



## TALKING DIRTY

### Children, sexual knowledge and television

**PETER KELLEY, DAVID  
BUCKINGHAM AND HANNAH DAVIES**  
Institute of Education, University of  
London, UK

Key words:  
children, gender, identity, sex, television

Mailing address:  
David Buckingham  
Institute of Education, University  
of London, 20 Bedford Way,  
London WC1H 0AL, UK  
[email: teemddb@ioe.ac.uk]

*Childhood* [0907-5682(199905)6:2]  
Copyright © 1999 SAGE Publications  
(London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi)  
Vol. 6(2): 221–242; 008140

Television is often blamed for making sexual knowledge available to children, and thereby for promoting ‘inappropriate’ attitudes and behaviour. This article draws on data gathered as part of a larger research project about the changing nature of the child television audience. It considers how children (aged 6–7 and 10–11) interpret and respond to the representations of sexual behaviour they encounter on television, for example in genres such as soap operas and dating game shows; and how they define what is appropriate, both for themselves and for children in general. Using discourse analysis, the article examines how children’s discussions of these issues serve as a form of ‘identity work’, through which they define what it means to be a child.

Recent sociological studies have questioned many of the distinctions that are typically drawn between childhood and adulthood. Childhood, they argue, is a social construction that is defined in different ways in different cultures and in different historical periods. As such, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are inevitably problematic: they are subject to an ongoing negotiation, and they have to be continually monitored and policed (James et al., 1998).

One of the most obvious ways in which this is manifested is in relation to sexual knowledge. Information about sexual behaviour is typically deemed to be appropriate only for adolescents and adults. It is seen to be part of the essential condition of childhood that children should remain fundamentally ‘innocent’ (or ignorant) of such matters. In her book *Childhood and Sexuality*, Stevi Jackson argues that although the latter half of the 20th century has seen the blurring of some of the boundaries between adulthood and childhood, the subject of children and sexuality remains extremely taboo: ‘If we regard children as a special category of people and sexuality as a special area of life, then any meeting between the two is likely to be explosive’ (Jackson, 1982: 2).

The issue of children and sexual knowledge thus provokes some of the

fiercest arguments about the apparent erosion of traditional notions of childhood. As in many other areas, the notion of childhood comes to be used here as the vehicle for much broader concerns about the social order. Conservatives hold sexual permissiveness partly responsible for what they perceive as social decline; while liberals argue that sexual repression leads to a whole range of social ills. These views overlap in complex ways with different perspectives on childhood. Thus, on the one hand, children's awareness of sexuality can be seen as a healthy, natural phenomenon, which is distinguished from some of the more distorted or corrupted conceptions of adults. On the other hand, it can also be viewed as precocious or unnatural (see Hey, 1997: Ch. 6); and the acquisition of sexual knowledge can be seen to weaken the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, which are apparently designed to protect children. For conservatives, access to sexual knowledge is often regarded as part of a more general permissiveness, equated with a rise in violence, drug use and criminal activity among children. From this perspective, sexual knowledge places children *in danger*; but it also makes them potentially *dangerous*.

Like many other countries, Britain has seen a succession of 'moral panics' over the past decade around children and sex, ranging from issues such as the sexual abuse of children and paedophilia, to the steady increase in rates of teenage pregnancy. Many of these debates have hinged on the question of children's allegedly 'premature' access to sexual knowledge. Battles have repeatedly been fought in the media, in the courts and in parliament about sex education, the availability of advice on contraception, education about HIV and AIDS and the supposed 'promotion' of non-monogamous or non-heterosexual 'lifestyles' in schools (Corteen and Scraton, 1997; Pilcher, 1996). There is now widespread confusion, both among professionals and among young people themselves, about the kinds of information that can legally be provided to children. As Jane Pilcher (1996) has argued, these debates raise much broader questions about children's competence as social actors, and their rights of citizenship. Typically, however, these eruptions of anxiety focus on the rights of *parents* to control their children's access to sexual knowledge, in the face of what is seen as 'interference' from others – not least from the media.

Childhood has been increasingly understood by adults in terms of risk (Hood et al., 1996); and sexual risks are high on the public agenda of potential threats to children and childhood. As Mary Douglas (1992) has pointed out, where there is risk, there is blame. Arguably, much of the blame for the supposed loosening of sexual boundaries and the subsequent 'loss' of children's innocence has been placed on television. Such arguments are frequently invoked in press reports, such as those surrounding the killing of James Bulger (Barker and Petley, 1997);<sup>1</sup> yet they have also been rehearsed in more academic studies. Neil Postman (1983), for example, claims that the creation of modern childhood was only made possible by the emergence of

print literacy; and that the demise of print literacy and of rise of electronic media will lead to the disappearance of childhood as we know it. Postman describes television as a 'total disclosure medium': it makes the 'secrets' of the adult world – including sexual knowledge – available to children, and hence destroys the 'shame' that should surround them. Likewise, Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) argues that children's relatively open access to television allows them to share rituals and experiences previously confined to adults: undermining the separation between children and adults in this way will, he predicts, inevitably lead to a reduction in the power and authority of adults.

The evidence in support of these arguments is somewhat dubious, however. Most obviously, there is the danger of looking back to an imaginary 'age of innocence' before the advent of television – a notion that is largely rejected by most childhood historians.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, holding television responsible reflects a kind of technological determinism. While there clearly are connections between media such as print or television and broader developments in society, those connections are much more complex, and much less unidirectional than these authors would suggest. Nevertheless, even those who dissent from Postman's view recognize that television has played an important role in reflecting new conceptions of childhood and in shaping children's lives.

The concerns voiced by Postman, Meyrowitz and others apply primarily to children's access to adult television: the problem is precisely that both groups are watching the same things, or that children's and adults' programmes are becoming indistinguishable (Davies, 1995: 30). In Britain, measures such as the 'toddler's truce' and later the 9 o'clock 'watershed' for family viewing were specifically designed to separate adult and child audiences; and regulatory bodies have specific guidelines for monitoring standards of 'taste and decency' during periods when children are more likely to be viewing. However, concerns have also been raised in relation to representations of sexuality in *children's* television over the years. Contemporary children's dramas featuring teenagers such as the BBC's *Grange Hill* and *Byker Grove* have been regularly criticized in the press for their treatment of sexual relationships; while more recently ITV's *Love Bites*, an educative magazine programme aimed at teenagers which explored sex and relationships, attracted predictable complaints from moral watchdogs.<sup>3</sup> Some children's broadcasters have hit back at these criticisms, arguing that while they may be disturbing to adults, such programmes try to deal with the reality of the lives of older children in ways that are both entertaining and informative (Home, 1993: 14).

