limitations inherent in using one or other of these methods exclusively and to shed some light on the interplay of social, economic, political and cultural processes.

The thesis has based its analysis of TV talk around different TV genres. This has been useful in highlighting the ways in which different genres organise the potential range of meanings. It has been argued that TV talk is to some extent generically specific because different TV genres employ particular modes of address and involve specific kinds of narrative structures, narrational devices and thematic content. As a consequence, viewers respond in structured, socially patterned but culturally diverse ways.

TV news addresses its audiences as citizens and members of the public. In setting both the agenda and the terms of public debate, it serves not simply to create some sense of participation in the public sphere but also encourages dependency. Informants believe that an understanding of TV news is indispensable to modern citizenship in that it is their major source of social, political and economic information. Being able to discuss news events is also considered to be a sign of maturity and a marker of the transition from child to adult status. Yet the kinds of educational and cultural competences required to understand, and to be able to discuss different aspects of TV news are not evenly distributed and therefore certain kinds of information are rendered inaccessible. This is particularly the case with most forms of political and economic news. In contrast, local news and human interest stories enjoy

widespread currency among informants. Yet TV news offers representations of events which are ideologically loaded. Young people's news talk about the Gulf war provides a telling example of the way in which viewers both manipulate, and are manipulated by, the discourses of TV news.

TV advertisements address viewers as potential consumers and, as a consequence, 'TV ad talk' involves discussions of their consumption practices and the construction of hierarchies of taste and style in the most basic aspects of their material existence; in what they drink, eat and wear. Ads also play upon young people's fantasies and much of their ad talk has a utopian or aspirational quality. The focus on TV talk in this thesis has therefore enabled connections to be made between the material and symbolic dimensions of consumption practices among young people and their families.

The thesis has demonstrated how TV comedy talk is integrated into joking relationships in the peer culture. TV sitcoms provide young people with a source of comic material in the form of jokes, gags, puns, comic characters, narratives and situations, which play upon their sense of the incongruous, the absurd and the 'unspeakable', as well as upon their delight in the flouting of social conventions. Their TV comedy talk emphasises the central importance of joking relationships in the peer culture.

TV soap talk resembles gossip and is frequently referred to as such. In their soap talk, young people draw not simply upon the content but also upon the formal qualities of soap operas. Gossip is a feature of the continuous text, not only as practised by the typical gossip character but also as a characteristic element in characters' verbal interactions. The unequal distribution of knowledge between characters and between characters and viewers creates gaps which generate gossip both within the text and among viewers. This is further fuelled by gossip about the soap stars and possible future developments in the soap which regularly appear in the popular press and magazines.

Whilst TV talk is to some extent genre specific, it serves three inter-related social and cultural functions, regardless of genre. It has been argued that TV talk, as an integral part of everyday talk, assists young people, first, in the negotiation of the relations between parental and peer cultures; second, in defining self in relation to 'others'; and finally, in dealing with some of the conflicts and tensions which characterise the processes of maturation in this peer culture. These functions are closely interconnected and overlapping but they provide some explanation as to why young people engage so frequently and ritualistically in TV talk and help to account for their culturally distinctive uses of TV. They serve to highlight some of the underlying social relations and structures which organize the ways in which TV meanings are both constructed and received.

The parental culture is a term which has been used to denote a diverse and heterogenous group of parents who nevertheless share a Punjabi cultural background. It refers to their value systems and beliefs, customs and traditions, family structures and processes which, in many respects, differ markedly from those prevalent in British society and culture. In other respects, in their occupational and financial goals, in the educational aspirations they hold for their children, Punjabi parents are no different to others. However, as a result of migration and settlement in Britian Punjabi families are experiencing an accelerated process of change due to the rapid transition from 'traditional' to 'modern' society and culture. The centrality of the family in Punjabi culture and the importance of kinship duty, respect and loyalty means that kin ties structure day to day life for the majority. The parental culture constructs frameworks of social action, in the immediate family and through their wider kinship, religious and social networks, which define some of the most significant social and cultural spaces in which young people live.

The peer culture refers to groups of young people who belong to the same generation and therefore the same phase of the collective process. Peer groups are bound together not simply by contemporaneity but also by

their participation in the same historical and local circumstances, by common social and cultural experiences and by the affective ties of friendship. Despite certain characteristic modes of thought and experience, the peer culture is not a homogenous group either but differentiated by, among other criteria, gender and religion and also by whether one is British-born, a child or a teenage migrant. Thus, the peer culture is not without its conflict, and antagonistic relations both within and between itself and the parental culture.

