Audience Understandings of Media Messages about Child Sexual Abuse
An exploration of audience reception and media influence

Jenny Kitzinger

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Abstract
This thesis examines media power and audience reception processes through a detailed study of media reporting and public understandings of child sexual abuse. It is based on 79 focus group discussions in which people were invited to write their own scripts (using pictures taken from the TV coverage) or comment on some anti-abuse advertisements (taken from the Zero Tolerance campaign). Public understandings are systematically compared to the content of media reporting and campaign materials. In particular I explore people's memories of two cases, 'Cleveland' and 'Orkney', and their views around specific themes (images of abusers, notions about stranger-danger, and ideas around sites of safety and danger). The thesis explores the diversity of audience reactions and the different ways in which people may identify with the characters represented in the media or in advertisements. However, I also draw attention to the themes which recurred across all the focus groups and argue that there is strong evidence of media effects. The thesis highlights factors in media coverage which are particularly influential. It demonstrates how 'story branding' and the social and geographical placing of an event may influence audience responses and examines how media representations may 'organise the imagination' through structuring patterns of empathy. I also highlight the impact of 'media templates': the powerful and routine association of one case with another whereby condensed versions of the past are used to interpret and frame the present.

In addition to looking at the media, attention is drawn to readers' and viewers' everyday interactions and experiences. I demonstrate how audience responses are influenced by embedded knowledge, structural factors and the social currency of different types of information. The final part of the thesis discusses the way in which the experience of abuse is itself mediated by the media environment, and draws on interviews conducted from the early 1980s to examine how the 'cultural vacuum' for abuse survivors has been transformed. The thesis concludes by challenging some taken-for-granted media studies terminology and points to the practical, theoretical and methodological implications of my work. I argue for a media studies agenda which reconnects questions about audience reception with questions about media production and content as well as the structuring of wider relations within society. It is through re-establishing such connections that media studies researchers can contribute to contemporary debates about power, control and social change.
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Foreword

This thesis draws together two long-standing interests for me: a concern about sexual violence and an interest in media power. Bringing these two areas together seemed important, especially as there have been dramatic changes in the media coverage of sexual violence during the last twenty years and the media have been a key arena within which battles over definition, recognition and policy have been fought.

In the early 1980s I was part of a small feminist group in Cambridge which set up a refuge and telephone support line for girls being sexually abused at home. We had been alerted to the need for such provision by the girls and young women coming forward through the Rape Crisis lines and Women's Aid refuges established during the 1970s. We obtained seedcorn funding, an office, a telephone line, and a council house. Our success in obtaining backing at that time was partly due to the support of the local Social Services Department which was increasingly confronting this problem. It was also partly due to the view that incest was a particular problem 'in the Fens'. (This image of incest as a 'localised' problem was explicitly raised in the debate concerning whether or not we should be allocated a council house).

Around the same time, similar initiatives were being developed by feminists across the UK (a refuge called 'TABOO' had already opened in Manchester) and a trickle of books had begun to address this issue: 'Kiss Daddy Goodnight' (Armstrong, 1978); The Best Kept Secret (Rush, 1980); Incest: fact and myth (Nelson, 1982); and, then, Father-Daughter Rape (Ward, 1984).

However, it was not until the mid 1980s that the mass media seemed, finally, to address the problem. I recall the excitement in 1986 as some
of us from the incest survivors' refuge, gathered around the TV set to watch 'Childwatch', a special Esther Rantzen exposé of sexual abuse. After that our office received dozens of calls from journalists. Few were interested in the work we did, or our analysis. They wanted access to 'victims' to tell their stories. A year later, we watched with mounting unease as the Cleveland case made headlines. In Cleveland, the story was, social workers and paediatricians had assumed sexual abuse where there was none. Families had been split up, and only reunited after national outrage.

Since the Cleveland case a series of shifting issues have engaged media attention: assaults by priests, sexual exploitation in children's homes, abuse by women, and, increasing, recognition of the victimisation of boys. There has also been ongoing concern about intervention, including in cases such as Rochdale and Orkney. At the same time an extensive 'incest industry' has become established (Armstrong, 1994). In the 1990s bookshops have whole sections devoted to it, therapists specialise in it and child sexual abuse is addressed in talk shows, documentaries and soaps as well as, of course, research projects. From cultural vacuum we have moved to multiple representation, from obvious silence and taboo to an apparent plethora of competing versions of reality.

The research reported here is informed by my own and other activists' practical experiences of working to combat sexual abuse, and the questions thrown up by the changes we have observed during the last two decades. It is also informed by my research experience both within media studies and more broadly around the issue of sexual violence.

The first research I conducted in the area of sexual abuse involved interviews with incest survivors and the mothers of sexually abused children (Kitzinger, 1988). These interviews, exploring how women survived and coped with such experiences, were conducted from the
early 1980s onwards. During that time I had very little knowledge of media studies. My degree had been in social anthropology and, at that time, my paid work was in the field of medical sociology (examining the impact of different NHS staffing structures).

In 1989 I moved to Scotland to join the Glasgow University Media Research Unit to work on a project examining media representations of AIDS. Later I took on work with the Medical Research Council. It was not until 1993 that I returned to the topic of sexual violence through a focus group study exploring media representations and public understandings of sexual abuse. The core of this thesis draws on these 49 focus group discussions, which were designed to explore how people's views around child sexual abuse were formed; how they shifted and consolidated, and how media messages might, or might not play a role in this.

Chapter 1 reviews the media studies literature and places my own work in the context of existing debates. It gives particular attention to the developments in media studies during the last twenty years: the domestic technology approach, theories about audience pleasure and research into diverse audience interpretations. Chapter 2 introduces my main research methods, describing my sample and introducing my specific data collection techniques. The central section of this thesis, Chapters 3 to 6, presents a detailed examination of media reporting and public understandings of two highly publicised and highly contentious cases: 'the Orkney case' of 1991 and the associated 'Cleveland case' of 1987. In these chapters I highlight how certain cases are 'keynoted' in public debate and how one cause célèbre (Cleveland) may become a 'template' for understanding later events. I show how a case may be 'branded' ('Orkney - the dawn raids case'), and explore the way in which the social and geographical placing of a story may influence audience interpretations.
This is followed by stepping back from case-specifics and examining embedded knowledge and the 'social currency' of different information and anecdotes (Chapter 7). I explore people's understandings about who is a source of danger to children and where children are at risk. I demonstrate how public understandings and media representations reproduce stereotypes about child abusers and emphasise stranger-danger. I trace how people's assumptions and image of abusers are constructed, not only from the media, but also from the patterns of social exchange and patterns of silence.

Chapter 8 draws on a different data set: focusing on reactions to the Zero Tolerance campaign. This was a feminist-inspired campaign, taken on by District and Regional Councils throughout Scotland during the mid 1990s. The campaign was designed to challenge many of the embedded assumptions discussed in the previous chapter. I conducted 30 focus groups to examine how people defined sexual violence, responded to the campaign posters, identified with the images and misinterpreted, re-negotiated or opposed some of the messages. This chapter examines how people 'read' any individual, 'alternative', message in the context of their existing perceptions and dominant mass media representations.

Chapter 9 reflects on all 79 focus groups in order to address some common media theory terminology and to explore the operation of audience diversity. Reviewing my evidence both for and against the power of the media I locate the processes by which people incorporate and resist mass media constructions and identify the complex but structured ways in which public understandings of a social problem are built up and maintained. This chapter also highlights the interaction between cultural resources (the available repertoire of explanations, vocabulary and accounts) and the way in which people may construct their own personal experience.
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The penultimate chapter, Chapter 10, focuses on the views and experiences of sexual abuse survivors. Here the focus group data is complemented by revisiting the interviews I conducted during the 1980s. I investigate questions such as: How did research participants frame the experience of abuse? How did they relate their abuse to what they saw on the television or in the press? How do mass media messages mediate survivors' understandings of what happened to them? I highlight the importance of cultural representation in helping to support or undermine different ways of relating to one's own experience.

The final chapter, Chapter 11, challenges taken-for-granted media terms such as 'polysemy', 'audience activity' and 'reading'. I highlight the key themes which can be demonstrated to influence audience understandings. I conclude by emphasising the need to continue developing methodological and theoretical innovations which take into account the social and political context of media messages. We need, I suggest, to develop audience research strategies which address theoretical and practical dilemmas and which are firmly linked into the important sociological and political debates of the day (and of the future).
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, John Eldridge, for his enthusiastic support and critical comment and also other colleagues from the Glasgow Media Group: Paula Skidmore, Jacquie Reilly, David Miller, Greg Philo and especially Joanne Yuill, Rick Holliman, Dawn Rowley and Lesley Henderson. Acknowledgement is due to the ESRC as the work builds on data I collected as part of an ESRC funded project (Grant no. R000233675). I am particularly grateful to all the research participants who gave up their time to contribute to this study and some of whom spoke very openly about a very painful subject. Finally, love and thanks to Sheila, Uwe and Diana - without whom this thesis might never have seen the light of day.
Author’s Declaration

Chapter 1 of this thesis is based on the section on audience reception research which I wrote for the jointly authored book: The Mass Media and Power in Modern Britain (Eldridge, Kitzinger and Williams, 1997). Aspects of the findings presented in Chapters 4-8 were presented in two previously published papers: Kitzinger 1994c and Kitzinger 1996. An article based on Chapter 3 is currently in press with Media, Culture and Society. The interviews and the focus group work reported in this thesis was my individual responsibility. Some groups were conducted within broader studies, alongside questionnaire surveys or interviews with journalists. The 40 interviews with abuse survivors and the 79 focus groups were conducted by myself apart from 21 group conducted, under my supervision, by Lesley Henderson, Rick Holliman, Dawn Rowley, Hannah Bradby and Eddie Donaghy. In addition, parts of this thesis draw on a data base of media coverage set up with the help of Paula Skidmore. Thanks are due to all these colleagues Where I draw on the work of colleagues with whom I collaborated on broader projects, this is clearly indicated in the text.
Chapter 1

A brief history of audience theory

Theorising about audiences has a long history which pre-dates the mass media. Before the invention of television, radio or even the printing press, political and military leaders, preachers and playwrights theorised about the effect of different types of communication. They were concerned to move their audiences to obedience or revolutionary fervour, anger or joy, critical thought or strong emotion. The Ancient Greeks, for example, developed highly sophisticated theories about how to impress one's audience through the power of the spoken word. Aristotle's 'Treatise on Rhetoric' (fourth century BC) was concerned with theorising the art of speaking and examined 'the recesses and windings' of the human heart, in order to discover how to 'to excite, to ruffle, to amuse, to gratify or to offend it' (Copleston, 1810 cited in Cooper, 1932).

The origins of modern media studies, however, is usually located in 1930s Germany with the work of scholars such as Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer. It is these writers who coined the term 'mass culture' - a concept originally suggested by the Nazi Propaganda machine but then applied to the American capitalist media. Their theories of mass culture were developed in response to Germany's descent into fascism and the apparent failure of the revolutionary social change predicted by Marx. This work, collectively known as 'The Frankfurt School', theorised that the breakdown of society into a collection of atomised individuals left people vulnerable to propaganda. It promoted a 'hypodermic model' of media effects whereby media messages were directly absorbed into the hearts and minds of the people.
This thesis was challenged by work carried out by American researchers in the 1940s and 50s, who were concerned with the role of personal influence. These writers highlight the role of social networks in mediating public responses to media messages. Merton's work on 'Mass Persuasion' (1946) focuses on the importance of reference groups in influencing the messages which people accepted from political campaigns. Katz and Lazarsfeld's research on 'Personal Influence' (1955) posits a two-step model of media effects whereby media messages are mediated by 'opinion leaders' who influence how ideas were taken up by members of their communities.

The Frankfurt School was also challenged by another strand of work: the Uses and Gratifications approach. Uses and Gratifications theory is diametrically opposed to the 'hypodermic' model. In fact, it turns traditional ways of thinking about media effects on their head. It replaces the question 'what do the media do to people?' with the question 'what do people do with media?' Rather than thinking of a media message as a powerful substance injected into the public mind, Uses and Gratifications scholars explore how people actively process media materials in accordance with their own needs. These theorists argue that individuals make a conscious selection between the various items of media content - choosing what they will watch and for what purposes. The degree and kind of media 'effect' will therefore depend on the need of the audience member concerned and is more likely to reinforce rather than change beliefs.

The Uses and Gratifications approach, is closely associated, in Britain, with the Television Research Centre at Leeds University and academics such as McQuail, Blumler and Trenaman (Blumler and McQuail, 1968; Trenaman and McQuail, 1961). However, an early example of such theory is evident in Herzog's pioneering work in the 1940s on women's consumption of radio serials. Her research is based on interviews with 100
women from a variety of age and income groups and provides a fascinating portrait of women’s lives at that time. She demonstrates how listeners could use and interpret the same radio serial quite differently according to their own needs and identifies three main types of ‘gratification’ obtained from these programmes. Firstly, she suggests that the serials provided an outlet for pent-up anxieties in giving the listener a chance to cry. Secondly, she states that they permitted a wishful escape from isolation and drudgery. Thirdly, Herzog argues that the radio serials provided what she calls ‘recipes for adjustment’. These early soap operas:

explain things by providing labels for them. Happenings in a marriage, in a family, in a community are verbalised in the programs and the listeners are made to feel that they understand better what is going on around them. Listening provides them with an ideology to be applied in the appraisal of the world which is actually confronting them. (Herzog, 1941: 69)

This perspective was explicitly articulated by her interviewees, although some people might interpret their statements as evidence of the ideological power of soap opera, rather than evidence to support Uses and Gratifications theory. For example, one woman who spoke to Herzog commented:

I like family stories best. If I get married I want to get an idea of how a wife should be to a husband. Some of the stories show how a wife butts into everybody’s business, and the husband gets mad and they start quarrelling. The stories make you see things. (Herzog, 1941: 90)

Such empirical investigation of radio and television audiences is in striking contrast to the dominant research paradigm emerging out of film theory in Britain during the 1970s and ’80s. The most influential film theory can be
found in the journal *Screen*. The contributors to *Screen* rarely spoke to real-life viewers. Instead they approach the audience through a detailed examination of the structure of the text and an examination of how that text positions the reader. Writers such as Stephen Heath, Laura Mulvey and Colin MacCabe draw on French film theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis which emphasises the 'de-centred' nature of subjectivity. Subjectivity, they argue, does not simply exist as a static and unified entity but is created through language and culture. They use these Lacanian insights about the nature of subjectivity in analysing films. In particular, they are interested in how the cinematic text confers subjectivity upon readers, sewing or 'suturing' them into the film's narrative through the production of subject positions (see Mulvey, 1975 and Heath, 1977/8). Many of these writers argue that reform of film content may be less important than the abandonment of structures which smoothly absorb the viewer. They criticise the realism of film-making Hollywood-style which erases the constructed nature of the text (making the editing, framing and selecting process invisible). Instead, they praise productions which foreground the machinery of representation (such as the avant-garde practices of film-maker Jean-Luc Godard (MacCabe, 1980).

The four schools of thought outlined above represent different ways of thinking about media power. This brief historical summary is by no means comprehensive. However, it does point to some of the key variables in the history of theories considering media influence (whether in the form of film, television, newspapers, or radio). *Screen Theory* presents the traditional Hollywood film as extremely powerful, forcing the hapless viewer to take on the identity and ideology pre-ordained by the text. The Frankfurt school, from a different point of view, adopts a similarly pessimistic position, whereby the masses are manipulated by the powerful forces of propaganda. A quite different perspective is presented by the researchers who highlight the importance of social networks, reference groups and 'opinion leaders' in mediating media effect. An even more
fundamental challenge comes from the Uses and Gratification theorists who see power lying in the hands (or eyes and ears) of the audience rather than the media. However, the most interesting challenge of all occurred during the 1970s with the Encoding/Decoding approach developed at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies [BCCCS], led by Stuart Hall and, later, David Morley, explicitly opposed the assumptions of Screen Theory. Hall, Morley and colleagues argued that Screen Theory fails to explore the relationship between texts and actual audiences and neglects to examine whether people actually accept the subject position offered to them and, if they do, whether that necessitates accepting the ideological content of the film (Morley 1980: 153). Screen Theory, critics argue, gives little acknowledgement to diversity between viewers in how they may ‘read’ the media. The encounter between text and reader is viewed in isolation from all social and historical structures and without regard to audiences’ actual diverse experiences. It fails to recognise that readers come to texts already constituted as subjects, with their own preferences, identities and opinions.

The foundations for developing an alternative approach were laid by Stuart Hall’s influential paper: ‘Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse’ (1973). This stressed the need to take the communicative process as a whole - with the moment of programme making at one end and the moment of audience perception at the other. Hall argued that texts are ‘polysemic’, being open to more than one reading, and that there is no necessary correspondence between the message encoded by the film or programme maker and that decoded by audiences. Hall proposed three hypothetical positions from which decodings of a televisual discourse might be constructed: the dominant, the negotiated and the oppositional (terms derived from Parkin, 1971). The dominant-hegemonic position was where the viewer ‘takes the connoted meaning from, say, a
television newscast or current affairs programme full and straight, and
decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been
encoded, we might say that the viewer is operating inside the dominant
code' (Hall, 1973: 101 emphasis in original). The negotiated position,
involves accepting the legitimacy of the dominant framework in abstract,
but negotiating its application to 'local conditions'. For example, a worker
may accept a news broadcast's hegemonic definition of the economic
necessity of freezing wages in 'the national interest' in order to avoid
inflation but still be willing to oppose such measures at the level of the
shop-floor. The oppositional position, by contrast, challenges the broader
hegemonic framing of the problem - questioning whether wage freezes do
indeed serve the 'national interest' or only the interest of the dominant
class.

Hall's distinction between 'encoding' and 'decoding' highlights the
possibility that 'meaning' does not lie in the text alone. Researchers
cannot accurately predict how audiences will relate to and interpret a
particular cultural product simply by analysing headlines and photographs,
camera angles, lighting, soundtrack and scripts. Paying attention to the
process of decoding also opens questions of audience diversity and
allows that 'other discourses are always in play besides those of the
particular text in focus - discourses...brought into play though "the
subject's" placing in other practices - cultural, educational, institutional'
(Morley, 1980: 163). In other words, people are not blank slates who
approach a film without any pre-existing identity, experience or resources.
They come to the cinema (or TV set) with sets of prior opinions, views and
ideas of themselves. In order to understand the role of the media it is
therefore, Hall argues, imperative to discover how different groups
respond to and interpret any particular programme, to explore the
resources they bring to bear on their interpretation and the discourses to
which they have access.
On the surface, this approach might seem to converge with the Uses and Gratifications perspective. Both approaches acknowledge that texts can have multiple meanings and that the text/reader relationship takes the form of a negotiation. Both think about audiences as 'active' and watching television as a social process. Certainly, some of the work inspired by Hall is reminiscent of earlier work. Herzog's 1941 study (of women from a variety of age and income brackets) certainly showed that women took different messages from the same radio serial. However, there are some crucial differences between the theories developed at BCCCS and the Uses and Gratifications research paradigm as it has become established over time. Whatever the implications of individual pieces of work (and Herzog's study is worth re-reading in this respect) the Uses and Gratifications tradition has focused on how individuals use the media to satisfy their needs and achieve their goals. It tends to exaggerate audience 'freedom' and 'choice' and rely on a psychological conception of human personality which focuses on the media's function for the individual. The work at the BCCCS, by contrast, relies on a social theory of subjectivity and meaning construction. Hall's argument is that the range of 'different interpretations' are not free-floating or individual readings but are influenced by the social context. Rather than thinking about perception as personal or private, Hall argues that audience research should be in the business of locating 'significant clusters' of meaning and linking these to the social and discursive positioning of readers. He is interested in 'linking in the boundaries of various interpretative communities', drawing up a 'cultural map' of the audience and relating these to social and political processes.

It was this understanding which laid the ground for a flowering of sociologically informed and in-depth empirical work with actually audiences during the 1980s and '90s. One of the first, and most influential of these studies was David Morley's work on people's responses to the popular current affairs programme Nationwide. He showed video
recordings of an episode of Nationwide to 29 groups of people including managers, students, apprentices or trade unionists. The video showings were followed by group discussions.

Morley's work confirms Hall's theory that there are at least three possible readings of a text - the dominant reading (accepting the preferred reading of the text), a negotiated reading and an oppositional reading. His findings show that people differed in their critique of the style of the programme and their critique of the content/framework and that this was related to class. For example, managers objected to the style of Nationwide but accepted the content, whereas trade unionists did the opposite. However, Morley also found that many people across a range of groups were well aware of the 'preferred' meanings embedded in the programme and that 'awareness of the construction by no means entails the rejection of what is constructed' (Morley, 1980: 140). He also found that class alone was inadequate to explain the diversity of audience responses. There were differences between working-class people active within the trade union movement and those who were not. There were also additional cross-cutting differences to do with age, gender, and ethnicity.

Moving on from this study Morley became increasingly interested in the context of consumption. He was concerned about the 'unnatural' settings in which his study of Nationwide audiences had been conducted. His research participants might never have chosen to watch Nationwide in the first place, and were unlikely to have engaged in such in-depth discussion of the programme in the normal course of events. He also hypothesised that the reading a shop steward makes in company with other shop stewards may be very different from the interpretation he might make in conversation with his family, the most usual viewing situation. His next study therefore focused on how people actually watched television at home and he subsequently went on to scrutinise the impact of the media as technological hardware (Morley and Silverstone, 1991). It is this
approach to audience reception analysis - the analysis of the process of consumption itself that is introduced in more depth in the next section.

Consuming the media: communication technology and audience choice
Examining how people actually consume cultural products has become a thriving area of media research. As different mediums and technologies have come on line, questions are asked about the impact on family and cultural life. Some of this has been prompted by concern for the potential detrimental effects of media consumption practices. Television, in particular, regardless of programme content, has been accused of reducing literacy, destroying the art of conversation, and interrupting proper child development (Winn, 1977). Some writers are also concerned that television's strangle-hold on leisure time serves the interests of the dominant class - consuming energies which might otherwise be mobilised in political actions. The average viewing time among adults in Britain is 26 hours per week (the heaviest in Europe). This is a disappointment to some commentators who point out that the class struggle to increase autonomy and reduce working hours was not intended to simply free up empty leisure time, 'filled for better or worse by the programmed distractions of the mass media and the oblivion merchants' (Gorz cited in Lodziak, 1986: 146).

Such concerns have been countered by those who argue that television is not simply 'peddling oblivion' and that such reactions are symptomatic of political arrogance. People are not passive consumers at the mercy of technological instruments, they argue, but active users of different technologies and mediums. Just because the average television is switched on for several hours a day does not mean it is being avidly watched: 'watching telly' is usually combined with a whole range of other activities (see McQuail et al., 1972; Palmer, 1986; Collet and Lamb, 1986; Gunter and Svennevig, 1987). Rather than colonising creative leisure
time, television viewing may be integrated into people's day-to-day lives and serve particular purposes in the social organisation of the home (Hobson, 1980; Modleski, 1984; Winship 1987). Far from destroying 'the art of conversation', it is argued, television may actually serve as a social glue. Soaps operas, for example, provide a sort of 'virtual community', creating a shared virtual reality around which moral and personal dilemmas may be explored.

Technology such as the video machine can also allow audiences to take more control over their viewing practices and shared video-watching can be used as a social event in itself (Gray, 1987). It can also serve as a way of gaining access to cultural resources unavailable on mainstream programming (or only shown unsociably late at night) (Gillespie, 1989; 1995; Ang, 1990a: 255).

Research into the practical and social aspects of audience interactions with the television set (and other media such as books or the radio) identifies the propensity of audiences to use media technologies in their own interests. It provides an important correction to naive assumptions about the nature of that relationship (assumptions explicit in phrases such as telly addicts, soap junkies and couch potatoes). Interest in the use of media technologies and the process of consumption also opens up new questions about power, not the power of the media per se, but the social power structures within which consumption is embedded. One extension of this line of inquiry involves examining the television set itself as a cultural object which carries symbolic meaning. For example, one's choice of media hardware can indicate status, disposable income and taste or the lack of it. (Morley, 1995)

Within the home itself, media technologies are also an important site of 'living room politics' (Cubitt, 1985). Men and women, adults and children compete over the media hardware: who has a TV in their bedroom or who
is allocated the small black and white set. They also struggle over its use: what, when and how to watch television and what counts as acceptable or unacceptable, high-status or low status programmes. Research in this sphere often reveals a depressing picture in which, for example, men tend to monopolise the remote control and prioritise their programme preferences, while women are expected to interrupt their viewing to take care of child care and food preparation (Morley, 1986).

However, such ‘ethnographic’ work into media consumption practices is often also concerned with identifying sites of resistance. In particular, much of this research explores the creative way in which women use reading, television viewing or radio-listening in the context of traditional family life. Coming from a background in literary studies, Radway showed how women used the romantic novel to create space away from their ‘duties’ as wives and mothers (Radway, 1984). Others have documented how ‘addiction’ to soap-opera may be used by women to establish time where they are not available and attentive to the needs of others (Brunsdon, 1981; Hobson 1982, 1985; Selter et al, 1989a). Hobson’s work even suggests that women may use soap-watching as a way of ‘kicking against patriarchal domination because they knew their husbands despised it’ (Fiske, 1991: 75). The practice of viewing (or reading or listening) is thus used in gender skirmishes around the structure of social relations in the home and, more broadly, may be an assertion of a woman’s separate identity and independence.

Some scholars argue that this is the cutting edge of media studies, the way forward for theorising about media audience. According to proponents such as Ang, this approach enables us to conceive of ‘the ideological operations of television in a much more radical way that has hitherto been done’. It allows us to see that:
If television is an 'ideological apparatus'...this is not so much because its texts transmit 'messages' as because it is a cultural form through which those constraints [on structuring social relationships, identities and desires] are negotiated and those possibilities take shape. (Ang, 1991a: 110)

Certainly I would agree that examination of the processes of media consumption has introduced important new perspectives into media studies. However, there are costs in prioritising this approach. There are also many problems in some of the research pursued under the rubric of 'the domestic technology' paradigm. There problems are compounded by the ways in which previous studies are interpreted, abstracted and marshalled to create a celebratory image of 'active consumption' that misrepresents the actual power relations between the media and their audiences, let alone ignoring the politics of production and ownership. Before concluding this section, it is therefore necessary to unpack some of these problems.

Firstly, although claiming to be about how media is consumed 'in everyday life', most of the studies focus on the moment of consumption within the traditional nuclear family to the virtual exclusion of all other contexts and fail to explore the practical consequences of an 'empowered' consumption process.

Secondly, there is the danger in some 'domestic technology' work of indulging in endless vacuous discoveries of audience activity. Some researchers seem to be pursuing ever 'thicker' ethnographies which foreground the banal practicalities of television viewing as if they were major revelations rather than important background information.

Thirdly, related to the above point, some of this work indulges in uncritical celebration of audience 'uses' of television. Some of the less sophisticated
versions of this work imply that audience ‘use’ of the media for their own ends is *ipso facto* A Good Thing. However, as the in-depth work with families makes clear, it is misleading to celebrate an individual’s ‘use’ of the television set without looking at how that operates in power relations with other people. If a man uses the TV to ‘switch off’ from any responsibility for housework or child-care, this cannot simply be celebrated as free-wheeling consumer sovereignty. It must be understood within the gender and generation politics of the family.

The more sophisticated work on consumption within the traditional family clearly challenges such assumptions but can commit its own ‘error of optimism’. Some of this work exaggerates the transformatory potential of alternative practices - as if revolution could be found in a woman watching a soap opera which her husband despises, and ‘freedom’ meant channel-grazing with the remote control. Gender skirmishes within the home should not be confused with challenges to the actual power relations in society as a whole. Nor is ‘active consumption’ a substitute for the ability to intervene in the press or the broadcasting industry. The power to switch on or off the television, or integrate the set creatively into your life is not comparable with the power to produce or influence programme content. Nor should a concern with how people ‘appropriate’ and ‘use’ technologies lose sight of the politics of production and distribution. People’s access to media hardware is subject to material equalities and the design and development of these technologies are shaped by economic and political forces (Golding and Murdock, 1990: 40; McGuigan, 1992: 160).

All three of the above criticisms can be dismissed as issues of emphasis or interpretation compared with the fourth, and most fundamental criticism. This criticism is that the domestic technology approach focuses on the medium at the expense of the message. It thus loses sight of the question which is unique and central to media studies - the questions of the meaning conveyed via the press, radio or television. The meanings that
people make from what they hear and see has become subordinated (linguistically and/or conceptually) to the details of the consumption process. Although many of the researchers cited above do consider the meaning of texts, 'the domestic technology' approach as a whole is becoming increasingly diverted from such questions. Indeed, some media researchers are now pursuing the power struggles within families in ways which entirely neglect the content of programmes and the power relationship between the media and the audience.

More worrying still, is when such studies do not simply ignore questions of ideological effect, but seem to equate audience active use and control of the television with audience power and freedom from media influence. Fiske, for example, although acknowledging that such studies 'do not tell us about the meanings that viewers make of television', goes on to argue that they do show that viewers 'are rarely dominated or controlled by it as so many of its critics would claim' (Fiske, 1991: 73). Such conclusions are only warranted if dominance and control are to be measured by the intensity of a viewer’s engagement with 'the box'. It tells us little about the role of the television set as a conduit for information and ideas. Alternatively, such conclusions rely on the assumption that inattentive audiences are less susceptible to media power. However, as I shall show, the opposite may be true. The fact that people view/listen inattentively may simply reduce the chance of people engaging critically with the media. It may also actually reinforce the power of dominant messages and undermine the influence of ‘deviant’ voices.

The insights emerging from work on TV as an item of domestic technology or the act of 'reading' (viewing or listening) as a cultural activity have usefully enlarged the sphere of media studies. They open up important new questions about the role of the audience and the operation of media power. Sensitive examination of these questions enhances and expands our understanding of how the media work. It allows for a fuller exploration
of the meanings of a romantic novel, a soap opera, a news bulletin or cartoon. However, while these insights should be incorporated into media studies, they should not be explored to the exclusion of examining the meanings understood from the text itself.

Appropriating pleasure: diverse interpretations and audience re-readings

How people watch television or read a book is not the only question which has attracted the attention of media researchers in recent years. An equally important and overlapping question is why people consume the media and what they get out of it. Central to that question is the issue of audience pleasure. This issue has been addressed primarily through studies of entertainment programmes and, in particular, through studies of female audiences. A key contribution to this area of enquiry was made during the 1980s by a group of women academics working at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS Women’s Studies Group, 1978). In addition to drawing on Hall’s distinction between encoded and decoded meaning, these academics were influenced by critical cultural theory, in particular, studies of leisure, style and consumption. Male colleagues, such as Willis (1977) and Hebdige (1979), both of whom worked at the BCCCS, examined ‘sub-cultures’ such as the ‘sub-culture’ of working-class lads, hippies, bike-boys, Rastafarianism and punk fashion. They challenged pervasive views of these youth-cultures as delinquency or social pathology and, instead, examined them as evidence of symbolic resistance to the dominant culture. This approach was developed by writers on women’s cultural consumption who shared a desire to counter perceptions of the media as bearers of dominant ideology invading the consciousness of the masses. Instead, they sought to emphasise popular resistance - demonstrating how oppressed groups create a meaningful world for themselves, ‘using the very stuff offered to them by the dominant culture as raw materials and appropriating it in ways that suit their own interests’ (Ang, 1990a: 246).
The writing on women's cultural consumption, however, is distinguished from previous work on 'youth culture' by adding in a gender analysis of this process. Writers such as Angela McRobbie (who wrote about magazines and 'the culture of femininity'), Terry Lovell (who wrote about Coronation Street), Ien Ang (who studied Dallas) and Dorothy Hobson (who studied Crossroads) rejected the class and gender condescension displayed toward 'mass female culture'. They also challenged specific academic neglect of 'the domestic' (female sphere) in preference for 'street culture' (where men and boys predominated). In particular they dissented from the predominant dismissal of female media genres as beneath serious critical attention (Brunsdon, 1993: 60). In this, their work acknowledges the way in which social hierarchies of 'good taste' and 'quality' versus 'popular' culture are socially constructed. They challenge the status given to 'masculine' taste (sports, 'hard' news, action movies) over 'feminine' taste (soaps, 'soft' news, romance). Instead of reifying such distinctions and unquestioningly accepting them as natural, researchers into women's viewing practice were concerned to explore the 'feminine' skills brought to the consumption of female genre (women's under-rated cultural competencies). They also, often, acknowledged their own enjoyment of such genres. Indeed, rather than positioning themselves as 'the critical outsider committed to condemn the oppressive world of mass culture', many of these writers consciously declare themselves as 'fans' alongside the subjects of their research and saw their role as 'giving voice to and celebrating audience recalcitrance' (Ang, 1990a: 246).

Examining why such genres were sources of pleasure was an essential part of this process. The focus on pleasure was in clear opposition to mainstream Marxist thinking (as promoted by theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer) in which pleasure was dismissed as manipulation. It was also a response to the success of Thatcherism in Britain during the 1980s, a success which 'had much to do with how it worked upon real conditions
and desires, addressing ordinary people's material aspirations and stressing the sense of personal freedom and choice engendered by the market place' (McGuigan, 1992: 113). In addition, for many researchers, a concern with pleasure was also part of a dialogue with feminism. As Janice Winship wrote about her study of women's magazines:

I felt that to simply dismiss women's magazines was also to dismiss the lives of millions of women who read and enjoyed them each week. More than that, I still enjoyed them, found them useful and escaped with them. And I knew I couldn't be the only feminist who was a 'closet' reader. (Winship, 1987: xiii, emphasis in original)

From the very start of second-wave feminism, popular culture was a key site of criticism. Betty Friedan who wrote The Feminine Mystique (1963) was herself a former editor of women's magazines. She attacked mass media images of 'happy housewives' to which, she argued, women struggled to conform and by which they were condemned to a perpetual sense of failure. 'I helped create this image,' she wrote, '... but I can no longer deny my knowledge of its terrible implications' (Friedan, 1963: 59).

Feminist theory not only identified media misrepresentation of women's lives and the reality of female discontent, but also questioned women's pleasures. Pleasure (whether it came from reading romantic novels or pomography, wearing high-heeled shoes or luxuriating in a real fur coat) became the subject of heated debate. Germaine Greer wrote, in The Female Eunuch (1971) that women's pleasure in the idealised romantic hero was evidence of women 'cherishing the chains of their bondage' (Greer, 1971: 176) and Susan Brownmiller's classic Against Our Will (1975) critiqued female fantasies of being ravished or 'taken' as 'a product of male conditioning' and 'a mirror-image female victim psychology' reflecting women's subordination (Brownmiller, 1975: 324).
One response to the feminist critique of popular culture and women's pleasure was to seek to 'imagine radically new forms of pleasure' and develop 'a political refashioning of the economies of pleasure' (Parker and Pollock, 1987: 54). Some feminists sought to do this through structural-social change and consciousness raising: talking about their own pleasure and pain, seeking to understand these 'subjective' and 'private' experiences in a political context and to reconstruct them in the light of this new perspective. Others set about developing innovative cultural forms: feminist films, magazines, photography and art.

An alternative approach pursued by some feminists (sometimes the same feminists) was to actively engage with existing female pleasures and women's genres. These activists were concerned that structural-social change on its own was slow or insufficient and that consciousness-raising had too restricted an appeal. They argued that many feminist strategies for 'refashioning the economics of pleasure' ignored 'ordinary women' and were hopelessly idealistic and 'puritanical'. Retreating from simple opposition to mainstream culture or the attempt to create avant garde alternatives, these feminists argued that it was important to explore and even celebrate women's enjoyment of mainstream culture. This should be done, they asserted, even when this culture might, at first glance, seem to operate against women's own interests. Modleski, for example, challenged the idea that 'feminist artists must first of all challenge this [mainstream/masculine] pleasure and then out of nothing begin to construct a feminist aesthetics and feminist form'. This, she argued, is a mistaken position:

[Feminist artists don’t have to start from nothing; rather, they can look for clues to women’s pleasure which are already present in existing forms, even if this pleasure is currently placed at the service of patriarchy. (Modleski 1982: 104)
It was against such a theoretical and political background that researchers began to study popular genre and, in particular, to conduct in-depth empirical work with female audiences. In order to illustrate the nature of such work, it is worth looking at specific research projects in detail. Here, I have chosen to focus on two studies - one conducted by Dorothy Hobson at the BCCCS, the other by Len Ang at the University of Amsterdam.

Hobson studied Crossroads, 'the most maligned programme on British Television' (Hobson, 1982: 36). At that time, this soap opera was attracting audiences of around 13 million, mainly female, viewers. Hobson went to women's homes to watch Crossroads with them and to discuss their enjoyment of the programme. She found that although Crossroads was broadcast during the early evening - a time of frantic activity for women they went to great efforts to watch, or at least listen to, this soap. Watching Crossroads was a considerable source of pleasure (Hobson, 1982: 115). For one woman, isolated with a young baby on the ninth floor of a tower block, the serial gave her 'something to look forward to the next day' (Hobson, 1982: 117). For others, it was a source of speculation and discussion. Women enjoyed hypothesising about the future actions of characters and would engage in sophisticated games with soap opera characters, including them in their 'gossip' even though fully cognisant of their fictional status. Above all, Crossroads was enjoyed for its 'emotional realism'. The acting might be poor and the situations implausible, but the emotional dilemmas were, in the words of one viewer, 'close to home' (Hobson, 1982: 109). Far from being meaningless escapism, Hobson argues that Crossroads was enjoyed because it focused on women's everyday difficulties (Hobson, 1982: 34).

Hobson also maintains that far from being passive, women were actively involved in bringing meaning to the programme by drawing on experiences in their own lives. Soap opera, she argues, 'is one of the most progressive forms on television because it is a form where the audience is always in
control'. It does not matter how a specific dilemma is resolved - whether an abortion is considered a reasonable option, the husband suffers for having an affair or the romance ends in marriage - the point is that the issue is raised for debate. The conclusion of the storyline is less relevant because the serial format, in which the dilemma is discussed, allows audiences to incorporate their own perspectives. The production can include whatever solutions it wishes, the viewer always knows best. They will always reinterpret the ending and make allowances for the dramatic needs of the programme, or the ignorance of reality on the part of the producers' (Hobson, 1985 cited in McGuigan, 1992: 144). Attending to audience pleasure and acknowledging their active engagement with the text, challenges traditional analysis of media content. Hobson concludes:

To look at a programme like Crossroads and criticise it on the basis of a conventional literary/media analysis is obstinately to refuse to understand the relationship which it has with its audience...To try to say what Crossroads means to its audience is impossible for there is no single Crossroads, there are as many different Crossroads as there are viewers. (Hobson, 1982: 135-6)

Hobson's approach is echoed, at least superficially, by a study conducted by Ian Ang looking at the American soap Dallas. Like Crossroads, this was a much despised programme. Unlike Crossroads, it attracted international audiences. Indeed, during the 1980s it was the most widely viewed television programme in the world and was seen by some as the 'symbol of American cultural imperialism' (Sontag cited in Ang, 1985: 2). Ang's work took place in the context of debates not only about 'female culture' but also about 'global culture', commercialisation and the threat to national identity. Ang argues, however, that a political stance against the increasing commercialisation of broadcasting at the level of policy should not 'preclude the recognition, at a cultural level, of the real enjoyment people take in commercially produced media material'. Her study was
designed to explore 'the ways in which people actively and creatively make their own meanings and create their own culture, rather than passively absorb pre-given meanings imposed upon them' (Ang, 1990a: 242). Ang placed an advertisement in a Dutch women's magazine identifying herself as a fan of *Dallas* and inviting people to write to her about what they liked or disliked about the programme. Like Hobson, she found that:

there is not just one 'reason' for the pleasure of *Dallas*, which applies for everyone: each has his or her own more or less unique relationship to the programme. What appeals to us in such a television serial is connected with our individual life histories, with the social situation we are in, with the aesthetic and cultural preferences we have developed and so on. (Ang, 1985: 26)

For fans of *Dallas*, a large part of their pleasure came from the way in which the programme facilitated fantasy. Rather than seeing such soaps as 'misrepresenting' reality, Ang argues that academics should acknowledge that these programmes are intended to be fiction and are recognised as such by their audiences. Fiction, she argues 'is not a mere set of images to be read reverentially, but an ensemble of textual devices for engaging the viewer at the level of fantasy' (Ang, 1990b: 83).

Like Hobson, Ang also argues that enjoyment of *Dallas* is based on its 'emotional' rather than its literal realism. The complicated plot and over-the-top events of the *Dallas* melodrama are, she argues, regarded by fans as 'symbolic representations of more general living experience'. The dizzying round of infidelity, fires, memory loss and discovery of long-lost relatives is undeniably unrealistic but, for *Dallas* enthusiasts, "what is recognised as real is a subjective experience of the world: "a structure of feeling". To appreciate *Dallas*, audiences needed certain cultural
competencies, the imaginative ability to recognise and project oneself into the melodramatic imagination (Ang, 1985: 79).

**Audience diversity and deviant readings**

Such investigations of women’s viewing pleasures and cultural competencies are paralleled by other studies of cross-national and cross-cultural reception processes. These confirm that different people may enjoy programmes and interpret their meaning in quite diverse ways. Katz and Liebes’ study of the reception of *Dallas*, for example, found that Russian Jews, newly arrived in Israel, read *Dallas* as capitalism criticising itself, while a Moroccan Jew ‘learned’ from the series that Jewishness was the right way to be - because it was clear that non-Jews lived messy and immoral lives (Katz and Liebes, 1985).

Within a single country, different cultural interpretations may also produce quite distinct ‘readings’ of a single film or programme. A study of women’s reactions to representations of violence against women reports that a group of British Asian women ‘learned’ from *The Accused* (a film about a gang rape and the subsequent trial) that drinking and flirting was dangerous:

> they seemed to view the film almost anthropologically as a report upon the wider society...their reading of the film validated their differences, showing how their culture could operate to protect them from danger. (Schlesinger et al, 1992: 164)

Other minority or oppositional social/political groups within a dominant culture may adopt a similar ‘anthropological’ gaze. A lesbian or gay man, for example, may enjoy *Blind Date* as a showcase for some of the more absurd heterosexual rituals and confirmation of the superior socio-sexual skills evident in the lesbian and gay communities.
It is clear then that audiences are not passive absorbers of pre-ordained meaning. Indeed, the 'active viewer' may appropriate unexpected pleasures from the most mainstream of texts. The diversity of ways in which this operates is amply illustrated by studies of one particular mainstream genre: the 'Cowboys and Indians' film. Such films routinely present stereotypical accounts of 'how the West was won' - casting cowboys as heroes and 'red Indians' as savages. They are, therefore, rejected by some Native Americans who identify with the 'Indian' characters, are critical of the stereotypes and inaccuracies in the films and refuse to enter into the story (Shively, 1992: 725). However, they are also actively enjoyed by many Native Americans. Why is this? One study by JoEllen Shively found that a group of 'full-blooded Sioux' men from a reservation did not identify with the 'red Indians' at all but identified with John Wayne - 'the good guy' (and hater of 'Indians'). In this way, their response to the film was very similar to the Anglo respondents included in the study. However:

although both Anglos and Indians responded in similar ways to the structure of oppositions in the narrative, the two groups interpreted and valued characteristics of the cultural product differently once they 'entered the narrative. (Shively, 1992: 729)

The Anglo men emphasised that they enjoyed the film as an 'authentic portrayal of the Old West' whereas the Sioux men emphasised their pleasure in the portrayal of the cowboys' way of life. 'Westerns', they said, 'relate to the way I wish I could live'. 'The cowboy is free', 'He's not tied down to an eight to five job day after day', 'He is his own man'. One Native American bartender summed up his enjoyment of the film, stating: 'Indians today are the cowboys'. By this, Shively says, he meant that it is contemporary Native Americans (not Anglos) who preserve a commitment to an autonomous way of life that is not fully tied to industrial society (Shively, 1992).
Rather than simply either rejecting such images or appropriating pleasures from such programmes, viewers may also ‘borrow’ from a media portrayal and apply the message to new contexts. Staying with the genre of ‘Cowboys and Indians’ films, it is worth drawing attention to a study by Hodge and Tripp (1986). They found that Australian Aboriginal children, watching a Cowboy and Indian film, identified with the Native Americans rather than John Wayne, and drew links between their own oppression and that of the 'Indian' underdogs in the film. They thus demonstrate ‘the ability of a subculture to make its own sense out of a text that clearly bears the dominant ideology’ (Fiske, 1991: 70).

A study by Gillespie found that Neighbours (an Australian soap featuring an all-white cast) attracted young 'British Asians' who perceived it as offering ‘a complex metaphor for their own social world’ (Gillespie, 1995: 207). Neighbours explores the tensions which exist between families and their neighbours in a way which resonated with those young people’s experiences of their communities (1995: 164). Viewing Neighbours and talking about it in the peer group also, Gillespie argues, enables young people in Southall to: ‘compare and contrast their family lives and neighbourhood with “white culture on the box”.’ (Gillespie, 1995: 174). These young Punjabi Londoners, she says, ‘draw on the soap as a cultural resource...as they attempt to construct new modes of identity for themselves’ (Gillespie, 1995: 143).

Advertisements can be used in a similar way. In fact, people can consume commercials ‘independently’ of the products advertised (Nava and Nava, 1992). Some of the most sophisticated and expensive advertising is constructed in ways intended to exploit this. When an advertising slogan enters everyday talk ('It's the real thing', 'Pure Genius', 'I bet he drinks Carling Black Label'), this is a success for the industry. However, this can also be seen as audience creativity and appropriation. For example, Coca Cola adverts were very popular among the teenagers studied by Gillespie.
These adverts, she argues 'place the product within an idealised world of teenagers, free from parental and other constraints' and represent an 'utopian vision of teenage lifestyle'. She concludes:

Since the spaces available for public representation of what they see as their generational culture are so limited, and since neither British nor Indian media offer representations which they view as acceptable or appropriate, it is perhaps no wonder that they turn to a third, alternative space of fantasy identification: they draw on utopian images of America to construct a position of 'world teenagers' which transcends those available in British or Indian cultures. (Gillespie, 1995: 197)

Research into children's use of mainstream media has yielded similarly interesting results. Studies of Prisoner Cell Block H, the Australian soap set in a woman's prison, found that school students strongly identified with the prisoners and that working-class children appropriated meaning from this programme and 'used it subversively against the rule-bound culture and institutions of the school' (Curthoys and Docker, 1989). The programme provided Australian school students with language and cultural categories with which to think through their experiences: teachers were given nicknames from the cast of prison guards and the children used the programme as a way of understanding and articulating their powerlessness (Palmer, 1986).

Indeed, pleasures, confirmation and meaning are often quite consciously 'poached' from mainstream texts and this may be especially true for viewers who are marginalised within the dominant media, or within society (e.g. by gender, age, culture, national or ethnic identity). Lesbians and gay men in particular are skilled practitioners in, and have theorised at length about, such creative viewing (Whitiker, 1985; Dyer, 1986; Jay and Glasgow, 1992; Doty, 1993; Griffen, 1993; Hamer and Budge, 1994;
Wilton, 1995). Prisoner Cell Block H is not only a favourite with Australian school children. It also has a strong lesbian following (along with other series dominated by female casts such as Cagney and Lacey and The Golden Girls). Gay fan clubs celebrate productions ranging from the Wizard of Oz to Strictly Ballroom, from Star Trek to Dynasty, from Doris Day's Calamity Jane to almost any Judy Garland film (Whatling, 1994). Pleasures may be 'snatched' from the most traditional of genre or formats. A lesbian viewer may even take pleasure in identifying with the villain. Some lesbians say they enjoy identifying with the evil lesbian queen in Red Sonja or the bisexual ice-pick murderer in Basic Instinct or even find alternative role models in vampire movies! One lesbian describes how vampires provided her with positive models of defiance during a time of intense isolation and alienation as a teenager. Her family treated her as an outsider, abnormal and potentially dangerous. '[A]ll my adolescent rebellion and loneliness', she writes, 'coalesced around that figure [of the vampire] on screen':

I knew I was supposed to feel relieved when the vampire got staked. I didn't...I knew I was supposed to find vampires frightening, and my home, family and their expectations of me comforting, safe. I didn't. I identified with the vampires. They were the rebels I wanted to be. They didn't have elders bugging them. I dreamed of independence and revelled in the vampires' anarchic force: they spurned families, marriage and other social conventions...Although loners themselves, they found others like them and were united by a shared difference against the mass of humanity (Garland, 1991: 36).

The discovery of 'active audiences' in the studies outlined above, challenges more traditional understandings of the mass media and 'the masses'. It disrupts old assumptions about how texts convey meaning and raises important new theoretical issues. Even if the extent to which these
insights are 'new' is disputed (see Curran, 1990; Morley, 1996; Curran, 1996) it is still worth highlighting the three main ways in which this recent research is often distinguished from other approaches.

Firstly, work on the 'active audience' seeks to understand people's enjoyment of mass culture. This work attempts to locate the sources and nature of such pleasure instead of merely dismissing it as evidence of gullibility or proof of effective media manipulation. The relationship between people and texts has been found to be much more complicated than previously assumed. Pleasure is not simply determined by identifying with particular characters or messages. Audience enjoyment may depend on 'perverse' or 'inverted' identification. It may be due to pleasure in 'gossip' or in fantasy. It may even be located in the format of a programme which allows viewers to know more than the characters in the drama, to anticipate events and exercise their 'cultural competencies' or 'melodramatic imagination'.

Secondly, much of the work with audiences disrupts assumptions about the homogeneity of the viewing/listening public. Many researchers exploring audience reception now attend to differences between people's 'readings' on the basis not only of class, but also of ethnic identity, nationality, gender, and sexual identity. In so far as audience reception research acknowledges overlapping social and political locations this work has fed into, and drawn upon, perspectives developed within, for example, feminist and black theory and experience. In this sense, academia is 'catching up' with the cultural criticism developed from explicitly political perspectives - although it does not always take on the cutting edge of such analysis and might even be said to be dulling the radical edge of such challenges (see hooks, 1991: 4).

Thirdly, and most crucial of all, such work with audiences adds to challenges to textual determinism, showing that audiences seize pleasure
and meaning that may be quite different from that accessible by a formal content analysis of the text alone. In combination with all the other approaches growing out of the encoding-decoding model, this empirical work with audience throws up unexpected interpretations, unanticipated pleasures, and a complex interweaving of diverse audience appropriations and reactions. Such insight has, over the last ten or fifteen years, opened up whole new fields of enquiry and ways of thinking about text-audience relations within media studies. It has also led to an unprecedented expansion in ethnographic work with readers and viewers; the blossoming of in-depth studies exploring audience pleasures and interpretations.

Outstanding problems and opportunities
But is this blossoming entirely a good thing or have we now reached a point where innovation has been replaced by endless banal replication whereby, as Meaghan Morris argues, 'thousands of versions of the same article about pleasure, resistance, and the politics of consumption are being run off under different names with minor variation' (Morris, 1988: 20)? The 'new paradigm' of audience research emerging out of the discovery of 'active audiences' certainly opens up fresh questions but it also can distract attention from other possible areas of investigation. The key question is what can such work tell us about the operation of power? What is the relationship between 'oppositional' cultural consumption and political change? If people wrest 'pleasure' or positive meaning from a text which might otherwise be alienating or offensive, is this necessarily 'liberating'? And if audiences read texts 'in their own way', does this mean that the media are powerless to convey ideology?

The answers to all these questions are not straightforward. Although many of the original studies cited do address these questions, derivative work and the broader research paradigm evolving out of these roots seems to assume that the answers are self-evident and in the affirmative. Some recent work even dismisses such questions as irrelevant. Indeed, 'active
audience theory' seems to be consolidating into a new theoretical orthodoxy within cultural and media studies. This is an orthodoxy which dismisses questions of media power by focusing on audience activity and interpretative capabilities. As Eco himself suggests: the 'rights of the interpreters have been overstressed' as if 'interpretation has no context and there is a failure to examine the limitations or constraints of 'readings' (Eco, 1990: 7). Sometimes such approaches seem to be accompanied by the assumption that pleasure is inherently revolutionary and 'oppositional' readings can be equated with 'liberation' in the real world (for critique see Gitlin, 1991; McGuigan, 1992; Seaman, 1992; Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 1993; Philo and Miller, 1997). Some authors seem to adopt an uncritical 'cultural populism' which suggest that popular readings are, by definition, 'good' and that mass audiences can be trusted to exercise an almost instinctive capacity to 'resist'. Others imply the text is so 'unstable' and 'polysemic' that it really has no meaning at all. (For critiques see Corner, 1991; Gitlin, 1991; McGuigan, 1992).

The enthusiasm for discovering 'active audiences', celebrating 'cultural populism', and documenting textual instability can lead to a failure to engage constructively in many of the central contemporary debates about media power in Britain (and across the world). The focus on 'pleasure' neglects the role of media coverage of some of the most important contemporary world events (e.g. war in the former Yugoslavia). The enthusiasm for examining the rich variety of audience interpretation can lead to a failure to discuss the truth (or falsehood) of media information. As Barry argues:

The whole question of the relation between media representations, information and knowledge (and, by implication, an investigation of truth) has, for some, been abandoned altogether in an effort to emphasise the diversity of possible audience responses to and uses of those representations. (Barry, 1993: 489)
At the same time, critiques of the racist or sexist content of a programme are dismissed because they are assumed to characterise audiences as compliant zombies - victims of the text. Concern about the under representation of ethnic minorities within media institutions is regarded as 'old-fashioned' and boringly empirical, compared to pursuing thrilling explorations of the potential for audience fantasy and creativity. (For critique see Jakubowicz et al 1994: 23). Programmes which are popular with minority groups are also celebrated as inherently revolutionary regardless of their potential implications (for critique of this in relation to The Cosby Show, see Jhally and Lewis, 1992).

Some writing about audience pleasure and activity has adopted a form of cultural relativism which often seems to do no more than produce apologies for mass culture (McLaughlin, 1993: 614). It can play into the hands of those seeking to build up monopolies and capitalise on a 'free-market' in media institutions. (McGuigan, 1992: 164, 183). It can also create a premature 'full-stop' to the development of cultural innovation. Like the Queen's baby in 'Alice Through the Looking Glass', we are told that 'he likes what he gets and he gets what he likes'.

The original impetus to understand and dignify the activity of 'the masses' and to explain the attractions of consumerism, the joys of popular culture and the success of Thatcherism has thus become distorted. It has disintegrated into complicity and the abnegation of critical responsibility. As McGuigan concludes: 'a pact has been made, overtly or covertly, with economic liberalism, rediscovering the virtues of the market as a cultural provider and incitement to pleasure' (McGuigan, 1992: 173).

