



# Delete expletives?

Research undertaken jointly by the Advertising Standards Authority, British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting Standards Commission and the Independent Television Commission

Andrea Millwood-Hargrave

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# Introduction

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This research, commissioned as a joint project by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) and the Independent Television Commission (ITC), was designed to test people's attitudes to swearing and offensive language, and to examine the degree to which context played a role in their reactions.

Two interrelated studies were commissioned from NOP:<sup>1</sup>

1. The first, a qualitative study, used a mixture of group discussions and depth interviews to elicit reactions, using television programming and advertising clips as prompts, as well as press and poster advertising. Those who took part in this study are referred to as 'participants'.
2. The second part of the project used an in-home questionnaire administered to 1,033 adults, referred to here as 'respondents'.

While this study has a broader remit looking at advertising in both the print and television sectors, many of the results are comparable with previous research conducted in 1998 by the Broadcasting Standards Commission.<sup>2</sup> Where appropriate, comparisons with the earlier study are made.

The report looks first at attitudes towards swearing and offensive language 'in life', including a range of swear words and terms of abuse. It then moves on to the use of such language within television programming and examines the different criteria that might affect attitudes ranging from the scheduling of material to the effect of the country of origin. Finally, attitudes towards the use of 'strong' language in advertising in different media are described.

[1] See Appendix 1 for technical details.

[2] *Bad Language: What are the Limits?*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1998.



# Executive summary

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- Participants say they have noticed an increase in the use of swearing and offensive language in daily life. It was generally disliked, but participants did not feel there was much they could do about it outside their home. However, their acceptance of ‘strong’ language did not signal an approval of it.
- The use of ‘strong’ language in the presence of children was especially frowned upon and, within their homes, participants sought to keep it at bay. Many talked of ‘house rules’ which forbade the use of such language at home.
- As a part of the home environment, television was expected to follow certain conventions which would conform to these ‘house rules’, especially when children were likely to be watching television.
- Key among these conventions was adherence to the principle of the Watershed at 9.00 p.m. Respondents generally did not accept the use of swear words and terms of abuse before this time, as they expected children to be in the audience.
- This concern about swear words remained, even if the words themselves were considered ‘mild’. Participants spoke of their concern that, in the hour before the Watershed, this convention was not always maintained and they were not able to prevent children from hearing language that they thought was inappropriate.
- Other conventions were based on the expectations created by the genres of programming, the channel of transmission and the editorial context.
- A list of words tested among respondents showed little movement in those words considered ‘very severe’ between this study and the previous one, conducted two years ago. Greatest movement had occurred for terms of abuse. Many more respondents now say that racial abuse words are ‘very severe’ and there were greater concerns about transmitting ‘strong’ language that may offend others.
- While younger respondents were not as concerned as others in the sample about the use of many of the words tested, they were particularly likely to consider terms of racial abuse as ‘very severe’.
- Those who took part in both the qualitative and quantitative research were asked about their attitudes towards the use of swear words and offensive language in advertisements. While many respondents thought all media should operate under similar rules, it was clear that advertisements provoked particular concerns.
- The majority of respondents (92%) thought the current convention that television advertisements should not include any ‘strong’ language was appropriate. Most respondents (81%) said this rule should apply even if the advertisements were transmitted after the Watershed.

- Most respondents (86%) expressed a dislike of such language in poster advertising because large poster sites could not be avoided. Ninety five per cent said this was because of a desire to protect children.
- Press advertising, both in newspapers and magazines aimed at specific readership groups, was also discussed. While most respondents thought these media should be treated similarly in terms of regulating the use of swear words or offensive language, the qualitative research suggested that advertising in targeted magazines might be allowed greater freedom since access to them could be easily controlled by the purchaser.
- Access to cinema advertising was thought to be more easily controlled, as the age classifications for films were thought to act as good guidance to viewers who wished to avoid hearing inappropriate language.
- Over a third of respondents said that the rules for advertising on the Internet may need to be stricter than those for television, but this concern seemed driven by uncertainty about the Internet and a perception of its uncontrolled accessibility and widespread use.



# Chapter 1: Real life and swearing

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In this study, only two years on from the previous one, the researchers - who conducted both pieces of work - noted an ever-increasing, but grudging, acceptance of the use of swearing and offensive language in daily life.

*'I think it is everyday life now, isn't it, swearing. I think it is accepted now. I think it is just part of the culture or whatever, you know.'*

(Group 9, male with older children, C2D, South Wales)

To the participants in group discussions and depth interviews, the use of such language was indicative of a general decline in community standards and there was a sense that there was little that could be done about it, that they could not stop it. In a study conducted some years ago looking at the way in which the values of society were thought to have changed,<sup>3</sup> respondents had voiced their dislike of the use of swearing and offensive language because they felt it indicated a decline in social standards and was seen as a sign of unsociable behaviour. Then, the researchers wrote: *'Language ... is taken as a statement of moral decline and as a statement about the decline in respect for authority.'* In this project, three years on from that one, the associations that participants made with swearing and offensive language were also with the variables of aggression, vulgarity and an inability to express oneself in any other way. Few participants applauded its use, either by themselves or by others.

*'I think it's really common and it sounds awful, I've got to be honest. But like I said, I work in a factory and you just pick it up so easy, like ... Oh, you know, "Bugger off", like I express myself by swearing, but I don't really like that, I think it's common. I think it sounds awful when you're saying f-ing this and f-ing that.'*

(Group 2, single female, aged 18-24, C2D, South Wales)

A concern was expressed that the high level of swearing and offensive language all around them had produced a deadening effect. Many participants suggested that such language now offended them less than in the past.

*'The thing is we've been hearing it for like such a long time, since we've been in, like, primary school, so it's like second nature now.'*

(Group 1, male, aged 16-18, C1C2, Irish roots, Manchester)

However, there was enough awareness of it for participants to talk of trying to keep 'strong' language at bay in their own homes, by creating house rules - which many accepted they themselves broke.

*'... But I think the fact of the matter is, this sort of TV, it's on screen, it's coming to you, and it's going into millions of people's homes ... and just because we hear it on the street, doesn't mean we want to hear it (at home) ...'*

(Group 4, female churchgoers with young children, C2D, Aberdeen)

[3] *Regulating for Changing Values*; Institute of Communication Studies; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1997.