The debate about children's exposure to representations of sexuality on television is thus polarized. On one side, there are those who continue to argue that sex and sexuality should be kept secret from children, and consequently call for greater censorship and control. On the other side are those who claim that children have a right to watch programmes which may deal

with their emotional needs and concerns, including those relating to sexuality. Ultimately, however, even the most traditional moralists must recognize that children do not exist in a vacuum from the rest of society, and that they will inevitably acquire sexual knowledge in all sorts of ways – not only from television.

### Defining the child audience

If we look beyond the debate about censorship, however, some rather different questions emerge. The issue is not so much about what children should or should not know, but about what they do with what they actually *do* know. In other words, how do children interpret and respond to the various representations of sexual behaviour that they encounter through television? What kinds of knowledge do *they* feel are 'appropriate' or 'suitable', both for themselves and for children in general? And how do their discussions of these issues help them to define what it means to be a 'child' or an 'adult'?

The data presented here are drawn from a larger study of changing views of the child audience for television.<sup>4</sup> In addition to looking at how the television industry defines and constructs the child audience – through practices such as programme production, scheduling and research – we wanted to understand how children perceived *themselves* as an audience (see Buckingham, 1994). To this end, we conducted a series of open-ended interviews and more structured activities with groups of children in Year 2 (age 6–7) and Year 6 (age 10–11) in one socially and ethnically mixed inner London primary school.<sup>5</sup> Though our research was not intended to be ethnographic, we also spent several days with each class prior to the interviews, observing or helping out with classroom activities and talking with the children. On other occasions, such as before or after lessons, we also talked to the children more informally, for instance being given snippets of 'gossip' about classroom or staffroom romances (see Epstein and Johnson, 1997).

Our position in this context was profoundly ambiguous. In our interviews the children were away from their teacher, and were being asked their opinions about television – a subject still rarely considered to be a legitimate focus for discussion in classrooms. This in itself afforded us a considerable degree of access to children's out-of-school cultures. Nevertheless, talking about television in an interview setting obviously differs from doing so in the playground or at home (Buckingham, 1993a: Ch.3); and as adults in the context of a school, we inevitably shared in a certain 'teacherly' authority. We were effectively inviting 'playground talk' of a kind that was generally frowned upon in the classroom;<sup>6</sup> and introducing issues such as sex or violence therefore served as a means for the children to 'test' the degree to which we might choose to exercise our authority.

As we indicate later, the gender composition of the groups was also bound to impact on the discussions. Our interviews and activities were

conducted by an alternating pair of researchers (one female, two male), in groups of three, or four if they were mixed-gender groups. The structure of the Year 6 (10–11) groups tended to reflect the existing seating arrangements of the class, where groups of four children had been seated together at a table according to academic achievement and/or friendship networks. However, because children were sometimes working to different timetables or were absent, it was not always possible to have the same children in each group on several occasions. The Year 2 (6–7) groups were selected by the class teacher, and were made up of three children of the same sex.

We began with a series of relatively open-ended discussions about the children's likes and dislikes in television.<sup>7</sup> These were followed by two more focused activities. The first was a scheduling exercise, in which the children were invited to construct 'ideal' viewing schedules for themselves (and in the case of the 10- to 11-year-olds, also for 6- to 7-year-olds) from a broad range of programme titles provided. In terms of their original scheduling, some of these programmes were aimed at an adult audience (that is, shown after the 9 p.m. 'watershed'); some at family audiences (early evening); and some at children (morning/late afternoon). This activity therefore attempted to tap into children's understanding of how childhood and adulthood are constructed within television schedules, and how far they challenged these definitions of space and time. The second activity was a sorting exercise, in which children were invited to categorize a similarly broad assortment of programme titles in terms of whether they were 'for children' or 'for adults'. In practice, of course, many groups chose to have more than two categories, including a pile for programmes that were 'for everyone', or for 'teenagers' or 'babies'.

Throughout each of these activities, the children were invited to comment and reflect on their choices and decisions. They were also permitted to make changes as the discussion progressed. The activities were intended to facilitate discussion, rather than to accurately reflect children's viewing tastes or habits; and it is these discussions that we primarily focus on here. However, the 'results' of these two exercises (that is, the children's final choices) are of some interest, even if in many respects they were fairly predictable. The schedules devised by the 10- to 11-year-olds, for example, displayed a general preference for comedy and drama, though there was a mix between 'lighter' material such as the sitcoms *Friends* and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* or the dating game show *Blind Date* and the more serious 'adult' dramas, such as *Casualty* and *The X-Files*, which were often scheduled later in the evening. The 6- to 7-year-olds tended to select children's programmes such as *Rugrats*, *Goosebumps* and *Art Attack*, as well as light entertainment or 'family' programmes, such as *Gladiators* and *You've Been Framed*. Animation such as *The Simpsons* and 'action' dramas such as *The New Adventures of Superman* were also popular; while most children avoided non-fiction programmes, with the exception of the animal

documentary *Vets in Practice* – a particularly popular choice for girls in both year groups.

Programme choices made by 10- to 11-year-olds frequently centred around genres that explore the ‘personal’. Soap-style dramas featured prominently in all of the older children’s selections, among boys as well as girls. Nearly every group included the ‘realist’ British soap *EastEnders* among their final programme choices. Dating game shows such as *Blind Date* and talk shows such as *Rikki Lake* were also popular. Conversely, 6- to 7-year-olds were less likely to choose either soaps or ‘romantic’ dating games as preferred viewing; and boys especially dismissed the parts of programmes that featured elements of romance, such as that between Superman and Lois Lane. In both instances, these children agreed that programmes that dealt with personal/sexual matters were more for ‘teenagers’ or ‘adults’ than for children. Thus, while few of the 6- to 7-year-olds yet aspired to join this teen audience, most of the 10- to 11-year-olds positively identified with it.

In both activities, the children used many criteria in distinguishing between ‘children’s’ and ‘adults’ programmes;<sup>8</sup> and, predictably, the presence of ‘sex’ or ‘rude words’ was one of these. Likewise, although we did not explicitly seek to introduce the topic, the children would commonly raise issues to do with sex and sexuality in more open-ended group discussions about television. As we indicate later, these discussions served particular and complex functions for the children, both in negotiating gender- and age-specific identities and relationships, and more broadly in making sense of their own experiences both at home and at school.