The 'new revisionist' paradigm (Curran 1990) has become increasingly detached from broader political and sociological concerns. A focus on interpretation seems to have blurred concern about media influence. The obsession with audience creativity sidelines questions about audiences
beliefs, comprehension and understanding. In the rush to document audience resistance, questions of 'meaning' and 'effect' have become unfashionable. A fixation on demonstrating textual polysemy has more or less precluded discussion of the consequences of interpreting things in diverse ways or how cultural power might operate through the media. As Corner concludes:

so much effort has been centred on audiences' interpretative activity that even the preliminary theorization of influence has become awkward...In certain versions of the reception perspective...[there has been] a loss of critical energy, in which increasing emphasis on the micro-processes of viewing relations displaces (through rarely explicitly so) an engagement with the macro-structures of media and society (Corner, 1991: 267-9, emphasis in original).

The brief summary of developments in audience theory presented here is necessarily 'partial' (in both senses of the word). It is not intended to be comprehensive or provide in-depth discussion of any one particular study. What I have tried to do, however, is introduce some of the debates and, while criticising the excesses of some directions in media studies, also to recognise the insights highlighted by different strands of work.

My own research into audience reception of media coverage of child sexual abuse is indebted to many of those cited above. It draws on the insights from a range of audience theories while also keeping the question of media power central to the investigation. The intention, in designing the study, was to allow for in-depth investigation of how the media might shape understandings of the world while also allowing that audiences might 'use' or 'negotiate' with the media. I wanted to examine diversity, but to do so in ways which would connect with broader sociological questions about people's daily lives, activities and identities. In this respect I am
particularly indebted to feminism, and to the women I worked with in
groups working against sexual violence and in the incest survivors refuge
(see foreword). My academic concern with media theory is closely tied to
the questions, theories and debates raised in this context. The research
which forms the main body of this thesis was designed to examine how
media coverage might influence public thinking about important social
issues; in this case, sexual abuse. I wanted to know which ‘cases’ people
recalled from the media reporting and how they ‘made sense’ of such
events. I was interested in how people judged allegations to be plausible
or implausible and how they responded to different political perspectives
on ‘male violence’ or ‘family dysfunction’. I wanted to know how people felt
about intervening in abusive situations or seeking help, how their own
concerns and fears developed and how they defined their own
experiences and negotiated identities (as victims or survivors of sexual
violence).

I could find no comparative research which addressed these questions.
Although a great deal of literature examines how the mass media
represent sexual and physical violence (rape, domestic violence or child
abuse), this rarely includes any audience reception work. (e.g. Soothill and
Walby, 1990; Benedict, 1992; Meyers, 1997). This is equally true of work
which addresses ‘discourses’ around abuse but is based on examination
of legal changes or documentation rather than any direct survey of the
modern-day public (e.g. Hechler 1988; Bell, 1993). Conversely those
studies which focus on how people understand such abuse tend not to
establish links with the media (Garrett and Rossi, 1978; Stainton-Rogers
and Stainton-Rogers, 1989; Wellman, 1993). Many of the latter type of
study also focus on specific populations - such as attitudes among sex
abusers, or among professionals rather than the general public framing of
abuse (Abrahams et al, 1989; Gilgun and Connor, 1989; Romano et al,
1990, Morison and Greene, 1992; Kovera et al 1993). The literature which
does link particular media with ‘effects’ largely ignores the mass media,
focusing instead on violent videos or pornography (see Allen et al, 1995) or the impact of particular intervention initiatives training children in 'safety and awareness' (for critical review see Kitzinger, 1990).

To pre-empt my conclusion a little I should say that, in exploring the relationship between the mass media and public understandings, I came to the view that there has been an unnecessary retreat from questions about mass media 'effects' (indeed even the word itself has become taboo in some British media studies circles). Media effects can clearly be identified, and part of this thesis is devoted to demonstrating this. However, while it is necessary to reassert that the media can have, sometimes quite powerful, influence, I think the more important goal of research should be to identity how this influence is mediated by factors both within the media representation and within the broader reception context. It is this which will allow us to refine textual analysis, develop alternative media and to expand our understandings of the social and political context which allow for resistance and transformation. In the course of this work I have became increasingly sceptical about some of the 'powers' attributed to audiences as isolated individuals. However, I have also been reaffirmed in my optimism about social and political change through collective activity, developing media-literacy, the 'revisioning' of experience and on-going practical, political and media-oriented activism. My conclusion therefore argues for a refocused audience research agenda which combines attention to media effects with more rigorous methodologies, greater precision and contextual understandings of certain media-studies terminology and a reconnection between studies of media production, content and reception.
Chapter 2

Research design and methods

The research reported here involved two phases. Phase 1 explored the relationship between the mass media and public understandings of child sexual abuse. This was based on 49 focus groups discussion about child sexual abuse, involving 275 individual participants. Phase 2 explored audience reactions to a specific campaign aimed at changing public knowledge, attitudes and beliefs around such abuse. This was based on a further 30 focus group discussions involving another 154 participants. (The focus group data is contextualised by 40 interviews with abuse survivors but I do not discuss this aspect of the research method here - see Chapter 10)

The size of my focus group sample (involving a total of 429 individuals) is more extensive than that employed in previous focus groups studies. My research thus combines in-depth exploration with a breadth of sample unusual in qualitative research. However, the overall shape of the main research design echoed the sample-gathering and selection procedures used in other studies. As many researchers had done before me, I chose to work with groups of people, rather than conducting individual interviews. Group work allows for the explorations of people's understandings in social context and has the additional advantage of encouraging them to relax into 'everyday' modes of communication (see Kitzinger, 1994a).

The common aim in all the groups was to explore people's memories of and responses to, media messages and to examine how such messages might, or might not, impact upon their thinking. The actual conduct of the
groups varied for Phase 1 and 2 because of the different foci of each Phase. The first part of this chapter therefore describes the specific ways in which focus groups were used in Phase 1 and introduces the groups used in this phase. The second part of the chapter introduces the focus group methods and sample used for Phase 2.

Phase 1

Research approach

One well established method of researching audience reception is the ‘video-showing’ approach: inviting people to view and discuss particular films or TV programmes. This was the method used by Morley and has been widely adopted as the method of choice since then (Morley 1980, Lewis, 1985, Corner and Richardson, 1986, Schlesinger et al, 1992). The technique allows detailed explorations of audience understandings of particular texts. It is useful for tracking the divergent experiences and attitudes which may (or may not) influence people’s critical assessment of a programme in a research context. However, such an approach has been criticised for creating an artificial situation that extracts people, and their reception of cultural products, from the context of their everyday lives in which viewing, listening and reading is rarely the focus of such undivided attention. It is argued that the method thus may obtain over-elaborated and reflective accounts of reception (Höijer, 1990). This has led some researchers to investigate audience reception in more naturalistic settings: recording the way people discuss television programmes in their living rooms (Esan, 1993) or on buses and trains (Dahlgren, 1988).

Neither of these types of approach were appropriate for the main part of my study. I wanted to explore the relationship of audiences to a whole topic area. I was, for example, less interested in how one programme might be received, than in the impact of a whole series of press and news
reports. I was also less interested in how people talked about a range of television programmes or a particular genre and more interested in how people might resource their conversations about a particular issue from a range of media sources.

Phase 1 was designed on the premise that people do not view individual media messages in isolation, but as part of a patchwork of messages over time and that people might draw on different genre (news, soaps, documentaries, chat shows) in constructing views on a topic or negotiating with different media messages. The research was also essentially retrospective: where other researchers have used in-depth observation to explore the immediate interaction between audiences and their television sets, I wanted to tap into people's memories and their uses and understandings of media messages long after the naturally-occurring media-watching event, and in a broader social context. Rather than assuming that 'consumption' and the relationship between text and audience is confined to the moment of viewing/reading (and the conversations which take place in the family sitting room or on the bus the next day) my research examined what people were left with long after the images had faded from the TV screen.

The study presented here was thus designed to start by exploring people's beliefs about sexual abuse and work backwards to examine the elements in their reception process and/or in the text which facilitated such a message being conveyed, challenged or reinforced. The research adopted and adapted an innovative data collection technique developed at the Glasgow Media Research Unit and called 'the script-writing exercise'. This exercise had been used to explore audience understandings of industrial disputes (Philo, 1990), AIDS (Kitzinger, 1990, 1993) and conflict in Northern Ireland (Miller, 1994). The exercise involves giving groups a set of stills taken from the media coverage of the issue in question, and inviting them to produce a related text. These scripts then form the basis
for discussion as people talk about how they think their scripts relate to actual news reports and how the scripts relate to their own attitudes and beliefs.

With sensitive conduct and analysis, this exercise offers several advantages over other techniques. As I have argued earlier (Kitzinger, 1993) focus group work using the script writing exercise can be an extremely productive method because:

- The exercise serves as a useful common focus in the group discussions, allowing for detailed cross-group comparison in otherwise very varied and free-ranging discussion.
- Relying on pictures as prompts avoids using words (important when trying to examine audience language and ways of talking) and does not pre-suppose the 'key questions'.
- The script-writing exercise also allows for some attention to the, often neglected, visual elements of media reporting.
- Writing scripts actively involves research participants in the research process - it can be a learning process for both research participants and researcher in exposing assumptions people did not even know that they had and engaging people in theorising about their own memories and views.
- The boundaries of relevance are not predetermined by pre-selecting any specific programme, genre or even medium. While people may be asked to reproduce scripts in the style of a news bulletin or soap opera the surrounding discussion reveals how people's thinking about a particular issue may be influenced by a mixture of images/information for a range of media sources including horror films, news reports, soap opera and books.
- Finally, this technique is excellent for accessing the long term legacy of media impact and exploring the cumulative effects of repeated media messages. It also takes into account the fact that the residue effect of media coverage may be quite different from people's actual
reading/critique of the coverage at the time. People may be less influenced by one individual item of media output than by the accumulation of similar stories and patterning of accounts.

**Design of the script-writing exercise**

Examination of the media coverage combined with preliminary discussions with other researchers, community groups and children's charities, suggested that a particular case, 'The Orkney scandal', had captured 'the public imagination' in the early 1990s and might be a useful case study. I therefore chose this as a focus for the 'script-writing exercise'. Selecting a case study for the script-writing exercise has the advantage of increasing specificity and allowing clearer tracing of information sources, an aim which can be partially undermined by rejecting the video-showing strategy, (see Kitzinger, 1993).

The Orkney case hit the headlines in March 1991 after nine children from four different families were taken into care from the Orkney Islands in Scotland. Early publicity focused on the 'dawn raids' during which the children were uplifted and there was severe criticism of social workers' actions. The children were all returned to their parents five weeks after they were taken and, in spite of a successful appeal by social services, the case was not pursued. The publicity surrounding Orkney dominated reporting about child sexual abuse during 1991. It accounted for 28% of all National UK press and TV news items about child sexual abuse during that year (Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995).

Nine images were chosen from the TV news bulletin coverage to be used in the script-writing exercise. These are reproduced in Figs 1.1 - 1.9.

The first six photographs showed the most commonly represented individuals or institutions in the Orkney coverage. These consisted of:
• A social services representative. This showed Paul Lee, captioned on screen, ‘Paul Lee, Orkney Social Work Department’. (He was the Director of Orkney Social Services severely criticised during the crisis).
• A judge, shown wearing his wig. (This was actually a picture of the judge who granted the social service’s appeal against the return on the children. However, another prominent legal figure involved in the case was Sheriff Kelbie, who had previously ruled that the children should be returned to their parents).
• A minister in his dog-collar, and captioned on screen: ‘Rev Morris McKenzie, Church of Scotland Minister’. (The minister was alleged to have been a ‘ringleader’ in the abuse).
• A woman captioned with her names and the statement ‘Friend of parents’. (She was one of many people from Orkney who appeared in the mass media speaking out for the parents and on behalf of ‘the community’).
• A picture of one of the families, taken from the time when the children were returned to their parents. This showed two children holding hands with their parents (back to camera).
• A picture of a whole row of parents and children linking hands at a quarry (the alleged site of the alleged abuse).

In addition three other photographs were included. These were:

• A common ‘establishing shot’ of Orkney harbour used to introduce news bulletins about the case.
• A shot of the quarry, with an old oil drum in the foreground and the camera shot taken from a low angle. (This was an unusual image, but included to counterbalance the establishing shot of the harbour).
• A shot showing some anatomically-correct dolls and children’s books lying on a table in an interviewing suite. (This was actually taken from a bulletin which focused on Rochdale, although it made reference to Orkney).
The nine stills described above and reproduced in Fig 1 were blown up into 10 x 8 inch photographs for easy handling in a group situation. Groups were presented with the set of photographs and told that they were taken from news coverage of the 'Orkney case'. They were given no further information. They were then asked to try to write a bulletin which reflected actual news reporting from the time. If the group involved more than four or five people then they were usually sub-divided into two teams. Most people quickly found that they could recall at least some aspects of the case. However, in the few groups in which people protested that they had no memories at all of Orkney, they were asked to try as hard as possible to recall what they could, but, failing all else, try to imagine what the story might have been and invent a news script accordingly. (Such 'imagined' scripts were quite different from those based on actual memories and are discussed separately in the analysis presented in this thesis, see, for example, discussion in chapters 5 and 6). The scripts were then read out in the group and research participants commented on the process of producing the script, how they had used individual photographs and the extent to which they believed their script echoed or differed from actual reporting at the time. They also talked about what they actually believed and thought about the case.

In conducting the research sessions, and analysing the transcripts I used the script-writing exercise as a tool for unpicking the often confused areas of audience recall of media messages, their views on those messages and their actual beliefs or assumptions. In this way, the script-writing exercise can help to distinguish between people's ability to reconstruct meaning; critique and deconstruct those meanings; resist dominant messages or construct alternative understandings. (A list of the questions used to probe is shown in Appendix 1).
Fig. 1. The pictures used in the script-writing exercise

Fig. 1.1

Fig. 1.2
Fig. 1. The pictures used in the script-writing exercise (cont.)

Fig. 1.3

Rev Morris McKenzie
Church of Scotland Minister

Fig. 1.4

JEANNIE BLAGGS
Friend of parents
Fig. 1. The pictures used in the script-writing exercise (cont.)

Fig. 1.5

Fig. 1.6
Fig. 1. The pictures used in the script-writing exercise (cont.)

Fig. 1.7

Fig. 1.8
Fig. 1. The pictures used in the script-writing exercise (cont.)
The script-writing exercise was also used to explore people's access to different discursive repertoires, their reception of the different 'voices' which fed into the Orkney coverage, their familiarity with competing accounts and explanations and their knowledge of different facts. I was interested not only in what people thought but also in what they 'knew'. After all, 'facts' remain a crucial aspect of media communication. Misinformation can guide people to accept certain actions as legitimate, while ignorance of particular details can restrict the perspectives that people can develop or defend in argument with others (see Chapter 5). As previous work has shown, it matters if people erroneously believe that the IRA members shot in Gibraltar had a bomb in their car (Miller, 1994) or if they think it is safe to have unprotected sex with someone who looks healthy because they could not possibly be infected with HIV. (Kitzinger, 1995).

The broader conduct of the group sessions for Phase 1

Each of the 49 group discussions conducted for Phase 1 were tape-recorded and lasted between one and three hours (averaging out at almost two hours). Although the script-writing exercise formed the central part of the group discussion it was not the only data collection technique employed. The exercise was preceded by each research participant completing a brief questionnaire. They were asked for their first name, which newspaper they usually read and to write down some 'typical' headlines about sexual abuse. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 2. Before being given the photographs general discussion was also promoted by open ended questions such as: When you think about sexual abuse, what sort of images come to mind? Is there any thing which has have made a particular impression on you? What do you think of the media coverage of sexual abuse? Answers were pursued with probes such as: where did you get that impression from? Why do you remember that? What made you change your mind about that?
Often the Orkney case was raised spontaneously by research participants in response to such open questions. Thus, even before being provided with the set of photographs, research participants talked about their memories of the case and the types of images they associated with it. (The images around Orkney which people spontaneously recalled closely overlapped with many of the photographs selected for the script-writing exercise).

After (and alongside) the script-writing exercise, discussion also covered issues beyond the specifics of the Orkney case, issues such as the sorts of places in which people perceived children to be 'at risk', their assumptions about abusers and victims, and their ideas about causes and solutions.

Where there was time research participants in Phase 1 also discussed a particular advertisement designed to challenge the sexual abuse of children. This was one of the advertisements which formed part of the campaign assessed in Phase 2 in greater depth. (This advertisement is reproduced in Chapter 8, Figure 10).

At the end of the group session participants completed a brief questionnaire requesting some personal details and asking whether participating in the group discussion had had any impact on their thinking. In addition they were invited to note down any comments or information that they had felt unable to say in the group context. This questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 3. Finally, research participants were given information leaflets about help-lines etc., and had the opportunity to talk to me individually if they so wished.
Fig 2. Broad structure of the research sessions

- Introduction

- Completion of first questionnaire

- General discussion around media coverage of sexual abuse (e.g. What are the most common types of stories about sexual abuse? Is there anything which made a particular impression on them?)

- Script-writing exercise

- Presentation and discussion of scripts: How similar/dissimilar is their script to actual news reports? What do they remember, what did they invent? What did they think of the reporting. What do they believe went on in Orkney? Why do they believe that?

- General discussion about the sorts of places in which people perceived children to be 'at risk', their assumptions about abusers and victims, and their ideas about causes and solutions.

- (If time allows) Attempt to reproduce slogan of anti-sexual abuse advertisement and discuss it.

- Final questionnaire and rounding up and opportunity for individual conversations. (Hand out leaflets).
The group sessions were conducted and analysed as genuine ‘focus groups’ rather than simply group interviews. Focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews by the explicit use of group interaction to generate data (see Kitzinger, 1994a). Thus, rather than adopting a very controlling ‘group leader’ role, I adopted a more low-key facilitating position. For example, instead of asking questions of each person in turn, group participants were encouraged to talk to one another: ask questions, exchange anecdotes, and comment on each others’ experiences and points of view. I allowed ‘natural’ conversation to develop and evolve in the group, and was tolerant of apparent ‘digressions’ in an effort to gain access to the context within which people discussed this issue with one another. Attention to this interaction was also part of the analysis process. The benefits of this approach, and the importance of examining interaction, are discussed in Chapter 9.

The sample for Phase 1
One of the first sampling decisions to be made was whether to work with pre-existing groups, or groups of people brought in a one-off session for the research. I chose the former strategy: convening groups through pre-existing networks of people who already lived, worked or socialised together. Thus sessions were conducted with groups of friends, neighbours, colleagues or members of the same social clubs. These are, after all, the networks in which people might normally discuss (or evade) the sorts of issues raised in the research session and the ‘naturally-occurring’ group is one of the most important contexts in which ideas are formed and decisions made (see Morgan, 1988, Kitzinger, 1994a, Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999).
Following in the footsteps of other researchers (Morley, 1980, Schlesinger et al, 1992, Richardson and Corner, 1986), I also selected the sample in order to include people with a wide range of cultural, social and material experiences. The aim here was to maximise potential diversity, especially in relation to the specific issue under discussion. Some groups were chosen because they might be expected to have particular knowledge of, or perspectives on sexual abuse (e.g. social workers, incest survivors support groups). Others were chosen because, as a group, they were not necessarily expected to have any special interest in this issue (e.g. a group of people attending the same community centre, youth club, or meeting for retired people). Efforts were also made to meet with groups in diverse settings (social, occupational and educational) and include participants with a range of demographic characteristics. Thus some groups were specifically targeted to ensure the sample included old people as well as young, English people as well as Scottish and black people as well as white. Community centres, clubs, youth groups and schools were also approached in different areas ranging from middle-class suburbia to areas of 'inner-city deprivation' on large council estates and including some rural as well as urban areas. Crucially groups of media workers were also included in recognition of the fact that they too are part of 'the public'. As Gamson and Modigliani point out, journalists 'observe and react to the same media accounts, already partly framed and presented in a context of meaning, that are available to other readers and viewers' (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: 9).

Figure 3 shows the range of groups involved in Phase 1. The sample is not intended to be statistically representative of the population as a whole and does not mirror general population demographics. For example, women proved much more willing to participate in the research than men (this seems to have been a result of the nature of the topic). However, the sample still includes 95 men and many different people, in diverse groups, had the opportunity to voice their options and experiences. Efforts were
also made to set up particular groups to allow voices which might otherwise be muted to be heard. The 49 groups in Phase 1 (complemented by the 30 groups in Phase 2) provided ample data to identify some common patterns in understanding as well as to map out some (but by no means all) of the differences in public perceptions of this issue. The 49 groups represent a wide range of people. Attitudes, ideas and ways of thinking evident across this sample are likely to be common in the 'general population'. Research sessions included participants as young as 14 to over 70 and were conducted with groups as varied as a group of football fans, British Telecom workers, local government officials and office cleaners. see Figure 3.¹

To sum up, the rationale for the construction of the focus group range were:

a) to include major demographic variables (such as age and class);

b) to include people from different parts of Britain, especially given the significance of particular cases in England (the Cleveland Case) and Scotland (the Orkney case);

c) to include those with specific personal or professional experience who might have a different attitudes toward the media and have access to a wider range of alternative sources of information/influence.

The intention was also to move beyond micro studies of small samples and specific reactions to particular viewing situations. I wanted to establish a large and diverse sample that would enable me to map out differences in people's responses to the media. I also wanted a sample that would allow me to confidently predict that attitudes common across the majority of groups might be common among the general population. The large number of participants in this study means that it is meaningful to offer general quantification statements identifying attitudes that were widespread across groups and contrasting these with 'minority' responses or points of view.
Figure 3 Groups conducted for Phase 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Group Description</th>
<th>No of people</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age ranges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>University Students, 1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6f</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>University Students, 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5f, 1m</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Television Editors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3f, 2m</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Neighbours, 1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4f, 1m</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>Academic colleagues</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6f</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6</td>
<td>Survivors support group, 1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 7</td>
<td>Postnatal support group</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5f</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 8</td>
<td>Neighbours, 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3f</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 9</td>
<td>Neighbours, 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5f</td>
<td>30s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 10</td>
<td>Community centre group</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10f</td>
<td>20s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 11</td>
<td>Community centre group</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8f</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 12</td>
<td>Women's Aid workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 13</td>
<td>Charity/Activist group</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4f, 3m</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 14</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3f, 2m</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 15</td>
<td>Social workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3f, 1m</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 16</td>
<td>Survivors support group</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 17</td>
<td>Youth group</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6f, 3m</td>
<td>16-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 18</td>
<td>Evening class</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1f, 3m</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 19</td>
<td>Church attenders</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2f, 4m</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 20</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3m</td>
<td>16-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 21</td>
<td>School pupils</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3f, 3m</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 22</td>
<td>School pupils</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5f</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 23</td>
<td>post-grad trainee journalists</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5f, 1m</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 24</td>
<td>Youth group</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5f, 4m</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 25</td>
<td>Youth group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5f, 1m</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 26</td>
<td>Retirement club</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3f, 5m</td>
<td>60s-70s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 27</td>
<td>Bowling club</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6m</td>
<td>60s-70s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 28</td>
<td>Unemployed workers centre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3f, 1m</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig 3. continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 29</td>
<td>Grandmothers/mothers of playgroup children</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4f</td>
<td>20s-60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 30</td>
<td>Community Education workers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4f, 3m</td>
<td>20s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 31</td>
<td>Community women's group</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10f</td>
<td>20s-60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 32</td>
<td>University lecturers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1f, 3m</td>
<td>30s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 33</td>
<td>Community Group</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5f, 2m</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 34</td>
<td>Women's centre group</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11f</td>
<td>30s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 35</td>
<td>Knitting circle</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6f</td>
<td>60s-70s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 36</td>
<td>Football fans</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5m</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 37</td>
<td>Local government workers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6m</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 38</td>
<td>Neighbours</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3f, 3m</td>
<td>30s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 39</td>
<td>Trainee journalists</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1f, 2m</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 40</td>
<td>Factory workers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5m</td>
<td>30s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 41</td>
<td>Neighbours</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4f, 3m</td>
<td>30s-60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 42</td>
<td>Pub group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6m</td>
<td>30s-60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 43</td>
<td>British Telecom workers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1f, 7m</td>
<td>20s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 44</td>
<td>Flatmates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3f</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 45</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3f</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 46</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3f</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 47</td>
<td>Football fans</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4m</td>
<td>20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 48</td>
<td>Survivors support group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3f</td>
<td>14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 49</td>
<td>Indian academic visitors</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1f, 2m</td>
<td>30s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>No. of participants</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>180f, 95m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 2

Research design and sample for Phase 2

While completing the research outlined above I was invited to help evaluate a particular campaign against sexual violence: the Zero Tolerance [ZT] campaign against violence against women (see Chapter 8 for description). I was subsequently also asked to conduct research to help develop campaign materials for schools and youth clubs. This was an ideal opportunity to explore how different types of messages might be received and how alternative campaigns might operate in relation to pre-existing mass media messages. Thirty focus groups were conducted for this purpose involving a further 154 participants. See Figure 5.

These focus group discussions were more tightly focused than the Phase 1 groups and the sessions lasted a shorter period of time (an hour to an hour and a half). The discussion sessions explored people's memories of, and views about, the ZT campaign (examples of campaign material are discussed and reproduced in Chapter 8). Details of how these groups were conducted are presented in Chapter 8. Here, however, I simply wish to note that these focus groups were selected on a similar basis to those selected for Phase 1 and were conducted in a similar manner to those for Phase 1, except that the Orkney script-writing exercise was not used and the focus was on a broader range of violence against women and included showing a wider range of specific material. The evaluation of the campaign as a whole was conducted, in part, through a street survey. This was conducted with a colleague and is not presented as part of the PhD (Hunt and Kitzinger, 1996).
**Figure 4: Groups conducted for Phase 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group no.</th>
<th>Type of Group</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 50</td>
<td>Office workers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2f, 3m</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 51</td>
<td>Neighbours</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13f</td>
<td>20s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 52</td>
<td>Youth group</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9f</td>
<td>13-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 53</td>
<td>Transport and Railway workers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2f, 3m</td>
<td>20s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 54</td>
<td>Members of the Christian Women's Guild</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4f</td>
<td>50s-60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 55</td>
<td>Single parents involved in Gingerbread</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 56</td>
<td>Women's Aid workers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5f</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 57</td>
<td>Police officers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3m</td>
<td>20s-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 58</td>
<td>Marriage Guidance counsellors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4f</td>
<td>30s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 59</td>
<td>Black women's support agency workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 60</td>
<td>Police officers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1f, 2m</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 61</td>
<td>Social workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 62</td>
<td>School staff</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2f, 3m</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 63</td>
<td>Rape crisis workers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 64</td>
<td>Health workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 65</td>
<td>Women's Aid workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 66</td>
<td>Meridian workers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3f</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 67</td>
<td>Housing workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3f, 1m</td>
<td>20s-40s</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 4 cont.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group no.</th>
<th>Type of Group</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 68</td>
<td>ZT Implementation grp no. 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10f</td>
<td>20s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 69</td>
<td>ZT Implementation grp no. 2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3f, 2m</td>
<td>20s-50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 70</td>
<td>School pupils</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3f, 2m</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 71</td>
<td>School pupils</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2f, 1m</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 72</td>
<td>School pupils</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3f, 3m</td>
<td>16-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 73</td>
<td>School pupils</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3m</td>
<td>16-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 74</td>
<td>Youth club group</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4f</td>
<td>15-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 75</td>
<td>Youth club group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3f, 3m</td>
<td>16-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 76</td>
<td>Youth club group</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5m</td>
<td>16-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 77</td>
<td>Youth club group</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3f, 5m</td>
<td>16-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 78</td>
<td>Youth club group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4f, 2m</td>
<td>14-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 79</td>
<td>Youth trainees</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6m</td>
<td>16-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total no. of participants</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>110f, 44m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transcription and analysis

Each of the 79 group discussions conducted for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 were tape-recorded and fully transcribed (with the exception of two groups where technical problems resulted in having to rely on detailed notes instead of transcripts). Transcripts from Phase 1 were input into NUD.IST and coded to identify different themes, types of narrative and interaction. The coding was designed to identify not only in what people said, but they way in which they said it. Thus as well as coding themes such as ‘ideas about abusers’ or ‘beliefs about the outcome in Orkney’ the scripts were also coded for ‘jokes’, ‘anecdotes’ and ‘stated change of mind’. (See Appendix 4 for coding details).

This NUD.IST database proved valuable for generating lists of all comments about a particular area across all 49 groups conducted for Phase 1, allowing for systematic examination. However, it was very time-consuming and I also routinely returned to the full transcripts in order to view comments in context and get a sense of the evolution of the group discussion within each session. I therefore decided to work without NUD.IST in the second phase of the research.

Presentation of data

The following chapters quote extensively from transcripts. All names have been changed. Quotes have been minimally ‘tidied up’, ‘correcting’ repeated false starts or ‘you knows’ where this seemed to interfere with readers’ comprehension. Otherwise I have tried to preserve the details and character of speech. Three dots are used to indicate a speaker tailing off or being interrupted, ‘[...]’ is used for places where I have deleted material. A capital letter is used for each new speaker, except where one speaker is continuing another’s sentence. Speakers are identified by gender, and where I am tracing complex interactions they are given individual identifiers and sometimes pseudonyms.
I have indicated where ideas were common across a variety of groups, or where they were unusual and only expressed by a few people. Even if unable to precisely enumerate the number of individuals who express a certain point of view, it is important to give an idea of the distribution of ideas across groups. As Lewis argues:

"It matters whether the discourse whose presence we identify during a focus group interview is widespread within the culture (or subculture). It is important for us to know, roughly, the number of people who construct one reading of a TV programme rather than another [...] We may not be able to enumerate it, but in describing its presence we assume that it is, in some form, quantifiable. We assume that it counts. (Lewis, 1997: 87)

I have tried to adopt a self-reflective approach to interpreting what people say (see Buckingham, 1991) and recognise that research involves 'translation' (Nightingale, 1996, x). I have also tried to give due consideration to the discursive context in which talk was generated and drawn attention to fluidity and change in the course of discussion. Expressed opinions altered as people responded to each other's arguments or reflected on their own points of views. The interactive nature of the data is illustrated by including, sometimes extensive, examples of dialogue between participants. I've also highlighted the use of irony, humour, hesitation or ritual display in the groups.

Finally, it is important to note some of the ethical issues which arise in research of this nature, especially around a topic such as sexual abuse.
Ethical issues

As with any piece of research, issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality had to be considered. Research participants were promised that the questionnaires and transcripts would be treated as confidential and that they would not be identified in any way. Codes and pseudonyms were used as tapes were transcribed and audio-tapes kept in a secure place.

Access to groups was usually negotiated by writing to or visiting community centres/work places/social groups and explaining the research and asking for volunteers. Other groups were found through snowballing out from these groups or other informal contacts. (For an example of a letter used for the initial approach see appendix 5). For Phase 1, six groups in London were set up through a research agency. Ensuring informed consent when negotiating access to groups rather than individuals proved to raise particular issues. For example, some groups such as a knitting circle or social club had a shifting and informal membership - new members might turn up to a regular slot to find the research session about to begin. Ensuring that they had the opportunity to participate or not as they wished was an important part of ensuring informed consent from every individual. I tried to check that my own information sheets were always passed on if I was negotiating access through any kind of 'gate-keeper'. I also reiterated the information at the opening of the session and routinely stated that that anyone who wanted to leave at any point could do so.

Over and above such routine ethical issues, the nature of the research topic in this case meant that sensitivity and additional preparation was required. I had prior experience of providing support services to sexually abused young people and had worked with the mothers of sexually abused children. This enabled me to be more sensitive to the needs of those with personal experience of abuse. This was important during the
course of the group discussion and afterwards. I always tried to stay on after groups in case anyone wanted to talk to me individually. Leaflets with helpline numbers were also provided (e.g. for Rape Crisis, men’s support organisations and for Childline).

The nature of the topic also called for some clear statements about boundaries and expectations. For example, in advance of the group discussions I made it clear that people were not expected to talk about personal experiences. However, I also acknowledged that the group might include people who had been abused and that mentioning such experiences should not be taboo. Obviously, there are ethical issues about asking people about sensitive and potentially painful areas. What is less often recognised is that there are also ethical issues about colluding to evade such areas. While it was inappropriate to ask people about their own experiences of abuse in the group session, I also considered it to be problematic to marginalise them by continually disregarding this possibility or assuming that no one could possibly want to reveal such experiences in public. Efforts were made to ‘manage’ this dilemma through ensuring that I never used my power within the research setting either to close off sensitive possibilities or to push them too far. Where highly personal discussion evolved in the discussion groups, the momentum was usually maintained by the participants rather than the facilitator. However, on occasions I did intervene to introduce a different perspective because of concern about individuals within groups (unintentionally) being insulted or bullied. For example, in one group it seemed to me that a woman was deeply upset and silenced by comments from the rest of the group who were declaring that incest survivors should be sterilised because they were bound to abuse their own children. The woman concerned said nothing and the other members of the group persisted in a string of negative comments about survivors. On this occasion I abandoned my non-interventionist stance in order to introduce a different perspective.
Media production and content analysis

This thesis focuses on audience data. However, this is contextualised by some interviews I conducted with journalists and television producers (as well as information gathered from such people when they participated in focus groups). Particular aspects of the audience data are also positioned in relation to detailed content analysis. In order to do this analysis I was able to draw on a comprehensive archive of one year's coverage of child sexual abuse in the national British press and TV news, as well as smaller archives of other samples and time periods. This data was collected and coded in collaboration with my colleague Paula Skidmore. The analysis of this data presented here, is, however, my individual work.

A note on media genre and format

Many researchers specialise in specific genre (such as soap opera or news) or media (see for example the distinct identity of 'film and television studies'). These divisions recognise the distinct issues raised by these different forms (from genre convention to technical and production differences). They also recognise differences in audience consumption processes and expectations (e.g. the expectation that TV news will be more 'objective' and 'trustworthy' than newspaper reporting).

By contrast, the research reported here started from audience perceptions of a whole issue, child sexual abuse, and worked backwards to explore the source of people's knowledge, ideas and images. It would be artificial to only locate people's understandings of a news story in relation to one medium such as television and to disregard the press. In the focus groups people drew on many different sources in their conversations about child sexual abuse and were often unable to specify exactly which media form had been the source of particular stories (or fact, or image). In particular, people were rarely able to distinguish between news they had seen in the press or on TV (although they did distinguish between news reporting and
fiction programmes and chat shows). In the 'script-writing exercise’ (which is based on images from TV news reporting) it was also evident that people were using a mixture of television and newspaper conventions in shaping the story they wrote and that they were using information from both these sources as they recalled the events. The script-writing exercise does not therefore simply access people’s ideas about, or impressions from, television in isolation from newspaper reporting. Explorations of potential ‘media influence’ in this case can not be neatly divided into the impact of television versus the press.

The bulk of this thesis focuses on public understandings of the Cleveland and Orkney cases. I have therefore focused on placing this in the context of television and press reporting, highlighting themes which were common to both forms of coverage. However, where there were differences I draw attention to these in the main text. For example, as would be expected the television had more visual images of places (see Chapter 6). Television news also tended to be more explicitly ‘balanced’ (see Chapter 6) and use a less direct ‘inflammatory’ vocabulary than the press. When such language was used on television news it was often attributed to a source or included in an interview, rather than directly identified with the reporter or news anchor. (See, for example, descriptions of social workers’ 'Gestapo' tactics in Chapter 5).

A note on the content analysis
The content sample which informs my analysis consisted of all national UK press and TV news reports in 1991 (and all Scottish press coverage during a 2 month sample in 1991). In order to provide a longer time perspective we also created an archive of all national UK press reports for 4 months in 1986. Each item from this sample was coded onto computer, recording: journalist, headline, date, location, format (e.g. editorial or
column), use of sources, and visual images. The main topic of the item was also recorded and whether it was a case-based (episodic) or thematic report. We also coded sub-categories of the content and details of the descriptions of abusers and victims. The latter section of the coding sheet including recording whether the (alleged) assailant was a stranger, an institutional figure in the child's life or friend/family.

In order to explore changes over a broader time period a headline analysis was also done on all items about child sexual abuse in the Times Index since 1980. In addition, I monitored press and television coverage while I was conducting the focus groups. The summary of findings from this analysis is available in Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995b.

This thesis focuses on audience understandings of a particular cases in 1991, Orkney, and how it was linked to a previous case, Cleveland. I am, therefore, primarily concerned with the reporting during 1991. Unless otherwise specified any numbers presented about the coverage refer to this sample. Qualitative analysis was conducted for specific themes. For example, in order to examine images of the Orkney islands discussed in Chapter 6 I re-examined newspaper and TV reports coded onto the database as 'Story type: Orkney' and 'image: place/sceney'. I then examined both the actual pictures (including moving camera work where applicable) and how the images combined with caption or voice-overs and were located within the story as a whole.
1 All groups for Phase 1 were facilitated by myself apart from eighteen conducted, under my supervision, by Rick Holliman, Dawn Rowley and Lesley Henderson. Special thanks are due to these colleagues.

2 All groups for Phase 2 were facilitated by myself, apart from three conducted by Eddie Donaghy and Hannah Bradby. Special thanks are due to these colleagues.

3 Where specific individual media sources were identified in the discussion of case such as Cleveland and Orkney they were usually TV news or press reports. However, during the course of discussing such cases, references were also occasionally made to other forms or outlets such as documentaries, radio reports and specialist professional magazines such as Community Care. In addition people were influenced in their assessment of ‘hard news’ by fictional representations. References to ‘soft’ genre however were more common in the general discussion about sexual abuse (including negotiating the personal experience of abuse). During such discussion people referred to a wider range of ‘soft’ sources including soap opera (such as Brookside), and films (e.g. Not a Love Story) as well as women’s magazines and TV discussion programmes/chat shows such as Kilroy and Oprah. (See Chapter 10).

In exploring people’s comments about different media and genre I have tried to signal differences such as different scepticism of different media. Comments from research participants also suggest the importance of the different social location and consumption process related to different media. For example, television viewing is often a collective and social process and this had implications for people’s responses to, and use of, TV programmes (see Chapter 10).
Chapter 3

Media Templates in the (re)construction of meaning: the role of 'Cleveland' in understanding 'Orkney'

Although I had chosen to focus on public understandings of Orkney as my case study, it soon became clear that I would have to take into account another, far older case. When invited to talk about child sexual abuse in general, or the Orkney case in particular, people often spoke about events which hit the headlines several years earlier. This was the 1987 Cleveland case: a 'scandal' involving allegations of wide-spread sexual abuse which were strongly disputed and led to a judicial inquiry highly critical of child protection procedures.

This chapter explores the role of the Cleveland case in people's thinking about child sexual abuse. It examines how 'Cleveland' figured in media coverage and public understandings about sexual abuse, even many years after the event, and how 'Cleveland' was used as a way of interpreting events in Orkney. I use this case study to argue that both the mass media, and the media audience, use 'templates' from past events through which to understand unfolding current events. Some high-profile episodes come to outlive the conclusion of events 'on the ground' and become part of a litany of key moments inseparably associated with particular issues in public debate. I argue that some of these episodes become 'media templates'. Routinely used to highlight one perspective with great clarity, templates serve as rhetorical shorthand helping journalists and audiences to 'make sense' of fresh news stories. They are instrumental in shaping narratives around particular social problems: framing patterns of reality and guiding public thinking not only about the
past, but of the present and the future. Theorising and analysing media templates is thus crucial to developing understandings of media power. (Many theorists researching a variety of topic have commented on the power of associations. However, most of these analyses only examine media reports. They do not investigate the 'collective memories' expressed by ordinary people' (e.g. Beamish et al, 1995, Nichols, 1997).

'Cleveland' has a particularly high-profile place in the history of child sexual abuse in Britain. It is used routinely as a paradigmatic example of professional malpractice and inappropriate intervention into 'innocent families'. It is a scandal which has been echoed by events in other countries: from the 'Jordan' case in the USA (Hechler, 1988) to the 'Christchurch' and 'Spence' cases in New Zealand (Atmore, 1996; Guy, 1996). This chapter starts by providing a brief overview of media reporting of events in Cleveland at the time (1987). I go on to illustrate the ways in which 'Cleveland' was referenced in on-going media reporting and people's talk about sexual abuse during the early to mid-1990s. Mainstream interpretations of Cleveland are then contrasted with a much more recent TV documentary (1997) which revisited the Cleveland case ten years after the event and challenged some dominant assumptions.

The final discussion points out that, while templates such as 'Cleveland' often seem 'natural' or 'inevitable', they are actually created and maintained by source strategies, social power relations and journalistic/audience reception processes. The chapter concludes by mapping out a tentative definition of media templates and outlining the implications for media production practice, media studies theory and audience reception research.
The media reporting of 'Cleveland'

The Cleveland crisis happened at a time when child sexual abuse was a very new issue for the modern media and it highlighted a new problem: not sexual abuse *per se*, but problems around intervention. In spring 1987, 121 children were taken into care in the county of Cleveland in England. All of them had been examined by one of two local paediatricians, Marietta Higgs or Geoff Wyatt. Using the anal reflex dilatation test, these doctors diagnosed the children as showing signs consistent with abuse. The parents campaigned against the proceedings, claiming that the children had been misdiagnosed and the test was unreliable. A local MP, Stuart Bell, and the local police surgeon, Alistair Irvine, joined with the parents in criticising social workers and the two paediatricians involved. Relations between the police and social services broke down. Stuart Bell MP held a televised press conference to launch a dossier detailing the cases of 19 families which, he argued, provided proof that parents were being inappropriately targeted. Most of the children were eventually sent home.

Events in Cleveland were accompanied by a national media outcry on behalf of the parents. Although the contemporary coverage was not uniform (Nava, 1988), the broad thrust was that these were 'innocent families' falsely accused by over-zealous and incompetent paediatricians and social workers. Media analysts point out that the rhetoric of 'innocent families' obscured any possible conflict of interest between fathers, mothers and children. They also argue that the portrayal of Higgs was sexist, indeed at times she was presented as 'positively perverse' (Franklin and Parton, 1991; Jenkins, 1992). Reporting of the subsequent Cleveland inquiry gave most space to evidence provided by lawyers for the parents (Donaldson and O'Brien, 1995) and certain allegations against the doctors and social workers persisted in the media, even after they had been challenged by the findings of the Inquiry (Franklin and Parton, 1991: 26). A critical book about the case, written by a dissenting feminist
journalist (Bea Campbell), documents the ways in which some inaccurate statements emphasising social work/medical malpractice were given a high profile, while corrections were tucked away. The media reporting, she argues, often conveyed a false impressions. For example, when children were returned home this was reported as if the obvious conclusion was that no abuse had occurred and no intervention had ever been justified. Indeed, a blanket embargo on media reporting of the settlements in wardship cases meant that when children were returned home no information was given to the public about any conditions such as social services supervision (Campbell, 1988: 148).

If the broad thrust of the media coverage at the time of the crisis and the subsequent inquiry promoted one particular understanding of the scandal, this was even truer of retrospective asides about the case. Media references to Cleveland long out lived the conclusion of the main news events connected with the crisis. During 1991, for example, Cleveland was mentioned over 200 times in the national UK press and TV news. Only a handful of these reports involved fresh developments in the Cleveland cases itself (such as the parents' fight for compensation). Instead, most reports used Cleveland 'in passing' to help 'tell the story' of more recent events. Cleveland was used as an interpretative framework in reporting controversies in Rochdale (in northern England) which was treated as a kind of 'hyper Cleveland' (Aldridge, 1994: 85) and was used again in accounting for events in Orkney. Media reports on Orkney frequently cited Cleveland as another case in which parents were 'wrongly accused' (Scotsman, 15 March 1991; Daily Mail, 4 March 1991). Headlines included: 'How the nightmare of Orkney ignored the lessons of Cleveland' (Evening Standard, 4 April 1991); 'How could this happen again - storm as sex abuse kids fly home' (Daily Mirror, 5 April 1991) and 'Cleveland, Rochdale, Orkney: What's wrong?' (Sunday Telegraph, 7 April 1991).
The struggle to assert or deny the links between Cleveland and Orkney was quite explicit in the strategies adopted by the diverse pressure groups and organisations seeking to influence the public profile of the Orkney case. The Orkney parents quickly sought the support of 'Parents Against Injustice' - a national group of aggrieved parents formed after the Cleveland case - and statements were produced drawing attention to similarities between the two cases. In the 81 national UK news bulletins about Orkney that I examined for the first 10 months of the crisis I found that Cleveland was referenced 24 times. The connections between Cleveland and Orkney were stressed by the Orkney parents from the first few days of the crisis:

Mother: It's a Salem Witch-hunt. That an agency like the Social Work Department can have total control over all our lives in Britain now. We are just feeling what the Rochdale families felt, the Cleveland families felt. (BBC1, Nine o'Clock News, 5 March 1991)

Members of the Orkney Social Work Department were left defensively denying the connection. Unable to renegotiate the public meaning of Cleveland, social services representatives in Orkney simply insisted that the cases should not be associated. Guidelines produced after Cleveland were, they said, not wholly applicable to the Orkney situation (where organised abuse was suspected), and the actions of the professionals in Orkney should not be lumped in with those of Cleveland. One article in the Guardian for example, headlined the declaration by Orkney social services: 'Orkney abuse case "unlike Cleveland".' (Guardian, 30 August 1991)

However, attempts to deny the link were largely unsuccessful. In the words of the Mail on Sunday, Cleveland and Orkney both represented 'the might of faceless bureaucracy' against 'the basic rights of bewildered families' (Mail on Sunday, 7 April 1991). News reports described Orkney
as 'only the latest' in a series of 'monumental cock-ups by social workers' (Daily Mirror, 14 March 1991). The pattern of social work malpractice represented by Cleveland and subsequent cases was used to underline headlines such as:

In the dock again. The care staff who go too far (Daily Mail 5 April 1991)

Throw the book at child stealers (Today, 29 March 1991)

Ban these Blunderers (Daily Mirror, 14 March 1991)

Sack the lot and start again (Daily Mail, 5 April 1991).

Back in 1987 Cleveland was a one-off scandal. By 1991 it was seen as part of a pattern of malpractice threatening ordinary families right across the country. Cleveland ceased to be a stand-alone case. Its symbolic power lay in its status as a template. This was not only evident from analysing media content. It was also clearly illustrated in interviews with journalists: ‘Cleveland’ was an important part of journalists’ vocabulary and a key reference point for them. This is not surprising. Cross-linking between events is a routine part of journalists’ practice as they attempt to draw together discrete episodes and uncover relationships between them (Whitney and Wartella, 1992). Linking events is part of the journalistic endeavour to capture the zeitgeist or expose the need for fundamental policy reform. Indeed, media logic will tend to mean that one major event (such as a bridge collapsing) will lead to a flurry of media attention to related events (Keppinger and Habermeyer, 1995).

Journalistic references to the past necessarily have to be condensed in the brief space provided by a bulletin or newspaper report. These constraints pose challenges, but to simply avoid referencing the past
would result in media coverage being entirely a-historical; there would be no sense of the past, no attempt to learn from mistakes or ensure that disasters were never repeated. The cry 'Never Again!' is a classic headline. The meaning of 'Cleveland' was 'obvious' to many of these journalists and not to have linked it to events in Orkney would have been a dereliction of duty.\(^2\)

Over and above this, memories of Cleveland influenced how journalists actually reported more contemporary events. These 'memories' (usually constructed from news cuttings or perceived public collective consciousness) informed how some media personnel framed their reports about Orkney. This was vividly demonstrated in a group discussion with TV news editors (Group 3). This group produced a script that they described as 'typical' but which one member criticised as 'unbalanced' and 'pro-family'. However, his colleague defended the report by saying that news had to be 'in context':

\[\text{I mean at the time there had been several cock-ups by social workers all over the bloody country and so the assumption is that you are going to side with the families. (Group 3, m)}\]

**Public recollections of 'Cleveland'**

This news editor's assumptions about audience expectations were borne out, and reflected, in the other focus groups conducted with 'ordinary' members of the public. Many of these research participants did indeed see Orkney as the latest in a long line of social work blunders stretching back to Cleveland. Indeed, research participants often commented that they could barely tell these cases apart anymore. This was true even for some of the relevant professionals. Thus a social worker describing memories which seemed to combine features of both Orkney and Cleveland commented: 'I think I'm confusing those two, I'm wondering if
there is something else as well that I'm confusing it with, but I'm not sure.' (Group 15, f). The Cleveland case was spontaneously named in over half of my 49 focus groups and, when the name of Cleveland was mentioned by the researcher, it was immediately recognised in most of the others. The seven groups with no memory of Cleveland included three groups composed of people who had not been resident in Britain at the time and/or whose first language was not English and several of the youngest groups, the members of which would have been children at the time of the crisis. For example, one group of school children had no memory of the Cleveland case at all. When I attempted to confirm that they had no recall of the case by providing further cues one girl came up with an interesting error. She conflated the name of Marietta Higgs with the infamous Myra Hindley who taped sexual assaults on children:

JK: What about the Cleveland case?

f1: No

JK: Do you remember that? [silence] A doctor called Marietta Higgs [silence] who did something called the anal dilatation test? Do you remember that?

f2: Yes, I remember that. She used to tape them, Myra Hindley.

(Grp 25)³

Among the other groups, however, memories of Cleveland, and its rhetorical use, were strikingly similar. This was true both across and within a wide variety of groups. Indeed, within groups, people were often able to finish each other's sentences as they attempted to summarise the case. At its most basic, Cleveland was recalled in terms such as those collectively constructed by a group of students:

f1: [Cleveland was] social workers coming under fire...

f2: children being taken away from families...

f3: like a mistake...
fl: because it was a big blunder. (Group 2)

The following example is also typical of the way in which Cleveland was discussed. Note the high level of consensus between the three speakers and how Cleveland is first mentioned while trying to recall the Orkney case. Although they had been asked to talk about Orkney they quickly became diverted by their recollections of Cleveland:

fl: Orkney, is that... Oh no, I'm thinking of another one there. I'm thinking of Marietta Higgs.

f2: No, that was the Cleveland child sex abuse. Yeah, I remember that stupid woman, because she had 5 kids.

fl: [...] They put something in the vagina or something and they said if the vagina dilated the child had been abused. Well, it was something incredible like that and it was this Marietta Higgs that was at the forefront of it all.

f3: They were testing any child that had been taken in for any reason.

f2: Bet they didn't test Marietta Higg's children!

fl: And there was a big outcry because then it was discovered that this method was not a good indication [...] But of course at that point...

f3: the damage was done.

f2: People's lives had been ruined and men were committing suicide. (Group 46).

Other groups came up with almost identical memories:

That Cleveland case was an absolute disgrace and that was social workers and an actual paediatrician that just got this thing into her head about child abuse. (Group 31, f)
I remember there was a female doctor and she did something wrong with the test or something and was putting two and two together and coming up with five. And the next thing you know there were like 30-odd families who'd had their children taken into care. (Group 47, m)

There was that one up in the north-east about the medical techniques used to determine if a child had been sexually abused and they found out that the techniques were faulty, and all these parents had gone through the hell of being accused of child abuse. (Group 37, m)

Research participants repeatedly spoke about 'innocent families falsely accused' through an 'arbitrary' test, which they said, was 'completely discredited' (Group 23, f) and 'proved to be a load of rubbish' (Group 15, f). Marietta Higgs was, they said:

Examining children and saying that there'd been sexual abuse when there hadn't. (Group 12, f)

She had a way of finding out, doing something with sphincter muscles or bums, weren't it. But it went wrong and [...] loads of people [were accused] and they hadn't even done it. (Group 14, m)

People often believed that the test had been carried out 'randomly' (Group 15, f). And they recalled the fear of parents in the Cleveland area:

If their wean [child] fell and scratched theirselves or they needed two stitches, they wouldn't go to Cleveland Infirmary because that's the first thing they tested a wean for. (Group 31, f)
Some generalised this to a concern about doctors 'jumping on the bandwagon':

When you get very young children, they go to the doctor 'They got a rash round here' and the doctor goes; 'Oh yeah looks like an abused child'. It could be urine infection, nappy rash you know, anything. A lot of this was going on the bandwagon at one time. (Group 40, m)

Indeed, when asked for her memories of 'Cleveland', one person said it was inextricably associated with 'being frightened to take your child to the doctors, in case...' (Group 19, f). Many also asserted that the test had been the only evidence of abuse: 'the children [were not] speaking out in Cleveland, it was the doctor that was sort of making judgements' (Group 11, f). Some also stated that the paediatricians had been sacked or even struck off because of her malpractice: 'What she said was a valid test wasn't a test [and the local authority was] left with no choice but to sack her.' (Group 19, m). Considerable hostility was expressed toward Marietta Higgs, attention invariably focusing on her rather than her male colleague, Geoff Wyatt. As one woman commented:

[Marietta Higgs was] warped, screwy... but I accept that my thoughts about that come directly from the media and that is the media images of her. (Group 5, f)

In addition to expressing hostility to Higgs, several research participants spoke eloquently about their distaste for the reflex dilatation test which they assumed (incorrectly) involved penetrative examination of the anus:

Her test for child abuse was to stick her finger up a child's anus. Well if somebody did that to you, you'd jump. That's what I
remember about it, it was a sort of stupid way to try and test.

(Group 20, t)

The anal examination was, in itself, an assault according to some research participants: 'A lot of these children could probably sue her for abusing them on the examination couch, frankly' (Group 23, f). Concern and empathy were also voiced for the children who had to endure such examinations:

f1: Here you're taking your weans to the hospital to get a stookie put on their leg, and afore you know where you are there are these strange people doing all these things. [...] All these kiddies all squealing and screaming and people doing things to them and there's no mammy and daddy.

f2: Takes us all our time to go for a smear test, how do the weans feel? (Group 31)

For some men, in particular, such cases still generated fears and inhibitions about how they interacted with children. One commented: 'You're afraid to do anything to your own family now' (Group 27). Another remarked: 'Everybody was frightened, nobody could relax. It put the fear of Christ up a lot of people'. He added: 'Kids do drop you in it, though' before tailing off into silence with the statement 'If it happened to me...'

(Group 43)

It was these fears, empathies, memories and associations around Cleveland which informed reactions to subsequent reporting of events in Orkney. Indeed, people not only confused details of the two cases but explicitly used Cleveland to help them recall and reconstruct what happened in Orkney. One man recalled Orkney as: 'The exact same sort of thing as Cleveland, and again I think that was found to be false. The thing with the Cleveland one, and the Scotland one, I think it was do-good
social workers' (Group 36, m). Another remarked that his reconstruction of events in Orkney was entirely based on his memories of other cases: ‘I don’t remember anything about it [Orkney] [But] I do remember that there was strong allegations that social work had got it wrong, as usual, inefficient and incompetent’ (Group 18, m).

Some research participants explicitly stated that it was obvious that the Orkney parents were innocent because social workers were known to indulge in ‘mass hysteria’ (Group 23, f) and are ‘always picking on innocent people’ or ‘always poking their noses in and always getting it wrong’ (Group 5, f). Seeing sexual abuse wherever you look and become a ‘fashion’ and a ‘social work trend’. Social workers were ‘obsessed with sexual abuse’ and ‘jumping on the bandwagon’ (Group 4, f). One man (apparently inverting the order of Orkney and Cleveland in his head) commented:

The Cleveland case was brought up just after another case, wasn’t it? And it was like a knock-on effect, so the social workers up in Cleveland got a little bit high and mighty and thought: ‘Well, we’ll bang them all, have them all up’. (Group 4, m)

Even some of those who declared themselves ‘suspicious’ of the media reporting or ‘open-minded’ about events in Cleveland, seemed to be influenced by the images, assumptions and fears generated by the case and its subsequent place in the history of ‘abuse scandals’. Many, for example, were left with a reluctance to call in social services and could only explain this with reference to such media reporting.