## Children

Despite participants' recognition that 'strong' language was widely used and that their children might use it in public, it was generally not allowed in the home. For many, this was seen to be a way of helping children to differentiate between what was acceptable and what was not.

*'I wouldn't like her hearing bad language, although they do hear it ... they know all of the words, but I wouldn't want to promote it in my house.'*

(Depth 2, Jewish family with young children, North London)

Many parents felt that the use of such language by other children was a sign of a poor upbringing. They expected other parents to have shown their children 'how to behave'.

*'I don't like it from your kids. I think it is a bit - I find it offensive. I just think it sounds awful from kids. And all I can think of is, well, they obviously got that from their parents.'*

(Group 12, gay men, single/partnered, C1C2, Manchester)

*'Like I swear and I don't mind swearing. But as you said, I'd never swear at my child, like I've heard parents swearing at their children and it's just awful. They call him the f-ing this and I literally like, my God, I wouldn't even call him a bugger or anything, you know I wouldn't do it.'*

(Group 2, single female, aged 18-24, C2D, South Wales)

When challenged with the possibility that their own children might swear, parents recognised this could reflect on their own ability as 'good and responsible' parents. It was important, therefore, to establish 'house rules' as a means to protect their children from hearing swearing or offensive language within the home. Besides controlling themselves, parents expressed a desire to be able to exert some control over the media received within ('invited into') the home. Television was seen to be the most invasive of the media, being a shared and easily accessible medium and also one thought to have influence, especially over children.

*'If our child sees or hears that (on television), then it's going to think that's the norm.'*

(Group 7, British Asian male with older children, C1C2, West London)

However, the extent to which parents felt they could control access to television varied. Other factors came into play. The age of the child was a key variable. Parents of younger children (those in primary school or the early stages of secondary school) felt they could control what was watched on television, even if the child had a television set in their bedroom. Parents of teenagers, on the other hand, felt they had little control, especially over what their children watched in their rooms late at night.

The gender of the child seemed to be another determinant, with parents exercising more control over their daughters' viewing than that of their sons'.

*'Well, I don't like women swearing to be honest ... women and girls swearing. That is a lot worse than if you hear blokes swearing.'*

(Group 9, male with older children, C2D, South Wales)

*'... some things I watch more with the 10-year-old than I do with the (older) daughter.'*

(Group 9, male with older children, C2D, South Wales)

Participants in the qualitative study who lived within extended, multi-generational families were more likely to have house rules that governed television viewing, as did families with strong religious beliefs. These factors led to greater control being exercised over children's viewing in these homes.

### **Severity of language**

Participants in all the groups were clear about the perceived severity of words. What was labelled 'baby talk' was thought least offensive - words such as 'poo'. Puns, rhyming slang and double entendres formed another group. Much of the acceptance of these came from a belief that children would not understand their meaning.

The next tranche of words was the profanities - words from a religious origin used as expletives, expressions (especially American) that were not easily understood, or were thought to belong to a particular group or culture (such as in rap music). Abbreviations belonged here. Again, the protection of children was key. Prominently displayed abbreviations were not generally accepted, as parents often felt obliged to try to explain them to their children.<sup>4</sup>

The next 'group' of words, in terms of perceived severity, was those used as expletives and could range from relatively mild words to those based on other, 'stronger' language. Sexual references, including crude words for genitalia, formed the next category with adjectival words. Often this latter group was used in aggression or anger, and that heightened their impact.

The abuse of minorities belonged in its own category. The data show this to be an area of increasing offence. Abuse - and especially racial abuse - is at the very top of the scale of severity and was felt to be unacceptable in today's society.

[4] For examples of material containing abbreviations, see Appendix 4.

## Ranking of words

The following section deals with respondents' views on the severity of individual swear words and terms of abuse. Respondents were asked to consider how severe each word was; the list is the same as that used in 1998, so comparisons of ranked order are given.

No context was given to respondents and the attitudes expressed for each word should be seen as an absolute view on its severity. Figure 1, shows the mean score given to each word, based on a system where 'very severe' = 3 and 'not swearing' = 0. (For a full breakdown of each word, see Appendix 2.)

## Topography of bad language

Although contextual differences and density inevitably affect perceptions of severity, the topography of bad language exists across all groups in a broadly consistent manner.