The kind of material referred to in these terms was quite diverse. In the following sections of this article, we focus primarily on four distinct areas or genres of television: ‘adult’ films and dramas; dating game shows; soap operas; and situation comedies. In each case, sexual activity is clearly represented in quite different ways – for example, with greater or lesser ‘explicitness’, or with different degrees of humour or seriousness. Sex occasionally features in the context of marital relationships, or alternatively outside them; as something associated with violence, and as something associated with pleasure; as something illicit or forbidden, or as something everyday and even banal. These differences clearly exert constraints on the kinds of positions the children are able to adopt in discussion.

### Crossing boundaries

For some children at least, sex in ‘adult’ programmes has the appeal of ‘forbidden fruit’. In our more open-ended discussions about television likes and dislikes, children from both year groups were fully aware that certain adult programmes were supposedly ‘off limits’ because they contained sex, violence or bad language. Certain films or programmes achieved a kind of mythic status in exchanges within the groups: children would frequently ask

each other whether they had seen particular horror films, or those that contained notorious scenes of violence, rather than sex, such as Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*.<sup>9</sup> The children's knowledge of these films sometimes appeared limited, and it wasn't always clear whether or not they had actually seen them, or were simply pretending that they had.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, they appeared to take great pleasure in recounting specific scenes from 'forbidden' films, not least because they knew they were 'not supposed' to watch them. In the following extract, three 10-year-old boys discuss the film *Trainspotting*, which two of them (and the male interviewer) had seen the previous evening.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the boys refer to two scenes in the film: one in which an addict retrieves drugs from a filthy toilet, and another involving the same character's theft of a pornographic video belonging to (and featuring) his friend and girlfriend:

*B1*: [to I] Did you watch *Trainspotting* last night?

*I*: I did, yes.

*B2*: I watched it, it was all about junkies.

*B1*: And he [character] went down the toilet.

*I*: Oh, that was horrible, that bit.

*B3*: I don't watch things like that.

*B2*: Disgusting!

*I*: So did you watch the whole of *Trainspotting*, or just some of it?

*B1*: All of it. He got dumped because he couldn't find the video.

Through their selective description of the film, the first two boys clearly set out to define themselves in a particular way. While they were friends, they appeared to be socially and academically marginalized in relation to the other children in the class.<sup>12</sup> Their discussion of the film is used to further cultivate and celebrate their 'bad boy' image in front of the two male interviewers, and in contrast to the third boy who comments (with implicit disapproval) that he doesn't watch 'things like that'. It is significant in this respect that the topic of *Trainspotting* is introduced by one of the boys, in an almost casual enquiry that seems to position the interviewer on a similar level to himself. Both boys are keen to illustrate the apparent lack of adult constraint on their viewing late into the night. In response to the interviewer's somewhat disbelieving question, the first boy is adamant that he saw the whole film, despite the fact that it began at 10 p.m. on a Sunday night, and describes an additional scene from it in order to back up his claim. The boy's selective reference to these two specific scenes is evidently intended to shock the interviewer, whom he knows has seen the film, and hence raise his status among the group for having seen some 'forbidden' material.<sup>13</sup> There is a kind of relish about the second boy's 'disgusting!' which distances him from the interviewer's professed squeamishness. These boys' defiance towards what they believe are adult conceptions of 'good' children is thus a kind of self-conscious celebration of the moralists' worst nightmare – children staying up late, in the company of adults, watching explicit 'adult' material.

An equally common – albeit more subtle – tactic here was for the children to use humour, often by ironically expressing shock at explicit sex scenes from a film. In doing so, the children were to some extent parodying adult conceptions of children as sexual ‘innocents’ by inferring their awareness of the sexual. In the following extract, for instance, one girl (in a group of three girls) describes a highly explicit scene at the beginning of the film *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*.<sup>14</sup> Without spelling out precisely what happens, her innuendo implies a certain sexual ‘knowingness’, and provokes much laughter from the others. At the same time she voices ‘surprise’ that such material was being shown when she was still viewing:

G: I watched a film – *Rita, Sue, and Bob Too*. I only watched the beginning of it – [breaking into laughter] – and it was about this man, yeah, and he just started – [more laughing in the group] – and then this other man was lying on the floor and he was sick – it was on at 9 o’clock and it was *really* early.

The girl here self-consciously plays the role of the ‘precocious’ child. Clearly, the pleasure and status gained in revealing (or even implying) one’s sexual knowledge to adults and other children derives from the fact that one is seen to be crossing into adult territory. The laughter here could be seen to reflect a recognition of this, and of the inappropriateness (and even subversiveness) of drawing attention to it in this context. Yet, as with the previous example, the girl’s revelations are also predicated on the understanding that, as a child, she should not really know or speak about sex: the film has been shown ‘*really* early’, thereby running the risk that it will be seen by children who (she implies) should be protected from such material. She thus mocks adult conventions around childhood and sexuality, while simultaneously reinforcing them: she herself knows about these things, but ‘children’ should nevertheless be protected from them.

The two excerpts above suggest that the appeal of such ‘forbidden’ programmes is as much to do with the fact of gaining access to them as it is to do with their actual content. Programmes notorious for featuring scenes of sex (or for the younger children, action and horror genres) were for many children symbolic of entry into adult time and space. Viewing adult television meant staying up late (whether by permission or not), and watching the same programmes as older siblings, parents or other grown-ups.

Although they claimed to be crossing these boundaries, most of the children were still subject to differing levels of parental constraint placed on viewing. Unsurprisingly, the younger children’s access to television appeared to be governed far more strictly. Many of the 6- to 7-year-olds were unfamiliar with popular adult programmes shown later in the evening, and a number said that they were not allowed to watch television beyond a certain time. Older children claimed that access to late evening programmes often involved negotiation with parents – although their accounts of these negotiations usually resulted in the child coming out ‘on top’. In the context of group interviews, it was not surprising that they tended to play down the



extent to which they were censored or constrained by bedtimes (see Buckingham, 1993a: Ch. 5). Children discussed a whole range of strategies they employed in order to view these forbidden programmes. For instance, those who had televisions in their bedrooms described how they would watch programmes after their 'official' bedtimes without their parents finding out, or when other adults were watching in the living room. Other children talked about negotiating *between* parents about access to programmes, playing one off against the other.

Children's position within the family was another important factor here. Children who had older siblings or younger parents were more likely to mention co-viewing adult programmes with them. For instance, a number of the 10- to 11-year-old girls talked about watching soaps and dramas with older sisters or mothers. Conversely, children with younger siblings had to negotiate more carefully with parents, since they were effectively testing new limits of parental regulation. In the following extract, another 10-year-old boy, who was the eldest child in a large family, describes how he has resolved the difficulties of having to fit in his preferred viewing with his younger siblings' bedtime patterns, with the collusion of his mother:

*B:* What I do is I get my mum to tape everything that I really want to see, like *Friends*, *Frasier*, *You've Been Framed* and so on – and on Saturday mornings I just go upstairs, sit under the covers and watch television for about 3 hours.