The combination of Orkney and Cleveland (along with other cases such as Rochdale) has left a vivid impression of children being dragged from their homes and the belief, by many research participants, that this is a potential threat to any family. As one woman said: ‘it could be social
workers up the morrow going and lifting your kiddies' (Group 31, f). Many people saw social services as a last resort rather than part of the investigation or support process. In the course of one group discussion, two women compared notes about their own (unreported) suspicions about a child they both knew. They had, quite independently, each become concerned that this girl was being sexually assaulted. Neither had previously voiced her concerns to anyone else, or considered consulting social services. When asked why they had not previously spoken of this, one commented: 'you'd have to be absolutely certain [because] you don't want kids whipped away for nothing'.

Memories of Cleveland did not simply mirror the main thrust of contemporary reporting during the crisis. There were some interesting and consistent differences between the contemporary reporting and public recall – in particular in relation to the relative roles of doctors and social workers.

The role of the paediatricians in Cleveland was a central theme in the original coverage, and recalled by many research participants talking in the mid 1990s. However, it is social workers rather than the medical profession who bear the lasting stigma of Cleveland.

Doctors, as a profession, remained relatively high-status and trusted. Thus while the headline during the Cleveland crisis, 'Sack the Docs' (Sun, 26 June 1987), was a demand to dismiss those particular individual medical practitioners, the headline 'Sack the lot and start again' (Daily Mail, 5 April 1991) is a call for the dissolution of social work as a profession. This difference in the status of the two professions was concisely demonstrated in the comment of one participant: 'It was hard to believe how a doctor could get it wrong' (Group 36, m). A similar statement about social workers is hard to imagine.
Over and above this some people described Cleveland as a 'social work scandal' with no (or only belated) mention of the medical profession at all. A few research participants even thought that Marietta Higgs was a social worker. They spoke of 'social workers examining children's bottoms' and 'social workers' fetish for anal dilatation' (Group 13) or made comments such as 'It was a mistake of this Marietta Higgs - a social worker - it was a big cock-up' (Group 14, m).

Such a shift provides an important clue to how templates operate and are operated upon. It would seem that as cases become associated with one another - osmosis occurs in both directions. The template case (in this example, 'Cleveland') is modified through the interaction between contemporaneous and retrospective reporting. The modification of templates over time is facilitated by the fact that people were not only drawing on their memories of the coverage of Cleveland during 1987, they also referred to more contemporary references to the case in news reporting during the 1990s. Indeed some of the younger research participants were only aware of this type of secondary reporting.

To summarise my argument so far, the combination of 'social work scandals' around sexual abuse seems to have become a defining feature of the public debate: encouraging suspicion of social services, justifying demands for radical reform, informing parental fears and focusing concern on false allegations. Just as phrases such as 'another Vietnam', 'another Chernobyl', or 'another Hitler' sum up a particular set of fears, so the phrase 'another Cleveland' provokes a set of powerful pre-packaged associations. Such framing by association is by no means unique: for analysis of the meaning of 'Watergate' and how this is reiterated, e.g. 'Iran-gate', see Schudson, 1992, for discussion of how Busia was represented as another Nkrumah, see Elliot and Golding, 1974: 243. References to Cleveland fixed an image in many people's minds which placed social workers firmly in the dock, drawing on and contributing to
spirals of negative publicity surrounding social workers. It seemed as if each new case might be more readily received as evidence of professional incompetence because the image 'fitted' with what people already 'knew' (for the concept of 'fit' in relation to audience reception and racist images of Africa see also Kitzinger and Miller, 1992). In combination all the 'sex abuse/social work scandals' gained an explanatory momentum, a powerful logical association, propelling audience reception in particular directions.

However, not everyone accepted this way of referencing Cleveland. Some research participants drew attention to the conflicting information available in some parts of the media back in 1987/88 and made comments such as 'I just did not know what to believe'. Nevertheless, many could only remember the more straightforward consistent accounts of Cleveland (and, of course, over time, it is only these accounts which remain easily accessible to the general public). Others adopted a 'no smoke without fire' approach (a cliché in its own right which some people thought required no further explanation). There were others who refused to accept a simple 'innocent families torn apart' narrative citing personal experience (e.g. of abuse), positive contacts with social services or political perspective (e.g. having been alienated from the reporting by sexist representations of Higgs). Such variations are explored further in Chapter 9. However, there were two ways in which the simple use of a Cleveland template were rejected which are particularly pertinent for developing an understanding of how templates operate. The first involved people pointing to the conflicting narratives around physical and sexual abuse. Physical abuse of children is associated with a roll-call of names such as, in Britain, Maria Colwell, Jasmine Beckford and Tyra Henry, children who all met their deaths at home. The main accusation against social workers in such cases is their inaction. How, then, some research participants asked, could we complain when social workers seemed over-zealous? The parallel templates seemed to contradict each other.
The second interesting example of template-rejection seemed to be a sort of 'boomerang effect' (see Curran, 1987). Far from seeing the Cleveland 'fiasco' as confirmation that social workers in Orkney were likely to have acted improperly some comments suggested that the history of Cleveland might make some people more likely to accept that Orkney social workers were justified. Take the following agreement between two neighbours:

f1: I don't think that the social workers would have acted like that [in Orkney] if there had not been...They're not going to put their careers on the line.
f2: Especially after Cleveland. (Group 8)

A similar perspective was expressed in another group:

You can't help feeling that there must have been something that really got the social workers, and the sort of team leaders and the Social Services Director and everyone, knowing it was a big issue, to take such steps and put themselves on the line. (Group 37, m)

There were thus some challenges to the dominant Cleveland template at the level of audience reception. There was also one striking example of a challenge to the template from within the media. It is instructive to take a closer look at this one TV programme which challenged pervasive understandings of Cleveland. This was broadcast in 1997 and is a useful case study with which to develop the theory of templates.

**An alternative media account**

Although the 'meaning' of the Cleveland scandal was very stable during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dominant paradigm was challenged in 1997 by one particular documentary: *Cleveland: Unspeakable Truths* (27
May 1997, 21.00-22.00, Channel 4). This programme presented a radically different image of Cleveland than had been portrayed in the mass media until that time (even though most of the information it presented had been available ten years earlier in evidence to the Cleveland Inquiry).

The tone of the programme was set by the first few minutes. It opened with a series of traditionally emotive images such as a riderless rocking horse and low-angle shots of stairs in a family home. This was overlaid with statements about the ubiquitous nature of sexual abuse and questions such as ‘why are families better protected than the children that grow up within them?’ The narrator’s voice was then replace by the voice of a woman who had been sexually abused as a child in Cleveland. The audience were immediately invited to empathise with how an abused child might feel and start to think about repeated abuse instead of concentrating their horror on the violation of an anal examination. The survivor’s voice was followed by text appearing on the screen: ‘A judicial enquiry (sic) did not resolve what had happened to the children [in Cleveland]. The public was led to believe that innocent families were torn apart.’ The screen was then filled with the words: ‘This is the true story.’

Unspeakable Truths set itself up to challenge the ‘myths’ surrounding Cleveland. It directly contradicted the ways in which Cleveland had been routinely referenced (both in the media and in general public debates). It ‘hailed’ viewers in ways which invited empathy with abused children rather than accused adults, and statements in this programme can be directly contrasted with some of the beliefs evident in my focus group discussions. The programme pointed out that most of the diagnoses in Cleveland were confirmed by an independent panel, that Higgs had not been sacked (although she was moved), and that anal reflex dilatation test was not as controversial as assumed. For example, the police surgeon, Alistair Irvine, went on national news in June 1987 stating that the majority of colleagues
did not accept Marietta Higg's interpretations of reflex anal dilation. However, his own professional body, the Police Surgeons Association advised its members that reflex anal dilatation 'should certainly give rise to strong suspicion that sexual abuse had occurred' (cited on Cleveland: Unspeakable Truths, 27 May 1997).

Unspeakable Truths stated that the children were not examined arbitrarily. There were usually prior suspicions and reflex anal dilatation was rarely the sole indicator (other evidence included venereal disease and statements by some of the children). The programme also highlighted the fact that some of the children were living with men previously charged with sexual abuse. The 19 'flagship' families summarised in Stuart Bell's highly publicised dossier included three adult males already charged with sexual abuse and a further two where the father was a convicted sex offender.

Unspeakable Truths went on to challenge routine understandings of Cleveland in other ways too. Where some of my research participants saw the children's return home as proof that they had not been abused, and none of the evidence stood up in court, the programme challenged this interpretation. It drew attention to the protection packages under which some of the children were returned and the fact that some were re-referred to social services within two years because of suspected abuse. It informed viewers that no one knows what happened subsequently to the 'Cleveland children' because, in 1989, the Department of Health decided that all records relating to them as a group should be destroyed and there should be no further follow-up.

Instead of focusing on social workers, Unspeakable Truths turned the spotlight on the police. It argued that police reactions made it difficult to process some cases correctly. The programme stated that Cleveland Constabulary adopted a policy whereby it virtually withdrew from investigating any sexual abuse cases diagnosed by Higgs or Wyatt. For
example, one of the 121 cases involved in the Cleveland crisis concerned a girl whose father had previous convictions for sexually assaulting three other children. After Higgs diagnosed likely abuse, the five-year-old herself confirmed this and the mother believed her. However no action was taken against the father. The police officer's record of the interview with the girl stated:

...she told me that she had a poorly tuppence which was caused by her father moving his fingers up and down inside [...] she stated that this had been going on for sometime [...] In my opinion, there is no doubt he is responsible for the assault, but with the present policy I was unable to charge him.

*Unspeakable Truths* argued that the 'real' (or additional) scandal of Cleveland was not necessarily (or only) that so many children had been taken from their parents, but that some children had been returned, possibly to face on-going abuse. The information it conveyed did not prove that most, or even any, of the accusations of sexual abuse, were justified. However, the programme did convey facts which had not been widely available prior to that point and challenged some widely circulating assumptions. It certainly challenged many of the 'facts' which formed the building blocks of people's beliefs about the case as expressed in the focus groups. It also disrupted the status of 'the Cleveland scandal' as a straightforward template of unnecessary intervention into 'innocent families'. Some of the information in this programme might have changed public reactions to the case. For example, community reactions to convicted sex abusers being rehoused in local areas suggests that many people would not trust such a person in their street, let alone leave children in their care.

I do not have systematic audience reception data about how people reacted to the programme. However, discussion with colleagues, friends and acquaintances suggests that some (but not all) who viewed the
programme had to radically rethink their views. Because Cleveland was such a key case they had their opinions about subsequent cases (such as Orkney) disrupted too. One woman, who had taken part in a focus group discussion with me in 1993, commented that watching *Unspeakable Truths* four years later left her 'really shaken. If those were the facts it really made me re-think everything I'd assumed' (comment to author).

Another, who in a focus group in 1993, had said she viewed Marietta Higgs as 'warped' and 'completely wrong', revised her opinion after viewing the programme. She summarised her reactions as follows:

> From what I remember at the time, it was completely hidden that some parents already had convictions. Of course that makes a difference to what you'd think. Also, I thought Marietta Higgs had wrongly diagnosed, and the programme suggested that probably she was right...I bought it [the original reporting] hook, line and sinker, Marietta Higgs was damned. I hadn't realised that Marietta Higgs and that man (I still can't remember his name, even after just watching that programme) hadn't been struck off - so they were clearly vindicated by their profession. I'm sorry if I said Marietta Higgs was a sleaze-ball. I take it back! (Focus group participant from 1993, interviewed in 1998, after viewing a video recording of *Unspeakable Truths*)

Going on to reflect on Orkney, this woman commented:

> It was a similar scenario wasn't it, but I think the parents in Orkney were innocent, but... That makes me think... maybe I'm completely wrong, because I was wrong about Cleveland.

Such comments suggest some pointers to how audience understandings of Cleveland might have been different if the media coverage had been different, and how, in turn this might have influenced responses to the
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Orkney case. However, in the absence of more systematic audience reception research, perhaps the most important point highlighted by the Unspeakable Truths documentary is that the presentation of episodes such as Cleveland are not pre-determined. The meaning of such events are constructed in the course of competition between sources, routine media processes and audience reactions. More generally, I would argue that this is also true of the selection of which key events are seen to define a 'social problem'. In other words, the particular cluster of cases most closely associated with any particular issue is not inevitable, any more than the meanings attached to these cases.

The importance of which (and what 'type' of) events are associated with any particular issue can be illustrated by looking once again at data from the focus groups. Before opening the focus group discussion sessions, preliminary questionnaires were given to group participants. This invited people to note down 'typical' headlines about child sexual abuse. Eighteen percent of the headlines generated in this way named Orkney, a further 12% named Cleveland or referred, in various ways, to 'botched interventions', 'dawn raids' and 'innocent families torn apart'. Child sexual abuse is inextricably associated with stories about apparent miscarriages of justice. This was further illustrated by people's responses to one of the very first questions asked in the open discussion: What comes to mind when you think of child sexual abuse? People tended not to think of distraught victims, but of distraught accused parents. When asked 'what kind of pictures come into your head, what would you expect to see on TV' about sexual abuse research participants made replies such as: 'Parents running around clutching on to each other' (Group 20, m), 'Angry parents' (Group 19, m), 'families who've had their children taken away' (Group 9, f).

This fact should not pass without comment. It would be interesting to ask a similar sample of people to write 'typical' headlines about 'murder' or 'the IRA'. I would not anticipate generating many headlines about 'Carl
Bridgewater' or 'The Birmingham Six'. Alleged, or even proven, examples of injustice are not routinely used to exemplify issues around 'murder' or 'the IRA'. Why is there this difference? This is not a simple reflection of 'the reality', it reflects complex issues about social power, class politics and the metaphorical and social status of both social workers and children in society (Kessel 1989; Franklin and Parton, 1991; Aldridge, 1994), as well as the politics of categorisation, identification, source strategies and media representation.

**Identifying and defining templates**

This chapter has examined the status of Cleveland as a key reference point in public understandings of sexual abuse. This has demonstrated the importance of collective memories and historical analogies in audience reception, media representation and effects. The concept of media templates developed from analysis of this empirical data will, I believe, be relevant to examining source/media/audience relations over a broad range of issues. Rather than focusing solely on reports which are explicitly about any particular crisis under study, it is clearly also useful to examine how particular cases are referenced in retrospect both by the media and in ordinary conversation. Patterns of media coverage and the process of association and accumulation may be very influential. The combined residue left by linking key cases may be particularly powerful. Identifying the legacy of media coverage (and re-coverage) is as important as examining people's ability to critique media texts at the time. The cumulative effect of different media messages is not simply a sum of the parts.

The work reported here suggests the value of analysing what I have called 'media templates'. Templates can be seen as a sub-category of 'key events', they also bear some relation to 'news icons' as discussed by Bennet and Lawrence (1995). These authors examined 'icons' such as the
videotaped beating of Rodney King by white police officers. They argue that icons are a nugget of condensed drama which can 'stand alone as an emblematic decisive moment that can be evoked with a simple phrase or visual reference'. They describe how such icons can be introduced in to other types of stories and thus 'break down narrative boundaries and open the news to [...] linkages between otherwise isolated events' (Bennet and Lawrence, 1995). In this sense the notion of 'icons' share some characteristics with templates. However, Bennet and Lawrence describe icons as opening up 'innovation' and 'historical reflection', evoking 'contradictions and tensions'. I would argue that templates operate in a rather different way - they are defined by their lack of innovation, their status as 'received wisdom' and by their closure. Far from opening up historical 'reflection' they reify a kind of historical determinism which can filter out dissenting accounts, camouflage conflicting facts and promote one type of narrative. I wish to highlight several distinguishing features defining media templates:

- **Media templates are key events which have an on-going shelf life which extends beyond the conclusion of news happenings. Indeed, media templates are defined by their retrospective use in secondary reporting rather than contemporaneous coverage.**

- **Media templates are used to explain current events, as a point of comparison and, often, as proof of an on-going problem. Templates are used to highlight patterns in particular issues or social problems.**

- **Media templates have a single primary meaning rather than being the focus for debate. When a template is referenced in discussion of subsequent discrete events its relevance may be challenged (e.g. this case is / is not like Cleveland) but the template itself is rarely explicitly questioned.**
The above definition of media templates has implications for how they operate:

- **Simplification and distortion:** In the process of transforming a key event into a media template, details may be blurred, dissenting accounts forgotten and facts (both from past and current events) may be misrepresented or disregarded.

- **Minimal opportunity for alternative readings:** Secondary reporting will often tend to oversimplify or at least present the event 'pared down to its essence'. This minimises the opportunities for alternative interpretations from audiences only exposed to secondary accounts. It may also influence recall of the events even among those who were aware of the contemporary reporting.

- **Osmosis:** The meanings of 'template events' are, in part, created by the interaction between such episodes and subsequent cases to which they are linked. Cleveland means what it means because of its link with Rochdale and Orkney (and vice versa). The meaning of media templates may be both reinforced and altered as they are applied to events as they unfold (e.g. Cleveland has become a template of social work malpractice, the role of the doctors has not been a reiterated theme).

Templates are very powerful, and often invisible, influences, however they are not inevitably self-perpetuating. They may be recognised and challenged through routine audience diversity (e.g. people's own personal experience) and templates may be exposed and undermined through coming into conflict with contradictory templates or the creation of a boomerang effect. In addition, media personnel (particularly documentary makers) may take on the challenge of 'debunking the myths' in ways which provides an alternative to dominant templates.
Thinking with templates: implications for journalists, policy makers and ‘the public’

Identifying key moments from the past and using analogies from history is not inherently problematic, indeed such practices may well be essential as well as inevitable if we are to learn from the past and make sense of the present. However, such associations and key moments are often taken for granted as templates and it is easy to ignore the constructed nature of these accounts. It is as if frameworks for understandings are invisible because of their all-encompassing nature and as if truth could be created by repetition. In order to reflect on the role of media templates it is useful to turn to debates within the disciplines of political science and history.

Social historians remind us that it is important not to assume that records of historical events are ‘innocent acts of memory’, but rather to see them as attempts ‘to persuade, to shape the memory of others’ (Burke, 1997: 47). Historians and political scientists also note that historical analogies are often used in misleading ways. Richard Neustadt (Professor of Government at Harvard) and Ernest May (Professor of History at Harvard) analyse the use of such analogies by policy makers in their book: ‘Thinking in time: the uses of history for decision makers’. This includes detailed analysis of tapes of Whitehouse discussions around, for example, the Cuban missile crisis. They argue that problems arises when analogies are used in an unthinking fashion. They highlight the problem of ‘fuzzy analogies’ where there is a failure to think about presumptions, ‘stereotyped suppositions about persons or organisations’ and little or no effort to see choices as part of any historical sequence (Neustadt and May, 1988: 33). Analogies can, they argue, predispose people to ‘come to conclusions with the minimum of analysis’. They suggest that we need to use history more reflectively. Neustadt and May advise systematically separating the ‘known’, from ‘unclear’ from ‘presumed’ and routinely
analysing historical events for their likeness and difference from now (Neustadt and May, 1988: 40). Many analogies, they conclude should be better used as warning lights to alert us to a potential problem, rather than a beacon by which we set an unswerving course (Neustadt and May, 1988: 56).

It is instructive to apply this advice to the use of Cleveland as a template - or arguably a 'fuzzy' or at least 'limited' analogy informed by 'stereotyped suppositions about persons or organisations' (such as 'families' or social workers). There appears to be a consensus that Cleveland was badly handled and that it should 'never happen again'. But what is 'it' which should not be repeated? Here the consensus breaks down. For example, is 'it' simply children being taken from their parents and/or is 'it' some children being returned to abusive situations? Is 'it' social work malpractice or police non-co-operation? There also appears to be a consensus that we should 'learn the lessons' of Cleveland. But this again begs the question: what are the 'lessons'? Are they about social work intervention or political intervention; childcare professionals or media reporting or do they reflect intractable dilemmas for child protection? Those questions are rarely asked. Instead the meaning of 'Cleveland' is described frequently as 'blatantly obvious' and its similarity to Orkney is seen as 'inevitable'.

Both journalists and 'ordinary people' talking about sexual abuse often made remarks such as 'look at Cleveland'. But this phrase was not a genuine invitation to examine the case. Rather it was a rhetorical full stop. 'Look at Cleveland' was a statement made in the sure assumption that everyone in the group would recall the events similarly and that what we 'saw' was self-evident. Such assumptions often proved to be justified, and dissenting voices were rarely heard on this particular issue.
This was in sharp contrast to the nature of focus groups discussion of other questions around sexual abuse and, indeed, my experience of researching other topics or taking part in other group discussions. While writing this chapter I’ve heard two similar forms of rhetoric used in conversation. In a discussion of Saddam Hussein one person remarked ‘we know what happens when you appease dictators’. In the second incident, a conversation about the Scottish Parliament, the comment was: ‘look what happens when you have a woman Prime Minister’. Both remarks started debate rather than concluding it, provoking the expression of widely differing views of the meaning and relevance of such statements.

**Challenging Templates: implications for media production**

Given the analysis above I think we should seek to encourage media reporting which seeks to develop the effective use of history. This would combine the accurate association of events with a questioning attitude towards templates.

Such reporting can and does occur, however it is rare. Given what we know about the sociology of journalism, it may be a vain wish to hope that such reporting will become standard. Studies of news content and production (e.g. Tuchman, 1978; Schlesinger, 1978; Franklin, 1997) outline some of the barriers to the development of such news coverage. Barriers include tight deadlines, established source-journalist relations, news gathering routines and ‘news values’, emphasis on ‘news of the day’ and the bias toward episodic reporting. My own work, along with that of my colleague, Paula Skidmore, has shown how these apply to child sexual abuse coverage and how such reporting is also influenced by ‘child abuse fatigue’ (Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995a) and gendered hierarchies within news organisations (Skidmore, 1998; Kitzinger, 1998).
In arguing that we should encourage innovative reflection about the past I am not arguing for gratuitous historical revisionism. Where one draws the line, and who defines this is, however, a question for debate. The reaction of Stuart Bell MP to Unspeakable Truths was to describe it as 'a sensational rehash of half-truths and supposition. It was a re-writing of history and perfectly useless exercise' (Middlesbrough Evening Gazette, 28 May 1997). By contrast his neighbouring MP, Frank Cook, stated that he was deeply shocked by some of the information revealed to him by the programme. It would, he said, not only have made a difference to his understandings of Cleveland, but might have made a difference to subsequent policy making, such as the Children's Act (speaking on Unspeakable Truths, 27 May 1997).

Whatever the judgement on this particular case study, the point is that the news media are not well adapted for re-visiting history (being concerned with the transient, 'up-to-date' news event). And, although the traditional documentary format can encourage iconoclastic approaches, this traditional strength is being eroded by current changes. Challenging received wisdom has never been the path of least resistance for programme makers. When I interviewed the producer of Unspeakable Truths, Tim Tate, he described obstacles to the programme's production at every level: from the Department of Health's decision to destroy all records relating to the Cleveland children as a group through to the difficulty of obtaining interviews with relevant professionals. Some of the key people who used to work in Cleveland were pressurised by their current employers not to talk to him. The main social worker from Cleveland, Sue Richardson, was working for the National Children's Home [NCH] in Scotland. She did co-operate with Unspeakable Truths. However, she resigned from her job because the NCH threatened that if she took part in the programme she risked sacking for gross misconduct. After the programme was in production Stuart Bell MP wrote to protest and senior management at Yorkshire Tyne Teesside Television then
vetoes the documentary, despite having already won the commission from Channel 4. The producer, Tim Tate, was only able to complete the documentary by negotiating to be released from his contract and continuing the production through his own independent company.

When I asked Tim Tate how the difficulties producing this documentary compared to previous experiences he replied:

I'm just thinking back. This is going to sound absurd, but the only comparable experience I've had was a film I made about the Chinese [...] system for political prisoners, when people became non-people and black was white and green wasn't a colour at all. That's the closest I've come [...] For the life of me I can not think what is so important that you have to protect it with this chapter of lies and evasions. (Interview with the author)

Tim Tate added that his confidence in the eventual release of the programme was supported by Channel 4's robust reputation for resisting political interference. However, so-called 'dumbing down' as well as financial constraints and changes in organisational structure may undermine such opportunities in the future. The form and content of media productions are being influenced by changes in the long-term employment and nurturing of experienced journalists (including those who have experience of investigative reporting or those who have followed events over time and have their own complex memories and source relations). This may mean that one-dimensional newspaper-speak version of event will be increasingly recycled, and converge as journalists, working to a tight schedule, rely on 'go through the cuttings' and have little time or space to re-visit history or produce in-depth investigations which might differ from mainstream opinion.
Reflections on framing

Terms such as 'frames', 'frameworks' and 'frame analysis' are used in a variety of disciplines (sociology, linguistics, psychology and fine arts). However 'framing' has been described as a somewhat 'scattered conceptualization' (Entman, 1993) used in 'a variety of disjointed and incompatible' ways (Fisher, 1997: 1). Fisher (1997) points out that the many branches of 'frame analysis' literature do not exhibit consensus over some basic questions, including; what frames are, their relationship to ideologies or how individuals and cultures make frames. Despite such problems and variations, there are common features in the way framing has been described by those interested in how the media construct reality and how people makes sense of social issues. These closely relate to the notion of 'template' discussed in this chapter, and it is for this reason that they are discussed here. The purpose of this final section then is not to provide a comprehensive review of the 'frame analysis' literature or to attempt to resolve its contradictions. Instead, I simply intend to provide a brief introduction to how 'framing' is used, particularly within media studies, and relate it to my own work.

Questions about how the media frame issues and how public perceptions are structured are fundamental to much media research and theory. The notion of the 'ideological framework' appears in Chibnall's study of crime reporting as a 'largely unconscious construction which structures perception and thought, systematically excluding certain realities and promoting and shaping others'. Frameworks are, he argues '...structures through which the subjective reality of things is fashioned and meaning is imposed on the social world' (Chibnall, 1977: 13). In Gitlin's study of reporting of the New Left frames are defined as 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse...'. 
(Gitlin, 1980: 7, original in italics). He writes of ‘tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters’ which inform the ways in which we negotiate, manage and comprehend reality (Gitlin, 1980: 6). He also explicitly links the concept to media production processes, declaring that: ‘Frames enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely: to recognise it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences’ (Gitlin, 1980: 7).

Such work builds on Goffman’s book, ‘Frame Analysis’ (1974). Goffman describes how frameworks ‘govern our appreciation of what goes on around us and enable us to differentiate between different sorts of ‘reality’ (Goffman, 1974: i), and how a framework ‘allow[s] its user to locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms’ (Goffman 1974: 21). Other authors have defined frames as: ‘semi-structured elements of discourse which people use to make sense of information they encounter’ (Fisher, 1997: 1); ‘the central idea collating the threads to form a coherent whole’ (Pan and Kosicki, 1993: 63); ‘cognitive windows’ through which stories are ‘seen’ (Pan and Kosicki, 1993: 59); or ‘maps’ helping us to navigate through a forest of multiple realities (Gamson, 1992: 117).

Frames may be located in at least four places in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture (Entman, 1993: 52). The concept of ‘framing’ has been used to explore media presentations and/or people’s discussions about political movements (Gitlin, 1980; Ashley and Olson, 1998); sexual harassment (Clair, 1993); environmental disputes (Leibler and Bendix, 1996) and nuclear power (Gamson and Modigliani, 1993). Such case studies identify particular ways in which framing is achieved, examining ‘framing devices’ such as metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989).
Frame analysis also delineates the ways in which particular issues are constructed. Work by the Glasgow University Media Group, for example explored 'inferential frameworks' in economic and industrial reporting and argued that the relation between wages and prices was presented as the key factor in explaining inflation. Wages negotiations were seen as 'threatening' and the normal working of the economic system 'are never treated as if they themselves generate serious problems. Rather the causes of economic problems are sought largely in the activities of trade unionists...' (GUMG, 1980: 112). This study concluded 'the basic inferential frames regularly used by the news producers conditioned reporting of strikes and did so in ways which were clearly skewed against the interests of the working class and organised labour...' (GUMG, 1980: 400). Other studies have identified the range of competing frames surrounding other issues in the public domain. Discussions of nuclear power, for example, involve frames such as 'Progress', 'Runaway', 'Devil's Bargain' and 'Energy independence'. Discussion of affirmative action include frames such as 'Remedial action', 'Delicate balance' and 'No preferential treatment' (Gamson, 1992).

Frame analysis can also identify frames which cross-cut different substantive topics. For example, an 'injustice frame' may be mobilised when discussing issues as diverse as affirmative action, troubled industry, Arab-Israeli conflict and nuclear power. Although such a framework may be much more likely to be applied to the first two topics, the way in which this frame relates to other frames is crucial (see Gamson, 1992). Similarly a 'confrontation frame', it is argued, might influence how the media represent protest whether that is from the New Left (Gitlin, 1980) or an 'anti-abortion' rally (Pan and Kosicki, 1993: 68). A related frame is highlighted by Iyengar who examines news coverage in terms of whether reporting is 'episodic' (depicting concrete events) or 'thematic' (presenting collective or general evidence). He argues that episodic framing (the most
common form of news framing) diverts attention from societal responsibility and 'effectively insulates incumbent officials from any rising tide of disenchantment over the state of public affairs' (Iyengar, 1991: 137).

Reflections on templates and the use of 'Cleveland' in discussions of child sexual abuse

The analysis presented in this chapter can be usefully related to the framing literature. Certainly the concept of 'templates' I developed around the Cleveland analogy is closely related to framing. I have argued that media templates serve as 'rhetorical shorthand helping journalists and audiences to interpret fresh news stories' and help to shape the ways in which people 'make sense' of the world. I have shown how Cleveland came to seem a 'natural' or 'inevitable' analogy and explored the way in which it shaped perceptions, helping to select and emphasise some aspects of events and obscure others.

The use of Cleveland by journalists and by 'the public' could thus be described as a 'framing device'. Cleveland was used as an analogy in order to encourage a particular understanding of Orkney and to promote the frame: 'innocent families torn apart (yet again)' through the 'persistent incompetence' of social workers. As a 'framing device' such an analogy lies somewhere between the metaphor and the 'exemplars' suggested as 'condensing symbols' by Gamson and Modigliani (1989: 3).

However, simply to present the Cleveland analogy as just another 'framing device' would fail to distinguish the particular status and influence of this event (as distinct from any other analogy) and its predominant link with a specific substantive frame. Any analogy can serve as a framing device. There were plenty of one-off examples in the focus groups (e.g. island life is 'like Lords of the Flies', see p 183). However, Cleveland was more than
just another analogy. It was the dominant analogy for Orkney and a key reference point in thinking about the whole issue of sexual abuse (which ran through journalists' thinking, the media content, and people's conversations). It also had one particular dominant meaning which meant, in effect, that it carried with it an entire frame which closely circumscribed perceptions of the new cases to which it was related. Where a 'frame' may provide a 'map' (Gamson, 1992) or 'window' (Pan and Kosicki, 1993) which can show different paths and perspectives, the template event implies a more rigid and precisely outlined perspective (which both operates within, and contributes to, a specific substantive frame). Rather than seeing 'templates' in terms of 'maps' or 'windows', the more appropriate metaphor in this case would be the 'template document' automatically summoned up each time one starts a new text file on a computer. Alternatively, to choose an even more regimented image, the template might be envisaged as the pastry-cutting shapes used to cut out gingerbread figures, or the template allowing a worker to stamp out identical metal pieces in a shipyard.

Finally, it is appropriate to reiterate and attempt further clarification of how templates might be identified. A template event is defined by its use in narrative constructions within public discourse (be that media accounts or people's discussions). An event is established as a template through two linked processes. Firstly, by successful efforts to define it as having one dominant meaning and, secondly, through the successful association of that event with other subsequent events. Cleveland fulfilled both these criteria. There was a high degree of consensus about its meaning (for example, the phrase 'Look at Cleveland' was used as a concluding and consensus comment, not an invitation to exploration). Cleveland was also repeatedly and successfully associated with Orkney in ways which influenced how people spoke about the Orkney case and attempted to explain and reconstruct it. The first criterion (the criterion of consensus) is, of course, a condition for the latter influence. An event without a high
In addition to having been successfully defined as having one dominant meaning other criteria must be met before an event can be used as a template. Any dramatic, high profile and powerfully defined event may become a template but not all such events will be used in this way. Some events may be isolated in prevailing public discourse, presented as a one-off occurrence that can not be related to any subsequent happenings. Templates then can only be identified through their operation. The method for identifying template events is essentially retrospective - examining how past events are referenced and how they are associated with new, unfolding stories.

However, educated predictions may be made to suggest such developments by paying attention to the contemporary coverage, event timing, cultural resonance, the organisation of sources, and likely future events. For example, Cleveland might have been predicted to become a template from the perspective of observers in 1987 on several counts. It attracted peak, dramatic and vitriolic coverage, it occurred very early on in the ‘discovery cycle’ of sexual abuse and it was the first high profile case of its kind. It also tapped into strong feelings about children, social workers and family life. Given the structural/ideological context of social work it was also likely that similar controversies would happen in the future. It was unlikely that social workers would never again feel compelled (and have the power) to take children into care in circumstances which seemed to go against ‘common sense’, or violate the ‘rights’ of parents. Crucially, Cleveland also put in place a report, ‘The Cleveland Inquiry Report’, against which future events might be judged. Another legacy of Cleveland was the fact that source organisations were set up (most notably PAIN).
ready to draw attention to future cases of injustice. The structural as well as rhetorical foundations were thus laid for future cases to be picked up and linked with Cleveland.

The important point here is that templates do not evolve 'naturally' out of the characteristics of events. No event is inherently of template status, or 'inevitably' associated with any other. Instead, it is crucial to consider the context in which an event is (or is likely to be) referenced and the forces (including interest groups) mobilised to promote particular sets of issue association and event analogies over others.

Conclusion

'Key events' have long been of concern to media researchers. Momentous happenings attract peak media coverage (indeed this is something of a tautology). Media analysts have tended to be media-led and studied major news stories such as wars, assassinations and disasters or examined events staged specifically for the mass media (Dayan and Katz, 1994). However, most of these studies have focused on contemporary reporting, rather than looking at retrospective references. Most also focus upon analysing media content rather than audiences. Indeed, Dayan and Katz in their book 'Media Events' declare that, due to lack of empirical evidence, their discussion of audience responses is largely based, not on research, but on 'the folklore of collective experience' (Dayan and Katz, 1994: 120). The aspect of research reported here, however, looks at retrospective referencing (in media coverage and public discussion) This highlights the operation of what I have called 'media templates'. Such templates may be seen to operate in many different areas (think of references to 'Vietnam', 'Watergate', or 'Chernobyl'). Media templates are a crucial site of media power, acting to provide 'context' for new events, serving as foci for demands for policy change and helping to shape the ways in which people 'make sense' of the world. The paradigmatic
examples and associations which surround any particular issue, can come to seem natural and inevitable. It is the task of media theorists, media practitioners, policy makers and audiences to question how such accounts are constructed and linked, and to ask how they might be different.

****

1 Some of the sentiments were expressed across both the tabloids and the broadsheets of all political persuasions. However, there were differences between papers - reporting from the Guardian was, in some respects, very different from the Daily Mail. Here, I concentrate on some of the broad common themes, but see Franklin & Parton, 1991.

2 Journalists who agreed with the dominant set of assumptions around this case and saw it as clear cut, referred to it freely. Where individual journalists dissented they tended to simply avoid referring to it. In practice, uncertainty about the meaning of Cleveland was not an opportunity to write, rather it deprived the journalist of a useful item of poignant shorthand. Most journalists who referenced Cleveland in their reporting had no professional experience in relation to Cleveland. One who did have, suggested that it had encouraged her to have a quite distinct way of seeing sexual abuse controversies. Far from serving as a template of 'yet another social work cock-up' she told me it had made her see 'the powerful interests which make sure children are not protected' and helped her to understand other 'backlashes' such as the promotion of the concept of false memory syndrome. (Broadsheet journalist, interview with author)

3 There are, however, other people who would not easily recall the Cleveland case. While writing this chapter I e-mailed a relative asking him to take five minutes to note down his memories. His reply is reproduced below: 'Cleveland case: that won't take five minutes. My first thought was this was in the Orkneys, where some child abuse accusations were made but later had to be withdrawn. Social workers can't win I suppose. But then realised Cleveland is somewhere in the north of the southern promontory of Scotland. It was probably something similar. Sorry - but I suppose I'm a typical reader of the Financial Times, in which such matters do not figure.'
4 The case in which the father committed suicide involved a two year old being taken to casualty with convulsions and bleeding from the anus. It does not fit into the context in which these research participants raised it (e.g. testing 'for any reason' or with their earlier assumption that fathers and mothers were united against the social workers). Indeed, this child's mother tried to challenge media representation of her family's situation and commented: 'I don't agree with people trying to get rid of Dr Higgs, because other people won't speak out, and the same thing will happen to other people as happened to my daughters' (Campbell, 1997: 183).

5 The image of the examination as itself abusive was promoted by police surgeons who opposed Higgs and Wyatt. In her evidence to the inquiry one police surgeon made a widely reported statement that the Cleveland paediatricians were guilty of 'outrageous sexual abuse' and that screaming infants had been held down to be examined. After being challenged by the judge in charge of the Inquiry and by the Official Solicitor representing the children she withdrew the allegation. Her original accusation had been headlined by the press but 'her reluctant retraction was reported in only one paragraph at the bottom of one report in the Guardian' (Campbell, 1997: 58).

6 In the absence of other images of social work intervention, such coverage leaves many people with the assumption that children suspected of being victimised would immediately be removed from the home. This accords with the image presented by the bulk of media coverage, but does not accord with usual practice (this would only happen in about 3% of cases (Gibbons et al, cited in Parton 1995).

7 It is not only the presence of certain associations that may be important, but also the absence of other potential parallels. Lewis makes this point in his analysis of the coverage of the Gulf War and the survey he and colleagues conducted into public attitudes. He argues that public acceptance of the war was partly made possible by 'the conspicuous absence of a paradigmatic reference system in which Saddam Hussein and the invasion of Kuwait become merely items on a list of despotic leaders (such as Pol Pot, Mobutu, Suharto, Pinochet, and, of course, Saddam Hussein) and foreign occupations (Namibia, Cyprus, East Timor, Tibet, ...), either recently or currently tolerated or encouraged by the West.' He comments that 'The presence of these references would have diminished the popular sense of moral consistency and resolve, a sense that was a key part of the 'pro-war' discourse in popular consciousness.' (Lewis 1997: 95)

9 This theme of 'damned if they do/ damned if they don't' was also often recognised, at least in passing, in news reports. One of the News at Ten reports about Orkney, for example, unable to obtain comment from social
workers inserted the statement: 'The social workers involved would not comment'. Many before them have been condemned for not acting fast enough when children have been suspected of being victims of abuse. (ITV News at Ten, 5 March 1991) Even the News of the World was careful, at times, not to condemn the entire profession. After the Orkney children were returned they printed a cartoon of a burly man in a kilt 'caber-throwing' a social worker with the caption 'My favourite event...tossing the social worker'. This was alongside an editorial headed 'Don't blame them all'. The paper reassured readers: 'They are not ALL lentil-eating left-wingers'. (News of the World 7 April 1991)

It is also related to the concept of 'precipitating events' which appears in Golding and Middleton's study Images of Welfare (1982). They point to how particularly high profile events may generate ongoing interest in a topic. They discuss the trial of one individual, Deevy, for obtaining supplementary benefits by deception. This was, they say, 'the case that launched a thousand clippings' (Golding and Middleton, 1982: 60). It 'opened the floodgates' for a focus on exploitation of welfare and then for an attack on the very apparatus and philosophy of the welfare state:

After Deevy, the label and prejudices created by the case began to embrace more routine reporting of criminal proceedings. 'This is a common observation in media analysis. An event precipitates concern about a new, usually threatening phenomenon, and subsequent quite disparate events are sought, recognised and portrayed in line with the expectations aroused by this signal events. (Golding and Middleton, 1982: 77)

Indeed, 'a precipitating event sensitises the media so that the surveillance procedures and journalistic categories are sharpened to capture similar subsequent events and give them considerable prominence' (Golding and Middleton, 1992: 60). Golding and Middleton relate their research findings about 'precipitating events' to previous work by Chibnall and by Hall and his colleagues:

Chibnall locates such an event in the shooting of three policemen in Shepherd's Bush in London in August 1976. The consequent concern with the increase in criminal violence in British society, and more generally what Chibnall calls 'The Violent Society theme', gave a cultural homogeneity to news coverage of a range of subsequent events linking the Krays with football hooliganism, student protest, teenage violence and political activism (Chibnall, 1977: 84-8). Hall and his colleagues have described a similar sequence, setting the career of the label 'mugging'... (Golding and Middleton, 1982: 60)

There are some commonalities between my data on the position of Cleveland in discussions of child sexual abuse and Comer, Richardson and Fenton's discussion of events referenced in discussions of nuclear
power. They point out that 'single, potent, catastrophic incidents' such as the Windscale fire, Three-Mile Island and Chernobyl 'cannot be ignored either by protagonists or by antagonists of nuclear power'. However, 'they can be read in different ways, their relevance disputed, and they can be played "up" or "down"'. (Corner et al 1990: 42) Thus a video promoting nuclear energy emphasises the difference between current British technology and the technologies involved in the Chernobyl disaster. By contrast, a programme taking the opposite position, dramatically reconstructing a Chernobyl-type incident set in Britain, using actual news footage from Chernobyl to set the scene. References to Chernobyl also recur in extracts from the focus group discussions. For example one research participant parodies attempts to characterise Chernobyl as an irrelevant analogy by making the exaggerated satirical statement 'the laws of physics are different in Russia' (Corner et al, 1990: 59). Corner et al describe Chernobyl as a 'key datum point' and also point to other 'datum points' in popular memory which can be 'introduced to inflect the argument as required'. For example, the pro-nuclear video referenced the 1985 British miners' strike to show importance of nuclear capacity (Corner et al, 1990: 42). Cleveland resembles Chernobyl in being a reference point that cannot be ignored. However, unlike the notion of 'datum points', the idea of a 'template' suggests that the analogy is a dominant analogy, that the meaning of the event is largely fixed (rather than being 'read in different ways') and that the event carries with it one particular dominant frame.

Feminist theory, for example, may link the 'Montreal Massacre' of women engineering students to other forms of violence against women. But this is not part of the dominant frame for understanding this event and efforts to assert this link have not been generally successful. Similarly, Gamson and Modigliani point out how events may only be picked up by the media as crucial (and, I would argue, as therefore offering potential to become templates) in particular times, with particular frames. One measure of the dominance of the 'Progress package' during the 1960s, for example, was the lack of attention paid to a serious nuclear accident at the Fermic reactor outside Detroit in the fall of 1966 (Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 14).
Chapter 4

Introducing the Orkney crisis: a key event

The next three chapters take a detailed look at the Orkney cases. If Cleveland was demonstrably a retrospective template, Orkney seemed to have potential for developing such status. In the following section I examine how research participants recalled and reconstructed this case.

Before discussing audience understandings it is first necessary to outline media coverage of the Orkney case. This will contextualise the more detailed discussion in subsequent sections. In this chapter I also provide an overview of how research participants respond to the script-writing exercise and give examples of the type of scripts they produced.

Orkney in the news - an outline of the case
The Orkney case hit the headlines at the beginning of March 1991 after nine children from four different families were taken into care following accusations of sexual abuse involving 'ritualistic elements'. This intervention was followed by a series of legal battles (in the civil courts) between parents and social services over the children’s fate. In early April a Sheriff ruled that the social services’ actions had been ‘fundamentally’ or ‘fatally flawed’ and the children were immediately sent home. Social services successfully appealed against this ruling. However, the case was not pursued. An official Inquiry (chaired by Lord Clyde) was set up to
examine the intervention process, this reported in October the following year (Clyde, 1992).

The Orkney case was front page news for the whole of March and April 1991 as well as reappearing intermittently throughout the year (e.g. re-emerging in the autumn at the opening of the Clyde Inquiry). I located 60 national UK and Scottish news bulletins in 1991 which covered Orkney (45 of which included outside broadcasts from Orkney itself), and made up over a quarter of all national UK press coverage of child sexual abuse. The intensity of the coverage is indicated by the fact that over two-thirds of the press attention and half of the TV news items about Orkney occurred in these first two months of the crisis, March/April of 1991.

From the start, media attention focused on the 'dawn raids' during which the children were uplifted. Television reports included vox-pop interviews with members of the Orkney community, angry about the way in which the children had been 'snatched', and harrowing interviews with the parents about their own and their children’s distress. Similar material appeared in the press. Subsequent 'news events' during the main six weeks of the crisis were provided by the legal wrangles between the parents and social services, the petition for a judicial review, and the children’s return to their parents. The latter event was followed 'live' by national, and international media, and was accompanied by retrospective analysis and interviews with the reunited families.

Media attention was deliberately sought by parents in Orkney. Social services, on the other hand, generally tried to avoid such scrutiny. Throughout the reporting there was severe criticism of social workers’ actions. The parents were portrayed as normal and loving, the social workers as cold and unfeeling, over-zealous and incompetent. Source organisations on both sides of the controversy saw the media as having acted in support of the parents (see Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995b). This
was explicitly acknowledged by one mother, in the euphoria of having her children back:

Mother: Oh brilliant, brilliant, just thanks, everybody. Thanks press, thank you community, wonderful to have the children home. (ITV, News at Ten, 4 April 1991)

Examples of the opening lines of news bulletins are shown in Fig. 5. Examples of headlines from press reports are shown in Fig. 6.
2 March 1991: Parents in the Orkney islands have demanded the immediate return of 9 children taken into care after allegations of ritual sex abuse. The call came after a public meeting to discuss mounting concern about the way the island’s Social Work Department has handled the case. (BBC1, Nine o’Clock News)

5 March 1991: The parents of 9 children allegedly involved in ritual sex orgies in South Ronaldsay, Orkney were formally told today why the children had been taken into protective custody on the mainland. Place of Safety Orders were upheld and extended for a further 21 days in each case at a children’s panel meeting. (ITV, News at Ten)

7 March 1991: The parents of 9 children taken into care over allegations of ritual abuse on the Orkney Islands today lost an appeal to have them returned. (BBC1, Nine o’Clock News)

12 March 1991: The parents of the Orkney children [...] have told of the moment social workers took them away. In their first television interview they say the children weren’t allowed to take any of their clothes or toys with them. (ITV, News at Ten)

15 March 1991: On Orkney, 4 families whose children have been taken away amid suspicion of ritual child abuse, warn of a strange kind of madness that has led to the allegations against them. The Director of Social Services justifies his actions. (BBC2, Newsnight)

3 April 1991: A court at Kirkwall in the Orkney islands has begun hearing evidence into the alleged ritual sex abuse of 9 children. (ITV, Lunchtime News)

4 April 1991: The headlines at 6 o’Clock - the Orkney child abuse case has been dismissed. 9 children held in care for 5 weeks will be back with their parents tonight. The Sheriff said the case was fundamentally flawed. (BBC1, Six o’Clock News)

5 April 1991: Parents of some of the 9 Orkney children who were placed in care following allegations of ritual abuse say that their sons and daughters are confused and withdrawn and will need support to get over their ordeal. Ken Rees has visited one family who are getting used to being together again. (ITV, Early Evening News)

19 April 1991: There’s to be a full judicial enquiry into the ritual child sex abuse case in Orkney. (BBC1, One o’Clock News)
Fig. 6: Examples of newspaper headlines March/April 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 March</td>
<td>Satan Inquiry children held in dawn raids</td>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 March</td>
<td>Abuse probe parents prepare for fight</td>
<td>Daily Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 March</td>
<td>Orkney uproar after ‘child sex abuse’</td>
<td>Independent on Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 March</td>
<td>Island families living in fear of knock on the door</td>
<td>Glasgow Herald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 March</td>
<td>Island child care raid defended</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 March</td>
<td>Cracking up! Isle of fear parents feel the strain</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 March</td>
<td>‘It’s a Salem witch-hunt’ sobs kid-sex probe mum</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 March</td>
<td>Anger and concern on Orkney</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 March</td>
<td>Orkney appeal fails to lift care order</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 March</td>
<td>How the world’s press pack descended on Orkney</td>
<td>Scotsman</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 March</td>
<td>‘Devil isle’ mums vow to fight on</td>
<td>News of the World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March</td>
<td>Islanders trapped in a nightmare</td>
<td>Scotland on Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March</td>
<td>Rules that were ignored in Orkney</td>
<td>Sunday Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 March</td>
<td>Island sex-probe kids not abused claims Doc</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March</td>
<td>Orkney children’s GP not consulted</td>
<td>Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 March</td>
<td>Ruling ‘in days’ on Orkney child abuse charges</td>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 March</td>
<td>2,000 sign Orkney protest</td>
<td>Sun</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 March</td>
<td>Court move to shift Orkney hearing south</td>
<td>Scotsman</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 March</td>
<td>End the agony!</td>
<td>Daily Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 March</td>
<td>Sex abuse charges came from children</td>
<td>Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 March</td>
<td>Orkney abuse case ‘near collapse’</td>
<td>Mail on Sunday</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 March</td>
<td>Orkney orders extended</td>
<td>Independent</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 March</td>
<td>Parents trapped in limbo of hope and fear</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 March</td>
<td>Judges decide to split Orkney abuse hearings</td>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 March</td>
<td>Orkney parents to appeal over care orders</td>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 March</td>
<td>Plea for MP to give ‘sex isle’ children Easter hug</td>
<td>Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 March</td>
<td>‘Satan’ case doctors rule out abuse</td>
<td>Mail on Sunday</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 6 cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 April</td>
<td>Kirk attacks child abuse care workers</td>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 April</td>
<td>Orkney care team ‘doing their duty’</td>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 April</td>
<td>Anger at plan to ‘ease strain’ on Orkney social workers</td>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 April</td>
<td>Private hearing in Orkney abuse case starts today</td>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>Orkney children home as abuse cases collapse</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>Home for a hug!</td>
<td>Daily Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>Abuse case children fly home</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>Home from a nightmare</td>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>They left here unharmed, they’re coming home abused</td>
<td>Daily Mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>Damning attack on handling of case</td>
<td>Scotsman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>It was all a lie!</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 April</td>
<td>They taught me how to nick cars, mum</td>
<td>Daily Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 April</td>
<td>‘Why did they keep putting words in my mouth?’</td>
<td>Scotsman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 April</td>
<td>Sack them</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 April</td>
<td>Hip hooray, I’m going home today sang a little boy</td>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 April</td>
<td>Tears of rage as the horror is relived</td>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 April</td>
<td>Orkney Inquiry call</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
People's memories of Orkney: introducing the audience data

The Orkney case was a major landmark in people's thinking about child sexual abuse. The focus groups were conducted between April 1993 and December 1994, a minimum of two years after the peak coverage. However, Orkney was spontaneously mentioned in most groups during open-ended discussion about sexual abuse. In fact, when invited to note down a headline about child sexual abuse on their questionnaires at the start of the session, 18% of the headlines explicitly identified Orkney. These included headlines such as 'Orkney dawn swoop by social workers' (Group 7); 'Social workers to blame for Orkney child abuse fiasco' (Group 9); 'Orkney scandal' (Group 9); 'Judge slams social workers in Orkney' (Group 16); 'Social workers to blame for Orkney "farce".' (Group 8)

However, at the same time, people often stated they remembered very little beyond such headlines. When they were then given the set of pictures taken from the coverage of the case and asked to reconstruct a bulletin, most expressed some nervousness about the task. Indeed, in a few groups, it was impossible to cajole them into completing the task and they simply talked around each photograph. (For example, Group 26 and 27, both drawn from social groups for retired people, did not write scripts, preferring to engage in open discussion around the pictures). Many people's initial reaction was that the task would be difficult if not impossible: 'I can't remember. I read it too, but it goes right out of your mind.' (Group 11, f)

Even if they were initially confident, some research participants subsequently became increasingly aware of what they had forgotten, or perhaps misunderstood, as they attempted to work with the pictures and compared notes with one another. They often commented, during the course of the exercise that they were beginning to realise how confused, or vague, they were on some points. Attempting to complete this exercise was sometimes accompanied by frustration and cries such as: 'Brain,
where are you?' (Group 9, f) and 'I think I've got pre-senile dementia!' (Group 15, f). Asked about their experience of the exercise, people made comments such as:

f: It actually reveals how little any of us can remember about the details of the case.

f: I was shocked by how little I can remember about the case at all.

f: My memory is quite confused. (Group 5)

Certainly, the groups' discussions and their news bulletins showed that a great deal of information about Orkney was not understood or recalled (if it was ever taken in at all). People often could not say from where the allegations had originated and did not know how many children had been taken into care. Most could not remember that the local Reverend had been named as the alleged ringleader. Very few of the research participants knew that social services had won an appeal against the children's return home\(^3\) and little was recalled about evidence presented at the subsequent Inquiry. These were all facts which were reported, at least once, on national news and received, at least some, press attention. However, they were rarely recalled unless people had some specialist interest or source of knowledge about the case. Even some reiterated media statements which my content analysis suggested might be important were not remembered. For example, Sheriff Kelbie's statement that social work actions in taking the children into care were 'fatally' or 'fundamentally flawed' was widely reported and made headlines. However, in only one group was a phrase anything like this recalled (and that was only after prompting from me in response to an inaudible comment). (See Appendix 6 for further discussion).

Confronting their lack of knowledge or confusion sometimes led research participants to their own conclusions about what this indicated about any
potential media impact: 'I can't remember a thing, I don't think I really take it in'; 'News just doesn't affect me, I never remember anything' and:

I found it was like really confusing. I don't think you could be left with an impact because there didn't seem to be any reason to anything, from what I remember of it. (Group 22, f)

Such views certainly accord with some theorists, who interpret audience confusion or lack of recall as evidence of weak media influence. Nordenstreng (1972), for example, argues that watching the news is a mere ritual with 'no effect' because, although 80% of his sample watched the news daily, very little specific information was recalled the next day (cited in Morley, 1992, 79). Other studies argue that people forget or misunderstand so many aspects of news reports that the impact of, for example, TV news, is short-lived and relatively insignificant. (See debate and criticism presented in Miller, 1994: 260-266)

However, this model fails to examine four important factors. Firstly, it ignores the fact that source strategies and news production processes do not just create neat information packages. Media reports contain contradictory and competing 'facts'. In any case, information per se may be the least important part of the message anyone is trying to convey.

Secondly, a model or method which focuses on recall of pre-defined 'pertinent' information ignores the selective process where by certain facts are highlighted and others played down. It fails to examine how patterns in forgetting and remembering might occur. It also ignores the fact that documenting what people forget or fail to take in may be as important as examining what they clearly recall.

