

# Where do you draw the line?

*Attitudes and reactions of video  
renters to sexual violence in film*

Dr Guy Cumberbatch

2002



*the* **communications**  
**research group**  
Anvic House  
84 Vyse Street  
Jewellery Quarter  
Birmingham  
B18 6HA

t: ++(0)121 523 9595  
f: ++(0)121 523 8523  
e: [research@crghq.com](mailto:research@crghq.com)

**A report prepared for the:**  
British Board of Film Classification  
3 Soho Square  
London  
W1V 6VD



# **Where do you draw the line?**

*Attitudes and reactions of video renters to sexual violence in film*

Dr Guy Cumberbatch, Dr Gary W. Wood, Sally Gauntlett, Hazel Collie  
and Victoria Littlejohns

With very special thanks to Terry McKevitt and Simon Heng for conducting the interviews, Mary Cumberbatch for considerable assistance with the survey and screening participants and to Jean Woods for data preparation.

## Contents

	Page
Summary	1
Introduction	3
Survey of video renters	
The sample	4
Main findings from the survey	5
Questions and answers about sexual violence	5
Beliefs in harmful effects of film and video	7
Predicting attitudes to sexual violence	8
Film preferences	12
Sample of film titles	13
Film preferences and rights to see sexual violence	15
Attitude clusters: regulation	17
Risk assessment	19
Conclusions	20
The viewing panel	21
Ethical issues	21
Procedural details	22
The films, viewer reactions and overall judgements	22
Straw Dogs	25
A Clockwork Orange	28
Death Wish II	31
Baise Moi	34
I Spit on your Grave	37
Last House on the Left	40
Problem scenes and problem films	43
Baise Moi	44
Last House on the Left	46
I Spit on your Grave	48
Reasons why films or scenes were problematic	49
What would make them more acceptable	50
Messages	51
Context above all	54
Concerns about harm	59
The limits of tolerance	62
Film scars	73
Distress to viewers	73
Attitude changes	79
Issues of classification	82
Sexual violence: more than the sum of its parts	82
Classification and labelling	84
References	87

## Where do you draw the line?

### Attitudes and reactions of video renters to sexual violence in film

#### Summary

The purpose of this research was to explore a neglected area of public attitudes: are there acceptable limits in the portrayal of sexual violence in films for video release? The study was conducted in several stages:

- A survey of video renters across the Midlands explored attitudes to regulation and rights to see graphic material on video.
- A cross-section of these respondents was selected to form a viewing panel. These participants watched three uncut videos which included sexual violence.
- Follow-up telephone interviews probed opinions and feelings about the films.
- Two focus groups derived from the viewing panel met to discuss if, why and how such videos should be regulated.

The survey was carried out at fifteen video rental outlets. A cross section of customers (N=277) revealed liberal attitudes where those believing there was 'too little' regulation of television, cinema and video were heavily outnumbered around four to one by those believing there was 'too much'. Nevertheless, the majority – just over one half - believed that the amount of regulation of 'films you can see at the cinema' and 'films you can see on video' was 'about right'.

This was also true of '18' rated videos where respondents thought that the amount of regulation was 'about right' for sex (58%), violence (49%) and sexual violence (52%). Among the remainder, those thinking there was 'too little' regulation were outnumbered by those thinking there was 'too much' by four to one in the case of sex and two to one in the case of violence. However with sexual violence the ratio dropped to almost one to one.

Additionally, almost twice as many respondents believed that people over the age of 18 had a right to see graphic portrayals of violence (74%), or real sex (67%) as said this about sexual violence (38%). This and other data suggests that sexual violence in films remains far more controversial and less acceptable to viewers than either sex or violence.

The large majority believed that it was important to protect young people from seeing '18' certified films. However, most video renters held a risky attitude to films agreeing that they were 'likely' or 'very likely' to watch a film even if they knew nothing about it.

There were large differences in attitudes to regulation due to gender (men were far more liberal) and age (older people were more conservative). The most liberal minded were heavy video renters and those with an interest in fantasy films especially horror. However, educational level, newspaper readership type, having children at home and hours of television watched per week revealed less variation.

The survey information was used to select a cross-section of the video renters (25 male, 25 female) who formed a viewing panel who were to watch three uncut films in their own homes. These films were randomly selected from a pool of six titles containing sexual violence: *Baise Moi*; *A Clockwork Orange*; *Death Wish II*; *I Spit on your Grave*; *Last House on the Left* and *Straw Dogs*. Each participant was screened prior to receiving the films and interviewed in depth after watching them by professional counsellors.

Surprising tolerance of sexual violence in film was found among both conservative and liberal minded people so long as it was justified in the storyline and it was 'in context'.

Conversely, among those films perceived to have little merit or justifying narrative, even liberal minded participants recommended not releasing the films uncut. As in the survey findings, gender was a clear discriminator: almost seven out of ten recommendations by men were to release the films uncut compared with only four out of ten recommendations by women.

The main characteristics of the viewing panel members who held liberal attitudes to these films (i.e. recommending they be released as '18' uncut) were:

- A 'risky' attitude to watching films (i.e. willing to watch films knowing nothing about them)
- Interest in films with 'gritty' graphic violence
- Being older (35+)
- Being male
- Not believing that film/video violence aggravate related problems in society

In interviews and particularly the focus groups, concern about what types of people would actually *want to watch* such - or at least some of the - films was common. This raised a dilemma about the films watched. On the one hand, advertising the film's content (such as 'contains graphic sexual violence') might attract 'the wrong audience'. On the other, viewers expressed the 'need to know' that with many of these films the content was 'different/worse' than the average film with an '18' certificate. The desirability of 'on-screen' warnings in addition to more detailed consumer advice on videotape packaging (at least for the kind of films used in this sample), would seem an important issue to investigate further.

None of the interviewees revealed any distress beyond those transitory experiences which might be expected from viewing somewhat harrowing horror films. Attitude measures taken before and after watching the films showed shifts towards less liberal views especially a stronger belief that *'It is very important to protect young people from seeing '18' certified films'*.

None of the participants regretted taking part in the viewing panel and most spontaneously expressed appreciation at being involved in the study, often despite the nature of the films, and praised the value of the research.

## Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore a neglected area of public attitudes: what are the acceptable limits to the portrayal of sexual violence in films for video release? The BBFC has always maintained a strict policy on the portrayal of rape and sexual violence, most often insisting on cuts particularly to acts considered by their treatment to eroticise or endorse sexual assault. However, despite the apparent wisdom of this, there is only an assumed public mandate for this policy. There are very few pointers on this from existing research. Thus, it is only an assumption that the acceptability of sexual violence is likely to be lower than that of either sex or violence.

It is the BBFC's responsibility to classify films for cinema release and for 'home viewing' on video and, increasingly, DVD. In the case of video/DVD the 'home viewing' element presents particular classification difficulties because of the potential presence of children in the home and the legal requirement to acknowledge this since the Video Recordings Act (1984). Under this act, the penalty for selling or renting a video which should have been classified but has not, is an unlimited fine and/or two years prison. Additionally the penalty for selling or renting an age-restricted video to someone below that age is a fine of up to £5,000 and/or 6 months prison (Video Standards Council, 2002).

The BBFC has, naturally, over the years, received many films for classification containing scenes considered 'problematic'. This has been particularly true when sexual violence has featured. A number of these films, refused classification to date, have been passed uncut in other European countries and have been recently resubmitted for certification. Given the particular difficulties of classifying material for home viewing, it seemed essential to know more about the attitudes of video renters to this issue. Additionally, a sample of the survey participants were invited to watch some of the films the BBFC had deliberated on in order to provide useful feedback about such sensitive issues.

It might be expected that video renters would tend to hold relatively liberal views about the regulation of film and video. For example, in the recent research initiatives by the BBFC to explore public attitudes to sex, drugs, violence and bad language in film, those who rarely visited the cinema or rented videos were the most conservative (Hanley, 2000). However this may be an age linked phenomenon since cinema attendance and video rental both decline with age. For example, one quarter (23%) of 15-24 year olds with VCR equipment watch rented videos on a weekly basis compared with only 2% of those over 55 (British Video Association, 2001). Perhaps for this reason, the 13<sup>th</sup> British Social Attitudes Survey, which covered attitudes to the portrayal of sex in various media, noted only small variations due solely to either the frequency of cinema attendance or video rental (that is, when age was controlled). On the other hand, age differences were considerable where restrictive attitudes increased strongly with age (Barnett and Thomson, 1996). Similarly, the ITC annual survey of public attitudes to television reveals that the proportion of people who see or hear things on television which they find offensive rises incrementally with each age band from one in ten 16-24 year olds to over half of those 65+ (e.g. Cumberbatch, Wood and Littlejohn, 2001).

However no existing survey data indicates how liberal or otherwise video renters might be to sexual violence in film. The first stage in exploring this uncharted territory - surveying video renters - was relatively straightforward. The second stage - using a cross-section of them to watch unclassified and uncut material - was more controversial and involved the highest ethical practices.

These two stages: the survey and the viewing panel experiment are reported separately but are mutually informative.

## Survey of video renters

### The sample

The first part of the research involved a survey of customers at specialised video rental outlets across the Midlands: Birmingham (metropolitan); Leicester (provincial city) and Evesham (rural market town). The survey was carried out during peak customer flows (from 4.30pm until 8pm on weekdays plus daytime over the weekend).

The survey comprised an interviewer assisted, self-completed questionnaire which could be answered in ten minutes. This method, compared with face-to-face interviews, is preferable for eliciting responses about sensitive issues from people when approached 'cold' (i.e. directly). The refusal rate appears to have been exceptionally low (interviewees were given a free pen and told that they had the opportunity to earn £20 to watch three uncut films). However, the precise figure on refusal rates is complicated by the number of people simply not having the time when advised how long it would take. ('Ten minutes' - 'Sorry, I'm just returning a tape, I've got the kids in the car outside' or 'I've ordered a [meal] next door'). The refusal rate of *not wanting to be involved* was in the range of 8% - 10%. A log was made of the age and gender of the video rental customers at the sampling area points over similar time periods in order to check the reliability of the survey sample. The final sample totalled 277 video rental customers split 55% male, 45% female.

The extent to which survey samples represent the assumed target population is always a concern. Clearly, the very high response rate in this study must be a strong recommendation of its reliability. However, any such survey will sample more regular video renters than infrequent ones. For example, those renting three times per week would be three times as likely to be surveyed as those renting only once per week. Having said that, this sampling of regular renters might well help pick up those who, having exhausted the stock of their local video store, might expose themselves to a film featuring graphic sexual violence. In any case, because the analysis compares high frequency renters with medium or low renters, this is a controlled research variable.

Table 1 shows the comparison of logged customers with those taking part in the survey. The modest under sampling of 16-20 year olds is due to the survey targeting those 18+ since the focus of the research is on '18' certificated material. The better representation of women was deliberate given the focus of the research on sexual violence.

Table 1 *Video rental customers: log v survey*

	Logged			Interviewed		
Age	M %	F %	T %	M %	F %	T %
16-20	17	19	18	9	20	14
21-24	25	27	26	26	26	26
25-34	28	24	27	32	25	29
35-44	14	15	15	18	15	16
45-54	13	11	12	12	11	12
55+	3	3	3	2	3	3
% Total	100	99	101	99	100	100
	Base = 1027			Base = 277		
	M: F = 58:42%			M: F = 55:45%		



## Main findings from the survey

The survey began by asking video renters simple and non-threatening questions about film preferences, films they had really enjoyed and those they would normally be interested in watching. Additionally, twelve controversial film titles were listed so that participants could rate how much they would be interested in watching them, how much they knew about these films and whether they had ever seen any of them.

Results from these sections will be used to explore how such film preferences might be linked to attitudes regarding regulation and rights to see graphic material (sex, violence and sexual violence). Findings from these sections will be described later.

The key sections of the questionnaire dealt with attitudes to film regulation and other related issues. To gain some overall idea of their attitudes, participants were asked their opinion about the regulation of films on television, at the cinema and on video. The questions and the responses are given below:

*(Q. 8) How much control or regulation do you think there is over the films that you can see on the five main broadcast television channels (i.e. BBC1, BBC2, ITV, C4 and C5)?*

Far too much %	Too much %	About right %	Too little %	Far too little %
14	37	39	8	2

*(Q. 9) And how much control or regulation do you think there is over the films you can see at the cinema?*

Far too much %	Too much %	About right %	Too little %	Far too little %
15	24	52	8	1

*(Q. 10) And how much control or regulation do you think there is over the films you can see on video?*

Far too much %	Too much %	About right %	Too little %	Far too little %
14	24	52	8	2

The important point is that the pattern of responses is quite similar for the various media. That is, between 9% and 10% of those polled thought there was 'too little' regulation and such people were heavily outnumbered by those thinking there was 'too much'. However, the proportion of respondents who thought that the regulation of cinema and video was 'about right' (52% in both cases) is much greater than for television (39%) where far more felt that overall there was 'too much'. This last figure can be seen as a liberal one compared with a national poll of television viewers by the ITC where only 11% thought there was too much regulation of TV while 22% thought there was too little (Cumberbatch, 2000).

## Questions and answers about sexual violence in films and video

Video renters were then asked directly about the regulation of sex, violence and sexual violence in '18' rated videos. Results are shown below:

*(Q. 11) We are particularly interested in '18' rated videos which might contain sex or violence or sexual violence. Could you say whether you think there is too much, too little or about the right amount of regulation for each of the following:*

## (a.) Regulation of sex in '18' rated videos

Far too much %	Too much %	About right %	Too little %	Far too little %
13	20	58	7	2

## (b.) Regulation of violence in '18' rated videos

Far too much %	Too much %	About right %	Too little %	Far too little %
9	24	49	14	4

## (c.) Regulation of sexual violence in '18' rated videos

Far too much %	Too much %	About right %	Too little %	Far too little %
7	20	52	17	5

Evidently, the mandate for more liberal policies over the portrayal of sex is not sustained for sexual violence. Most thought that for each, the amount of regulation was 'about right'. However, among the remainder, the ratio of 'too much' to 'too little' declined from almost 4:1 (33%:9%) for sex, to almost 2:1 (33%:18%) for violence. In the case of sexual violence this dropped further, down to almost 1:1 (27%:22%). It is worth adding here that respondents would have been describing their experiences of regulation in video and not describing BBFC guidelines. Indeed, the impression from the focus group research (described later) was that very few video renters had ever seen BBFC guidelines (published for the first time in 1998) let alone the 2001 revised version.

Attitudes to sex, violence and sexual violence were explored further, asking respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with the rights of adults to see graphic portrayals of each. The question details and results are shown below:

(Q. 12) "People over the age of 18 have a right to see graphic portrayals of violence in films and videos."

Agree strongly %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Disagree strongly %
37	37	16	8	2

(Q. 13) "People over the age of 18 have a right to see graphic portrayals of real sex in films and videos."

Agree strongly %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Disagree strongly %
32	35	21	7	4

(Q. 14) "People over the age of 18 have a right to see graphic portrayals of sexual violence in films and videos."

Agree strongly %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Disagree strongly %
20	18	27	22	12

Here the pattern of results shows a notable amplification of the differences observed earlier about regulation. While the great majority believed that adults have a right to see graphic violence (74%) and graphic sex (67%), it dropped to a minority of only 38% for sexual violence. Similarly, only one in ten respondents disagreed with this right in the case of sex (11%) and that of violence (10%) but the proportion rose three fold to 34% for sexual violence. Interpretation is somewhat complicated by the rising numbers who could not decide one way or another – almost doubling from only 16% in the case of graphic sex to 27% in the case of sexual violence. Looking at the ratio of those ‘for’ versus ‘against’, the right to see graphic sex, those in favour outnumbered those against by almost 7:1 and, in the case of violence, it was 6:1. However, with sexual violence, support dropped and opposition rose to almost balance 1:1.

The above findings indicate that sexual violence is far more controversial than either sex or violence in film and that the growth in liberal attitudes to the media noted elsewhere (e.g. Barnett and Thomson, 1996; Cumberbatch, Wood and Littlejohn, 2001) may not extend to all types of material.

### Beliefs in harmful effects of film and video

Attitudes people have about ‘rights to see’ may be related to their beliefs about potential harms from viewing various types of material. Understanding something about attitudes on this issue will be particularly useful when trying to predict attitudes to sexual violence in film and video and what kinds of people are most likely to hold liberal or conservative views. The following three questions were asked to gain some idea of how video renters located themselves in such an arena. Question 16 about rape was of particular interest.

(Q. 15) *“Watching violence in films makes people more likely to be violent in real life.”*

Agree strongly %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Disagree strongly %
7	18	19	34	22

(Q. 16) *“The problem of rape in our society is bound to be made worse by the easy availability of videos which show sexual violence.”*

Agree strongly %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Disagree strongly %
5	27	22	29	17

(Q. 17) *“It is very important to protect young people from seeing ‘18’ certificated films.”*

Agree strongly %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Disagree strongly %
37	37	16	8	2

The generally liberal position of video renters is also seen here. These responses may be compared with a national sample polled for the BBFC. This found that 46% agreed that violence in film generally makes people more likely to be violent in real life while only 28% disagreed (Hanley, 2000). Here, with video renters, the reverse pattern is observed with those agreeing heavily outnumbered by those disagreeing (25%: 56%). However even this sample falls short of the liberal position maintained by a sample of internet users polled by the BBFC where only 7% agreed with the statement and a massive 85% disagreed (Hanley, 2000).

The previous questions on rights to see revealed that sexual violence was far less acceptable than sex or violence. Thus we could have expected more respondents to believe that, 'The problem of rape in our society is bound to be made worse by the easy availability of videos which show sexual violence' (Question 16). However, this was not the case with the ratio dropping only modestly to 32% agreeing versus 46% disagreeing. This is intriguing and suggests that more important factors than belief in harm might influence attitudes to sexual violence in film.

The overwhelming support (by 75%) to protect children is impressive. Indeed almost one half (42%) 'agreed strongly'. Only 12% disagreed. It is worth noting here a recent ITC poll which probed television viewers on the guidelines covering what can and can not be shown on television. Respondents were asked 'who do you think these guidelines are aiming to protect?' In total eight out of ten spontaneous replies were to protect children/young people (Towler, 2002).

The following sections reveal the results of various statistical analyses which trawled patterns in the data to attempt to identify the kinds of people who hold different views about rights and responsibilities concerning sexual violence in video films.

### **Predicting attitudes to sexual violence**

The first stage in the analysis examined the pattern of responses to the two key questions:

- Whether people over the age of 18 have a right to see graphic portrayals of sexual violence
- How much regulation respondents thought there was of sexual violence in '18' rated videos.

Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents agreeing or disagreeing with the right to see sexual violence broken down by various groups which we would expect to have different attitudes. It should be noted that the full sample is not always represented in the rows (when respondents were unwilling or unable in the time available to provide relevant information).

The results highlight a clear gender difference in attitudes. Far more men strongly agreed with the right to see sexual violence than women (24% versus 14%). Furthermore, more women than men strongly disagreed with this right (16% and 9% respectively).

Usually age reveals large attitude differences but here it is less clear particularly due to the youngest age cohort. However, both the 21-24 year olds and the 25-34 year olds show a distinctly liberal orientation compared with the older age groups. Thus:

Right to see graphic portrayals of sexual violence:

Ratio of agree to disagree:

18-20 years %	21-24 years %	25-34 years %	35-44 years %	45+ %
27: 37	49: 21	47: 27	30: 48	28: 58

It is also worth noting that the numbers who could not decide decreased with each age cohort from 37% of 18-20 year olds down to only 15% of those aged 45+.

Table 2 *People over the age of 18 have a right to see graphic portrayals of sexual violence*

	Total	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither/ Nor	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Total
	N	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Total:</b>	276	20	19	26	22	12	100
<b>Gender:</b>							
Male	149	24	21	20	26	9	100
Female	125	14	17	34	18	16	99
<b>Age:</b>							
18-20	38	16	11	37	26	11	100
21-24	71	24	25	30	14	7	100
25-34	78	21	26	27	22	5	101
35-44	44	21	9	23	27	21	101
45+	40	13	15	15	30	28	101
<b>Education:</b>							
School (15,16)	60	27	12	25	18	18	100
Further(17-19)	73	11	16	29	36	8	100
Higher (20+)	139	22	23	26	17	12	100
<b>Newspaper:</b>							
Tabloid	78	17	17	29	29	12	101
Mixed	30	17	20	27	20	17	101
Broadsheet	66	24	18	26	21	11	100
<b>TV Viewer:</b>							
Light	93	15	19	32	24	10	100
Medium	85	24	16	24	19	18	101
Heavy	87	22	20	24	24	9	99
<b>Children:</b>							
Yes	69	13	23	25	25	14	100
No	201	22	17	27	21	12	99
<b>Film Viewer:</b>							
Light	85	18	12	32	25	14	101
Medium	85	14	21	28	26	11	100
High	83	30	22	22	15	12	101
<b>Video Renter:</b>							
Light	80	16	14	25	29	16	100
Medium	103	14	19	29	26	12	100
Heavy	79	32	20	27	13	9	101
<b>Religious:</b>							
Very	15	20	7	33	20	20	100
Quite	48	23	27	15	21	15	101
Not very	94	16	18	29	20	17	100
Not at all	111	20	18	29	26	7	100

In the group profiles, the categories of television viewer, film viewer and video renter type were each created by splitting the sample into three fairly equally sized groups. Thus:

Television viewer type was based on the total hours per week spent watching television (not just films). 'Light' viewers were those watching up to 14 hours per week, 'medium' viewers watched 15 to 21 hours per week while 'heavy' viewers watched more than 22 hours per week. This split produces fairly equal size groups – very few respondents watched 35 hours per week which would usually be the requisite amount to be labelled 'heavy' (e.g. Cumberbatch, Wood and Littlejohns, 2001).

Film viewer type was based on the total score of films watched on television, films seen at the cinema and videos rented or purchased per year. 'Light' film viewers scored up to 140 per year (i.e. up to twelve per month), 'medium' film viewers scored 141 – 244 (i.e. 12 to 20 per month) and 'heavy' film viewers scored 245+ (i.e. more than 20 per month).

Video renter type represents only the score for videos rented per year. The category 'light' included those renting up to 36 videos per year, 'medium' types rented 37-52 videos, and 'heavy' renters claimed more than 52 per year.

Both the heavy film viewer and the heavy video renter groups were the most likely to agree that adults have the right to see graphic portrayals of sexual violence. For example, heavy video renters who agreed with this right outnumbered those who disagreed by more than 2:1 (52% versus 22%), while among light video renters those who agreed were outnumbered by those who disagreed (30% versus 45%). However, the difference between light and heavy television users was small.

Table 3 shows how the various groups evaluated the amount of regulation of sexual violence in '18' rated videos. Here, as noted earlier, the majority agreed that the amount was 'about right'. Broadly speaking, those thinking there was 'too much' or 'too little' regulation tend to follow the same pattern as noted in rights to see. However, the differences between groups are very much reduced, thus showing higher levels of agreement that the regulation of sexual violence was 'about right'.

One exception to this is shown by those who rated themselves as 'very religious'. While this is a crude measure, strikingly, one third (33%) of these people thought there was far too little regulation compared with only one in twenty (5%) in the sample as a whole. However the sample size of very religious respondents here is numerically very small and, indeed, represents only 5% of the video renters surveyed.