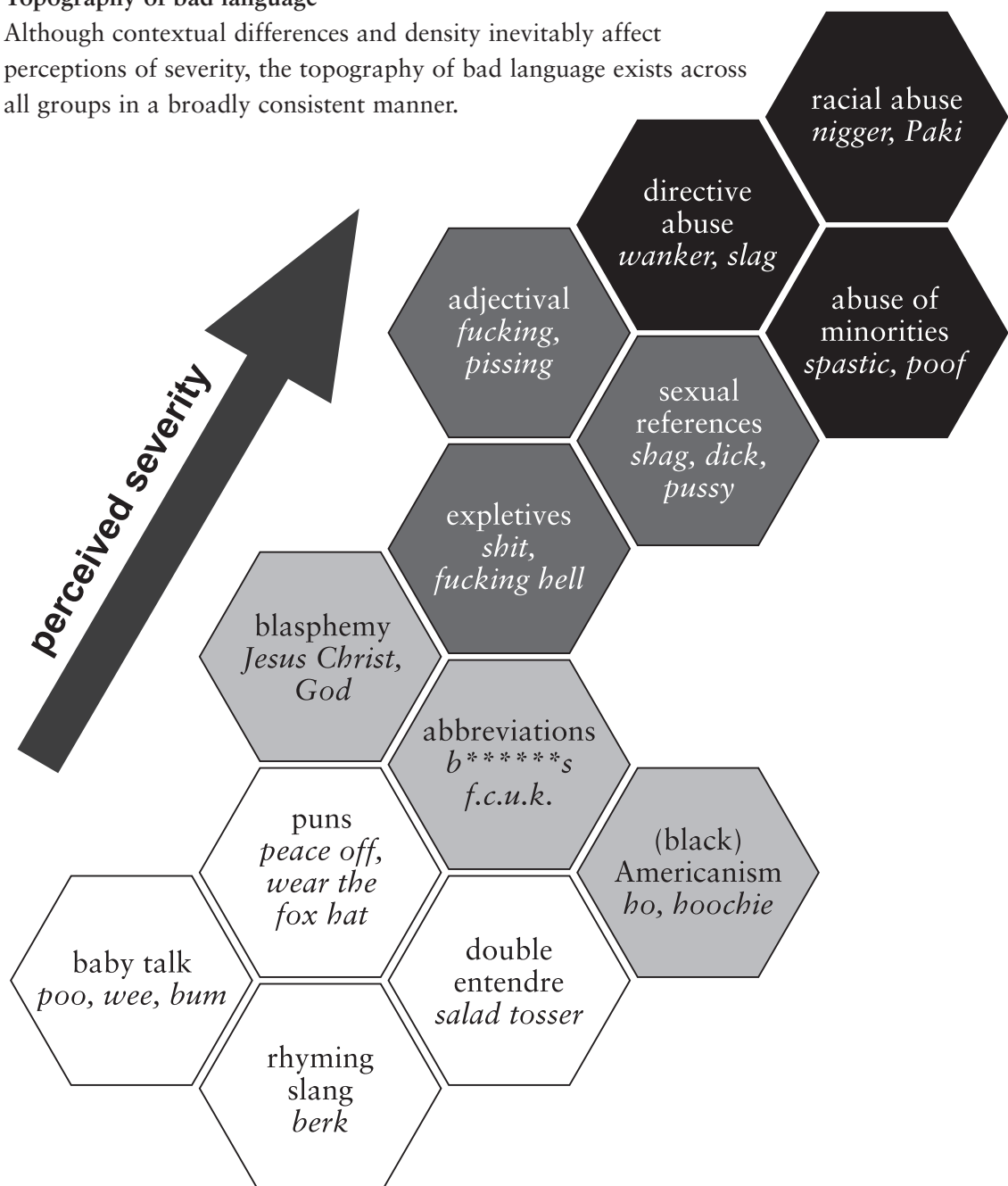




























Figure 1: Ranked order of words according to severity<sup>5</sup>

		<i>Position (1997)</i>	
Cunt		1	(1)
Motherfucker		2	(2)
Fuck		3	(3)
Wanker		4	(4)
Nigger		5	(11)
Bastard		6	(5)
Prick		7	(7)
Bollocks		8	(6)
Arsehole		9	(9)
Paki		10	(17)
Shag		11	(8)
Whore		12	(13)
Twat		13	(10)
Piss off		14	(12)
Spastic		15	(14)
Slag		16	(18)
Shit		17	(15)
Dickhead		18	(19)
Pissed off		19	(16)
Arse		20	(20)
Bugger		21	(21)
Balls		22	(22)
Jew		23	(24)
Sodding		24	(23)
Jesus Christ		25	(26)
Crap		26	(25)
Bloody		27	(27)
God		28	(28)

Base: Total sample

[5] Based on mean where 'very severe' = 3 and 'not swearing' = 0.

## Swear words

### The top three

The three words rated as ‘very severe’ by the majority of respondents have not changed from 1998. In all cases women find the words far more offensive than do men, and older respondents find them more offensive than younger ones.

Table 1: Ranking of ‘very severe’ words<sup>6</sup>

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>18-34 years</i>	<i>35-54 years</i>	<i>55+ years</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Cunt</b>						
Very severe	83	80	86	78	84	85
Fairly severe	13	15	11	15	13	11
Mild	3	*4	*2	*5	*2	*2
Not swearing	*1	*1	*1	*2	*1	*1
Mean	2.77	2.73	2.81	2.69	2.81	2.82
<b>Motherfucker</b>						
Very severe	79	74	84	78	76	83
Fairly severe	15	18	12	17	17	11
Mild	4	5	*2	*3	*5	*3
Not swearing	*2	*2	*2	*1	*1	*3
Mean	2.72	2.65	2.78	2.72	2.69	2.73
<b>Fuck</b>						
Very severe	71	65	76	65	66	82
Fairly severe	22	26	19	25	27	16
Mild	6	8	*3	9	*5	*2
Not swearing	*1	*1	*1	*1	*1	*1
Mean	2.64	2.55	2.72	2.54	2.59	2.78

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

[6] Unless otherwise specified, those responding ‘don’t know’ are excluded from all Tables.

## Directive personal abuse

The next three words are all words that may be considered ‘personal’ and directive abuse. When considering the ranked order, however, it is important to remember that, while ‘wanker’ is fourth both in this study and in the previous 1998 study, ‘nigger’ is now fifth. ‘Bastard’ and ‘prick’ are sixth and seventh respectively.

**Table 2: Ranking of ‘personal’ and directive words**

	<i>Total</i> %	<i>Male</i> %	<i>Female</i> %	<i>18-34 years</i> %	<i>35-54 years</i> %	<i>55+ years</i> %
<b>Wanker</b>						
Very severe	37	31	43	37	34	40
Fairly severe	37	38	36	37	42	31
Mild	22	27	17	22	20	24
Not swearing	4	*4	*4	*3	*4	*6
Mean	2.06	1.94	2.18	2.08	2.06	2.05
<b>Bastard</b>						
Very severe	33	24	43	30	33	38
Fairly severe	33	33	33	33	35	29
Mild	25	31	19	29	24	23
Not swearing	8	12	*4	8	8	9
Mean	1.92	1.68	2.15	1.86	1.94	1.96
<b>Prick</b>						
Very severe	26	21	32	19	22	38
Fairly severe	36	35	38	33	40	36
Mild	29	34	24	37	31	19
Not swearing	8	10	6	11	*7	*6
Mean	1.81	1.66	1.96	1.59	1.77	2.06

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

Again, gender and age make a difference as to how strongly respondents felt about each word. There also appeared to be some regional differences, with ‘wanker’ thought to be ‘very severe’ by more people in the Midlands (45%) than in the south (37%) or the north (32%). Similarly, ‘bastard’ was more likely to be thought ‘very severe’ in the Midlands and north (40% and 39%, respectively) than in the south (26%).

## Other expletives

The next set of words is a mixture of expletives and directed abuse. Significant proportions still find ‘bollocks’ and ‘arsehole’ ‘very severe’, although more respondents considered them ‘mild’ in comparison with the three above. The term ‘shag’ is also thought ‘very/fairly severe’ by over 50% of the sample and relatively small numbers think of the first three as ‘not swearing’. However, a significant proportion (44%) thinks ‘dickhead’ is a mild word.