TV talk contributes in important ways to the processes of maturation and personal experimentation which acquire some urgency in late adolescence. These are particularly complex and difficult, but potentially enriching and creative processes, for London Punjabi youth. Compared with young people brought up in more mono-cultural environments within dominant or mainstream British culture, London Punjabi youths have greater cultural resources at their disposal but they also have more complex sets of social and cultural relations to negotiate since the dominant culture is not their family culture. Furthermore, they are aware of their minority status and subordinate position in British society as 'ethnic minorities' but since Southall itself developed as a sanctuary against the racism of the wider society, many young people, unlike their parents, have never directly experienced racism themselves. Therefore, compared to their parents Southall youth position themselves and are positioned rather differently in relation to both Punjabi and British culture.

Due to the self-contained nature of life in Southall and the predominance of Punjabi culture some young people feel themselves to be 'ghettoised'. Their limited social experiences beyond Southall and the limiting social controls they are subject to leads many young people feel they lack direct contact with the wider society. It has been argued that TV provides a major source of information about, and a significant means of enculturation into the norms and values of the wider society or 'western' culture as informants describe it. The analysis of their TV talk demonstrates how comparisons and contrasts are continually made

between the parental or 'Asian' culture and British or 'western' culture which are so frequently constructed as oppositional categories. The reasons for this are complex but British imperialism, a deep suspicion of western culture on the part of many Indians and the construction of 'western culture' in stark opposition to 'Indian culture' in popular Hindi films have undoubtedly been influential factors. Furthermore, the propagation of racism in Britain has depended upon maintaining these cultural categories in an oppositional relationship. .

The construction of 'western' culture as immoral and licentious in the parental culture and the construction of 'Asian' culture as based on archaic and traditional customs and beliefs in British society have served to reinforce the notion that the two are mutually exclusive and oppositional categories. Yet despite the fact that many young people think in such terms their social and cultural practices defy these ideologically constructed boundaries. TV provides common reference points, narratives, role models, points of identification and alternative sets of values and identities with which young people can experiment and which, at times, they use to challenge notions of fixed identity prevalent in both the parental culture and the wider society. But it also offers limited and limiting representations of 'Asian' people and thus at the same time serves to construct and reinforce racist discourses.

In this thesis I have argued that the collective construction of social and cultural identities, assisted by TV talk, is a dynamic process. Identities and differences cannot simply be reduced to essentialist categories and labels and distinctions of age, 'race', gender, class, caste, religion, language, nationality, region. Despite the importance of these, identities and differences are also created through a whole range of consumption practices; through tastes and distastes; fashion and style and through, among other things, what one eats, wears, drinks and watches on TV. These processes of self-definition are so complex and differentiated that the term 'cultural identity' is too general to

convey the specificities of its constituents or the processes of its construction.

The thesis has documented some of the constituents of young people's self-definitions and has demonstrated that for London Punjabi youth, 'what one is' is defined in relation to 'what one is not'. It has highlighted the way in which these self-definitions are also dependent upon contextual factors. Whilst certain features of self identity appear to be immutable, such as one's gender or the colour of one's skin, others are shifting, plural, fluid and constantly in the process of formation. Explorations of self and group identity are not only activities which take place in the peer culture but are also crucially involved in the negotation of the relations between parental and peer cultures since young people are defining themselves in relation to and, often against their parents. As such they are also part of the processes of maturation which are manifest, articulated and explored in young people's TV talk.

The social and cultural functions of TV talk carry with them specific thematic concerns which cut across the data. The thesis has highlighted young people's preoccupation with family relations, gender roles in the parental and peer cultures, courtship and marriage, and with issues of sex and sexuality. The striving toward some degree of independence, individuality and autonomy is a characteristic feature of most peer cultures. Among London Punjabi youth this is complicated by differences in the value systems of the parental and peer cultures. In the parental culture the family is perceived as central and as sacred. Deeply engrained values such as family duty, honour, loyalty and respect override the individual pursuit of self-interest. A tradition of aggregating family economic interests and an ethos of mutual dependence and dependability prevail. The family is thus a corporate unit in which those with status and authority are responsible for all major decision making. Obviously families vary in the degree of control or influence they have over individual members. However, there is generally little

scope for independent action or autonomous decision making as far as young people are concerned.