Table 3 *Amount of regulation of sexual violence in 18 rated videos*

		Far too much	Too much	About right	Too little	Far too little	Total
	N	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Total:</b>	276	7	20	52	16	5	100
<b>Gender:</b>							
Male	150	10	19	50	19	2	100
Female	125	2	22	54	13	9	100
<b>Age:</b>							
18-20	39	5	18	56	18	3	100
21-24	71	4	20	58	14	4	100
25-34	78	9	19	50	19	3	100
35-44	44	9	25	48	9	9	100
45+	40	5	20	45	20	10	100
<b>Education:</b>							
School (15-16)	61	13	21	51	7	8	100
Further(17-19)	73	5	23	47	19	5	99
Higher (20+)	139	4	18	55	19	4	100
<b>Newspaper:</b>							
Tabloid	78	4	26	51	13	6	100
Mixed	30	10	7	50	27	7	101
Broadsheet	66	5	20	53	17	6	101
<b>TV Viewer:</b>							
Light	93	4	20	55	15	5	99
Medium	85	5	21	53	15	6	100
Heavy	88	11	19	46	21	3	100
<b>Children:</b>							
Yes	66	6	18	49	21	6	100
No	199	7	21	52	16	5	101
<b>Film Viewer:</b>							
Light	84	4	26	50	16	5	101
Medium	85	5	18	51	22	5	101
High	83	11	19	53	12	5	100
<b>Video Renter:</b>							
Light	79	6	29	42	17	6	100
Medium	103	3	16	58	20	3	100
Heavy	80	10	18	53	14	6	101
<b>Religious:</b>							
Very	15	--	13	27	27	33	100
Quite	48	10	13	54	15	8	100
Not very	94	3	20	61	12	4	100
Not at all	112	9	23	46	21	1	100

Further analyses were carried out to identify the factors which might be associated with attitudes to regulation and rights to see graphic material. The first examined film preferences.

## Film preferences

People's experiences of and interest in different kinds of films may well influence their attitudes to regulation and related issues so this was examined in two sets of questions.

First of all, respondents were asked to rate a number of film genres in terms of how interested they would normally be in watching them. The overall results showing those 'very', or 'quite interested', are given by gender in Table 4 below.

Table 4 *Interest in film genres by gender*

Film Genre	Male	Female
	%	%
Action/adventure	89	69
Science fiction	73	40
Crime/detective	68	76
Supernatural	60	55
Psychological mystery	66	82
Contemporary drama	28	69
Period/costume drama	13	52
Spy/political intrigue	53	43
Cult/art house	43	30
Romance	27	71
Disaster	46	47
Horror	62	33
War	56	33
Comedy	94	33
Gangster	72	46
Western	40	17
Erotica	37	28
Musical	15	47

Base: All those 'very' or 'quite interested' in the film genre

Considerable gender differences are apparent in most film preferences:

Women show much stronger interest in:

- Contemporary drama (69% of women interested versus 28% of men)
- Period costume (52% of women versus 13% of men)
- Romance (71% of women versus 27% of men)
- Musicals (47% of women versus 15% of men).

Men show much stronger interest in

- Science fiction (73% of men versus 40% of women)
- Horror (62% of men versus 33% of women)
- War (56% of men versus 33% of women)
- Gangster (72% of men versus 46% of women).



**Sample of film titles: knowledge of and interest in**

Respondents were given a list of controversial film titles and were asked to rate how much they knew about them and how interested they would be in watching them. The list included a number of films whose content had been problematic for the BBFC. Responses to these questions would help indicate the size of the video rental market for these films and the kinds of people comprising it.

The sample offered and the responses given are shown in Tables 5a and 5b below, again broken down by gender.

Table 5a *Knowledge of film sample*

Film title	Gender	N	Know nothing	Know a little	Know a lot	Seen it	Totals
			%	%	%	%	%
Deliverance	Male	149	39	10	10	41	100
	Female	125	65	17	2	16	100
Crash	Male	148	31	20	19	30	100
	Female	125	50	25	11	14	100
The Sex Pirates	Male	148	85	8	3	3	99
	Female	125	94	3	2	--	99
Straw Dogs	Male	149	50	17	16	17	100
	Female	125	66	16	11	7	100
The Story of O	Male	149	66	14	9	10	99
	Female	125	82	11	6	1	100
I Spit on your Grave	Male	150	63	9	13	15	100
	Female	125	82	10	5	4	101
A Clockwork Orange	Male	148	8	20	25	47	100
	Female	125	18	22	24	37	101
Reservoir Dogs	Male	150	6	6	13	75	100
	Female	125	14	14	13	59	100
Death Wish 1	Male	150	17	12	18	53	100
	Female	125	46	19	8	27	100
Ladybird, Ladybird	Male	149	81	9	3	6	99
	Female	122	78	11	7	5	101
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre	Male	150	14	18	19	49	100
	Female	125	33	15	26	26	100
Saving Private Ryan	Male	149	7	6	15	72	100
	Female	124	6	11	19	63	99

It should be noted here that the film title *The Sex Pirates* was a fabricated one - designed as a lie test in order to identify potentially unreliable respondents. Very few claimed any knowledge of this film. This suggests that proportions claiming to have seen other films in the list were not exaggerated.

Almost half the men in the sample claimed to have seen *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* which suggests that the market for such films may be quite substantial. Equal numbers claimed to have seen *I Spit on Your Grave* as *Straw Dogs*, while these two films received equal 'very interested' scores in Table 5b.

Table 5b *Interest in film sample*

Film title	Gender	N	Not at all interested	Not very interested	Quite interested	Very interested	Totals
			%	%	%	%	%
Deliverance	Male	141	31	18	20	30	99
	Female	115	38	29	23	10	100
Crash	Male	142	37	26	23	13	99
	Female	113	37	35	18	11	101
The Sex Pirates	Male	140	60	16	19	6	101
	Female	114	69	21	4	6	100
Straw Dogs	Male	143	38	23	22	16	99
	Female	113	40	31	20	9	100
The Story of O	Male	143	55	22	16	6	99
	Female	114	51	25	16	8	100
I Spit on your Grave	Male	144	49	22	13	16	100
	Female	113	55	24	12	10	101
A Clockwork Orange	Male	144	25	13	19	43	100
	Female	119	26	23	29	22	100
Reservoir Dogs	Male	143	14	13	17	55	99
	Female	114	27	19	22	32	100
Death Wish 1	Male	141	30	26	18	26	100
	Female	112	39	31	13	16	99
Ladybird, Ladybird	Male	140	58	26	9	7	100
	Female	110	46	34	15	5	100
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre	Male	144	33	22	12	33	100
	Female	116	47	17	24	11	99
Saving Private Ryan	Male	144	6	14	24	56	100
	Female	113	12	21	25	42	100

As expected, there are some considerable gender differences among those interested in watching these films, in line with what may be expected given the results so far. They clearly indicate that film interests and experiences might be usefully included in attempts to predict attitudes to sexual violence which are explored in the following section.

### Film preferences and rights to see sexual violence

Table 6 shows how interest in the various film genres is related to attitudes to the right of people over the age of 18 have to see graphic portrayals of sexual violence on video. Almost one half (49%) of those interested in watching horror films agreed with this right compared with under one third (31%) of those who were interested in romance.

Table 6 *Attitudes to the right to see sexual violence on video by film preferences*

		Agree	Neither/Nor	Disagree
Film genre:	N	%	%	%
Action	220	40	25	35
Science Fiction	156	42	26	33
Crime	193	38	26	35
Supernatural	156	45	25	30
Psychological	197	41	28	31
Contemporary	125	36	30	34
Period	82	30	30	39
Spy	131	37	25	38
Cult	98	44	28	29
Romance	124	31	33	35
Disaster	123	42	24	33
Horror	150	49	19	32
War	119	45	24	31
Comedy	245	40	28	33
Gangster	159	48	24	28
Western	76	50	18	32
Erotic	88	49	18	33
Musical	76	26	32	42

Base: All 'very' or 'quite interested' in watching the film genres

The data in Table 6 can be simplified by statistical analysis to detect clusterings in film preferences. When subjected to factor analysis, five groups of films emerged:

Story-led – films characterised by storylines (drama) and comprised contemporary drama, period/costume drama, romance and musicals. Overall, this group was strongly preferred by women (66% showed high interest versus only 18% of men).

Action – comprised action, war, gangster and westerns and appealed most strongly to men (45% of men showed high interest in this group compared with only 16% of women).

Fantasy – comprised science fiction, supernatural, horror and erotic film genres. This group appealed more to men (40%) than to women (23%).

**Intrigue** - included crime, psychological and spy film genres and appealed fairly equally to men (27%) and women (34%).

The remaining film clusters were cult, disaster and comedy but these did not appear to share commonalities and do not warrant further analyses.

Table 7 shows how the various film preferences, including interest in the sample of film titles, relate to agreeing or disagreeing with the right to see graphic images on video (this is the combined score of the questions on sex, violence and sexual violence in order to provide a more robust measure).

Table 7 *Attitudes to the right to see graphic images\* on video by film preferences*

		Agree	Neither/Nor	Disagree
	N	%	%	%
<b>Interest in 'Story-led' films:</b>				
Low	66	36	41	23
Moderate	91	31	45	24
High	101	21	44	36
<b>Interest in 'Action' films:</b>				
Low	71	17	39	44
Moderate	106	31	41	28
High	82	35	50	15
<b>Interest in 'Fantasy' films:</b>				
Low	80	16	44	40
Moderate	93	24	47	29
High	86	45	40	15
<b>Interest in 'Intrigue' films:</b>				
Low	77	26	45	29
Moderate	105	30	38	32
High	78	29	49	22
<b>Interest in Sample films:</b>				
Low	71	13	44	44
Moderate	74	27	46	27
High	78	46	37	17
<b>Knowledge of Sample films:</b>				
Low	73	22	38	40
Moderate	88	19	50	31
High	99	39	39	21
<b>Watch film if knew nothing:</b>				
Very unlikely	26	31	39	31
Quite unlikely	63	16	51	33
Quite likely	118	27	44	29
Very likely	60	40	33	27

\*Combined scores from questions 12, 13 and 14.

Here the attitude differences between the various groups are quite large. This is most evident when looking at the ratio of those agreeing to those disagreeing with the right to see graphic images.

Those with a high interest in fantasy films were far more likely to agree with the right to see graphic images than those with low interest (45% versus 16%) as were those expressing interest in the sample film titles (46%) and those very likely to watch a film even if they knew nothing about it (40% agreed with the right to see graphic images).

**Attitude clusters: regulation**

A similar analysis was carried out examining how the different film groups compared in their overall attitudes to regulation of films on all media (television, cinema and video). Combining answers to questions about regulation provides a more robust measure. This combined measure is used to classify respondents as conservative, moderate or liberal in later analyses. Also included here are the results of questions about knowledge of and interest in the sample of film titles given to respondents. Here the figure refers to the total score added across the film titles. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8 *Perceptions of regulation on all media by film preference*

		Too much	About right	Too little
	N	%	%	%
<b>Interest in 'Story-led' films:</b>				
Low	67	39	27	34
Moderate	92	37	30	33
High	101	19	31	50
<b>Interest in 'Action' films:</b>				
Low	71	21	30	49
Moderate	106	28	32	40
High	84	42	26	32
<b>Interest in 'Fantasy' films:</b>				
Low	80	18	24	59
Moderate	95	25	38	37
High	86	49	26	26
<b>Interest in 'Intrigue' films:</b>				
Low	78	28	27	45
Moderate	105	30	33	37
High	78	35	27	38
<b>Interest in Sample films:</b>				
Low	71	15	31	54
Moderate	75	24	29	47
High	78	51	31	18
<b>Knowledge of Sample films:</b>				
Low	74	15	15	70
Moderate	89	22	43	35
High	99	48	30	22
<b>Watch film if knew nothing:</b>				
Very unlikely	26	31	31	38
Quite unlikely	63	21	30	49
Quite likely	119	34	27	39
Very likely	61	31	34	34

Once again the largest differences emerge in fantasy film preferences and in the sample film titles. Those with a high interest in fantasy were almost twice as likely to think there is 'too much' regulation as to say there was 'too little' (49% and 26% respectively). Those with a low interest in fantasy films were over three times more likely to believe there was 'too little' regulation as to think there was 'too much' (59% and 18% respectively).

The sample films produced an even bigger difference. Those with a low interest in the titles were three and a half times more likely to say there was 'too little' regulation as to say there was 'too much' (54% and 15% respectively). The reverse was true of those with a high interest in the sample (18% 'too little', 51% 'too much').

These results show the presence of promising attitude predictors regarding regulation and the right to see graphic material. Of course there is some interdependence between these and the variables usually classed as the 'drivers' of attitudes: gender, age, education level, religiosity and so on. However, film preferences tended to show larger differences. Age, which traditionally reveals the largest variation in attitudes when a full population range is included, showed a shift from liberal to conservative between the 21 – 34 year old groups and those 35+ but did not emerge here as particularly significant continuous effect, probably because video renters are clustered around the younger age groups.

## Risk assessment

One important issue in allowing the availability of potentially distressing films featuring sexual violence is that video renters might casually select them, careless as to their content. This concern is grounded by the fact that almost one quarter (23%) of respondents admitted that they were 'very likely' to watch a film if they 'knew nothing about it', and a further 44% said they were 'quite likely' to do so. Thus, only one third (33%) of video renters claimed they would be 'unlikely' to watch unknown films. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, when asked if they had ever watched a film or video they wished they hadn't, most respondents (60%) said they had. The various reasons given were grouped and are shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9 *Reasons why viewers wished they had not seen a film/video*

	First Mention		Any Mention		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Poor film	77	48	40	66	117	53
Disappointed	47	29	12	20	59	27
Gore/Taste	14	9	7	11	21	9
Disturbed	8	5	2	3	10	5
No Reason/Other	15	9	--	--	15	7
	161	100	61	100	222	101

The most common reasons generally referred to poor quality ('*badly made*', '*bad acting*', '*poor storyline*' etc) often succinctly summarised by respondents. For example, one said simply of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, '*it was shit!*' whilst another criticised *Me, Myself and Irene* because, '*it wasn't funny*'. Poor film embraced almost one half (48%) of the reasons mentioned first and two thirds (66%) of the additional reasons given.

Poor film was closely followed by a related concept: disappointed which included, '*over hyped*', '*not what I expected*' and '*not in the mood*' which made up three out of ten (29%) of first mentioned reasons. These two reasons were often applied to the same film such as *The Blair Witch Project*. This was the only film mentioned by three people and was described as, '*boring*', '*rubbish*' and '*over hyped*'. One said it had made him physically sick - because of, '*the bouncing camera!*'

Around one in ten reasons referred either to crude or graphic violence or gore, summarised in the table as Gore/taste. Films being, '*too bloody*' and '*too violent*' included *Natural Born Killers* and *Casino*; '*violence for the sake of violence*' (*Long Good Friday*), or '*crude/sick*' (*Reservoir Dogs*). Additionally, a number of respondents described their tastes rather than a film. For example, '*I don't like violence, I find it disturbing – I don't like graphic violence.*'

However, none of the explanations, nor any of the films mentioned by respondents referred to sexual violence specifically or even to related concepts - such as the humiliation or degradation of women. One video renter wrote '*where children are abused*' but did not offer any film titles. One noted '*not good to women*' but mentioned the comedy film *What Women Want*. The lack of references to sexual violence or abuse is perhaps notable in that many respondents claimed to have watched films such as *Deliverance* (30%), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (38%) and *I Spit on Your Grave* (10%). It is worth adding that the latter two, so-called, 'video nasties' were most often reported by the older age groups. Respondents may have rented these videos before the 1984 *Video Recordings Act*, but they were not probed on this.

Only a small percentage (5%) of reasons referred to a film being disturbing. For example, 'very scary' (re *Event Horizon*) or 'had not expected it to be so horrific'... 'but I quite liked it' (re *Jagged Edge*). One person still remembered being 'very frightened' when she was much younger and saw *The Exorcist*. One other person said of *Final Destination*, '[it] really scared me.' The only video renter whose language suggested some distress worthy of some exploration mentioned *Requiem for A Dream* (sic) reporting that it had 'visually stayed with me' and that 'it had a negative effect' but added that this was 'better than no effect'.

The remaining miscellaneous reasons included, 'Almost Famous should be called *Almost Bearable*' plus sundry cryptic notes such as 'Jeepers Creepers!' and 'Stigmata'. Overall, the various comments offered provide some reassurance that traumatic responses to films must be very rare. Distress was very infrequent in this sample of video renters despite their fairly wide experiences of film and even seeing ones they wished they had not. Of course, it is possible that some respondents may have failed to disclose distressing experiences but this seems unlikely. The emphasis of the research was on controlling interview standards to achieve the highest quality assurance in the survey. Thus, the procedures adopted and the pattern of findings provide an important reassurance in assessing the potential risks involved in asking a sample of video renters to watch controversial uncut films.

## Survey Conclusions

The main findings from the survey were that:

- Video renters hold liberal attitudes towards graphic sex and graphic violence.
- But fewer hold liberal attitudes to sexual violence (clearly more controversial).
- Most think that the amount of regulation of videos is 'about right'.
- Most disagreed that watching violent videos makes people violent.
- The majority disagreed that the problem of rape would be made worse by the easy availability of videos which show sexual violence.
- Men, high video renters and fantasy film fans were the most liberal groups.
- The majority of video renters admitted that they were 'likely to watch a film even if they knew nothing about it'.
- There was a strong belief in the need to protect children from '18' rated videos.



## 2. The viewing panel

The survey results showed video renters to be fairly liberal in their attitudes to people's rights to see graphic detail in '18' classified videos. In selecting participants to take part in the viewing panel, the main consideration was to achieve a good cross section of views.

Equal numbers of men and women were chosen and represented more evenly across the age bands than found in the survey. Additionally those who had declared themselves to be 'very' or 'quite' religious were somewhat better represented than in the survey findings. Table 10 shows how the viewing panel compared with the survey sample.

Table 10 *Sample Details*

	Survey	Viewing Panel
	%	%
<b>Gender:</b>		
M	56	50
F	44	50
Total	100	100
<b>Age:</b>		
18-21	15	--
21-24	25	22
25-34	29	29
35-44	17	20
45+	15	29
Total	101	100
<b>Education:</b>		
School	22	24
Further	27	31
Higher	51	45
Total	100	100
<b>Religious:</b>		
Very	5	6
Quite	18	20
Not very	35	36
Not at all	42	38
Total	100	100
<b>Children:</b>		
No	75	80
Yes**	25	20
Total	100	100
<b>Video Renter:</b>		
Light	30	33
Medium	39	45
Heavy	30	22
Total	100	100
	N = 277	N = 50

\*\*Respondents with children at home were selected only if they had responded 'strongly agree' to the statement 'It is very important to protect young people from seeing '18' certificated films'.

### Ethical Issues

In this report, naturally, all the names of participants have been changed. However to further protect their anonymity, the names given in the interview quotations are changed again in the focus group quotations. This precludes the possibility of focus group participants being able to use this report to discern additional information about others in their focus group. Given that the participants were being asked to watch uncut films which might distress or even disturb them, it was imperative to set high ethical standards in all respects of the research. This was additionally achieved by:

1. Pre-screening the participants by examining the details provided in the questionnaires.
2. Telephone screening the participants when inviting them to take part. Confirming the nature of the films to be watched, the purpose of the research and inviting the participants to say if the study 'might not be right for them'.
3. Asking participants to agree to watch the films on their own and not allow anyone else to see them.
4. Delivering the video tapes personally to each participant, confirming again the nature of the films and informing participants that they could withdraw from the study at any stage if they did not want to watch the films.
5. Asking participants to read and sign a contract outlining their rights and responsibilities in this research before allowing them to accept the films each of which was labelled 'For research purposes only. Not to be copied' (see section 8 *Film scars* and Appendix 1).
6. Using experienced, qualified counsellors to screen applicants and carry out the interviews post viewing.
7. Collecting the video tapes personally from each participant.
8. In addition, one half of the participants were re-contacted to confirm their availability for a focus group.

At each of these stages, participants were encouraged to reveal any problems which they might have experienced from watching the films.

### **Procedural details**

A total of 58 survey respondents were selected and contacted by telephone in order to screen their suitability for the viewing panel.

- Two respondents were no longer interested in taking part.
- Two respondents were unable to do so (one did not currently have a functioning video recorder and one was leaving the country).
- Two respondents were screened out. One was thought to have a mental health problem. One was identified as a journalist (any publicity given to the research might well jeopardise its integrity).
- Thus, the initial recruitment was a total of 52 participants for the viewing panel which later dropped to the target of 50 when,
  - One participant (a 35 year old married male) contacted the research team almost immediately to withdraw from the study reporting that he *simply could not watch films like that*.
  - One participant was unable to complete the viewing during the time scale having just had a baby.
- Only one participant was unable to watch all three films. 'Anna' saw *Straw Dogs* and then *Last House on the Left* but 'could not bring herself' to watch *Baise Moi*. However, she did not reveal any lasting distress (and indeed attended a focus group meeting).

The following section provides details of the interview procedure along with the main findings.

### **The films, viewer reactions and overall judgements**

This section summarises the interview findings on reactions to each film. For convenience these are discussed in the rank order of 'acceptability' as given by the overall judgements of the viewing sample. The allocation of films was designed to ensure that one half of the viewers saw each film plus a random selection of the others. Thus, judgements on each of the films can be taken as relative to the others and so can be meaningfully rank ordered.

The results are summarised in Table 11 which shows the proportion of viewers who thought that the film could be released 'as seen' or only needed minor cuts compared with those who had far more reserved opinions (i.e. major cuts needed or should not be released at all).

Table 11 *Should the film be released as seen with an '18' certificate?*

Film title	N	Yes/Few Cuts	Major Cuts/Not at all
		%	%
Straw Dogs	26	96	4
A Clockwork Orange	25	92	8
Death Wish II	23	87	13
I Spit on your Grave	26	73	27
Baise Moi	24	71	29
The Last House on the Left	25	56	44

The use of percentages can be misleading with small samples. For example, with *Straw Dogs* just one person becomes represented as 4%. However, what they do offer is an easily understood currency where sample sizes vary (here between 23 and 26 people) and they provide an important perspective on the reactions of the viewing sample. Most qualitative research does not show how representative the quoted views are and, indeed, may give undue weight to more articulate voices. In this report, the various sample details are used to provide a structured approach to the qualitative analysis of discourses provided by the interviewees. In the following sections respondents are described as conservative, moderate or liberal based on their overall attitudes to regulation.

Each telephone interview was recorded and lasted around half an hour (average 27 minutes). Easily answered questions were designed to establish rapport between interviewer and interviewee in the opening stages of the interview and to boost confidence for the more probing questions later on. First of all, viewers were asked to confirm which films they had seen and in what order. Table 12 below shows the answers to this:

Table 12 *Order in which viewer watched the films*

Film	N	First	Second	Third	Total
		%	%	%	%
Straw Dogs	26	42	19	38	99
Clockwork	25	24	40	36	100
Death Wish II	23	26	52	22	100
I Spit on your	26	36	32	32	100
Baise Moi	24	29	21	50	100
Last House	25	42	42	17	101

At the design stage, consideration was given to providing a recommended viewing order so as to counterbalance exposure to the films. However, this seemed an unreasonable request since most people decide what to watch depending on how they feel on any particular evening (or viewing session). Insisting on the order in which people watched them seemed unnecessarily dictatorial since we wished to allow naturalistic viewing and good will to the study. Not surprisingly, *Baise Moi* (a French soundtrack with English subtitles) was more often watched last (by 50%) than any other film.

The reasons why viewers chose the order of films was not probed in the interviews, but informal comments (particularly when the video tapes were collected or when participants met at focus groups) helped illuminate these.