**Table 3: Ranking of other expletives**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>18-34 years</i>	<i>35-54 years</i>	<i>55+ years</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Bollocks</b>						
Very severe	25	19	31	20	19	37
Fairly severe	32	29	35	32	34	29
Mild	34	42	26	37	36	30
Not swearing	8	9	8	11	10	*4
Mean	1.74	1.59	1.90	1.60	1.63	2.00
<b>Arsehole</b>						
Very severe	22	17	27	15	19	32
Fairly severe	34	33	35	31	37	34
Mild	36	42	31	43	38	28
Not swearing	7	9	6	10	6	*5
Mean	1.71	1.57	1.84	1.51	1.68	1.93
<b>Shag</b>						
Very severe	27	19	35	16	26	39
Fairly severe	28	24	33	24	31	30
Mild	32	40	24	40	32	24
Not severe	12	17	8	20	11	*7
Mean	1.7	1.45	1.95	1.37	1.72	2.02
<b>Dickhead</b>						
Very severe	16	9	23	16	13	18
Fairly severe	24	20	27	23	25	23
Mild	44	51	37	46	49	37
Not swearing	16	20	13	14	13	21
Mean	1.39	1.19	1.60	1.41	1.39	1.38

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.



## ‘The rest’

Many of the remaining words were not considered ‘very severe’ by large groups of people, although there are gender and age biases.

**Table 4: Ranking of other words**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>18-34 years</i>	<i>35-54 years</i>	<i>55+ years</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Piss off</b>						
Very severe	18	13	22	15	14	24
Fairly severe	32	30	35	36	31	30
Mild	42	48	36	41	46	39
Not swearing	7	9	6	7	9	*6
Mean	1.61	1.47	1.75	1.59	1.50	1.74
<b>Shit</b>						
Very severe	16	12	20	11	12	26
Fairly severe	26	23	28	27	26	24
Mild	49	54	44	53	52	42
Not swearing	9	10	8	9	11	*8
Mean	1.49	1.37	1.60	1.40	1.38	1.68
<b>Arse</b>						
Very severe	10	7	14	*6	9	17
Fairly severe	21	18	25	12	26	26
Mild	47	50	45	52	48	42
Not swearing	21	25	16	29	17	15
Mean	1.22	1.06	1.38	0.96	1.27	1.44
<b>Bugger</b>						
Very severe	9	6	11	*5	7	14
Fairly severe	22	17	27	18	25	23
Mild	48	50	47	44	52	50
Not swearing	21	27	15	33	16	13
Mean	1.18	1.03	1.34	0.95	1.24	1.37
<b>Balls</b>						
Very severe	11	8	14	*2	9	22
Fairly severe	19	15	23	15	18	24
Mild	44	46	42	42	50	41
Not swearing	25	31	20	40	23	12
Mean	1.16	1.00	1.32	0.79	1.14	1.56

Table 4 (continued)

	Total %	Male %	Female %	18-34 years %	35-54 years %	55+ years %
<b>Sodding</b>						
Very severe	7	*4	10	*3	*5	14
Fairly severe	18	12	24	14	18	22
Mild	45	46	44	45	48	41
Not swearing	30	37	22	38	29	23
Mean	1.03	0.84	1.22	0.82	1.00	1.27
<b>Crap</b>						
Very severe	5	*4	7	*3	*4	9
Fairly severe	15	9	21	9	15	21
Mild	48	50	45	47	52	44
Not swearing	32	37	27	42	29	25
Mean	0.93	0.80	1.07	0.72	0.93	1.15
<b>Bloody</b>						
Very severe	3	*2	*4	*1	*2	*6
Fairly severe	11	7	16	*7	9	19
Mild	56	53	58	51	62	55
Not swearing	29	37	22	41	27	20
Mean	0.88	0.73	1.03	0.68	0.86	1.11

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents

### Taboo words - terms of abuse

*'Children should not have the opportunity to learn these words. They mimic.'*

(Depth 11, person with mental disability, Aberdeen)

The researchers noted that one of the most striking differences, qualitatively, between this piece of research and the previous study two years ago was an increased awareness and sensitivity towards other people. There was recognition among participants that changing social conventions meant that many words, often referring to minority groups, had become, or were becoming, less acceptable. Participants felt this came about because of an increasing awareness of, and empathy with, different minorities and their role and status within society. Many minority groups were felt now to be more visible and more integrated into mainstream society and words that were derogatory towards them were not generally accepted. This was most notable in terms of racial abuse, but other groups were also mentioned: people with disabilities, those from different religious faiths, homosexual men and women, and also national minorities.

## Terms of abuse: racial

*'I think the racial comments are far more offensive than sexual innuendo.'*

(Group 10, female empty nesters, C2D, Aberdeen)

The word 'nigger' was found, as in the research conducted two years ago, to be particularly 'severe'. There was an increase of 10 percentage points between those who said it was 'very severe' in this study in 2000 (42%) and those in the previous study in 1998 (32%). Women, younger respondents and those living in the south were more likely than the sample as a whole to rate the word strongly.

**Table 5: Reactions to terms of abuse: nigger**

	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	South	Midlands	North
	%	%	%	years	years	years	%	%	%
Very severe	42	36	47	45	43	37	47	37	37
Fairly severe	26	27	25	26	26	26	26	25	27
Mild	14	15	13	15	13	15	11	17	16
Not swearing	18	21	15	14	17	22	16	20	19
Mean	1.92	1.78	2.05	2.02	1.96	1.78	2.05	1.81	1.82

Base: Total sample

In terms of the ranking of severity across all the words tested both in this research and that conducted in 1998, 'nigger' showed the most movement, going from eleventh position in 1998 to fifth in 2000.

A similar movement in terms of ranking was noted for the word 'paki'. In 1998 it was ranked as the seventeenth most severe word, while in 2000 it was tenth. As with 'nigger', a higher proportion of respondents thought it a 'very severe' word in 2000 (34%) compared with 1998 (26%).