The thesis documents how in their TV talk young people compare and contrast their own families with TV families. In particular, they admire the 'independence' and 'freedom' that teenagers in soap operas, such as 'Neighbours', are granted: independence and freedom to participate more fully in a 'teenage lifestyle' and to 'date' with parental permission. According to informants, the Coca Cola ads and American TV sitcoms which are targetted at teenagers, seem to portray an 'ideal teenage lifestyle' to which many aspire. Yet perhaps one of the most persistently lamented features of life, among girls, is their subordinate position within the family, compared with boys, and the expectations upon them to conform to traditional gender roles. This is most obvious in rules that parents set and in their tighter control of their daughters' behaviour and social relations and in their greater share of domestic chores and duties. But it is more subtly manifest in the pressures upon them to maintain a 'respectable' and 'chaste' reputation to safeguard family honour and to be married respectably. The dowry system, still in widespread practice, places further pressures on families to provide for their daughters and is a mark of their unequal status when it comes to marriage arrangements.

Despite such constraints, young people have exhibited remarkable ingenuity in subverting the norms of the parental culture in attending day-time discos, organizing social outings, courting and sometimes, by various subterfuges 'arranging' their own marriages. Many parents, too, have allowed their children a much greater involvement in decisionmaking and marriage arrangements. But for girls, it would appear that higher education is one of the main escape routes from an early marriage. In contrast, for girls whose transgressions are discovered, marriages are often speedily arranged and they are dispatched, in haste, to their husband's family. London Punjabi girls tend to marry in their late teens and early twenties and despite the fact that some marriages now take place at a later age the question of marriage assumes an importance at a

very early stage. Rumours of unsuccessful 'love' marriages are as rife as those of failed 'arranged' marriages. The question is very much on the minds of girls from their early teens onwards. It is perhaps partly because of the imminence of marriage for many teenage girls that issues of sex and sexuality are a prominent feature of their TV talk. But curiosity about sex is also a feature of the processes of maturation as was demonstrated in their TV comedy talk.

These negotations and explorations, to which TV talk contributes, take place in the specific local context of Southall. The thesis has highlighted the way in which the local context is important in shaping the construction of meanings and the uses of TV. The census data highlighted some of Southall's demographic features; its higher than average young population; the high percentage of households headed by people born in the New Commonwealth and Pakistan; the larger than average household size and the prevalence and of owner-occupied type housing; its high unemployment rate and the predominance of people employed in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs and the density of population in the two wards (Glebe and Northcote) where the survey and fieldwork were carried out. The youth survey data identified similar patterns to the census data and further highlighted larger than average families and the density and proximity of kinship networks in Southall, and the cultural heterogeneity of its inhabitants, despite the prevalence of shared Punjabi background and the central importance of religion and caste as markers of difference.

The survey also documented the diversity of Southall's media culture where popular Hindi films and TV programmes are viewed in the family alongside British, American and Australian programmes. Young people draw upon culturally distinctive media sources to compare and contrast, judge and evaluate their aesthetic, normative, substantive and formal qualities. Their stated preferences are for 'western' media, and American media in particular, which is perceived as an important marker of their 'westernization' and of their 'difference' from parents. However, they also watch Hindi films and enjoy them more than they are

willing to admit in the peer culture which prides itself on its difference from the parental culture. TV consumption and talk has been contextualised within this local media culture, the diversity of which provides resources for the articulation of cultural differences.

A full examination of the implications of the local and global dynamics of TV consumption is beyond the scope of this study. This is an important goal for the future. However, the thesis does begin to explore the way in which global events communicated through TV, such as the Gulf war, have local consequences and how they are interpreted in locally specific ways. It has also highlighted the way that this local peer culture defines and redefines itself through the consumption of 'global' media, such as 'Neighbours', Coca Cola ads and American TV programmes, as well as through the consumption of products like hamburgers, jeans and trainers. However, the appropriation of global media for local purposes takes place in the face of ever greater dependence upon the TV products distributed by transnational culture industries. The rapid expansion of transnational media systems, owned by powerful multi-national corporations has dramatically affected all aspects of globalisation. These transnational markets and distribution sytsems are crossing and transforming established cultural and territorial boundaries with profound political and cultural implications. Ethnographic studies representing the diversity and complexity of local situations at specific historic conjunctures will be of significant value in tracing and evaluating the cultural and ideological consequences of these globalising tendencies.

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