Thirdly, simplistic information-processing models which simply 'test' people's memories of particular news items ignore the cumulative effect of
reiterated media accounts (see also Philo, 1990, Curran 1990: 152). People may recall little about one individual report but a high-profile case which receives repeated coverage may make a deep impression. In addition, common themes which run through a variety of stories may infiltrate public assumptions (e.g. reiterated themes such as that Africa is a place of tribal warfare and famine, or Northern Ireland a place of irrational conflict, see Husband, 1975; Van der Gaag and Nash, 1987; Kitzinger and Miller, 1992; Miller, 1994).

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, straightforward information-processing models neglect the multi-level dimensions of any media report. People may forget 'the facts' but may still feel that they 'know' about the story through recalling fragments of information combined with certain phrases, themes, images, emotions, associations and narrative structures.

Here it should be noted that while my research participants often remarked on how much they had forgotten about the Orkney case, they were often also struck by how much they recalled about certain aspects of the case:

- Some of it did stick in your mind, but not everything. (Group 31, f)
- It's funny isn't it, how much you can remember about it, how upsetting it was. (Group 7, f)

Indeed, they were sometimes quite startled by how much they could recall:

- It's amazing how it sticks in your head. (Group 1, f)
- You know more than you think you know. (Group 10, f)
In this sense people often felt they 'knew' more than they realised. As one commented on their news report: 'It wasn't detailed enough, but basically we know that's what happened'. (Group 24, m)

Such observations were backed up by the scripts these groups produced. In spite of lacking knowledge about much, arguably crucial, information, research participants' scripts often bore striking resemblance to actual news reporting, in certain respects. People were able to reconstruct particular phrases, facts, themes, and explanatory structures. Their news bulletins and the surrounding discussion revealed systematic patterns in their knowledge or understandings of the Orkney case. People not only recalled the strong similarities to the Cleveland case (see previous chapter) but they also vividly recalled the dawn raids, and they remembered media portrayals of the island as a haven of peace and the outraged reaction of the local community on the parents' behalf. A selection of the full scripts is reproduced in figure 7.

The next two chapters explore two examples of the patterns in audience scripts in more detail and examine what they might indicate about the potential and limits of media influence. They explore the role of the media, in interaction with other influences, in helping to construct and support certain ways of remembering, defining and interpreting the Orkney case. The first chapter introduces the notion of 'branding' (the basic 'definition' of the story). The subsequent chapter focuses on how an event is 'located' (the way in which a happening is contextualised socially and geographically).
Fig. 7: Examples of news scripts written by audience groups

The scripts below indicate some of the range of scripts produced by diverse audience groups. The first script is the most schematic and basic of all those produced. Most were more elaborate, as indicated by nos. 2-7 (the third of which was produced by trainee journalists and in which members of the group took on different roles of reporter and interviewees).

**Script no. 1:** Judge signs protection order. Orkney kids snatched in dawn raids. Parents suffer in quiet aftermath. Neighbour tells of families' ordeal. Reverend denies satanic abuse. Parents' joy at being reunited with kids. Calls for Paul Lee's resignation. Parents stand firm in the fight for Inquiry. (Group 28, members of unemployed workers' centre, in their 20s and 30s, Inverness)

**Script no. 2:** This is News at Six, I'm Sue Lawley reporting. We're going to have a live satellite link with the Orkneys and the major news item this evening on the alleged Orkney child sex abuse case. Mr Paul Lee, Orkney Social Work Department spoke defending his decision to take children away from their parents. The Rev Morris McKenzie strongly stated his defence of parents saying it was an unthinkable accusation. Jeannie Blaggs, friend of the parents said the whole affair was an utter disgrace and the Head of Social Services should resign. Could you add to your earlier statement please, Mrs Blaggs: 'We have all lived together for many years on the island and the families all know each other well and we have seen the children grow up and it is beyond our belief that such a thing could be true and we feel that the Head of Social Services should resign.' The following picture from our reporter shows the scene where life carries on for the children whilst flanked by social worker on the one hand and their foster mother on the other. Judge X, in sombre thought, reflecting on his judgement in allowing the children to be taken into care in a safety order. The following picture shows families reunited with their children, reflecting on the past few weeks, contemplating life back in this close-knit and remote community. (Group 38, Neighbours, in their 30s and 40s, London)
Script no. 3: m: The children at the centre of the ritual abuse case in Orkney were today reunited with their parents. In an emotional scene at Orkney airport this morning the three children came home after three months separation from their families, following allegations of sexual abuse. Following the collapse of the case, Mr Paul Lee, head of Orkney Social Services denied suggestions that his department had acted in a heavy-handed manner.

f: [speaking as head of Social Services]: We acted entirely properly on the information we received. Our main concern was the children's safety and at the time we felt it was the only appropriate course of action to take.

m: But friends of the family now feel they have been proved right. Mrs Jeannie Bloggs (sic), next door neighbour, said:

f: We never believed, and we are very glad to hear that this whole terrible incident has come to an end. I think social services have got a lot to answer for. [...]  
m: [speaking as the Reverend] I still stand by my accusations, rant, rant. (f: [aside] He blew the whistle. Said there was ritual abuse going on, that's what we reckon).

f: And now the background: It was three months ago in a sleeping village, sleepy seaside town, in Orkney that dawn raids took 18 children from their homes without even allowing them to take their teddy bears with them. Following an extensive investigation during which the children were taken to sites where some had said the abuse had taken place, all of the accusations were found to be unfounded and some of which appeared to be out of a video that some of the children had been watching. And a public enquiry into the actions of social services and the police has been held by Lord Thingy Whatsit in his wig. (Group 23, trainee journalists in their 20s and 30s, Wales)

Script no 4: This is the quiet town of Stromness in Orkney where rumours have broken out about sex abuse, about child sex abuse rituals. The man at the centre of the controversy, Reverend Morris McKenzie, denies any claims to involvement in the case, as do friends of the parents involved who complained bitterly about the allegations they claim are false. However, during the dawn raids mounted by the Social Work Department the children were roused from their sleep in the middle of the night and dragged from their homes and families. The allegations began after a tip-off given to the police that the children were being abused in this derelict quarry. Then in Edinburgh High Court, there followed a strenuous legal case with social workers denying that they were being too impressive on the children. When the dust settled, the children were happily reunited with their 11 parents and all claims of sex abuse were dismissed. (Group 21, School students, 16-17 years old, Inverness)
Script no. 5: [Main speaker]: This is the tranquil fishing village of Strathblair in the Orkney Islands which is a tranquil close-knit community which has been savagely shaken by the taking away of 2 children from one of the village’s most well-respected families. The kids today have been reunited with their happy family and they’re trying to get back to a normal family life. [...] Paul Lee from Orkney Social Work Department [...] reported that [...] the children came in with bruises and fantasies that they had been subjected to abuse. Paul Lee apologised for the whole of the Orkney Social Work Department last night and said he hoped that this sort of thing would not happen again. Last night a friend of the family was interviewed: [Second speaker]: "I supported Kate and John all the way as have many of their other friends. It’s just preposterous that this evidence could have been built up against them because they’ve always been very caring parents and doted on their children and we’re immensely pleased that the decision was reversed'. The judge, that released the children back to their parents was interviewed as well: 'Well we decided to reverse the decision after looking at all the evidence and we’re going to have a full enquiry'. Reverend Morris McKenzie [Third speaker]: 'It’s devastated the whole place. The town is really shaken that people can come from the mainland and interfere with people’s lives, its disgraceful. With God’s help the community will pull together and get through it. Further measures need to be taken so innocent families such as Mr and Mrs won't have to go through this again'. [Main speaker]: As the village tries to settle back into normal life, they were today confronted with another disaster, which was oil spilled all on to their beach and here’s a picture of them all looking at the barrel. (Group 14, Friendship group, 19 - 20 years old, London)

Script no. 6: Today sees the conclusion to the child sex abuse allegations in the once peaceful island of Orkney, allegations of systematic satanic ritual child abuse. Reverend Morris McKenzie expressed the community’s shock and horror about the allegations made by the Social Work Department. Children were taken into care by social workers during large scale dawn raids [...] Angered and distraught parents and community members gathered outside the Social Work Department in one of a succession of demonstrations in protest against the actions of the Social Work Department in Orkney. A friend of the parents [...] expressed the disbelief of the break-up of the stable happy families and demanded a general public Inquiry. Paul Lee defended the initial decision to remove the children [...] stressing that correct procedures were adhered to. Despite the social work’s defensive position, a public Inquiry did lead to the happy reunion of the Orkney children with their parents. While the Inquiry continues, the people of Orkney will attempt to put this trauma behind them and rebuild their lives. (Group 2, students, early 20s, Glasgow)
Script no. 7:
Good evening and welcome to the 8.30 news. During a dawn raid on the island of Orkney off the Scottish mainland, children were snatched from their beds by police and social workers in what appears to be a complex and bizarre story of child sexual abuse. In the light of allegations of children in care from the island an investigation was set up. Several of these children claimed that there was ritual sex abuse taking place on the island under a cloak of satanic worship. The head of this group would appear to be the local minister, known to the children as 'the master'. Dressed in a long black hooded cloak with a shepherd crook, during these meetings a child would be selected and sexually abused by one of the group. Afterwards any evidence of abuse was burned. On trying to establish the truth of these allegations the children were encouraged to reveal to social workers thought the use of dolls whether abuse actually took place. Speaking to Jeannie Blaggs, from Friends of Parents, an action group set up in defence of the parents, who contested that abuse had not taken place and was all the product of a fertile imagination. She urged the authorities to return the children to their families and criticised the Orkney Social Work Department for their mishandling of the case. The parents felt that the way in which the children were unjustifiably taken from their beds, causing needless distress, and called for the resignation of Paul Lee, Orkney Social Work Department. Following public outcry and no charges being brought an Inquiry was set up, headed by Lord so and so, which made recommendations that future cases of child abuse should be handled with more compassion for the children. It was very critical of the department's handling of this matter. Public feeling was that the Inquiry failed to reach any conclusions. After months of separation the children were finally reunited with their families. (Group 9, Neighbours, 30s - 40s, Glasgow)
This involved 445 individual news articles, editorials, letters and features. The Orkney case also attracted considerable attention in the Scottish press. During March and April 1991 there were 230 items in just four daily newspapers: (Glasgow Herald; Evening Times; Daily Record; Scotsman), and two Scottish Sunday newspapers (Scotland on Sunday, Sunday Scot).

2 This is partly influenced by the fact that most of the focus groups were conducted in Scotland. Scottish respondents were more than twice as likely to spontaneously mention the Orkney case when invited to write a newspaper headline about child sexual abuse. English respondents were more likely to mention Cleveland. This is partly a result of access to local/regional media coverage but is also connected to perceived significance. People tended to pay more attention to cases in their area.

3 Only a handful of research participants knew that social services had won an appeal against the ruling which returned the children to their parents. This successful appeal ruled that the actions in sending the children home had been unlawful and that social services were entitled to pursue the case to a proof hearing (although they decided not to proceed). Most of the research participants had no knowledge of this, even though it was widely covered in both the lunchtime and evening news the following day: (BBC1, One o'Clock News, 12 June 1991; BBC1, One o'Clock News, 12 June 1991; BBC1, Six o'Clock News, 12 June 1991; ITV, Lunchtime News, 12 June 1991; ITV, Early Evening News, 12 June 1991; Channel 4, Channel 4 News, 12 June 1991; ITV, News at Ten, 12 June 1991). The lack of recall of such events is, I argue, partly due to the fact that this does not 'fit' with the main logic and narrative of the Orkney story.
Chapter 5

Story branding: 'the dawn raids case'

Media coverage of the 'dawn raids'
The focus of the Orkney coverage was on the accusations of social work malpractice rather than the accusations of abuse. Concern was concentrated, in particular, on the way in which the children had been taken from their homes. The children were taken without warning, in a series of co-ordinated actions across the island. The parents were given very little information and the children were not allowed to take anything with them. These interventions were quickly dubbed the 'dawn raids'. One of the very first TV news reports of events in Orkney included comments about those raids from neighbours and a local doctor who was to become a key campaigner for the children's return:

Neighbour: It was despicable, can you imagine being taken out of their beds, told to get dressed, couldn't even say goodbye to their parents properly [...].
Dr Helen Martini: I happen to be a doctor, I also happen to be a human. I don't think you have to be a doctor to express what effect this is going to have on the children being kept away. (ITV, News at Ten, 5 March 1991)

Within the first fortnight of the crisis the parents themselves began to appear on television and be photographed in the press (backs to camera to protect the identity of their children). Even while the children were still in...
care, Channel 4, ITV and BBC2’s Newsnight all had main stories devoted to the dawn raids:

The parents of the Orkney children [...] have told of the moment social workers took them away. In their first television interview they say the children weren’t allowed to take any of their clothes or toys with them. (ITV, News at Ten, 12 March 1991)

Plus the latest case of alleged child abuse, we report from the Orkneys on how social workers and police came by plane to take children away from their families. The families tell us of their horror at the dawn swoop, the authorities tell us they’ve acted correctly throughout. (Channel 4, Channel 4 News, 12 March 1991)

On Orkney, four families whose children have been taken away amid suspicion of ritual child abuse, warn of a strange kind of madness that has led to the allegations against them. The Director of Social Services justifies his actions. (BBC2, Newsnight, 15 March 1991)

In these, and subsequent reports, audiences were presented with harrowing accounts from the parents about the way in which their children had been taken:

Father: Well, we were asleep in bed, it would be just almost exactly seven o’clock when there was a knock at the door. It was six policemen and four social workers. They waved Place of Safety Orders at us and pushed their way in. Boys were woken, they weren’t allowed to speak to us. We weren’t allowed to speak to them, weren’t allowed to hug them or anything. (BBC2, Newsnight, 15 March 1991)
Father: Well, the children were just dressed, they weren't allowed to eat anything or drink anything. They just were taken, just in the clothes they stood up in. [...] I asked may they take a book or a teddy bear or personal stereo, anything, absolutely not. Just the clothes they stood up in. (Channel 4, Channel 4 News, 12 March 1991)

Alongside detailing the distress caused to their children, the parents also expressed their own emotions:

Mother: When they actually came and took my children and there was not a thing I could do to protect them from what was happening. That had to be the worst moment in my life possibly. (ITV, Early Evening News, 5 April 1991)

Mother: I then went to the car and sat him in the car with his sister and said goodbye. When I came into the house [my daughter] was still locked in the bathroom frightened and the policeman handed over his walkie-talkie and said: 'Hold this a minute, we'll have to do something here'. So I know they were going to knock the door down or something to get her out and [beep], I don't remember. I think she must have opened the door but, when my husband came home, I went to get washed, the sink's leaking, she must have hung on to the sink while they dragged her out. That's a 13 year old girl. (ITV, News at Ten, 12 March 1991)

This last report intercut interviews with the parents with a statement from the Director of Social Services that everything was done in an appropriate manner. The juxtaposition was damning:

Director of Social Services, Paul Lee: I am satisfied that we did everything that we should have done in an appropriate way.
Reporter: But for one mother on the island, whose husband was away in England on the day she lost her children it wasn't like that at all. 
Mother: Dropped off by the police outside my house on my own in the dark, and they just driving off having taken and shattered my whole world, taken my children. I actually came running into the house screaming for my own mother who's been dead for 20 years. (ITV, News at Ten, 12 March 1991)

Such accounts had made an indelible impression on many of the research participants in my study. Indeed, for many people, Orkney was 'that dawn raids case'. In this chapter I demonstrate how 'dawn raids' came to be the insignia of Orkney and explore the importance of linguistic labelling, imagery, reconstructions and empathy in reinforcing this branding. I also explore how the focus on the 'dawn raids' trauma was promoted in ways which avoided considering particular dilemmas and sidelined certain 'facts' or official judgements. I argue that the 'dawn raids' branding of the Orkney story highlighted particular moments and personnel in these events while obscuring others.

Memories of the dawn raids and script reconstructions
Research participants routinely summarised their memories of the Orkney case in terms of dawn raids. Indeed, even before being asked specifically about Orkney people would often volunteer descriptions of this case in these terms. Asked what came to mind when thinking about sexual abuse people made comments such as:

There was one case where [...] it was a big headline, children been removed. [...] One of the children hadn't even been able to say cheerio to it's mother and they were taking the child out the door
and it wasn't allowed to take it's toys, I found that's the sort of thing that sticks most. (Group 11, f)

f: There was that Highland, up the Highlands,

f: Up north, the Orkneys?

f: Aye, it's horrible

f: The children getting taken off their parents [...] 

f: Going in in the middle of the night, taking the children away. 

(Group 35)

When asked what they could recall about the Orkney case it was the dawn raids which were often the first thing to be volunteered:

m: Kids getting snatched at dawn. 

f: Aye, that's right, children getting taken out their homes and social workers and their parents not knowing anything about it. (Group 28)

f: Them getting taken away from their parents. 

f: In the middle of the night out of their beds, that's horrific. 

f: I mean it's tragic for the mums and dads, I mean it must have been dreadful for them, I think it was really awful, I really do. (Group 26)

The way in which the children were taken was often identified by research participants themselves as the most memorable (and sometimes the only memorable) part of the crisis:

What I remember is just the children being removed. (Group 16, f)

I just remember what was in the papers, they were took screaming from their beds. (Group 28, m)
f: All I know is that [they] were lifted in the middle of the night...

f: swooping on the island at four in the morning, uplifting all they weans out their beds. (Group 31)

In addition, people were often able to give detailed descriptions of the events of that morning on Orkney in February 1991. They recalled the early hour at which the children were taken, the lack of information available to the parents, the fact that the children were taken off the island and that they were not allowed to take personal belongings. A group of neighbours in Glasgow, for example, shared the following memories of Orkney as they first started to talk about the case:

m: I remember the headline: ‘Dawn raids’ [...]  
f: Yes you do, yes, knocking the door down at three o’clock in the morning.

f: Social workers coming in the night and taking children away in a very sort of aggressive and firm manner.

f: They were taken off the island weren’t they?

f: They took them completely away, no contact allowed [...] 

f: That’s right and not allowing children to take their teddy bears.

(Group 38)

A similar discussion occurred among a group of factory workers in London:

m: They knocked on the door, 4 o’clock in the morning, wallop, put in a helicopter to the mainland and the parents weren’t really told [...] 

m: That’s it, they were literally dragged out the houses.

(Group 40)

Similar sentiments were echoed in a youth group in Inverness.
The parents weren't allowed to discuss the case, the children were just snatched away, at midnight.

f: Dawn raids.

f: That's it, dawn raid in Orkney.

f: They never even had a chance to examine the children or talk to the parents or nothing, they just grabbed them away.

(Group 17)

The physical 'abduction' of children from their homes on the island was often mentioned. The fact that the children had been taken to the mainland by 'helicopter' or aeroplane, seemed to underline the horror of the raids:

m: Well they took the children off the island completely didn't they, if I remember rightly, took them to the mainland didn't they?

m: Probably over-reacting again I expect. (Group 43)

Some explicitly talked about the impact this had made on them. One woman in a group of trainee journalists, for example, commented:

That [image] had quite an impact. The fact that they lived on this island and they were flown to the mainland and you had this image, that might be that child's first flight, and they were like almost being abducted. They were being abducted in fact, like a real childhood sort of horror story in a way. The idea of being removed and taken on a plane and whizzed off. (Group 23, f)

It is not surprising, given comments such as those illustrated above, that many groups included reference to the dawn raid when asked to produced a news script about Orkney. This choice was in spite of the fact that the pictures they were given did not include any scenes from the dawn raids.
(After all there had been no cameras or photographers present for that event). However, people routinely used one of the stills, the image of a woman, identified on screen as: 'Jeannie Blaggs, friend of the family' to describe the way in which the children had been snatched. They also often 'co-opted' other, less obviously relevant, pictures to illustrate the raids. For example, several groups decided that a picture of Orkney harbour (see Chapter 2, Fig. 1.7) had been taken at dawn and used this to illustrate the dawn operation. As one woman declared triumphantly as she sifted through for an appropriate picture: 'There we are, it's dawn! That is what that picture is' (a remark to which her English colleague replied tartly: 'No, that's just Scotland!') (Group 5).

Another photograph which showed two children holding hands with their parents after being reunited with them (Fig 1.5) was co-opted in a similar way. This was used by some research participants as a shot of children being taken away by social workers. The actual news bulletin which accompanied this image at the time stated: 'Orkney families reunited' and described the scene as showing 'jubilant parents'. Audience groups who used this picture as a scene of reunion used similar language to that used in the news reports, e.g. 'you can see they are jumping for joy' (Group 28). However several groups disregarded (or failed to recognise) this interpretation of the picture and used it instead to illustrate the dawn raids. This picture, they said, showed the children being snatched. As one woman declared: 'It looks as if the children are being dragged along the street doesn't it, looks as if they're going like not very freely' (Group 11).

Some groups made even more imaginative use of a third picture in the set with which they were provided. This picture showed anatomically correct dolls (the type used to facilitate interviews with children) (Fig. 1.9). Most groups recognised these dolls and used them accordingly to illustrate 'disclosure interviews'. However, this photograph was used in almost a third of the news scripts to represent toys discarded as the children were
taken away. One group held up the picture declaring: 'these discarded emblems were once the property of innocent children' (Group 18). Others presented the picture as a poignant or even metaphorical representation of the aftermath of the raids. They gave the image captions such as 'Homes, desolate since the 4 a.m. raid' (Group 32), or discussed the image in ways illustrated below:

That's obviously the empty sitting room after the children had gone. (Group 43, m)

f: [...] it's an empty house.
f: It shows how their life was destructed. (Group 26)

m: Empty lives after...
f: they've been taken away. You can picture it yourself, somebody coming in and the wean's toys and photos and his mother upset and, you know, the house is quiet. (Group 28)

The scripts which resulted from the process of working with the pictures often revealed common themes. At their most basic, many of the scripts followed the themes schematically outlined by one group in which the members wrote individual statements rather than a whole news script. This group (members of an unemployed workers centre) simply wrote a series of captions which included: 'Orkney kids snatched in dawn raids. Parents suffer in quiet aftermath. Jeannie Blaggs tells of families' ordeal' (Group 28). Most groups, however, produced more detailed scripts and, within these, similar phrases were used repeatedly. There was also a striking similarity between the scripts produced by the focus groups and actual press and TV news reports from the time of the Orkney crisis several years earlier. This is illustrated with a selection of examples from audience scripts and actual news reporting texts in the table below (see
How can such striking similarities between research participants' scripts and the media accounts be explained? After all, these focus groups were conducted several years after the crisis had broken. Why were some aspects of the media accounts of Orkney apparently recalled so clearly when others were forgotten? Why were these memories so vivid even when people were often unable to identify one of the main alleged ringleaders and, occasionally unable even to say whether or not any of the children had been returned home? And what do people's reconstructions of news reports tell us about their actual beliefs? What are the implications for media influence? It is these questions of recall, impact and belief that will be discussed in the next two sections.
Fig. 8 Comparing audience-generated scripts and actual news reporting: descriptions of place and community

Examples from audience groups' scripts

In the early hours of this morning on the remote island of South Ronaldsay, children from 4 families were snatched in a series of dawn raids. The sleeping families were roused from their beds by heavy-handed social workers and police. The swiftness of the operation did not even allow the children time to collect personal belongings such as their favourite toys. (Group 30, August 1994)

In this quiet Orkney town, tranquillity was shattered by the news this morning of 24 children being taken away from their parents by social workers. [...] A family friend, said she heard the cars arrive at dawn, swoop on the houses. 'The children were crying and parents were screaming for the bairns to be brought back, it was terrible to see. They're all lovely families. The social workers wouldn't allow the children to take away their favourite toys. (Group 38, October 1994)

The small island of South Ronaldsay [...] there were dawn raids on the homes of several families. We talked to a friend of one of the families who described the raids from first-hand knowledge, [...] reporting on the effect of the shock to the parents and how it filtered through to the whole community, how they were all shattered by what had happened and how it continued on throughout the day. She commented on how the police and social workers stole the children away at first light, not giving

Actual press/TV reports about Orkney

Nine children have been snatched from their families [...] Five families on the close-knit island of South Ronaldsay were awoken without warning in a series of dawn raids. 'It was just like a witch hunt,' said one tearful mother. 'The police came to the door with social workers and took our children. They just waved a piece of paper in our faces and left with the kids. We didn't even have time to kiss them good-bye.' (Today, 1 March 1991)

 [...] nine children from four families were dragged from their beds in a series of dawn raids [...] we were not allowed to give them breakfast. They left with only the clothes they had dressed in. They could not take a book, or personal stereo or even a teddy. I asked to know where our children were being taken - we were told we were not allowed to know' (Daily Mail, 3 March 1991)

Father: 'They were just taken, just in the clothes they stood in. What really horrified us was they weren't allowed to take anything that had any element of security for them. I mean children need favourite things, I asked may they take a book or a teddy bear or personal stereo, anything, absolutely not. Just the clothes they stood in.' (Channel 4, Channel 4 News, 12 March 1991)
them a chance even to pick up any toys or clothing and take them with them and how the parents were just left, not knowing what was going on at that time. (Group 19, February 1994)

Just one week after the peace was shattered in the beautiful islands of the Orkneys, when children were snatched from their beds in this small tight-knit community in dawn raids by social workers accompanied by police, the children were torn from their parents without even having time to gather their toys. (Group 13, December 1993)

The peace and tranquillity of the small remote community on the island of Orkney was shattered recently by a midnight raid carried out by police and social workers. The removal of x number of children has left the community shocked and bewildered. In a moving interview, Jeannie Blaggs speaks of the suffering felt by the parents... (Group 15, December 1993)

A voice at the door of his remote cottage at dawn first alerted the sleepy father of two that something was wrong. (Sunday Times 3 March 1991)

Nine children at the centre of sex abuse allegations have been flown from a tiny island. They were airlifted from Orkney to the mainland after an early morning swoop on their home. (Daily Record, 1 March 1991)

Police and social workers had earlier swooped on 4 families and took nine children into care [...] Another mother, whose three children were taken away, said: ‘I feel so helpless. They wouldn't let me speak to my children.' (Daily Record, 28 February 1991)
Audience impressions and beliefs

One argument often produced by my research participants, and sometimes by my colleagues, is that the pictures used in the script-writing exercise 'write the script' on their own. No significance can therefore, they argue, be attributed to what people recall when presented with a particular set of images. People often felt that the way they had used the pictures was 'inevitable' and 'obvious'. For example, when questioned about her use of the anatomically-correct dolls as an illustration of toys left behind during dawn raids one research participant, a trainee journalist, protested that there was no other way of interpreting this image: 'that's the only one [picture] we had, do you know what I mean, how else could we have used that?' (Group 23, f). The fact that this picture was taken from a news account about social work interviewing techniques, and was used in this way by other audience groups, disproves her contention that the pictures determined the script.

Certainly, the TV stills provided to the groups help to create some common focal points for research participants (which would account for some inter-group similarities). It is also true that the pictures sometimes triggered memories. However, as illustrated above, often people accommodated the images to their memories rather than vice versa. In addition, groups or teams which had no memory of Orkney interpreted many of the pictures in a very different way. Thus some young people commenting on the pictures of all the families joining hands through that it might be volunteers searching for a child's body (Group 14). In another discussion between people who could recall nothing of the Orkney case the dolls were identified as belonging to a paedophile- used to entice children into his house (Group 41).
Another argument is that people's ability to reconstruct particular elements of a story may tell us more about their familiarity with a certain genre of reporting than their actual memories of that story. This argument has more validity. Certainly research participants' attempts to reconstruct the Orkney story drew on their understandings of the nature of the news genre, and in particular, the style of certain types of press reporting. The audience groups' reconstructions demonstrate people's familiarity with journalistic conventions and clichés as well as sophisticated understandings of the format and structuring of news bulletins. Audience groups routinely 'recognised' the establishing shot in the script-writing exercise as a 'scene-setter', and their scripts included inventing live satellite links with Orkney, on-site interviews as well as studio based reports and they debated the words and images appropriate in different circumstances (see also Kitzinger, 1993). Indeed, research participants sometimes joked about the process of script writing, making reference to programmes such as 'Whose Line Is It Anyway', 'Have I Got News For You' and 'Drop the Dead Donkey' as they did so. (These are radio and television shows which satirise news and media production processes). Here we can see how people combined their knowledge of TV news conventions with language taken from the (tabloid) press and informed by radio programmes.

While acknowledging the role of both choice of images and genre familiarity, it is not possible to dismiss the news script reconstructions produced by research participants as 'merely' a product of these two factors. Research participants' talk and script-writing about Orkney were also explicitly informed by actual memories of events at the time.

This begs the question: why had the phrase 'dawn raids' and the imagery and emotion surrounding them, made such an impression? Close attention to the surrounding discussion within the focus groups suggests the impact of the dawn raids was related to five key factors. These were: the high-profile and repeated nature of this theme in the media reporting,
patterns of audience attention and avoidance, the timing and trajectory of the story and the labelling process whereby the phrase 'dawn raids' was reiterated across all news reports. It was also influenced by the way in which reporting of the raids tapped into audience empathy, particularly as parents.

The high-profile and repeated nature of the 'dawn raid' coverage

The impact of the dawn raids was partly due to the sheer quantity of coverage. It was the dawn raids rather than other aspects of the case which attracted peak attention. Descriptions of the dawn raids were also often included in later reporting. For example, reports of the children's return home in April were accompanied by lengthy re-visits to the conditions under which they had been originally taken from their homes. In one case a TV news report included a dramatic reconstruction of the social workers arrival to uplift the children (Channel 4, Channel 4 News, 12 March 1991).

Patterns of attention and avoidance

The impact of front-page coverage or reiterated reporting (and relative lack of impact of more detailed, one-off or less high-profile accounts) may be also related to another factor. The impact of such reporting may be proportionately increased because of some people's deliberate avoidance of reading anything in depth in this topic area. Several research participants commented that they deliberately avoided reading anything even remotely related to sexual abuse and just noted the occasional headline. As one woman declared: 'I really don't know [what happened in Orkney], I don't read these things. No, no, head in the sand' (Group 9). This woman could only remember that Orkney had something to do with dawn raids. In the light of this the timing and trajectory of the unfolding story also proved crucial.
The timing and trajectory of the story as it unfolded

Close attention to the audience's own discussions of how they related to the Orkney coverage suggests that audience recall of the raids was related to how they followed (or did not follow) the case as it developed over the weeks and months following the 'dawn raids'. Research participants often stated that they stopped paying attention to the media coverage after the immediate scandal had broken ('that's why I've no idea what happened in the end'). People often made comments such as: 'After about six months I must admit I thought Oh no! [...] There is only so much that you can take in' (Group 9, f), or 'You get to a point where you just switch off.' (Group 18, m). One woman described how, after paying close attention to the initial reporting, she failed to take in the on-going story:

> I remember being horrified that they hadn't been returned at one point. I was saying to my husband about it blah, blah, blah, and he said: 'No, no, no, they are not back yet.' and it was a long, long time that they were away. (Group 9, f)

Another research participant said she had deliberately detached herself. She would go and make herself a cup of tea when she saw the typical 'establishing shot' showing the harbour on the island:

> The affair lingered on for so long [...] especially that scene of the island, [pointing to one of the photographs] we knew it would be the same old stuff. (Group 10, f)

Labelling

Over and above this issue of timing and attention, the dawn raids were often the most memorable part of the Orkney story because the phrase itself had been reiterated throughout reporting of the case. Indeed, during the course of the coverage the phrase 'dawn raid' became synonymous
with Orkney. 'Dawn raids' was used in more than 50 headlines in the National and Scottish press coverage during 1991 and appeared repeatedly in TV news reporting. Some reports used the term as a shorthand for the Orkney case e.g.: 'Unhappy letters of dawn raid children' (Daily Mail, 3 September 1991) or 'Dawn Raid Boss “had not read vital report”.' (Daily Mail, 30 August 1991)

The phrase itself was widely recalled. The exact phrase, 'dawn raids', was used in 38 of the 49 groups who could remember anything at all about the Orkney case (and others talked of 'dawn swoop' or 'snatch'). Asked about events in Orkney, the following exchanges were typical:

f: They swooped in
f: Swoop being the word, I think
f: Because it was like dawn wasn't it, early hours of the morning. (Group 11)

Mention of the phrase, 'dawn raids' or 'swoop', was often greeted with cries of recognition from other members of the group and remarks such as: ‘Of course, you have to use 'dawn raids' [if you’re going to write a news report about Orkney]’ and ‘Dawn raids? Yes, it’s all coming back to me now’.

Organising the imagination: structures of empathy
The power of the phrase 'dawn raids' was linked to the nature of the reporting (both in the press and on television) and the drama, emotion and particularly empathy it evoked. People talked about particular incidents that occurred during the 'dawn raids' and often spoke with great vehemence about how they themselves would have reacted.
If the social work department did anything like that to me I would probably commit murder. (Group 7, f)

I'd be violent if somebody turned up to take my child away in the middle of the night. (Group 5, f)

I would have stuck a knife in the social people. (Group 26, f)

See if a social worker came and tried to take a kid out of my house, I think he'd be sorry. He'd be dead to be quite honest with you. (Group 27, m)

Research participants described watching the television reporting or reading newspaper reports and all the while: ‘... imagining how your own kids would sort of react and how would you have reacted to them getting hauled out the house’ (Group 12, f). Indeed people often referred to their imaginations when talking about the raids e.g. ‘I imagine some of them were really terrified, some of them thought they would never see their weans again’ (Group 10, f). Some research participants also explicitly commented that it stuck in their minds ‘because you can relate to it, to the parents you know’ (Group 28, m). They often talked about their own emotional engagement with the story: ‘It makes me feel really good that the kids are back with their parents.’ (Group 26, f). During the course of the group discussions people also often explicitly invited each other to imagine themselves in that position: ‘Can you imagine anybody coming up to your house and dragging your children out of bed at that time in the morning?’ (Group 26, f). It was almost automatic, they suggested, to empathise with parents in that situation: ‘It's not hard to imagine how they must have felt.’ (Group 30, m)
Such empathy had been explicitly encouraged by certain features in the reporting. Some newspapers reports explicitly placed the reader in the shoes of the accused parents:

It is dawn and you are woken by the sound of hammering at the front door. Opening it, you find two social workers. They say they have come to take away your children. And they do. (Today, 29 March 1991)

Empathy was also encouraged by representatives from the support groups for the parents in Orkney, who talked of their own fears that no children were safe from social workers:

Demonstrator 1: We are all frightened and I can only think that we are so frightened because a great mistake, great mistakes are being made.
Demonstrator 2: You are worried that it might be our children next [...]. (BBC1, Nine o'Clock News, 5 March 1991)

I think every one of us is terrified to death. (ITV, News at Ten, 5 March 1991)

Well, it's a terrible effect. It's striking terror into the hearts of people with children. (BBC1, Nine o'Clock News, 2 March 1991)

Indeed this was a recurrent theme in the coverage. Headlines declared: 'Island families living in fear of knock on door' (Daily Herald, 4 March 1991) and reports stated that some parents were considering sending their children away: 'Parents may hide children after Orkney raids' (Scotsman 4 March 1991); ‘Kids in hiding on isle of fear’ (Sun, 4 March 1991).
In addition, because of the need to protect the identity of the children, parents were interviewed with their backs to camera. This showed that some TV reporters were themselves clearly very moved during the interviews with parents, their emotional response underlined by the fact that cameras focused on their faces rather than the parents. Some of the reporting also drew audiences into the scene with a live and 'fly-on-the-wall' style of coverage. For example, one news bulletin showed a mother in her living room as she received the phone call to say that her children were on their way home:

Mother: [into phone] Yeah, OK then, bye. [puts phone down] They are on their way! And [appearing to address the reporter] you were right, it was 6 o'clock, we're going to give them a couple of days to calm, to get into the swing of things, and we'll have the biggest party South Ronaldsay's ever seen, I'll tell you. (BBC1, Nine o'Clock News, 4 April 1991)

Another striking television moment was the dramatic, and unusual, use of reconstructions on TV news. Channel 4 accompanied its news report about Orkney with a dramatic reconstruction: camera shots of car wheels crunching on gravel, low angle shots of feet walking up to the house and then a fist rapping on the door. These images accompanied statements about the way the children were taken into care: 'There had been no prior indication that something was wrong. But within minutes the children were being taken from their beds and removed.' Viewers were then shown a car being driven rapidly away (with the camera view from the back seat), the gates of airport, a spinning aircraft propeller, feet walking up steps into the plane and then the wheels on plane beginning to turn. The report concluded with the image of a plane flying off into the sky. (Channel 4, Channel 4 News, 12 March 1991)
But perhaps the most powerful impact of all was made by interviews with parents themselves - their obvious distress, anger and bewilderment made a deep impression on many people and was the focus on many TV reports (see earlier examples) and extensive press profiles, e.g. "Our Nightmare" Sad dad tells of his family's agony' (Daily Record, 16 March 1991); ‘Mother's Day tears on Orkney.' (Sunday Post, 10 March 1991) 3

But empathy, almost by definition, is not just dependent on the content of reports but depends on what people bring to their reading of media messages. Many research participants brought their own experience of parenthood to their understandings of the Orkney case. There was nothing vague about their memory of the dawn raids because they had engaged with the details on the basis of their own day-to-day knowledge as parents. In the focus groups participants often talked about this at length. They spoke, for example, about the care they took when preparing a child for an aeroplane flight, or for staying away from home overnight for the first time. Others described their children’s distress on losing a favourite toy or how easy it was to confuse children by waking them up at night. A group of mothers with children in the same playgroup, for example, talked about their own children's reactions to disruption.

Taking a kiddie out it's bed, I think that's terrible, I really do. I mean you know how you feel yourself if there's an emergency and you have to lift the kids. Kids are just bemused, they don't know what's happening to them. (Group 29, f)

Some talked about how protective they felt about their children, and their fear of losing them. Several people volunteered that they felt particularly vulnerable to social services' intervention because of their own class, race, marital status or other factors. Thus one woman commented that she felt vulnerable to social work 'interference' because her own child had been sexually abused and she feared being judged to be a bad or
collusive mother. Another said she was wary of social workers because; 'I'm a single parent and I think that [...] marks you out as being an "at-risk".' (Group 5)

However, such fears cross-cut all types of parents who participated in the research. Dawn raids were identified as a threat to anyone. This may be not least because the parents in Orkney were white, middle-class and married. As one of the Orkney parents stated: 'We're middle class, boring people with boring lives' (BBC2 Newsnight. 15 March 1991). Working class parents commented that if even those sorts of people were vulnerable then nobody was safe. In addition, research participants often commented about some similarity between their own lives and homes and those of the families caught up in the crisis. Sometimes they specifically referred to items taken from parents’ homes by the police. Some research participants said these resembled items in their own home, such as a book with a goat on the front, a black cloak, a printing block with backwards writing, or a Hallowe'en outfit.

Such details served as powerful reinforcement, but the very fact of being a parent seemed sufficient to encourage people to remember the details of the raids and to identify with the accused adults in Orkney. As one research participant, a worker for Women’s Aid, suggested:

You do identify if you're a mother, that's the first thing you would do, think about how you would feel in that position. I think it's every woman's fear [...] that somebody's going to come in and take your kids away you know. It's going to get out of your control and you wouldn't be able to do nothing about it like these people were, there was nothing they could do. (Group 12, f)

The idea that all parents were at risk (if they can do it to us, they can do it to you) seemed to have been taken on board by many research
participants. Indeed the belief that the raids could be arbitrary made the memory particularly stark and indelible. As this woman went on to say: 'I know that's what it highlighted for me, how easy it can be done and on such a mass scale how it can be done, it's quite frightening'. A point echoed in another group when one person commented: 'Some of it did stick in your mind, but not everything', to which her neighbour replied:

Of course it sticks in your mind, because it could be the social worker up the morrow going and lifting your kiddies. (Group 31, f)

To round up my argument so far: the 'dawn raids' in Orkney clearly made a huge impression on those who heard about them. I have demonstrated how this impression was created through a combination of the nature and timing of the reporting, the statements of sources, and the empathetic reactions from audiences (particularly parents).

The reporting of the dawn raids was, in most groups, accepted and even applauded. Nobody questioned whether or not the raids had occurred, everyone believed that children had been taken from their parents in traumatic circumstances. Most people not only recalled the dawn raids vividly but also believed that their memories and the media reporting included the accurate and relevant facts. This is an unproblematic demonstration of media effect.

Such media 'effects' are perhaps uncontentious in so far as children were indeed taken from their homes at an early hour and it was indeed traumatic. However, in this final part of the chapter, I want to argue that the 'dawn raids' branding of Orkney encouraged people to accept a definition of the 'meaning' of Orkney which excluded other ways of recalling the story and which included significant exaggerations and absences. The media emphasis on such 'social work fiascos', in the absence of other types of story in the media about social work
intervention, also promotes an image of intervention which is inaccurate and off-putting.

The branding of Orkney as 'that dawn raids case'

As I have demonstrated, Orkney was quickly branded as 'the dawn raids case'. I borrow and adapt the term 'branding' from commercial advertising where efforts are made to reiterate and establish a series of simple associations ranging from 'Beans means Heinz' to 'Happiness is a cigar called Hamlet'. Branding, however, is not confined to the promotion of commercial products. Politicians or political parties may try to create a brand image and source organisations may struggle to brand themselves or events in particular ways, through the reiteration of key facts and phrases. The idea is to establish an indelible association between an event and certain values, or to create a thumb-nail sketch of the essence of an individual or organisation. The manufacture of news is partly based around the struggle to create 'bite-sized' news labels which will ensure that an event will be seen as evidence of a 'dirty tricks campaign' rather than a 'sex scandal', that a party will be seen as 'new' and 'progressive' rather than 'old fashioned', or that a military action will be seen as a proud 'victory' or a necessary act of defence, rather than a shameful defeat or act of aggression.

The framing of Orkney as a story about dawn raids may seem so inevitable (and justified) as to be meaningless. However, there were other ways in which Orkney could have been defined. For example, it could have been recalled as a case about alleged ritual abuse or a story of the triumph of parents against the state-sanctified abduction of their children or even a story about social workers putting words into children's mouths. But such definitions of the case among the audience groups were rare or identified as 'side-issues'. The 'meaning' of Orkney to most research participants was focused squarely on the way in which the children were
taken into care (a process which, according to the inquiry, was actually one of the least problematic aspects of the case). During the course of discussion, a few research participants began to think about other ways the story could have been framed and sometimes decided that the way they thought about Orkney did not accord with their own preferred political or personal perspective. One man, for example, came to the conclusion that he remembered 'the wrong bits':

> It was when we were thinking about how to put it [the news bulletin] over, it occurred to me that it comes across in my mind as [...] they went in at dawn and that was it. [...] That's what I remember of it. Just thinking about it, these are the wrong bits, I remember them more than anything else. (Group 19, m)

For others however, the dawn raids were the unquestioned 'key' to the story, particularly because the raids were 'fact' and other aspects of the case were simply supposition. As one trainee journalist pointed out:

> We don't know [whether abuse] happened, even today we don't know, do we? What we know as fact is that a number of children were removed from their beds at the crack of dawn and dragged screaming from their parents' homes. That's fact and that obviously is a very powerful image, whether you are a journalist, a mother, a father or whatever, that's a strong image. [...] What was so shocking was the fact that they were removed from their homes by police, at crack of dawn and taken by helicopter to another piece of land, away from their parents for three months. (Group 23, f)

**Exaggerations and absences**

The 'facts' which people recalled, however, included both exaggerations and gaps. One exaggeration concerns the time at which the children were
taken. According to the Orkney Inquiry Report, police and social workers arrived at the four houses at ‘7 a.m. and it was daylight.’ (Clyde, 1992, 89). However, the time most frequently cited by the groups was 4 or 5 a.m. or earlier (this was the case even though logically the term ‘dawn raid’ should allow one to consider the fact that sunrise in Scotland in February is unlikely to be that early). There were also (inaccurate) references to the children not being allowed to get dressed (e.g. ‘boys and girls barely having got their dressing gowns on, being whisked away’ (Group 13, m) and memories about the use of force which went beyond that which actually occurred. People referred to: ‘Gestapo methods breaking into the house’ (Group 26, f); [like an] ‘SAS attack on it, swinging through the windows’ (Group 20, m); ‘breaking down doors’ (Group 38, m) and one person even suggested that the police had been armed: ‘dawn raid with shotguns’ (Group 2, m).

One might argue that such details are irrelevant given the horror of what actually did occur, and, how close the authorities did come to breaking down a door in one case where a girl had locked herself in the bathroom (Clyde, 1992: 92). However, what the seamless version of social work malpractice avoids is engaging with the dilemmas of how to protect children when abuse is suspected and how, if necessary, to remove children from their homes in any situation. The focus on the horror of taking children into care, ignores questions about balancing this against the horror of abuse. The presentation of the dawn raids also erased any possibility that the social workers considered the need for sensitivity. The ‘raids’ are stereotyped to an extent that ignores any suggestion that social workers considered the children’s needs. Indeed, the groups echoed media statements which repeatedly contrasted parents’ traumatised emotions with social workers being ‘cold’, ‘unfeeling’ and ‘heartless’ or commented that the Director of Orkney Social Work Department could not be a father himself or he would never be able to inflict such suffering on
other parents, let alone children: 'I just wonder, if he'd had children of his own, would he go in and tear children apart like that?' (Group 26,f)

The dominant impressions of social workers' actions in Orkney were, for some (but not all) research participants, supported by a generally low opinion of social workers. Social workers, they said, were ill-educated, naive and inhuman. Some were dismissive of social workers in general, arguing that many did not understand family life: 'they live on another planet and don't have families'. Some social workers were dismissed for being unmarried, and some were characterised by a few research participants as lesbian, who could not be trusted with children.

Blaming the social workers also fitted neatly with the gaps in people's knowledge of the raids in another way: their lack of awareness about the role of the police. The removal was a joint operation by police and the Social Work Department (Clyde, 1992: 214). Decisions about the coordination and timing of the 'raids' were taken on police advice. However, this was not known by most of the audience groups. Instead, responsibility was laid solely at the door of social workers. In a few groups, people had no memory of police involvement at all - even though they thought that the police should have been involved:

m1: I can't remember the police being involved at all actually.
m2: I don't think they were involved.
m3: They had no chance.
m1: But what gives the social worker a right to go into people's houses and take anything out of it? The police can't do that without a search warrant, but the social worker can. There's something wrong there. Do you not think that they should have went to the police and the police should have went and lifted they kids? (Group 27)
Even among those (the majority) who did remember the police as having any involvement in the dawn raids, their role was seen as minimal:

The police were only really involved with the social workers to make sure that there wasn't any trouble. I mean I don't think that they were actually involved. (Group 9, f)

Often the police were seen as mere appendages following social workers' demands:

f: I actually don't really remember much about police involvement. [...] f: Did the police not have to went with the social workers? f: Oh aye. f: Could they not have said something about, 'Do you not think it’s a wee bit too early in the morning'? (Group 29)

Sometimes people became self-reflective as they talked about, or worked with, the pictures. As one commented: 'what I did was, social workers I condemned and criticised and police I simply reported that they'd gone in. I was immediately aware of an attitude there in me' (Group 16, f). 6

As well as blaming social workers alone for the timing of the raids there was a lack of knowledge of attempts by social services to justify their action. Social services' sources tried to convey the message that the children had been taken at 7 a.m., half an hour before the school bus arrived. This time was selected in an attempt to minimise harm. It was chosen so that all the families were likely to be together and to avoid taking the children from public venues such as school (explanations which were, in fact, accepted as legitimate in the subsequent Inquiry) (Clyde, 1992: 240, 349). However, few members of the audience recalled such explanations and some had partial memories of unconvincing attempts at
justifications. One woman, for example, commented: 'Apparently there was some explanation about the Caledonian MacBrayne ferries which I don’t think is entirely plausible' (Group 39). Research participants who did try to defend the timing of the dawn raids were often overruled by other members of the groups because they were unable to give good explanations to defend their position:

f: If you had Jasmine..., Maria Colwell, you name it, a whole series of girls that you know died and everybody blamed social workers then, you’d be a very edgy social worker. What else would you do?

m: Yeah but [...] they went in at dawn, and there would have been a logic for that if it was in the middle of London, [...] but in Orkney, there was absolutely no logic for it because you couldn’t get off the island until the 11 o’clock plane or the 12 o’clock boat you know.

f: Yeah, right, OK, yeah. Yes. OK. Scrap that. (Group 32)

People’s inability to express the point of view of social workers was also demonstrated in their news bulletins. There were few problems in creating a lengthy statement to accompany the picture of ‘Jeannie Blaggs, friend of the parents’ representing their perspective. However, participants had great difficulty thinking what might be being said by ‘Paul Lee, Director of Social Services’:

I don’t remember what he said, I don’t remember anything about him at all actually. (Group 7, f)

I don’t remember Paul Lee, I can’t remember that much, to be perfectly honest, with regards to the Social Work Department. [What they said is just] a blank. (Group 18, f)

Just remember seeing him on telly, what they actually said, I can’t think. (Group 34, f)
Paul Lee was on the news all the time, always rushing about going 'no comment'. (Group 20, m)

In their news scripts people tended to either attribute bland statements to Paul Lee such as 'we are looking into the matter' or to give him no voice at all. Some groups simply held up his picture while saying that a judge had criticised him or there had been calls for his resignation. Others simply stated that he made 'no comment'. One group disposed of the need for Paul Lee to say anything at all by sending him on annual leave (Group 30, m).

Exceptions to this approach were rare, however, one script which stood out explained that the raids had been conducted 'considering the timing when all the children would be at home'. The research participant who attributed this quote to Paul Lee turned out to be a member of the Children's Panel (part of the Scottish system for child protection and justice). She was also a reader of Community Care and had been very interested in the Inquiry report (Group 8). Most other participants, however, would have been surprised to read the findings of the Inquiry which, in spite of many critical statements about the conduct of the social services, concluded that:

The conduct of the workers in the removal of the children was efficient and supportive [...]. The timing of the removals was beyond serious criticism. (Clyde, 1992: 349)

The fact that people were usually ignorant of social services' attempts to explain their actions reflects the low profile given to social services' perspectives at the time in the media and the lack of a coherent story about reasonable social work intervention. It also reflects the balance of voices from the coverage. In the press and TV news reporting of Orkney,
parents or their representatives were twice as likely as social services to be quoted. Social services did indeed sometimes make 'no comment' (there was no example of parents' representatives refusing to comment) and audience groups had memories of social workers in Orkney: 'walking past cameras, trying to ignore the reporters' (Group 3, f). The fact that they often believed that the raids had been so early, and so brutal (or even earlier and even more brutal than they actually were), was also facilitated by the metaphors used by the media, predominantly the press, at the time. The journalists (or reported statements by parents or their representatives) compared social workers actions to the actions of 'some sort of Nazi state' (Sun, 4 March 1991), 'Russia under Stalin' (Daily Mail, 4 March 1991), 'the Gestapo' (Guardian, 5 April 1991), 'the SAS' (Sunday People, 10 March 1991), 'the KGB' (letter, Sunday Times, 14 April 1991) and fascism generally. One newspaper report referred to 'the knock on the door at dawn and grim-faced polizei there under the direction of neo-fascistic social workers' (Daily Herald, 15 March 1991). (see also Chapter 3)

Even without references to fascism, the very term 'dawn raids' (widely used in the press and on television) was an effective 'aide memoire' which tapped into a whole series of associations. Other researchers have noted the importance of particular key phrases in promoting certain associations. Labels such as 'smart bombs' or phrases such as 'a war of drugs', 'the drift back to work' or 'winter of discontent' help to set up ways of thinking about and remembering events from the news (see Philo, 1990; McLeod et al., 1991, 246). In the case of Orkney, the phrase 'dawn raids', tapped into other images of, for example, raids on houses to arrest suspected terrorists and, in particular, drugs raids. The phrase thus not only told people where to focus but added layers to their memories and told them how to remember:
It was a swoop, it was a swoop. I don't know why I never got that down [in the news bulletin] because that's the word that always comes into my mind when I'm thinking about the Orkney trials [...] it was like a drug bust to me. (Group 12, f)

f: It was like a drugs raid. That is the image it gave me. [...] 
f: Yeah, in my mind it is exactly of a drugs raid [...] That kind of thing when you go in with a hammer and hurling up the stairs and just sort of taking the children. That is the sort of image I have. (Group 5)

Conclusion
This chapter has illustrated the impact of press and TV news reporting about dawn raids on audiences. The media overwhelmingly transmitted one particular aspect of the story. It would simply not be true to say, as Hobson suggests about Crossroads, that there were as many 'Orkney cases' as there were viewers of news reports about Orkney (see Hobson, 1982: 136). What is striking in this research is the shared perspective of the 275 individuals, the recurring nature of the language, images and emotions recalled by such a diversity of groups (whatever the odd individual differences). I have argued that this influence was not unproblematic. Indeed, I have demonstrated how the branding of Orkney as 'the dawn raids case' muted other facets to the story and other information which might have facilitated different perspectives on the crisis. I show how this was facilitated by specific aspects of media coverage. The intense media interest combined with particular aspects of the timing of the story and patterns of audience attention, to make the raids one of the most memorable parts of the story. The reiteration of the phrase 'dawn raids' itself also proved crucial. Equally important were the poignant interviews with parents and the way in which audiences were drawn into the story (through camera angle and text). At a very basic level...
most parents felt they could identify with any other parent in such a terrible situation. But even this, I have argued, should not be accepted as 'given'. ‘Empathy’ is a socially structured as well as media-mediated emotion.

1 Although many people said they could emphasise with falsely accused parents and imagine how they felt, very few talked about empathising with victims of ritual abuse. To be a victim of such crimes would be horrific but was unimaginable. One research participant who did express such empathy had herself been abused and removed from home. For her, acknowledging the terror of ‘the raids’ did not mean discounting the possibility of abuse. ‘I was taken away when I was 11, it was a terrible experience. I left my brothers and sisters there and you felt you were wrong for being lifted. I was wanting to go back home even though [the abuse] had happened.’ She added: ‘It sounded a horrific experience and I noticed how we were saying how awful it was for the children, which indeed it was, but if the children were being abused, isn’t it better?’ (Group 16)

2 Some newspaper and television reporters did become very close to parents in Orkney. A certain amount of empathy and identification became important to some in obtaining and maintaining good access. (Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995)

3 Retrospective more in-depth media discussion of Orkney did include interviews with social services sources debating this question. But it was not a theme addressed in most of the reporting. One occasion on which it was addressed was when a father appeared in silhouette alongside his daughter on the news. He criticised social workers’ ‘Gestapo-like methods’ and argued that being removed from home would be far worse than being sexually abused. (BBC1, Reporting Scotland, 4 March 1991)

4 The image of social workers in the media is generally negative (see Aldridge, 1994). Fictional representations too have only rarely given social services a positive role and have sometimes shown screaming children being dragged away from home. Since Orkney the case seems to have fed directly into further portrayals, see, for example, the depiction of a condescending naive social worker using leading questions and jumping to conclusions to take a child into care, the eight year old girl snatched from her distraught parents and forced to leave her doll behind. (Rumpole of the Old Bailey: Children of the Devil, ITV, 21.00, 29 October 1992). Also see similar portrayal of social workers’ behaviour in a case of ‘suspected Satanic abuse in a small Highland community’ (Flowers of the Forest, BBC2, 21.30, 26 October 1996). It is worth noting that although there are
dramas that invite empathy with police officers (The Bill) Fire-fighters (London's Burning) lawyers (LA Law) and doctors and nurses (Casualty). There is no equivalent for social workers.