A few participants were *'dying to see [film]'* they had heard about (and so saw it first), a few participants mentioned *[putting] 'in the tape and thought the picture was so [bad] that I'd leave it till later'*. Two participants mentioned that *Last House* *'sounded familiar'* (implying 'safe') and so watched it first. Three people either expected *Baise Moi* to be subtitled or, on discovering that it was, decided it was *'something to watch'* (meaning when they felt like concentrating rather than just *'sitting down in front of it'*). As with the other films, there seemed no obvious difference in the judgements of people who saw it last - compared with the majority who selected the order of films almost 'randomly' (or at least without any conscious plan). Possibly, focussed questions on this issue could well illuminate some quite important distinctions between viewer types and their relationships with films.

Secondly, interviewees were asked about each film. *'Lets start with the first film [title], briefly, how would you describe the film to someone who knew nothing about it?'*

While it might be expected that participants would indicate here whether they could recommend the film, in practice, most did not and so were prompted by an additional question: *'So what did you think of it?'*

Many of the film descriptions were quite clinical, with little evidence of abstraction or affective responses. In order to summarise the patterns, these accounts were classified in terms of the kind of language used: as essentially restricted code or essentially elaborated code. Those judged to involve essentially restricted code language (37% of all descriptions) used basic vocabulary and mainly concrete descriptions (such as, *'and they went out, and they killed her'*). Those considered to show distinctively elaborated code (12% of all descriptions) tended to use more complex vocabulary, conceptual synthesis and evidence of abstraction. The remainder (50% of all descriptions) were not easily categorised and are referred to as 'average'. A simple summary of these is provided under each film title.

Participants were then asked various questions to address the concerns raised by the BBFC about each film. Finally, they were asked to pass judgement on whether the film as seen should be given an '18' video release and, if not, whether minor cuts, or major cuts would make it acceptable or whether it should not be released at all.

The summaries below outline the main findings organised thus:

1. The film. This a synthesis of various film guides and the BBFC's concerns about each film plus a sample of reviews.
2. How viewers described the films.
3. Summary analysis of how viewers responded to the BBFC's concerns.
4. Summary analysis of how viewers judged the suitability of the film for video classification.
5. Overall comments.

In later sections we examine responses to the films in more detail and how viewer characteristics relate to the judgements they made on the films (see section 7 *Limits to tolerance*).

## Straw Dogs

Director: Sam Peckinpah (1971)

Starring: Dustin Hoffman, Susan George

Running time: 118 m (film)

*Escaping social unrest in the U.S, pacifist husband Sumner and his wife escape to her childhood home – a quiet country retreat in Cornwall. However, both Sumner and his peaceful surroundings soon reveal themselves to be dominated by violent undertones. Continual taunting and a rape upon his wife see Sumner concluding with a haunting and relentless spree of violence – acts thought to underlie his wavering masculinity.*

### BBFC concerns

Cinema: Passed 'X' uncut in 1971; Passed '18' in a pre-cut version (2<sup>nd</sup> rape reduced) in 1995

Video: Rejected in 1999 (cuts offered but refused by distributor)

The film contains a lengthy central rape scene in which Susan George's character, Amy, is raped twice, first by her ex-lover Charlie, and then at gunpoint by one of his friends, Norman. The Board's principle concern lies with the first rape scene which begins with Charlie attacking Amy but gradually comes to show her responding to – and even beginning to enjoy – what started as a sexual assault. The Board is concerned that the construction and development of this scene offers an endorsement of the male rape myth that 'women really like it' (i.e. that although a woman may start by saying 'no', she will come to enjoy an attack if the man persists because she secretly wants to be raped). This could be a potentially dangerous message to convey to men predisposed to sexual violence.

### Sample of film reviews

*"[This] is moviemaking of a very high order. Hoffman's performance, as the weak mathematician goaded into violence, is still his best." (Kehr, 2001)*

*"A violent, frightening film reaction to the violence of the 1960's." (Craddock, 2001)*

*"You will have gasped and shuddered through an orgy of detailed rape, slaughter, arson and wanton destruction." (Wilson, Daily Mail)*

## 2. How viewers described the film

Here the pattern of language styles was fairly typical of most film descriptions:  
Restricted code descriptions (35% of accounts) included:

*'It's a film about a bloke who rapes a woman. And they'd gone to this house that was being done up and it was, er, one of the builders that went in and raped her. They were then thrown off the job...um, but her husband still didn't know about it. Um...e got ran over and they took him back to their house...and the gang of thugs found out that...they'd took, he'd took this girl somewhere and they wanted to 'ave words with 'im, but this guy that had took him back to his house wouldn't let them in. So they then start bombarding the house and trying to get at him and...then get violent.'*

Charles, case no 92, liberal

Elaborated code (12% of accounts) included:

*'I thought that was a great movie! Um, I thought it was very, um...powerful, compelling and violent, but I thought it was a really interesting, um, film about masculinity and lots of themes about masculinity.'*

Sarah, case no 188, moderate

Average (54% of accounts)

*'I'd say it was a well made film, and that it was a good plot, and any violence, I thought, in that film was...was part of the story, I would say. It was more integral. I think it's a far...far superior film to the other two.'*

David, case no 197, moderate

Overall, the participants' views were quite favourable about the film (50% made essentially positive comments) often referring to the overall quality or the narrative in particular:

*'A very good film'*

Grace, case no 115, moderate

*'It's a good story'*

Charles, case no 92, liberal

Essentially negative evaluations (19%) were given often because of the violence:

*'Quite harrowing and, um... pointless'*

Lucy, case no. 192, liberal

*'The only reason for its being was to provoke a reaction to the violence and the sex scenes.'*

Holly, case no.204, conservative

However a small number found it dull or dated:

*'To be perfectly honest, I didn't get all the way through 'Straw Dogs' because it was so dull! Nothing to do with the sex or the violence, it was one of the dullest...and that was one that I'd heard of!'*

Denise, case no 208, liberal

### 3. How viewers responded to the BBFC concerns

The film gives the message that women might enjoy being raped

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/Nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
8	36	4	28	24

The film gives the message that when a women says no to sex she might really mean yes

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/Nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
16	44	8	20	12

The film gives the message that women like being knocked around a bit during sex.

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/Nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
4	36	8	32	20

### 4. Release on video?

Yes '18' video %	No, Minor cuts %	No, Major cuts %	Not released %	Total %
77	19	0	4	100 (N=26)

### 5. Overall comments

While the rape scenes were undoubtedly controversial and a minority of participants would like to see them edited, the majority view was that the overall quality of the film carried these. A number expressed surprise that the film had not been released uncut. For example:

*'I don't understand why it's banned, 'cause, er I wouldn't even put it at as an '18'. I would put it as a '15'.'*

Terry, case no. 127, liberal

## A Clockwork Orange

Director: Stanley Kubrick (1971)

Starring: Malcolm McDowell, Michael Bates, Adrienne Corri, Patrick Magee

Running time: 137 m (film/DVD)

*Adapting the Anthony Burgess novel, the film supposes a controversial experiment to eradicate the sadistic tendencies of main character and psychopathic gang leader, Alex. Set in the future, the story follows Alex as he leads his gang to an orgy of violence and rape. After initial imprisonment, he is offered experimental brainwashing instead to eradicate the evil in him. After the supposed success of turning him into a good man, Alex returns to society to find it even more violent than it had been in his prime.*

### BBFC Concerns

Cinema: Passed 'X' uncut in 1971; Passed '18' uncut in 1999

Video: Passed '18' uncut in 2000

The film contains three scenes involving sexual violence. Firstly, there is an attempted rape scene in which a woman is forcibly stripped and mauled by a gang on a deserted stage. However, the attackers are interrupted by a rival gang and the woman escapes. Later we see Alex's (Malcolm McDowell) gang preparing to rape Mrs Alexander (Adrienne Corri) after breaking into her home and violently assaulting her and her husband. We see her being restrained and gagged. Her clothes being removed (with scissors) to the sound of "Singin' In the Rain". Much later, Alex is forced to watch scenes of sex and violence on a cinema screen as part of his 'aversion therapy' (designed to 'cure' his love of violence and rape). In this sequence we see a fairly brief sight of a woman being gang raped on the screen. This is the only point in the film where rape, as opposed the build up to rape, is shown. The sequences in question are all presented in a deliberately stylised manner, often accompanied by classical music, and take place within a futuristic setting.

### Sample of film reviews

*"It has a very strong plot and message...can people change? A film everybody should see."* (Lundqvist, 2001)

*"The average judgement is likely to remain that it is pretentious and nasty rubbish for sick minds."* (Halliwell, 2001)

*"Truly outstanding, provocative work from master filmmaker Kubrick."* (Craddock, 2001)



## 2. How viewers described the film

*A Clockwork Orange* received the highest number of descriptions reflecting elaborated codes (20%) and the fewest number of restricted code (20%) uses of any film.

A restricted code example is:

*'It's about, well a criminal who's like, performed murder and rape, and how he's sort of attempted to be converted back to normal.'*

Peter, case no. 195, liberal

Elaborated code descriptions most often touched on the surreal nature of the film:

*'That was less scary, I feel, or less...um...because it was surreal it, I don't know, it somehow took the edge off it for me. I mean, I thought it was too violent still, but I dunno. It was almost circusy, wasn't it? Because of the way, y'know, it was done, like I say, it was like this circusy thing, it didn't make it acceptable, but it didn't...I mean, if they hadn't been dressed in these white suits and drinking the all and all the rest of it, I think, y'know, if it had of been done with young men in ordinary clothes, and um, y'know, not sort of in the future and all the rest, or whatever, I think it would have been as bad, almost as bad, as 'Spit' [on your Grave]'*

Audrey, case no. 87, conservative

*'The actual film itself is, um...I think it's a clever look at, um, personal choice.'*

Ian, case no 94, moderate

However many of those who were classified as 'average' in their linguistic style were puzzled by the film:

*'A very weird film'* Elizabeth, case no.117, moderate

*'Weird'* Kate, case no.168, conservative

*'I can't see the logic of it – a degrading film.'* Wesley, case no. 134, conservative

Despite this, the film received the lowest number of negative appraisals (19%) of any of the films and the highest number of positive comments (68%).

*'A film that's been given very bad press because of the violence but well worth watching. It was a very good film, erm, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and well worth bearing with, 'cause if ya don't like violence, to get over the first few minutes, and then after that, a very enjoyable, thought-provoking film.'*

Angela, case no. 35, moderate

## 3. How viewers responded to the BBFC concerns

Forcible sex with a woman is presented as exciting and attractive

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/Nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
8	36	0	24	32

The main character Alex (Malcolm McDowell) is presented as an attractive role model

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/Nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
8	28	12	20	32

#### 4. Release on video?

Yes '18' video %	Minor cuts %	Major cuts %	Not released %	Total %
76	16	4	4	100 (N=25)

#### 5. Overall comments

Even more so than *Straw Dogs*, the large majority of viewers recognised that the film had some serious intent and that its overall quality recommended it for release.

## Death Wish II

Director: Michael Winner (1982)

Starring: Charles Bronson, Jill Ireland

Running time: 95 m (film)

*Paul Kersey becomes violent vigilante after his daughter and maid are the victims of a criminal gang whose violent attacks include kidnap and rape. Soon after his daughter commits suicide and Kersey's once liberal attitudes are shattered taking him into a violent world of revenge.*

### BBFC Concerns

Cinema: Passed '18' after 3 minutes 5 seconds of cuts in 1982

Video: Cut cinema version passed on video, without further cuts, in 1988

In the first *Death Wish* (1974), Paul Kersey (played by Charles Bronson) is transformed from a mild-mannered liberal into a vigilante killer following the brutal gang rape of his wife and daughter. In the second film (shown here), his Spanish maid, Rosario, is violently gang raped by criminals who break into Kersey's home. Kersey's daughter then returns home (she had already been raped in the previous film) where she is kidnapped by the gang and raped once more, before taking her own life. As with the first film, the rape scenes are vital to the narrative in providing the dramatic 'justification' for Kersey's subsequent vigilante attacks. It is necessary to retain at least some sense of the horror of the rapes to explain Kersey's extreme reaction. However, in *Death Wish II*, even more so than in the first film (which was also cut by the Board), there is an indulgence in the process of rape and terrorisation, and a focus on the male enjoyment (thrusting, orgasmic groans, laughter, cheering, etc) that seemed potentially dangerous. The film also focuses upon the fully naked body, linking sexually arousing images and violence. Cuts were made to both rape scenes.

### Sample of film reviews

*"Extremely violent sequel to the successful 1974 movie."* (Craddock, 2001)

*"The sort of sequel which makes you realise that the original wasn't half so bad as you thought."* (Hinxman)

## 2. How viewers described the film

Restricted code descriptions covered 43% of those offered such as:

*'He comes home to find his housekeeper's been raped and killed, and they kidnapped his daughter and she later gets raped and killed as well, so he starts taking his revenge on all the pe...the gang who's done it.'*

Megan, case no.224, liberal

Elaborated code accounts were rarely made (13% of descriptions):

*'It always seems to be from a male perspective, how it's viewed, how...how the violence is controlled and portrayed in it and things like that. Well, from my personal opinion, really you could tell it was made by a bloke.' [on 'American Psycho'] 'That was a movie which I sort of like thought...'cause if you've read the book it's pretty horrendous and everything, and it makes you think "God – how could they do this? this could never be made into a film". But I found the woman's perspective was more tongue in cheek and she took a much more...she took a different angle to it.'*

Nicola, case no. 230, moderate

Almost half of the descriptions provided were judged as average in linguistic style and tended to summarise the revenge narrative. For example:

*'A man who's broken by the things society's perpetrated upon him.' [and] 'The message is: presume that society will fail you and you have to sort of, take matters into your own hands.'*

Gavin, case no. 217, liberal

Most (52%) viewers were quite neutral in their opinion of the film, although negative comments (30%) outweighed positive ones (17%).

*'I like his films.'* Richard, case no. 34, conservative

*'[So] on the whole I quite enjoyed that film.'* Grace, case no.115, moderate

Negative comments were often strongly worded:

*'Rubbish!' It was pathetic' It should be set on fire and forgotten about!'*

Angela, case no. 35, moderate

*'I was really disgusted that anyone could, y'know, portray black men in that way.'*

Andrew, case no. 98, liberal

*'But I think the impact of the film, as I said to begin with, sort of, like, is lost somehow, because it has this feeling of being very dated and something that isn't actually relevant to now.'*

Andy, case no 198, conservative

## 3. How viewers responded to the BBFC concerns

The rape scenes are unacceptably prolonged

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/Nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
30	43	0	17	9

The second rape scene (of the daughter) gives the message that women sometimes enjoy being raped

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/Nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
0	13	4	43	39

#### 4. Release on video?

Yes '18' video %	Minor cuts %	Major cuts %	Not released %	Total %
57	30	13	0	100 (N=23)

#### 5. Overall comments

Perhaps Audrey best summed up the viewers opinions:

*'Again it had a lot of violence in it, but, um, er, and I don't think it was necessary to show, um, all the rapes!'*

Audrey, case no. 87, conservative

Thus there was a clear sense that most viewers felt that the rape scenes exceeded the narrative needs of the film.

## Baise Moi

Director: Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi (2000)

Starring: Raffaëla Anderson, Karen Bach

Running time: 77 m (film)

*The film comprises unrelenting and violent revenge when two women are brutally gang raped. With graphic and frequent scenes of sex, the film is also packed with bloody violence as the women re-empower themselves. Originally banned in France this film, with English subtitles, is thought to comment upon the social underclasses and the marginalisation of two women – raped by both society and by men. Also known as: Fuck Me and Rape Me.*

### BBFC Concerns

Cinema: Passed '18' after 10 seconds of cuts in 2000

Video: Not yet classified for video release

The film contains, within its opening 10 minutes, an extremely brutal and explicit three-minute sequence showing the gang rape of two women. The Board felt the scene was in fact, responsibly handled by the (female) directors, focussing on the horror and pain of rape from the female point of view, deliberately underplaying any sense of arousal. There is little female nudity shown and nobody in the scene, either victims or rapists, appears to be experiencing any pleasure. The men make no noise at all and are blankly concentrated upon their purpose. One of them is entirely frustrated, the other partly so. The main female character retains a hard-faced psychological control, which causes the men finally to back off. Nonetheless, the Board did delete a 10 second shot of penetration from the rape scene because it was felt that the inclusion of such a pornographic image in the context of a rape scene could prove harmful to some viewers through its association of a sexually arousing image and violence. The extreme sexual imagery of the deleted shot is unmatched elsewhere in the rape scene. Without it, the Board believes that the sequence remains a compelling portrayal of the ugliness and horror of rape whereas, with it, the scene takes on a more explicit pornographic dimension.

### Sample film review

*"It is a coarse and crude movie, but in fairness, it is dealing with coarse and crude people and equally unpleasant circumstances...it's pretty grim." (Bose, 2001)*

## 2. How viewers described the film

Although *Baise Moi* attracted some sophisticated comments, elaborated code descriptions were outnumbered by restricted code accounts (8% versus 42%)

Among the more elaborated offerings was that by Andy:

*'Two people who had just thrown everything out the window and, um, lost touch with reality of life being part of a society, fitting in to society just living for themselves.'*

Case no. 198, conservative

A common description was along the lines of:

*'Thelma and Louise' with full penetration and, er, violence.'*

Ian, case no. 94, moderate

*'I would say it's a bit like, um, 'Natural Born Killers', but females and its got a lot of, um, sexual violence in it as well and a lot of sex in there.'*

Elizabeth, case no. 117, moderate

Overall opinions on the film were more negative than positive (46% versus 29%) with the remainder (25%) essentially neutral:

*'I'd describe it a horrible film and recommend them not to watch it.'*

Charles, case no. 92, liberal

*'It was just not pleasant and...really annoyed me.'*

Ian, case no. 94, moderate

*'I was quite disgusted by it, really.'*

Natasha, case no. 96, moderate

But the film was so different that it appealed to a few:

*'I'm so bored with, um, Hollywood plots and the same actors and the same endings that I've...I'm always have got an eye out for something a bit off-the-wall.'*

Trevor, case no. 62, liberal

*'that was good to watch, yeah!'*

Linda, case no. 88, liberal

and

*'That was probably the most entertaining of the three. Again I s'pose it was quite...um, it was more bizarre and it was quite kind of Tarantinoesque, um, in the fact that it probably wasn't so shocking with the sexual abuse, but it was more...quite bizarre I s'pose again people just going around killing for the sake of it. But it wasn't so harrowing.'*

Lucy, case no. 192, liberal

### 3. How viewers responded to the BBFC concerns

The shot of penetration in the rape scene is pornographic

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
48	36	0	12	4

### 4. Release on video?

Yes '18' video %	Minor cuts %	Major cuts %	Not released %	Total %
29	42	8	21	100 (N=24)

### 5. Overall comments:

Probably a few participants would have agreed with Angela (case no. 35) who, when asked if it should receive an '18', said, "*18' certificate? I think it should be given a 40 certificate!*" However, unlike most other films there was general agreement that one scene in particular, the penetration scene, needed to be cut as a minimum.



## I Spit on Your Grave

Director: Meir Zarchi (1978)

Starring: Camille Keaton, Eron Tabor, Richard Pace, Anthony Nichols

Running time: 100 m (film)

*A young woman spends the summer in an isolated lakeside house intending to write her book in the tranquillity of the countryside. However, her peace is shattered after attracting the attention of four local men who subject her to two brutal gang rapes and then leave the weakest member of their group to kill her. When he fails to carry out this task, she exacts her revenge, by seducing and then killing each of the men in turn.*

### BBFC Concerns

Cinema: Never submitted for UK cinema release

Video: Passed '18' after 7 minutes 2 seconds of cuts in 2001

Before the video could be classified, the Board removed just over 7 minutes from the film's lengthy rape scenes. Cuts were made to reduce the violence and detail of the rapes, and to the film's parading of the woman's vulnerability and youthful nakedness, which seemed to carry a potentially dangerous erotic charge. The enthusiasm of the rapists, with their cheering and their orgasmic groans, was felt to contribute to the general effect. The 'revenge' section of the film was, by contrast, passed uncut, but it might be argued that its message that a recently raped woman can recover from her ordeal to have sex with her attackers is also pernicious.

### Sample film review

*"...this one is worth zero as a film; lots of violent terror and gory death, totally irresponsibly portrayed." (Craddock, 2001)*

## 2. How participants described the film

Once again comments on this film were rarely at the level of elaborated code (12%) and were equally likely to be judged as predominantly restricted code (43%) as simply 'average' (43%). In examining the language styles, it was difficult to find examples where the opinions of viewers were not embedded in the descriptions:

*'I thought it was chronic. If I was describing it, I'd describe it as...well, I didn't look on that as vigilante. Um, I thought it was a very poor film, just about a girl who gets raped by a gang and goes out for vengeance. But I thought it was such a poor film...it was almost laughable.'*

Shirley, case no. 28, moderate (classified as restricted code)

*'Absolutely no redeeming features whatsoever, and it was fairly grizzly and sort of, um, I wouldn't recommend it to somebody actually...but not...only because I can't see any point in...it's, it's not a good film, quite basically, y'know? Irrespective of violence in it, it's not a good film, I don't think.'*

Paul, case no. 229, liberal (classified as average)

*'The girl was raped and then she avenges her attackers, but...it's the way she avenges her attackers which I found a little offensive, because she just doesn't go out there and kill 'em and do what she...she tends to sort of dress it up in a more sexual role of how she's playing out her revenge with them. And it's like, hang on, you don't need to do this! This woman's gone through hell enough as it is, and she has...and it was...um, it was close, it was close to offending me, really.'*

Nicola, case no. 230, moderate (an example of elaborate code)

A small number (12%) were fairly neutral:

*'If you're wanting to watch a video nasty, then it's perfect, but if you're wanting a story or anything apart from nasty, don't bother.'*

Rebecca, case no. 233, liberal

*'I wasn't too keen on that one' [but] 'If it had been on the telly, I would've watched it.'*

Richard, case no. 34, conservative

*'The first twenty minutes was quite disturbing, um, but the rest of it was, well I s'pose I found it quite tongue in cheek 'cause you couldn't imagine that sort of thing actually happening. So I suppose it went from being really horrific to being quite farcical.'*

Lucy, case no. 192, liberal

Overall, only 12% of participants offered some positive points in the film's favour (compared with 64% against):

*'I think that's one of the funniest films I've seen. I thought it was utterly bizarre'*

Denise, case no. 208, liberal

*'Interesting – it's almost moral isn't it. I mean, y' know, sweet revenge as they say.'*

Nicholas, case no. 58, liberal

### 3. How viewers responded to the BBFC concerns

The humiliation of the woman in the first half of the film goes too far

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
38	38	4	15	4

The film gives the message that women can recover from rape quickly

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
19	31	4	31	15

### 4. Release on video?

Yes '18' video %	Minor cuts %	Major cuts %	Not released %	Total %
50	23	8	19	100 (N=26)

### 5. Overall comments

The extreme violence of the rape scenes was troublesome but made less acceptable by the lack of justifying context to sustain such lengthy treatment. Many viewers who were reluctant to see it released as seen but did not believe it could be edited to an acceptable level.

## Last House on the Left

Director: Wes Craven (1972)

Starring: David Hess, Lucy Grantham, Sandra Cassell

Running time: 84 m (film)

Two teenagers are kidnapped by a gang of escaped convicts and are subjected to a series of humiliating sexual, torturous and violent acts. Finally, after their murder, the girls' parents exact a bloody and brutal revenge on the perpetrators. The film was thought to have used the Manson massacres to comment upon American culture and the grief of the victims' families. Also known as: *Grim Company*, *Krug and Company*, *Night of the Vengeance*, *Sex Crime of the Century*. Film loosely based on Bergman's *The Virgin Spring*.