**Table 6: Reactions to terms of abuse: Paki**

	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	South	Midlands	North
	%	%	%	years	years	years	%	%	%
Very severe	34	28	40	36	38	27	38	31	31
Fairly severe	26	26	26	29	23	26	30	27	22
Mild	16	18	14	17	15	16	12	17	21
Not swearing	24	28	19	17	24	29	20	25	26
Mean	1.71	1.55	1.87	1.85	1.76	1.50	1.86	1.62	1.58

Base: Total sample

Again, women, younger respondents and those living in the south are more likely to rate the language as ‘very severe’.

*‘I think for a commentator ... to say something like that, maybe he should be reprimanded by the company he works for. I mean you couldn’t really have that sort of thing flying around the television all the time.’*

(Group 12, gay men, single/partnered, C1C2, Manchester)

### Terms of abuse: disability

Terms of abuse against people with disabilities also rank high in the overall list of words - ‘spastic’ was fifteenth. There is a slight change since the research was last conducted; 32% of the total sample now says the word is ‘very severe’ compared with 30% in 1998.

The key demographic variable is the different tolerances of men and of women. Age also affects attitudes, with older respondents less likely to rate it as ‘very severe’. In 1998, a clear distinction based on geography was also found. This was not true in this study.

**Table 7: Reactions to terms of abuse: spastic**

	Total %	Male %	Female %	18-34 years %	35-54 years %	55+ years %
Very severe	32	25	40	33	36	27
Fairly severe	24	22	25	24	25	22
Mild	16	18	15	19	14	15
Not swearing	28	35	20	24	25	34
Mean	1.6	1.37	1.84	1.66	1.71	1.43

Base: Total sample

*(Re. spastic/retard/epileptic) ‘Yes, when you say, “Oh, you bastard” and they’re not, they don’t really take it offensively, but if someone is a spastic or a retard or epileptic, then it’s not their fault.’*

(Depth 1, Irish family with young children, Manchester)

### Terms of abuse: religious beliefs

In the previous study, the term ‘Jew’ used abusively was tested. Then, as now, about one in five respondents thought it ‘very severe’, with women far more likely to say this than men. There is also the suggestion in the data that respondents in the south were more likely to say it was ‘very severe’ in comparison with those in the north.

**Table 8: Reactions to terms of abuse: Jew**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>18-34</i>	<i>35-54</i>	<i>55+</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>Midlands</i>	<i>North</i>
	%	%	%	years	years	years	%	%	%
Very severe	20	15	26	20	20	20	24	20	16
Fairly severe	15	12	18	12	16	18	17	14	14
Mild	14	14	13	14	15	12	13	14	15
Not swearing	51	59	42	53	49	50	47	53	55
Mean	1.05	0.82	1.28	0.98	1.08	1.08	1.18	1.00	0.92

Base: Total sample

### Profanity

There has been barely any change between the studies in the proportion of respondents who considered that words from a religious origin used as expletives were ‘severe’. More respondents thought ‘Jesus Christ’ was very severe (14%) than said the same about ‘God’ (10%). Gender and age made a difference, with women and older respondents more likely to say these were ‘very severe’ terms.

**Table 9: Reactions to the use of ‘Jesus Christ’ as an expletive**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>18-34</i>	<i>35-54</i>	<i>55+</i>
	%	%	%	years	years	years
Very severe	14	9	19	9	13	19
Fairly severe	13	11	14	8	12	18
Mild	27	24	30	27	28	26
Not swearing	46	56	37	56	46	37
Mean	0.93	0.72	1.14	0.69	0.92	1.20

Base: Total sample

**Table 10: Reactions to the use of ‘God’ as an expletive**

	<i>Total</i> %	<i>Male</i> %	<i>Female</i> %	<i>18-34 years</i> %	<i>35-54 years</i> %	<i>55+ years</i> %
Very severe	10	5	14	7	9	13
Fairly severe	8	6	9	*5	8	10
Mild	23	18	28	20	26	22
Not swearing	60	70	49	68	56	54
Mean	0.67	0.46	0.88	0.50	0.70	0.82

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

*‘They often in children’s programmes sneak in words that, instead of using out-and-out what they would consider out-and-out swear words, they’ll say things like, “Oh, God” ... I must say I find that I don’t want my little boy to hear that, and that’s in almost every children’s programme, that seems to be the expression of choice in terms of, if we’re going to have an expletive, let them say that. And as I say, he doesn’t watch half the kid’s programmes because I switch them off. I say “You’re not listening to this ...”’*

(Group 4, female churchgoers with young children, C2D, Aberdeen)

### **Words referring to women**

This study shows women generally were more likely than men to find the words tested ‘very severe’. However, young people in general were less likely to say this than older respondents. The 1998 study had suggested that abusive terms referring to women were particularly insulting to young women, so that, while the gender bias remained, the age bias was generally removed.

This is true again in the 2000 study. The gender differences remain, but there is no age difference, with young people as likely as older respondents to say these are ‘very severe’ terms. It will be interesting to see if ‘slag’, which is now at sixteenth position in the ranked order, having been at eighteenth in the 1998 study, will continue to move up the list. It, with other terms of abuse, is one of the few words that more of the younger than the older respondents say is ‘very severe’.

**Table 11: Ranking of words referring to women**

	Total %	Male %	Female %	18-34 years %	35-54 years %	55+ years %
<b>Whore</b>						
Very severe	26	19	32	26	25	27
Fairly severe	33	33	34	36	32	32
Mild	25	27	24	25	26	24
Not swearing	15	20	10	13	15	17
Mean	1.70	1.52	1.88	1.74	1.66	1.69
<b>Twat</b>						
Very severe	26	22	31	25	23	31
Fairly severe	27	28	27	28	28	26
Mild	27	32	23	30	28	24
Not swearing	19	19	18	18	20	18
Mean	1.62	1.52	1.71	1.59	1.55	1.71
<b>Slag</b>						
Very severe	19	15	22	20	17	18
Fairly severe	31	25	38	31	33	30
Mild	33	38	29	39	34	27
Not swearing	17	23	10	10	15	24
Mean	1.52	1.32	1.72	1.60	1.53	1.44

Base: Total sample

## The views of minority groups

A list is given in Appendix 1 of the minority groups interviewed, either within groups or as part of the depth interviews.