Some people remembered the idea that social workers may have been motivated by religious fanaticism to 'invent' ritual abuse or been simply misled. As one research participant commented, she had heard that one of the social workers was supposed to be 'evangelical': 'it seemed very plausible that evangelical social workers could get carried away with something for which they had very small evidence' (Group 5, f). Or, as another commented, his impression was that: '...some Wee Free [colloquial name for a member of the Free Church of Scotland] social worker got the wrong idea from a kid [...] and just read the whole thing wrongly because they didn’t happen to live the same way as.... I don’t know, I mean that’s my view anyway [...] [Wee Frees] no fun, you know, on Sundays and no dancing and stuff like that [...] it’s kind of repressive.' (Group 2, m)

Police were crucial players in both Cleveland and Orkney but that is not part of the public memory of these events. In fact the police have a relatively positive profile in this field. I asked research participants to write two headlines about child sexual abuse, one including the word 'social worker', the other including the word 'police'. 72% of the headlines about social workers produced in this way positioned them in a negative light (only 2% were positive). By contrast 33% of the headlines about the police gave them a positive role e.g. 'Police smash paedophile ring' and 'police rescue abused boy'. This was neatly paralleled by an examination of actual headlines in all the national UK press reporting of sexual abuse in 1991. There were 70 headlines about social workers, 44 of which were explicitly negative e.g. 'Obsession of social workers made them ignore experts' (Daily Telegraph 8 March 1991) and 'Beware the social work abusers' (Daily Telegraph 7 March 1991) By contrast of the 31 headlines about the police only 4 were critical and many were neutral if not positive, e.g. 'Police rescue child bride' (The Times 12 August 1991)

Some people thought that the return of the children proved that the social workers had no evidence at all. They believed (incorrectly) that all the evidence had been heard in a court of law and the case dismissed. Some people thought the children had been returned as a result of the Orkney inquiry (e.g. Group 37), and some referred to a 'lengthy court case' (Group 24). Although most people thought that the case had never been properly heard, others explicitly thought that the evidence had been assessed and the children returned because: 'There was no evidence' (Group 8, f); 'The accusations were found to be unfounded' (Group 23, f); 'It was all a pack of lies' (Group 7, f); 'All claims of sex abuse were dismissed' (Group 21); 'Proved [to be] a load of nonsense, social workers were idiots' (Group 31, f); 'The parents were found not guilty.' (Group 17, m)
Chapter 6

Story placing: representation of place and community in the Orkney case

The previous chapter documented the widespread acceptance of, and anger about, the dawn raids. This chapter explores a theme which generated less consensus in the groups: the story location. It shows how the social and geographical placing of the accounts about Orkney influenced some people's judgements about the case. It also shows how different positions could be taken about this aspect of the story.

Media accounts: locating the story in place and community

Television and press reports of the Orkney case routinely portrayed the Orkney islands as a sleepy, quiet string of islands where nothing much ever happened. Shots of the harbour on South Ronaldsay, the farms or the surrounding hills were accompanied by captions or voice-overs which emphasised the traditional way of life in Orkney and its status as 'a haven of peace' (BBC2, Newsnight, 15 March 1991). Channel 4 News, for example, opened one of its news reports with a scene of the islands with the (somewhat ambiguous) caption 'Island of Nightmares?' and explained that the accused parents had moved to Orkney to 'escape the rigours of city life for the simple life' (Channel 4, Seven o'Clock News, 12 March 1991). This point was reiterated in press reports of how the parents (all incomers to the island) had come to Orkney in pursuit of 'a quieter, more fulfilling life' (Sunday Times, 1 September 1991) seeking to 'escape the rat race of contemporary urban society' (Scotland on Sunday, 10 March...
The audience was informed that, ironically, the parents had chosen Orkney because: ‘It was regarded as a "place of safety" to bring up their children.’ (Scotland on Sunday, 10 March 1991).

The fact that the islands are remote was underlined in reports and used to emphasise their idyllic nature. TV bulletins showed pictures of aeroplanes or ferries, and maps emphasising the geographical isolation of Orkney. One outside broadcast opened with the windswept reporter at the ferry terminal detailing the lengthy journey that must be taken to reach Orkney:

The ferry at Scrabster, near John O'Groats, in the very north of Scotland. [...] serious fog has delayed all flights to Orkney for more than two days. Getting to Orkney was always difficult, but these weather conditions only emphasise the isolation of the islands. (Channel 4, Seven o'Clock News, 12 March 1991)

This isolation was, on the whole, used to conjure up a picture of an untouched place of innocent beauty (rather than, for example, a place of primitive and backward practices, which would be the other standard cultural association). Newspaper articles painted word pictures of the beautiful countryside more Arcadian than Orcadian. They spoke of: ‘brilliant sunshine etching the hills and fields in spring gold. It looked like the perfect safe haven for children to play...’ (Express, 6 April 1991). One newspaper picture showed the quarry where the abuse was alleged to have occurred, and described it in language reminiscent of a Laurie Lee novel. The caption read: ‘The farm quarry: “In that long, now lost summer, the place where the water warmed up and brought youngsters from miles around”’. (Scotland on Sunday, 24 March 1991). Indeed, in some descriptions it was as if the social workers had introduced the notion of evil into some kind of contemporary Eden. One newspaper picture showed the parents looking over Orkney landscape with the caption ‘Paradise Lost’.
If Orkney was established as a 'place of safety' and a 'once peaceful island' then the social workers were implicitly seen as the source of any discord or suspicion. It was social services who had introduced fear to Orkney:

Now doors that were never locked remain closed, and curtains twitch to check who is coming to call. *(Scotland on Sunday, 10 March 1991)*

Indeed, one of the few negative descriptions of Orkney landscape was closely tied to negative representation of social workers:

It is a story that can only be thought of in monochrome. There are houses of grey granite and a swirling Orcadian mist. At 7.00 am, as daylight breaks over the island of South Ronaldsay, social workers call on four families without warning. In their eyes is the cold hard light of those who believe they are about to strike at ultimate evil. *(Daily Telegraph, 5 April 1991)*

Intertwined with ideas about Orkney/South Ronaldsay as an island were ideas about the type of people who lived there and local community relations. Media reporting often included interviews with representatives of the community speaking in support of the parents. Reports also routinely included references to the 'close-knit community' united in the face of social workers' allegations; a community stunned and angered by the taking of their children:

The allegations [...] have stunned this normally peaceful community. Demonstrators on the island today bitterly condemned the actions of social workers who removed nine children from their homes in a series of dawn raids. *(ITV, News at Ten, 5 March 1991)*
This close-knit island community has been deeply shaken at the speed and manner in which the children were removed from their homes. (BBC1, *Nine o'Clock News*, 5 March 1991)

It was emphasised that, even though the accused parents were incomers, they had the full support of native Orcadians: ‘their fellow islanders have rallied behind them’ (Channel 4, *Seven o'Clock News*, 12 March 1991). Headlines read ‘Village fury at “Satan” claims’ (*Mail*, 2 March 1991); ‘Islanders threaten to picket hearing into child abuse’ (*Observer*, 3 March 1991); ‘Islanders support families’ (*Glasgow Herald*, 5 March 1991), or simply ‘OUTRAGE: They all came together in the small hall to demand: give us back our children’ (*Mail on Sunday*, 3 March 1991). The press and TV news showed pictures of local people demonstrating for the children’s return and publicity was given to a petition signed by Orcadians calling for an enquiry into social work actions.

From the outset the media also reported testimony from friends and neighbours asserting that the accusations of abuse were ridiculous. In the following extract, for example, the reporter interviewed a series of people attending an open meeting in the town hall on South Ronaldsay:

Reporter: ...what’s absolutely clear is that islanders themselves simply don’t believe the charges:

Islander1: I go to the peoples’ houses every day and I know the families and I know it is just a total lot of rubbish.

Islander2: This sort of ritual music that’s supposed to be taking place - the acoustics of the island, I can hear these people talking in their farmyard, I can hear their animals, I can hear cars pulling up outside. If anything was going on over there, I’d have heard it. It’s nonsense.
Islander3: Orkney is a very small community and everybody knows each other very well.

Reporter: Why are people so certain that there's nothing in this?

Islander4: Well they're such nice people, you can't believe it, they're such nice people.

Islander5: Good, God-fearing, hardworking people. Couldnnae get better. (Channel 4, Seven o'Clock News, 12 March 1991)

Many of the TV news reports 'balanced' such comments with statements from social work sources stating that there were reasons for concern. However, some TV reports and much of the press coverage seemed to suggest that canvassing local opinion was at the very least an important part of this news story and, in some cases, by implication a reasonable way of deciding whether or not the children had been abused. As one report on ITV concluded: 'We couldn't find one person who thinks there's anything in the ritual abuse charges.' (ITV, News at Ten, 12 March 1991)

Members of the community quoted in the media were usually adamant that they would have known if abuse was taking place and that the whole idea was absurd. The nature of island life and the geography of South Ronaldsay were both said to mitigate against secrecy:

In a community where the grapevine can tell you within half a day who's changed their curtains or bought a new car, the idea of secret and sustained alfresco devil-worship is greeted as faintly ridiculous. (BBC 1, Reporting Scotland, 4 March 1991)

Native Orcadians were quoted saying:

There are no secrets here, no one locks the doors of their house or cars. If these people were guilty, we would all have known. There is no great conspiracy involving hundreds of islanders. I would
suspect myself before I suspected these people. (Mail on Sunday, 3 March 1991)

I could find only two media reports which pointed out that the prior conviction of an Orkney resident for abusing his children might challenge this idea. Although a few press reports suggested some people in the community had turned against the incomers, in most reports the parents were closely identified with ‘the community’. The whole community had been ‘scarred’ by the allegations (BBC1, Six o’Clock News, 4 April 1991) and the actual island was sometimes personified as sharing a single reaction. One headline read: ‘Fears of outraged island’ (Mail on Sunday, 3 March 1991), another referred to ‘Island anger’ (Evening News, 4 March 1991) a third report was headlined: ‘Orkney Reels’; (Scotland on Sunday, 24 March 1991). This linguistic collapsing together of categories refuses any possible conflicts. Terms such as ‘parents’, ‘families’, ‘islanders’ and ‘the island’ were used interchangeably in a way which excluded the possibility of divergent interests between, for example, children and parents within a family and reinforced the idea that the entire community was of one mind.

Memories of place and script reconstructions

These recurrent representations of Orkney as a place and as a community were widely recalled by audiences. Positive descriptions of the island and the community were echoed almost word for word in the focus groups discussions. Although research participants were unable to reproduce many of the facts of the case, most were able to reconstruct the way in which Orkney as a place had been represented. They readily reconstructed news reports which described Orkney (South Ronaldsay) as a rural idyll with a tight-knit community (‘the sort of place you wouldn’t
expect abuse to happen'). The following interaction while constructing a news report was typical:

f1: How about we start with [...] something like 'the sleepy something or other of, where did it take place? was it Ronaldsay? [...]  
f2: OK, sleepy community of South Ronaldsay  
f1: was rocked, shocked or what ...  
f3: rocked by allegations of sexual abuse [...]  
f1: A friend of the parents, [...] reflected the community when she...  
f1 and f2 [simultaneously]: expressed anger and shock [laughter]  
f1: at such a decision  
f3: It's amazing how it sticks in your head.  
f1: It's scary, isn't it, when you come out with the same thing.  
(Group 1)

The audience reconstructions described Orkney as: 'a little serene sleepy seaside town'; 'a once peaceful haven'; 'a retreat'; and a place of 'innocence'. Thus where a typical news item introduced reports with words such as: 'The remote and mystical landscape of Orkney, traditionally a haven of peace, with a population of just 20,000... a small community where people appear to live simple lives' (BBC 2, Newsnight, 15 March 1991), the audience scripts opened with references to: 'sleepy fishing village' (Group 23); a 'quiet wee place' (Group 11); 'the once peaceful village' (Group 21); 'a little seaside town with a population of 75' (Group 14); or referred to a 'quiet community' [in a] 'small secluded village' with a 'quaint shore front' (Group 22).

The media's repeated use of the term 'community' was also echoed in the audience group discussions. As one man commented: 'What I remember about Orkney was that it just rocked the whole community' (Group 18, m) or, as another member of this group commented: 'Nothing has ever come
back to me because I know so little about the case itself, although I do remember the agony it was causing to the island community... But I don't really remember too many details' (Group 18, m). References to community reaction were also a routine part of the audience scripts:

This [...] is a tranquil close-knit community which has been savagely shaken by the taking away of two children from one of the village's most well respected families. (Group 14)

In the normally idyllic setting of the Orkneys the community has been rocked recently by allegations of child sex abuse. (Group 18)

Last month in the peaceful town of Orkney, the quiet tranquillity was shattered when allegations of satirical abuse were thrown up against certain upstanding members of this quiet community. (Group 46)

Emphasis was placed on neighbourhood support:

Jeannie Blaggs reflected the feelings of the community when she expressed the shock of the heavy-handed method of dawn raids which she said can only be described as overkill. The community showed public sympathy and support for the families. (Group 1)

Audience-generated scripts characterised the whole island as suffering from social workers errors:

They just put the full island through misery, the full place they put through misery. (Group 31,f)

As in the original news reports, they also often presented the community as synonymous with 'the families': e.g. one audience-generated script
concluded with the words 'The remote community in Orkney await the return of their children' (Group 8). Others, like the actual news reports from the time, also personified the place itself. One audience script opened with the words: 'This remote and peaceful Scottish island of Orkney has been devastated' (Group 8). Others referred to South Ronaldsay 'reeling in shock' or declared that 'A sleepy Orkney hamlet today was devastated' (Group 15). 'A serene Orkney town has been ripped apart (Group 23); 'the town was shaken' (Group 14) and that 'a cloud hangs over the island' (Group 1).

If their scripts concluded with a happy ending with the children sent home, a return to normality was often stressed: 'homes...were once again scenes of...normal family life' (Group 32) and such descriptions were applied to the whole community. People talked about: 'the town united again' (Group 4) and 'the village tries to rebuild itself' (Group 14). One report even mentioned the way the sunshine had come out and smiled on the island as the children flew back home (a point echoing almost word for word an actual report at the time) (ITV, Early Evening News, 17.40, 5 April 1991, see endnote 1).

As with the original reports, the corruption of the innocence of Orkney was laid firmly at the door of social services. The innocence of Orkney was also contrasts with the ordeals awaiting the children when they were taken from their island home. For example, one BBC1 lunch-time news introduced an interview with one of the Orkney children with the words: 'One of the Orkney children taken from his parents talks about the 5-week ordeal' (BBC1 One o'Clock News, 5 April 1991). By the evening this interview was introduced with the headlines 'One of the Orkney children says he was taught to steal cars while he was kept away from home' (BBC1 Six o'Clock News Headline, 5 April 1991). A point picked up and reiterated in subsequent press reports:
And as he played with his dog in his South Ronaldsay farm yesterday, he spoke of learning to steal cars, rolls a cannabis joint and glue sniffing. (Daily Record 6 April 1991)

Audience groups displayed extensive memories of this:

A lot of the children apparently suffered sort of mental abuse when they were in care, like one was put into some sort of detention centre for yobs so he was picking up all sorts of ideas. (Group 39, f)

Aye, was there not something about a guy that got taught how to open cars or something like that, [...]. He'd been taken away and here's the real abuse going on. (Group 20, m)

Audience impressions and beliefs
Why did people find it so easy to reconstruct the 'placing' of the Orkney story? How were people able to reconstruct images of Orkney as a place and a community when so many other aspects of the story were forgotten?

Such reconstructions need not be entirely based on memories of reporting of the actual case. After all, journalists and 'ordinary people' share a common cultural repertoire in which place and community are considered relevant context for such stories. In discussion it was clear that research participants were partly influenced by familiarity with certain types of narrative: the idea of 'establishing shots' and the routines of 'setting the scene'. In particular, they were accustomed to journalists' tendencies to 'set the scene' in foreign reports (and Orkney was certainly treated almost as a 'foreign country' by some journalists flying up from London).

Participants were also familiar with discourses around violence which associated threat with certain types of places or people. They were
accustomed to the type of narrative played upon by the media (and the surrounding culture) when, for example, reports highlight the deserted area of wasteland where an attack took place or contrast a pleasant scene with alleged horrific events. As one man commented: 'It's the type of way the press or the TV would portray it isn't it - nice tranquil scene to start with, then shock horror and accusation' (Group 43).

Adopting such narrative structures in their scripts may also have been encouraged by the stills with which the groups were supplied. The set of photographs provided for the script-writing exercise included a shot of Orkney harbour. This shot was instantly recognisable to most groups and, in the words of one participant, 'sums it all up'. It was usually also seen as picturesque image, representing 'a nice place to be, sort of middle-class, cucumber sandwiches stuff' (Group 23, f) or in the words of one woman, 'it looks just like a wee postcard' (Group 6).

However, the way in which people worked with the photographs reveals that while the presence of the standard 'establishing' shots may have encouraged a particular narrative structure, it did not determine the nature of the narrative. This is most clearly illustrated by comparing people's reactions to the harbour shot with a second still they were given. This second still represented a very unusual image from the TV reporting about Orkney. Taken from a low camera angle, it showed the deserted quarry (the alleged site of abuse) with an old oil drum lying in the foreground. The image was shot low to the ground (see Fig. 9). This scene and the 'technical codes' (Fiske, 1991) within the image were recognised as deliberately 'threatening' both by those who knew about the Orkney case, and those who did not. One of the most interesting comments about this image came from an Indian woman visiting Britain, who had not been exposed to the Orkney coverage. She 'read' the image as indicating the type of place in which a body would be found:
To an Indian imagination this is maybe the place where they were killed or dumped or misused [...] This place looks very abandoned place, an isolated place and usually you don't have such places in your country where these things are just thrown out. [...] even during the rainy season you don't find these things. Even when they are repairing the roads, it's quite tidy. So I could only think that it must be some place which is quite away from the city and maybe this pool signifies something happening to the kids. (Group 49, f)

To those who had been exposed to the Orkney coverage however, this image often did not fit with their memories of the case:

I don't remember it about that pit with the oil, I don't remember anything about that. (Group 22, f)

I think we should leave it, I thought that one was something to do with the oil tankers. [laughter] Wrong story, sorry! (Group 2, f)
Fig. 9 Two TV images of Orkney landscapes: contrasting pictures from the script-writing exercise
Whereas research participants instantly 'recognised' the shot of the harbour and quickly incorporated it into their news reconstructions, they found it difficult to use the 'quarry and oil drum photograph. Some groups left it out, others resolved their problem by absorbing it into another type of story. One group, for example, opened their script by referencing past problems with oil pollution:

Good Evening. This is a peaceful island in the north of Scotland. This community used to have as its main concern the pollution from Sullem Voe [showing shot of quarry and oil drum]. Now, a more disturbing issue has been alleged to have affected the inhabitants of this remote island. (Group 30)

Another group incorporated the image by concluding their report with a similar reference:

As the village tries to settle back into normal life, they were today confronted with another disaster, [showing shot of quarry and oil drum] which was oil spilled all on to their beach. (Group 14)

A third group joked that it was a scene of invasion: 'That's after the Yanks had gone in!' (Group 43,m). A fourth group used the picture in a quite different way. They decided that they could only incorporate this still by using it as a metaphor for the devastation caused by the dawn raids: 'This is a metaphor for Orkney, a hole in the mud, [...] a devastated community.' (Group 8)

Sometimes, however, the photograph did trigger memories of the quarry where the abuse was alleged to have occurred:
And I suddenly remembered, when we were looking at the oil drums, I remembered the quarry and I thought is this supposed to be that? (Group 30, f)

However, where it was recognised as a potential abuse site, the image was widely interpreted as ‘sinister’, ‘biased’ or ‘misleading’. The discussion below was typical of the type of exchange that took place within some groups as they encountered this image:

f: Bleak. [...] 
f: What is that about? 
f: I think that we should leave this one out for a bit and maybe come back to it because I think that is a distraction. 
f: It’s a distraction to make you think it’s a scene where something nasty has happened. 
f: Desolate wasteland. 
f: Yeah, tips! [...] 
f: Enclosed as well, protected so that nobody could see him. 
f: Dirty, symbolic. (Group 5)

The audience groups’ interaction around the two photographs (the harbour and the quarry scene) clearly show that their memories of the Orkney coverage were that the island was represented as a peaceful place, disrupted by social work intervention and that the media coverage had not, on the whole, conveyed a sinister image of island geography or played up the notion of community conflict.

Clearly, the predominant media representation of Orkney had been understood and recalled by audiences. But understanding and recalling a message is not necessarily the same as actually accepting it. How did the media promoted image of Orkney (as a place and as a community) actually relate to what they believed? How did people construct ‘the
geography of safety and danger in relation to Orkney? How did media images of Orkney relate to their own ideas about the 'sort of place' where abuse would occur or their personal knowledge, if any, of Scottish islands and rural communities?

For some people, the descriptions of Orkney in their own news bulletins were an automatic and unconsidered part of their thinking. In some cases, understanding and recalling the message, were synonymous with influence. The idea that Orkney was 'not that sort of place' was deeply embedded in these people’s assumptions.4

However, for many others, the recall and reconstruction process involved an element of self-conscious reflection on media representations. As one person commented:

They [the media reports] weren’t very factual, they focused a lot on people in the community expressing their outrage, you did see a lot of the peaceful end of Orkney. (Group 8, f)

Some statements attributed to reporters or interviewees in their scripts were also satirical. One group, for example, laughed as they read out a statement they attributed to the Reverend. The sentiments were deliberately exaggerated:

[speaking as ‘the Reverend’] We never thought that nasty society that you’ve got down on the mainland would invade our little heaven up here. (Group 14, m)

Some people also became reflective about media representations and their own assumptions during the course of the group discussions. Others said they had been alerted to this dimension of media coverage because
some of it had been so 'over the top'. As one research participant commented, (recalling a specific programme about Orkney):

They had a documentary on BBC Scotland and the kind of closing shot in the documentary was this beautiful sunset over the west of Orkney, the sun going down on the island. [...] The sort of message that came from that sort of closing still was: how could anything like that happen in a place like this? (Group 32, m)

Clearly, each person's position on a particular issue cannot simply be 'read off' from their news bulletin. The audience-generated news scripts included deliberate satire as well as straightforward representation and reconstructions. Understanding how audiences relate to such representations must be contextualised by the surrounding discussion within the focus groups. Analysis of these discussions identified four positions. However it should be noted that people did not necessarily adhere solely to one position or maintained a static stance throughout the discussion. In addition, adherence to one aspect of one position did not necessitate subscription to the entire argument.

Orkney is just not that sort of place/ they are not that sort of people
Some research participants simply accepted the 'fact' that Orkney was just not the sort of place where abuse would happen. Many spoke positively of Orkney and accepted the image of a supportive tight-knit community. For some, these representations informed their belief that social workers were guilty of gross incompetence. People taking this position did not necessarily notice the ideological content of representing Orkney as a rural idyll, and some could not imagine any alternative construction of Orkney.
Usually these people were totally dependent on media reports for their image of Orkney. However a few had actually been to the islands and their perceptions of the way of life there did not accord with their images of the sorts of community in which abuse would occur.⁵ A group of schoolgirls from Inverness for example, included some who had visited the Orkneys. They said it was hard to believe that abuse could take place in Orkney because:

f: [Orkney is] just small, wee crofters.
f: Close knit community.
f: You wouldn't think it would happen on a tiny little island in the north of Scotland, you'd think it would be more central - like Glasgow or Edinburgh or something.
f: Yeah, like when you go to Orkney it's all like people fishing and taking lobsters in and selling them in the markets and that. (Group 21)⁶

People were also influenced by media declarations that the whole community would have known if abuse was going on and yet the whole community supported the parents. The idea that an entire community might collude was seen as totally implausible:

f: I think too the fact that there were so many people supposed to be involved it wasn't just a very small group. It was supposed to be most of the community almost. [...] 
f: It was a lot of people, it was a lot of families wasn't it. That is why I didn't believe it, because it was so many families. (Group 9)

Such perspectives were bolstered by some research participants' knowledge of small community life:
m: I really thought that it [the accusation] was a load of rubbish anyway, you know, personally.

JK: What made you think it was a load of rubbish?
m: I just didn't think that something of that scale could come off. [...] If there was a certain proportion of the community at it the whole community would know about it. [...] I'm from a small community and they knew that the fighters were off to Libya before the national press even knew. Because it is a small community everybody knows everything.[...] There would be bound to be one person would have picked up and said 'Basically, aye, it went on, this is outrageous'. But the entire community said 'we are absolutely bewildered'. [...] I really don't think that it happened. I can understand, aye, in this day and age it could happen, but in that case I don't think that it did. I really don't think that it did. (Group 4, f)

The testimony of the community was seen as crucial evidence in favour of the parents, particularly given that the parents were incomers. Indeed, even if they were sceptical of media portrayals of the landscape of Orkney, the community reaction was seen as important. One research participant, who had grown up in Orkney and maintained contacts there, commented:

The interesting thing on the ground, which came across in the media coverage as well, was that despite the fact they were incomers, they got the support of the locals, which was quite unusual. [...] There's usually quite a lot of antagonism. I would have expected the community not to rally round and the fact that they did suggested that it was more likely they were innocent. (Group 32, m)
Orkney is just that sort of place/ they are exactly the sort of people

A second position adopted by some research participants was to recall that the news reporting had generally promoted a positive image of Orkney but to reject this message. Those asserting this position were consciously opposed to what they identified as the dominant media presentation of Orkney. These people had alternative images of the island as a sinister place, and the site of bizarre religious practices, precisely the sort of location where abuse would occur.

Some people, for example, thought that a close-knit community might collude. Thus when one research participant referred to the support of 'the close-knit community' on Orkney, his co-participant replied: 'too close-knit, were they not all supposed to be involved?' (Group 35, f). In a second group one young man declared he thought the abuse was likely to have occurred because:

It seemed like all the main folk on the island were involved. I mean it was all like all the families knew each other [...] so it was like a whole clump of people in one place getting down to something. So it did seem, it was probable you know. (Group 20, m)

In other groups people talked about island life as backward, strange, secretive and introverted:

All backwards, you think of it, don't you [...] ritual abuse usually happens on islands and the like. (Group 14, m)

Weird and strange things go on in small isolated places. (Group 10, f)

f: They have their own way of living too. [...] m: They've nothing but fish and sex, and they have sex all winter.
m: If you knock on the door and ask them to use the toilet they put a shovel in your hand and point to a hill about five miles away. (Group 26, m)

m: They tend to inter-marry don’t they and, I mean, you don’t know what’s going to happen then do you?
m: They could keep it sort of hushed up if everyone’s involved [...] you could hush it up much more on a Scottish island than you could on the mainland. (Group 43)

You’d expect people to have really strong beliefs in something or other, whether it was in themselves or in God and they wouldn’t expect themselves to be wrong because they don’t have anyone to ask questions, you know. It’s not like they wander around and get the opportunity to talk about a lot of things. (Group 22, f)

Such ideas were not drawn from the media reporting of the Orkney case (which usually eschewed such association). Instead, people drew on personal experience combined with broader cultural images of island life:

Orkney is more likely, I’d say, for things like that to happen. [...] I went to Mull [...] and it’s so isolated and desolate. [...] When you think about it it’s so likely that it could happen in one of these places. (Group 22, f)

I know quite a few people that have come from the islands and I know they’re very, very, very secretive and they do not like outside interference. And they’re definitely into cult things, and I don’t think they’re all innocent. I really don’t think. (Group 29, f)

I come from Devon and Dartmoor and like Exmoor are synonymous with things like that going on. [...] The Orkneys are an island aren’t
they? It's away from mainland society and an ideal place for witchcraft. (Group 14, f)

One woman even drew, for her images of Orkney, on her late husband's experiences during World War 1:

My husband was there during the first world war and he used to say there was nothing in Shetland and Orkney, it was just barren land. They used to say 'bonny Scotland', that was a joke, it was nothing but sheep and cattle where the soldiers were billeted, hated it, he only done 6 month there [...] He wanted back home, it was too quiet ... I'll tell you something, there was a lot of funny things went on then. (Group 35)

Others exchanged anecdotes about the experiences of friends of friends:

My friend went to Stornaway [the main town on South Ronaldsay] and he was asked to come and see the big bonfire. It was the Minister running down the fiddlers - the Devil's music. He said there was a big pile of fiddles and he looked at one, costs thousands of pounds, and he nearly cried when he seen the whole lot went up in flames.' (Group 26, m)

Talking about their negative images of island life research participants often explicitly drew on other sources of reference too. Two people referred to having seen the film 'The Wickerman' (a film about devil worship in the Western Isles), another commented: '[Island life is] like 'Lord of the Flies', you develop your own rules' (Group 15). Others referred to the general genre of horror film in which 'murderers loom out of the mist'. Several had powerful associations between island living and paganism:
Oh there was definitely some sort of cult ... all those islanders and what they’re up to. I’d imagine that there’d be something weird like that going on. You hear about these magic circles [...] the sort of thing you see on the television, the drama series, I think it was Inspector Morse, like druids and that. (Group 21, f)

Some people drew on such representations to re-interpret images from the television in ways which ran directly counter to the accompanying voice-overs. For example, two research participants commented that whatever the reporter might have said, the camera actually showed parents dressed in rubber-boots and woolly jumpers looking ‘like new age hippie types’. This was an appearance which, according to these research participants, suggested they might well be ‘into paganism and that kind of thing’ (Group 1; Group 4).

Orkney may not be that sort of place, but the accused parents were outsiders

A third position, held strongly by a few Scottish people was that Orkney might be a rural idyll but that these positive attributes could not be associated with the accused parents because they were incomers. Some research participants also challenged the media image of an island united in support of the parents. Some adopted that position because they knew people from the islands - either directly or as friends of friends, and, in Scotland, the case was subject to extensive discussion and gossip. Thus one woman challenged the predominant media image of a united community by referring to Orcadians who resented the ‘white settlers’. She described friends who were ‘born and bred Orcadians’ whose analysis of the case was ‘They are not Orcadians [...] Orcadians don’t do that [abuse kids]’ (Group 9). Another spoke about the opinions of a friend of her mother-in-law who lived in Orkney:
Well I've not actually spoken to them [the friends] but they're like, conversing through my mother-in-law. They say something must have happened up there. [...] It was all blew out of proportion and all the rest of it but he says there is satanical whatever, there's definitely something. (Group 11, f)

Knowledge of Orkney islander's suspicions and their own doubts about incomers combined in some participants to make them very cynical about the parents:

The fact that they were incomers, that was through speaking to Orcadians, one in particular coloured my view of it. [He] said, they were all incomers, people bringing in things. Whether it was true or not, I know that coloured my opinion after that. (Group 19, m)

According to my friend (from the islands) the local people were nothing to do with it, not at all implicated in it. [My friend thought] it was just typical incomers causing trouble again, giving the island a bad name, causing trouble for the island people. (Group 7, f)

The accused people weren't Orcadians themselves, they were all outsiders [...] That they were English made it more suspicious. (Group 18, f)

A lot of them (the accused) have moved up there [...] I think it is more the criminal element that's being put in there. (Group 21, f)

No disrespect to certain people here though, but some of them are English [...] maybe they brought in something from where they came from. (Group 19, m)
The importance of knowing that the accused parents were incomers and the affect this could have on people's thinking was sometimes evident during the course of the group session itself. Thus when one group member asserted that: 'The thing that made me think about it was the fact that they are all incomers. They weren't local people, they were all English incomers.' Another group member conceded: 'that sheds a different light on it, that makes you think.' (Group 4)

It is worth noting that all the respondents quoted above were Scottish and reiterating that they had come to their conclusion in spite of, rather than because of, the media coverage.

**Different conceptual sentences, but a common grammar: similarities between these three accounts**

On the face of it, the three positions outlined above may appear very different. In traditional media terms those taking the second or third position might be described as reading the Orkney coverage 'against the grain'. A great deal of investigation has focused on 'resistant' or 'oppositional' readings of specific programmes (usually shown to research participants on video). The concern in such work is to examine how people resist the intended meaning of the programme producers (or the 'preferred meaning' as identified by the researchers). In this sense the second two interpretations outlined above are certainly 'resistant' or 'oppositional'. The research participants who focused on the parents' incomer status, or who declared that islands were likely to harbour child abusers, consciously 'resisted' the predominant presentation of the Orkney story. They resisted what they saw as the manipulative self-presentation of the Orkney parents and refused to accept what they understood to be the preferred meaning of most of the press and television reporting.
However, the limits of the terminology 'opposition' and 'resistance' must be recognised. The fact that people could 'resist' such meanings does not mean that 'the media' have no influence. It simply means that a particular 'message' (the Orkney parents must be innocent because Orkney is such a nice place) could be disputed. This 'resistance' is itself supported by other media messages. Positive reporting about Orkney may be challenged by drawing on books or films or other media representations of island life as strange or backward, however this can not be used as grounds for generalising about audience resistance to 'media power' in any broader way.

In addition, the resistance evident in many people's reaction to the predominant media representation of Orkney cannot be the subject of unqualified celebration (as you find in some media theorists' accounts). Many cultural theorists would wish to challenge some of the attitudes outlined above - and would be more likely to describe these opinions as prejudice than resistance.

Rather than highlighting the differences between these three types of response I think it is more important to identify their common framing. I would argue that these first three groups in fact have more in common than divide them. They may differ about whether or not Orkney is a 'nice' place or whether or not the accused parents were therefore 'nice' people, but they all retained the underlying construction that abuse does not happen in nice places within 'nice communities'. They also often share the assumption that neighbours would be aware if abuse was taking place (and, of course, in Orkney the abuse was allegedly to have involved gatherings in the open air). Whether or not they accept the specifics of the coverage of the Orkney case, they are accepting a similar framework of thinking. They may construct different types of conceptual sentence, but they are working within the same rules of grammar. They share a fundamental acceptance of 'sites of danger' which are (differently)
entangled with ideas about class and 'normality', and concepts about urban versus rural, England versus Scotland, modern versus old-fashioned, and Christian versus pagan.

Rejecting the relevance of story 'placing'

Outright and consistent rejections of this sort of logic were however, evident in about half of the focus groups: 'I think sexual abuse could happen anywhere. It doesn't surprise me that it is Orkney, doesn't surprise me that it wouldn't be Orkney' (Group 11, f); 'It's going on in normal families and normal communities' (Group 46, m). Even so, although many people expressly stated that abuse 'can happen anywhere' fewer maintained this position throughout the discussion. Many had some 'gut instincts' or 'intuitive response' on the subject. Some of those who explicitly rejected the relevance of ideas about geography and community in assessing the Orkney case, went on to implicitly use such notions as they discussed the case. Some became conscious of this as they spoke. For example, one man observed:

I seem to be saying that it doesn't surprise me that something nasty happens there because I don't like [the place]. I try not to make sweeping generalisations [...] but I would have thought 'yeah, it happened'. I can't really escape that because it's been hammered into me. (Group 14, m)

However, some people were able to position themselves consistently outside such discourses. These people were clear that place and community had nothing to do with their judgements about Orkney. This position was often combined with the assertion that neighbours would, in any case, not necessarily be aware if abuse was taking place and that no-one could be taken in by media assertions that abuse could not happen in
a small community like South Ronaldsay. One social worker, for example, dismissed media descriptions of Orkney as irrelevant:

I suppose I think it [this media theme] doesn't promote that [the idea that abuse could not have occurred]. All it promotes is people like me, I'm from a small village myself, saying: 'Don't be ridiculous, of course village life isn't like that'. Village life is made up of locals and non-locals and groups of people do particular things whether they be in a village or the city or wherever and it's nothing to do with where it happens. (Group 15, f)

Others who consistently rejected media promoted assumptions about dangerous/safe places/communities often described events in their own lives which had convinced them that abuse could be carried out 'under your nose' but in complete secrecy. For example when one research participant asserted that the community would have known if anything had been going on because: 'It sounded like a right close-knit community, you know, everybody knows each other's business.' Another responded:

Well, I live in a small [housing] scheme and there was a scout leader charged with abusing boys over 20 odd years, and nobody knew about it and he was supposed to be a respected member of the community. (Group 34, f)

Several of the groups who collectively asserted this view had compelling personal and political experiences which had led them to reject this position. One group, whose members retained a complete and absolute rejection of such discourse, was a group of charity activists working in relation to the third world. They refused to produce a 'typical' news bulletin about Orkney, choosing to produce a deliberately oppositional account instead. Their script consciously inverted everything they remembered and the bulletin opened with the promise that they were going to reveal: 'The
facts that lurk behind the stone walls of this Orcadian backwater' (Group 13, m). In subsequent discussion these participants made it clear that they completely rejected the idea that it was ever possible to judge the likelihood of abuse on the basis of the type of place or community in which it was supposed to have occurred. They talked at length about stereotypes about Africa and India and how these influenced public attitudes and political policies in different parts of the world.

A second group which consistently rejected media discourse about Orkney as a place was a support group for incest survivors. It was one of the women in this group who had picked out the photograph of Orkney harbour and declared: 'it looks just like a wee postcard'. She went on to say 'It's like nothing ever happens here - that's what that picture says, really, isn't it? It's a sleepy Orkney village' (Group 6,f). She absolutely rejected this message and went on to talk about her own experience of being abused in a 'nice' middle-class home and the difficulty of drawing attention to her plight. Her family presented a normal, respectable front to the world, the abuse she suffered was well-hidden, including from close friends and neighbours.

Similar proactive rejection of the notion that abuse only happens in certain types of place/community also came from another group - a group of neighbours active in their local community centre. This centre was in a notoriously 'rough area' of Glasgow, the type of place, they said, which job-seekers should avoid giving as an address for fear of discrimination. This group were very conscious of how an area's reputation can influence judgements about its inhabitants. They explicitly deconstructed media representations of Orkney declaring:

A lot of people questioned if it did or didn't happen because it was Orkney. [...] If the same sort of thing had happened in Campbell Street [...] everybody would have just thought 'Och, that must have
happened there'. [...] Because people tend to look at an area and just say 'Oh that's a ghetto [...] and yes, it probably did happen there'. (Group 8, f)

In each of the last three groups cited above, participants had been at the receiving end of stereotypes about places of safety and danger. They were also actively involved in working with other people in similar situations (i.e. the incest survivors self-help group and community centre). These factors seemed to help them to step outside the 'grammar' that associates sexual abuse with certain types of places and not others. At the very least it ensured they were careful not to suggest they ascribed to any such sentiments in the group context.

Conclusion
The data discussed above has implications for research methods, audience reception theory and news production practice.

*Methodology and audience reception theory*

In the course of the chapter the reader has been introduced in greater detail to the specifics of the script-writing exercise. I have illustrated how the exercise operates as a tool through which to initiate discussion, access memories and identify patterns of recall. Obvious care is needed in interpreting people's scripts, but in the context of the surrounding discussion it can be a useful way of exploring media influence.

The data discussed provides empirical evidence from which to engage with existing audience reception theory. They clearly show that the media reporting of Orkney as a place and a community had been commonly understood and recalled in similar ways across a wide range of groups. People's ability to reconstruct scripts closely echoing actual news reports was bolstered by knowledge of standard media narratives and existing
cultural images. However it was also the result of, sometimes quite startlingly accurate, recall of the contemporary reporting. It is clearly inadequate to measure people’s recall of pre-determined ‘key points’ and then judge their failure as evidence that the media have little impact. People do have clear memories of certain aspects of reporting, though these may not be the aspects considered most important by the researcher, and certainly may not include all the facts.

Over and above documenting people’s ability to recall media reporting, the data also demonstrate media influence. This chapter has highlighted how one particular factor, 'story placing', can operate. Some people, at least some of the time, were influenced against the social workers and in favour of the parents through the emotive descriptions of Orkney and the community.

This finding is common to, and will be important in, analysis of a wide range of topics. In focus groups I conducted about AIDS, for example, story 'placing' proved important in how the media reported, and people responded to, information about AIDS in Africa. Some people found the idea that HIV was widespread in Africa easy to accept because of pre-existing images of the 'dark continent' (Kitzinger and Miller, 1992).

The social and geographical placing of a story is thus a crucial analytical tool. However, it would be wrong to create a simplistic model of how such story placing operates on audiences. The group discussions indicated how complex this process can be. Media influence does not always result in a neat absorption of the predominant media message: not everyone accepted Orkney as a peaceful rural idyll or agreed that this made the incomers unlikely abusers. Nor were judgements solely based on the media representations of the Orkney case (other cultural images were important and, in Scotland at least, personal contact and 'gossip' had been a factor). However, the underlying logic of the association between
certain types of place and abuse was accepted by many research participants (even if sometimes against their 'better judgement'). The media (both in their reporting of the Orkney case and in other reports about crime and sexual violence) played a part in helping to maintain this assumption.

Of course, the media have also been a conduit for public statements that sexual abuse happens across all classes and strata of society, in villages as well as cities. Such statements were often also recalled and reiterated by research participants. However, such ideas were not always fundamentally absorbed into people's ways of thinking. Instead, outright and consistent rejection of the logic which associates abuse with certain kinds of places/communities when it did occur, was often based on extra-media factors such as personal experience of abuse and discrimination.

**Media production process**

The story placing described in this chapter is echoed in media coverage of a wide range of stories. News reports routinely place stories geographically and socially. 'Placing' a story is identified, by journalists, as an important part of their trade. Two trainee journalists told me, the first question they were taught to ask when writing a report was: 'What's going to set the scene?' or how can you 'paint a picture of it' (Group 23). The TV camera establishing shot introduces audiences to where an event is taking place and emphasis on 'I was there', 'eye-witness' news-telling (both in press and in TV reports) is also supposed to add veracity to an account whether the journalist stands on a wind-swept hillside or in front of the Houses of Parliament. At the same time journalists often make plentiful references to 'local colour'. Vox-pop interviews with the 'man on the street' to assess community response are also routine, while main interviewees will be placed against certain backdrops. These all help to locate an event
and to 'place' interviewees and may explicitly, or implicitly, convey the reporter's attitude toward a story.

Geographical 'placing' may be particularly pertinent when it comes to covering sexual abuse - the assailant and victims may be anonymous or unknown but the site of abuse can 'set the scene' and, indeed, it is no coincidence that most of the major rape or sexual abuse stories are recalled by geography - the Moors murderers, the Yorkshire Ripper, the Cleveland scandal, the Orkney case. Descriptions of the Orkney islands certainly proved to be important to the Orkney story (and attention to the location was perhaps particularly acute because of the influx of London journalists for whom these islands were indeed a unusual site for 'national' news attention).

What I found particularly interesting was the way in which story placing was accepted as a routine, and relatively neutral part of their job by some media workers I spoke to. The three focus groups of media workers (one of practising news editors, two of trainee journalists) all produced reports which incorporated emotive descriptions of Orkney. Yet, initially, most of them did not see this as in anyway 'biased':

JK: Do you think you took any particular angle in these news reports?
f: No we did it straight didn't we?
f: We didn't disagree with what we were saying did we? Morally.
(Group 23)

m: It kind of sits on the fence, tries not to take an opinion [...] It can't afford to be controversial
m: Absolutely
f: Can't afford to have an opinion on it. You can report it but I don't think you're the best person to judge. You don't have all the facts at
hand, you’re just reporting on limited bits of information that you’re getting from different sources. (Group 3)

Whereas most participants in the two groups cited above did not seem to see any ‘bias’ in their reports, one of the groups of trainee journalists took a slightly different approach. They accepted that their descriptions were ‘emotive’ but defended this as just an attention grabbing device and a way of ‘keeping in touch’ with their audience:

The news always focuses on the human element, always focus on a specific community […] Instead of saying ‘this is Orkney’, […] it’s the fact that it is serene [that you’ve got to get across] […] That’s why, I think, probably this kind of emotive language keeps cropping up, like ‘the sleepy village’ - because it’s a description. You can’t just say ‘the village of Orkney’. Well, you could, but your audience would probably go ‘oh yes? What’s on the other side? Happy Days is on the other side.’ You’ve got to keep people’s attention. (Group 23, f)

However, when asked if they would have included a shot of standing stones in Orkney (an unusual image that was, however, included in one actual TV news bulletin) they were clear that this would be inappropriate:

f: They [the audience] are going to be able to relate to that [image of the harbour] a bit more, than the pagan...

f: Puts ideas into people’s minds that weren’t there anyway, if you insinuate that Merlin lives there or something, […]

m: If they had shown pictures of the standing stones, I think they might have got into trouble.

f: In a way, it’s the production team trying to say, this could happen where you are, that kind of thing. Don’t you think that’s the
message? Whereas if you say it's all mystical, people are going to say: 'well I don't live somewhere like that'.

JK: So if you are trying to keep your audience, then...

f: This might concern you.

f: Yes, that's exactly

JK: Again, is that something you've been trained to do as a journalist?

f: You've got to be in touch. (Group 23)

To conclude, the above discussion illustrates how people work with the script-writing exercise and what it can tell us about media influence, audience recall and diverse audience responses. It suggests that the media 'placing' of a story (geographically and socially) serves as more than just a 'back-drop' and provides more than innocent 'local colour' or 'wallpaper'. The way in which Orkney was described was systematically slanted toward particular types of representation and it was clear that the 'placing' of a story can help people to make judgements about the significance, implications and plausibility of an account.

The seasons and the weather were often used rhetorically to indicate emotional states. A picture of a reunited family was accompanied by the caption: 'Sunshine after the storm' (Scottish, 6 April 1991), another article had a headline: 'Back together. From magic summer to winter nightmare' (Scotland on Sunday, 7 April 1991). Indeed news reporting seemed to suggest that the weather was controlled by a benign being totally in support of the parents: 'After days of rain, the island was bathed in sunshine today, a fitting welcome back for the children who'd been held on the mainland for more than 5 weeks, their families having that date etched in their memory' (ITV, Early Evening News, 17.40, 5 April 1991).
Dissenting accounts were rare. But where they existed sometimes inverted every element of this. Compare the portrait of the quarry as part of the happy 'long lost summer', to the way it was represented in another, quite different report in the Evening News. This article was unusually negative about the accused parents. The report described: 'The remote quarry, shrouded in mist' and 'partially filled with muddy water'. The island as a whole was described as: 'a place so wild it appears to have been abandoned totally by both God and man'. All the emotive elements in this report pointed towards believing that Orkney was precisely the sort of place where abuse could occur. The journalist was explicitly sceptical about some of the parents' assertions, e.g. whether the quarry the parents displayed to the journalists was in any case the 'right' quarry and described a tense and divided community. (Evening News, 28 March 1991)

One of these examples appeared in the Evening News article quoted above, the other appeared in the Independent. This latter article included a section which read: 'Last November eight children from a family of 15 were taken into care. Their father was already serving a seven-year prison sentence in Aberdeen for abuse of his children. Local people used the word "horrific" more than once to describe details of this case. Mr Rosie [the local busdriver] said: "We'd never have thought. He must have been a Jekyll and Hyde character. Nobody could believe it when he was taken away". As Mr Rosie said this, he recognised the inconsistency of his previous words.' (Independent, 1 April 1991)

Such assumptions are encouraged by routine media coverage. Where attention is drawn to the normality of the scene this is done to exploit the contrast rather than to challenge it. This was comprehensively illustrated in descriptions of the house - dubbed by the media 'The House of Horrors' - where the Wests hid the bodies of the murdered women and girls. Captions read: 'So Normal, So Chilling' and descriptions underlined the contrast between scenes of apparent 'normality' and acts of extreme 'depravity': 'On the wall the infamous address is written in wrought iron. A lucky horse-shoe above the door completes the suburban scene' (The Last Rites, Mirror, 9 March 1994). We were treated to computer simulations of the interior of the house - invited to imagine that we are walking through the house. We were shown photographs of the bedroom: 'On the bed is a small cuddly toy - and a model of Paddington Bear is on a shelf behind...' (Mirror, 7 March 1994). We were led into the 'beige-tiled' bathroom filled with everyday items; 'a crushed tube of toothpaste, an arrangement of plastic flowers' and invited into the lounge - where 'a cushion perches on the knitted settee cover. It's embroidered with the word "Dad".' (Mirror, 8 March 1994)

Media descriptions of decaying urban scenes, wild and misty moorland, or pretty white-washed fishing villages, of course, do not emerge out of a vacuum. They are part of a long-standing Western cultural repertoire and
bear emotive connotations which can help to provoke fear, provide reassurance, or persuade people that children really were, or were not, sexually assaulted in this place. Research participants reported two
general associations with Scottish islands - one bleak and cold, the other	tourist brochure picturesque. As one group commented when asked if
their description of Orkney was 'memory or invention'? 'Poetic license
isn't it really, well, you know, Scottish island, you know, tranquil [...] Well,
being Londoners we, me anyway, we naturally assume that anywhere up
in Scotland like that is going to be a nice peaceful place'. (Group 43, m)

6 The idea that cities are more dangerous than rural areas is routine. For example, journalists played up the shock of the unexpected when a girl was raped in: 'The picture postcard National Trust village in Lackock,
Wiltshire' (Express, 22 July 1991) or headline an article: 'Kidnap rape in Royal Village' citing a resident's bewildered comment: 'You think you're a
lot safer in a small place...until this happens. It's not as if you are in a city like London or New York'. (Express, 25 June 1991)

7 This film had been scheduled for a repeat showing on TV during the
eight of the Orkney crisis but was cancelled because it was considered
inappropriate - however some people remembered it anyway.

8 This view was challenged by other members of the group in each case.
In the first case another woman protested: 'But in most island
communities, everybody dresses like hippies. I know because my
husband lives up North.[...] Everybody just walks about in sort of really
Worzel Gummidge type clothes' (Group 1). In the other case another
research participant replied: 'I'm a hippie and I dress strangely but I'm not
into satanic rituals in my bedroom with my boyfriend'. (Group 4)

9 The motivation of people who actually chose to move to the Orkneys
was also questioned. 'They probably feel that they are so remote where
they were that they would never be found out.' 'Exactly, exactly.' (Group
9)

10 The one English person to express this view took a slightly different
approach commenting: 'But I have this sort of funny notion that these were
incomer families rather than native families. In my mind that makes it quite
different [JK: How is it different?] Because there must be a reason why
they chose to come from somewhere else to go and live in an isolated
rural community [...] They might be sort of peaceful loving people who
wanted to get away from the turmoil of city life or they were a bunch of
weirdos anyway wanting to go and do that'. (Group 5, f)
Chapter 7

Embedded knowledge and the importance of ‘social currency’

The previous chapter demonstrated the importance of wider beliefs and how intertextuality may operate in people’s understandings of any particular news story. This chapter takes a closer look at routine media coverage and people’s broad knowledge base about child sexual abuse. I argue that the media have been crucial in the emergence of sexual abuse as a publicly recognised problem. However, I also highlight the way in which the media perpetuate stereotypes about child abusers and focus on stranger-danger at the expense of confronting sexual abuse within the family.

This chapter also broadens out the terms of the enquiry. I show how stereotypes and the focus on threats from ‘outsiders’ are not only encouraged by the media. This emphasis is reinforced by everyday parental experiences and conversation, community mobilisation and the influence of stigma and taboos. Through close attention to the nature of conversation in the focus group discussions I highlight patterns in the information that was freely exchanged in the group, and that which was withheld (and only revealed to the researcher in private) or only reticently revealed. Different stories have different ‘social currency’. Some experiences or personal knowledge, I argue, are public and common currency, some are ‘private’. The social structuring of such exchange is a key to examining public responses to mass media representations.
The discovery of abuse and incest: media coverage and public recognition

During the last 15 years there have been remarkable changes in the extent and nature of media coverage of child sexual abuse. The foundations for this change lay in the 1970s, as widespread and often incestuous abuse was revealed through the work of Women's Liberation organisations such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis. The recently established battered women's refuges began to find women seeking help, not so much (or only) because of assaults against themselves, but because of sexual abuse of their children. Similarly, some of the women ringing Rape Crisis lines were calling, not because they had been attacked recently, but because of rape during childhood, often by men that they knew. Feminist journalists and magazines such as Spare Rib began producing articles, and survivors began speaking out publicly about their experiences.

The start of the sea-change in media coverage however was signalled in 1986 when Esther Rantzen devoted an entire programme to the issue: Childwatch. This launched the setting up of the children's helpline ('Childline') and was followed up by other media initiatives (e.g. Childwatch update BBC1 25 June 1987). This was accompanied by a dramatic increase in attention to this issue in the rest of the media. Analysis of The Times, for example, shows a four fold increase in coverage of sexual abuse between 1985 and 1987 (Kitzinger, 1996). During the second half of the 1980s child sexual abuse became a regular topic for documentary and investigative series such as Brass Tacks, (BBC2, 7 July 1987); Everyman, (BBC1, 8 May 1988); Antenna, BBC2, 10
May 1989); Diverse Reports (Channel 4, 14 May 1986); Horizon (BBC2 19 June 1989); and the Cook Report (ITV, 17 July 1989). Such interest continued into the 1990s in programmes such as World in Action (ITV, 20 May 1991); Dispatches (Channel 4, 19 February 1992); Inside Story (BBC1, 17 June 1992); Panorama (BBC1, 7 December 1992), and Assignment (BBC2, February March 1993).

Alongside such news and documentary reporting, sexual abuse was the topic of 'softer' outlets: magazine programmes, chat shows and fiction. The issue became a regular topic for chat/confession shows such as Oprah (e.g. Adult Oprah, Channel 4, 23 January 1993). It was addressed in TV films: Something about Amelia, (BBC2, 6 March 1989) and Testimony of a child, (BBC2, 5 July 1989), and by the early 1990s, began to appear in regular police, hospital and legal drama such as The Bill (ITV, 29 January 1993); Casualty (BBC1, 6 February 1993); and LA Law (Channel 4, 16 March 1994). Child sexual abuse also became integrated into soap opera story lines (most extensively the 'Jordache' story in Brookside, which ran from March 1993, see Henderson, 1996).

This dramatic increase in coverage was widely noted in the focus group discussions:

f: It became an issue about ten years ago. There are all these big cases...

f: They are in the papers all the time now.

f: Aye, now they are. (Group 4)

Nobody knew about such things when I was young, now it's even on children's programmes like Grange Hill.