### BBFC Concerns

Cinema: Rejected in 1974; Rejected in 2000 (cuts offered but refused by distributor)

Video: Rejected in 2001 (cuts offered but refused by distributor)

The film shows the girls being stripped at knifepoint, and forced to perform sex, and other degrading acts, for the pleasure of their kidnappers. The Board is concerned that the film's protracted scenes of gross violence against women, often of a sexual nature, may not only be unacceptable to the viewing public, but may also cause harm to viewers through their invitation to relish the (sometimes eroticised) detail of the violence and bloody killings.

### Sample of film reviews

*"It is masterfully made, but it is a tough film to watch. I am going to have a hard time getting the images out of my head. So my advice to you is, if you are going to watch this film, proceed with caution."* (Grant, 1999)

*"Low-budget shocker."* (Halliwell, 2001)

*"Controversial and grim."* (Craddock, 2001)

*"The film, to its credit, details both the initial acts of violation and the revenge that ensues as similarly de-humanising and reprehensible."* (Wood, 2001)

## 2. How viewers described the film

The overwhelmingly negative reaction (83% of participants) to this film tended to be expressed in fairly simple terms, perhaps eclipsing any opportunity for elaborated code descriptions. However one example of the few neutral comments was given in a restricted code form:

*'Based on a couple of girls who went missing, that y'know, kidnapped and tortured and...y'know, they're...one ends up raping the one. It's based on raping them both, but you don't actually see it. Both end up getting killed and they find out they've gone by one of the parents houses and the parents end up killing the villains.'*

Nick, case no. 99, moderate

More typical were the following:

*'I've been thinking about that one, I've been trying to find something, um, some redeeming feature for it, but the acting was awful, er, the cinematography was awful, there was um...the plot I found...um, pretty dire, and I couldn't work out if it was supposed to be slapstick comedy with the policemen, or horror or...well, it just seemed a bit confused, and I didn't like that one at all. And that was the only one that I almost turned off.'*

Phoebe, case no. 163, moderate

*'The sound was terrible, I thought the acting was...terrible. Even taking both of those into account, if the acting had been OK and the sound had been fine...I thought the storyline was not very good. I thought there was, literally, too much gratuitous violence...very much so. Um...I literally had to...I did not want to watch it to the end.'*

Jason, case no. 126, moderate

Many others used adjectives such as *'gruesome and sickening'* (e.g. Grace, case no. 115, moderate), *'revolting'* and *'extremely disturbing'* (Sarah, case no 188, moderate) or *'disturbing and sadistic'* (Terry, case no. 127, liberal)

Neutral:

*'Nothing really caught my attention about it.'*

Glenda, case no. 54, moderate

Only one participant provided an overall positive comment:

*'Quite good. I enjoyed it to be honest'*

Richard, case no. 34, conservative

## 3. How much viewers responded to the BBFC's concerns

The treatment of women in this film is sadistic

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
54	42	4	0	0

The film invites the viewer to enjoy the spectacle of young women being stripped and killed

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither/nor %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
29	38	13	13	8

#### 4. Release on video?

Yes '18' video %	Minor cuts %	Major cuts %	Not released %	Total %
44	12	12	32	100 (N=25)

#### 5. Overall comments

Among the films shown to the viewing panel, *The Last House on the Left* was clearly the one which viewers thought the least acceptable. Given the descriptions offered it was surprising that so many (44%) appeared to endorse its certification at '18'. However, this was clearly with some reluctance as Jason said in agreeing to an '18' video certificate:

*'Personally I think it should be banned.'*  
Jason, case no. 126, moderate

Most viewers thought that so many cuts would be needed to make the film acceptable, that very little of the film would be left.

### 3. Problem scenes and problem films

Viewers were asked to say, of the films they had watched, which one they thought might present the biggest problem for a film classification body. At other stages in the interview they were invited to comment on what scenes they had difficulty with. Additionally, when participants were reluctant to grant films an '18' certificate, they were asked to say which scenes might be cut in order to make the film acceptable. Elsewhere, participants often articulated concerns about particular films and particular scenes. This section summarises how the participants discussed these both in the interviews and in the focus groups.

A convenient starting point, to encourage the interviewees to talk about their perceptions, was to ask them:

*'Of the three films which you watched, which film contained scenes that might present the biggest problem for a film classification body? What were those scenes?'*

Only one participant (Nicola, case no. 230, moderate) said that she did not believe anything in the films she had seen should cause a problem. Nonetheless, she had agreed earlier in the interview that the first rape scene in *Death Wish II* was 'unacceptably prolonged' and that 'the humiliation goes too far' in *I Spit on your Grave*.

Three other participants mentioned more than one film. One of these (Matthew, case no 161, conservative) said all three films (*Last House*, *Baise Moi* and *I Spit on your Grave*) 'were very similar in terms of the...um...violence, sexual violence and sadism'.

Of course the ease with which participants could identify just one film as noteworthy was somewhat dependent on which others they had seen. However, overall, *Baise Moi* was more often mentioned here than any other film (by 70% of those who had seen it). This may be compared with 46% nominating *Last House on the Left*, 40% *I Spit on your Grave* and only 17% *Death Wish II*. No other films were offered as presenting particular problems, although at later stages a few participants mentioned problematical scenes in the remainder. In the following section those films described as most problematic (*Baise Moi*, *Last House on the Left* and *I Spit on your Grave*) are discussed in more detail.

Following this, participants were asked why the scenes might be a problem and what might make them acceptable. At this stage, interviewees usually were quite helpful to the research aim and often mentioned other films and scenes.

Finally they were asked whether they would describe these scenes as *titillating*, whether they thought the film makers intended audiences to be *titillated* by the scenes and whether they would describe them as *pornographic*. The importance in these questions is that, although a matter of some controversy, one ingredient which might be expected to be present for a production to be judged 'pornographic', is that the material is titillating and intended to be so (Robertson and Nicol, 2002). Thus, it is worth adding here that none of the participants used the term 'titillating' about any of the films *before* this idea was introduced in a direct question by the interviewer. Clearly, while of some import to legalistic debates, the concept does not seem to be a salient concept in the spontaneous vernacular of video renters.

## **Baise Moi**

Unlike most other films, the viewers were in good agreement that the overwhelming problem with *Baise Moi* lay particularly in the brief penetration shot during the rape scene at the beginning of the film. Although the graphic detail of violence and sex was a notable feature of the film, and for many these were difficult to deal with, the close up detail of genitalia during the rape scene clearly stood out as unacceptable. The overall impression of viewers' reactions was of both their surprise and, indeed shock at such detail.

Andrew explained:

*'Yeah, when you actually see him, like, entering her, sort of thing. You actually see the, um, sex organs, you know entering [and] To be honest with you, I think that's classed as hard -core porn, and, er, they're normally X rated.'*

Case no. 99, moderate

Charles admitted:

*'I was slightly shocked when I received that and I was watching it. I was, like, hmmm, is this stuff legal in this country?'*

Case no. 92, liberal

As Natasha put it:

*'It's the detail, really. The detail that went into it and the shots that they actually did.'*

Case no. 96, moderate

Darren's comments were typical:

*'Just, um, well...full on penetration shots and things like that. Y'know, it's more like a triple 'X' rated than the other two movies....'*

Case no. 16, liberal

And Terry said:

*'Definitely 'Baise Moi', because of the penetration. I can't see the British Board letting that through'.*

Case no. 127, liberal

Thus, when asked what would make the scenes more acceptable, it is not surprising that viewers focussed their recommendations on reducing the graphic detail in the film, with a predominance of comments on the rape scene.

The term 'pornographic' was very often applied to *Baise Moi*. In the earlier questions about each film, 83% of viewers had either agreed or strongly agreed that the shot of penetration was pornographic. Here - a later section of the interview - three quarters (75%) of those mentioning *Baise Moi* as a problem for film classification also said that the scenes were pornographic.

However the term 'pornographic' was rarely used (by only 13%) *spontaneously* in the film descriptions – that is before being introduced by the interviewer in a direct question.



Moreover, there was some indication that the term 'pornographic' was more often understood in a technical sense - as Ian explained after he was asked:

Interviewer: *Was it pornographic?*

Ian (case no. 94, moderate): *Yeah - there was, er, well there was, um, there was full sex and then they go into a, um, into a sex bar and anything was pretty much going on.*

Interviewer: *Right, so it's the full sex, it's the explicitness, is it?*

Ian: *I'd imagine so, yes. Yeah, I think, a full penetration shot is pretty much pornographic [laughs] I would say.*

Of course it is very difficult to guess how *Baise Moi* would have been judged if viewers had seen the cinema release version (where the 'pornographic' penetration shot has been removed). Certainly the decision to edit out this scene would seem to be a minimum for most viewers.

Perhaps most importantly, negative reactions to the graphic detail in the rape scene confirm earlier observations that attitudes to sex and to violence are more tolerant than to sexual violence. As Nina put it:

*'I don't think the rape scene was central to the plot, so I think the film could quite happily lose that scene and be, um, you could watch it as a body of work without that scene.'*

Nina, case no. 202, conservative

Far fewer endorsed the concept of 'titillating' as true of *Baise Moi* than had indicated that 'pornographic' was appropriate for the film. Thus less than four in ten (37%) participants were able to agree that *Baise Moi* contained scenes that were titillating and did so without much enthusiasm. One exception was Clive who replied:

*'Titillating? Yeah, certainly, yeah'*

Case no. 176, liberal

More expressed some reluctance such as Terry:

*'Erm...possibly with 'Baise Moi', yeah.'*

Case no. 127, liberal

However slightly more viewers (42%) more firmly rejected the idea. Nick, who had previously described the film as 'hard core porn', was more typical in saying:

*'They're nothing to me'.*

Case no. 99, moderate

Asking whether the film was titillating was clearly a more difficult question for interviewees. Answers were usually given somewhat hesitatingly. However, in total 38% of those who had seen *Baise Moi* agreed that the film makers might have intended it to be so, but participants tended to qualify their comments on this. For example:

*'I think in 'Baise Moi' it was, er... I just don't understand, I suppose, um, watching full sex, um, for some people is, er, like an excuse. It was either an excuse to have a story to a porn film, or...um, it was an excuse for a story to have a lot of porn in it'*

Ian, case no. 94, moderate

One other variation was apparent agreement but using different language. For example, Richard decided:

*'It was put in to excite people a bit'.*

Case no.34, conservative

Or Clive:

*'Some of the scenes are not needed'*

Case no.176, liberal

An equal number of replies (38%) rejected the notion of titillation but said that the filmmakers intended to 'shock' or 'horrify' the audience.

### **Last House on the Left**

This was often mentioned as a problem film, but there was less consensus among viewers on the problematic scenes. The general poor quality (notably of acting, plot and treatment) and the almost unrelenting assault on the two young women were both problematic. However, the general humiliation and sadistic treatment of them by the gang was more often mentioned than any particular scenes. In the rating scales reported in the earlier section, 96% of viewers agreed that *'the treatment of the women in this film is sadistic'*.

For most participants who nominated this film as presenting particular problems for a classification body, the difficulty was probably best summed up by Holly:

*'Everything I would say to cut is – the whole film really'.*

Case no. 204, conservative

Particular scenes mentioned were *'in the forest'* (a substantial part of the film) or *'most of it, particularly rapes, murders and chopping the girl's arm off'* (Nicholas, case no 58, liberal). Similarly Alexandra (case no. 235, conservative) listed *'the rapes, carving into chest, violence, made to wet themselves, humiliation'*.

Even Richard who confessed to quite enjoying the film admitted that the film might present a particular problem for classification. But:

*'Only the one where they stabbed the young girl and that type of thing. Some people it wouldn't have suited.'* He then added thoughtfully:

*'A lot of people would be a bit 'huffy' about it'*

Case no. 34, conservative

The central problems in the film seemed to be essentially twofold:

1. That the degree of violence against the women was so great that it demanded more justification than the film gave. Here the poor storyline, bad acting were a handicap. Additionally,
2. The film unsuccessfully combined humour with an extremely violent, sadistic theme.

These issues were touched on in various interviews and in the focus groups but was perhaps best expressed by two participants.

Sarah gave simple summaries of all the films she had seen:

*‘A Clockwork Orange’: I hated it!’*

*‘Straw Dogs’: I thought it was a great movie!’*

*‘Last House’: I thought it was revolting!’*

She was invited to expand on her reactions to *Last House on the Left* and said:

Sarah (moderate): *In this movie, it was unintelligent, um, it was pure...pure gratuitous violence in an extremely, well it swung from being realistic to being completely, um, idiotic. And at points that sort of swing became almost offensive.*

Interviewer: *Anything else you would like to add?*

Sarah: *I wouldn’t like to completely slag it off, because there was some quite interesting filming in it. And the fact that they did get some bits so real and so...um, lacking in what happens to a lot of violence nowadays where it’s really dressed up. I mean, there’s something almost admirable about that, even though it’s absolutely revolting. But, um, no...that’s the only good thing about it.*

Interviewer: *I take your point there. If you think about the particular scenes, though...*

Sarah: *Yeah, the ones that have stuck in my mind as disturbing scenes are...um, the murder of the, um, the stronger of the two girls – the first murder, and um...*

Interviewer: *What was the particular problem with it?*

Sarah: *Well, I think she was disembowelled at one point...and, um, and I think the...y’know, and again, if they’re going to film stuff like that they need to say why they’re doing it. The film needs to discuss it on some level...and it was just there, it was just let’s put this in as well and do nothing with it. And actually, the other problem with that as well was that the way the girls were killed seemed to reflect directly on their personalities. So, the one who was more sexily frivolous...in the opening bit, and the suggestion is she’s not that innocent, has to meet the more horrible death, and the film itself is making a rather...violent judgement against her.*

Sarah, case no 188, moderate

Linda was particularly concerned about the comic element:

*‘I think, generally, if it was better acted and better filmed...um...I think...I think the policeman sort of bit where they’re meant to be comic relief was wrong because...although, yeah, it could show them up as being really awful policemen, which they were, but having it as a bit of comedy wasn’t really appropriate, I don’t think. It doesn’t show the seriousness of the film, it...and...er...the chainsaw at the end bit was almost humourous, but it shouldn’t be because it’s not a humourous subject.’*

Case no. 88, liberal

The ‘comic’ elements in the film, at best confused a number of people.

*‘I’ve been thinking about that one, I’ve been trying to find something, um, some redeeming feature for it, but the acting was awful, er, the cinematography was awful, there was um...the plot I found...um, pretty dire, and I couldn’t work out if it was supposed to be slapstick comedy with the policemen, or horror or...well, it just seemed a bit confused, and I didn’t like that one at all. And that was the only one that I almost turned off.’*

Phoebe, case no. 163, moderate

However, the comic dimension to the film was raised sufficiently often to suggest that while, in itself not necessarily offensive, it seriously detracted from a subject which could not be treated flippantly. As Holly commented:

*'It was making light of an issue that is highly serious, which is rape. Um, even the music in that and the, um portrayal of nature and the sun shining and everything was almost like...it was making light of an issue that is so serious'.*

Holly, case no. 204, conservative

When invited to say whether they would describe any of the scenes as titillating, only five participants (20% of those who had seen the film) agreed that this was the case, but slightly more (25%) thought that scenes were intended to be titillating. However, as noted elsewhere, none used the term 'titillating' before it was introduced by the interviewer. Similarly only one viewer described the film as 'pornographic' spontaneously, but as many as 29% agreed that this term could be applied to scenes in the film when invited to comment on this by the interviewer.

These terms were not thought particularly appropriate, even though they had some resonance with viewers. Alexandra perhaps illustrates how viewers often discussed these issues. She had nominated *Last House on the Left* as a film likely to present problems for classification:

*'Because it was done in a very...voyeuristic way. Um, it was just very...there was nothing...to sort of support it'.*

She was not quite sure whether 'titillating' best described the scenes but agreed that the filmmakers had intended this:

*'...and it wasn't to feel sorry for other people...you know...it wasn't to sort of show, I don't know the situation of someone being attacked or whether that was to fit in with something. It was really to sort of, y'know...watch this gang do whatever they liked'.*

Alexandra, case no. 235, conservative

She added '*Distasteful – and you can imagine someone really enjoying it*', but, of course, this is not quite the same concept as 'titillation'. Her earlier spontaneous use of the term 'voyeuristic' more obviously captured her thoughts and best describes those of many others.

### **I Spit on Your Grave**

In total, two fifths (40%) of those who had seen *I Spit on your Grave* said this film would present a particular problem for a film classification body. Almost all focussed on the sheer length of the rape scenes:

*'I don't know if a particular scene, but it was just the length of time of...depicting this poor woman being chased around this island.'*

Ian, case no. 94, moderate

*'The prolonged rape scene...it just goes on and on and on, and I don't think...I think that would be a problem quite honestly. I don't particularly agree with censorship, but it's just more of a case of...because I couldn't see the point of it, why bother, y'know? Just want to...I'm not strongly pro-censorship, and I don't believe in stopping people watching what they want to watch, but I just think it was a tasteless film, really. The problem is the way it's filmed it's voyeuristic, and*

*it looks as though...some...I mean people could get, people get, some sorts of people could watch it for entirely the wrong reasons, I think. Like the sort of people who watch hard-core porn, 'cos it's filmed in a similar sort of way. Y'know, it's uncritical, it just goes ahead with it, it's, it's shock tactics.'*

Paul, case no. 229, liberal

### Reasons why films or scenes were problematic

Graphic detail was the clearest concept in the various reasons given why a film or scene might present a problem for a classification body. However a total of 61 reasons were counted in the transcripts. The most popular concepts are described below.

Almost one half of reasons referred to graphic detail in some way such as 'explicit' 'too graphic', 'saw too much', and 'nothing left to the imagination'.

The second most common concept was disturbing. Here viewers would mention that a scene was disturbing, or the message was disturbing or even describe their own reactions as Megan explained (talking about *I Spit on your Grave*):

*'I dunno, 'cause they're not that graphic, well I suppose they are in a way, you can't really see anything but...they're just quite violent, and, I dunno, the one thing I found really bad, erm, was that guy who's playing a retarded guy. It seemed like it was being played a bit for laughs, in the scene in the house. I think it was just his bad acting to be honest with you, but he was like a typical slow...he just seemed to be a humour character. And it just seemed really weird that he was stuck in the middle of this scene. I found myself laughing at him, which is really disturbing when you're watching a rape scene.'*

Case no. 224, liberal

A third category was that of context often expressed as 'gratuitous', 'pointless' or 'no point to it', 'unnecessary' or that [scene] was 'out of context' or 'not contextualised'.

These concepts were sometimes applied in combination. For example, *Last House on the Left* might be described as 'too graphic and disturbing'.

The relative frequency of these terms can be seen below:

Graphic %	Disturbing %	Context %	Miscellaneous %
46	23	21	10

The preponderance of graphic themes is largely due to *Baise Moi*. This film accounted for almost six in ten (57%) of its uses while *Death Wish II* attracted a further 21%

Disturbing was applied most often to *I Spit on your Grave* (43% of uses) followed by *Baise Moi* (29%)

Out of context was most often applied to *Last House on the Left* (46%) followed by *I Spit on your Grave* (38%).

The miscellany of reasons included the racism of *Death Wish II* (in the portrayal of the rapists) and one interesting case of an interviewee who took exception to figurines of Christ in *A Clockwork Orange*. Joe said:

*'Um, there was some scenes in there that I was really, really against. I wasn't happy at all about the one caption in which there were four figurines of, er, Jesus Christ, or, or made to look alike, and there was, um, like the figurines and in the film it was really tasteless, that was.'*

Case no. 151, conservative

Even more intriguingly, Joe described himself as 'not very religious'. In fact he told us he was of Islamic faith and so possibly his self description as 'not very religious' was relative to his peers who attended places of worship more often than he found possible in his busy life.

### **What would make them more acceptable?**

Inviting viewers to explain how the films or scenes could be made more acceptable rarely developed beyond the concepts listed above. Cutting scenes, either in length or graphic detail, was the most popular recommendation, but did not seem entirely convincing as the principal objection to a film.

However, when the overall pattern of each interview was examined, and the various discourses inspected, the most frequently appearing concepts were not related to the explicitness. Graphic detail was primarily mentioned as relevant to *Baise Moi*. The pattern of responses to the other films suggested that the predominant themes, in fact, revolved around ideas of context or the narrative justification given in the films. Thus, taking the interviews as a whole, it seemed that graphic detail was less of a problem if viewers could accept that the film justified the explicit scenes in some way. The following sections deal with various perceptions of film messages (the perceived narrative) and discourse about justification (context).

#### 4. Messages

Viewers were probed directly about perceived messages in films when they discussed which films might present the biggest problem for a film classification body. The questions were:

1. *Thinking about the film overall, do you think it gave any particular message about sexual violence? What was this?*
2. *Did it give any overall message about women, men and the relationships between them? What was this?*

A total of 65 responses were obtained to these two questions. Not surprisingly, given that *Baise Moi*, *Last House on the Left* and *I Spit on your Grave* were most often mentioned as problem films, these three films accounted for three quarters (73%) of all the messages identified by viewers.

Most (66%) of the messages were fairly literal descriptions of the film's narrative while only around one third moved beyond this to more abstract interpretations.

Examples of fairly literal messages would be:

##### ***Baise Moi:***

*'The message is it's not good, and, um, it gets worse because of the way that the women then started attacking men.'*

Michelle, case no. 57, moderate

*'The way it came across to me, it looked like...as if, um, they're saying 'if men can do it, then we can do it. And we're not gonna put up for men doing what they did to us.' So this is like a pay back kind of thing.'*

Elizabeth, case no. 117, moderate

##### ***Last House on the Left:***

*'Yeah, not to, like, I think they're trying to tell, like, young girls not to go out on their own, really, and y'know not to leave your wife in the home when there's strange men about.'*

Nick, case no. 99, moderate

*'Well only that one where the two girls went into that house. I mean that was, I think that was a bit, er, trying to tell young girls not to, go into houses, like, y'know, with strangers.'*

Richard, case no. 34, conservative

Indeed, few of the messages provided much illumination of just why some viewers found some films more acceptable than others. For example:

*'Reinforced the fact that, y'know, sex can be so misused and so, um, it's not an end in itself. And it was portraying...perhaps it was portraying the hopelessness of that. It makes you very callous towards other people's feelings...maybe.'*

Andy, case no. 198, conservative (on *Baise Moi*)

*'A message of, um, sort of, misuse of power and violence...sort of get what you want and do what you want to force people to do what you wanted, because you can.'*

Wendy, case no. 102, moderate (on *Baise Moi*)

There is little in the above two quotations to indicate whether the viewers found the films acceptable or not. In fact both participants recommended that the film should not be released at all.