### Ethnicity:

*‘These things should be brought to the surface. From that, you could actually stimulate some real conversation with a child and, if she said, “What’s a nigger?” you could say, “It’s a really horrible term that some people call Blacks, but you never do that because they are the same as us.” You could turn it into a positive thing. I thought that (the use of the word “nigger” in a pre-Watershed programme) was absolutely fine, it highlights the problem ... it is the real world out there, and it was the real world.’*

(Depth 2, Jewish family with young children, North London)

Religious belief formed a stronger demarcation of attitude than the ethnicity of respondents. For many Black British participants, however, programmes which were broadcast late at night, had appropriate pre-transmission warnings and had storylines to support such language were generally accepted. Such language during times when children might be watching was not acceptable, nor was language which could not be anticipated by the editorial context or programme genre. This group thought they would find the sort of classification system used in cinemas helpful to guide their viewing.

For these participants, particular offence was generated by the use of terms of racial or homophobic abuse, or language that was directive and personal.

*‘... if you were driving in your car, somebody cuts you up in your car, if they shout and call you a f-ing idiot, or a bloody idiot or whatever, fair enough. If they start putting your racial background into that, it’s unacceptable.’*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)

This group also talked of a dislike of profanity.

The attitudes of many of the British Asian groups were more conservative. This was especially true of practising Moslems. For them, the desire to protect their children from the negative effects of hearing swearing and offensive language was strong, and there was a sense that children copy what they hear on television. Some of these participants said they felt that television made their duty and responsibility as parents more difficult.

*‘This type of behaviour is objectionable within our culture.’*

(Depth 7, family with older children, Moslem, Hemel Hempstead)

*(Re. advertisers’ use of swearing and offensive language in posters). ‘(They have) no consideration of how it affects people beyond their target group.’*

(Depth 7, family with older children, Moslem, Hemel Hempstead)

Those participants who were churchgoing also had a greater concern about children hearing ‘strong’ language. This group had a great sensitivity to the use of profanities and especially disliked their use as expletives or as exclamations.



## Sexuality

The homosexual groups were more open about the inclusion of swearing and offensive language in programmes, but they expressed a particular dislike of terms that mocked (other) minorities.

*'The woman who said about the spastic pram, that would be very upsetting for someone who had a spastic child. That is way out of order.'*

(Group 12, gay men, single/partnered, C1C2, Manchester)

Age seemed to be a significant determinant of attitude, with older gay men more ambivalent towards the use of 'derogatory' and homophobic terms. The younger homosexuals were less willing to accept such usage.

*'It's (use of the word "fudgepacker") almost what you come to expect with someone like that (a television presenter). From someone who's respected though, you do get a shock. It does piss me off to an extent. You can take offence to it. I mean, I'm sure it touches all of us to a certain extent.'*

(Group 12, gay men, single/partnered, C1C2, Manchester)

## Disability

Disabled people were very aware of the offence that could be caused by the use of abusive or derogatory terms that illuminated people's differences. Some, like the older gay men, accepted that offence was not always intended, but all respondents in this group thought television should not include such terms as part of entertainment.



## Chapter 2: Swearing and offensive language in television programmes

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*'You don't want to switch on the TV and expect to have a true reflection of everyday life. People know that that is not the case. If you want that to be a reflection of everyday life and hear a swear word every other minute, then go outside your door instead of sitting in your front room.'*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)

Participants accepted that one of the functions of television programming was to reflect reality. As they knew that swearing was around them in 'real life', this meant that television programmes might include it. However, participants did not necessarily accept its use. Many felt it exceeded boundaries that they thought appropriate. As the researchers said: *'The simple fact that swearing and offensive language is expected does not qualify it as being acceptable.'*

Participants did acknowledge, however, that there were certain conventions surrounding the transmission of swearing and offensive language on television. Prime among these was recognition of the place of the 9.00 p.m. Watershed.

*'That (a "mild" swear word) was on at 8.00 p.m. ... probably even five years ago you wouldn't have heard language like that on the television, probably not even after 9.00 p.m., let alone before.'*

(Depth 6, Jewish family with older children, North London)

Material transmitted after 9.00 p.m. was understood to be likely to include language which might cause offence. Parental duty for what a child might hear earlier was expected to be greater, while the broadcaster was also expected to take far more care and share the responsibility.

*'At the end of the day, the option is there isn't it, so parents know about it, but after nine o'clock the kids shouldn't be watching telly. You know without them monitoring carefully what they are watching. Before that they should be able to ... they can watch whatever they want and not have any swearing or anything whatsoever, which is right. That is the way it should be.'*

(Group 12, gay men, single/partnered, C1C2, Manchester)

Other conventions involve the expectations built by the programme genre, or the nature of the broadcast channel, pre-transmission announcements and other information, such as that provided in listings in magazines and newspapers.

Should any of these prime conventions be broken then participants laid the blame at the broadcaster's door - they felt they were not being given the opportunity to 'protect' their children, or themselves, from material they might judge unsuitable or offensive.

## Scheduling

Many of the expectations created by the scheduling of programmes were driven by the hope that children could be protected from exposure to swearing and offensive language.

*'If I'm sitting down watching a programme at night and I know there is going to be swearing, I make sure the child is in bed, but if I'm sitting down at 7.00 p.m. watching a programme in the evening, I'm not expecting to hear any words which are swear words.'*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)

*'Programmes that are during the day, they shouldn't have swearing. I think it's acceptable if you watch it at night-time, you're sort of prepared and you can switch off ...'*

(Group 4, female churchgoers with young children, C2D, Aberdeen)

This desire to shield children from hearing 'strong' language stretches across the media. Research recently published by the Radio Authority and the BSC<sup>7</sup> also pinpointed times around the school day as being 'swear-free' zones.

Daytime television schedules, running from the pre-school to early evening slots, were judged against similar criteria. The slot before school started was thought to be for family viewing. It was assumed that parents with children need not be over-vigilant about what their children might be watching. Although it was accepted that one of the channels produced a breakfast show which was known to be rather risqué, it was recognisably aimed at an older teenage-young adult market, and - even on this programme - swearing and offensive language were disliked by participants.

During the day, while children were at school, it was accepted that programmes need not be made specifically suitable for children and could cover more adult subjects. Nonetheless, it was felt that children should still be able to watch them unsupervised.