I recall my parents saying: 'Now don't talk to strangers' or 'don't stand at the bus queue if there's just one person in front of you',


that was about the end of it. But now everyone's looking round every corner [...] the whole culture's changing or it's changed. (Group 37, m)

People often reported that this has altered their own views on the subject:

We never talked about it in my day, I've no doubt it went on, but it just wasn't discussed. It's right to be out in the open now. I realise now it's going on. (Group 58, f)

There's much more general awareness now anyway. Ten years ago I found it hard to believe that fathers abused their daughters. But now I realise it's often just like that. I know that largely because of the telly, it comes back to the media. (Group 5, f)

Such basic acceptance that child sexual abuse does take place was fundamental to people's reactions to cases such as Orkney and should not be taken for granted. It is also important to note that most people welcomed basic media recognition of child sexual abuse. However, some thought the media exaggerated the figures, or that the publicity had 'gone too far'. Whatever their reservations however all the research participants stated that they believed sexual abuse (including incest) did occur. They all agreed that (even if not as common as some statistics suggested) sexual violence against children was still a very real and widespread problem. However, alongside that they were often reluctant to believe that anyone they knew could possibly be an abuser, and stereotypes about abusers were often evident in their conversations. It is these issues which will be explored in more depth in the rest of this chapter.
**Media constructions of 'the danger that prowls our streets'**

In spite of explicit media statements that children are most likely to be abused by someone they know and that it is impossible to identify a 'paedophile' on sight, this is not reflected in the actual balance of news coverage. Nor is it reflected in the way in which abusers are often represented both in factual and fictional reports (Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995a, Henderson, 1996). Routine news coverage displays an ongoing reluctance to suggest that members of one's family or immediate social network might assault children. Often it also subtly (or not so subtly) implies that sex offenders are 'different' and that one can somehow 'tell' if someone is a likely abuser. Here I will focus on 'factual' reporting but it is worth noting how the role of abuser was cast in fiction too. In every regular fiction series (from soap opera to hospital drama) when sexual abusers were portrayed they were always played by a new character, 'an outsider', being brought into the series for that purpose. Often they were also presented in ways which suggested they were obviously unstable (see Henderson, 1996).

The focus on stranger-danger and stereotyping of abusers is evident in press reporting on a number of levels. Systematic examination of press coverage shows that stranger assaults are much higher profile than assaults by immediate family members. They often receive national crisis treatment, denied to the epidemic of sexual assaults and murders within the family. 'Serious' stranger attacks receive sustained coverage and are seen as cause for national alarm. They lead to warnings to all parents and articles with headlines such as:

*Every Parent's Nightmare: After three child-killings, a climate of fear mars the summer holidays. [...] Tim Raymond asks how to guard against the ultimate nightmare.* *(Sunday Times, 18 August 1991)*
WEEP, 3 children murdered in 100 hrs as Britain sinks to a new low. (Sun, 14 August 1991)

Yet, 150 to 200 children meet their death every year at the hands of their own parents and a large proportion of reported sexual assaults are by relatives or friends of the family (NSPCC, 1992). Front page treatment of these cases are rare, except where social workers are held responsible (for a child's death) or judged over-zealous (in cases of alleged sexual abuse). Publicity about how to prevent sexual abuse also focuses on stranger-danger. In 1991 there were 47 articles in the British press about abuse prevention - only two addressed abuse within the family (Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995a).

Earlier work I conducted with my colleague Paula Skidmore demonstrates some of the production factors which influence this attention to stranger-danger and relative neglect of assault from family or friends. Factors range from the narrative momentum of a stranger-abduction case (the appeal by parents, the anxious search, the eventual tragic discovery) to the available images (when a child is abducted the media can publicise pictures of little Louise in her school uniform). It is also influenced by the random and public nature of stranger attacks (any child is at risk from this 'pervert on the loose'). By contrast, incest cases may be played down or disguised. This is sometimes because of reporting restrictions (the relationship between perpetrator and victim may have to be kept out of the media). However, this relative neglect also seems to be influenced by deep-seated attitudes among potential sponsors and within media organisations. This was widely remarked upon by children's charities. As one representative from Kidscape (an organisation promoting training in child safety) explained:
Advertisers, people who want to sponsor us, [think that stranger-danger] is a subject they're happy to talk about. [But] people don't want to be associated with child abuse as incest.

The same is true, in her experience, of journalists:

It's a message we try to get across to the press [that most children are abused by people they know] but they're very wary, [...] it's not a fun subject, it's likely to put readers off, may upset readers, and it's easier and safer to concentrate on strangers and bullying.

(Kidscape 1994, interviewed by Paula Skidmore, cited in Kitzinger and Skidmore, 1995)

**Media constructions of the 'paedophile'**

Over and above this reluctance to address incest, parts of the media also perpetuate particular stereotypes about abusers. This is particularly true of the tabloids. Indeed, the tendency to present sex offenders as very different from other men, or to frame them as monsters and beasts, was subject to criticism from early feminist critiques of rape (e.g. Brownmiller, 1975/1977) and is still noted in more recent studies (Benedict, 1992; Soothill and Walby, 1990; Meyers, 1997). It was certainly evident in much of the reporting about child sex abusers in my own sample. On a very basic level for example, analysis of headlines which referenced a (male) 'paedophile' during 1991 showed that only 1 in 4 attacks were attributed to 'men', the rest were perpetrated by 'fiends', 'wolfmen' and even the occasional 'Dracula'. There were 21 headlines referring to a man (e.g. 'Man sought over sex assault'), 20 headlines referring to sexual assaults by a 'fiend', 14 referring to 'pervert', 11 to 'monster' and a further 19 to 'beast, 'wolfman', 'animal' or 'brute'.

Such reporting is often accompanied by disturbing 'mug shots' of these 'evil beasts' with captions or headlines drawing attention to their distinctive appearance. (e.g. 'Evil Mr Staring Eyes' (Sun, 2 May 1991)). And, if the photograph makes the abuser look too normal, then the tabloid press, in particular, may resort to the Jekyll and Hyde metaphor identifying the picture with captions such as 'Smile that hid the violent depravity of sex fiend headmaster' (Star, 12 April 1991). It was noticeable that the few descriptions of abusers as clean-shaven and smartly dressed were contained within police descriptions of wanted men - once they are caught, they soon become unshaven and dirty.

If they are not 'wild beasts' then sometimes child sex abusers are distanced from ordinary heterosexual men by being identified as gay. There is a striking asymmetry here in labelling of male-female and male-male sex attacks. While the latter are routinely identified as homosexual assaults, the former are rarely identified as heterosexual ones. In 1991, for example, most of the cases reported in the British press involved at least one female victim (and less than a third of the reports explicitly involved male-on-male assaults). However, the abuser or act of abuse was explicitly identified as 'homosexual' in fifty newspaper articles (and headlined as such seven times). By contrast no assailant or assault was ever explicitly identified as heterosexual.

Interestingly, the word heterosexual or 'straight' did appear in two reports during 1991. But, in the first, it was used when describing how a 'gay' headmaster had used 'heterosexual' blue movies to 'trap' and 'seduce' two boys (Daily Mirror, 25 April 1991). The second report simply stated that police investigating a sex murder had interviewed 92 men: 'Not all of them were paedophiles; sometimes they were straight men' (Sunday Times, 23 June 1991). Homosexuality is mentioned in a way which routinely links it to perversion and child abuse, a point simply reinforced by the two mentions of heterosexuality that I located. Unlike the use of terms
such as ‘monster’ and ‘beast’ which are more common in the tabloids the use of gay-identifiers are common to both broadsheet and tabloids. The *Independent*, for example, headlined a report ‘Man tells of homosexual abuse by care staff’ (*Independent* 10 October 1991) and the *Guardian*, uncritically reported dismay at the fact that Frank Beck was allowed to foster two boys - ‘even though there were complaints that he was homosexual’ (*Guardian* October 1991).^2 (It is hard to imagine the parallel sentence: ‘he was allowed to foster two girls even though there were complaints that he was heterosexual’.)

The above figures do not include references that may imply homosexuality. But these too should be noted. Abusers are often described as immature, under-developed and effeminate or references are made to living with mother or being a bachelor. (The unspoken implication is that this man is so un-masculine that rather than asserting his sexual prowess over adult women, he has to resort to children).^3 Take the example of Frank Beck, who assaulted predominantly boys, but also raped a young lesbian in his care, informing her that he was going to show her what a real man was like. Beck was framed by parts of the media as ‘a sissy’:

Frank Beck had a lonely and disturbed childhood - and grew up to be a sex monster. Before he was 13 he was sexually assaulted by a man on a train. And he was teased about being like a girl. Students at agricultural college dubbed him "Mrs Beck". Beck stood out from other boys because he did not drink, swear or know about girls. (*Star* 30 November 1991)

Over and above the rather crude profiling of men who sexually abuse children as monsters, ‘queer’ or ‘sissy’, the media have widely adopted the concept of ‘the paedophile’. This is a noun which implies that sexually abusing children is an identity, rather than an activity which might be
carried out by a variety of human beings. Some theorists have argued that this will contribute to a failure to recognise abusers when they appear to be 'ordinary men' (respectable members of the community with families of their own) (Kelly, 1996). Certainly, there was some evidence of this happening in my focus groups and, in the next section, I examine people's assumptions and stereotypes.

Public attitudes and beliefs

Stereotypes of abusers: 'Obviously, I don't know any child abusers'

Most research participants stated that 'it's not just men in dirty macs' and knew 'intellectually' that 'anyone can be an abuser'. However, many also admitted they would find it very hard to believe allegations made against anyone who was part of their own social circle. Here it is worth having a closer look at how people talked about 'paedophiles' both in the concrete and in the abstract.

Research participants routinely expressed intense alienation from the very thought of child sexual abuse, and distanced themselves from anyone who could possibly commit such an act. Indeed, expressions of disgust and incomprehension (particularly by and between men) seemed to be an important ritual as the some groups settled down into the discussion.

A geezer's [...] got to be sick to be able to do it to his own daughter...just physically, I personally physically couldn't do it. (Group 40, m)

It's just beyond me, because I've got a daughter as well. I think that the people that do these things must have something seriously wrong with them mentally...to actually comprehend doing it. I couldn't personally feel sexual toward [...] a harmless child. (Group 4, m)
m: Anyone who's normal just doesn't understand it, it's incomprehensible.
m: It's a no-no, isn't it. It's just like a brick wall. (Group 43)

The obscenity of abuse was described as not only incomprehensible but beyond comprehension - people would often shrug their shoulders and make statements such as:

Obviously, I don't know any child abusers, but I can't imagine what sort of person could do that. (Group 14, m)

This assumption that they could not possibly know any child abusers was widespread and was often accompanied by a sense that, if they did meet an abuser, they would instinctively know that 'something was wrong'. People acknowledged that they 'knew' that abusers could appear perfectly ordinary (they're crafty buggers) (It could be anybody / m: 'Most normalest person' / 'They don't wear a badge' (Group 43). However, at the same time they often also had a clear image of the type of character who would abuse.

Such images were encapsulated in routine talk, jokes, phrases and the exchange of anecdotes. A child abuser was, to some people, likely to be socially inadequate, possibly 'backward' and definitely 'a loner':

Most of the people that do things like that are inadequate in some sort of way aren't they, and aren't quite the full ticket. (Group 43, m)

You look at certain people and you can say: 'God he looks a right...'[...] They're quiet, they don't get involved with other people, they keep their own personal life to theirself, they don't tell you anything about theirself. And they just live in a world of their own. Like most
blokes sit and talk a lot of old crap when we're having a drink, you know, [but] then you've got the others who just sit there and won't tell you nothing about the'self. Too frightened aren't they? (Group 40, m)

On a few occasions people described particular individuals of whom they felt suspicious, even if they thought this was irrational. Invariably this was someone with whom they had little, if any, interaction. One man described his neighbours:

I've got a couple live opposite me, must be in their sort of late 60s I suppose. I've lived there for 2 years now, [and they] haven't said a word. They really are a pair of recluses, they don't ever come out their front garden. And he goes off about 10 o'clock every night and he's back there in the morning. Strange behaviour, whether he's got a night job or something I don't know but [...] I'm suspicious, what the bloody hell's he up to? [...] [Because] they don't fit the norm, like I mean we'd probably all talk to each other if we were neighbours. You don't have to have a particularly close relationship with people, but you talk over the fence every now and again or say 'I'm going away, keep an eye on me house', but they never say anything. (Group 43, m)

Another research participant described a local 'odd-ball':

He never speaks to anybody and he's totally [into] fishing [...] I'm sure he is going to want to, one day perhaps, he's going to want to sort of become involved in a sexual way and whether he's going to force [it] [...] because saying 'hello' I'm sure is something that bothers him. (Group 14, m)
Other research participants described child abusers as mentally deranged: 'a fruitcake' (Group 43, m); 'a nutter' (Group 4, m); 'a maniac wandering the streets' (Group 18, f).

Often the image also echoed media portraits of immature and effeminate individuals. One research participant described her image of an abuser as: 'thin, weasly like [...] in a scrawny suit' (Group 23, f). Another talked of 'a little guy, sort of thin, anorak type' (Group 20, m). Abusers were often assumed to be unmarried, what one research participant described as: 'the lives with his mother type'. Sometimes paedophiles were explicitly assumed to be gay. Some people were self-conscious and ambivalent about this stereotype, but still wary:

'If a man's homosexual why does that mean he naturally preys on young boys? It's daft really. Your prejudice is clicking in, I like to think I'm an extremely liberal person but it all goes out the window as soon as my own family becomes involved. (Group 37, m)

Other groups moved seamlessly between discussing paedophilia and homosexuality. The following exchange, for example, occurred in the middle of a discussion about 'it' (child sexual abuse) and I had to clarify what they were talking about:

m: Once it was illegal, wasn't it. Then it was optional. Now they've made it legal and I'm thinking of emigrating before they make it compulsory! [laughter]
JK: What's 'it'? What's 'it' in this case?
m: Poofters! [laughter]
m: I actually think they made it legal for men because half the MPs are bent. (Group 40)
Indeed liberalising laws against homosexuality, employing gay men or
lesbians to work with children and allowed gay fostering or adoption were
all, in some groups, identified as a failure to protect children from potential
abuse. (Such embedded knowledge is not, of course, only evident among
ordinary lay people - it informs legislation. It was precisely this type of
slippage between homosexuality and paedophilia which was evident in the
recent House of Lords debate around equalising the age of consent.)

Other research participants included 'effeminacy' in the type of
characteristics they associated with child sex abusers, but sometimes
distinguished this from actually being gay:

   f: Loneliness and sexual inadequacy [maybe motivates abusers]
   f: Older people maybe [are more likely to abuse]
   m: The sort of unmarried bachelor type, never married, never had
      children.
   f: Someone that couldn't conduct normal sexual relationships.
   f: Yes, I suppose quite effeminate, almost maybe ... I wouldn't say
gay at all, but quite ...
   f: Didn't relate to women
   f: Not butch at all, I never imagine a butch abuser.
   f: I always imagine someone who is maybe inadequate ...
   (Group 23)

One member of this group had explicit class/education assumptions about
who was most likely to sexually abuse children. This image, was informed
by her experiences of attending court cases where the defendants always
seemed to be poorly educated or unintelligent. Most 'educated people',
she said, would intercept their own sexual responses to a child and stop
themselves actually doing anything whereas: 'Most people you see in
court tend not to look overly bright. [...] they are not always very with it.'
(Group 23, f)
A similar idea was echoed in another group which focused on the 'chaotic' (and working class) nature of the typical 'sex abuse family'.

m: I think a lot of the time as well, it's the sort of background people are from. [...] it's normally people, when you see them on the television, with pretty grubby houses and [...] it's always run down.
m: One parent families, grubby houses.
m: Basement tenement block or something, waste ground or something, its not sort of...
m: [...] a normal type of person. (Group 43)

Intertwined with these ideas about mental stability, class, age, education, and appearance was the assumption that abusers would not be the sort of person they might like or admire. This applied to people in the public eye, as well as their immediate neighbourhood. Thus, for example, when discussing whether Michael Jackson or Woody Allen might be guilty of sexual abuse (both allegations in the press at the time), responses sometimes seemed to be influenced by whether they were fans of, or could identify with, either of the celebrities. For example, comments about Michael Jackson included the following exchange as this respondent, rather self consciously, identified her own bias in his favour:

f: No, not Michael Jackson, not him [he's not a child abuser]
JK: Why not?
f: My son's going to be the next Michael Jackson - he can do all the dance routines [laughter]. (Group 8, f)

On the other hand, other participants thought both Michael Jackson and Woody Allen were perfectly capable of abusing children because both were seen as 'strange'. Comments about Jackson referenced his 'confused' identity and pet chimpanzee:
his odd lifestyle...perhaps that influences our decisions...he's going white and he's black...you wouldn't put anything past him. You know, ... how many people have a close relationship with a chimp? (Group 37, m)

Comments about Woody Allen included references to his shuffling gait, 'weirdness' and his 'peculiar' or 'alien' ways of thinking:

He's weird. I think he is quite easily capable of abuse. He's got a warped sense of humour so how does his brain work? (Group 9)

He is weird. He puts me in mind of ..., did you see that film about the man who was kidnapped as a boy, do you not think he's awful like him? (Group 10, f)

Over and above this, and sometimes even in spite of their own better judgement, people often had a very clear mental image of the child abuser as 'Mr Ultra Creepy! People that you just look at, [and ] you see a dodgy guy' (Group 20, m).

'Staring eyes' or bulging eyeballs were mentioned in several groups and were directly related to media images:

Staring eyes [...] like Myra Hindley and Ian Brady [...] when you see a photo [...] you think 'oh yeah, I can tell. (Group 14, m)

There was a case in the East End a couple of years ago - there was a bloke who looked particularly odd, he has staring eyeballs. (Group 23, f)
Alongside and intertwined with such stereotypes people often said they could not imagine abuse going on within their own communities. Asked if she could accept it might be happening in her neighbourhood one woman commented:

I can't imagine it happening to anyone I know, I don't like to think about it. It's very hard to take on board, You couldn't imagine anyone doing something like that. (Group 4)

In another group a woman commented:

You can't imagine that. Oh my goodness, if a man that lived next door to us, was out (sic) doing so and so and such and such and you just ...I can't believe that these kind of things go on. I know that they do, but it is like the ostrich thing. Because if you really...you just wouldn't go out, you wouldn't do anything. (Group 9, f)

Her neighbour confirmed that she felt the same:

If it is happening in [our area/community] you would tend to say that it can't be happening here. You know the people so well. If it was happening on your doorstep you wouldn't believe it. (Group 9, f)

But, she added (in a statement that still positioned the threat literally 'beyond the threshold'):

But it can happen on your doorstep. That is usually where you find these sorts of people. They tend to lurk around playgrounds. (Group 9, f)

This attitude was shared by several other groups, and in a few cases people flatly denied that sexual abusers could live in their neighbourhood:
They wouldn't be living up here if that's the case.

[...] No, I don't know of any.

Because you all know one another, we all know their businesses and everything. Everybody knows - see, like if [anyone did anything]...everybody would know. (Group 10, f)

Unusually, in the group quoted above, one woman did then reveal the information that a man they all knew had been convicted of abusing his daughters. This revelation was greeted with the shocked comment: 'Not Jimmy! You're joking?'

This sort of reaction was common in most cases where research participants personally knew someone accused or convicted of abuse. Focusing on how people reacted to concrete cases instead of in abstract revealed that people could subscribe to stereotypes even when they, in theory, rejected them. The few occasions when people spoke about learning that people they knew had been accused of abuse are thus worthy of close attention. Encountering actual accusation was usually a shock because the individual failed to conform to their stereotype. One man expressed his shock when a colleague in the Air Force, 'just one of the boys', was 'done' for flashing at little girls:

I worked with somebody who actually got done for that [flashing at little girls]. He got kicked out of the Air Force pretty sharpish. You would never have known that he was like that. You'd never think anybody his age would do it, he was just one of the boys. (Group 18, m)

Another research participant described how a case, thirty years earlier, had made an indelible impression on her mind, not least because the man
had ‘shiny shoes’. Here she was commenting on her mother-in-law’s assumptions, as much as her own:

I actually remember a local case in Ayrshire and the chap used to come past my mother-in-law’s window every Sunday and he had shiny shoes [...] and she used to draw comparisons to my husband at the time because he wore suede shoes and you should always wear shiny polished shoes and be a pillar of society. And two or three months after that [it was revealed in the papers that] he had been [found guilty of sexual abuse] and yet that chap was going up the road with his shiny shoes every Sunday and held up as a respectable member of society. That was about 30 years ago, that always stuck in my head. (Group 30, f)

A third participant expressed his shock at the arrest of a casual acquaintance:

He was a real nice chap, and see if anything suggestive came on the television, the likes of women or a bedroom scene he’d say ‘I’ve got no time for that, you know’. So this day I walked into the house and the place was in a right hullabaloo, he’d been caught - one of the kids came out with that he’d been messing about with the daughters and the kids. So they actually came and they took him away. (Group 26, m)

A fourth commented on his own shock at the conviction of a workmate, even when, in retrospect his behaviour with his daughter had been obviously inappropriate:

It had been going on for a good while, she was 14 or 15 when she started but she used to come up the firm and sit on his lap and
everything you know [...] but] You just never ever think, never, that it might be happening with someone you know. (Group 40, m)

Another young woman said she had learned the hard way that stereotypes did not always apply. She expressed anger at having been so ill-equipped to respond to her younger sister's needs.

I think they should do something about it because my little sister was sexually abused by our next door neighbour, the son, and [when] she told me, I didn't want to believe her. I knew this man and as far as I was concerned anyone I knew..., he couldn't do it. I didn't want to believe it had happened. [...] She said 'Marie, somebody was touching me and I don't like it.' I said 'Who was it?' and she said 'Stephen' and I said 'No, no, no, Stephen couldn't do anything like that.' (Group 25, f)

Where there was no criminal conviction people often tried to be 'open-minded' about whether or not the allegations were true, but expressly drew on their notion of the 'typical' abuser in order to assess the allegations. A trainee journalist, for example, described how she'd been influenced by the appearance of an alleged abuser she saw in court:

I've been to a child abuse case and I just remember this man [...] just looked like a hollow with the cheekbones and just how you imagine a child abuser to look like. And it was amazing that when you actually see it, even though you're innocent until proven guilty, because he fitted the image I could imagine him doing it. (Group 23, f)

By contrast another research participant expressed the difficulty she was finding considering the possibility that a friend of hers might have abused
his nieces. Her reluctance was, she said, informed by the fact that he was a friend and a married man:

You couldn't meet a nicer couple and they've got six children, a family of their own, [...] he's such a good person in his daily life, he does charity work for prisoners and things like that. (Group 34, f)

Even if there was a conviction, some people rejected this judgement in favour of their own perceptions of the individual:

I know someone that's been convicted of sexual abuse but I don't believe it. I don't believe he could do it. I've seen him with children and I don't think it's possible. He's brilliant with kids. (Group 25, f)

A clear pattern is obvious here. People are not surprised when 'social inadequates' are accused of abuse but they are astounded by accusations against 'respectable', 'moral' or 'normal' men with 'shiny shoes', or those who are 'brilliant with kids'. They find it particularly hard to imagine that anyone they like might commit such an act. (This is not unique to sexual abuse of course, but different types of images might be mobilised around the discussion of other criminal acts. Diverse ideas revolve around, for example, the typical shop-lifter, 'benefit cheat', spy, murderer, drunk-driver, computer-hacker or jewel thief).

This data allows me to return to the Orkney case, to clarify how people responded to media representations of the parents and to highlight some of the assumptions which were mobilised in reacting to this case.

The previous chapter has already discussed how some people believed that neighbours would be sure to know if someone was abusing their children and that abusers were unlikely to be up-standing members of the community (see Chapter 6). Reactions were also influenced by ideas
about the appearance of abusers and the 'type' of person who assaulted children.

For example, although most people did not remember that the Reverend had been the alleged ring-leader, his appearance was often the subject of negative comment. As one research participant recalled:

His hair was wild, he had these wild eyes [...] if you were going to draw up a picture of someone who was abusing children, it would have been a picture of him really. (Group 19, f)

The fact that he had had a stroke and his face was partially paralysed was used against him ('he looks kinda queer'). The rural attire of the parents on the Orkney Islands also made a couple of participants identify them as 'peculiar': 'They were hippies, they dressed strangely' (Group 4, f).

However, usually assumptions about the appearance, manner, class of abusers were all mobilised in support of the Orkney parents. Generally, they successfully appealed to the idea that normal, nice (white, well-educated) parents could not commit abuse (especially involving bizarre rituals). As one of the mothers commented: 'We're middle-class boring people with boring lives. It's inconceivable that we would even have thought of carrying on like this'. (BBC2, Newsnight, 15 March 1991)

Such assertions were not lost on the audience. This was most clearly and concisely illustrated in the following, not atypical, exchange among a group of schoolgirls:

f: I just couldn't, I couldn't believe it. I didn't look at them and think: 'Oh they could have done that'.

f: They weren't, you know..., you have this typical image of a dirty old man that would do it. You know. They didn't look like that.

f: They were just normal people.
In previous chapters I have been able to establish a direct link between media presentations of a particular case, and people's memories. Such links are harder to examine when exploring something as diffuse as stereotypes of abusers. (If there is a connection, in which direction does it operate? Is it simply a question of journalists' and audiences' common cultural repertoire?) However some of the research participants' comments explicitly drew on media imagery (e.g. the infamous Myra Hindley photograph). Clearly, at the very least, some parts of the media draw on and feed into popular assumptions, they rarely challenge them. The media encourage, feed off and perpetuate certain assumptions even if they do not 'create' them in isolation.

Analysis of the focus group discussions also suggested other factors might be significant. It became obvious that the nature and type of routine information exchange between friends and neighbours might be important in structuring knowledge in this area. Some information is rapidly and widely exchanged, while other information is censored. It is this factor which is addressed in the final section of this chapter.

Social currency: 'public' and 'private' knowledge

Stories about attacks by or threats by strangers were routinely exchanged in focus group discussion. More people knew of such stories than knew about assaults within families within their own social network and, unlike stories of incest, these accounts were volunteered without awkwardness or hesitation:

My kids go to school just up the road here. One girl at the school, this was about 2 weeks ago, she was late for school one morning,
some guy tried to get her [...] Police involved, just a weekday morning, half past nine. (Group 43, m)

Indeed, the way in which these stories were introduced assumed that they were already common knowledge.

There was somebody kerb-crawling up here about a year ago - in Allison Road. Remember? They stopped that wee girl, Clara. (Group 9, f)

Do you remember a man [...] [in] a white car that was going about [...] and it was down at the school, and he tried to drag in Alex McIntosh? (Group 10, f)

Such events inevitably become the topic of conversation (e.g. outside the school gate) and parents felt they had a duty to seek out and share such information. Structural issues are important here. Parents talked about the heart-stopping moment when they looked round and realised their young child had disappeared from their side in the supermarket or described the daily pattern of worry around a child's first solo journey to school or times when they were late home: 'I've only got Matthew and I keep an eye on him. If he's not home by four thirty, I'm out the window looking, you know what I mean?' (Group 9, f). Parents also often felt they could make judgements about the people with whom they left their children, but that the outside world was not under their control: 'When Andrew goes round the corner he could be off the end of the earth'. (Group 9, f).

Such fears feed into, and are reinforced by the public profile of stranger-danger. Such incidents were often publicised by the school (e.g. letters sent home to parents urging care), or in the local newspapers. Stranger-danger may also have been collectively experienced at the time. Take this
example, from a young woman, describing an event at her school some years earlier:

The rumour went round the school, like Katy Miller is talking to those weird guys. All the kids took a pure panic attack and like half of them ran down to the car to scare the car away and half of them ran up to the teachers and the police were called. (Group 4, f)

Particularly violent attacks and sex murders may also become part of the local folk-memory:

A wee lassie up from the back of us, she was taken away in a car by a guy when she was young [...] he actually tried to kill her and she played dead basically until he went away. (Group 4, m)

Media stories about stranger-danger are thus complemented, reinforced and reiterated through everyday conversation and the very public, and sometimes collective, nature of some of the experiences.

The public and ‘everyday’ experience of such alarm combined with the free and open discussion of such stories were in marked contrast to talk about abuse within one’s own community, particularly within families. Incestuous abuse is likely to be a more private and isolated event in any case. In addition, people are less likely to ‘gossip’ about it even if they do know it has occurred. This is partly because the abuser is often not seen as a threat to other children and partly because they respect the family’s confidentiality. It is also because of the surrounding stigma.

At a very basic level it is obvious that incestuous abuse is more 'shameful' for the individual victim (talking about being flashed at by a stranger, is different from 'admitting' to being flashed at by one's own father). It also is more 'shameful' for the victim's relatives.
Mentions of such personal experience were revealed in the group (if at all) somewhat reticently. They were often only 'confessed' well into the group session and it was often clear that other group members had not previously been aware of these experiences. In the extract below, for example, a group in a community centre, were making a series of judgements about mothers of sexually abused children which included statements such as: 'How could the mother not know?', 'She must know'. (Such opinions were almost ritually exchanged in many of the session, certain phrases reoccurring across groups). This routine exchange was interrupted by one group member who I have called 'Alison' (participants have been given pseudonyms to make discussion easier to follow):

Jan: A lot of women stay with the guy and I can't understand that.
Mike: That's crazy, I don't understand that.
Christine: I mean if I had kids and a guy done anything to my wean ... you'd kill him.
Alison: That's easier said than done. That's crap, Christine, that's crap, that's crap.
Paula: Everybody's different, maybe Christine feels she could do that.
Alison: She must be a big person because I'll tell you something...
Christine: I'm not big.
Alison: You must be, Christine, for the simple reason that my lassie was sexually abused by my father. I'd love to blow his brains off. I'd have loved to have stabbed him. [...] Hey listen, there's not a night goes by but that I wish my Da would drop down dead for the things that he's done. [...] Christiné: Maybe I say that right, but maybe I might feel different if I was in the situation, right. But I've never been in the situation so I don't really know.
Alison: Ah well, I've been in the position, I'm in the position. I'm in the position and I've been in the position for years. I've been in the position for 8 years now.

The tangible tension as Alison provides this information is in marked contrast to the routine 'gossip' about strange men offering children sweets or, indeed, the very public knowledge associated with the abduction and assault of a child by a 'maniac'. Her daughter's abuse at the hands of her father had been part of her life for eight years but this was clearly the first time her friend and neighbour (Christine) had heard about it. Alison's revelation was followed by another member of the group revealing that his daughter had been raped by a neighbour. Again, this appeared to be news to most group members.

It is clear that although parents routinely warn each other about any stranger behaving 'suspiciously', even close friends do not usually talk about the 'dangerous' father, brother, grandfather or neighbour in their own communities. It was sometimes only in the focus groups which provided an unusually focused context for debate and a 'liminal' space, that such experiences were discussed for the first time.

Conclusion
This chapter has argued that both the media and the differential 'social currency' of information encouraged stereotypes of abusers and predisposed people to focus on stranger-danger rather than the danger posed by those known to the child. This in turn shapes 'community reactions' to issues such as the location of 'known paedophiles' in their neighbourhood (see Kitzinger, in press, b).

In terms of broader audience reception theory this work highlights the importance of looking at existing cultural/media images. Both this and the previous chapter demonstrate how assessments of a new story like
Orkney will be influenced by what people assume about abusers, family life, island communities, social workers and other related issues. This argument will apply whatever the area under examination. Representations of an outbreak of violence in Africa cannot be examined in isolation from general constructions of the African continent. Nor can reactions to a nuclear accident be understood without looking at routine understandings of nuclear energy.

This means that media researchers need to examine routine as well as crisis reporting. It also means that researchers need to pay attention to everyday conversation around the topic and general socio-cultural interaction. I used this term to mean not only 'encounters in which people act out their role as citizens and discuss social and political issues' (Dahlgren, 1995: x) but also the 'more fundamental construction of social reality at the intersubjective level'. For, as Dahlgren points out:

Society is in part generated, maintained and altered in our ongoing interactions, in a complex interplay with structural and historical factors. Norms, collective frames of reference, even our identities, ultimately derives from sociocultural interactions. (Dahlgren, 1995: x)

In order to do this we need to broaden our understandings of reception and meaning-creation processes beyond the media (while always keeping the media within the frame). We need to pay attention to how people interact and not only what they say but how they say it. Analysis of transcripts should include attention to how people talk: when do they express hesitancy, surprise, or mark out a communication as unusual or 'sensitive'? (Kitzinger and Farquhar, in press). In my work on AIDS, for example, there was evidence of stigma and silencing of some accounts, such as personal experiences of homosexuality, whereas other stories, such as the 'vengeful AIDS carrier tale' had great social currency and had
become ‘urban myths’. This helped to shape public understandings of AIDS (see Kitzinger 1993). In the issues discussed above a similar dynamic seems to be operating and these dynamics directly impact not only on individual attitudes but also, crucially, on group responses. I would argue that these dynamics influence the ways in which communities identify threats, respond to them, and demand policy reactions. The findings from the focus group discussions about sexual abuse (conducted in the early 1990s) provided insights into community dynamics which predicted the recent furore about known abusers being relocated in ‘the community’ and the subsequent push for legislative change.

1 Some people were concerned about children being exposed to such information, some felt it might encourage people to be too suspicious and a few quite simply did not what the issue integrated into entertainment genre which they wanted to watch to relax: 'I just don’t think it should be so publicised. The amount it’s on the TV every day, you know, it’s like every fucking day, papers or TV, there’s abuse' (Group 4, f)

2 The Sun explicitly stated that gay men were 17 times more likely to be paedophiles than heterosexuals. The statement which was in an article by Anne Atkins, Sun columnist and ‘vicar’s wife’, resulted in a Press Complaints Commission ruling stating that the article ‘failed to distinguish between comment, conjecture and fact.’ (The Pink Paper, 6 February 1998)

3 However, the links which feminists assert exist between masculinity and sexual violence are disowned by rhetoric around the alleged effeminacy or immaturity of abusers. Feminist theory around this issue is notable by its absence. Examining all the articles about causes and prevention of sexual abuse during 1991, I could only find two which included statements about the gender imbalance in patterns of abuse. One of these was in parody form and attributed to a social worker with ‘a largish body’, ‘jeans’ and a ‘determinedly unmade up face’ (The Times, 19 October 1991). More attention was paid to other features of abusers e.g. in one case the abuser’s Orthodox Judaism was the subject of extensive comment in the press. The fact remains that, as David Finkelhor has pointed out, and feminists have been asserting for many years: ‘The most obvious characteristic of sexual abusers has been one of the least analysed: they are almost all men’. (Finkelhor 1979: 75)
Traditional rhetoric is that sex offenders are let out to 'walk the streets' and locates them outside the home, 'prowling' in parks and around playgrounds. It also assumes that dangerous adults are convicted (whereas most are not).

This point of view was challenged by another group member:

m: I'm not sure about that, it still goes on in the upper classes as well.
m: Might do, I don't know. [...] m: Yeah [...] It goes on at public schools and all that sort of stuff [...] I think possibly the people in the money can probably to a certain extent afford to cover it up, I mean, probably don't get caught so easy. (Group 43)

It is instructive to look at people's use of the term 'imagine' and compare the difficulty people said they had imagining that a neighbour was a paedophile, with the ease with which they 'imagined' how the parents in Orkney must have felt - see Chapter 5.

Another reaction was to state that they had always known something was odd about the behaviour of this individual, but no one had ever named it as abusive. Several participants described cases where everyone had known this particular man had a reputation for exposing himself to little girls, or all the boys at school had known this teacher was a 'slime-ball', but it was only years later that he was taken to court. It was thus only in retrospect that people recognised the signs. (This seemed to partly a historically-rooted phenomenon, some of those free to abuse with impunity during the 1960s and '70s being 'brought to book' as the social climate changed.

Another research participant described how difficult it was to tell his mother about having been sexually approached by a family friend (and father figure) who had offered him money. The fact that this man was a friend, a married father and widely seen as 'a diamond geezer' made the situation particularly difficult. He was unsure his mother would accept what he said and he, himself, was 'totally knackered' by the experience. 'It's totally done me head in, [...] you know he's a diamond geezer, you seen him with his kids, he's got 2 girls and a lad, and you just think...I used to be jealous of them because my mum and dad split up and this family was really sort of happy and stuff. And [...] all of a sudden he's in there offering me a tenner to sort of do whatever and it just totally totally knackered me. You just think, 'oh yeah Sam he's a sound guy' and then all of a sudden he turns out to be this. I don't know what I'm going to say, my mum would never hear anything like that. My mum thinks he's an absolute charmer and he is as far as she's concerned and she thinks he's fantastic and I could never sort of turn and just say: 'well, look, he tried to do this to me'. And I don't think anybody'd believe me now.' (Group 14, m)
Chapter 8

Challenging embedded knowledge: the Zero Tolerance campaign

This chapter concentrates on the focus group discussions exploring the Zero Tolerance campaign. This was a campaign designed to challenge some existing attitudes about sexual abuse. I use this example to explore audience reception of particular messages, reflect on methodology and lead into the subsequent discussion of semiotic polysemy, resistance and diversity.

The Zero Tolerance Campaign

The campaign under examination was the Zero Tolerance campaign, launched in Edinburgh in December 1992. It was the first major advertising initiative in Britain with the stated aim of challenging social attitudes towards assaults against women and girls. (It has subsequently been taken up and adapted for use elsewhere and other phases have been developed, however it is the initial campaign which is addressed here).¹

The Zero Tolerance [ZT] campaign started from the premise that intervening against sexual violence depends, at least in part, on addressing prevailing social attitudes. The campaign was explicitly informed by feminist analysis. It highlighted the fact that most perpetrators of sexual assault are male and suggested that there are links between the social construction of male sexuality and the potential for abusive
behaviour (Dominelli, 1986; Finkelhor, 1982; Hearn, 1988; Hollway, 1981; Kelly, 1988; Smart, 1989). The campaign drew links between the various abuses perpetrated against women and girls throughout their lives, whatever their age and it linked rape, battering, murder and abuse. Two of the campaign posters which included a focus on sexual violence against girls are reproduced in Fig. 10 and Fig. 11.

The campaign aimed to place the issue of sexual violence within the home and in intimate relations, into the public sphere. Advertisements such as those shown in Figs. 10 and 11 were displayed on billboards throughout Edinburgh. Some were sited on prominent placards in Edinburgh’s main shopping street. These included statements such as: ‘85% of rapists are men known to the victim’, ‘Almost 50% of women murdered are killed by a partner or ex-partner’, ‘Male abuse of Power is a Crime’ and ‘No Man has the Right’.

The posters used words and images to stress that abuse is committed by ordinary men who often appear perfectly pleasant and respectable. The designers deliberately chose to locate their images inside - across the threshold (focusing on violence in the home rather than on the streets/in parkland/wilderness etc.). Fathers as well as strangers were clearly identified as potential perpetrators and the posters were designed to challenge class stereotypes. The women and girls in the pictures were shown in ‘posh’ surroundings. In addition, no visible signs of physical or mental damage were shown. This was both because ZT designers did not want to produce more images of women as victims and because they wanted to make the point that abuse was often hidden. It was also a response to information that people might turn away from scary or upsetting images.
Fig. 10: The Zero Tolerance advertisement: ‘By the time they reach 18...’

By the time they reach eighteen, one of them will have been subjected to sexual abuse.

FROM FLASHING TO RAPE
MALE ABUSE OF POWER IS A CRIME

EDINBURGH DISTRICT COUNCIL WOMEN’S COMMITTEE
WORKING FOR ZERO TOLERANCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
Fig. 11: The Zero Tolerance advertisement: ‘From three to ninety-three...’

From three to ninety three,

women are raped.

HUSBAND, FATHER, STRANGER
MALE ABUSE OF POWER IS A CRIME

EDINBURGH DISTRICT COUNCIL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE
WORKING FOR ZERO TOLERANCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
Researching audience responses

How were these images received? And what does this tell us about reception processes? The data to be discussed here draw on two different forms of research. Firstly, I used the Zero Tolerance advert shown in Fig. 10 as a focus for discussion at the end of about half of the groups included in my main Phase 1 study. (The groups which have so far formed the basis of this thesis).

Over and above this I also conducted further research involving 30 intensive focus group discussion entirely focused on the ZT campaign. In some cases this data was complemented by collaborations with colleagues at other universities in which we also developed questionnaire and street surveys (for full report of these evaluations see Kitzinger and Hunt, 1993, Kitzinger, 1994, Burton and Kitzinger, 1998). Quotes from my general groups have ID numbers 1-49, quotes taken from groups which focused solely on ZT are identified with code numbers 50-79.

In all groups which discussed the campaign materials a similar format was followed. I started by asking people what (if anything) they remembered about the campaign and what they thought about it. I then showed them the poster images, without their captions, and invited them to reconstruct the strap-lines. Finally, the actual caption was revealed and their comments sought. Such methods are designed to tell us more about 'reactions' than 'effect' per se. However, they can give us some insight into the latter, especially where research participants had already been exposed to the ZT campaign in natural settings and could talk about their reactions at the time and memories of the materials. (For full evaluations and discussion of campaign 'impact' see the publications cited above.)

In the first section I discuss the common understandings most people shared of the posters, in the second section I explore how they were
differently position by the posters, or identified with them. The third section examines opposition and resistance.

Common readings
The focus group discussion revealed a high degree of consensus about the main meaning of the images. The picture of the two children playing with their dolls was identified as 'nostalgic' and 'old fashioned' (because of the black and white print and the type of clothing and toys). It was also identified as having the sort of 'aspirational' qualities associated with advertisements. The image was described as 'a Father Christmas card picture' (Group 15, f), and like 'an advert for Habitat' or 'Mothercare' (Group 5, f). People made comments such as:

It's like the Dulux shade cards. (Group 9, f)

An insurance advertisement: 'secure yourself and your child'... safe little ideal, happy, playing environment. (Group 2, f)

Research participants were usually clear that the image was 'middle-class' and (until they saw the caption) thought that it projected the suggestion of happiness and security:

f: ...nice wooden floor, nice middle-class, very comfortable.
f: Lots of toys, very expensive dolls house. (Group 5)

A happy home, isn't it? You can imagine mum down the stairs, just about to shout up 'Tea's ready!' (Group 4, f)

People often commented that the campaign imagery was unusual - saying they were more used to images of frightened, poor or despairing children (the type used to advertise for the NSPCC or Childline): 'It's always this
image that the kids are dirty, not clean and well-looked-after' (Group 56, f). When shown the image on its own, those who had not seen the campaign could not imagine the caption. They drew on their knowledge of more conventional advertisements to suggest captions such as: 'give money to the NSPCC'/ 'Or Childline' (Group 13); 'Talk to someone about it' (Group 17, f) or 'who're your children with?' (Group 20, m). Some emphasised notions of innocence and vulnerability suggesting captions such as 'The age of innocence' (Group 19, m), 'Don't spoil our innocence' (Group 4, f) or 'It would be nice if all little girls felt this safe.' (Group 58, f)

When shown the actual caption: 'By the time they reach 18 one of them will have been abused', those who had not already seen the poster on public display expressed considerable surprise. It sometimes took a few moments to 'digest' the messages but then, once again, a high consensus was clear in how most people interpreted the meaning of the advertisement. The combination of traditional image and disturbing words were identified as particularly powerful:

Well it seems like little, idyllic, naive, two happy little girls playing and the idea of abuse seems all that more sort of negative and oppressive and bad. (Group 20, m)

The picture on its own doesn't tell the story, [but...] when you then wrap it with all the other phrases on there it completely turns it around. (Group 19, m)

Some people commented that it was important that the images themselves were attractive and 'benign' rather than horrifying and 'off-putting'. As one young man commented: 'It lures you in' (Group 20). Some said that when they had seen the posters up in Edinburgh this had caused them to read a message they would normally have avoided.
These posters with the pictures - talking about the violence and with the non-violent pictures there. In a way they made me think. Even today they made me think more about it. If it had been a sort of violent picture I would just have sort of dismissed it because I don't like violence, you know, I don't like dwelling on it particularly. (Group 58, f).

f: These visual images are quite peaceful but the words are frightening. [...] Personally, for me, you need a peaceful, domestic scene but what the writing gives you is the horror.

f: There are so many bad images - I think people are quite inured. You turn on the television and you're just sick of all these horrible images. (Group 64)

Another woman described how this affected her sister who was visiting Edinburgh:

We passed one of these posters and she was looking at it, saying about what a lovely looking room that was and then she sort of realised what it said and it was kind of a shock. So I think it's quite good, because it draws them in and then it shocks them out of their comfortable idea of what life is like [...]. I think it's quite a good wee twist. (Group 56, f)

Many research participants also read the advertisement as conveying the message you can't tell by looking whether someone is being abused. '[It's] implying that every child looks safe, but they aren't. (Group 19, f); 'Things might seem normal' (Group 17, f); 'You never know what goes on in anybody else's life'. (Group 58, f)

It's not necessarily obvious. I mean your friend's child could be experiencing it and you wouldn't be able to detect it. (Group 12, f)
Obviously there's a lot could be going on there that you don't know about. (Group 57, m)

f: It's just like the issue really, it's sort of hidden child abuse, it's hidden and that shows that it's there.
f: Looks like sort of happy family you know, well cared for but are they? (Group 22)

Research participants also recognised that the focus was on including abuse by known men: 'It explodes the myth, that rapists are guys who jump out of a dark alleyway (Group 50, m). One man talked quite specifically about the concerns the caption generated for him:

That bit at the bottom - 'husband, father, stranger'... That makes me feel uneasy, and anything that makes me feel uneasy, makes me think. That's what's really good about it. I go to work and put my bairns in the nursery, what's going on in the nursery? What's going on with my bairns? (Group 53, m).

Some research participants drew attention to the contrast between these posters and routine mass media coverage: 'The stranger gets publicised, if it's the husband or the father it gets swept under the carpet' (Group 51, f). Some also contrasted the information in the poster with the sort of advice they had been given at school or from parents. One sixteen year old, abused by her mother's boyfriend commented:

Kids need to know. We did stuff on strangers at school - it made you more scared of strangers [...] but it wasn't strangers that were doing it to me. (Group 48, f)
Another woman, sexually assaulted by her father, commented that the message on this poster was:

...the opposite of what I was told. I was told 'Don't get in a car with strange men'. That was the only time you would ever get harmed, if you did something like that. (Group 6, f).

Most research participants were also clear that the advertisement emphasised that abuse did not only happen in chaotic working-class families. The advert, they said, was conveying the message that: 'it's not just like deprived kids and deprived families' (Group 22, f); 'even if a girl's brought up nice, [...] she can still be abused.' (Group 51, f); 'It could be someone living in a mansion, it could be someone living in a hovel' (Group 53, m). The poster generated comments and discussion such as:

f: It makes you think it's going to happen at home.

f: It makes you think it's not just some kid in the slums with an alcoholic parent...

f: and drug overdosing and stuff like that.

f: It's a nice little house, you know. (Group 21)

f: It brought it into every sort of possible household.

f: Aye that's what I was thinking.

f: you know, this isn't just working-class or kids in care. (Group 2)

f: It could be any child anywhere.

f: They don't look poor. (Group 15)

The above discussion shows a close correlation between the intended message of the producers and the understanding of that message by audiences. It also shows how a particular strategy (using attractive images to draw viewers in) had been effective in reaching some people. Some
research participants reported that the campaign had influenced them to change their minds, that it had raised their awareness and made them think and talk more about the issue. One man, for example, commented that the advertisements made him think about how he used power over his children: 'Every time I've shouted at my kids I've sat back and thought 'how could I have done that better?'' (Group 53 m); another commented: 'there's a message for every male here [...] I don't think men can say 'this is nothing to do with me' (Group 50, m). Others talked about how the campaign generated conversations, or encouraged women and children to seek help. (For further discussion of 'effect' see Kitzinger and Hunt, 1993.)

However, the classic 'middle-class', 'white' and 'traditional' nature of the images raised interesting issues about identification. The focus on men as perpetrators and women and girls as victims also raised questions about how male and female audiences would feel positioned by the campaign.

**Different Identification and positioning**

All the pictures from the ZT posters were usually, although not invariably, identified as middle-class. (A few working-class respondents expressed initial doubt about this, thinking, at first glance, for example, that the bare floor boards indicated that the family were too poor to afford a carpet). However, no-one said that they did not identify with the home portrayed because of the obvious wealth of the surroundings. If questioned closely some working-class respondents agreed that the images showed homes far more wealthy than their own ("It would take a week's wages to buy a dolls house like that"). However, they seemed to identify closely with the scene. One man in the transport and railway workers group responded to the picture of the old woman and young girl by saying:
That's my wean [pointing at the child] [...] I've just left my weans in the house with their grandmother [...] That's my house, there's my horrible mother-in-law and there's one of my weans. (Group 53, m)

Later, looking at the advertisement showing the two girls playing together he commented:

I see an advert like that and I tense up because these wee girls there (pointing at the two girls) that's my son and wee daughter. That's anybody's kids. (Group 53, m)

In fact, research participants were far more likely to say that the room in the picture was unlike their own home because of factors other than the apparent wealth of the surroundings: 'It's not a normal bedroom - they're not fighting' (Group 51, f); '[it's not realistic] because children's bedrooms are always messy.' (Group 52, f).

The middle-class symbolism of the pictures seemed to be easily read as 'Everyfamily' and the children as 'Everychild':

They look just like an ordinary wee couple of girls - like anybody's kids, and you realise something's going to happen to them - it could happen to your kid.' (Group 51, f).

Some also felt that the campaign redressed stereotypes in the media, making comments such as: 'If it could happen to them it could happen to anyone.' (Group 18, m); and 'If women like this can be abused too...[it's] showing it's universal' (Group 58, f).

Thus initial concerns by some commentators on the ZT campaign were not borne out by the audience research. Some writers have suggested the images were too 'middle-class' and would not 'speak to' working-class
audiences. In fact this underestimated the sophistication with which people read the images, ignored the ZT campaign's exaggerated play on advertising conventions and neglected the context in which such images were presented (in which abuse is usually associated with middle-class homes).

Different issues arose around the 'whiteness' of the images and some black research participants were clear that they could not see the images as 'universal'. Black research participants were more likely to scrutinise the ZT materials to see whether or not they included 'black imagery' and to comment on this aspect. Whereas some white people did not seem to notice that one of the children in the 'from flashing to rape' poster was black, this was often noted by black research participants (and was particularly likely to be articulated in the groups I contacted via black organisations). While concerned about stereotyping black men as abusers or further problematising black families some felt that it was vital to explicitly include black people in the images. Some participants in these groups made comments such as, abuse is such a 'silent issue amongst the black community. They keep it right under the carpet. And maybe [...] that [the campaign] had just sealed that.' (Group 59, f) In this sense, the 'whiteness' of the images appeared to be more of a problem than their middle-class emphasis (this 'whiteness' was not just about the nature of the models, but also the surroundings, the white doll, etc.). As one black woman commented: 'I wouldn't associate that with my own home or my mother's [...] they are very whitey, whitey'. She added that if the images had clearly included black people:

I would have taken slightly more notice, I would have related to it maybe a little bit more. [...] But the pictures were just average; what you see in a magazine, white people, that's it. You just get so used to it [...] You don't even consciously think about it until later [...] [But] there is like a screen between me and that picture, but not the
The third important difference evident in audience responses was related to gender. Whereas women were often comfortable in how they were positioned by ZT, both women and men were sometimes concerned about the positioning of men by the campaign. As one man commented:

It could be my little girl, it could be my mother, it could be my sister’s that’s raped or attacked or whatever. [But] I’m rejected on the same side as the rapist [...]. But let me tell you that my aggression toward that male is probably greater because it’s my little girl, my wife, my mother, my sister and I’ve seen what can happen to them and how they might then be nervous of me. So I want to get back to sorting out the males, that not only would attack my mother, my little girl etc., but they would attack me as well. What I’m saying is that I’m also a victim of this male abuse of power. (Group 53, m)

(This issue is discussed further in the final section of this chapter)

Over and above issues of identification and positioning, some people’s responses to ZT varied in other ways. Whereas, most people quoted above apparently understood the main thrust of the ZT campaign some of the group discussions revealed some 'misinterpretation', resistance and more outright opposition. There are 3 aspects I wish to highlight here: ‘misreadings’ of the image, resistance to the statistics and opposition to the gender-politics of the ZT campaign.
Text-reading disjunctures

The above discussion shows congruence between the producer’s intentions and most people’s ‘readings’ of the campaign. However, some research participants responded quite differently. Using embedded knowledge (that you’d be able to tell if a child was being abused) they read the image in a rather different way. Once they had seen the caption some people said the children looked sad or lonely. Several even decided which of the two children was the obvious victim. This is partly a function of what people expect to see. For example some people expected a child who was sexually abused to be ‘withdrawn’ and limp, sitting in the corner with her head down (rather like the images used on the television news and in some children’s charity advertisements). Indeed some people tried very hard to read the Zero Tolerance photographs in this way - looking for signs of abuse:

The little girl doesn’t look secure to me - sucking her thumb and the way she’s sitting. (Group 2, m)

That’s the one who’s been abused - She’s very withdrawn. (Group 51, f)

I think it’s that one, she’s got her legs crossed. (Group 17, f)

One woman even commented that she had always misread the picture caption when she’d seen it up around Edinburgh. It was only in the research context that she read the caption correctly:

f: I’ve seen that one. I thought that [caption] said: ‘One of them has been [abused].’ I would say that one. [...] Because she is sitting dead dour! [laughter] [...] 

f: Like if she was, like, kind of ‘away’ you would know that she would be the one. (Group 10, f)
Invariably the black child was selected as the victim, although no one who selected her as the victim made reference to this fact. Indeed few of the white groups explicitly identified her as black or Asian. Although a few referred to her a 'the darker one' some even assumed the children were twins.

Re-negotiating the statistics
In addition to circumnavigating the photographer's efforts to show children without visible signs of abuse, some people re-negotiated the statistics through reinterpreting the images. They could not believe the implication that one in every two girls would encounter some form of abuse and tried to interpret the poster accordingly. A few people recalled the picture from memory as having shown three or four (or even ten) children rather than two. When shown the actual picture they tried to find more children that were actually there. One man, for example, peered closely at the image and asked: 'Is there a baby in the chair or is it a doll?' (Group 19, m)

People also resisted the message by complaining that 'flashing' should not have been included as a form of abuse. Such a broad definition of abuse was, they said, ridiculous and misleading:

Maybe a father will take a wee lassie in the bath with him and wash her. Is that going to be classed as sexual abuse, because she's seen you naked? You know, from the ridiculous to the sublime! (Group 53, f)

Others commented that the poster was obviously biased and that: 'statistics can be used to prove almost anything' (Group 57, m). Research participants made comments such as: 'The only thing that leads me to doubt them is that they are such round numbers [...] I'd be interested to know what percentage error there are on these' (Group 50, m) or 'Some of
the statistics which have been quoted have been carefully selected to
further the point of view which the organisers of the campaign want to get
across.' (Group 57, m)

Even if they accepted the statistic some people objected to them being
publicised. As one man asked, what can you do about it?:

What are you going to tell women? Simply don't know any men?
Just forget about them? [...] Just keep away from men? Don't have
anything to do with them? (Group 53, m)

Others accepted that the figures might be true but were quite clear that, in
one woman's words, 'the men I know aren't going to behave like that.'
(Group 50, f). Research participants also sometimes interpreted the
statistics presented in the campaign in ways which distanced the
information from their own lives. For example, one research participant,
reacting to a campaign statement that almost 50% of female murder
victims were killed 'by their partner or ex-partner', suggested that these
were mainly prostitutes murdered by their clients. The figures were
therefore, she said, not applicable to 'ordinary women'. Another research
participants suggested that maybe the rapists who were 'known to the
victim' had only met her that evening - after all, most rapes were pre-
planned so he would have to come up and introduce himself in the disco.
In addition some people suggested that the statistics displayed by the
Zero Tolerance campaign were not as bad as they might seem because
the figures included 'bogus' cases such as 'date rapes' which did not really
count:

f1: They'll go so far and then say no. They don't say no at the very
beginning and that's bound to be included in that statistic. Women
who have reported it because they have agreed at the beginning
and then turned round and say no [...]

f2: Well there was a case in the paper just about a fortnight ago [...] about a young lady lawyer and a male lawyer and she allowed him to stay the night in her apartment [...] she undressed in front of him and so he assumed that was an invitation and so he tried it on and she sued him for rape. [...] I mean you hear of the one-sidedness, I mean it just gets me so mad. [...] I'm sorry for the woman that is genuinely raped [...] but by the same token, if [...] the situation grows and grows and grows and he's getting the come on, I think that girl's got everything she deserves. (Group 54, f)

In this way many people managed to keep rape and assault as the preserve of 'stranger danger' or misfortunes that would only happen to women who 'asked for it'.