Of course, some of the viewers made it quite clear that they took exception to a film's message. For example:

*'I think it objectifies women totally. Um, it gives its own messages, i.e. a young girl whose...budding sexuality is slightly frivolous or...hinting at promiscuity, will meet with a violent death. The two seem to be...y'know, equivocal, whereas the more innocent of the two girls gets let off lightly. So there's some really worrying messages about women. And the mother, I mean it's so dated it's a bit unfair to criticise the film for the way that she's portrayed but...Gordon Bennett! She is completely naïve and stupid, and, and then capable of, y'know, killing this other woman. And, of course, the woman...the criminal woman, is described as an animal...not the men, but the woman. And the news reporters describe her as an animal, and you just think again 'how come they are nasty, violent, powerful criminals and she just becomes an, y'know, made into an animal?'*

Sarah, case no. 188, moderate (on *Last House on the Left*)

However, despite this strength of feeling, Sarah wished to see only minor cuts to the film. Perhaps the most interesting discussions about film messages were prompted by the rape scenes in *Straw Dogs*. Viewers were asked (earlier in the interview) whether the film gave the message that when a woman says 'no' she might really mean 'yes'. Almost twice as many viewers agreed to this as disagreed (60% versus 32%). This rape myth was perceived as the message by a number of viewers. For example Nick said:

*'Um, like 'Straw Dogs' when they're saying, y'know, if you raped a woman what's she gonna do. I mean, 'cos she doesn't want it at first, 'cos she's, like forcing him away, but she seemed to enjoy it after.'*

Case no. 99, moderate

Others were less sure. For example Linda replied:

*'I actually thought 'Straw Dogs' was very good...um... for the portrayal of the rape scene and...um...her reaction afterwards. I thought that was very good. How she coped with her husband and the flashbacks when she saw them and stuff like that...I thought that was quite realistic. Got the message across that, y'know, it's not a good thing, basically. That it does affect people seriously.'*

Linda, case no. 88, liberal

The rape scenes in *Straw Dogs* were discussed at some length in one of the focus groups:

Zoe (liberal): *I don't think she's enjoying the act, I just think she's enjoying...the closeness of somebody. Somebody actually caring enough to...y'know*

Marie (conservative): *I don't think it's ambiguous enough to...to say that she looks like she's enjoying it, probably.*

Facilitator: *It started off, he was knocking her around. Did it progress at all...I mean, how did the scene change?*

Zoe: *He started feeling closer to her. Um...when the bloke, the other man came back with a gun and he didn't want to...sort of get out the way, he was...it was enough. It was almost like he wasn't really meaning to abuse her, I s'pose...*



Marie: No. But that's the...that's the point, because he... 'cause there's that bit in the middle where he...the other guy comes in and he's kind of all protective of her and it's like 'No!' and you're kind of 'Oh no! Leave him alone!.'

Steve (liberal): It's almost a case of, I dunno...possibly difficult...you almost get the impression that the first bloke probably doesn't actually believe that what he did was rape. Because, I mean, there's the definite insinuation...um, in the film, that she's had a relationship with this bloke previously...it is definitely...it is quite unquestionably rape, what he does to her. You get the distinct impression that...he would've said 'oh yeah, she was reluctant to start with, but it wasn't rape.' Y'know, this chap probably doesn't believe that what he has just done is rape, whereas when the second chap appears, he believes that what the second chap is about to do is...rape her and would see it very, very differently from what he had just done. Um...I can probably see why the BBFC would have problems with it...but then, also saying that I think taking it out would...I think without that the film would be missing an important episode.

Zoe: Hmm, I don't think it would make sense without that...

Steve: Because what happens right at the end...where she gets attacked from...the chap who was the first one to attack her goes up to help her. And without that...without having that first rape scene, that probably wouldn't make as much sense. You would be like, y'know, why's he done this? Y'know, he's already raped her, why does he care what anybody else does?

## Conclusion

In the earlier section (*the films, viewer reactions and overall judgements*), participants responded quite readily to attitude statements such as *'the film gives the message that women can recover quickly from rape'* (50% agreed this was true of *I Spit on Your Grave*). Additionally, viewers often used the term 'message' directly or similar phrases like *'the film seems to be saying that...'* However, when asked specifically whether the film or scenes gave any message about sexual violence or about men and women and so on, the responses were somewhat hesitant. Many answers simply described the plot. Moreover, there seemed to be no obvious relationship between agreeing that a film had a 'bad' message and willingness to censor it. The impression from interviewees was that they did not usually think of these films in such terms.

Despite this, some of the discourses about a scene's meaning (notably the rape in *Straw Dogs*) touched on its role within the film's narrative, but this is a somewhat different concept. In this latter sense it relates more closely to the way in which participants discussed the idea of context which is examined below.

## 5. Context above all

As indicated earlier, the viewing panel participants were more likely to talk about most films in terms of the importance of context in the representation of sexual violence than any other issue. To be sure, the graphic detail, especially in *Baise Moi*, the sheer length of harrowing scenes, especially in *I Spit on your Grave* and *Last House on the Left*, the perceived messages in the film, worries about copycat violence and sundry other matters were often important. However, these were almost always discussed by reference to context – a concept which usually embraced some judgement of what the film was trying to achieve. The central issue for most viewers was: Did the film as a whole justify what was shown?

By way of summary, this emerged particularly strongly in focus groups where participants were pressed to say what might make the portrayals of sexual violence more acceptable. What if the film had been made by a famous director, or it was ‘art house’ (for example, in a foreign language), or made three decades ago, or based on an actual event? Would such considerations make any difference to the judgements about a film’s acceptability? Ideally they might, since this would make the task of film classification somewhat easier.

However, while toying with the idea that a film’s vintage might be pertinent, viewers strongly rejected these various suggestions as important considerations when judging whether a film was acceptable or not. Apparently, a film’s integrity could not be enhanced or retrieved by considerations beyond those demonstrated in the film itself. This is particularly well illustrated in the focus group discussions about *Last House on the Left*.

Emma (liberal): *I also think for me it was difficult watching two films that were clearly of an age, and a contemporary film like ‘Baise Moi’, d’ye know what I mean? It’s very difficult to make the comparisons because of the societal changes that you know have happened. And I think it might have been easier if I’d had all films from 1974, so you’ve got a level playing field...or all films from ‘96 or something. I don’t think it helped me to sort out some of the issues in my mind because of the, the dis...the different ages of the films.*

Susan (conservative): [to Harry] *We said that, didn’t we? It was ‘cause...seen as Last House on the Left came to us like a 1970s...y’know. All the ones you’d seen before as...*

Emma: *So I think it might have helped me, certainly, get me ‘ead round it a bit more if they’d of all been of the sort of contemporaneous nature.*

Vernon (moderate): *Very good point, Emma. It’s a cultural gap, isn’t it? It’s almost a generational gap.*

Facilitator: *I wonder if you could comment a bit more on that. I mean you’ve said, y’know, you need to look at each film on an individual basis, I mean, sure, I understand that, but is there some general advice you might have for the BBFC? I mean, what makes sexual violence more or less acceptable? What do you do if the film’s old? Perhaps a good example is um, ‘Baise Moi’, French, art house, subtitles. Does it make it more acceptable?*

Jason (moderate): *It doesn’t make it more acceptable, but at least you know what you’re letting yourself in for...people know what they’re letting themselves in for.*

Facilitator: *If a film’s very old does there come a time when, when they say ‘well, for heaven’s sake. You know, it’s 30 years old, it’s so dated...’*

At this point the facilitator: mentions that someone had claimed that *Last House on the Left* was loosely based on the Charles Manson gang who murdered Sharon Tate.

If they had believed it to be based on a true story, would it have made any difference to their judgements on the film?

Susan: *As for that Charles Manson thing, um, I think in that way it makes me feel even worse, because, er, because I mean that was, I think it was three girls and a boy who went in and killed Sharon Tate and the people who were there at the time, and that almost makes light of it. And it was, like I say, such a big thing at the time that they were going and doing that, under the, um, Charles Manson sort of persuasion that, um, it really...to connect the two together makes seems really strange, because that sort of makes the film worse, it just makes such lightness of it, and er, as I say, it was such a serious thing at the time. It still would be if it happened today, it'd be still...I can see the comparison, in that this a girl and the two, is it two men or three men...three men and a lady. I can almost see the comparison, but as I say, that'd make the film worse to me 'cause it was totally...I mean it was like it was, it was quite funny in places the film was, I found it quite funny in places, which is probably stupid.*

Facilitator: [raises the same issue in the second focus group]:

Zoe (liberal): *I think if you deal with such issues as that then you should have good actors and a good storyline and just focus on making it a good film, really. Because if that was the subject and you betray it like that... um...it was almost sort of comic it's so bad.*

Marie (conservative): *It got sort of comic at the end with the...*

Zoe:(liberal) *...and surely it's not right to be comic with such a serious issue.*

Anna (moderate): *The most interesting part of it was when the parents got their own back, and that lasted a whole 10 minutes out of like a hour and a half, two hour film.*

Marie: *She didn't half get 'em, didn't she?*

Facilitator: *Do you think that was a bit out of character?*

Steve (liberal): *There didn't actually seem to be any sort of character development in the film. Um...I mean, you say it was an attempt to, y'know, putting on film a reaction to a, to a serious event. I have to say that probably actually makes it even worse...the fact that somebody could take a serious and horrific event and use it as...a justification to make such utter exploitative crap...um, I mean...plot development, character development, story development, it's like...let's lurch from one gratuitous set piece to the next, um...yeah, as I say, if anything that probably makes the film seem even worse.*

Clearly the attempts by the facilitator to draw out other perspectives on a film which might make it more acceptable were firmly rejected. A bad film was simply a bad film.

What is particularly important about the idea of context is that it appeared to be equally salient to all the varieties of viewer identified as having large differences in attitudes to the portrayal of sexual violence: Men and women; older and younger people; liberal and conservative voices shared similar views about the importance of context: context determined acceptability.

As noted earlier, viewers used a variety of terms to refer to context. The main ones were of course 'context' but additionally other key words used were 'gratuitous', 'pointless' and 'unnecessary'. These words were used in global searches of the interview transcripts. The extracts overleaf show how the terms were used.

Context:

*'The sexual violence...sometimes I think comes through as being sexual violence for sexual violence sake and to sell...sell a film. Whereas, I think full blown sex on the cinema might have its place, so long as it's in...just shown to be in the right situations. I think the context is important for me, in this sort of film with this sort of subject.'*

Michael, case no. 29, conservative

*'I would just say it was a very good film, very well acted and, and the violence in it in and everything was...acceptable and in context with the film's storyline and the points it was trying to get across, about the relationships and personalities.'*

Linda, case no. 88, liberal (on *Straw Dogs*)

*'The humiliation in the woods...that was er...that was particularly repellent. The scenes within the hotel, well the room, er, were ok...they weren't pleasant, but they were, at that point they were within context. When they started in the woods to, um...start humiliation, I didn't really enjoy that. And when they start...when they actually killed one of the two of the ladies...no! It just wasn't pleasant at all.' [and] I've actually seen more violent films, to be honest...but they've been within context. In that film there didn't seem to be...any reasonable context.'*

Jason, case no. 126, moderate (on *Last House*)

*'I think with the sexual content I think...I don't think that people should really be wanting to watch films, y'know, which actually show intimate details of sexual acts, y'know, portrayed in a very...um, disturbing way which y'know, is nothing to do with relationships, it's nothing to do with intimacy...it's to do with carnal enjoyment which...which portrays completely the wrong aspects of...of...sex within the context of y'know actually being very...y'know sensual for people watching it.' [and on *Right to see sexual violence*] 'I think that's a lot more debatable...I think, y'know...it depends what context it's in. It's a lot more...um, disturbing. It has a lot more impact on you.'*

Andy, case no. 198, conservative

*'That, um, A) it's alright to do these sort of things, um, B) you can quite easily get away with it and C) it made light of the whole issue. It took a serious issue, um, took it out of context and made it seem so easy...um, and fun. And together with the music and the bright day and the, y'know, singing in the car on the way down there and everything, they just made it into some sort of easy, fun thing to do.'*

Holly, case 204, conservative (on *Last House on the Left*)

*'I think, er, it's all presented very much within context...and we see the comeuppance...y'know, we see the moral side of things as well.'*

Rebecca, case no. 233, liberal (on *Clockwork Orange*)

*'There's nothing but, um, murder and rape. The in between parts are violent, there's very little story going on, so it's, um, there's nothing but that. Whereas the others, perhaps the violence or rape is part of an ongoing story. It's in context more in the others, perhaps.'*

Rebecca, case no. 233, liberal (on *I Spit on your Grave*)

Gratuitous:

*'To be fair...in context, if a rape is very graphic but it is...achieving something within a film in terms of, um, to elicit an audience's reaction because they...y'know, such as a very famous film in terms of rape – The Accused- y'know, I mean I thought that was quite a graphic film, but it elicited the right reaction because you needed to empathise with the character and so forth. Y'know, but then everybody has a different tolerance level.'*

Nina, case no. 202, conservative

*'Gratuitous violence.'* Darren, case no. 16, liberal (on *I Spit on your Grave*)

*'That was the most gratuitous.'* Michelle, case no. 5, moderate (on *Baise Moi*)

*'Did I see any point to the film [*'Last House*]? Not a lot, really. It was fairly gratuitous. [and] 'Whilst it was similar, in a way, to, um, *I Spit on your Grave*, I think it was probably more gratuitous. Making it more acceptable is irrelevant, because it was, um, a fairly gratuitous subject anyway. So you couldn't of made it more acceptable...otherwise there would have been no point to it at all.'*

Nicholas, case no. 58, liberal

*'The sound was terrible, I thought the acting was...terrible. Even taking both of those into account, if the acting had been ok and the sound had been fine...I thought the storyline was not very good. I thought there was, literally, too much gratuitous violence...very much so. Um...I literally had to...I did not want to watch it to the end.'*

Jason, case no. 126, moderate (on *Last House on the Left*)

*'All three films were very similar in terms of the...um...violence, sexual violence and sadism. Um, but...actually I would say '*I Spit on your Grave*' was, I thought, that was the first film I saw, that was er...that showed scenes of, um...gratuitous sexual violence and sadism that wasn't necessary. It was explicit without being necessary! I thought, er, the scenes in that film would cause problems.'*

Matthew, case no. 161, conservative

*'I thought it was revolting! [laughs] I'd say, y'know, '*Clockwork Orang*'e I could see there was a lot of cleverness in it. In this movie, it was unintelligent, um, it was pure...pure gratuitous violence in an extremely, well it swung from being realistic to being completely, um, idiotic. And at points that sort of swing became almost offensive.'*

Sarah, case no. 188, moderate (on *Last House on the Left*)

*'Extremely disturbing, um...you think about it a lot after you'd watched it, particularly if you're not used to watching films like that. Er, certainly not suitable for anybody under the age of...I'd probably say '18' minimum, really. Um...and to be honest I found it, um, quite gratuitous. It was sort of playing on the violence and the sex together and that seemed to be the whole point of the film. And there was no other point to it.'*

Holly, case no. 204, conservative (on *Last House on the Left*)

*'It was palatable. It had a beginning, a middle and an end, and it wasn't trying to be gratuit...well, I didn't think it was trying to be gratuitous.'*

Nicola, case no. 230, moderate (on *Straw Dogs*)

### Unnecessary:

*'There was a lot of very graphic, basically y'know, what I would label pornography. The sexual content was...was...very unnecessary to anything. Um...and the sort of the club basis, and where they invite a man into their room and...and then eventually kill him. Yeah, it's just like hell on earth, really.'*  
Andy, case no. 198, conservative (on *Baise Moi*)

*'I would've thought scenes that depict graphic displays of sort of oral sex, penetration, that sort of thing would make it difficult for...release, or general release. But at the same time, I s'pose...I think the one thing I remember being taken aback by was the scene of sort of close up penetration in a rape scene. It was a bit unusual in terms of...well, unnecessary, would probably be a phrase.'*  
Gavin, case no. 217, liberal (on *Baise Moi*)

*'Extremely violent, unnecessary rape scenes.'* Paul, case no 229, liberal (on *I Spit on your Grave*)

### Pointless:

*'It seems a really pointless film because...it's not well enough acted to...um...portray the idea that what is going on is unpleasant. There doesn't seem to be a point to this film, it just seems to be sex and violence and unpleasantness.'*  
Linda, case no. 88, liberal (on *Last House*)

*'...because there was the, um, club for people to have sex in and that was just...um...well it was part of the storyline, sort of, but it...it's very difficult because there was so much of it that after a while it became a bit pointless.'*  
Linda, case no. 88, liberal (on *Baise Moi*)

*'Quite harrowing and, um...pointless.'*  
Lucy, case no. 192, liberal (on *Straw Dogs*)

### **Conclusion**

The prevalence of these context-related discourses provides an illuminating perspective on how viewers judged the films. They seem particularly relevant as an indicator of a film's acceptability. Thus, it was the absence of context or justification which made the unpleasant scenes in *Last House on the Left* so troublesome. As a consequence, viewers had difficulty understanding why anyone should want to watch such a film and this raised concerns about the kind of people who might enjoy it. These concerns about harm are examined next.

## 6. Concerns about harm

It might be expected that viewers would often voice their concerns about the potentially harmful effects of the kinds of films they had seen. For example, in the initial survey of video renters, almost one third (32%) of the viewing panel participants had agreed with the statement: *'The problem of rape in society is bound to be made worse by the easy availability of videos which show sexual violence'*.

After seeing the films, the proportion of viewing panel members agreeing with this statement rose to 40% (with the number 'strongly agreeing' increasing from 4% to 12%). Similarly, when first surveyed, 26% of the viewing panel had agreed that: *'Watching violence makes people more likely to be violent in real life.'* After seeing the films, the proportion agreeing rose to 44%.

It was very clear from the interviews that many participants simply had not appreciated just how 'graphic' some of the films might be. Indeed, a number admitted to being *'quite shocked'* at the level of gritty sexual violence. This was despite a vigilant ethical focus in the research design on informed consent, which stressed the controversial nature of the films.

In this context, it was surprising that, overall, *spontaneous* mentions of concerns about copycat behaviour as such, were quite rare. More often mentioned, especially in focus groups, was the puzzle of what kinds of people would want to watch these kinds of films - with the implication here that such people could be quite disturbed.

Most of the relevant comments on this were prompted directly when viewing panel members were asked: *'Do you think that scenes of sexual violence might encourage copycat behaviour?'*

Interviewers were also instructed to probe: *'Which of the ones you have seen might fit this category?'*

In total, one third (34%) of the viewing panel members either said 'yes' to the first question or provided a film title thus endorsing this view. Additionally, an equal number (34% of viewers) replied that some people *might* if they were that way inclined or predisposed to do so. A further 12% said that this was a *possibility* while the remaining 20% clearly disagreed and said 'no'.

These answers are somewhat difficult to evaluate, since, however unlikely, the theoretical possibility of some deviant mind being influenced by a film can never be completely rejected.

Only a small proportion (18%) of viewers gave film titles when invited to do so:

*Death Wish II* given by four viewers (17% of all those who had watched the film)

*Baise Moi* by one viewer

*Last House on the Left* by one participant

*A Clockwork Orange* by one participant

*I Spit on your Grave* by one participant

Interestingly, *Straw Dogs* was not mentioned at all. However, if *Straw Dogs* is considered on a checklist of factors which some believe to represent the problem of sexual violence, it offers an unusually high cocktail of support for rape justification. Indeed, the BBFC concerns (listed earlier) represent a fairly modest summary.

In *Straw Dogs*:

1. A very attractive woman (played by Susan George) is portrayed resisting her attacker who continues to slap her around until she finally submits to rape.
2. During which she is depicted as beginning to show some pleasure and even affection towards her assailant.
3. Her assailant is a fairly normal member of the local community – a reasonably handsome ‘regular kind of guy’ who viewers might identify with.
4. He is seen to ‘get away with it’ (she does not call the police).
5. He was portrayed as an ex-boyfriend of the now married woman.
6. For UK viewers, the setting is not psychologically distanced (by time or culture).

Thus, arguably, the film more clearly represents ‘dangerous’ messages about rape than any of the other films seen by the viewing panel. It is far from clear why no viewer mentioned it.

On the other hand, in *Death Wish II* (most often cited as likely to encourage copycat violence), the rape scenario lacks most of the key ingredients for viewer identification and imitation. Indeed it is almost completely the opposite of *Straw Dogs*:

The gang of rapists are portrayed as unattractive characters with whom viewers would be unlikely to identify. They are depicted as part of some underclass – as Andrew put it:

*‘...portrayed as basically, y’know, anima...an...er, sadistic and unpleasant animals, who lead in all the sexual violence, who delight in it, who, y’know, who grin at it, yeah, er I thought it was, huh, y’know, horrific for that reason’.*

Case no. 98, liberal

Moreover, there is no ambiguity in the victim’s distressed reaction, nor her unpremeditated murder, nor in the ‘moral’ message that if the law cannot punish such violent offenders, the vigilante will.

Thus, the choice of *Death Wish II* as a problem film in terms of copycat violence is at first sight difficult to understand and quite intriguing. Possibly, it reflects other rape myths held by viewers such as of the violent stranger where the danger is perceived to come from deranged ‘outsiders’ invading our communities. The more mundane and dangerous reality is, of course, that rapists tend to be undistinguished and may pass unnoticed in the local shop.

The worry that unpleasant films might pose a particular problem in influencing unstable people was made by a number of interviewees. Audrey found the rape scenes in *Death Wish II* and *A Clockwork Orange* unacceptable but worried most about *I Spit on Your Grave*, saying that when she watched it ‘*I got this really cringe feeling*’ and:

*‘I think that people who are fairly, y’know, mentally and emotionally well-balanced will probably be appalled at them, and, and, y’know, um, and not even think about doing y’know, anything even remotely like what the things that happened in that film. But I think if, y’know, people are watching it who are already a bit unstable,*



*mentally unstable or emotionally unstable, it could incite them to go out and...do comparable things, if not copy it in full.'*

Audrey, case no 87, conservative

Only one of the participants, Emma, could offer any 'informed' opinion in this area. This emerged in a focus group when Susan raised her concerns about the kinds of people who might rent some of the films:

Susan (conservative): *It still worries me, who would choose to hire it. It really still bothers me, who would actually choose to...to hire it and how, what they would feel about it. I mean, everybody in this room says we watched them, yeah they were discovered no lasting effects and we're not gonna go out and jump on somebody in the street, but it's the people who choose to. Y'know, that bothers me. How do they feel about people around them...are they, I mean, but are they gonna effect their attitudes towards women they live with, or women they come into contact with? And that bothers me. I think if one rape came out of it, it'd be one too many.*

Emma (liberal): *But I think, I mean certainly my experiences of, of working with sexual offenders, perpetrators of sexual offences is, believe me, they can take Jackanory, and in their deviant thought world it, they don't need it to be that explicit, believe me. People who want to go down that route, and their deviancy, their thought processes are such that...d'ye know what I mean?*

Toni (conservative): *There's a lot of grey area there though, of perhaps...I mean, certainly having been a student and hearing about cases of boys who got girls blind drunk and...sleep with them. Perhaps they, y'know, they might not consider themselves to be rapists. And perhaps they can see the film as 'yeah, it's okay.' Perhaps they would've seen a thing on TV about, y'know, slipping some drugs to her though, or something.*

Jason (moderate): *I think that's a diff...if it's...you're right to bring that up, but I think that's a society morals thing. Um...yeah, you see people, or you read about people in the newspapers who think there's nothing wrong with that, y'know getting, er, a man or a woman blind drunk and doing what they want with them. But that's a society moral issue. I'm not really sure. I know it doesn't affect me. If I watch something horrible I'm not immediately thinking to myself 'will I do that?' be it pure violence or robbing a bank, or, or sexual violence...but in the back of me mind, as you just said, I'm sure it will suggest things to some people. In some cases, if only 'yeah I can do that, because for, if I do it this way I can get away with that type of thing.'*

Vernon (moderate): *But...I think really fantasy has its own rules. We may not think consciously that we are attracted by these things, but deep down they may have a corrupting influence.*

Jason: *Well, yeah, everything affects us, so there's no reason to think a film or a TV programme won't affect us. Even if it only affects us in a revulsion sort of way.*

## **Conclusion**

One difficulty usually encountered in asking opinions about media effects is that most people believe that they themselves are quite immune from such influence but that other people are much more vulnerable (Perloff, 2002). For example, children of almost any age will agree that someone a bit younger than themselves could be influenced by media. Thus, while many viewers here seem to support concerns about the imitation of sexual violence in film, the beliefs cannot be considered to be grounded and so are difficult to evaluate. Certainly concerns about the kinds of people who would want to watch a film like *Last House on the Left* seemed much stronger than that such people might be changed by the experience.