*'You can't watch it with them all the time. You can't vet it beforehand or you've got to sit and watch it with them. What are you going to do, switch it off?'*

(Depth 6, Jewish family with older children, North London)

Participants queried the possible presence in the daytime audience of pre-school children or other children who may be at home, unwell or during the holidays. There was a concern expressed by many about the appropriateness of the subject matter in many of the daytime shows. An American show, broadcast at this time, was especially disliked because much of the language was 'bleeped' out, while the violent or abusive behaviour accompanying it indicated the nature of the exchanges taking place.

[7] *Listening 2000*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave; Broadcasting Standards Commission and Radio Authority, 2000.

*(American chat show) 'It's definitely not acceptable at that time of the morning.'*  
(Group 10, female empty nesters, C2D, Aberdeen)

The period immediately after school, from 3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m., was seen as the time for programming targeted at children. While most participants did not think that children's programmes should avoid contentious issues, there was a clear expectation that swearing and offensive language would play no part in such programmes. More concern was expressed in the groups about talk shows, sometimes scheduled as an alternative at this time, which were not aimed at a child audience. They were thought to deal with issues that were inappropriate for children and often to contain unsuitable language.

From the time of the early evening news to about 7.00 p.m. it was generally accepted that programming started to shift away from being 'safe' for children to watch unsupervised (especially children of primary school age). However, there was still an expectation that 'strong' language would not be used.

The time at which parents felt most vulnerable and were increasingly uncertain about the action they should take was the period between 8.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m., as the Watershed approached.

*(Re. use of "very severe" terms in a pre-Watershed documentary) 'You sort of know ... (you) tune into a documentary at eight o'clock, you do expect it to be somewhat milder than the one that you would see at nine or ten o'clock, and I should say I would not expect to see that at eight o'clock at night ...'*  
(Group 4, female churchgoers with young children, C2D, Aberdeen)

A number of programmes, it was felt, increasingly pushed at the conventions that governed scheduling by using 'strong' language. Participants recognised that television soap operas dealt with themes that were not targeted at a child audience, but were guided by the parameters around the use of 'realistic' language.

*'... the soaps are on usually between 7.00 p.m. and 8.00 p.m., and the children are still around at those times, and the soaps are watched especially by the children. Therefore, they've got to recognise that and not have swear words in them.'*  
(Depth 6, Jewish family with older children, North London)

Other programmes, particularly some of the 'police shows', came in for more criticism.

*(Re. pre-Watershed police drama) 'It's sort of an aggressive programme though, isn't it? And you use aggressive language to get that across, to increase the aggression. It's always men angry and I'm not sure that that's appropriate for 8 o'clock, some of the language.'*  
(Group 10, female empty nesters, C2D, Aberdeen)

The hour from 9.00 p.m. was seen as a time of graduated change to increasingly adult material with language to match. From about 10.00 p.m. onwards, there was a greater acceptance that swearing and offensive language may be used in programmes, even though many participants did not like it themselves. The later the hour after 10.00 p.m., the greater the acceptance of more severe terms, or the more frequent use of ‘strong’ language.

*‘... but some words are obviously more offensive and should be after a certain time, like nine o’clock obviously, then they can put “bloody”, all those sort of things. But then when you’ve got things like the “C” word, that should not be before ten o’clock, if at all ...’*

(Group 2, single female, aged 18-24, C2D, South Wales)

## The Watershed

Most respondents are aware of the Watershed at 9.00 p.m.<sup>8</sup> It is clearly recognised as an indication of the likely suitability of material for children<sup>9</sup> and the majority of parents accept that they must exercise greater responsibility for their children’s viewing after that time.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, it was felt that the Watershed represented a mutual ‘contract’ between the viewer and the broadcaster. Parents, it was agreed, should be able to rely on its responsible use. Broadcasters who transmitted ‘strong’ language before 9.00 p.m. were considered to have broken an ‘agreement’ with the viewer, regardless of the nature of the programme. As the Table below shows, the vast majority of respondents (especially parents of older children) agreed that all pre-Watershed programmes should be suitable for children.

**Table 12: All pre 9.00 p.m. programmes should be suitable for children**

	Total	Households with children	Households with children aged under 12	Households with children aged 12-15
	%	%	%	%
Agree	84	81	79	86
Neither agree nor disagree	3	*4	*5	*3
Disagree	13	14	16	10

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

Indeed, most respondents (81%) said they were happy to stay up later to watch programmes that might not be suitable for children. Those parents with younger children (aged under 12) were more likely to say this (89%) than those with children aged between 12 and 15 (81%).

[8] *Television: The Public’s View 1999*; ITC; 2000. [9] In the context of this research, ‘children’ are those aged 15 years and under, although participants were noted to differentiate between their children depending on whether they went to primary or secondary school. [10] Briefing Update No. 5, *Regulation: The Changing Perspective*; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2000.

When asked if it was the parents' responsibility alone to monitor what their children watched, one in three agreed, but the majority (65%), disagreed. Parents were marginally more likely both to agree and disagree than the sample as a whole, but they disagreed 'strongly' rather more than the sample as a whole (48% of parents said they disagreed 'strongly' with this suggestion, compared with 41% of the total sample). Those aged over 55 were far more likely to lay all responsibility at the parental door (37% of those aged 55+ agreed it was the parents' responsibility - compared with 26% of younger respondents). The age of the child in the home made no difference.

**Table 13: It is the parents' responsibility to monitor what their children watch**

	Total %	Households with children %
Agree	30	27
Neither agree nor disagree	5	*4
Disagree	65	69

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

*'I think basically you should be guaranteed not to hear offensive language. If the programme, the channel makers, the TV makers can't guarantee that, or they can't restrict bad language to a particular time, then it's just a shame.'*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)

It was also recognised from the qualitative research that the Watershed is not an absolute demarcation line and that the further away from 9.00 p.m. a programme was, the more it could lead to 'adult' content. Participants suggested that the Watershed was the time after which viewers should be 'prepared' for the use of swearing and offensive language in programmes.

*(Documentaries) 'I don't have a problem with it (swearing). I think if anything they're the ones you are going to hear it on the most, because they are meant to be real life documentaries ... Obviously you are expecting a real life scenario, and I don't find that offensive. Having said that, I wouldn't want to see a real life documentary with a lot of swearing in it before 9.00 p.m.'*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)

A series of questions was asked about the time of the Watershed: two-thirds of the sample (65%) said they were happy with the Watershed at the time it is now (9.00 p.m.). It is well known and established. The great majority (87%) were against bringing the Watershed forward to the earlier time of 8.00 p.m. When a later, 10.00 p.m. Watershed was suggested, the sample split between those who favoured moving it to an hour later (50%) and those who disagreed (40%). The remaining 10% had no view. Parenthood made little difference, while older respondents (those aged 55+) were more likely to favour the later time (61% of this group).