### Dating games

Although adults continue to attempt to shield children from sexual knowledge, it is considered more acceptable for children to witness expressions of intimacy between adults that take the form of heterosexual 'romance'.<sup>15</sup> Thus, a number of groups selected and discussed the television game show *Blind Date*. Though it was the only one of its type included in the scheduling and sorting exercises, the presence of *Blind Date* facilitated conversations about similar programmes, such as *Man O' Man* and *God's Gift*. These programmes were most popular with the older girls. Their discussions focused on the more comic elements of the show: adults behaving 'embarrassingly', or the teasing of (principally) male contestants. In the next extract, with a female interviewer, one girl describes a scene from *Man O' Man* where the male contestants receive kisses from the female co-hosts before being pushed into a swimming pool if they are eliminated by the female contestants:

*G1:* I like that American one where they choose one person [*Singled Out*]. . . . It's not *Blind Date* . . . and I like *Man O' Man* ...

*I:* What sort of a programme is it?

*G2:* It's got Chris Tarrant on it. And they [the male contestants] have to say something, and they [women contestants] have to press the button of what number they want.

I: Would you like to be on *Man O' Man*?

G1: [shouts] No!

G2: I would . . . I'd like to chase the man – and when one of them wins a sort of – [loud laughter] – they kiss them on their face, and when they kiss them they go . . . [girl mimics pushing action, with much shrieking and laughing in the group].

The girls here appear to identify with the ritualized sexual power of the adult female participants choosing or rejecting the men – with one girl acting out the elimination scene. Nevertheless, the sexual overtones were not taken too seriously. As in the discussion of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, such references to sex are accompanied by much hilarity, reflecting a mixture of embarrassment and self-conscious subversiveness, as well as (in this case) the parodic humour of the performance itself.

In her study of children in US schools, Barrie Thorne (1993) observed that for boys and girls, discourse around 'going with' (that is, dating) members of the opposite sex took increasing precedence by this age. Dating, along with a growing interest in fashion and pop music, were positively linked to participating in teen cultures, and were part of what Thorne calls the 'rituals which shape the transition into adolescence' (Thorne, 1993: 140–1). Clearly, certain television genres form part of this culture. Debbie Epstein (1997), for instance, found that older primary schoolchildren borrowed elements of these dating shows and incorporated them into games and rituals that took place between girls and boys in the playground or classroom. Likewise, it became evident in our study that some of the children had participated in similar 'dating games', and one group discussed having staged a version of *Blind Date* with classmates the previous year.

At this age, the 'dating' appeared largely to be a form of role rehearsal, rather than leading to actual relationships. To an extent, 'playing' at dating, with all its emotional triumphs and cruelties, mirrored the playing out of romance on the television game shows; and this lack of seriousness was acknowledged as such by the children. In the following extract, another group of girls discusses whether or not children should watch *Blind Date*. One of the girls has reservations about 'children' watching (by which she means younger children), inferring that they should be shielded from such material:

G1: I don't think they [children] should watch it.

G2: I think it's for all ages really.

I: Do you think *Blind Date*'s rude at all?

All: No, no!

G2: 'Cause they – they ask some silly questions, you go away with this guy you pick [then] come back [and say] 'Oh we didn't get on . . .'

When pressed by the (female) interviewer, the girls conclude that the programme isn't really sexually 'rude'. They understand that the formula of *Blind Date* is ultimately about pretence and performance.

By contrast, while the 6- to 7-year-olds were familiar with *Blind Date*,

they were generally dismissive of it. However, their rejection of the programme was not on the grounds of its moral inappropriateness, as this might be understood by adults or indeed by the girl just quoted. On the contrary, these children claimed that they were simply not interested in the show's romantic content. They professed to know about romance or 'kissing', but equated this with the more 'boring' aspects of 'adult' television. At least in respect of this kind of material, the identity of the adult or teen viewer was not aspired to, but on the contrary rejected.

As this implies, such responses reflected the children's attempts to position themselves in relation to dominant, publicly available conceptions of age differences. Predictably, gender also played a role here. Thus, children sometimes expressed very strong views about what they regarded as programmes 'for girls' and those 'for boys'. Younger boys in particular defined their 'maleness' principally through avoidance of anything associated with the 'feminine' or 'girlish' (Buckingham, 1993b). As Thorne (1993) found, young boys commonly saw girls as polluting, and 'kissing' or other expressions of romance as a kind of invasion. Boys' expressions of aversion to programmes like *Blind Date* thus became a way of policing gender boundaries. In the next extract, for example, a group of 6- to 7-year-old boys being interviewed by a male and female interviewer are asked why they have put *Blind Date* into a category 'for teenagers':

I: Why do you think it's [*Blind Date*] for teenagers?

B1: 'Cause there's this old woman –

B2: [interrupting] No – because children don't like people smooching and things.

B1: 'Cause there's always a woman and stuff –

B2: Yeah, and they're always smooching when they win.

I: And you don't think that's for children?

All: [shouting] No!!

I2: When do you think people start liking smooching?

B2: Well, about – [shrieks of laughter] well, because teenagers start to smooch – my brother – it was his birthday and he was 14 and he invited – I'd never seen her before and I didn't even know he had a girl friend [all laughing and screaming].

The boys strive to distance themselves from romance and sexuality, both on the grounds of gender and on the grounds of age. *Blind Date* and the 'smooching' it contains are identified with 'women' and with older children: yet this appears to invest it not with a 'forbidden' appeal, but merely to give grounds for expressions of disgust and rejection.

Nevertheless, such dating programmes may have a rather different kind of 'child appeal', as our earlier extracts suggest. While authors such as Postman (1983) have castigated television for making children more like adults, the pleasure of dating shows appears to reflect a delight in seeing adults behaving 'childishly', which some critics appear to regard as equally subversive.<sup>16</sup> Dating shows were often defined by the children here as 'game

shows', like other light entertainment or quiz shows, including the increasingly popular 'children's revenge' format, such as *Get Your Own Back*.<sup>17</sup> In this respect, it may be its 'infantilization' of adults, as much as its sexual or romantic content, that accounts for the popularity of *Blind Date* and similar programmes with children.