## 7. The limits of tolerance

The selection of participants was designed to achieve a good cross section of views rather than a representative sample. The aim was to examine how different attitudes to censorship and regulation might produce different evaluations of the films.

Thus, fairly equal numbers were recruited from the various age bands so that almost one half (49%) of the viewing panel was over the age of 35 compared with just under one third (32%) in the survey of video renters. Similarly, equal numbers of men and women were selected whereas the survey indicated that the majority of video store customers were male. The consequence of this should be to boost the representation of more conservative opinion. Additionally, in the survey only one in ten believed that there was 'too little' censorship, but the two respondents who appeared to have the strongest opinion on this (they mentioned that they had attended 'the Media March') were both invited to be participants in the viewing panel.

In the results so far, the categories of 'conservative', 'moderate' and 'liberal' have been used to identify viewers who, in the survey, had told us that they thought there was 'too little' regulation, the amount was 'about right' or there was 'too much' respectively. These categories did not appear to discriminate well between the various kinds of discourse viewers offered about the films. In this section, we return to the judgements made about each film and examine the recommendations alongside a profile of each participant.

Tables 13 to 18 show the results for each film in the same rank order as given previously (from the most to the least acceptable film).

In Table 13 (*Straw Dogs*) only very small numbers (5 participants) wished to see any cuts. However, three out of the four viewers with conservative attitudes to regulation wished to see cuts or a ban. Moreover four out of the five were classified as 'agree' to beliefs that videos may cause harm. Three out of five had agreed that '*people over the age of eighteen have a right to see graphic detail on video*' – a view which was clearly at odds with their recommendations on the film.

In Table 14 (*A Clockwork Orange*) the role of attitudes to regulation appears clearer since all six participants wishing to see some cuts or a ban, were conservative and none of these agreed with the right to see graphic detail on video.

However, in Table 17 (*I Spit on Your Grave*) the pattern is broken where, among the seven participants wishing to see major cuts or a complete ban on the film, five were classified as liberal in their attitudes to regulation and five had agreed that adults have the right to see graphic detail on video. Moreover, half of those who felt the film could be released uncut had been categorised as conservative in their attitudes to regulation.

Examining the profiles of participants and their judgements about each film does not provide a very clear or consistent picture. Perhaps the most surprising, and indeed extraordinary, finding was that the three groups selected to represent conservative, moderate and liberal views fairly consistently failed to reveal such attitudes when invited to recommend how the films should be classified. Even more puzzling this was also true in the focus groups, where participants were selected to amplify for and against views. Indeed, the participants were told that they had been selected because we wanted to explore the arena of differences in opinion. However the level of agreement among participants was more notable than any differences.

The viewing panel clearly had a number of problems with a number of the films. However detecting any pattern attributable to the characteristics of the participants was, of course, hampered by relatively few of them wishing to see cuts to *Straw Dogs* or *A Clockwork Orange*. The reverse was true of *Last House on the Left* and *I Spit on Your Grave*.

A clearer picture emerges when all of the decisions made about the films are cross-tabulated with all of the known characteristics of the viewing sample (including the information given in the screening survey questionnaire). Table 19 shows a simple summary of these judgements according to whether the decision was to release as seen as an '18' or whether cuts were needed/the film banned. While this is a crude split, it divides the sample into two fairly equally sized groups. Of course, since the table shows the three judgements of each participant, rather than individual participants, each individual is represented three times. Thus, the table exaggerates the contribution of individuals, but is useful here since very few liberals consistently urged that all three films should be released uncut while few conservatives consistently argued for cuts in each of the three films they had watched.

Table 19 offers a fascinating new dimension. However, given the small number of participants involved, these results should be treated as 'hypothesis-suggesting' patterns rather than 'hypothesis-testing' ones.

Clearly, gender emerges as a promising discriminator. It is worth remembering here that in selecting equal numbers of men and women, the genders were matched as far as possible on attitudes to censorship, rights to see graphic material etc. In the list of films, *Last House on the Left* is notable in being supported for an '18' release uncut by nine men and only one woman, while, among those wishing to see cuts, only three men argued for this compared with eleven women. However, returning to the broader pattern across all judgements of all films, the most obvious characteristics associated with liberal judgements seem:

- Being male – in total 69% of judgements by men were to release the films uncut compared with only 41% of judgements by women.
- Enjoying gritty films – based on having an interest in watching the sample of 'gritty' film titles offered earlier in the survey. Here 75% of the judgements by those with a high interest in such films were to release uncut compared with only 41% of those with a low interest in such films.
- Being a 'risky' viewer – based on whether participants had told us they were likely to view a film which they knew nothing about. Here 76% of judgements by those very likely to do so were to release without cuts compared with only 40% by those unlikely to do so.
- Not believing films could be harmful – based on whether or not participants believed that film/video portrayals of graphic violence or sexual violence were likely to increase such problems in society and that there was a need to protect children from '18' certificated films. Overall 70% of judgements by those disagreeing with this belief were to release the films uncut compared with only 48% of judgements by those who agreed.
- A number of other viewer characteristics appear consistent with expectations. Those who believed that people over the age of eighteen have a right to see graphic portrayals (of violence, real sex and sexual violence) were less censorious. Thus, 63% of judgements by those who agreed with this right recommended releasing films uncut compared with only 51% of those who disagreed with this right

- Similarly, those who thought that there was 'too much' regulation were far more likely to recommend releasing films uncut than those who thought there was 'too little' regulation (61% and 43% respectively).
- Surprisingly, there was little difference between those who scored relatively low on their frequency of video rental compared with those who scored high (60% and 56% respectively would release the films ) and the trend is in the *opposite* direction to that expected. It appears that those with children at home were more likely to recommend releasing films uncut than those without (73% versus 50%) but this is based on a very small group of parents.

The age split seems interesting in that those 35+ were less likely to want cuts or a ban than their younger counterparts (only 47% of those under 35 agreed release uncut compared with 64% of those older than this). Again this is quite the opposite of what might be predicted about the behaviour of age cohorts. This is especially so remembering the results of the survey where those 'very interested' in horror declined notably in those over 35 years old. From a stable 37% very interested across each of the age cohorts from 18-20, 21-24 through to 25-34 the proportion then dropped to 18% in those 35-44 and fell to only 8% in those older than this.

However, it must also be remembered that the majority of the films used in this study were of 1970's vintage. Not only are the younger age groups much more interested in recent releases, but also their awareness and appreciation of 70's films would be much lower than among the 40+ age groups. This also emerged in the survey where knowledge of and interest in a sample of 'gritty' films (which included three titles used in the study) was much higher in the older age groups.

A final set of data is provided in Table 20. This shows the film judgements made for each member of the viewing panel. Overall, only 30% of the participants recommended that all three of their films should be released uncut. Those with liberal attitudes to regulation were only slightly more likely to do so than moderates (44% of liberals, 32% of moderates). However only one participant with conservative attitudes to regulation recommended that all three films should be released uncut (representing 8% of conservative opinion).

Perhaps the most important point is that the majority of those with liberal attitudes to regulation were able to draw the line on some of these films.

## Conclusions

A number of participants had said that they did not think there were any general features (such as famous director, art house), which would normally influence their judgements about a film's acceptability. Their sound advice was that decisions could only be made on a film-by-film basis. At first sight, this seemed to be so true of most members of the viewing sample that the variety of classification recommendations seemed to swamp the expected individual differences.

Fortunately, the macro analysis of all of the viewing judgements revealed a far more consistent pattern where many of the expected differences between groups emerged quite clearly. However, equally important was the flexibility shown by individuals in their judgements about particular films. These demonstrate that few participants could be accused of following their beliefs to the point of prejudice.

Table 13 *Straw Dogs* – Should the film be given an ‘18’ certificate?

	Case Name	Gender	Age	Education	Children	Attitude	Video Renter	Sample Interest	Fantasy Interest	Religious	Right to see	Belief in harm	Risky viewer
Yes	12 Anna	Female	21-24	Further	No	Mod	Med	Mod	Hi	Quite	Neither	Disagree	Not
	30 Charles	Male	45+	Higher	Yes	Mod	Med	Lo	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Not
	57 Michelle	Female	45+	Further	No	Mod	Med	Hi	Hi	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
	62 Trevor	Male	35-44	Further	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Hi	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Very
	78 Jennifer	Female	45+	Higher	No	Lib	Med	Hi	Hi	Not at all	Disagree	Disagree	Not
	88 Linda	Female	21-24	Higher	No	Lib	Light	--	Hi	Very	Agree	Disagree	Not
	89 Steve	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Hi	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	98 Andrew	Male	45+	Higher	No	Lib	Heavy	Hi	Mod	Not at all	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	99 Nick	Male	21-24	Further	No	Mod	Light	Mod	Mod	Quite	Agree	Agree	Very
	115 Grace	Female	35-44	School	Yes	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Mod	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
	117 Elizabeth	Female	21-24	Further	No	Mod	Heavy	--	Mod	Not very	Neither	Neither	Quite
	126 Jason	Male	45+	School	No	Mod	Heavy	Hi	Hi	Not at all	Disagree	Agree	Very
	127 Terry	Male	21-24	School	No	Lib	Heavy	Hi	Hi	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Very
	156 Brian	Male	21-24	Further	No	Lib	Med	Mod	Mod	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	182 Keith	Male	45+	Higher	Yes	Mod	Med	Mod	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Not
	188 Sarah	Female	35-44	Further	Yes	Mod	Med	Mod	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Not
	197 David	Male	35-44	Further	Yes	Mod	Med	Lo	Lo	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
	208 Denise	Female	35-44	Higher	No	Lib	Med	Lo	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Quite
	230 Nicola	Female	35-44	School	No	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Lo	--	Neither	Neither	Quite
	235 Alexandra	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Med	Hi	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Very
	Total	N	20	20	20	20	20	18	20	19	20	20	20
No, few cuts													
	92 Charles	Male	25-34	Further	No	Mod	Heavy	Mod	Hi	Not at all	Agree	Neither	Quite
	102 Wendy	Female	35-44	Further	No	Lib	Light	--	Hi	Not at all	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	151 Joe	Male	25-34	Further	No	Cons	Med	Mod	Mod	Not very	Agree	Agree	Very
	192 Lucy	Female	21-24	Higher	No	Lib	Med	Mod	Hi	Not very	Agree	Agree	Quite
	204 Holly	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Light	Lo	Mod	Very	Disagree	Agree	Not
	Total	N	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Not at all													
	202 Nina	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Med	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Quite
	Total	N	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Total	N	26	26	26	26	26	24	26	25	26	26	26
-- Data not available													

Table 14 Clockwork Orange – Should the film be given an '18' certificate?

	Case Name	Gender	Age	Education	Children	Attitude	Video Renter	Sample Interest	Fantasy Interest	Religious	Right to see	Belief in harm	Risky viewer
Yes	28 Shirley	Female	45+	Further	No	Mod	Light	Lo	Mod	Not very	Disagree	Agree	Not
	29 Michael	Male	45+	Higher	No	Mod	Light	Hi	Lo	Not very	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	35 Angela	Female	45+	School	Yes	Mod	Medium	Lo	Lo	Not very	Neither	Neither	Quite
	58 Nicholas	Male	45+	School	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Hi	Not at all	Agree	Disagree	Very
	62 Trevor	Male	35-44	Further	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Hi	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Very
	94 Ian	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Mod	Light	Mod	Mod	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
	98 Andrew	Male	45+	Higher	No	Lib	Heavy	Hi	Mod	Not at all	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	117 Elizabeth	Female	21-24	Further	No	Mod	Heavy	--	Mod	Not very	Neither	Neither	Quite
	126 Jason	Male	45+	School	No	Mod	Heavy	Hi	Hi	Not at all	Disagree	Agree	Very
	163 Phoebe	Female	25-34	Further	No	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Not
	175 Claire	Female	25-34	Higher	Yes	Cons	Medium	Lo	Mod	Not very	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	176 Clive	Male	25-34	Further	Yes	Lib	Medium	Mod	Hi	Not very	Agree	Neither	Quite
	188 Sarah	Female	35-44	Further	Yes	Mod	Medium	Mod	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Not
	195 Peter	Male	21-24	Higher	No	Lib	Medium	Hi	Hi	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Very
	198 Andy	Male	35-44	Further	Yes	Cons	Medium	Lo	Lo	Very	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	224 Megan	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Lib	Medium	Hi	Hi	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Very
	229 Paul	Male	35-44	Higher	No	Lib	Heavy	Hi	Lo	Not at all	Agree	Neither	Quite
	233 Rebecca	Female	21-24	Higher	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Mod	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	235 Alexandra	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Medium	Hi	Mod	Not at all	Disagree	Neither	Very
	Total	N	19	19	19	19	19	18	19	19	19	19	19
No, few cuts													
87	Audrey	Female	45+	Higher	No	Cons	Light	Lo	--	Not very	Disagree	Neither	Not
151	Joe	Male	25-34	Further	No	Cons	Medium	Mod	Mod	Not very	Neither	Agree	Very
168	Kate	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Medium	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Not
237	Geoff	Male	25-34	Higher	Yes	Cons	Heavy	Mod	Hi	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Very
Total	N	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4
No, major cuts													
204	Holly	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Light	Lo	Mod	Very	Disagree	Agree	Not
Total	N	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Not at all													
134	Wesley	Male	45+	School	No	Cons	Light	Lo	Lo	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Quite
Total	N	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	N	25	25	25	25	25	25	24	24	25	25	25	25

-- Data not available

Table 15 *Death Wish II* – Should the film be given an ‘18’ certificate?

	Case Name	Gender	Age	Education	Children	Attitude	Video Renter	Sample Interest	Fantasy Interest	Religious	Right to see	Belief in harm	Risky viewer
Yes	29 Michael	Male	45+	Higher	No	Cons	Light	Hi	Lo	Not very	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	34 Richard	Male	45+	School	No	Cons	Light	Mod	Lo	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	35 Angela	Female	45+	School	Yes	Mod	Medium	Lo	Lo	Not very	Neither	Neither	Quite
	98 Andrew	Male	45+	Higher	No	Lib	Heavy	Hi	Mod	Not at all	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	156 Brian	Male	21-24	Further	No	Lib	Medium	Mod	Mod	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	182 Keith	Male	45+	Higher	Yes	Mod	Medium	Mod	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Not
	195 Peter	Male	21-24	Higher	No	Lib	Medium	Hi	Hi	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Very
	198 Andy	Male	35-44	Further	Yes	Cons	Medium	Lo	Lo	Very	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	217 Gavin	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Lib	Medium	Hi	Mod	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	224 Megan	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Lib	Medium	Hi	Hi	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Very
	230 Nicola	Female	35-44	School	No	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Lo	--	Neither	Neither	Quite
	233 Rebecca	Female	21-24	Higher	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Mod	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	237 Geoff	Male	25-34	Higher	Yes	Cons	Heavy	Mod	Hi	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Very
	Total	N	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	12	13	13	13
No, few cuts													
	28 Shirley	Female	45+	Further	No	Cons	Light	Lo	Mod	Not very	Disagree	Agree	Not
	92 Charles	Male	25-34	Further	No	Lib	Heavy	Mod	Hi	Not at all	Agree	Neither	Quite
	96 Natasha	Female	21-24	School	No	Mod	Light	Lo	Lo	Not very	Neither	Neither	Quite
	100 Stephanie	Female	45+	School	No	Lib	Medium	Mod	Mod	Not at all	Agree	Neither	Not
	115 Grace	Female	35-44	School	Yes	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Mod	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
	168 Kate	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Medium	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Not
	229 Paul	Male	35-44	Higher	No	Lib	Heavy	Hi	Lo	Not at all	Agree	Neither	Quite
	Total	N	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
No, major cuts													
	30 Charles	Male	45+	Higher	Yes	Mod	Med	Lo	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Not
	87 Audrey	Female	45+	Further	No	Cons	Light	Lo	--	Not very	Disagree	Neither	Not
	163 Phoebe	Female	25-34	Further	No	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Not
	Total	N	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3
Total	N	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	22	22	23	23	23

-- Data not available

Table 16 *Baise Moi – Should the film be given an '18' certificate?*

	Case Name	Gender	Age	Education	Children	Attitude	Video Renter	Sample Interest	Fantasy Interest	Religious	Right to see	Belief in harm	Risky viewer
Yes	35 Angela	Female	45+	School	Yes	Moderate	Medium	Lo	Lo	Not very	Neither	Neither	Quite
	62 Trevor	Male	35-44	Further	No	Liberal	Light	Hi	Hi	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Very
	89 Steve	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Liberal	Light	Hi	Hi	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	94 Ian	Male	25-34	Further	No	Moderate	Light	Mod	Mod	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
	127 Terry	Male	21-24	School	No	Liberal	Heavy	Hi	Hi	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Very
	176 Clive	Male	25-34	Further	Yes	Liberal	Medium	Mod	Hi	Not very	Agree	Neither	Quite
	208 Denise	Female	35-44	Higher	No	Liberal	Medium	Lo	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Quite
	Total	N	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
	No, few cuts												
	16 Darren	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Moderate	Light	Lo	Lo	Not at all	Agree	Disagree	Very
No, major cuts	54 Glenda	Female	21-24	School	No	Moderate	Heavy	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Disagree	Quite
	57 Michelle	Female	45+	Further	No	Moderate	Medium	Hi	Hi	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
	88 Linda	Female	21-24	Higher	No	Liberal	Light	--	Hi	Very	Agree	Disagree	Not
	99 Nick	Male	21-24	Higher	No	Moderate	Light	Mod	Mod	Quite	Agree	Agree	Very
	117 Elizabeth	Female	21-24	Further	No	Moderate	Heavy	--	Mod	Not very	Neither	Neither	Quite
	161 Ian	Male	35-44	Higher	No	Cons	Medium	Hi	--	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	192 Lucy	Female	21-24	Higher	No	Liberal	Medium	Mod	Hi	Not very	Agree	Agree	Quite
	202 Nina	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Medium	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Quite
	217 Gavin	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Liberal	Medium	Hi	Mod	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	Total	N	10	10	10	10	10	8	9	10	10	10	10
Not at all	92 Charles	Male	25-34	Further	No	Liberal	Heavy	Mod	Hi	Not at all	Agree	Neither	Quite
	96 Natasha	Female	21-24	School	No	Moderate	Light	Lo	Lo	Not very	Neither	Neither	Quite
	Total	N	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Not at all												
	78 Jennifer	Female	45+	Higher	No	Liberal	Medium	Hi	Hi	Not at all	Disagree	Disagree	Not
	102 Wendy	Female	35-44	Further	No	Moderate	Light	--	Hi	Not at all	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	151 Joe	Male	25-34	Further	No	Cons	Medium	Mod	Mod	Not very	Neither	Agree	Very
	175 Claire	Female	25-34	Higher	Yes	Cons	Medium	Lo	Mod	Not very	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	198 Andy	Male	35-44	Further	Yes	Cons	Medium	Lo	Lo	Very	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	Total	N	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Total	N	24	24	24	24	24	24	21	23	24	24	24	24

-- Data not available



Table 17 *I Spit on your Grave – Should the film be given an '18' certificate?*

	Case Name	Gender	Age	Education	Children	Attitude	Video Renter	Sample Interest	Fantasy Interest	Religious	Right to see	Belief in harm	Risky viewer
Yes	16 Darren	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Lib	Light	Lo	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Disagree	Very
	28 Shirley	Female	45+	Further	No	Cons	Light	Lo	Mod	Not very	Disagree	Agree	Not
	29 Michael	Male	45+	Higher	No	Cons	Light	Hi	Lo	Not very	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	30 Charles	Male	45+	Higher	Yes	Mod	Med	Lo	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Not
	34 Richard	Male	45+	School	No	Cons	Light	Mod	Lo	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Not
	58 Nicholas	Male	45+	School	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Hi	Not at all	Agree	Disagree	Very
	94 Ian	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Mod	Light	Mod	Mod	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
	161 Matthew	Male	35-44	Higher	No	Cons	Medium	Hi	--	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	182 Keith	Male	45+	Higher	Yes	Mod	Medium	Mod	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Not
	208 Denise	Female	35-44	Higher	No	Lib	Medium	Lo	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Quite
	224 Megan	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Lib	Medium	Hi	Hi	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Very
	230 Nicola	Female	35-44	School	No	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Lo	--	Neither	Neither	Quite
	237 Geoff	Male	25-34	Higher	Yes	Cons	Heavy	Mod	Hi	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Very
Total		N	13	13	13	13	13	13	12	12	13	13	13
No, few cuts													
54 Glenda	Female	21-24	School	No	No	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Disagree	Quite
57 Michelle	Female	45+	Further	No	No	Mod	Medium	Hi	Hi	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
96 Natasha	Female	21-24	School	No	No	Mod	Light	Lo	Lo	Not very	Neither	Neither	Quite
134 Wesley	Male	45+	School	No	No	Cons	Medium	Lo	Lo	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Quite
197 David	Male	35-44	Further	Yes	Yes	Mod	Medium	Lo	Lo	Not very	Neither	Neither	Not
229 Paul	Male	35-44	Higher	No	No	Lib	Heavy	Hi	Lo	Not at all	Agree	Neither	Quite
Total	N	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
No, major cuts													
192 Lucy	Female	21-24	Higher	No	No	Lib	Medium	Mod	Hi	Not very	Agree	Agree	Quite
217 Gavin	Male	25-34	Higher	No	No	Lib	Medium	Hi	Mod	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Quite
Total	N	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Not at all													
87 Audrey	Female	45+	Further	No	No	Cons	Light	Lo	--	Not very	Disagree	Neither	Not
100 Stephanie	Female	45+	School	No	No	Lib	Medium	Mod	Mod	Not at all	Agree	Neither	Not
156 Brian	Male	21-24	Further	No	No	Lib	Medium	Mod	Mod	Not very	Agree	Disagree	Quite
202 Nina	Female	25-34	Higher	No	No	Cons	Medium	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Quite
233 Rebecca	Female	21-24	Higher	No	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Mod	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Quite
Total	N	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
Total		N	26	26	26	26	26	26	24	25	26	26	26

-- Data not available

Table 18 Last House on the Left – Should the film be given an ‘18’ certificate?