**Ideological opposition**

The above discussion addresses forms of negotiation with the campaign material. But there were also examples of outright opposition. The strongest and most focused area of opposition concerned the gender-politics of the presentation. Indeed, this was the subject of extensive press attention with the *Sunday Times*, for example, lambasting the campaign for being 'anti-male', a 'poisonous' 'grotesque libel' and a 'Goebbels-style exercise in hate propaganda (Sunday Times, 9 October 1994). Within the focus groups some were concerned about the focus on girls 'at the expense' of boys. This was a complaint not simply from men and was a perspective which came from a variety of different positions. One woman who had herself been abused said she knew how important public recognition was and therefore: 'I felt sorry for the boys who were left out of that' (Group 6, f). Another survivor of abuse stressed the importance of recognising that some perpetrators were female: 'You're putting it just on men whereas it's not just men that do it, there's women as well.' (Group 16, f). A third woman said she felt excluded as the mother of a son:
The reason I think about boys being abused is because I’ve got a son. I think, when I’m talking about boys being abused, ‘Oh God you know, hope it doesn’t happen to Duncan’. (Group 5, f)

Some people thought the issue of sexual abuse of children should be kept quite separate from male violence against adult women. Focusing on child sexual abuse as a problem for girl-children was also seen by some as undermining the ‘dignity’ of the problem or to weaken the campaign:

It’s kind of making abuse a little girlies’ thing. You know, there is something in that that is kind of denying it the dignity it deserves. It is something that happens to people and is perpetrated by people. (Group 6, f)

Others were concerned about how men might react:

I think men are beginning to feel threatened in all walks of life because they’re looking around and they’re seeing women doing everything. [...] I sometimes feel that we women aren’t as tactful to them as we could be. We’re actually laying ourselves open for future maybe verbal abuse, if you like, and here we are ganging up against them. Whereas if this was widened to include any violence ...’ (Group 64, f)

For some this was a question of strategy:

I don’t think it matters if it turns out the 90% of abusers are men and 10% are women [...] Like splitting it up into 90% or 60% of abusers are blond. I don’t think that really has any bearing. (Group 5, f)
f: We're not disagreeing at all that there are problems, or saying that it's not the true state of affairs but you don't solve it by this antagonistic...
f: You don't help these men to sort themselves out by alienating them further.
f: Or help the women help themselves either.[...
f: This is just anti-male, it's nothing more. (Group 58, f)

It's dividing men and women further and further apart. It's giving women something to have on men. (Group 50, f)

Some people were quite simply opposed to the clear feminist line taken by the campaign:

m: Male abuse of power
m: Very feminist!
m: Don't like that.
m: That aspect of it [...] turns me off completely. I'm all for women being equal but I'm not for women being positively...
m: Even the words 'Zero Tolerance' really grates.
m: To my mind it moves it away from sexual abuse of children to a feminist perspective.
m: Man's abuse of women, which loses the child's aspect of it.
m: The children are being abused because they are being used by the feminist women.
m: It puts you on to women of Greenham Common [...] The children are appropriated like they were are Greenham Common. (Group 19)

Presenting sexual violence and abuse in this way was seen as 'sexist' and 'old-fashioned':
I don’t think you nowadays say ‘Men do this and women do that’. It’s persons, people, how they are, their personalities, [...] it’s abuse of people. (Group 55, f)

It’s the ‘male abuse of power’ that is offensive [...] It’s too limited, it’s restrictive and it’s way too sexist. [...] It pisses me off right now just looking at it, it really does. And it pisses me off in that sort of really aggressive feminist butch ‘I hate men’ way, you know, and I just think that’s a non-starter as a position these days. (Group 58, f)

The pendulum, according to some respondents, has swung too far against men and their side of the story is no longer heard:

  f1: The man’s position [is] being rubbished, I think we women have done a lot of harm.
  f2: We’ve done ourselves more harm than good. (Group 54, f)

Conclusion

The focus group data discussed here shows a high degree of consensus about the central message of the ZT campaign. Audiences show considerable skill and a shared cultural understandings in interpreting some highly complex messages being conveyed by the style of image, and the juxtaposition of text and photographs.

However this chapter has also shown how dominant ideas (about ‘the look’ of a victim or the likely frequency of abuse) may lead some people to interpret a message in a way different from that intended by the message designers. This finding echoes results from my own previous work on AIDS. I found that people sometimes ‘misread’ a Health Education advertisement aimed at convincing them that people with HIV looked just like anyone else. The advert showed a page in which the words ‘eyes’,
‘nose’, ‘mouth’ were positioned on the page as if on a face. The caption read ‘how to recognise someone with HIV’. The message was that they look just like anyone else. Unfortunately some people superimposed familiar media images of people with AIDS onto this abstract advertisement. Thus people made comments to the effect that the advert was trying to say that if you have HIV you show certain symptoms. ‘their eyes are all black underneath’, ‘his face is all skinny’, ‘their hair drops out’ (Kitzinger, 1995). I would emphasis that such findings, far from suggesting that audiences are ‘powerful’ in relation to texts, actually suggests quite the opposite. Dominant mass media messages, that pervade different outlets, may make it hard for alternative messages to be understood or even ‘seen’.

Finally it is important to note that variations were also evident in people’s reactions. People differed in how they felt ‘positioned’ by the ZT campaign, what they noticed, and how they felt about it. People could also recognise the intended message while clearly opposing it. It is this diversity which is the focus of the next chapter.

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1 The initial ZT materials were developed by Edinburgh District Council Women’s Committee in consultation with groups working with victims/survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and drew on research into initiatives undertaken in other countries, especially Canada (see Westmount Research Consultants Inc., 1992).

2 This was the first campaign of its kind in spite of the fact that professionals, activists and researchers in this field continually note the importance of the broader social context of abuse, informing readers that: ‘sexual abuse of children is an inherent condition of our society’ (Miller-Perrin, C and Wurtele, 1988) or that ‘the real battle lies in making fundamental changes in a society that allows and even encourages child sexual abuse’ (DeYoung, 1988: 111; see also Conte and Fogarty, 1988; Finkelhor, D and Strapko, 1988; Murray and Gough, 1991; Tharinger et al,
As Conte and his colleagues point out: 'While many prevention professionals recognise that fundamental change in power relationships in families and in society from a sexist to egalitarian distribution will be necessary to prevent sexual victimisation, not enough has been done to link political and cultural life and sexual victimisation.' (cited in Tharinger et al. 1988).

I facilitated these groups myself apart from one which was conducted by Hannah Bradby and two by Eddie Donaghy. Thanks are due to these colleagues.

The scenes were also usually, although not invariably, identified as being set inside the home. A few people thought that the absence of a mother-figure in two of the pictures suggested the children were in an institution. The wealth and relative tidiness of one of the scenes made a youth worker suggest that the children were in a psychologist's clinic because 'it's not a home, it's too tidy.' (Group 52, f).

A belief in the statistics was reinforced by the fact that the posters were seen to come from a respectable source (the District Council) rather than a marginal pressure group. In one group the first response to being shown the strap line was to pick up the poster to see who had produced it: "Aye I think it's quite a high figure" / m2: 'Just trying to see if there's a stamp, some kind of respectable stamp on it who done it, whether that's an actual realistic figure. It must be though cause it's eh ... [interrupted] (Group 20).

The query, 'what about boys?', was partly influenced by the extent to which people saw the advert as apart of a series of posters about violence against women, or the extent to which they saw it as addressing the abuse of children: f: 'Why are there no boys? If it's child abuse it should have boys.' / m: 'The whole thing is based on male abuse. Which is the problem with it.' / f: 'If it's about children,' / m: 'It's not about children is it?' / f: 'Abuse is about power, it's not about what sex a child is,' / f: 'It's not child sexual abuse, it's abuse against women.' (Group 15) f: 'Oh, I thought Zero Tolerance was about something else. I thought it was about violence against women. I didn't realise it dealt with children as well'. f: 'Well, they are women, women in the making.' [laughter] (Group 5).
Chapter 9

Diversity, resistance and the role of personal encounters

This chapter draws together evidence from previous chapters to reflect on audience diversity and the factors influencing people's responses to general media representations or to particular messages. I relate this to theories about 'coding' and 'decoding', textual 'polysemy' and audience resistance. I conclude by examining the interaction between cultural representation and how people articulate events in their own lives. I argue against simply categorising reactions on the basis of demographic variables and suggest we need to look at the dynamic interchange between identity, experience and cultural representation.

The data discussed so far has illustrated people's broad common understandings of media coverage of Orkney. Most people, most of the time, shared similar perceptions of the intended meanings that source organisations and journalists were trying to convey. Chapter 8 has also shown there was very little diversity in interpretation of the main intended message of a particular campaign. In this sense my data show little evidence of 'semiotic polysemy'. Most people, most of the time, shared common understandings of the main messages.

However, there were some examples of diverse 'readings'. The comments from my research participants which come closest to illustrating semiotic polysemy in relation to the Orkney coverage came from two research participants who decided that the Orkney parents were 'hippies' (and therefore likely to be into strange satanic cults). They both ignored the
textual/spoken presentation of the parents' case, in favour of the 'evidence' of their own eyes: images of people wearing hand-knitted woollen jumpers and rubber boots. However, even they were self-consciously aware that they were reading against the grain. They felt that the parents had made (albeit, in their eyes unsuccessful) efforts to present themselves as nice, middle-class Mr and Mrs Ordinary. A different kind of 'reading' was also evident among those who accepted the association the media established between Orkney and Cleveland, but used this to challenge the media conclusions. Far from the association reinforcing condemnation of social workers, it made their actions seem more plausible (why else would they have exposed themselves to the inevitable furore?) (see Chapter 3). It is thus clear that the impact of a media message may not always be that intended by the sources (or journalists). In some cases media messages may 'backfire' or produce a 'boomerang effect'.

My method of examining reactions to the Zero Tolerance campaign detected some even more detailed 'negotiation' with the text and some less conscious 're-readings' of the details (sometimes people were not consciously aware of the message producers intended and did not realise they were opposing or adapting it). This was evident when, for example, people thought more than two children were in the picture when presented with the caption that 'By the time they reach 18 one of them will have been subject to sexual abuse'. Others (more or less consciously) 'negotiated' their understandings of the statistics about male violence to make them more acceptable (the women who are murdered by their partners must be prostitutes, the rape statistics are inflated by including 'bogus date rapes'). Such interpretations of the images or words are clearly influenced by the unusual and 'marginal' nature of the posters. The ZT messages clashed with dominant representations and assumptions, people adapted their 'reading' or recall of the posters, so that the messages more closely
conformed to what they already believed and the sorts of images and statistics they expected to see.

Here it is worth clarifying the meaning of ‘codes’. In Stuart Hall’s work on encoding/decoding he argued: ‘It is possible for the reader to decode the message [...] in a wholly contrary way, either because he does not know the sender’s code or because he recognises the code in use but chooses to employ a different code’ (Hall, 1980, emphasis in original: cited in Corner, 1986: 55). As Corner points out the distinction between these two forms of decoding is crucial. ‘the willed employment of a code know to be different from the one “preferred” seems to be more a case of ‘double decoding [...]’, he argues, since:

>a conscious shift follows the recognition, by the reader, of ‘preferred codes’ at work and this shift involves a meta-level of interpretation - an active, aware reading against the rhetorical grain of the text. (Corner, 1986: 66)

Corner argues that ‘code’ is often used in ways which blur the nature of meaning, production/transmission and the levels of consciousness involved.

It is important here to (attempt to) separate out people’s interpretation of media messages and their reaction to them. What is striking about the themes outlined in previous chapters is the general consensus around interpretation (with a few exceptions as outlined above), even where there is sometimes multiple diversity in reaction. In this chapter I will unpack these ‘reactions’, looking at how we can account for their diversity and what some theorists might dub ‘resistance’. I will therefore highlight minority reactions and opposition to the media.
Diverse media consumption

Some audience diversity is associated with the different media people consume. Although I have highlighted themes (about Orkney and about paedophiles) which were common to many different outlets, it is worth noting that media coverage was not uniform. As might be expected, for example, The Guardian was more sympathetic to social workers in Orkney, the Daily Mail more condemnatory. Not surprisingly, such differences were broadly paralleled in the attitudes of Guardian and Daily Mail readers in my sample.

Establishing a specific causal association between any individual newspaper and their readers' overall attitudes (and certainly the direction of any causal relationship) is however outside the scope of this research. Here, in any case, I have been more interested in the representations which pervaded the media as a whole. Nevertheless, there were clear examples where research participants had access to information not publicised or emphasised in other outlets, and this helped them to build up their own confidence in a particular perspective and to argue with others. Thus, for example, research respondents sometimes asserted particular facts which had been unavailable to others and sometimes they were able to trace this to particular media. The research participant who knew the reasoning behind the decision to uplift the children at 7 a.m., had read this information in Community Care. Another, who knew that one father in Orkney had been convicted of abuse, traced her memory of this to a particular documentary. In examining reactions to the Death of Childhood documentary revisiting the Cleveland case, I have also shown that particular programmes can influence attitudes and beliefs when people are provided with new information - in this case that some of the children came from families which included convicted sex offenders (see Chapter 3).
Sometimes the sharing of such information within the group had an observable effect on the expressed attitude of other research participants. In the following exchange, for example, one young man, who had originally asserted that no abuse could possibly have occurred in Orkney, began to waver in the light of assertions from two of the other group members. Unusually, these two women knew that social workers had won an appeal against the children's return, and that Sheriff Kelbie's decision to send the children home had been made without hearing all the evidence. The young man had not previously been privy to this information. By the end of the group he was beginning to shift more towards their point of view:

m: Something might have happened...but not on that scale.
f: He's coming over to our side!
JK: What makes you think that it might have happened?
m: Just hearing all the new evidence.
JK: What evidence?
m: Well, basically the judge not actually listening to everything beforehand and the social work department actually appealing.
(Group 4)

Cynicism about the media
Cynicism about the media was a second factor influencing audience diversity. Such cynicism was not confined to a small sub-sample, but was displayed in all the focus groups. People routinely made comments such as:

You just know whenever you are watching the news that you are not actually getting the facts. (Group 13, m)

Don't let the truth get in the way of a good story. (Group 18, m)
My TV blew up one night. That's the best thing I've seen on TV. The TV blew up! (Group 4, f)

Expressing one's own scepticism and immunity to media influence is perhaps an inevitable and well-rehearsed part of discussions about the media. However, some research participants identified particular incidents in their lives which had underlined such cynicism. One woman, for example, regularly attended court cases in her capacity as a Women's Aid support worker. This had increased her scepticism, at least about the press.

Maybe not so much on the television, but certainly in newspapers, I've seen things [court cases I've attended] that are written completely different [...] [so] I don't really believe anything I read. (Group 12, f)

Others had personal rather than professional encounters and, sometimes, these had made them withdraw from media consumption:

[I don't read the papers] For the simple reason - I lived in Drumchapel and I was coming home from work one night and I saw a fight with six boys. And I kicked three of their backsides and sent them that way, and I kicked the other three on the backside and sent them that way - [...] Next morning in the Daily Record: 'Gang fight in Baltimore St'. Gang fight? It was school kids fighting coming out of school [...] if you believe everything you read in the papers there's something must be mentally wrong with yourself. (Group 27, m)

The media were widely accused of 'exaggerating'. A view which could support many different perspectives: whether the speaker believed that
the media exaggerated the frequency of abuse or gave undue emphasis to social work mishandling:

Do you not think publishers are maybe making mountains out of molehills for their paper to sell. (Group 31, f)

f: The paper'll blow everything out of proportion anyway.
f: You're never going to know what really happened. (Group 11)

It's like a lot of other things in my opinion, you get people goes on to bandwags. One time it was invalid people, now it's child abuse, then it's sexual harassment. All these papers jump on the bandwagon. (Group 27, m)

Sex crime reporting was also accused of being sensationalist and exploitative:

They were printing anything that was sensational to get them a headline. They weren't worried who was getting hurt. (Group 27, m)

They are using it for a cheap thrill. (Group 9, f)

The papers are using it to sell adverts and page 3 models. (Group 6, f)

Some people also identified the coverage of cases such as Orkney and Cleveland as 'over the top' and 'just too pro the parents'. The reporting had, they said, seemed 'orchestrated' or 'staged'.

The media kept showing you the families in Orkney and you know it kind of 'the poor families' kind of thing, very slanted against the
Social Work Department. It was all staged [...] It wasn't impartial at all. (Group 1, f)

The whole thing just seemed like cover-up, cover-up, cover-up. Even all the coverage it got on the news. Did they actually tell you anything? You know, all I remember is the social workers are saying this and meanwhile all these jolly, respectable looking ministers and friends of parents and local sort of professionals...
(Group 6, f)

Sometimes people's reactions were also informed by what they perceived as long-standing patterns in media coverage such as anti-social work biases:

The media always project the social workers as the bandits. I don't think they could ever have done the right thing. (Group 18, f)

Alternatively people drew on critical analysis of other types of story or news events and used this as a basis from which to criticise the current media accounts. Thus several research participants linked the Cleveland case not to Orkney but to an apparently unrelated case concerning the consultant obstetrician Wendy Savage (who was suspended for adopting a different approach to managing childbirth than her male colleagues). The coverage of Marietta Higgs had, they said, been so 'blatantly biased' ('just like the attitude of male colleagues toward Wendy Savage') that it lost credibility in their eyes. For example, one group member who asserted that Marietta Higgs was 'warped, screwy' was challenged by a colleague who commented:

I think if we are talking about her as a professional you can't separate her from say, people like Wendy Savage. Because I actually think that there are things about women doctors and
women consultants [...] both of them were portrayed as being pretty screwy [...] not objective enough, kind of swayed by their own kind of feelings. (Group 5, f)

This perspective was echoed in another group, in which several participants had become alienated from the coverage of Cleveland by the stereotyping of the female paediatrician:

f1: For me it is all tied up a bit with the Wendy Savage thing. That kind of labelling of women as kind of hysterical.

f2: I get the feeling that there was a little implication about her being obsessed [...] I got the inference that she was a bit frustrated and she had gone over the top with this thing [...] she was very skinny and looked as if she wasn't having much fun in life anyway, and that was her deviancy if you like. [...] 

m1: They used Marietta Higgs' appearance in the same way that they used Myra Hindley's appearance in the media. It was almost like they drew things on [her face], to make her look kind of more ugly than she was.

f2: [...] I think this came just after the Wendy Savage thing, and it felt like there were real parallels around that, about the way it was handled in the media [...] it is also the anti-feminist line, as well, [...] it affects career women, or uppity women who challenge the establishment.

f1: Maybe that's why I think of the Wendy Savage case as well.

(Group 13)

Demographic variables, identities and political orientation
Declared scepticism of the media, and critical reflections of media coverage, were intertwined with demographic variables (although not coterminous with them). Some participants based in Scotland and Wales were particularly suspicious of how the London-based 'national' ('in other
words, English') media reported cases outside Southern England. Some black participants made remarks about media racism and some working-class participants felt the media were likely to be more ready to defend middle-class families against state interference (see Chapter 6). Women informed by feminist politics were also conscious of 'male bias' in media reporting (as indicated above). None of these concerns were, however, expressed solely by those in these demographic groups, each position or identity may also overlap with the others in complex ways and there is no neat mesh between people's structural position and their reactions.

The focus groups (albeit a large sample) are not, in any case, ideally suited to making systematic statements about demographic associations. However, in examining the ZT campaign I also had access to survey questionnaire data. This provides a broad mapping of reactions to the campaign. It showed that younger people were more positive about the ZT campaign than older people, and found it much more acceptable to address such issues in public. Women responded more positively about ZT than men (only 2% of the women said they felt negative about the campaign, compared with 12% of men). Differences by housing tenure (our proxy for class) were less marked but owner occupiers were a little more likely to be positive about the campaign than those living in rented accommodation. These differences were crosscut by the fact that people with traditional attitudes toward gender roles were much more likely to be opposed to the campaign than others. Such surveys can be a useful complement, but also, on their own do not tell the whole story.

What focus groups do is present more nuanced data about experience and identity, and highlight how people relate to their own structural positions. Parenthood, was one such complex variable. Research participants themselves also drew attention to the transformational experience of parenthood in their response to media stories. For many, it had increased their concern about threats to children and their willingness
to believe in abuse: 'Having children of your own makes you more likely to believe these things' (Group 4, f). For some it had triggered depths of tenderness and protective feelings that made the behaviour of abusers all the more incomprehensible. At the same time the transition to parenthood sometimes alerted people to the difficulty of parenting under the 'scrutiny' of a society 'paranoid about abuse' and it increased their empathy with the feelings of any parent who had their children taken away (see Chapter 5).

Parenthood also seemed to alert people to 'the funny things that children say'. Within the focus groups, parents often exchanged tales of the strange things their children had said or done which others might interpret as signs of abuse. Fathers in particular expressed this concern about how they interacted with children. Both fathers and mothers identified with losing children, but it tended to be fathers who identified with being accused of abuse:

m: You get your little girl (mine are older now, if I done it now I'd expect to be told off) but when they're about 3 or 4, you get in bed and give them a cuddle. And now you're afraid they might go to school, [and say] 'My Dad was in bed cuddling me', you know next thing..., you have got to be careful. [...]
m: I think also we've got to be careful here because I read in the paper today a 17 year old girl was sent to prison for lying. She reckoned that her step-dad raped her and buggered her and it's proved he didn't do nothing of the sort, OK. But just to get him out of the way, she built the story up [...] 
m: I agree with that, look at that student a little while back, he got accused of raping one student, proved he was innocent. Now her name was never mentioned or a photo but he's plastered all over the country. (Group 10)

As with reactions to the ZT campaign, the gender element here was quite clear as these men went on to express concern about routine activities
such as collecting their offspring from school and having other children round to play. They also talked about being ‘caught short’ in the open air and the dangers of being labelled a ‘flasher’.

m: When we lived down the bottom of Clarence Lane, on a Sunday afternoon about half past two some kids come running round, [saying]: 'There's a man round the back flashing'. Well, we honestly think he was just reversing for a pee on the way home and a couple of kids have seen and all of a sudden he’s a flasher.

m: I know a bloke Billy Burrows, way up by the shopping centre [...]. He had a pee up there, in the road and pavement, done for indecent exposure! [laughs] Well that to me is out of order, you might as well get every man in England and nick 'em for indecent exposure. (Group 40)

Alternative sources of information: personal contact and professional perspectives

The media, of course, are not people’s only sources of information. Diversity in response to media representation, and resistance to media-promoted views, were also due to the information people received from other sources. Their views were informed by stories they heard from one another (indeed this process could be observed in action, albeit in a slightly artificial context, in the focus groups themselves). I have already demonstrated how such stories could, on the one hand, reinforce media emphasis on stranger-danger (see Chapter 7) or, on the other, challenge media accounts of the united community on Orkney (see Chapter 6). In each case these sources were evaluated for their credibility (those sources based in Orkney usually being seen to have more insight than other sources). Talking to professionals was also particularly influential in some cases. One man for example, was strongly influenced by a statement made by a police acquaintance:
Well, one policeman commented to me that they had to be very sure what they were doing before they went anywhere near the families. I kind of hung on to that in the middle of all the media bias, which is one of the reasons I kind of stepped back from watching that. (Group 19, m)

Another described a social work source as 'the horse's mouth':

The thing is, though, I know a social worker and he says, you know, this whole thing about middle-class people not abusing their children, people who are intelligent not abusing children, he says it's just that they have big houses with long drives. They don't live in terraced houses and so you can't hear it happening. And I think that to a certain extent that's probably true. That's from the horse's mouth. (Group 23, f)

One woman was influenced to reject the general negative media image of social workers because of what she had learned from her parents. They had fostered an abused child with gynaecological problems resulting from rape by the child's natural father:

It was at that point that the authorities then stepped in and, in fact, I think they did that very well. They were able to remove the children very delicately from the home. We're not talking about you know, dawn raids, and so on. And the man was removed from the home. There were a lot of really important things had been done to this family to keep them together, get the mother back, get her head together and this sort of thing. That was an example that doesn't appear in the media, because they did it well, so no-one's ever going to know about that. (Group 23, f)
Other research participants were influenced by working with abused children or with abusers. A group of social workers, for example, commented cynically on the photograph of the Orkney children joining hands with their parents on their return home. This picture was, they said, evocative but misleading:

f: That's a classical picture [of children skipping between their parents on their return home]. Children still love their parents despite the fact their parents are abusing them, they still want to be with their parents, they still want to hold hands and run down the road with the parents.

f: And you are right that the media used that as a way to show that it was not going on. But of course that's not the case at all.

f: [But people think] 'Well, children wouldn't want to hold hands with somebody that was fucking them for God's sake, would they?' And children do. I've done access with children who absolutely cannot wait to see their dad, who has been abusing them for years. [...] Every time [but on one occasion] that I've done access with parents who have abused their children, they have had a wonderful time together. (Group 15)

Others were suspicious of media reporting because of other types of experience with the child care system:

I used to work for social services and [...] we used to have Children In Care Register and Children At Risk Register and I think we once had publicity, and when I read things I don't think I take it in very well now. Because now I keep asking myself well, what are the other factors around it? I tend to dismiss now most of the way the reporting takes place. (Group 13, f)
I suppose because I've had experience of it, you know working with young people, and so I know that they don't just decide that, you know, they're going to do a dawn raid and take children into care. There has to be some evidence for them to be able to do that.

(Group 30, f)

More generally the idea that abusers were a particular type of person ('scrawny', 'socially inadequate', 'effeminate' or 'immature') had been challenged for some people by the experience of knowingly meeting abusive men. A group of Women's Aid workers, for example, criticised the style of the Orkney reporting and the way journalists and 'the public' seemed to be making judgements about the case:

f: [...] I wouldn't ever say, 'no, you know that they weren't abused at all' or, 'yes, all of them were'.

f: We've seen enough of what does happen you know to, not so much not be shocked, but it's like we do believe that these things go on.

f: Not surprised anymore.

f: Yeah, we're not surprised, that's the word.

f: [And we know that] perverts are just normal men, most of them. [...] 

f: They don't have to have been from a particular class or...

f: That's right, or standing drooling and...

f: dirty raincoat, aye...

f: Yeah, because a lot of the people still think, well, because it's like your bank manager...

f: yeah but they're usually in nice suits [...] 

f: I mean some of the men, the abusive men, [that we meet] make you think if you'd met them in any other situation, it'd be, 'what a nice bloke', or it'd be 'very charming'. (Group 12)
Similar reactions were expressed by other people who had incidentally discovered that they knew a 'paedophile' (or a user of child pornography). Thus in one group, when his workmates describe paedophiles as scrawny and effeminate, one man countered with the following story:

I worked with a guy many years ago and like we was all the lads off the estate and he used to give us all the jobs and we went back to his house to have a drink and he went out to buy some drink. And we found this book and it was pictures like you would get of women, you know in magazines, but these were all little boys. [...] The sort of thing you'd see in Penthouse, the positions women were in, these were kids in. And we couldn't believe it [...] and this guy, you know, I mean, he was built like a brick what'sit. (Group 40, m)

In another group one research participant asserted that abusers could be anyone on the basis of his brother's viewing of a police portfolio:

When my brother was a lot younger we used to go and play in a place near here called Black Park and he was up there with some of his friends and some chap approached them and [...] we got the police involved and they took him down the police station [to look] through all the old books [of known offenders] and my brother actually saw people who he knew in those books and he couldn't believe it [...] So there are a lot of people around who they've got on file, shall we say, that you wouldn't even think of probably. (Group 43, m)

But the single most consistent and powerful variable influencing audience diversity was the experience of abuse itself. I would not expect such experiences always to be volunteered, but, where they were, such experiences were identified as an important source of insight.
Encountering abuse

Where most people had difficulty believing that apparently 'nice' men might abuse, this was not usually difficult for some of those with personal experience. For example, one woman countered her friend's difficulty believing that a man she knew could be guilty because he's 'such a good person in his daily life' by describing her own father's abuse of her. She commented:

Anybody met my father, great man, a hard worker, he was top staff in the Post Office and everything. Anybody to meet my Dad thought 'oh perfect, Billy's lovely', nobody would think of him touching his kids. (Group 34, f)

Personal experience of abuse (of oneself or one's child) proved a powerful source of dissident views on cases reported in the media and influenced people positively in favour of the Zero Tolerance campaign. Indeed, personal contact was often the touchstone for believing or disbelieving the ZT statistics. Thus one man who had discussed the campaign with a friend as they walked along Princes Street commented: 'He's the same as me, he's surprised by the figures [...] We don't know any people at all who've abused or been abused' (Group 50, m). Similarly, a woman rejected statistics suggesting that 50% of women experience some type of sexual abuse ('from flashing to rape') commenting: 'I've never met anyone who's been flashed at' (Group 53, f). By contrast research participants who had been abused, or knew people who had been, were predisposed to accept the figures. Thus, for example, one man, whose mother had been a 'battered wife', had no problem accepting that such violence was widespread and hidden behind closed doors. Similar dynamics were evident in responses to the Cleveland and Orkney cases. For example, many people commented that they thought social workers in Cleveland must be in the wrong because there were 'just too many' children involved and they could not accept that abuse was that widespread. However, a
woman who had herself been sexually abused had a quite different perspective: 'I personally was not shocked at the amount of children who failed the test, which resulted in saying they had been sexually abused.' she commented:

As far as I'm concerned, that wasn't too big a number for the one area. I believe it was just the tip of the iceberg. I do think, probably, every single one of those cases were genuine and I think it's the old denial syndrome again. (Group 6,f)

Personal experience could also directly impact on reactions to photographs provided for the script-writing exercise. For example, although most people responded positively to the sight of the children who had been 'snatched' by social workers being returned to their parents, one research participant viewed the same scene with suspicion and considerable distress. It turned out that, as a child, she had run away from home to escape from her abusive father, only to be forcibly returned by the police. For her, the scene of the child 'reunited' with 'jubilant parents' was deeply upsetting.

**Negotiating abuse: cultural explanations, definitions and labels**

However, it is important to note here that although personal experience can be a potent source of alternative information, allowing people to reject media representations, this is not always the case. The potential of 'personal experience' to challenge media representations may be curtailed in several ways. For a start, people may not bring their personal experience to bear on a subject, or only do so when asked to explain their point of view to a researcher. They may dismiss their own experience as highly unusual ('I must be the only person this happens to') or simply not apply it to their broader understandings. This was particularly evident in the one-to-one interviews I conducted (rather than the focus groups in which experiences were shared and analysis developed). Thus a young
woman I interviewed, who was abused by her middle-class, successful, father, started to tell me that abusers were probably men who were unable to assert their masculinity through being good ‘bread-winners’. Their frustration, she argued, led them to abuse their children. As she spoke, however, she realised that this did not fit with her own experience:

I reckon abusers are insecure - like if a man has a house and two children and is not earning enough money ... [pause] but I can't explain it because we're not poor but it happens to me.

Her hesitation and reflection indicate the beginning of personal experience being mobilised to challenge taken-for-granted cultural explanations about abusers' motivation.

It is also clear that the way in which personal experience is defined and evaluated is not a 'media-free zone'. The same young woman quoted above was very surprised when I referred to what happened to her as ‘rape’. She countered that she did not see it as such because 'I let it happen...rather than thinking “Oh my God, what's he going to do to me?” and being scared, I just get on with it'. She added that she could not call it rape because her understanding of rape was ‘walking down the street and a man coming up with a knife’.

Cultural representations inform how people understand and label events in their own lives, and sexual assaults are surrounded by complex and competing notions of 'what counts' as abuse or 'real rape', and what counts as consent. This was illustrated in broader ways in general group discussions with young people about the Zero Tolerance campaign and about what they considered acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour. These young men and women drew on cultural frameworks to evaluate what had happened to them (or what they did) and sometimes came into conflict as they described similar actions as ‘abuse’ or ‘a bit of
fun', 'harassment' or 'a laugh'. Shifts of opinion and even shifts in assessments of their own experience were observable in reaction to the ZT materials, especially the strap line: 'from flashing to rape'. In particular the idea of a continuum of sexual abuse, which included flashing, often led to reflection and debate. People sometimes started by asserting that flashing was 'funny' or 'pathetic' and 'not really abusive':

> When you're flashed at, it doesn't physically hurt you, it shocks [but you just] scream with laughter [...] I wouldn't call it sexual abuse. (Group 77, f)

However, even if they initially 'disapproved' of this strap line, further discussion among women sometimes highlighted the feelings of vulnerability that flashing could engender in certain settings:

> I can remember thinking, 'He's gonna rape me next!' I was twelve. I was petrified, and then you think you're going to get raped, they're going to chase you. (Group 4, f)

Sometimes talking about such experiences led them to an increasing sympathy with the strapline:

> One of the times we were down the pub down the road and there was this football team and they were all [drunk], and they were having a carry on and then they started stripping off. You know off came the knickers, off came this. [...] I was sitting there and I thought, 'I really need to get out of here.' But I didn't want to get out the pub in case they came out after me [...] It was a horrible, horrible sickening feeling and a horrible, it wasn't fun anymore. It was just 'get me out of here' and 'I don't want to be involved in this' and I'm sure that's like...like flashing to rape, probably have that unclean, dirty feeling. (Group 9, f)
It was also very striking that debate about the phrase ‘from flashing to rape’ seemed to enable research participants to reveal incidents which they had never mentioned before to the friends, neighbours or colleagues in that group. Such personal revelations during the course of the research sessions had an unexpected consequence. During the course of the discussion some people who had originally rejected the statistics as exaggerated, came to accept them. One group, for example, initially dismissed the poster’s suggestion that 50% of girls would encounter some form of abuse. They said that they knew very few people who had been abused in any way. However, this reaction changed as they tentatively began to reflect on their own experiences. The conversation culminated in the following exchange:

f2: All these years I’d just thought: ‘Oh, that was the night I lost my virginity’. I hadn’t even took the time to think about what actually happened...He forced me. Now I’m thinking, for fuck’s sake, when I lost my virginity I was raped. I remember actually thumping him to get him off me and he wouldn’t get off....I was too young, I didn’t want to do it...I couldn’t physically get him off me. I was beating him and I couldn’t get him off. It was all over.
f1: The first time I got drunk, I lost my virginity. I didn’t want to do it either. I was pretty young as well.
f3: You see. I’m the exact same...So that’s every single person in this room. (Group 4)

In fact, at that stage it was not ‘every single person in this room’. The only man present had not commented. However, later in the session he remarked:

One thing which I have never ever told anyone about [...] I was at a party when I was sixteen [...] I was staying overnight [...] and I woke up and there was somebody in bed beside me, groping me [...] It frightened the absolute life out of me. (Group 4)
Clearly, the ways in which experience is defined (evaluated and explained) and how it is brought to bear on one’s understandings of the world, is not a fait accompli, but a process. Personal experience can be culturally validated or invalidated. The ‘self’ is constructed in a mediated world (Grodin and Lindlof, 1996). Building theory on the basis of one’s own experience, in ways which challenge dominant cultural assumptions, does not come ‘naturally’ but involves reflection, analysis and often requires collective meaning-making (Kitzinger and Farquhar, in press). Group conversations (as in the focus groups) and media representations are both part of this process.

On the one hand, the above discussion illustrates the power of collective exchange combined with innovative media to contribute to revisioning experience. On the other hand, it demonstrates the power of media silence (or predominant mainstream categories) to invalidate aspects of experience, at least for a time. This is not to suggest that experience, representation and language form a closed circuit. Cultural representations may be challenged by the flow of experience and events, and direct experiences can be a powerful source from which to counter dominant representations. For example, a woman may feel pain and anger even if she is ‘told’ she should be enjoying what is done to her, this may be mobilised to challenge dominant representation and create an alternative political language. It is this powerful underswell of experience which was a key force in creating the change in the public profile of sexual abuse in the first place. It underlay much of the writing, activism and public ‘speak outs’ which originally challenged the idea that abused children were provocative Lolitas or that a ‘little bit of tickling’ was harmless fun, or that the activities of sleazy Uncle Harry were best ignored. The penultimate chapter rounds up this thesis by reflecting on what this shifting public profile in turn means for those who have been, or are being, abused.
Similar use of the visual to undercut the spoken message was documented by Richardson and Corner (1992). Many of their viewers perceived a mismatch between a speaker's claims to poverty (on a programme about 'fiddling' on state benefit) and the evidence displayed on camera of his ability to buy cigarettes, own a video and have a well-furnished house.

Scottish and English residents were also more likely to remember cases in their own countries. People also referenced other aspects influencing attention to and memory of stories. One man, for example, commented that he vividly remembered a case of a priest who attacked a girl but commented: 'Then again, I'm a Protestant, that would stick in my mind, him being a Catholic, you see!' (Group 27,m)

This statistical correlation from the survey was evident in focus groups too. One woman, for example, spelled out her opposition to the campaign. 'You've got to bring up women to respect men [too] [...] a man has been out there earning your bread and butter to keep you, so he comes home and he is tired. Why should a man come home and start doing housework [...] where the wife is at home all day? [...] If a man comes home and finds he's got to start helping to clean the house, and cooking and things like that, I think the one way they can vent their frustration is to use their hand, and I think [in a minority of cases] women bring it on themselves, because they are brought up to [...] expect the men to come in and start working. I think it's all wrong, and I think it's women's lib to blame. (Group 54,f)

In addition, of course, some personal experiences are rarely introduced into the public domain. The sharing of experience may be censored by stigma. Thus people think they do not know anyone who has sexually abused a child, or that no-one in their community is an abuser (see Chapter 7). One of the successes of the ZT campaign was the way it intervened in the social fabric and created discussion about sexual violence. In focus group discussions people said that the campaign had led to friends telling them about having been abused and the survey showed that 39% of those who had seen the ZT campaign had discussed it with someone. The occasions when revelations were made in the course of focus group discussions documented how this, in turn, could shift understandings.
Child sexual abuse is a disorientating and isolating experience. This was articulated particularly starkly in the interviews I conducted during the 1980s. These interviewees repeatedly spoke about their sense of being 'apart', dislocated from all cultural reference points, with no models of how to respond and no words to define what was happening to them. When they did try to talk about the abuse they were often disbelieved, silenced or misunderstood. They often knew no-one in a similar situation and while they were being abused some did not even know whether what they were experiencing had ever happened to anyone else. (Although some had siblings who were also victimised, it was never discussed). In the early 1980s abuse victims and survivors were living in a cultural and social vacuum, gleaning information and ideas from the odd article about rape or child abduction in the newspapers, even turning to the dictionary for basic information.

There are structural aspects to child sexual abuse that may always generate a sense of isolation, dislocation, doubt and confusion. Such feelings may be generated by the abuser’s manipulation of reality, the subterfuge or insistence on secrecy, the early (even pre-verbal) age at which a child is abused and his or her love for, or dependency on, the abuser (see Kitzinger, 1990). However, the way in which abuse is culturally represented and mediated is also crucial.
For the abused child, the media may be a crucial source of information. Media coverage may be people's only source of information about what will happen if they 'tell'; it may reinforce fear and guilt, or it may help those being abused to resist and to survive. Representations (on television, radio or in the press) may provide a way of defining experience, map out ideas about how to react and, how to communicate about it. The mass media may also provide people with images of what it means to have been abused and what their future holds. This chapter explores the implications of media coverage for those experiencing abuse. It does this through drawing both on the focus groups conducted in the 1990s and on the interviews I conducted during the 1980s. The earlier interview study was not focused on the media, it was designed to explore how women confronted and survived abuse, particularly abuse within their families. I conducted 40 tape-recorded interviews. All were with women. Most of had been abused by a (step-) father, brother, uncle, grandfather or other close male relative (although a few had suffered abuse by strangers, or involving female perpetrators). In addition several of the interviews were with women whose children had been assaulted.

Experiencing abuse in a shifting media landscape

Returning to these interviews a decade or more later, I am struck by the sense of time and place evident in the interviews. These women were speaking to me at a particular moment of historical change in Britain, especially in relation to the media coverage of this issue. Some interviews were conducted 'pre-Cleveland', some afterwards. All were conducted prior to the Orkney case, and before the 'discovery' of 'false memory syndrome'. The range of ages (from 16 to over 50) meant their own abuse was also located in very different social contexts, some were children in the 1940s or '50s, some were being abused in the 1970s or even the early '80s.
Comparing these interviews to the data gathered through focus groups in the 1990s reinforces this sense of history and an understanding of how identity may be negotiated in a shifting media landscape. The group discussions in the 1990s included reflections on how publicity about 'false memory syndrome' impacted upon family acceptance or even women’s own sense of reality, reactions to publicity around ritual abuse and the Frank Beck case and responses to soap opera story-lines. One of the focus groups was conducted with a support group for teenage survivors of abuse. They were children during the Orkney crisis.

This chapter does not address all the issues raised by interviewees and focus group participants who spoke about their own experiences of abuse. They talked about the law, about housing and welfare provision, the health service, and the judicial system. They raised many issues about training, legislation and practice. Some of this has been written up elsewhere (see Kitzinger, 1990, Kitzinger 1997). Here I simply focus on their comments about the media. In doing so I try to give a sense of how ‘private’ experiences of abuse can be mediated by public representations. The chapter starts by reflecting on the experience of discovering that your own child has been abused, it then focuses on what it means to have been abused oneself.

Layers of silence and the absence of models

For women who slowly realised, or suddenly confronted the fact, that their children were being abused, the first reaction was often shock and a sense of unreality. One interviewee, who I shall call ‘Kathy’ describes her reaction, when, in the mid 1970s she confronted what was happening to her daughter:

[I felt] totally as though I was just in a nightmare and when daylight came I would wake up and it hadn’t happened. And daylight came,
and it didn’t go away. I remember lying in bed with her and just holding [my daughter] until she went off to sleep and trying to ease something from her [...] [Finding my husband in there with my daughter] confirmed what I knew, although I didn’t know I knew it.[...] it was very surreal. (Kathy)

The next morning she told her husband (Rose’s stepfather) to leave the house and took her daughter, Rose, to their GP. The doctor suggested that Rose’s allegations could have been just a dream and that children did occasionally make things up. However, Kathy persisted in believing her daughter. There followed a long period of trauma and adjustment involving desperate attempts to find support for Rose, deal with her disturbed behaviour, cope with the devastation of Kathy’s own sense of self-worth, and the difficult task of telling other people, such as Rose’s father. In all this Kathy stressed the absence of cultural reference points, the sense of being totally on her own, and having to respond ‘by instinct’ without any guidance:

It felt just as though it were a primitive kind of instinct. I had to protect her. It was just like an animal, you know, the young have been threatened and you just have to close round them and just protect them. And that is what I did, in anyway I knew how. But I had absolutely no model whatever, that was the horrible part of it. I didn’t know how I should react. [...] I just didn’t know anything about sexual abuse. I remember thinking: ‘if only I had read something about it’. But I had never read anything about it. I couldn’t think of any instance that I had read that had told me what to do, only awful stories in the paper, but no useful articles in women’s magazines that said ‘I did so and so’. These things just weren’t around then. (Kathy)
Landmarks and maps: navigating abuse with the beginnings of media recognition

By the mid to late 1980s this situation had changed. By then many women confronting the abuse of their children had at least some reference points, some information, a way of 'touching base' and raising the issues with friends. Many of the feelings (shock, a sense of unreality) remained the same, but the sense of being totally without guidelines had shifted. One woman, 'Shiobhan', for example, described how she became concerned about her seven-year-old's reaction to her husband. She discussed her concerns with a friend who suggested that sexual abuse might be taking place. Shiobhan found this hard to believe but felt she had to pursue the suspicion. She had watched Esther Rantzen's programme about sexual abuse and it gave her a way of approaching the subject with her daughter:

I didn't know how to approach it. But I remembered Esther Rantzen's programme which suggested asking: 'Has anyone ever touched you or made you feel uncomfortable?' So I asked her, and she said: 'Yes, today a boy threw a ball and it hit my head' [...] I said: 'Yes, that was today, what about anyone else?' And she said: 'Yes, dad' and started screaming. She wept and wept, I'd never heard a child cry like that. (Shiobhan)

By the late 1980s, post-Cleveland, women not only had information about how to approach the subject, they also knew about the highly publicised dangers of social services involvement. As Shiobhan went on to explain, she delayed seeking help because of this:

I was so scared, the first thing I asked the social workers when I did see them was, "Are you going to take my children off me?" You hear it on the telly, they just grab the children off you and I thought I'd be seen as incompetent. But it didn't turn out that way. (Shiobhan)
Similar shifts of experience are evident in the interviews and focus group discussions with incest survivors themselves. The women I interviewed during the mid 1980s described a strong sense of 'cultural vacuum' - a vacuum just beginning to be challenged. They had grown up feeling that their experience was not recognised by, or represented in, the dominant culture, that what was happening to them was literally 'unspeakable'.

Many of the women I interviewed also spoke of a time when they had been confused or unsure about their own memories. They made comments such as: 'I just had these funny ideas floating around in my head - I had no way of making sense of them' and 'The hardest thing is trying to keep belief in it all - trying to grab hold of it. It just disappears through your fingers as you try to grasp it'. As one woman explained, at the time she had no way of understanding what was being done to her:

I defined it as something I didn’t like happening. My father tickling me and refusing to stop, in a place that he never should have been tickling me anyway. Very difficult to define. I didn’t really define it at all. […] there was that sort of doubt - was it actually wrong or not?

Women frequently said they were unsure about whether or not they were really being abused if 'he only touched me' or 'he only made me touch him'. One woman, who I shall call Liza, for example described how she felt when her step-father finally penetrated her:

Afterwards I thought, ‘Jesus, I’ve been raped, I’ve been raped’. Like all the stuff before was just other things. I’d never seen it as rape because whenever you're told about it in newspapers or school it's always that, it's never anything else. So I thought 'I've actually been raped this time. He's actually raped me now'. It felt quite real. It felt real because I could call it something. It really happened. (Liza, my emphasis)
Liza’s feelings of anger came to the fore in her early twenties which she attended a feminist film and post-viewing discussion about sexual violence and pornography held in her local arts cinema. The film, Not a Love Story included some footage of explicit pornography:

Everyone in the audience was really shocked [by the porn] and I was thinking: ‘God, I have seen all this before’. What got me in a state of shock wasn’t that it was new, but that I had seen it all before and nobody else seemed to have. For the first time it made me think what a real bastard he is. It really brought it home to me what he had done because everybody else was saying what a shock it was and how terrible it was. After about three quarters of an hour of them all talking about how upsetting it was, I told them that I had seen all that when I was eight. (Liza)

Other women, however, were influenced by more mainstream output. The rise in media coverage of child sexual abuse during the mid- to late 1980s was instrumental in making some start dealing with what had happened to them. Amy, for example, first sought out help in the late eighties because: ‘It were too much, it were all coming on the telly and it were starting to really get to me.’ Others described a slow process of making sense of what had happened in the context of the increased publicity:

When you hear [about abuse and incest] then it means it is possible, it can happen. That means you can start to put together all those funny ideas you’ve had in your head and begin to make sense of them. (Lyn)

One woman described how the media began to ‘give voice’ to her experience. This was in stark and welcome contrast to the literal silence surrounding the original abuse:
It started being talked about a bit more in the media and then I heard a radio programme, that made me start thinking about it... Whenever he abused me he never said a word I always found this silence around it a very loud thing. It's all been so silent.

Cultural recognition and representation (in TV programmes, on radio, in the press, in films and in discussion fora) has been vital to changing women's feelings and definitions of their own abuse. Some women I spoke to in the eighties expressed a positive hunger to seek out such materials. While some avoided watching or reading anything about sexual abuse, others read every article on the subject they could lay their hands on. Anything which described experiences of childhood sexual abuse and publicised statistics were identified as 'legitimating' and 'confirming' both on a personal level and by bringing the issues into the public domain:

It legitimises your experiences, it is saying 'yes, it does happen' and you know that other people are reading it and are accepting it. Whether it's fact or fiction, whether it is research or autobiography or whatever, it's adding to this. I know when I read Sarah Nelson [a journalist who published a book on sexual abuse in 1982] it was wonderful seeing all the basic feelings that I had there, down in black and white. [...] [And] it moves people forward all the time, and it isn't just odd people saying things [...] it is actually down on paper. [...] it's not just me having a fantasy in my head about this, many people believe this. (Joanne)

The media reporting was not only identified as an important site of recognition it was also being used as a conduit for communicating that experience to others. One young woman told me how she saved up two articles about incest from women's magazines and eventually used these to tell her mother what was happening to her:
I was hysterical. I'd been smoking a lot of dope and I was feeling really, really low... I ran into the house screaming 'Mum, come and help me, I need to talk to you' and she came out and said 'Oh, what?' And she pushed me into the caravan and she couldn't understand what I was saying and I shoved these two articles from women's magazines under her nose. (Melissa)

Engaging with the media: representation and communication

This sense of engaging with and using the media as part of the communication and survival process was even stronger in the focus group sessions conducted in the mid 1990s. Indeed, the media were often discussed as an important resource. One middle-aged woman talked about how an Oprah Winfrey programme echoed her own situation:

I watched her programme [which presented an account of a woman encountering her abuser in the family home]. That's the way my family are, we're no allowed to show our angers. I'm not allowed to show my feelings at home because that anger's still in me. I'm more or less told, 'Right, it's happened, it's happened, forget it and keep it quiet'. (Group 34, f)

A fourteen year old in another group commented on the portrayal of an incest survivor, 'Beth', in the soap opera, Brookside:

You can watch it and say - I had those feelings like Beth, that happened to me, [...] We've got some kind of communication with the telly and can talk to each other about the way Beth is. (Group 48, f)
Another member of this group commented on how a TV film, *Liar, Liar*, had been helpful in communicating with her mother:

> My mum watched it with me. In the film the mother doesn't believe - my ma watched it and saw what pressure the girl went through and it made her see how I could feel. (Group 48, f)

A third girl, whose mother was less understanding, had videotaped and repeatedly watched a discussion programme (*Kilroy*) because it showed supportive family reactions:

> It was on about two years ago - families talking about how they'd reacted. I've got that on video and I kept re-watching it, wishing my mum had so much sympathy. (Group 48, f)

For some of the women who had been abused, high profile publicity initiatives such as Zero Tolerance were particularly welcome:

> It's a message that's got to get put across because people, like what I'm finding with my family is, they think they're the only family that child abuse happens. (Group 16, f)

Some of the positive statements about ZT echoed comments made in my interviews ten or fifteen years earlier. There was still a feeling in the 1990s that 'society' or their individual families avoided confronting the existence of sexual abuse. There was also a sense that survivors of that abuse were being made to 'carry the can' for exposing it. Seeing something 'in black and white' can legitimise experience and say 'yes, it does happen', it could also make survivors feel 'unburdened'. One survivor spoke very positively about the way in which the ZT campaign pushed sexual abuse into the public agenda:
It is not because somebody is standing there saying 'I was raped as a child' that it's there. If it's just a big picture on a billboard, then nobody's personally responsible for bringing that up. That's kind of the burden that we leave survivors with [...] [Edinburgh District Council] definitely deserve a round of applause for that, because they're relieving the burden of bringing it up into every-day life from the people who are affected by it. (Group 6, f).

Some members of this self-help group indeed expressed considerable excitement and identification with the Zero Tolerance campaign. One woman emphasised how thrilled she had been to see the huge placards about sexual violence stretching the length of the main shopping street in Edinburgh:

You know that sort of prickly feeling, like when you see something and think ....ooohh! It was when all the posters were up along the tripods right along Princes Street [...] I couldn't believe it. I was going along in the bus and I thought: 'There's one there. There's another one! They haven't got them all along Princes Street...YES! They have! It was very good. [I thought] Yes, this is what I want. I want people to see this. [...] Next month it will be on the buses. They'll go by and you'll go: 'Yes, I'll get on that one. Look at that!' [laughter] (Group 8, f)

However, a few of the survivors who spoke to me expressed caution. Indeed, it was the very power of such public representation that made them wary. Two women warned about the potential effect on other survivors, if they were faced with materials which confronted them with their abuse, without back-up and services. One woman, who had only recently began to think about what had happened to her, commented:
I think there's a danger in that, because through my own experience [...] it wasn't until my Ma died 2 years ago that another sister, same day of my mother's funeral, admitted that she'd been abused for quite a long period of time. But it's like you're opening doors for people to think about things. There's nobody there to tell them how to deal with it. (Group 34, f)

Another woman in a different group expressed similar reservations:

I think maybe it [the Zero Tolerance campaign] might have triggered [memories] [...] But I see that as very traumatic, because if things are triggered into a situation where there is not anywhere to go and get help [...] [that] spells danger to me in some ways. Because I think I really started remembering when I was well and truly safe and away from the situation and able to cope with it and at least find support for myself. Whereas, as a teenager being put in that position, perhaps it's a bit worrying. [Group 6, f].

Another member of this group, however, responded by drawing attention to the different cultural climate in which children and young people might be developing in the 1990s.

We were teenagers at a time - almost an era before the teenagers of today and the children of today and tomorrow. I think maybe it's the other way round of saying what you have just said. It is because of the absence of posters like that when we were little that we had to keep it down - we had to deny it - bury it deeper and deeper. (Group 6, f)

A similar point was made by another woman. Asked whether she felt the campaign might confront survivors with unpleasant memories and 'rub your nose in it', she replied 'It's the silence that's rubbing our noses in it,'
that common notion of "Keep it quiet", that's shoving your nose down all the time.'

The ZT campaign was thus, with a few reservations, broadly welcomed by most of those who spoke to me 'as incest survivors' (there may, of course, have been others who preferred not to disclose such experiences and had different views).

The images in the mainstream mass media which have filled the earlier vacuum are, however, not without problems. Some women described fears that seemed to have been partly generated by glib media statements about 'the cycle of violence'. One woman was unable to wash her baby son properly because: 'I thought if I touched his bits I'd end up like me dad and do it to him.' Asked what made her think this way she said that the media 'tell you that if you've been abused, you abuse'. (Amy)

Others talked about the fears created by coverage of particular cases. One woman described hearing about a judge stating that a woman had 'asked for it' by answering her door in a dressing gown. This increased her sense that she would only be blamed for what had happened to her. Another survivor commented on the likely effect of the Orkney coverage:

If I was a child and I sort of seen the paper and all I could see was that man and that man [pointing to the picture of the priest and the judge], oh there's my neighbour and she's saying it didn't happen either. You know I'd be pretty like, 'oh gosh, all these people aren't going to believe me'. (Group 6, f)

Indeed, one young woman who had been just eleven years old during the Orkney crisis, explained why she had been reluctant to confide in anyone for so long. She commented:
I used to think I'd get sent away if I told. [The media] make social workers out to be big and bad [...]. They sort of put a barrier up.