### Sex, soaps and sitcoms

As we have noted, soaps in general were especially popular with the older children. Interestingly, however, many of them seemed less interested in children's or 'tween' soaps such as *Byker Grove*, *Hollyoaks* or *Neighbours*, claiming that their plots were slightly 'soft' or that the characters were 'unbelievable'. Most said they preferred more 'realistic' adult soaps, particularly the BBC's *EastEnders*. In Buckingham's (1987) earlier study of *EastEnders*, he argues that the programme was particularly popular with the younger audience, not because of the inclusion of younger characters, but on the contrary because of the fact that it reveals 'secrets' about adult life. However, *some* secrets are clearly seen to be more interesting than others: as one child in our study put it, *EastEnders* was the 'best soap' because, 'in *EastEnders*, there's alcoholics, gay people, there's marriages going wrong, there's everything!'

Although the older children in our study had fairly disparate viewing habits, *EastEnders* was watched by nearly all of them, and often provided an 'anchor' for group discussions. These discussions focused primarily on 'scandals' involving the various characters' personal relationships, including current romances, affairs and break-ups. We would agree with Epstein (1997) that although primary schoolchildren are generally less 'sexually aware' than older children, they show considerable knowledge about personal and sexual issues. Evidently, soaps provided a platform for sharing and debating such knowledge. In the following extract, three girls recall a past storyline about an affair between two of the characters:

I: What about Grant?

G1: He's just sweet [giggles].

G2: What about when what's her name – Michelle –

G1: Something like that, no, not Lorraine, his other wife?

I2: Sharon?

All: Yes, Sharon!! [great excitement]

G1: Yes, she slept with Phil, because Grant used to be the violent one – he pushed her around –

Though clearly excited, the girls here are seeking to demonstrate their maturity by showing their engagement with complex 'adult' relationships in *EastEnders*, in this case involving multiple infidelities. A number of the children also focused on specific soap characters, and girls especially talked about which current stars they did or did not 'fancy'. Grant (one of the older male

characters) is perhaps an unlikely object of such attention for the girls in this group, although the first comment cited earlier may have echoed discussions the girl had heard between her older sisters or other female relatives. As Epstein (1997: 42) suggests, such talk may reflect children's attempts to 'insert themselves within heterosexual discourses' as much as 'active fantasies of sexual relationships'. Acquiring a (hetero)sexual identity is becoming an increasingly central requisite for these older children. These girls could be seen to be resisting adult attempts to confine them to childhood, by drawing on what Hey (1997: 82) calls 'illicit sexualised girl talk'. Yet in seeking to redefine themselves as 'sexual', these children also appear to be subscribing to the rigid conventions of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. As Hey (1997: 70–80) and Thorne (1993: 154) found, the boundaries of what is sometimes termed 'compulsory heterosexuality' remained under constant scrutiny within school cultures, even if privately children may have been able to draw upon soaps to identify otherwise.<sup>18</sup>

Teasing and banter about sex and romance were one of the primary means of maintaining this form of scrutiny and mutual policing (see Buckingham, 1993b). In mixed groups, girls were generally more confident in initiating conversations around personal and sexual relationships on television, due perhaps to them having greater access to information about sexual behaviour, for example through 'teen' magazines, which have no male equivalents (McRobbie, 1991). Whereas a few of the boys attempted to 'shock' girls by being deliberately crude and provocative, others appeared embarrassed or reluctant to contribute to discussions about romance or sex in mixed company. A number of girls were aware of this apparent embarrassment, and on occasion the boys' silence allowed the opportunity for them to talk without interruption. Unlike the situation among adults, where 'talking dirty' can serve as a means of sexual harassment by men, this kind of talk often seemed to allow girls the upper hand. In the next extract, a group of two girls and two boys are talking about their weekend viewing. One girl introduces the drama *The Lakes*, which had been scheduled in a 'post-water-shed' slot on Sunday evening:<sup>19</sup>

G1: I like a programme called *The Lakes*.

I: Oh, yes. It was on last night.

G2: I watched that – and he goes, 'stay away from Lisa' and she's talking on the phone. And he's going 'and she's shaved her legs' and she wears these nice lacy knickers. [much giggling]

I: Wasn't it –

G1: And then he breaks in the door. And starts tearing off her knickers.

I: Were you allowed to watch that? It's quite –

G1: Yes, my mother was watching it. I like filthy programmes, they're fun. And then they were trying to drown him at the end [goes on to explain the plot in some detail]

I: What did you think of that character? Is it Danny he's called?

G2: Yes. And I liked the bit where she went to the confession box and she was saying 'what am I going to say to my sister then – my girl won't wear your

daughter's coat because your daughter's dead'.

I: Yeah. Quite powerful stuff, wasn't it. So, you both watched that then?

G1/G2: Yes.

B1: What are you talking about?

G2: *The Lakes*.

B2: Cor!

I: It was on quite late, wasn't it? So have you two not seen that?

B2: I haven't seen it. Cool!

B1: And this is another programme – *Cartoon Critters*, [it] sucks.

The first girl begins by relaying one of the more explicit scenes involving a disturbing and sexually violent encounter between a married couple, as the woman prepares for a liaison with another man with whom she is having an affair. Again, she attempts to impress the group with her knowledge of the plot and dismisses the (male) interviewer's surprise at her being allowed to watch the programme, by claiming to enjoy what she self-consciously describes as 'filthy programmes'. Notably, the boys, who had earlier attempted to dominate the conversation, are excluded from the discussion between the two girls since they have not seen the programme. Although one boy is obviously impressed, the other appears somewhat embarrassed, and without losing face, tries to steer the conversation back to our activity and to the much safer territory of cartoons.

This is not to suggest that sex and romance were absent from the boys' discussions, however. Particularly in the less threatening context of single-sex groups, and with a male interviewer, several boys made exaggerated or self-consciously lewd references to women as sex objects on television, for example in the form of 'topless darts' or *Baywatch* star Pamela Anderson. Compulsory heterosexuality – or at least the *performance* of it – appeared equally rigid for boys of this age as for girls. However, many of the boys were not quite so comfortable with discussing these overtly sexual representations. As Buckingham (1993b: 103–5) notes, boys were more inclined to focus on programmes and characters that allowed them to explore gender and sexuality from a 'safe' distance, particularly in the form of comedy. Situation comedies such as *Friends*, *Frasier* and *Men Behaving Badly* were especially popular with boys. Their discussions of these programmes tended to focus on the male protagonists' adeptness or ineptitude with women, rather than on which of the female characters they 'fancied'. By describing comic situations, boys were able to centre attention on the character and away from themselves, thus avoiding the possibility of being teased by others in the group. In the following extract, for instance, a boy discusses a scene from the US sitcom *Friends*:

B: The last time I watched it, it was funny . . . when they were going on about him [the character Ross] liking the bit in *Star Wars* where Princess Leia is wearing her bikini thing and then he makes Jennifer Aniston [another character] get dressed up in a bikini thing like her . . . and then he's looking at her, and then he goes 'you're my life' . . .