	Case Name	Gender	Age	Education	Children	Attitude	Video Renter	Sample Interest	Fantasy Interest	Religious	Right to see	Belief in harm	Risky viewer
Yes	16 Darren	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Lib	Light	Lo	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Disagree	Very
	34 Richard	Male	45+	School	No	Cons	Light	Mod	Lo	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	54 Glenda	Female	21-24	School	No	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Disagree	Quite
	58 Nicholas	Male	45+	School	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Hi	Not at all	Agree	Disagree	Very
	89 Steve	Male	25-34	Higher	No	Lib	Light	Hi	Hi	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Quite
	99 Nick	Male	21-24	Higher	No	Mod	Light	Mod	Mod	Quite	Agree	Agree	Very
	126 Jason	Male	45+	School	No	Mod	Heavy	Hi	Hi	Not at all	Disagree	Agree	Very
	161 Matthew	Male	35-44	Higher	No	Cons	Medium	Hi	--	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	175 Claire	Female	25-34	Higher	Yes	Cons	Medium	Lo	Mod	Not Very	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	176 Clive	Male	25-34	Further	Yes	Lib	Medium	Mod	Hi	Not Very	Agree	Neither	Quite
	195 Peter	Male	21-24	Higher	No	Lib	Medium	Hi	Hi	Quite	Agree	Disagree	Very
	Total	N	11	11	11	11	11	11	10	11	11	11	11
No, few cuts													
No, major cuts	88 Linda	Female	21-24	Higher	No	Lib	Light	--	Hi	Very	Agree	Disagree	Not
	163 Phoebe	Female	25-34	Further	No	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Not
	188 Sarah	Female	35-44	Further	Yes	Mod	Medium	Mod	Lo	Not at all	Neither	Agree	Not
	Total	N	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Not at all													
Not at all	12 Anna	Female	21-24	Further	No	Mod	Medium	Mod	Hi	Quite	Neither	Disagree	Not
	127 Terry	Male	21-24	School	No	Lib	Heavy	Hi	Hi	Not Very	Agree	Disagree	Very
	168 Kate	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Medium	Lo	Mod	Not at all	Neither	Neither	Not
	Total	N	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
	78 Jennifer	Female	45	Higher	No	Lib	Medium	Hi	Hi	Not at all	Disagree	Disagree	Not
	100 Stephanie	Female	45	School	No	Lib	Medium	Mod	Mod	Not at all	Agree	Neither	Not
	102 Wendy	Female	35-44	Further	No	Mod	Light	--	Hi	Not at all	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	115 Grace	Female	35-44	School	Yes	Mod	Heavy	Lo	Mod	Not Very	Neither	Neither	Not
	134 Wesley	Male	45	School	No	Cons	Medium	Lo	Lo	Quite	Disagree	Agree	Quite
	197 David	Male	35-44	Further	Yes	Mod	Medium	Lo	Lo	Not Very	Neither	Neither	Not
Total	204 Holly	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Light	Lo	Mod	Very	Disagree	Agree	Not
	235 Alexandra	Female	25-34	Higher	No	Cons	Medium	Hi	Mod	Not at all	Disagree	Neither	Very
	Total	N	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
	Total	N	25	25	25	25	25	23	24	25	25	25	25
	-- Data not available												

Table19 Should the films be given an '18' certificate? Summary of all viewing decisions

Film Decision	Gender	Education	Kids	Age	Attitude	Renter	Interest in sample	Interest in fantasy	Religion	Attitudes to right to see	Belief in harm/protect	Risky viewer																			
18 cert	M	F	S	F	H	Y	N	21-35	35+	C	M	L	L	M	H	L	M	H	V/Q	NV	NA	A	N	D	A	N	D	N	Q	V	
Spit	7	4	3	7	1	1	10	4	7	5	2	3	6	3	2	4	3	4	3	4	3	2	4	5	3	3	4	3	4	4	
LH	9	1	3	6	1	2	8	5	5	3	2	5	5	4	1	2	3	5	2	3	3	5	1	4	5	1	4	0	5	5	
DW	9	4	3	8	2	4	9	6	7	4	3	6	3	7	3	3	4	6	5	5	2	6	3	4	4	3	6	1	9	3	
SD	10	10	4	9	7	5	15	7	13	1	11	7	4	10	6	5	5	8	5	6	8	7	11	2	4	8	9	6	5	3	
CO	10	9	3	9	7	5	14	9	10	5	6	8	6	8	5	5	3	10	4	8	7	8	5	6	7	6	4	9	6	6	
BM	5	2	2	3	2	5	2	3	4	0	2	4	3	3	1	2	2	3	2	4	1	4	3	0	4	3	1	4	2	2	
Yes T	50	30	18	42	20	22	58	34	46	18	26	33	27	35	18	21	20	36	24	25	29	24	32	27	21	25	25	30	18	37	25
Cut/Ban	M	F	S	F	H	Y	N	21-35	35+	C	M	L	L	M	H	L	M	H	V/Q	NV	NA	A	N	D	A	N	D	N	Q	V	
Spit	5	8	4	5	4	1	12	7	6	3	4	6	3	8	2	6	3	4	2	7	4	6	5	2	3	6	4	4	9	0	0
LH	3	11	4	5	5	3	11	7	7	4	6	4	3	8	3	6	3	3	4	3	7	3	6	5	5	4	4	10	2	2	2
DW	2	7	3	2	4	1	8	4	5	3	3	3	3	2	4	6	2	1	0	4	5	3	4	2	2	7	0	6	3	0	0
SD	2	4	0	3	3	0	6	5	1	3	1	2	2	3	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	2	2	2	5	1	0	1	4	1	1
CO	3	3	1	3	2	1	5	4	2	6	0	0	2	3	1	4	2	0	3	2	1	0	2	4	4	2	0	3	1	2	2
BM	7	10	2	9	6	2	15	12	5	5	6	6	5	9	3	6	4	4	4	7	6	5	6	5	8	4	5	3	11	3	3
T =	22	43	14	27	24	8	57	39	26	24	20	21	18	33	14	30	17	12	14	25	26	19	25	20	27	25	13	27	30	8	8
%	M	F	S	F	H	Y	N	21-35	35+	C	M	L	L	M	H	L	M	H	V/Q	NV	NA	A	N	D	A	N	D	N	Q	V	V
Yes	69	41	56	61	45	73	50	47	64	43	57	61	60	51	56	41	54	75	63	54	48	63	52	51	48	50	70	40	55	76	76
No	31	59	44	39	55	27	50	53	36	57	43	39	40	49	44	59	46	25	37	46	52	37	48	49	52	50	30	60	45	24	24
Key:	Male Female	School Further Higher	Yes No	Conservative Moderate Liberal	Light Medium High	Low Mod High	Low Moderate High	Very/Quite Not very Not at all	Agree Neither/Nor Disagree	Agree Neither/Nor Disagree	Agree Neither/Nor Disagree	No Quite Very																			

Table 20 Viewer decisions

Name	Case	Attitude	Straw Dogs	Clockwork Orange	Death Wish II	Baise Moi	Spit on your Grave	Last House
Anna*	12	Mod	Yes	--	--	--	--	Major
Darren	16	Mod	--	--	--	Few	Yes	Yes
Shirley	28	Mod	--	Yes	Few	--	Yes	--
Michael	29	Mod	--	Yes	Yes	--	Yes	--
Charles	30	Mod	Yes	--	Major	--	Yes	--
Richard	34	Cons	--	--	Yes	--	Yes	Yes
Angela	35	Mod	--	Yes	Yes	Yes	--	--
Glenda	54	Mod	--	--	--	Few	Few	Yes
Michelle	57	Mod	Yes	--	--	Few	Few	--
Nicholas	58	Lib	--	Yes	--	--	Yes	Yes
Trevor	62	Lib	Yes	Yes	--	Yes	--	--
Jennifer	78	Lib	Yes	--	--	No	--	No
Audrey	87	Cons	--	Few	Major	--	No	--
Linda	88	Lib	Yes	--	--	Few	--	Few
Steve	89	Lib	Yes	--	--	Yes	--	Yes
Charles	92	Lib	Few	--	Few	Major	--	--
Ian	94	Mod	--	Yes	--	Yes	Yes	--
Natasha	96	Mod	--	--	Few	Major	Few	--
Andrew	98	Lib	Yes	Yes	Yes	--	--	--
Nick	99	Mod	Yes	--	--	Few	--	Yes
Stephanie	100	Lib	--	--	Few	--	No	No
Wendy	102	Mod	Few	--	--	No	--	No
Grace	115	Mod	Yes	--	Few	--	--	No
Elizabeth	117	Mod	Yes	Yes	--	Few	--	--
Jason	126	Mod	Yes	Yes	--	--	--	Yes
Terry	127	Lib	Yes	--	--	Yes	--	Major
Wesley	134	Cons	--	No	--	--	Few	No
Joe	151	Cons	Few	Few	--	No	--	--
Brian	156	Lib	Yes	--	Yes	--	No	--
Matthew	161	Cons	--	--	--	Few	Yes	Yes
Phoebe	163	Mod	--	Yes	Major	--	--	Few
Kate	168	Cons	--	Few	Few	--	--	Major
Claire	175	Cons	--	Yes	--	No	--	Yes
Clive	176	Lib	--	Yes	--	Yes	--	Yes
Keith	182	Mod	Yes	--	Yes	--	Yes	--
Sarah	188	Mod	Yes	Yes	--	--	--	Few
Lucy	192	Lib	Few	--	--	Few	Major	--
Peter	195	Lib	--	Yes	Yes	--	--	Yes
David	197	Mod	Yes	--	--	--	Few	No
Andy	198	Cons	--	Yes	Yes	No	--	--
Nina	202	Cons	No	--	--	Few	No	--
Holly	204	Cons	Few	Major	--	--	--	No
Denise	208	Lib	Yes	--	--	Yes	Yes	--
Gavin	217	Lib	--	--	Yes	Few	Major	--
Megan	224	Lib	--	Yes	Yes	--	Yes	--
Paul	229	Lib	--	Yes	Few	--	Few	--
Nicola	230	Mod	Yes	--	Yes	--	Yes	--
Rebecca	233	Lib	--	Yes	Yes	--	No	--
Alexandra	235	Cons	Yes	Yes	--	--	--	No
Geoff	237	Cons	--	Few	Yes	--	Yes	--
Totals			26	25	23	24	25	25

\* Participant did not want to watch *Baise Moi* after seeing *Last House on the Left*

## 8. Film scars

### Distress to viewers

The use of experienced counsellors at various stages in the study was thought to be of particular value in satisfying ethical considerations. All the video renters selected were invited to take part in the viewing panel by the counselling qualified researchers who discretely probed any possible mental instability (one person was excluded from the study on this basis). The films (video tapes) were both delivered to the participants and collected from them by qualified counsellors. When participants telephoned the office to say they had watched the films they were connected to the research manager (12 years experience as a qualified counsellor) who unobtrusively checked how they felt. The interview counsellors were then informed of the participant's availability and asked to make immediate contact to both finalise an interview time and to check any possible distress. Finally, of course, the counsellors, who were particularly well experienced in dealing with clients with 'denial'/reluctance to self disclose, probed interviewees for any potential psychological distress. This counselling resource also provided the possibility of therapeutic intervention if any such problems were detected.

The opening questions in the interviews, asking what viewers thought of the films, might well have revealed any distress. This should also have emerged when probing about any particular scenes which the participants thought might present a problem for a film classification body. Additionally, at the closing (debriefing) stage of the interview, the counsellors asked eight questions to provide fairly exhaustive coverage of any potential problems:

- *Is there anything about the films or what you saw which you would like to talk to us about?*
- *Have you talked about the films to other people? What did you say?*
- *Has taking part in the study troubled you in any way? If so could you tell us how?*
- *Have any of the films changed you or your attitudes in any way?*
- *How do you feel about having taken part in this study?*
- *Do you wish that you had not seen any of the films? Why?*
- *Are there any questions that you thought we might have asked you and didn't? (and how would you have answered it?)*
- *Anything else?*

There is no doubt that at various stages in the interviews, a number of the participants used language that implied potential distress (which would need to be probed). For example, Paul:

*'Y'know it's just ....odd really, 'cos I watched, um, the first two films (I Spit on your Grave and Death Wish II) and I felt quite bludgeoned when I went to bed, y'know, it's just too much'.*

Case no. 229, 35-44, liberal, higher education, not religious, heavy video renter, agree right to see graphic images

During the debriefing, however, he said he had not been troubled in any way by any of the films, and did not have anything he wished to discuss further.

Wendy said:

*'I really was shocked by the first one (Last House on the Left) ....I think the rape scenes were really quite disturbing'. But she then added 'I'm more worried by things like spiders to be honest'.*

Case no. 102, 35-44, moderate, further education, not religious, light video renter, disagree right to see graphic images

Terry said about *Last House on the Left*:

*'Erm, the rape and death scenes of the two girls, even though it's not particularly graphic, it just stays with you for a little while, if you know what I mean. It's, er, quite disturbing'. And 'Erm, like I say, it just, it, Ugh! After the film had finished I kept thinking about a couple of scenes, y'know, I was actually disturbed by it all.'*

Case no. 127, 21-24, liberal, school education, not very religious, heavy video renter, agree right to see graphic images

However in the focussed questions during the debriefing he explained:

*'I think I'm over it now [laughs]. I was perfectly fine with them. I've seen a lot in m'time.'*

Table 21 shows the results of the debriefing. It is worth observing here that no one regretted taking part (indeed the comments were overwhelmingly positive). In total, ten participants (20% of the viewing panel) mentioned films which they 'wished they had not seen': *Last House on the Left* (by three); *Baise Moi* (by three); *I Spit on your Grave* (by two) and *Death Wish II* (by two). It is worth remembering here that in the survey sample of video renters, almost two thirds (62%) claimed to have seen a film 'they wished they had not' (although of course the scale was more extended than just three films).

Table 21: Debriefing Case Summaries

Case No	Case Name	Gender	Age	Any Problems?	Any Regrets?	Any seen wish not?	Which film?
12	Anna	Female	21-24	No	No	Yes	<i>Last House</i>
16	Darren	Male	25-34	No	No	No	N/A
28	Shirley	Female	45+	No	No	Yes	<i>Death Wish II</i>
29	Michael	Male	45+	No	No	No	N/A
30	Charles	Male	45+	No	No	No	N/A
34	Richard	Male	45+	No	No	No	N/A
35	Angela	Female	45+	No	No	No	N/A
54	Glenda	Female	21-24	No	No	No	N/A
57	Michelle	Female	45+	No	No	No	N/A
58	Nicholas	Male	45+	No	No	No	N/A
62	Trevor	Male	35-44	No	No	No	N/A
78	Jennifer	Female	45+	No	No	No	N/A
87	Audrey	Female	45+	No	No	No	N/A
88	Linda	Female	21-24	No	No	No	N/A
89	Steve	Male	25-34	No	No	--	N/A
92	Charles	Male	25-34	Yes	No	No	N/A
94	Ian	Male	25-34	Yes	No	No	N/A
96	Natasha	Female	21-24	No	No	Yes	<i>Baise Moi</i>
98	Andrew	Male	45+	No	No	Yes	<i>Death Wish II</i>
99	Nick	Male	21-24	No	No	No	N/A
100	Stephanie	Female	45+	No	No	No	N/A
102	Wendy	Female	35-44	No	No	No	N/A
115	Grace	Female	35-44	No	No	No	N/A
117	Elizabeth	Female	21-24	No	No	No	N/A
126	Jason	Male	45+	No	No	No	N/A
127	Terry	Male	21-24	No	No	No	N/A
134	Wesley	Male	45+	No	No	No	N/A
151	Joe	Male	25-34	No	No	Yes	<i>Baise Moi</i>
156	Brian	Male	21-24	No	No	Yes	<i>I Spit on your Grave</i>
161	Ian	Male	35-44	No	No	No	N/A
163	Phoebe	Female	25-34	No	No	Yes	<i>Last House</i>
168	Kate	Female	25-34	No	No	No	N/A
175	Claire	Female	25-34	No	No	No	N/A
176	Clive	Male	25-34	No	No	No	N/A
182	Keith	Male	45+	No	No	No	N/A
188	Sarah	Female	35-44	No	No	Yes	<i>Last House</i>
192	Lucy	Female	21-24	No	No	No	N/A
195	Peter	Male	21-24	No	No	No	N/A
197	David	Male	35-44	No	No	No	N/A
198	Andy	Male	35-44	No	No	Yes	<i>Baise Moi</i>
202	Nina	Female	25-34	No	No	No	N/A
204	Holly	Female	25-34	Yes	No	No	N/A
208	Denise	Female	35-44	No	No	No	N/A
217	Gavin	Male	25-34	Yes	No	No	N/A
224	Megan	Female	25-34	No	No	No	N/A
229	Paul	Male	35-44	No	No	No	N/A
230	Nicola	Female	35-44	No	No	No	N/A
233	Rebecca	Female	21-24	No	No	No	N/A
235	Alexandra	Female	25-34	No	No	No	N/A
237	Geoff	Male	25-34	No	No	Yes	<i>I Spit on your Grave</i>
<b>N 50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>50</b>

A total of four participants in the viewing panel, Gavin, Charles, Ian and Holly were categorised as 'question problem?' in that they described troubled reactions. The full transcriptions of their relevant comments are included below.

**'Charles': case no. 92, 25-34, liberal, further education, not religious, heavy video renter, agree rights to see graphic images**

Interviewer: *From what you've said Charles, it sounds like you found definitely parts of 'Death Wish', and also parts of 'Baise Moi' really quite distressing...even at the time.*

Charles: *Yeah [laughing nervously]*

Interviewer: *Yes?*

Charles: *Oh yes. 'Death Wish II' expecially [sic] was distressing to me.*

Interviewer: *Right, so...do you...do you feel that you're experiencing any sort of ongoing problems after, after watching those particular films and scenes?*

Charles: *No [Side of tape ends]*

Interviewer: *...and that's the end of it. So it's possible to feel shocked and distressed at the time, turn it off and well, that's it. Your mind switches to something else?*

Charles: *Yes*

Interviewer: *Yeah? Okay, 'cause I just wanted to check that out with you, because obviously we did want to talk with people about any...maybe ongoing issues or feelings that people might have so that you don't feel you're just left alone with, um, sort of unpleasant thoughts or feelings.*

Charles: *No, no, I'm over it now.*

Interviewer: *Yeah, okay. Well thank you. Is there anything you want to say about, um, maybe how those films have, did trouble you? I mean, I know you have talked about them, um, earlier on in the interview, but is there anything else you want to say about them?*

Charles: *No, not really. Apart from what I've said. I think I've said everything.*

**'Ian': case no.94, 25-34, moderate, higher education, not very religious, light video renter, neither/nor right to see graphic images**

Interviewer: *Now, just want to sort of check with you, um, whether there are any sort of lasting issues you want to talk over. Is there anything about the films or what you saw that you'd like to talk to me about now? Y'know, in the sense that you've got some ongoing issues about it, it's been disturbing...*

Ian: *Well, I must admit, y'know, I'm not easily shocked or surprised or put off by...by things, but 'Baise Moi' was just...'orrible. That's the only way I can describe, and I could not see any way how that whole film could possibly be entertaining.*

Interviewer: *Right.*

Ian: *Like I've said the only reason I carried on watching it was because, er, I was gonna be interviewed about it and...wanted to um...give it a chance basically. I thought well, I can always stop again...if it really puts me off. But because I had no idea of what was, er, going to happen I was kind of braced for it.*

Interviewer: *Okay, yes...*

Ian: *Not pleasant at all. Not nice watching. Send me something nice [laughs]*

Interviewer: *Yes, yes, I can appreciate what you're saying. I mean, have you talked about any of the films to other people?*

Ian: *Yeah, that was the only one I talked about, 'cause I was quite cross about it, and er...*

Interviewer: *When you say cross?*

Ian: *Well, it was just about the whole thing that...someone would...it just wasn't entertaining. Um, the whole rape issue I find very...just...it just aggravates me. I find it absolutely horrendous and...just watching it for...as a justification for how*



people act afterwards, again I thought was...the kind of, um...almost justified what was going on...nasty.

Interviewer: Um...I mean is there...in terms of the 'Baise Moi', because it was horrible watching for you, have you had any, um, sort of disturbing thoughts since watching it.

Ian: Um, no! It's just, um, it's not something I'm gonna dwell on. It was...how do you mean disturbing thoughts?

Interviewer: Well like you've had any sort of flash backs, any distressing thoughts going on?

Ian: Oh no. It was just one of those things that you see and...when you see a film and you discuss it afterwards and you think 'well, there was no need'. I mean, you can get annoyed about things, but it's not going to affect me, I don't think.

**'Holly': case no.204, 25-34, conservative, higher education, very religious, light video renter, disagree right to see graphic images**

Interviewer: Is there anything about the films, or, or what you saw in them that you'd like to talk to me about? I mean you said that actually you found it, if we go to 'Last House', you said that you found that disturbing and actually thought about it for quite a long time afterwards. Has that sort of...gone now, or are you still getting thoughts about that?

Holly: Um...irregular thoughts, but it's faded now. A lot of them, like, first night I watched it and the next day when I was working and I was thinking about it. But now it's sort of...it's in the back of my mind now. It's still there, but, um, not like to the forefront or anything.

Interviewer: Right, so would you describe how you're feeling now as troublesome in any way, distressing, or has that passed?

Holly: Not really, no. I mean, that's passed. I'm not the sort of person to be afraid while walking down the street, so it didn't evoke fear in me in any way, but I think, um, I had a relationship in the past where I was given sleeping tablets and alcohol and don't know what happened to me.

Interviewer: Ah, right...

Holly: And I think probably...um, I'm tying it in with that a little bit. But I think even before then, um, I found it quite disturbing. I have a bit of a problem with sexual stuff anyway. Um, in the way that, y'know, it's almost like society, TV, films and magazines and everything portrays it as so titillating and so...like in your face. I mean, it's the wrong way as to what it should be. But, um, it's almost like easy to have this, um, corrupt idea of sex as being really dirty and disgusting and horrible. And I know I shouldn't feel that way, but that's the way that society is sort of heading. And that's the way the media portray it, even though they're trying to portray it as exciting, um...the way that they're doing it leaves me feeling like it's something dirty y'know, and it should really be something loving. But what is s'posed to be natural is almost becoming unnatural now.

Interviewer: Yes, so, and it was really 'Last House' that, that did this most. That had this effect and got you thinking about this and really...images that were quite difficult to get rid of for a while.

Holly: Mmmm, yeah, yes.

Interviewer: Although now you're saying it didn't evoke fear in you, um...

Holly: No certainly not fear. Certainly if I was out walking alone at night, say tonight or just after I'd watched it, I wouldn't think 'ooh gosh, that could happen to me' y'know, I wouldn't be a fearful person. It's just the psychological, um, aspect of it. And the helplessness, really.

Interviewer: Yes...so it's more...it's not about a physical thing, it's more what's left in your head or what...

Holly: Yeah, and combined with the sexual stuff as well and, and my own views of it already, it's quite a big thing, really.

Interviewer: Well, yes. I mean given, as you said, about this relationship in the past, I mean it sort of touches around that and makes it all that more powerful, yes.

Holly: And of course I realise how serious an issue, like, rape can be. Although I don't know quite what happened to me that night, it's something that I'm still quite disturbed about, um, and I would imagine that if people watched it that had come into encounters where it was almost like rape or if they'd been raped it would...be highly disturbing for them, I would've thought.

[Talk about how she talked about the films to her boyfriend because she found them quite disturbing]

**'Gavin': case no.217, 25-34, liberal, higher education, not very religious, medium video renter, agree right to see graphic images**

Interviewer: Is there anything about the films that you'd like to talk about? Anything that you found particularly troubling or upsetting?

Gavin: Troubling or upsetting? Obviously I didn't particularly enjoy watching the rape scenes. I think I found some of the repeated rapes of the woman in 'I Spit on your Grave'...um, more distressing to watch than anything in the other two films. Um...um, I'd...I know there's an issue of whether or not people find some of the scenes of sexual violence as titillating, but I think those, I don't know. I'd envisage that you were the sort of person who was that way inclined anyway. I think most people if they see a scene like that would just be quite distressed by the sort of violence, the way the sex was depicted towards someone. Um...and certainly it's...as I said, it isn't necessarily a film that I would choose to see myself, um...I mean, it's, it is on release isn't it? 'I Spit on your Grave'?