(Group 48, f)

Programmes about incest were also sometimes viewed with considerable wariness. One teenage girl expressed her own ambivalence about being unexpectedly confronted with allusions to sexual abuse: ‘When it comes on the telly and I'm not expecting it I go dead cold inside and it brings back memories.’ (Group 48, f). Research participants spoke of being nervous when a programme came on, wondering how it would represent abuse and portray survivors. They did not want abuse survivors to be hidden away as if they were shameful: ‘You still heard the fear in they peoples’ voices, as well like doing it as a silhouette’ (Group 34, f). They also complained that survivors are often only allowed one role, a stock part, in the sexual abuse morality tale: that is to parade their scars. 4 This was particularly resented because some felt their friends and family would identify them with the incest survivors portrayed in the media, whether they liked it or not. One girl described becoming upset while watching the film Liar, Liar with her little sister: ‘My wee sister says: “What are you greeting [crying] for? It’s only a film”’. But then she said: “Oh, that was you” (Group 48, f). Another girl agreed, adding:

You don’t know if they are watching it, or putting you in the film and watching you. (Group 48, f)

It is in this context that positive representations are crucial. One widely applauded portrayal of abuse was through the character of Beth in Brookside. This was not only important as a cultural resource for talking about feelings (see above), it also offered an unusual and important model of survival (at least before the character was ‘killed off’ while in prison from a rare and fatal heart condition). Before this happened
however one girl summarised comments made by many other survivors when she declared:

Victims on TV, they're like a big shadow, all blacked out. That makes me feel terrible, they're hiding away [...] I thought: 'I'm going to grow up and I'm going to be scared of everything'. But Beth [in Brookside], she's so strong, she's got a grip of everything. Before that, everything I saw seemed to say that if you were abused you'd be strange, different, keep yourself in a wee corner. Watching Beth has really helped me. (Group 48, f)

This young woman was not alone in her feelings. When news leaked that 'Beth' was to be killed off, incest survivors groups demonstrated outside the TV studios to try to save this valuable representation of survival.

Conclusion
Cultural representation (mass media coverage and campaigns) are a valuable resource for information, ideas, images, and can be a springboard for communication with others. They are also enormously important to the experience and identity of being 'an abuse victim' or 'a survivor', or of being a parent whose child has been abused. The media may be particularly powerful where other sources of information or models are lacking. Most abused children suffer in isolation. Negotiating a 'survivor' identity is rather different from negotiating other identities and the importance of the media will vary accordingly. It is not possible to neatly transfer theories about the role of the media in relation to 'national identity', 'class identity', 'gender identity' or 'ethnic identity' onto the identity of abuse survivors. This is true not least because most people are brought up in families or communities which include visible members of their own national, class, gender or ethnic identity. In some ways, the issues raised by incest survivors and their relationship with the media
have more in common with the way gay men or lesbians sometimes talked about their relationships with the media, when gay men and lesbians were so much more invisible than they now are. Older lesbians and gay men who grew up in the 1950s, '60s and '70s echo similar issues: from the desire to find a cultural representation with which one could identify, through to the fear the others will automatically assume that you are 'just like' the gay character on television.

I would like to end this chapter with another observation and plea. The media have enormous power in this area. They also have a special responsibility. After all, it is the mass media (alongside school education and particular campaign materials) that can reach into a home in which abuse is normalised or silenced, or from which women and children feel there is no escape. When media producers (journalists, script writers and editors) think about the cultural representations they are promoting, there is one audience I think they should always consider. Children who are being abused are a special type of consumer with very little consumer choice. The mass media can throw them a lifeline - or it can reinforce their silence.

Images of non-abusive family life on television were, however, an important resource too. One young woman commented how important images of happy family life were to her - whether these were fictional or the lives she saw being lived by her friends: 'Because if you've been brought up with it all your life then you can't even think about a different situation... So you don't actually have a vision of how life could be different, to motivate you to get something different. All I've got is [...] the situations I see on television or when I go round to a friend's house and see the family altogether and being really nice to each other [...] Their dad don't go in and say goodnight the way my dad did. Their dads just go in and say: "Goodnight, sleep well" and go back to their beds again. That never happened in my family.' (Samantha)
Whereas childhood sexual abuse within the family happened in a cultural vacuum, other experiences such as 'sexual harassment' were simply defined in another way: as 'office slap and tickle'. The way in which the cultural context and the availability of different labels can influence experience was spelled out in an interview I conducted with one woman who described how hard she found it, at fifteen, to protest when her teacher started pressurising her to have sex with him: 'I thought I was having an affair with him, because that's what he called it. And I couldn't understand why I felt so frightened. He dismissed her fears - 'he slapped me down' [calling me] 'neurotic, 'over-sensitive' and 'vulnerable'. She did not feel her distress was legitimate, as she points out, 'Grown up men are supposed to take an interest in you, I was fifteen, I was just at puberty'. It was not until much later as the cultural context changed that: 'I suddenly realised: “My God, that's really weird that actually happened to me and that's why I felt so terrible, that's why I felt so dirty and powerless and manipulated because I was being manipulated.'

This active process of reconstructing the past in the light of new knowledge, new ideas and new 'memories' is alien to many 'experts' and, even before the 'discovery' of false memory syndrome, various experts were noting what they call 'pseudo-rape' or 'subjective rape' and commenting on the increase of women's subjective sense of having been abused or their 'artificial' reinterpretation of their past. West, for example, writes about 'retrospective accusations', 'distortion' 'Jumping on the bandwagon' and feminist indoctrination (West, 1985). Such dismissal however oversimplified the complex relationship between how experiences are labelled, identified, recalled and reinterpreted (although some self-help books equally over-simplify the process of 'discovery').

Articles which gave any space at all to the opinions of adult survivors often focus on their emotional state and endlessly reiterate the damage done by abuse even if also recognising their courage: ‘Secret Shame that has ruined my life' (Sunday Mirror, 13 January 1991); ‘The tormented Life of a literary lion’s daughter’ (Mail on Sunday, 30 January 1991); 'I still wake up screaming over childhood abuse says Rosanne' (Mail, 24 September, 1991); ‘Abused by my father - La Toya opens her heart on the torment she suffered as a child’ (Express, 26 September 1991); ‘Imprisoned by shame’ (Today, 12 April 1986).
Chapter 11

Conclusion: context, effects and implications

This thesis is being completed at a time of fierce debate between the established sociology of mass communication and the 'younger' field of cultural studies (Philo and Miller, 1997; Ferguson and Golding, 1997; Morley, 1998). This is accompanied by, at times heated, disputes around the status and implications of audience reception studies (see Morley 1998; Curran, 1996) and the validity and findings of research on media effects (Miller and Philo, 1996; Barker and Petley, 1997).

In part such disputes depend on how each writer perceives the past and experiences and theorises the current 'prevailing climate' (Barratt, 1997). There are also issues about disciplinary loyalty, knowledge and political perspectives. Specific points of controversy are framed in terms such as: did traditional mass communication research ignore the questions of race, gender and sexuality opened up by cultural studies, or have these always been important areas of concern? (Morley, 1998: 488). Should we be rescuing popular culture from disparagement and challenging condescending attitudes to the mass audiences, or should we be challenging the 'dumbing-down' which sees ratings as the highest goal, privileges commercial priorities and discourages innovation? In addition, within our own discipline(s) and contemporary political context, are we responding to a swing toward 'celebrating' audience 'freedom', or responding to 'decades of stunted and rather irresponsible talk about media 'effects' (Gauntlett, 1998: 128). There has also been a resurgence of the media and violence debate which includes the question; do we live
in a society which is puritanical about depictions of violence in an
unreflective and politically repressive way, or are we encouraged to
celebrate and glamorise violence, seeing it as 'cool' or a legitimate way of
resolving conflict?

Some of these controversies set up false polarities involving conceptual
confusions which could usefully be disaggregated. It is, for example,
possible to believe that much discussion about 'television violence' is
unreflective and politically repressive, while also believing that some forms
of aggression are legitimated, celebrated and glamorised. Similarly, it is
possible to recognise audience 'resistance' while also theorising about
media effects. In this final chapter I will not dwell on the debates about the
history of our disciplines. Different perspectives on this are amply explored
in some of the exchanges cited above, and I have given a brief history of
developments in the introduction to this thesis. What I want to do here is
position my own work in relation to two strands of enquiry: firstly,
established 'effects research' and secondly the more cultural studies
approach of examining audience reception. I will also reflect on the
implications of my work for media production processes and for content
analysis practices.

Effects and influences
'Effects' has become a dirty word within some media studies/cultural
studies circles. To suggest that one's research includes questions about
effects has come to be seen by some as rather unfashionable or even
suspect. This seems to be (in part) because 'effects research' has
become associated with a very narrow and methodologically problematic
strand of work, more specifically identified as 'the traditional effects
model'. Using this paradigm, the concept of 'effects' is often employed to
mean 'immediately observable changes in human behaviour' (Moores,
1996: 5) and, it is suggested, the very word 'effects' is problematic, simply
because the impacts of television viewing are 'self evidently not effects of
the same kind as that of a bat hitting a ball' (Hodge and Tripp cited in

Gauntlett presents a thorough requiem for the traditional effects model in
his book *Moving Experiences* (1995). This is worthy of note for two
reasons. First, because it provides a detailed review of a particular strand
of traditional effects research. Second, because the assumptions in, and
absences from, his discussion are symptomatic of what I see as a major
problem in the way the term 'effects' is used (and dismissed) in
contemporary debate within media/cultural studies.

Gauntlett rightly condemns the traditional effects model for its crude
stimulus -response approach and unreflective confusion of correlation with
causation. He criticises the over-simplistic way in which it categorises
'effects' ('good and 'bad'), 'violence' (often treated as a generic category
regardless of context) and viewers (e.g. 'heavy' and 'light' viewers). He
also attacks the politics of the traditional effects model: its focus on
children and negative outcomes and its tendency to scapegoat television
for problems such as crime whilst ignoring other possible 'causes' such as
inequalities (Gauntlett, 1995: 116, see also Gauntlett, 1998). His review
systematically highlights conceptual and methodological flaws in the
research conducted under the traditional effects model and concludes
that:

> The cumulative 'message' of this monograph is not so much that
there should be no concern about television content...but that,
scientifically speaking, you're on your own...The search for direct
'effects' of television on behaviour is over, every effort has been
made, and they simply cannot be found. (Gauntlett, 1995: 115,
120).
This conclusion is shared by many other commentators. Cumberbatch, for example, takes a similar line on ‘media effects’ research in his introductory review of the field for students. ‘Closer examination of the vast literature on media effects’, he concludes, ‘reveals a consistent tendency to gloss over inconvenient detail to salvage a media harm thesis. For each strong claim there is an abundance of dissenting data’ (Cumberbatch, 1998: 271). He goes on to declare that:

Of course television might have all manner of effects on society and anxieties and these have certainly been fuelled by analyses of media content. It must be a matter of some concern that there is so much to criticize from the under-representation of minority groups - including women - to the lack of good news. But to argue that media images distort viewers' perceptions is more a good hypothesis than a demonstrated phenomenon. (Cumberbatch, 1998: 271-2)

I disagree. The conclusions of both of these writers include unjustified generalisations. There is a great deal of research suggesting that media images help to shape people’s perceptions and it is wrong to dismiss ‘concern about TV content’ as based on a scientifically unproven (or invalidated) assumption (Gauntlett) or hypothesis rather than ‘a demonstrated phenomenon’ (Cumberbatch).

Both authors draw their conclusions from examining one, very narrow, area of research and using it to generalise about media ‘effects’ research in general. Both also slip between the general concept of ‘effects’ and a specific category of effects (direct, immediate, observable effects on behaviour, similar to that of ‘a bat hitting a ball’). Cumberbatch draws his conclusion at the end of a review that is confined to research on violence using a stimulus-response model. Gauntlett, although he throws his net wider, similarly ignores whole areas of work. Indeed, his book (although
useful as a review of the traditional effects model) finishes just where some of the most interesting work from the early 1990s might have been addressed and thus does not do justice to the range of work into media effects.

Gauntlett’s rigorous critique of method does acknowledge some work indicating the effects of media content on audiences. For example, he accepts the findings of a study of Sesame Street suggesting that the programme helped children to develop social skills and racial tolerance. He also seems to agree with the evidence that a drama series was able to influence attitudes toward sex-typed behaviour (Gauntlett, 1995: 51-53, 118). However, he suggests that such findings are ‘rather unique’ (Gauntlett, 1995: 53). He also briefly mentions studies of effects outside the simple ‘stimulus-effects’ model, but indicates that they are beyond his terms of reference. For example, he mentions Noelle-Nuemann’s work on the possible effect of the media on individuals’ perceptions of public opinion (Noelle-Nuemann, 1994). He also makes one reference to Murdock’s discussion of how particular discourses are reinforced by their use in the mass media, for example, how governments may seek to define particular groups and their actions as ‘terroristic’, so that they appear transparently unjustifiable. Gauntlett argues however that such investigation of effects ‘are so far from most concerns about television effects that they constitute a significant break from the effects tradition, forming a new and separate field of enquiry’ (Gauntlett, 1995: 96). And that is all he has to say on this subject. He implicitly recognises that a new field of study has developed but chooses not to engage with it, or allow it to influence his conclusions.

There is, in fact, a great deal of in-depth qualitative work with audiences which provides useful reflection, and compelling information, about, media effects, and does so with a sensitivity to audience diversity and sense-making activity. I would include in this category work by, among others,

Jhally and Lewis's study, for example, was designed to 'delve into the complex interaction between the program and the viewer. ...[to] look into the delicate ideological suppositions that inform the sites where program and viewer meet to create meaning and pleasure' (Jhally and Lewis, 1992: 9). They advance clear conclusions, thoroughly backed up by data from their 52 focus groups, about how 'television influences the way we think' (Jhally and Lewis, 1992: xv). They conclude that white people used *The Cosby Show* to make judgements about the position and behaviour of black people, 'observations that their actual experience of black people did not equip them to make' (Jhally and Lewis, 1992: 32). The growing image on TV of black middle classes, they argue, distorts how the majority of black Americans are understood and fuels resistance to affirmative action. *The Cosby Show* helps to create the illusion that racism is 'a thing of the past' and obscures the class-race nexus (Jhally and Lewis, 1992: 70). In addition, they argue, *The Cosby Show*, and others like it, 'divert attention from the class-based causes of racial inequality. More than this, the series throws a veil of confusion over black people who are trying to comprehend the inequities of modern racism' (Jhally and Lewis, 1992: 129).

Gamson's work is a similarly fascinating and in-depth study. He examined how people talk about politics and how this relates to media treatment. His writing is self-consciously respectful of his participants and certainly avoids the 'cultural dope' approach so criticised in relation to conventional effects research (e.g. see Gamson, 1992: 175). He also thoroughly explores how people draw not only on the media, but also on experiential discourse and popular wisdom and argues that 'people read messages in complicated and sometimes unpredictable ways' (Gamson, 1992: 6). However, he points out '[f]rames...invisible in mass media commentary...
rarely find their way into [people's] conversations. Systematic omissions make certain ways of framing issues extremely unlikely' (Gamson, 1992: 6). In his final chapter he also suggests a particular way of thinking about 'effects' as 'effects in use'. Media content, he argues, serves as:

an important tool or resource that people have available, in varying degrees, to help them make sense of issues in the news. When they use elements from media discourse to make a conversational point on an issue we are directly observing a media effect...The causal relationship is complicated and bidirectional as the tool metaphor implies. (Gamson, 1992: 180)

The third example I wish to draw attention to is work by Corner, Richardson and Fenton. They examined people's responses to different programmes about nuclear power. Again, this study has nothing in common with the traditional effects model but does tell us a great deal about how media effects might operate. These authors prefer to use the word 'influence', but as I have indicated above I do not see a huge difference between the two words. Corner, Richardson and Fenton were concerned to explore 'the interpretive activities by which viewers comprehend and attach significance to what they see and hear', exploring 'responses' and 'understood meaning' (Corner et al, 1990: 2), and 'to investigate how viewers made sense of, and evaluated, the programmes we chose for analysis' (Corner et al, 1990: 47). They thus place themselves in a tradition of reception studies that examine 'the "creative" processes of interpretation...not generally observable in the mainstream social science tradition.' (Corner et al, 1990: 47)

Their work provides some key insights into how effects can operate. They examine how people respond to different images (such as steam rising from a pond next to a nuclear power plant), presentation of facts (such as information about leukaemia pockets) and also to programme structures.
For example, one programme, 'Heart of the Matter', shown to three groups, was:

generally interpreted as suggesting a Sellafield radiation-leukaemia link, despite drawing on explanations which problematized or even rejected this. Our own analysis suggested that it was, in basic structure, a two-level programme. At one level, it focussed on a particular instance of illness and the legal battle that was beginning around it. At another level, it engaged more broadly with questions of risk probability in the nuclear industry. But the sheer power of the depiction it offered of one family's tragedy, backed up by the programme's own "dark" framing of the industry...tended to crystallise meanings at the lower level for our respondents, leaving the wider reach of speculation relatively unassimilated. (Corner et al, 1990: 100)

In their conclusion they comment that their research engages with questions of influence:

particularly in so far as we have registered the extent to which television images can exert a "positioning" power upon viewer imagination and understanding of a kind which may prove more resistant to counter-interpretation than the devices of commentary, interview and voice-over. (Corner et al, 1990: 105)

They go on to comment that different groups attached differential value to the affective properties of televisual texts, but add:

Yet this striking divergence between the groups should not be allowed to obscure the more important convergence - the power of the affective dimension, even on groups who reject its legitimacy, comes through in many ways. This may be of considerable
significance in the shaping of public opinion about the issue.
(Emphasis in original)

Corner and his colleagues conclude:

...though our findings suggest that, indeed, there is a good deal more at issue than many traditional approaches [e.g. the old effects model] have assumed, they also suggest that taking the power of television seriously is as important as recognising the considerable extent to which it falls well short of being omnipotent. (Corner et al., 1990: 108)

The future of audience research (and indeed the future of developing more sophisticated content analysis) clearly must include such research. As Livingstone, citing Katz, points out it is not that 'the multiplicity of factors which mediate between television and viewers undermine media effects but rather that it is only through such complex mediations that any effects could occur at all (Livingstone, 1997: 321).

Gauntlett, however, does not discuss such work. This would have been acceptable if he had confined his conclusions to the area he reviewed, but as I have suggested, he, like many others, uses criticism of the traditional effects model to dismiss 'effects' entirely.

However, Gauntlett seems to slightly revise (or clarify) his position in a later paper, in which he states that 'the failure of this particular [traditional effects] model does not meant that the impact of the mass media can no longer be considered or investigated'. He goes on to cite recent work from Glasgow University Media Group (much of which was in the public domain in the early 1990s). He seems to accept that this work takes into account the way in which understandings of any social problem are 'embedded' within the 'social cultural' sphere, 'where it will be fed by many other
contributory factors' (Gauntlett, 1995: 11) and that it seeks to explore 'the impact of mass media on general consciousness and culture over long periods of time' (Gauntlett, 1995: 11). However, he suggests that the research at the Glasgow Unit is about 'influences and perceptions' rather than effects (Gauntlett, 1998: 128).

This, I think, is splitting hairs. Synonyms for 'effect', according to my Thesaurus, are words such as 'outcome', and 'consequence'. Synonyms for 'influence' include 'control', 'power', 'sway', 'rule', 'authority' (and 'effect') (Windows 97, tools). My Chambers dictionary defines 'influence' as 'power of producing an effect, especially unobtrusively' and 'ascendancy, often of a secret or undue kind'. Such synonyms and definitions might perhaps make Gauntlett more cautious of the word 'influence' rather than the word 'effects'.

None of my colleagues at the Glasgow University Media Group (whatever our differences on other issues) would shy away from using the word 'effects'. I believe it is important to reclaim the concept of 'effects', not least because of the types of leaps and over-generalised conclusion displayed by Gauntlett and by Cumberbatch. (The latter is all the more problematic because it purports to provide an overview introduction for students). The concept of 'effect' is too important to leave either to the traditional effects model or to the perspectives presented by Gauntlett, Cumberbatch and others. Media representations do indeed have effects and 'consequences', including, of course, unintended consequences. Our many different audience research endeavours have repeatedly demonstrated this. These effects include the media's 'effect in use', the affective impact of particular images and stories on how people think about minority groups and the effects of the media on a wide range of other public perceptions (as well as on policy makers) and on aspects of identity, and, in some cases, certain behaviours (See, for example, Eldridge, 1993; Henderson, 1995; Kitzinger, 1990; Kitzinger 1995;
Kitzinger and Miller 1992; MacIntyre et al, 1998; Miller, 1994; Philo, 1990; 1996; Reilly and Miller, 1997). Perhaps we should call this 'the new effects research'. It certainly seems to be time that such a label was coined if we are to resist both the traditional effects model and those who feel that academic criticism of media content and its consequences is passé.

New effects research
The answer to the question about whether there is any evidence for 'concern about TV content' is not as 'unproven' as Gauntlett and Cumberbatch (and many other commentators) assert. If they have failed to find convincing research in this area I would suggest it may be because they not looked for such research, or at least not integrated it into their arguments. They call for a new type of research on the basis of a critique of the old, but have failed to address a whole body of new work (including, but by no means confined to, work cited above). It is quite inappropriate to dismiss the concept of (and the very word) 'effects' based on a deserved criticism of one strand of work. Rather, I think we need to clarify the concept (away from simply assuming an imitative or hypodermic impact). There is a need to itemise the different levels of effect, to continue to develop innovative work in this area and to draw together the range of good work already in existence. The concept of 'media effects', should not be abandoned, rather we should work to develop our understandings of how and when the media might have consequences, and how these might occur.

My own work and that of colleagues at the Glasgow Media Research Unit builds on insights from the 'new' audience reception work (based on the challenges from Hall, Morley and others). It also is informed by the sociology of mass communication and has developed new approaches and methods. Our research is often based on discussion of topics (like Gamson's work) but includes a clear element focussing research participants' discussion onto the media. However, rather than using video,
an alternative strategy is adopted. The 'script-writing exercise' offers a
different way into exploring how people relate to media representations
(including how they recall and reconstruct the media coverage of particular
issues or stories). 3

This work, of which this thesis forms a part, is concerned with how media
messages interact 'both with the universe of other media messages and
with the material and social realities of people's lives' (Kitzinger, in press).
It explores audience diversity, and ability to criticise and deconstruct
media messages and (like many other research endeavours) has
identified the importance of different dimensions in audience reception
including ethnic identity, national identity, gender, sexuality and class.
Alongside such exploration this body of work also draws attention to the
limits of people's resources to resist the media. These limits include the
way in which people may rely on information even if they distrust it (Reilly,
in press), the selective way in which a general scepticism may be applied
in practice, and the limits of 'personal experience' as an oppositional
resource (Kitzinger, 1993; Philo, 1996, Miller et al 1998, Kitzinger, in
press). All the recent audience reception work conducted at the Unit,
shows that, alongside all the diversity and 'resistance', clear 'effects' are
evident.

These effects can be indicated at several levels. Firstly, although much
information from the media is discarded by audiences, people can recall
certain facts, images, story-lines and themes very clearly (including being
able to reproduce strikingly accurate dialogue from a soap opera weeks
after it has been broadcast). This is an 'effect', consistently evident in all
the 'script-writing exercises'. However one cannot, of course, draw
conclusions about influence simply from this observation alone. However,
our work also shows how, in many cases, images, story lines or themes
become integrated into people's conversation and arguments and that
media-conveyed facts can influence beliefs. For example, media coverage
led to inaccurate public beliefs about the shooting dead of three IRA members in Gibraltar (Miller 1994). It also helped to establish an association between pickets and violence (Philo, 1990) and the likelihood of people with mental illnesses becoming violent (see Philo, 1998). A third (intertwined) level of effects can be identified in the ways in which images and themes from the media are used as rhetorical reference points. They are used in explaining or justifying a point of view (rather like the 'effects in use' discussed by Gamson) and we demonstrate that the media can serve as a resource to clarify, interpret or 'frame' experience. (See, for example, boys' discussion of the film Disclosure, and how it helped to shape how they evaluated their interactions with girls (Kitzinger, in press).)

Our work also explores how certain phrases may, within particular social contexts, lead people to particular conclusions. For example, the focus group discussions I ran about AIDS and the media suggested that the widespread media adoption of the phrase 'body fluids' led some people to believe that saliva was a route of HIV infection. This research also demonstrates the impact of vivid media images of people dying from AIDS on people's understanding of HIV. It also revealed how health education advice such as 'If you're not 100% sure of your partner, use a condom' interacted with cultural conditions to produce, in some case, an anti-safe sex message (see Kitzinger, 1993). More general cultural associations were also explored. For example, the focus groups (combined with extensive content analysis) revealed how the media effectively associated HIV transmission with unnatural and perverse acts (leading to the inference that lesbians are a 'high-risk' group (Kitzinger, 1993). This work also showed how the media had contributed to a racist formulation of the associations between AIDS and 'Africa' (Kitzinger and Miller, 1992).

My thesis confirms and expands on findings from our earlier research. I have demonstrated the effects of media coverage at many levels. I have shown how people clearly recalled particular accounts of what happened
in specific cases and highlighted the ways in which the media helped to establish particular associations (e.g. between Orkney and Cleveland) and images (e.g. of abusers). I have shown how people were influenced by story branding, rhetorical location, dramatic personal account, and the presence and absence of certain explanations and facts. I have also explored how the balance of coverage (for example, media emphasis on 'stranger-danger') interacted with people's day-to-day experiences and the cultural currency of different stories to promote particular understandings of where danger was located. The penultimate chapter explored how the changing media profile of sexual violence has impacted upon and changed people's direct personal experiences of abuse over the last fifteen years. In the second half of this conclusion I will briefly sum up the evidence of media 'effects' emerging from my study of public understandings of sexual abuse. I will then reflect on the challenges posed for existing cultural studies/audience reception terminology. Finally, I consider the implications of my work for media production processes and the practice of content analysis.

The reception of effects: reflections on power and cultural studies terminology

The mass media are a powerful source of influence. This thesis has demonstrated how the media help to define what counts as a public issue, frame our understandings of individual cases, shape suspicions and beliefs, and resource memories, conversations, actions and even identities. Such media powers can not be dismissed simply because these processes are complex, multi-mediated, and sometimes successfully resisted. Acknowledging that audiences are 'active' does not mean that the media are ineffectual. Recognising the role of interpretations does not invalidate the concept of influence (or effect). The way in which the media represent issues is still crucial, whatever negotiations may be brought into the equation by audiences. Nor can the variety of people's responses be
viewed as evidence of individual 'freedom'. Audience responses are themselves products of time and place, influenced by power structures, patterns of everyday life, conventions, assumptions, 'common sense', language, social stigma and social struggles.

The audience reception research presented in this thesis confirms findings noted (indeed, endlessly reiterated) in many other studies: audiences cannot be assumed to be a single, passive, homogenous mass. Demographic, political and 'personal' differences influence what people remember and what they believe. Audiences are not *tabulae rasaes* ready for the imprint of messages. Investigation of these factors, examining how 'sense-making' activities operate and interrogating pleasure continue to be important routes to understanding the media-audience relationship.

At the same time it is important to note that, alongside evidence of diversity, strong common understandings may be detected. Even though certain aspects of the Orkney coverage, for example, were resisted, forgotten (or never taken in at all) this cannot be taken to mean that the media have no impact. On the contrary, certain aspects of the coverage were very widely and vividly recalled. Some messages were conveyed particularly effectively because of textual features such as: the initial framing of a story, the reiteration of key phrases and themes, the coherence of narratives, the use of metaphor, and tapping into pre-existing discourses or ways of thinking about the world (such as the association of danger with certain types of places). What was striking about the conversations among the research participants was not their diversity but their similarities (identical images, phrases and explanations recurred across different groups and closely echoed media reports from two or three years earlier).

My research challenges the notion that the media have little influence and questions utopian visions of an endlessly fluid 'semiotic democracy'. The
media coverage of Orkney conveyed a series of dominant meanings which could impact upon readers' and viewers' long-term perceptions and actions. In some cases, the media had structured people's thinking in ways which did not accord with their own preferred critical position. Even if people are sceptical of the media (and MORI polls show that journalists are one of the least trusted professions), the public may still depend on the press, radio and television as their primary sources of information about some issues. These sources will still, therefore, inform their judgements. Scepticism and political critique do not necessarily inoculate people from media influence.

My work suggests the need to clarify the status of some previous research findings and to refine, or even jettison some common media research terms. Indeed, terms such as 'polysemy', 'reading', and 'resistance' may, in combination, obscure more than they clarify.

The notion of 'polysemy' has, I believe, been greatly overplayed. In general, the intended message of any representation is recognised by its audience (see also Eco 1990). People share highly sophisticated understandings of the meaning of words and images from the dominant culture in which they live. Most 'readings', most of the time, by most of the intended audience, will have more in common than divides them. This fact may be obscured by polysemy's 'sister' concept of 'reading': a term often used in ways that conflate questions of understanding and reaction. These two levels of interpretation are often intertwined, but attempting to distinguish between them is crucial. I would add that the fact that the same programme may appeal to different audiences for different reasons should not necessarily be used to imply that its 'power' is thereby diluted. Jhally and Lewis's study of The Cosby Show, for example, combines an understanding of a programme's popularity and different pleasurable appeals to black and white audiences, with a damning indictment of its impact on people's thinking (Jhally and Lewis, 1992).
References to 'aberrant' or 'oppositional' readings can be equally problematic. For example, in my research some people 'read' representations of the Orkney islands or the Orkney parents in a way diametrically opposed to the dominant message. Instead of seeing the island as a rural idyll they decided it was a sinister backwater, instead of seeing the parents as seekers after the good life, they saw them as hippies prone to devil worship (Chapter 6). Similarly, others 'saw' in Zero Tolerance posters the images they expected: images of children displaying visible signs of trauma (Chapter 8). Far from demonstrating weak media influence these examples would be better understood in terms of intertextuality. In the case of the Zero Tolerance advertisement, for example, the 'misreading' occurred because people were used to seeing visible signs of abuse displayed in more traditional and widespread images (such as NSPCC advertisements). People themselves referenced these more 'typical' images as they talked about the potential meanings of the ZT imagery. Such 'oppositional' readings do not demonstrate that 'the media' are weak. They merely indicate that a particular message is open to 'misreading' in the context of a broader media environment. The expectation that abused children should show visible signs of their suffering demonstrates the comparative power of other types of representation common in the mass media. In other words, people may resist one message because of the plethora of alternative (but possibly 'worse') contradictory messages in other, more ubiquitous, cultural products.

Such data provides strong grounds for questioning some of the glib assumptions that surround concepts such as 'resistance'. When audiences reject the stereotype of Orkney as a rural idyll in favour of an image of an island frozen in time and populated by hippies liable to abuse their children this can not be uncritically celebrated as 'resistance'. Such concepts, detached from any substantive political questions, may lure us
to a false optimism about 'the power of the people' and evade examining the consequences of different types of 'reading'. In studying 'resistance' we must never forget to ask: where does this resistance come from? Where might it lead? After all, as Jenson points out, 'oppositional decodings are not in themselves a manifestation of political power' (cited in Moores, 1996: 27). There is also a huge difference between 'active audiences' and audiences who are activists (Lyon and Eldridge, 1997).

I think there are some fundamental problems in the practice, interpretation and presentation of much audience reception research that have led to the inappropriate use of such concepts. Firstly, research which examines the most 'open' and multi-layered of fictional representations has been used to generalise about audience relationships with 'the media'. Studies of 'Cowboy and Indian' films, soap opera and medical dramas do not necessarily offer the best model for understanding how people relate to news and documentary reporting about war, or 'family violence' or medical breakthroughs. Although, of course, even fiction may be seen to 'shape' popular interests, concerns and hopes (Gripsrud, 1995: 19). Similarly, focusing on audience 'pleasures' fails to take into account all the other motivations that guides people's consumption of media products and all the other responses media coverage might generate.

Secondly, a further smoke-screen has been created by the disproportionate attention given to minority examples of diverse 'readings'. I am assuming that such readings are in the minority (they could hardly be called 'deviant' otherwise); however it is worth noting that researchers citing such data rarely deign to indicate the proportion of people who created 'alternative readings'. It is therefore very hard to judge the overall importance of such findings.

The discovery of 'deviant' readings was rooted in important theoretical and political questions (see Chapter 1). However some of this research now
seems to have become increasingly introspective and to have lost its way in the broader sociological endeavour. I suspect this may be partly due to the straitened circumstances under which we are conducting research. Just as journalists are influenced by the conditions of news production, so academics are influenced by changes in academia. Intensified teaching loads and demands to rush into print combined with the insecurity of contract research mean that few researchers have the luxury of pursuing extensive fieldwork. Many so-called ‘ethnographic’ studies rely on no more than a dozen or so group discussions. Ironically, small samples lend themselves more easily to writing about diverse rather than common understandings (although this is not a necessary result, see Corner et al, 1990). It is methodologically weak to argue that the shared viewpoint presented in a dozen focus groups illustrates a view widespread across society. By contrast, focusing on the diversity among even such a small selection of people, can appear more convincing.

Futility and utility in audience reception studies: the future of media research

My analysis of public understandings of child sexual abuse, and the role of the media, does not suggest that media and audiences are locked into a self-perpetuating cycle of reproducing existing dominant definitions and relations. The radical shift in the public profile of sexual violence is testimony to this: a shift which has not been brought about by ‘audience power’ (privately renegotiating mainstream images) but by political action. The growing awareness about all forms of sexual abuse over the last two decades directly built on survivors speaking out and feminist groups setting up support services and publications which created space for the development of new vocabularies, theories and practices. It was this which helped to prompt increasing mass media recognition during the late 1980s, establishing a profile for sexual violence in which the taboos around discussing sexual abuse were questioned and practices which had
been previously tolerated came under critical scrutiny. In the 1990s, the Zero Tolerance campaign represents a continuation of this process, in the form of alternative media. The ZT campaign uses all the tools of propaganda and advertising to insist that the issue be kept in the public domain and attempts to (re)assert a feminist framework which challenges common assumptions and evasions (Chapter 8).

The last twenty years do not, of course, represent a simple ‘victory' for one straightforward feminist perspective. As this thesis has shown, deeply embedded assumptions persist: assumptions about who is 'at risk', why, where and from whom. New problems also have arisen as social services have attempted to develop intervention strategies and as the issue of child sexual abuse has become professionalised and subject to an 'incest industry' (Armstrong, 1994). Some of the early activists feel that the original aspirations which informed protest against child sexual abuse have become lost as the issue has become trivial ‘talk show fodder' (Armstrong, 1994). Feminists also criticise the way in which sexual abuse has become increasingly enmeshed in 'expert vocabularies' (Kelly, 1996) and how the path to 'survivorhood' is mapped out in self-help and therapy guidelines in ways which neutralise feminist analysis. (Kitzinger, 1992)

Breaking the taboo around discussing sexual violence (such as the abuse of children) has been invaluable. However, it has not proved a sufficient end in itself. Nor have feminists and survivors been the only 'players' in this particular drama. The issue of sexual violence and abuse has been co-opted to serve a variety of agendas and there is fierce competition over policy responses, definition and representation. During the last decade we have witnessed extensive disputes about 'date rape' and 'sexual harassment' as well as controversy around social work intervention and legal regulations. In the last three years (since my main fieldwork was completed), press and television reporting have also proved crucial to the development of the most fierce controversies raging around child sexual
abuse today: from the rehousing of convicted 'paedophiles' in the community, to the existence of 'false memory syndrome' (Kitzinger, 1998). It is within this context that the findings of my research should be understood: a context of conflict between interest groups for whom the media, and their own success as news sources, are central.

For all the reasons outlined above, it is essential to reconnect analysis of audiences with debates about 'effects' (as I have attempted to do above). In addition, it is important to connect such analysis with questions about the content of media representations and the production processes which informs them. It matters who controls the media, which sources gain a voice, and how issues are represented, because this has consequences. It has consequences for everyday understandings and relationships. It influences policy and practice. It impacts upon the position of men, women and children within families and in relation to the State. Ultimately it is because of such consequences that media analysts (whatever their particular area of interest) care about 'The Battle for the BBC' (Barnett and Curry, 1994), the descent of news into 'Newzak' (Franklin, 1994) or the media's 'Power without Responsibility' (Curran and Seaton, 1997) (to quote just a few of the recent titles from books scrutinising media production). Media studies researchers have an important task in analysing these connections and examining how they might be transformed. I conclude by briefly highlighting the implications of my work for media production practice and the analysis of media content.

Implications for media production practices

This thesis has drawn attention to the potential of the mass media to transform perceptions. Indeed, the feature of television which has traditionally caused most concern - its invasion of the private space - is the very feature which offers hope for those abused within the home. The data discussed in this thesis suggest that journalists should consider the
abused children who might depend on the media for information and images. It also identifies some very obvious areas where guidelines and reform are needed (e.g. around the asymmetrical identification of abusers as 'homosexual', see Chapter 7).

Although the media have been crucial in highlighting sexual violence, their role has not been unproblematic. Some of the criticisms I have highlighted should be seen in the context of current changes in the media. Historically 'soft' journalism has been an important avenue through which 'women's problems' gained a public profile. Formats other than hard news still offer potential for addressing key social issues (the character of 'Beth' in 'Brookside' was clearly a positive example of this, see chapter 10). However the expansion of 'soft' under-resourced journalism can also simply lead to a proliferation of ill-informed stories which rely on emotive accounts rather than engage with critical debate (whether these are the family tragedy stories from Orkney or dwelling on ever more horrific accounts of violation by survivors of abuse).

Many of the problems with media coverage highlighted by this thesis may also be exacerbated by lack of resources, pressures of time, and deteriorating employment conditions for journalists. Reducing the number of full-time specialists employed on newspapers means that there will be even fewer journalists able to write about issues with knowledge of the wider debates or a first-hand understanding of the history. Obsessions with 'up to the minute' reporting in the broadcast media could lead to further deterioration in media reporting of past events. There will be little space for thoughtful journalism which might challenge one injustice (such as children being taken into care unnecessarily) without perpetrating another (such as misrepresenting routine social work practice). Time constraints already mean that complex ideas have to be presented in simple sound-bites. Lack of time may also undermine efforts to access the most vulnerable and 'difficult' of interview sources. Those prepared to
parade on chat shows and expose their 'deepest secrets' on cheap 'confession-telly' will have a public platform. However, highly pressurised media production processes are unlikely to create conditions under which survivors might assert more positive and critical representations. At the same time journalistic 'research' may increasingly consist of merely 'going through the cuttings' and recycling media-defined truth, resulting in the proliferation of formulaic journalism. The crass use of media templates and stereotypes is likely to be exacerbated, while opportunities for innovative or investigative journalism are likely to diminish. In this context 'alternative' media and other avenues for communication and education continue to be essential; critical media studies also have a vital role to play.

Media researchers are in a key position to comment on the changes currently taking place within media institutions and to continue to critique media content, support the development of media literacy and contribute to the creation of alternative media. To achieve this we need multiple methodologies, self-reflexivity and clarity of purpose.

**Implications for content analysis**

Although this thesis has focused primarily on audience reception, it has not disregarded media content. Indeed, having access to a fully coded archive of all newspaper and television coverage of sexual abuse for considerable chunks of time enhanced the type of analysis I have conducted on my focus groups. It would be quite wrong to relegate textual analysis to the dustbin of history as if it were some quaint, outmoded practice out of touch with the 'real' sites of meaning creation. Analysis of media representations continues to be an important task for, as Dahlgren points out:
... even if we cannot specify with full certitude all the possible meanings a televsional text may offer its audiences, we can still elucidate tendencies and likelihoods, specifying the different registers and discursive strategies at work. The domains of meaning which are relevant for media research are overwhelmingly social, not idiosyncratic, so the play of difference in regard to interpretive horizons would be cast in sociocultural, not individual terms. (Dahlgren 1995: 31)

Rather than abandoning textual analysis in favour of examining the audience we should use audience reception work to refine the content analysis process (and vice versa). We need to continue to document and analyse media presentations (or non-presentation) of the 'facts' as well as examining more subtle representation processes: narrative trajectories and repetition, images and words, the structuring of identification. We need to examine not only what information the media convey but also how they 'organise the imagination'. (Chapter 5)

Analysis of content can be refined and developed (but not replaced) through audience reception studies. Research into how people actually view, discuss, recall and understand media coverage provides important data which may confirm some aspects of content analysis, but challenge others, and produce new insights (see also the work by Corner et al, 1990, cited earlier). My own analyses of 'story branding' (Chapter 5) and 'story placing' (Chapter 6) and identification of 'template events' (Chapter 3) are directly drawn from the focus group data. There were also features of the both the ZT campaign and the Orkney coverage which seemed important to commentators but which proved to have made very little (or very different) impression on my research participants (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 8). Clearly, analysis of content is not sufficient to predict audience responses. However this does not mean that content analysis is redundant. Rather it suggests that research which combines analysis of
text and audiences should be developed to enable a general refinement of content analysis theory and practice and even message production.

Indeed, I believe that we can and should bring the skills developed from broad-based communication studies to the field of message production, a field currently dominated by market research. Some theorists scorn the idea of producing 'pedestrian', practice-orientated 'useful' knowledge, contributing to 'propaganda' or 'prostituting' media/cultural studies in 'administrative research'. Certainly, any research can be appropriated for ends of which we disapprove. After all, cultural studies can be used to defend monopoly ownership and inspire commercial advertising. However, there are areas in which we might actually want to contribute to 'effective' or 'influential' communication. In my previous work around AIDS engaging with the Health Education Authority and the Health Education Board for Scotland seemed a responsibility, not a compromise. Similarly my work on the Zero Tolerance Campaign was commissioned by local government (originally by Edinburgh District Council women’s committee). One of the recent gains and challenges emerging from the Women’s Liberation Movement is that some feminists have now gained positions of influence within ‘the administration’: from women’s committees on local councils to committees on human rights at the level of Europe. This brings dangers of co-option and compromise, however it also offers new potential for positive change. This is particularly true of issues around sexual abuse because traditional divisions between ‘the State’ and ‘the little man’ break down when considering strategies to protect women and children. Indeed, in the case of abuse within the family, it is sometimes ‘the State’ which is one of the few potential resources for victims. Communication theorists can usefully engage with the dilemmas and opportunities this creates and think hard about how we respond to the changing political context for our work.
In conclusion, there is an urgent need for reception analysis to be contextualised and refocused in order to regain its critical edge. This means developing new research, drawing together the insights of existing reception work, and making the links with content analysis and production studies (and practice). If, as I argue, audience interpretations are characterised by their patterns rather than their idiosyncrasies, then it is inappropriate only to focus on the latter. This is not to suggest that differences in audience interpretations are unworthy of study. Rather I would argue that we need to include analysis of common readings alongside acknowledging differences. We also need to go further than simply documenting the various ways in which people ‘decode’ messages to identify the origins of such diverse readings and reflect on why they matter. Even more importantly, rather than seeing these patterns as evidence of ‘consumer freedom’, we should examine how they are shaped by their socio-political context, including by the conduct of people’s everyday lives and social interchange (structured by social conditions and the policing of information exchange by stigma, see Chapter 7).

On-going work is needed on the complex interaction between the ‘personal’ and the ‘cultural’ that explores both audience acceptance and audience resistance as sites of power while maintaining close attention to the content of texts. We need to continue developing ‘new effects research’ which takes into account the insights from reception studies and from the sociology of mass communication, moving beyond the pantomime shouting of ‘Oh yes it does’, ‘Oh no it doesn’t’. In this way I hope that audience reception research can move further towards developing a nuanced understanding of how media influence operates (when and under what circumstances), at all times maintaining a clear conceptualisation of who is trying to communicate, what, to whom, and why.
One problem for traditional approaches to 'effects' research is, of course, that if 'the messages are so stable, the medium is so ubiquitous, and the accumulated total exposure is what counts, then almost everyone should be effected. It is clear, then, that the cards are stacked against finding evidence of effects' (Gerbner et al cited in Livingstone, 1997: 311).

Some of this is 'experimental' work set in laboratory-type settings. Iyengar's work on 'news framing' is an interesting example of experimental work (albeit with some limitations) which attempt to examine 'effects' on attitudes rather than direct 'copy cat' behaviour and which includes a more sophisticated understanding of topic variety than is common in experimental work. He concludes that the predominant 'episodic' framing of news reporting has important consequences for public opinion about certain issues and broad implications for the status quo. The 'episodic' framing: 'by strengthening attribution of punitive and individualistic responsibility [episodic framing] indirectly increased support for measures such as the death penalty and military reprisals against 'terrorist' states. Episodic framing of poverty indirectly reduced public support for social welfare programmes and increased public approval of leaders committed to slashing such programmes (Iyengar, 1991: 101). Episodic framing, he argues, also diverts attention from societal responsibility and 'effectively insulates incumbent officials from any rising tide of disenchantment over the state of public affairs' (Iyengar, 1991: 137).

There may be some truth in this assumption, but this is an artefact of the method rather than a finding. Certainly I think that the process of small group discussion after showing a range of videos creates particular conditions. It exerts a methodological pull away from observing effects for several reasons. Firstly, because people tend to say they are not affected (only other people might be affected, but not them personally) and secondly because an arranged video showing, especially when comparing several different programmes switches people into critical mode. A third reason why this method may be less likely to suggest 'effects' is because, in any case, it is unusual (although not impossible, see Chapter 3) for an individual programme to have a powerful effect. Media effects operate more, I would argue, through cumulative exposure and pervasive repetition of particular phrases, images and themes, than as the result of individual programmes.
Appendix 1

Guidelines for discussion of script-writing exercise

How did you find writing it? (Were there any problems? Any particular areas of disagreement between you, or anything which came particularly 'easy'.)
What about the pictures - were any missing or were there any that did not seem to fit? Were there any you did not use - why didn't you use that picture?
Is it typical of an Orkney news bulletin? What was usual/unusual about the bulletin?
Did you find that you had to invent some of the facts? Which ones were invented/which ones were recalled, which ones were you unsure of?
Are there any particular words or phrases you would like to comment on (that you felt were similar to or dissimilar to those which actually appeared on the news/that you agreed/disagreed with)?

Were there things you wrote that you particularly agreed/disagreed with?
What about when you said 'x' what did you mean? [follow up on specifics of story itself]

(If two scripts are presented ask about differences and similarities between the two audience-generated bulletins)

(If not already clear from above)
What was the message in the Orkney coverage about the parents/the children/the social workers/the police? What do you believe?
Where are the children now? Why were they sent home/not sent home?
What do you think 'really' went on? Why?
Appendix 2

The first questionnaire

Code no: .................

THANK YOU FOR COMING ALONG TO THE GROUP.

1. It would be helpful, but not essential, if you could write down your first name. Your name will not be used in the research report.

My first name is: ................................

2. When you read a newspaper, which newspaper do you usually read?

..............................................

3. Think about the sort of newspaper headlines you've seen about child sexual abuse. Please jot down examples of 'typical' headlines that you can remember.

Now please turn over the page.
4. Finally, please look at the chart below and try to write five different 'typical' headlines each one containing the word listed in the left hand column. Just write down the first sort of headline which comes to mind when you see that word, as long as it has something to do with child sexual abuse.

1. 'social workers'

2. 'police'

3. 'parents'

4. 'priest'

5. 'judge'

THANK YOU
Appendix 3

The second questionnaire

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMING ALONG TO THE GROUP. IT WOULD NOW BE VERY HELPFUL TO KNOW A BIT MORE ABOUT YOU......

1. How old are you?
under 16/16-19/20-29/30-39/40-49/50-59/60-69/70 or older

2. Are you male or female? Male/Female

3. Do you see yourself as belonging to any particular National or ethnic group? Yes/No
If 'yes', how would you describe yourself?...

4. Do you have any children? Yes/No

5. Are you currently in paid work? Yes/No
If 'yes', then what is your job?

6. If there was a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?

7. Is there any other information about yourself that you think is relevant?
If so please indicate such information here:

Now please turn over the page......
8. Has participating in this group discussion made you change your mind about anything or think about something differently? Yes/No

- If yes, please could you say in what way you now think differently?

9. Is there anything you would like to add to what you said in the group? Or anything which you felt unable to say or ask in the group?

Yes/No

- If yes, please say what this is.

10. It would be helpful, but not essential, if you could write down your first name. Your name will not be used in the research report.

My first name is: ........................................

** THANK YOU **
Appendix 4

The NUDIST codes used for group transcripts

1. Comments on the media
1.1 Structure or production motivation
1.2 Comments on sources/ who is heard
1.3 Perceived differences between diverse media/ changes over time
1.4 Perceived differences between own bulletin and actual news reports
1.5 Criticism/ praise of media
1.6 Stated impact on self

2. Speaking as an audience
2.1 Visual recall from media
2.2 First or most powerful impressions
2.3 Mixing up cases
2.4 Reasons for believing/disbelieving the media
2.5 Lack of recall, lack of detail
2.6 Viewing behaviour (switching off/on etc.)

3. Method and Interactions
3.1 Laughter and jokes
3.2 Disagreements
3.3 Changes of mind and contradicting self
3.4 Self-reflection or comments on the group process
3.5 Strong agreement/ consensus
3.6 Revelation/ secrets
3.7 Remembering
3.9 Miscellaneous

4. Structure of session sections
4.1 The picture captions
4.2 Preparing the bulletin
4.3 The news reports
4.4 The ZT advert

5. Cases
5.1 Orkney
5.2 Cleveland
5.3 Rochdale
5.4 Beck
5.5 Abductions
5.6 Michael Jackson
5.7 Woody Allen
The NUDIST codes used for group transcripts (cont.)

6. Topics
6.1 Ideas about abuser
6.2 Ideas about victim
6.3 Social workers
6.4 Belief/disbelief in allegations
6.5 'Not again'
6.6 Sexuality and gender
6.7 Place/location
6.8 Priests
6.9 Collusion
6.12 Miscellaneous
6.14 The dolls/ Interviewing technique
6.18 Reference to documentaries
6.19 Soaps and drama

7. General discussion
7.1 Causes/ prevention
7.2 Consequences/ cure
7.3 Diagnosis and intervention
7.4 Nature and statistics
7.5 Treatment of offender
7.6 Courts and police
7.7 Institutional abuse
7.8 Ritual abuse
7.9 Risk
7.10 Date Rape

8. Personal
8.1 Empathy, explicit self-reference
8.2 Personal contact
8.3 Personal behaviour
8.4 What was told/tells own children

9. Orkney
9.1 Dawn raids
9.2 Outcome/details/who was involved
9.3 Emotions (parents/ children/ social workers)
9.4 Community
Appendix 5

Example of a letter of invitation

THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A DISCUSSION GROUP

Child sexual abuse has been in the media a lot lately. What do you think of the issue and how it is covered on the television and in the press? What, if anything, can you remember about particular cases? What do you think about the role of social workers, the police and judges? How do you see the problem of child sexual abuse and what do you think can be done about it?

We are currently doing research into the media coverage and public understandings of sexual abuse and would like to hear the views of members of your group.

If you would be willing to help with this research it would simply involve meeting up with the researcher, Jenny Kitzinger, for a tape-recorded group discussion at the time and place of your choosing. Perhaps I could come along to one of your usual meetings? You will be asked to fill in a short questionnaire and be shown some pictures from news bulletins and newspaper articles and asked to discuss some of the issues raised in the press. The discussion usually involves about six people and takes about one and a half hours.

Whether or not any of you have strong opinions on the subject, or feel you know much about it, I do hope you will be willing to set aside the time to help with this project. People usually find it interesting - and it is important that we include as wide a range of people as possible (including people who do not feel they know anything at all about this topic and do not read newspapers and watch much television!)

If you think that members of your group might be willing for me to join them for such a discussion, or if you would simply like further information about the research, then please ring me on: 041 330 6686

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY KITZINGER,

Glasgow University Media Group, 61 Southpark Av, Glasgow G12 8LF
Appendix 6

Examples of information forgotten by the audience

Given the detailed recall of some of the aspects of the case it is worth spelling out the extent of forgotten information (or information which was never ‘taken in’ in the first place). This appendix gives two examples of ‘poor’ or inconsistent recall.

The judgements against social services

Phrases which had been reiterated during the coverage, and which I had assumed to be important when examining the media content, in fact did not appear in audience discussions. For example, Sheriff Kelbie’s judgements that social workers’ actions had been ‘fundamentally’ or ‘fatally flawed’ appeared repeatedly in the media. The phrase was reiterated on national news bulletins no fewer than 23 times. However, while the idea that the case had ‘collapsed’ was common, the phrases ‘fundamentally’ or ‘fatally’ flawed were not widely recalled and this phrase was not used in a single news bulletin reconstruction. Indeed it was only referenced in one group and then somewhat diffidently after I prompted in response to an inaudible comment.

The alleged ringleader

Many research participants were unaware who were the key suspects in the current crisis. Presented with a picture of the alleged ringleader, named as the Church of Scotland Minister, only a minority identified him as an alleged abuser. Indeed, only one in four of the audience scripts named him as such. Instead, the Reverend was often given the role of community representative providing support for the parents (‘I’m just trying to provide as much spiritual guidance and comfort as possible in these hard and difficult times’ Group 38). Alternatively he was identified as the source of the allegations: ‘He blew the whistle, said there was ritual abuse going on, that’s what we reckon’ (Group 23). The discussion surrounding this photograph confirmed that research participants were trying to make informed guesses about his role rather than actually remembering it:

f: What’s this? Are these really all to do with the story? Who’s this fucker?/ m: What’s this fuckin’ ...

f: Why was the minister involved, who’s that Church of Scotland minister?

f: Maybe he knew the families or something, I don’t know...

m: I just cannae remember/ f: I cannae mind anything about it [...] f: I take it the minister just basically said I’ll speak to God about this.’ (Group 24)
Even among the one in four of scripts that did name the Reverend as a suspect it was sometimes clear that such identification was based on guesswork or stereotyping rather than memory. People joked that he 'looked like' an abuser and said that they tended to assume that religious figures in the news about child abuse were abusers. Indeed, in the questionnaire administered prior to the group research participants had been asked to write a headline about sexual abuse including the word 'priest'. The priest was identified as an abuser in 75% of the headlines. The link between such 'typical' news reports and how people worked with the pictures was made explicit by one research participant who commented:

That earlier questionnaire you gave us, it had 'priest' [as one of the words to incorporate into a headline about sexual abuse]. And then when I saw the photograph the first thing I thought of was he must have been one [an abuser]. (Group 8, f)

This lack of recall of the Reverend's alleged role in the Orkney case was in spite of the fact that he was interviewed on national news and in the press about his alleged involvement from the first weeks of the crisis and was officially named in the Inquiry at the end of the year.
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