Undoubtedly, this boy wants us to know that he identifies with the heterosexual male gaze; but through his description of Ross projecting his comic sexual fantasies onto Jennifer Aniston, he maintains both involvement with and disengagement from this position. As Liesbeth de Block (1998) notes in her study of children and comedies, *Friends* and *Men Behaving Badly* seem to be popular with children partly because of their focus on personal relationships within non-family settings. While their portrayals of relationships between male and female characters are fairly hackneyed (and intentionally exaggerated to provide much of the comedy), their portrayal of adulthood is less stereotypical. On the one hand, the characters appear to have some of the desirable trappings of grown-ups – such as independence, money and control over their own space and time. Yet, unlike characters in more serious adult soaps or dramas for instance, the male characters in these comedies are not portrayed (or indeed perceived by children) as particularly mature. As de Block suggests, their appeal rests largely on the fact that they are men behaving like boys.

### Suitability and censorship

These extracts highlight the considerable ‘cross-over’ appeal of soaps and sitcoms. In our sorting exercises, many of the older children were therefore uncertain about whether these should be categorized as adults’ or children’s programmes. Most concluded that they were suitable for both children and adults – but then went on to discriminate between older and younger age groups. Notably, the 10- to 11-year-olds likened themselves to teenagers, with different tastes from those of younger children. In the next excerpt, a girl gives an account of why she thinks the ‘teen’ soap *Hollyoaks* is suitable for her age group:

G: ‘Cause, um, they [children] want – there’s a stage where they’re growing up and a stage where they’re looking already [for dates] because they want to be part of the world, you know – like, to be a teenager.

This girl draws on a kind of developmental discourse about the transition from one ‘stage’ (childhood) to another (adolescence); and she argues that soaps and dramas have a broadly educative role, in introducing older children to a range of personal and sexual issues which they may encounter in adolescence and adulthood. Interestingly (and typically), she talks about ‘children’ in the third person, as though this was a category that somehow did not apply to her. There is nonetheless a certain poignancy in the notion that it is only on entering one’s teenage years that one becomes ‘part of the world’ – and the implication that children somehow have yet to attain this.

Though some of the younger children in our study said they enjoyed more ‘action’-oriented dramas (such as *Xena*) and comedies (such as *Mr Bean*), they claimed that programmes such as *EastEnders* were of little interest to them. ‘It’s disgusting . . .’ one girl put it, ‘they want chucking in the

river.' When asked why they had categorized the relatively bland Australian soap *Neighbours* as an adult programme,<sup>20</sup> one of the younger boys claimed that it was because it is a 'soap programme', and that soaps were not to his taste:

*I*: What is it about soaps that – [you don't like] ?

*B*: Well, it's just that there are lots of conversations in them. No funny things.

*I*: No – ?

*B*: – funny things, it's about weird stuff.

While there is perhaps an equation here between 'adulthood' and seriousness ('conversations'), and also perhaps a gendered rejection of the 'weird' (personal?) emphasis of the genre, the basis for this judgement is presented as a matter of personal taste. By contrast, as we have seen, the implications of such judgements in terms of claims about identity were often more explicit among the older children. Yet while some of the older children used their knowledge of sex on television to demonstrate their 'adulthood', others presented us with a different version of maturity, by adopting a more censorious attitude towards storylines that dealt with personal/sexual relationships. A number of children also drew on adult discourses concerned with the supposed 'effects' of television, and the need to shield 'children' from images of sex or bad language – particularly in children's programmes and those adult programmes that were considered to have cross-over appeal.

However, as Buckingham (1993a, 1996) has shown, children will commonly claim that media 'effects' only pose a danger to children *younger* than themselves – in rather the same way that adults claim that children are at greater risk. For instance, when we asked them to select an evening's viewing for younger children, some 10- to 11-year-olds claimed that certain shows were not suitable. As in the second quotation on *Blind Date* cited earlier, younger children were seen as more likely to be negatively influenced by television. In the next extract, a girl talks about the effect viewing *EastEnders* has on her younger brother:

*G*: Well it's [*EastEnders*] really scary – parts of it – some of it, not all of it. My brother, he's 4 now, but he swears sometimes, and he's always talking about sex . . .

Like many adult moralists, this girl slips easily between three of the most contentious concerns – violence, bad language and sex – implicitly accusing the programme of introducing her brother to adult 'secrets' at too early an age. By contrast, while the younger children could also show a censorious attitude, they were less able to draw on the kinds of moralistic discourses familiar to the older children. For example, in the following extract, three 6- to 7-year-old girls debate whether *Blind Date* is a children's or adults' programme:

*I*: What about this one – *Blind Date*?

*G1*: No – that's kind of for grown-ups, 'cause everybody's kissing and stuff.

*G2*: I watch it.



G3: So do I.  
 I: So you think it's more for grown-ups because there's lots of kissing but you still watch it?  
 All: Yes.  
 G2: And everybody's going to places with each other, and they don't know each other really.  
 G1: And they get married.  
 I: So why is all that stuff just for grown-ups then?  
 G2: Because kids –  
 G1: I'm not really allowed to watch kissing and stuff 'cause it's –  
 G2: It's bad for –  
 I: Right, so it might make them want to do kissing when they grow up?  
 All: Yes.  
 I: Is that a bad thing?  
 G1: Not when they're at school . . .  
 G2: Sometimes people play kiss chase –  
 G1: – and kiss them on the lips.  
 I: And you don't think that's a very good thing?  
 G1: No.

Despite the fact that two of the girls here watch the programme, all agree that *Blind Date* is 'adult'; and this is confirmed by the fact that one of the girls is forbidden from watching it. This adult status is explained by the presence of 'kissing', and there is perhaps a sense of moral disapproval in the suggestion that the participants 'don't know each other really'. Somewhat uncertainly, the girls suggest that such material might be 'bad for kids'; and when the interviewer asks about the consequences of viewing, they suggest that it might lead to inappropriate or 'bad' behaviour, not so much when they 'grow up' but in the school playground. Yet again, however, the individuals affected remain in the third person – they are very definitely *other* 'people'.