Interviewer: I understand so.

Gavin: Is it released in that form?

Interviewer: I haven't seen the version that's in shops.

Gavin: Oh right. Yeah, it's...it's not necessarily graphically explicit it's simply the concepts in it are pretty excruciating in terms of it's simply...I think I remember noting that the sort of, the woman is first raped what, half an hour into the film, and half an hour later I think she's still being raped. And...so it's...

Interviewer: The long nature of the...

Gavin: Yeah, I dunno, it's just pretty unrelenting, um...and then, yeah...I did find the whole concept of her suddenly, um, including the sex act with at least two of the rapists a wee bit perplexing.

The question of why these participants were so troubled by the films cannot easily be covered here. However in the case of Holly, the film clearly resurrected memories which were painful to her. The extent to which films can revive experiences in those who have lived through distressing events is an important issue which has been covered elsewhere (Schlessinger, Dobash, Dobash and Weaver, 1992). Moreover there can be little doubt that sexual violence is a particularly sensitive area in terms of individual vulnerability and therapeutic needs (Hodgson and Kelley, 2002). However, for the moment the research focus must remain with the matter of acceptable limits to the portrayals of sexual violence in films released on video.

There are four points worth making:

1. Three out of the four 'question: problem?' cases were men (and all four were in the 25–34 age group and not the youngest group included).
2. The distress appears to have been transitory and was judged so by both the interviewer and an independent counselling qualified researcher.

3. None of these four interviewees named films they wished they had not seen – although perhaps they may have considered this redundant since they had already expressed their negative reactions to the films.
4. Their judgements on whether the films should be released or not were:

'Charles'	<i>Death Wish II</i>	Minor cuts
	<i>Baise Moi</i>	Major cuts
	<i>Straw Dogs</i>	Few cuts
'Ian'	<i>Baise Moi</i>	Yes – release as '18'
	<i>I Spit on your Grave</i>	Yes - release as '18'
	<i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	Yes - release as '18'
'Holly'	<i>Last House</i>	No (ban)
	<i>Straw Dogs</i>	Few cuts
	<i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	Major cuts
'Gavin'	<i>I Spit on your Grave</i>	Major cuts
	<i>Baise Moi</i>	Few cuts
	<i>Death Wish II</i>	Yes - release as '18'

### Attitude changes

In this section we examine how the viewing experiences may have changed the attitudes of the participants especially regarding acceptable limits. First of all, during the debriefing, interviewees were asked *'Have any of the films changed you or your attitudes in any way?'*

Five participants said that it had:

*'I would have said, y'know, I don't care if people go and watch a film like the French film, but now I would be more strongly, well, personally I wouldn't watch them. And if I could have a say, y'know, I'll say, no I wouldn't want people to be watching it.'*

Andy, case no. 198, 35-44, conservative, very religious, further, medium, disagree

*'I'd have gone 'ooh, no, no – who needs censorship? Oh it would be lovely, everyone would choose what they want to watch'. And I thought, "Oh my god!", if someone did pick one of these off the shelf and got home and put it on, and oh, have a terrible shock.'*

Wendy, case no. 102, 35-44, moderate, not religious, further, light, disagree

*'I Spit on your Grave' has maybe caused me a bit of a problem in my belief that people over 18 should be allowed to watch what they want, and that films should be released to the general public, because, like I said, I'm not so sure about that one. So that's maybe changed my opinion in that I'm not so black and white about it.'*

Rebecca, case no. 233, 21-24, liberal, higher, quite religious, light, agree

Linda: *In a way, seeing 'Straw Dogs' and the rape scene made me think...yes there is point in rape scenes and things...um, more so than I thought before. Before I thought I just don't want to see it really, but...*

Interviewer: *Right, and that point is for you?*

Linda: *That I think it was a...good thing. It wasn't a negative thing.*

Interviewer: *A good thing in what way, sorry?*

Linda: *Um...it's good to show things that happen in reality that are bad um...because it's good to show them as it is so people understand better.*

Linda, case no. 88, 21-24, liberal, very religious, higher, light, agree

*'About films with that sort of thing in. I don't really agree with it any more. Yeah, fair enough show you a little bit...sort of do it in a different way. Make people think about it rather than actually seeing it.'*

Brian, case no. 156, 221-24, liberal, not very religious, further, medium, agree

A second source of information came from asking the participants the same questions about rights to see graphic detail in '18' certificated videos, whether they believed that violence or sexual violence in films could aggravate such problems in society and their attitudes to protecting children.

The results are shown in Table 22

These *before* and *after* measures of attitudes suggest some important shifts in opinion. However, there are two methodological issues to note. First of all, the *before* measures were completed by the respondent using the scales provided on the questionnaire, while the *after* measures were obtained in oral questions and answers. Secondly, we cannot know whether merely answering the same questions twice might in itself produce shifts in opinion (a control group would be needed to examine this). However, it seems unlikely that either factor was very important compared with the experience of seeing the films.

Table 22 *Attitudes to regulation, rights to see and harm of videos: before and after measures in viewing panel*

		Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither/nor		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Right to see graphic violence (Q12)	Before	21	42	17	34	5	10	6	12	1	2
	After	12	24	26	52	1	2	10	20	1	2
Right to see graphic real sex (Q13)	Before	16	32	17	34	10	20	5	10	2	4
	After	11	22	33	66	2	4	3	6	1	2
Right to see graphic sexual violence (Q14)	Before	11	22	10	20	11	22	12	24	6	12
	After	7	14	23	46	4	8	9	18	7	14
Watching violence makes people more violent. (Q15)	Before	5	10	8	16	5	10	17	34	15	30
	After	3	6	19	38	2	4	14	28	12	24
Problem of rape made worse by videos... (Q16)	Before	2	4	14	28	5	10	16	32	13	26
	After	6	12	14	28	7	14	13	26	10	20
Important to protect young people from seeing '18' films. (Q17)	Before	19	38	21	42	4	8	6	12	--	--
	After	29	58	18	36	1	2	2	4	--	--

The overall right to see graphic violence was endorsed by similar numbers before and after (76%) but within this group those strongly agreeing fell from 42% to 24% while those disagreeing increased (from 14% to 22%).

Those agreeing with the right to see graphic portrayals of sexual violence actually increased overall from 42% to 60% although again those strongly agreeing declined (from 22% to 14%). Very similar numbers before and after disagreed with this right. The clearest picture is in replies to question 13 on the right to see graphic sex where those agreeing with this right increased from 66% before to 88% after while those disagreeing fell from 14% to 8%.

Interpreting the results is somewhat complicated by the pattern in most of the questions where those who could not decide (neither/nor) generally fell after seeing

the films. However, the exception to this is question 16, where the proportion who could not decide rose slightly from 10% to 14%. Here, the proportion agreeing that rape might be made worse by sexually violent videos increased modestly from 32% to 40%. This is a small increase compared with the responses to question 15 where the proportion agreeing that watching violence makes people violent increased from 26% to 44% with somewhat smaller decline in those who disagreed (from 64% to 52%).

Overall the pattern is for more participants to endorse people's rights to see graphic detail, but where violence is involved this is with less enthusiasm and the numbers expressing some concern about the harmful effects of such material increased.

Examining which respondents showed shifts in opinion did not help understanding the data any better. It was thought quite likely that women might show conservative shifts in opinion since they emerged as more critical of the films than men. To investigate this, all those participants were scrutinised who showed an attitude shift (that is from neutral to a position; from a position to neutral; complete change in opinion). The results are given for each question in terms of the number of male and female participants who showed a conservative or liberal shift. Thus the row for graphic violence shows eleven participants shifted position. Of the five who become more liberal, four were women.

Table 23 *Shifts in attitude by gender*

	Women		Men	
	More lib	More cons	More lib	More cons
	N	N	N	N
Right to see graphic violence	4	2	1	4
Right to see graphic real sex	7	1	5	1
Right to see graphic sexual violence	7	2	5	3
Watching violence makes people more violent	8	4	--	4
Problem of rape made worse by videos...	5	3	--	4
Protect young people from seeing '18' films.	1	5	--	3

Although of course the numbers involved here are very small, the pattern seems to be for more women than men to move to a liberal position. This is puzzling. Any explanation might also consider that men showed much greater interest in and knowledge of films likely to contain graphic violence or sexual violence. Thus, arguably the films watched should have been more of a surprise to women. However, any interpretation must remain highly speculative.

Returning to the overall scores in Table 22, it is difficult to decide whether the pattern can be described in terms of a more liberal shift (as given by an increase support for rights to see) or a less liberal one (given by greater anxiety about harm). However one result which is quite unambiguous is the belief in the need to protect young people from seeing '18' certificated films. This increased from the majority (80%) opinion before to become almost unanimous (94%) after taking part in the viewing panel. If this belief is considered the tie breaker, then perhaps we might conclude that the film experiences resulted in a conservative shift which urges some caution over sexual violence.

## 9. Issues of classification

### **Sexual violence: more than the sum of its parts**

At various stages in this research, evidence pointed very clearly to viewers being far less tolerant of sexual violence in film than either explicit sex or graphic violence. The reasons why portrayals of sexual violence might be different from other kinds of material were not explored directly in this study. The focus has been on understanding how more or less censorious viewers judged the acceptability of controversial films which included sexual violence.

However, it is interesting to note the extent to which viewers often appeared puzzled by their own reactions to the sexual violence in the films they had watched. This was especially so where, for example, a participant had declared an anti-censorship liberal position but felt compelled to decide against a film and vice-versa.

Emma mentioned this spontaneously in a focus group:

Emma (liberal): *Well, as I say I've been sort of discussing, having full and frank discussions with a lot of my friends over this issue, and I've been quite surprised about the people that have come down, that I would've thought were quite libertarian in their views, that have come down on anything to do with sexual violence, anything to do with rape does not get seen. Even if that's, if you like, documentary type stuff. Now I can't go down that route, personally, um...equally I don't want to be on the other end saying, y'know, people can do what they like, when they like, whenever they like and there's no control over it whatsoever, but it's that issue about...I think in Britain we've had a very, um, interesting attitude towards sex and towards violence...and put them both together and I think that confuses a lot of people, d'ye know what I mean? That they're very clear about I don't mind seeing 'Reservoir Dogs', 'cause that's all about violence, and I don't mind watching a porn film, because that's about fun and titillation, but put those two things together and I think a lot of us, including myself, are not 100% of where my views actually are. And therefore I would have to take it on a film-by-film basis. And none of what I saw personally, as an adult, would I say that it has profoundly disturbed me, or that I want those films to never, ever have, be seen by another adult. I can't say that. There might be another film, one of the other ones that you've seen and I haven't, that I would watch and think, my god, no.*

Susan (conservative): *See, I s'pose that's one thing that I'd have to, I mean I must admit as an a...I mean I wouldn't like to see 'em released, but I can't say that any of them really disturbed me that much. I didn't like them, I thought they were awful. I wouldn't like to see them on general relea, I wouldn't like to see them on a shelf where people could pick them up and take them home, but they didn't disturb me personally. I've not lost any sleep over watching them, which I suppose is what you're saying for most adults how it would be. But it's just the fact it's where would you put it? That's...I just don't know where you would put it. I mean, say 'Baise Moi', where would you...you can't put it as pornography 'cause it's giving over the wrong image. You can't put it under an '18' on the top shelf because...*

Emma: *Well that's what I mean, we're very clear about violence, we're very clear about sex, it's that whole bit in the middle where it's...[ends]*

In the second focus group, participants were asked directly:

Facilitator: *Is there a difference between sex, violence as, and when they come together in the scene does it...do the criteria by which you judge it change?*

Ivan (liberal): *Should, should sexual violence be judged any differently to any other violence? I mean, it's still people committing crimes against the person.*

Zoe (liberal): *Or is it? It's not taken like that though, is it? I mean, you watch films and there's tons of violence in them, and films respect the violence.*

Ivan: *This is what I mean. It's, y'know, it's almost okay for somebody to walk, y'know, sort of walk through a shopping centre spraying people with machine gun, y'know that's...that's fine, but er...if they were sort of walking through a nudist camp spraying people with machine guns, suddenly it becomes, suddenly becomes a totally different context. Y'know, it's still people committing crimes.*

Zoe: *For me it is different, and I don't know why. Y'know, not just woman being sort of the victims, but the same for male sexual violence as well. It's just different. I don't know why. It just seems to be worse, for some reason to be...*

Facilitator: *what do you feel, Anna, because...*

Anna (moderate): *What I would say basically is, if it's sexual violence or anything like that you tend to take it more personal. I mean...yeah, you tend to take it a bit more personal, whereas like, as you said, somebody walking around spraying bullets, yeah you watch it and you don't bat an eyelid because...you're that used to watching it and it...it's like an element of fantasy that is, d'ye know what I mean? There's that element of fantasy. But when there's sexual violence it's more brought home to you, it's more personal to yourself.*

Zoe: *'Cause it's mixing something that's horrific, violence, with something...with sex and feeling close to one another, which should be a good thing, and they've just completely twisted it round and...I think that's what's bad about it.*

Ivan: *Sort of...leads on to the trail of domestic violence, I mean the home is supposed to be a safe environment and...*

Zoe: *I think that has greater impact as well. Yeah. Rather than if you just go round shooting random people.*

Facilitator: *That's quite interesting, the idea that domestic violence you say is worse than...*

Ivan: *is it, so, is it...*

Zoe: *It's violence towards women. You have a reaction to the film...*

Ivan: *Is it the, almost the personal element of the violence...um...and the fact you can identi...in a domestic situation or a sexual situation you can identify...with the person more easily than if it was just a random homicide?*

Marie (conservative) then added - apparently to explain why sexual violence is different:

*'The thing that got me about it...the thing that was horrible about it was the way they humiliated them, and that was the thing that...y'know, it was over a long time, they make, y'know they made them wet themselves and then take their clothes off...and that in many ways was worse than the...actual. The sexual violence in it was horrendous, I mean, when they're chasing them round, obviously, but that was more...it was humiliating people.'*

Perhaps, the key to understanding attitudes to sexual violence, which can only be touched on here, might lie somewhere beneath a notion such as humiliation. In films, most scenes of sex and most scenes of violence involve protagonists who tend to be fairly equally matched and often equally motivated in the behaviours depicted.

This is almost always *not* true of sexual violence. Especially in the case of *Last House on the Left* and *I Spit on your Grave*, the victims were very unequally matched against their opponents and could do little to prevent the most obviously unwelcome violence against them. Additionally, of course, rape is more than violence. Perhaps one intrinsic notion within the concept of rape, especially in its figurative sense, is

that of despoiling or taking away. This is a quite different idea to that of violence which implies action rather than consequence. Perhaps too, sexual violence may evoke stronger empathic responses to the humiliation involved where victims eventually surrender their integrity through penetration to their inside – in most films, violence scenes are predominantly about assaults on the outside of people's bodies.

Returning to the notion of humiliation, it is interesting that one scene which many viewers like Marie quoted earlier, found particularly distressing was in *Last House on the Left* where one of the women was forced to urinate herself. In terms of physical harm to the victim, this must be one of the mildest of scenes in any of the films seen by the viewing panel. Perhaps, unlike the sadistic violence that ends in the death of both women, the mundane humiliation in this scene resonated much more deeply with the experienced world of most viewers. The normal transition from dependent babyhood to a more independent childhood where bladder control and decisions relating to this become part of an individual's integrity might be of some relevance here. Of course, extending interpretation along these lines to an essentially Freudian perspective on viewer reactions would be to over egg the pudding of speculation. However, just why viewers experienced such difficulty with scenes of sexual violence and responded so strongly to particular scenes and films deserves further investigation.

### **Classification and labelling**

Many viewers implied that they would have preferred to have a more restrictive classification than '18'. In the interviews they were advised that the alternatives were to release the film uncut as an '18' or to recommend cuts (minor or major) or not to release at all. While these alternatives should have been predictable, interviewees often hesitated as if there should be a third way between cuts and '18'.

Perhaps Emma (liberal) articulated a shared concern:

*'I mean 'I Spit on your Grave' was made at a time when '18' certificates were Robin Asquith doing his...what were they called? 'Not Carry On' films, you know what I mean, though? They were '18' and...that's it, 'Confessions of a bloody Window Cleaner'! So I mean, in that context...if that's, if 'Confessions of a Window Cleaner' got '18' then I can see why 'I Spit on your Grave' is on like, d'ye know what I mean? Why that was seen as being 'out there'.'*

As Jack (moderate) put it:

*'I wonder if there should be a different classification to films. Not just...but a classification of...sexual violence, for instance. 'This has got strong sexual violence'.*

Thus, if the films were to be granted an '18' video certificate this would not indicate clearly enough that many of these films were different (i.e. worse) from what is 'out there' at the moment. The category '18 R' was not seen as at all appropriate, since they were not sex films. When the concept of '18 X' was suggested most focus group participants made approving noises.

However, while participants believed that the films should be clearly identified as different, doing so might attract the 'wrong kind of people' to watch them.

A related issue often mentioned in the focus group about '18' classification was that chronological age may not correspond well with maturity.

Jack said:



*'I mean my 20 year old daughter I keep thinking she's a 12 year old in some ways'.*

Jessica (conservative) agreed:

*'No its like Jack was saying as well. That y'know, you can have a 20 year old that's like a 12 year old, and a 12 year old that's like almost as old as a 20 year old, so it's relative isn't?'*

Indeed in a number of the interviews, when asked whether '18' uncut was appropriate for a particular film, viewers had joked - such as 'No! '40' - at least! While viewing panel members were not polled on this issue, it is likely that most would have preferred something like a '21' age category.

When the issue of labelling was raised in focus groups, it was discussed with some enthusiasm. Concern about the kinds of films which participants had watched, was that they required a very clear warning of their contents. This should not simply be on the video box but appear as an on-screen display as well. Jessica also endorsed this idea despite the fact that she strongly believed there was 'too little' regulation.

*'There's less harm in doing that than actually having the thing cut, isn't there?'*

At various points in focus groups and in interviews, viewers revealed that they were unaware of BBFC guidelines or of the revisions to them. Additionally, the labelling system on videos which would seem to be a valuable contribution to consumer advice and protection was not praised by anyone. This is one further puzzle raised by the research and an additional problem area that needs to be explored.

While there remain many more questions than answers, this research provides valuable reassurance that the BBFC's position on sexual violence is broadly in line with that of the sample of video renters. Perhaps by way of conclusion, the final words may be given to the focus group participants who were asked to conclude with some advice for the BBFC:

Facilitator: *I'm sure we could spend a long time talking about the world of problems, and because we did say it would be around an hour I don't want to abuse your hospitality as they say. So are there any further comments you wanted to make about anything for Robin Duval, the BBFC. Perhaps we should have a final sentence from each of you?*

Jack (moderate): *yeah, I'd like the classifications to be, er, changed. To be more explicit so you know, er, what's in them. Even if it involves going to the scale of 20, you know.*

Clive (liberal): *yeah, I agree.*

Susan (conservative): *I agree with the classification thing, that we should definitely be more on the box, so you know exactly what you're getting. Um, I think we've got...about right now, what we're seeing is as far as we should go. I think, y'know, what is released is, is pretty good. I don't think we should go much further than that.*

Facilitator: *Clive?*

Clive: *Um, I don't think they go far enough, to be honest. Because I still think you should be able to watch more or less what you want, and as long as it's...obviously there are some things that I wouldn't wanna watch, um, I still think it's up to the people to decide, but to know what they're actually getting before they decide that. So you're not just...y'know, you hire a Saturday night video and then you've got pornographic scenes on it, y'know?*

Facilitator: *Toni, d'you wanna?*

Toni (conservative): *I think the, the film classifications are probably quite, um, quite an old system now. I mean how long have we been dealing with, y'know, '18's, '15's, 'PG's? Um, perhaps it's just time for a radical overhaul. And say, right all videos are now gonna be operate under a new classification system.*

Facilitator: *Well, what might that be?*

Toni: *Um, well as I said earlier, perhaps, um, classifying things that do show things of extreme violence, y'know, very graphic sex, of great graphic sexual violence.*

Facilitator: *You don't mean to get rid of the other ones though? Y'know, the '15', the 'PG'?*

Toni: *Well, y'know, perhaps you could have family gradings, or teenager gradings or...y'know, I mean it's, it's difficult to compact into a sentence, but, y'know, perhaps it is time for an overhaul, with the way that society is so different to the way it was thirty years ago.*

Facilitator: *Hmmm. David? A final sentence?*

David (moderate): *I agree. I don't think the current method of, um...censorship works, but I can't think of an alternative. Um, some of the films...some of the films I watched, I don't even understand how in the hell they got made! Um, what the person was thinking when they were created, um...but I'd have to...I've also got this thing in the back of my mind, I just don't want to become a book burner, do you know what I mean? I don't want people to think that I'm...I don't want to think that I'm stopping somebody from seeing something that...*

Jack: *I think what you just said about why it was made in the first place, I mean for something like pornography...that is show people having sex, or show a woman's body, or show a man's body. That's fine. If someone wants to watch that, that's fine. But...these things I...I didn't know why they were made in the first place.*

Ivan (moderate): *Well, my final point is that I think the law should be strengthened. The, the importation of explicit material like the films we've seen should be...strengthened. The video...the classifications should be amended and I think cert...cert...some films like the ones we've mentioned should not be available at all. I think you gotta draw the line between black and white. We're talking too much in terms of relative and values rather than...and I don't think profit should come before morality.*

Jessica (conservative): *Actually, Ivan echoed my views there. Um, I don't think that they should come out, I don't...I think it's a shame that we're having to have a discussion where we've got to classify videos that none of us seem to know where to put it, and we're desperately trying to classify it so people can watch it rather than saying...this just shouldn't be out, it shouldn't be watched at all. And I think that, um, we're sort of...we feel compelled to say, well we've got a right to watch it, we've got to put it in some classification. And as far as the classification thing goes, I think everyone's right in the sense that we do need a better form of classification on videos, even if it's a...numerical scheme rather than ages, because ages are just irrelevant, they don't tell us anything. So I think certainly more information on the videos if they have to be released.*

Facilitator: *Good, excellent. I think we must let you go because we've run out of time. But much appreciated. Thank you each and all.*

## References

- Barnett, Steven & Katarina Thomson (1996) Portraying sex. In R..Jowell; J. Curtice; A. Park; L. Brook & K.Thomson (eds) *British Social Attitudes: the 13<sup>th</sup> report*. Aldershot, Hants: Dartmouth Publishing Company Ltd. Pp 19 - 52
- British Video Association (2002) *Yearbook*. London: British Video Association
- Cumberbatch, Guy (2000) *Television: the public's view 1999*. London: ITC
- Cumberbatch, Guy; Gary Wood & Victoria Littlejohns (2001) *Television: the public's view 2000*. London: ITC
- Hanley, Pam ((2000) *Sense and Sensibilities: Public opinion and the BBFC guidelines*. London: British Board of Film Classification
- Hodgson, James F. & Debra S. Kelley (2002) *Sexual Violence*. New York, NY: Praeger
- Peloff, Richard M. (2002) The third-person effect. In J. Bryant & D. Zillman (eds) *Media Effects: Advances in theory and research*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum. Pp 489 – 506
- Robertson, Geoffrey & Andrew Nicol (2002) *Media Law*. London: Penguin Books
- Schlessinger, Phillip; R.E. Dobash; R.P. Dobash & K. Weaver (1992) *Women Viewing Violence*. London: BFI Publishing
- Towler, Robert (2002) *Television: the public's view 2001*. London: ITC
- Video Standards Council (2002) *Setting the Standards*. Borehamwood, Herts: The Video Standards Council