Even among the older groups of children, however, there was some disagreement about what was suitable for *children's* television – whether or not the children actually watched these programmes themselves. In the following extract, we return to the same three boys whom we encountered discussing the decidedly 'adult' movie *Trainspotting* much earlier in this article. Here, they discuss whether or not the teenage drama *Byker Grove* has 'gone too far' because it features a boy and girl 'kissing on the lips':

B3: Well, I think it's getting too romantic, because I saw people kissing.  
 I: Do you think that's for older people then, kissing on *Byker Grove*?  
 B3: Yes –  
 B2: It's not for older people, it's for kids.  
 I: You mean your age then, right?  
 B3: What, about 9 and over?  
 I: [to B1] Do you agree with that?  
 B1: No – it's about these kids.  
 B2: It's just like kissing your mum . . . they just kiss on the cheek.  
 B3: No, I saw one kissing on the lips.  
 I: Right, so they have boyfriends and girlfriends in it?  
 B2: [insistently] Yes!

B3: I saw the storyline when Gary got a girl, I thought it was getting out of hand.

B2: It doesn't worry me, you know.

Here, the more emotionally marginal, middle-class boy (Boy 3) maintains a censorious stance that is closer to that of the younger children, perhaps having not yet 'learnt' the sexual discourse of his peers. The other two boys dismiss his criticisms of the programme, suggesting that its representation of sexuality is somehow tame or innocent (it is worth noting here that *Byker Grove* is transmitted in a children's slot). Yet there is another kind of censorship going on here, whereby the other two boys attempt to silence the criticisms of Boy 3. First, they question his maturity, and he is pressured into redefining a suitable age limit of 'over 9' – to include himself. Second, by claiming that he 'doesn't worry' about girls and boys kissing, the second boy (backed by his friend) presents himself as sexually 'mature', and in doing so implicitly questions Boy 3's sexuality.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to move on from the debate about what children should or should not know about sexual relationships. Children will inevitably find out about such matters, whether they do so from television or from elsewhere. The key question, we would suggest, is how they interpret the information and the representations they do encounter. More specifically, our emphasis here has been on the ways in which interpretation is *performed* in the context of group discussion; and on the functions that such talk might serve in terms of the ongoing formation of children's identities. As we have implied, this is very much a matter of interaction between the texts of television and their readers, in which neither holds anything approaching absolute power. Television obviously makes available particular representations and identities, and excludes others; but in defining and debating the meanings of television, readers also claim and construct identities of their own. In this article, we have focused particularly on how children's talk about sex on television serves as a means of defining identities in terms of *age* and *gender*. While these are clearly not the only dimensions of identity, they did emerge particularly strongly in the context of our study – not least for methodological reasons.

Clearly, there are limitations as to how far one can generalize from a qualitative study of this kind. Aside from the obvious limitations of scope and representativeness, our chosen methods place a central emphasis on the *discursive performance* of gendered identities. Peer group talk, gathered in the context of a school and at the invitation of an adult interviewer, does not necessarily tell us anything about what really goes on in these children's heads – or indeed in their everyday lives. But it is not our aim to uncover children's 'true' identities. On the contrary, we aim merely to provide an

indication of some of the ways in which identities are discursively defined and negotiated by these particular children in the course of these particular social interactions.

Our analysis suggests that the functions and consequences of such talk are often profoundly ambiguous. On one level, witnessing and discussing representations of sexual behaviour serves as a kind of index of maturity – and the fact that such representations are typically forbidden, or at least categorized, on the grounds of age only serves to reinforce this fact. Yet whether that ‘maturity’ is seen as desirable or not depends upon the position from which it is viewed. For some of the older children, claiming that one has seen such material (or pretending to have done so) represents a kind of *aspirational* claim, for an essentially desirable form of maturity – not only in terms of the behaviour that is shown, but also in terms of the freedom from adult constraint that being able to view it is seen to represent. On the other hand, some of the younger children clearly did not aspire to partake in such behaviour, even if they might have wished for the freedom to be allowed to watch it: ‘kissing’ was, if not positively disgusting (as it appeared to be for some of the boys), then at least ‘boring’, like so many other aspects of adult life.

Meanwhile, children of both age groups – but particularly the older ones – were also inclined to adopt a censorious stance, albeit on the understanding that this was only to be applied to *other* people. As in adult debates about the effects of television, this ‘otherness’ itself was also defined primarily in terms of age. In employing these arguments, the children were attempting to position themselves as mature, and hence as immune from the negative moral influences that applied to those younger than themselves. Yet this argument also reproduces a kind of logic which ultimately works to the benefit of adults: it seeks to determine access to knowledge (and hence to the power that it may confer) simply on the grounds of biological age.

These kinds of identity claims, defined primarily in terms of age, are crossed and inflected by those defined in terms of gender. As we have indicated, ‘talking dirty’ is one of the strategies that children employ in reproducing and policing gender identities, and in enforcing a form of compulsory heterosexuality. While the younger children possessed fairly rigid binary systems here, they were relatively unproblematic. For the older children, the issue was often much more difficult and fraught. In this study, there appeared to be some advantages for girls in these kinds of power games, although these are advantages that are not, by and large, sustained into adulthood. By contrast, for boys of this age, discussions of sexual behaviour appear to pose more dangers than they offer rewards.

The central question that is raised here, at least for us, is how these processes of identity formation at the ‘micro’ level – that is, in the politics of interpersonal relationships – *interact* with the definitions and identities that are made available at the ‘macro’ level – that is, at the level of socially

available texts and institutional practices. In this case, we need to look again, and to look more closely, at the specific texts that children choose to watch and talk about. We would obviously refuse any definition of television as simply a monolithic machine for imposing 'stereotypes' or 'gender roles' – or indeed for merely 'constructing' childhood identities. Nor would we accept that readers simply 'identify with' and hence take on the identities that are offered. On the contrary, we need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the *range* of identities that television makes available to children. As well as considering what children do with television, we also need to consider what television does for children.

### Notes

1. For a symptomatic recent example, see Paul Johnson, 'The Death of Childhood' (*Daily Mail*, 28 March 1998), which seeks to blame television for the shooting of three girls and their teacher by a 13-year-old boy in the United States.
2. For instance, Cunningham (1995), Hendrick (1997) and Humphries et al. (1988).
3. See, for example, Lynda Lee-Potter (*Daily Mail*, 8 April 1997): 'Love Bites is taking childhood away from children. It's asking them questions that adults shouldn't ask. It's intruding into their lives in a way which I find indefensible.'
4. 'Children's Media Culture: Education, Entertainment and the Public Sphere', based at the Institute of Education, University of London, and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council UK (award no. L126251026). The project also looked at the changing institutional and economic context of children's television production and the formal characteristics of texts produced for children. Further material from these aspects of the research is presented in Buckingham et al. (in press) and Buckingham (forthcoming) respectively. Other aspects of the audience research are presented in Davies et al. (forthcoming a, b).
5. We conducted 18 open-ended interviews about the children's general tastes and preferences in television, followed by 36 more structured activities (described later). All interviews were with groups of three children: those with the older children lasted an average of 50 minutes, while those with the younger children lasted around 40 minutes. These interviews took place outside the classroom, generally in an empty office in the school.
6. For instance, we did not observe any instances of children swearing or using sexist 'put-downs' in the classroom, although there were instances of these occurring in interviews.
7. Space precludes a more detailed discussion of the research methodology. For accounts of similar studies, see Buckingham (1993a) and Robinson (1997).
8. For a broader analysis of this, see Davies et al. (forthcoming a).
9. Films aimed at adults (rather than children) featured in these discussions too, since children were more aware of film classifications that supposedly restricted their viewing than they were of the 9 o'clock 'watershed'.
10. Some children in Year 2 seemed especially confused. For instance, one boy who claimed to have seen Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* told us that the film was literally 'about some dogs'.
11. *Trainspotting* is a British film based on the 'cult' novel by Irving Welsh, featuring the lives of a group of drug addicts. All the movies mentioned in this paragraph have an '18' certificate for cinema or video release in Britain.
12. In this instance, the two boys were from a white working-class background. Both needed extra help with schoolwork. The third boy was from a middle-class background, but also appeared more marginal to the class because he had a form of autism.
13. What was 'censored' obviously varied from child to child. Some children claimed that

their parents prevented them from seeing many '18'-rated, or post-watershed films, while others asserted that watching films like *Trainspotting* was not particularly exceptional.

14. This is a 'realist' British film featuring the lives of two working-class young women in a northern town. It is fairly sexually explicit, and again attracted an '18' rating for cinema/video release.

15. Romance has traditionally been tolerable in girls' teen culture, since sex is rarely made explicit, or even discouraged (see McRobbie, 1991). However, there have been significant changes in this respect in recent years: questions have even been asked in the British parliament about the sexually explicit content of newer girls' magazines such as *Bliss* and *More*.

16. See for instance, Mike Presdee 'Consumption and Enjoyment of Crime as Popular Pleasure' (*Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 1997).

17. *Get Your Own Back* is a light-hearted children's game show, where children get to take 'revenge' on adults who they feel have wronged them, usually by immersing them in 'gunge' or throwing fake custard pies at them.

18. This argument about the imposition of 'compulsory heterosexuality' tends to impute an overweening power to such discursive processes. In the process, it may neglect the instability and flexibility of (hetero)sexual identity, and the *real* – rather than merely discursive – nature of sexual desire. Neither would we agree with the implication that children are somehow not 'sexual' until 'compulsory heterosexuality' is imposed upon them. There is clearly a much broader debate to be had here! We should emphasize, however, that our focus in this article is not primarily on the construction of sexuality, but on the circulation of sexual knowledge.

19. *The Lakes*, written by the British television dramatist Jimmy McGovern, was a short drama serial set in the Lake District in the north of England, featuring (among other things) a series of marital infidelities among the characters.

20. *Neighbours* is transmitted immediately following children's programmes in the afternoons, and is primarily popular with children rather than adults.

## References

- Barker, M. and J. Petley (eds) (1997) *Ill Effects: The Media Violence Debate*. London: Routledge.
- Buckingham, D. (1987) *Public Secrets: 'EastEnders' and its Audience*. London: British Film Institute.
- Buckingham, D. (1993a) *Children Talking Television: The Making of Television Literacy*. London: Falmer Press.
- Buckingham, D. (1993b) 'Boys' Talk: Television and the Policing of Masculinity', in D. Buckingham (ed.) *Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media*, pp. 89–115. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Buckingham, D. (1994) 'Television and the Definition of Childhood', in B. Mayall (ed.) *Children's Childhoods Observed and Experienced*, pp. 79–96. London: Falmer Press.
- Buckingham, D. (1996) *Moving Images: Understanding Children's Emotional Responses to Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Buckingham, D. (ed.) (forthcoming) *Television for Children: Texts and Genres*. London: British Film Institute.
- Buckingham, D., H. Davies, K. Jones and P. Kelley (in press) *Children's Television in Britain: History, Discourse and Policy*. London: British Film Institute.
- Corteen, K. and P. Scraton (1997) 'Prolonging "Childhood", Manufacturing "Innocence" and Regulating Sexuality', in P. Scraton (ed.) *'Childhood' in 'Crisis'?*, pp. 76–100. London: University College of London Press.
- Cunningham, H. (1995) *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*. London: Longman.

- Davies, H., D. Buckingham and P. Kelley (forthcoming a) 'Kids' Time: Childhood, Television and the Regulation of Time', *Journal of Educational Media* 24 (1).
- Davies, H., D. Buckingham and P. Kelley (forthcoming b) 'In the Worst Possible Taste: Children, Television and Cultural Value', MS submitted for publication.
- Davies, M.M. (1995) 'Babes 'n' the Hood', in C. Bazalgette and D. Buckingham (eds) *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences*, pp. 15–33. London: British Film Institute.
- De Block, L. (1998) 'From Childhood Pleasures to Adult Identities', *English and Media Magazine* 38: 24–9.
- Douglas, M. (1992) *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Epstein, D. (1997) 'Cultures of Schooling/Cultures of Sexuality', *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 1(1): 37–53.
- Epstein, D. and R. Johnson (1997) *Schooling Sexualities*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Hendrick, H. (1997) *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880–1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hey, V. (1997) *The Company She Keeps: An Ethnography of Girls' Friendship*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Home, A. (1993) *Into the Box of Delights*. London: BBC Books.
- Hood, S., P. Kelley, B. Mayall and A. Oakley (1996) *Children, Parents and Risk*. London: Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.
- Humphries, S., J. Mack and R. Perks (1988) *A Century of Childhood*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson.
- Jackson, S. (1982) *Childhood and Sexuality*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- James, A., C. Jenks and A. Prout (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McRobbie, A. (1991) *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen*. London: Macmillan.
- Meyrowitz, J. (1985) *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pilcher, J. (1996) 'Gillick and After: Children and Sex in the 1980s and 1990s', in J. Pilcher and S. Wagg (eds) *Thatcher's Children: Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s*, pp. 77–93. London: Falmer Press.
- Postman, N. (1983) *The Disappearance of Childhood*. London: W.H. Allen.
- Robinson, M. (1997) *Children Reading Print and Television*. London: Falmer.
- Thorne, B. (1993) *Gender Play: Boys and Girls in School*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