## Scheduling and words

The strength of feeling that participants and respondents expressed when discussing the shielding of children from ‘strong’ language within the home was tested against the list of words that had been examined for their ‘severity’.

Table 14: List of words and broadcast time<sup>11</sup>

	<i>Saying word could be broadcast should never be broadcast</i>	<i>Saying word could be broadcast after 11.00 p.m.</i>	<i>Saying word could be broadcast after 9.00 p.m.</i>	<i>Saying word could be broadcast after 6.00 p.m.</i>	<i>Saying word could be broadcast at any time</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Cunt	52	28	16	*1	*2	*1
Motherfucker	50	30	16	*1	*2	*1
Fuck	38	36	22	*1	*2	*1
Wanker	26	31	36	4	*2	*1
Nigger	53	14	23	5	4	*2
Bastard	20	23	45	7	4	*2
Prick	23	24	43	6	*2	*1
Bollocks	20	22	47	8	3	*1
Arsehole	19	20	48	9	*3	*2
Paki	50	13	25	6	5	*2
Shag	25	24	40	7	3	*2
Whore	21	24	44	7	*2	*1
Twat	27	28	33	9	*3	*1
Piss off	14	18	50	13	3	*2
Spastic	51	12	23	7	5	*2
Slag	18	20	45	11	3	*2
Shit	14	16	48	15	5	*2
Dickhead	17	20	47	12	4	*1
Pissed off	15	17	50	13	3	*1
Arse	15	13	50	16	5	*1
Bugger	12	15	46	19	6	*1
Balls	15	15	47	17	6	*2
Jew	46	15	22	9	6	*2
Sodding	15	14	45	17	7	*1
Jesus Christ	30	10	30	16	11	*3
Crap	12	14	43	23	7	*2
Bloody	7	8	41	32	10	*2
God	29	8	27	18	13	*5

Base: All who think word is a swear word

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

[11] It should be noted that the base for this Table is those respondents who thought the word was a swear word or offensive. This varies from word to word and the Table should be used in conjunction with the Table in Appendix 2.



Significant percentages of respondents felt that the two strongest words should never be broadcast. However, 'fuck' is accepted by more respondents late in the evening, after 11.00 p.m., and a far smaller percentage (two in five) say it should never be heard.

With the next set of swear words, most respondents still do not think these words should be broadcast before the Watershed. There are some exceptions - notably 'bloody' and 'crap' - which are mentioned as acceptable after 6.00 p.m., respectively, by 32% and 23% of the sample who think of these as swear words.

In this context of acceptable transmission times, the abusive terms - 'nigger', 'Paki', 'spastic' and 'Jew' - are rated as inappropriate for transmission as the two strongest swear words.

Similarly, 'Jesus Christ' and 'God' used as expletives are mentioned by one in three as being inappropriate for transmission at any time.

In summary, even though respondents might consider a word or expletive 'mild', they rarely feel they can condone it within programming that children might be expected to see. However, the qualitative research has shown that other factors do affect attitudes and participants could see justification, at times, for the use of certain words within their editorial context, even before the Watershed.

## **Genres of programming**

While scheduling is the clearest indicator of the likely content of programmes, viewers also use the type of programme as part of the mix to help them make viewing decisions. Children's programming, for example, is never expected to contain any swear words or offensive language, nor is breakfast television. The daytime chat shows and entertainment programmes are acknowledged to be more risqué in the subject matter they cover, but this does not mean there is an assumption that 'strong' language will be heard.

Those genres where such language is anticipated are those clearly perceived as being 'adult': drama, film, comedy and documentaries, particularly those dealing with controversial subjects.

*'In a documentary you are showing it as it is. And to cover it up using different words or using no words at all makes it less believable. In which case, why show it in the first place?'*

(Group 12, gay men, single/partnered, C1C2, Manchester)

Within this was a difference in expectation about material produced domestically and material bought in, especially from the United States. It was widely accepted that imported American material contained different levels of 'strong' language depending on the genre. So, comedies were thought to contain less swearing and offensive language, and little sexual innuendo, when compared with their British counterparts. American films, on the other hand,

were expected to contain ‘stronger’ language than the equivalent British product.<sup>12</sup> However, participants suggested this use of language was less offensive because the culture being depicted was removed from their own and so they could disassociate themselves from the language.

British productions were expected to be more restrained. This was found to be especially important for those funded by the BBC. This rests with the judgement that the BBC is answerable to its licence fee payers and so should create material suitable for all. The earlier research into public attitudes towards ‘values’ had also noted this distinction drawn for the BBC. The report stated: *‘To hear words on television that one objects to, most especially if that service is provided by a common levy such as the licence fee, is to witness a rebuttal of the values that one lives by, and the triumph of the values of other groups who enshrine such language in their lifestyle.’*<sup>13</sup>

### Scheduling and genre

In the 1998 research, respondents had been asked whether swearing and offensive language in films should be edited. Sixty five per cent of respondents had said then that they would rather have the film transmitted in its entirety later in the evening. Those with children particularly agreed with this (75%). In the current study, respondents were asked if they would find it acceptable for swearing and offensive language to be bleeped out of a film to enable it to be shown before the Watershed. The sample was less definite: 58% said this was not acceptable and 42% said it was. Parents were less likely to agree (64% of parents said this would not be acceptable). It is likely that respondents who are parents are among the younger respondents in the sample and their reactions may be based on their age, rather than on their status as parents in this context.

Reactions to a suggestion that swearing and offensive language should be taken out of a post-Watershed film were clearer. The same proportion as in the previous study (65%) said the language should be left in, while one in five said it could be dubbed. A slightly smaller proportion (16%) said it should be bleeped. As before, parents were more likely to agree the film should be shown in its entirety after the Watershed (71%).

**Table 15: In a post-Watershed film, what do you do with the swearing and offensive language?**

	Total %	Households with children %
Bleep out	16	12
Dub	19	17
Leave in	65	71

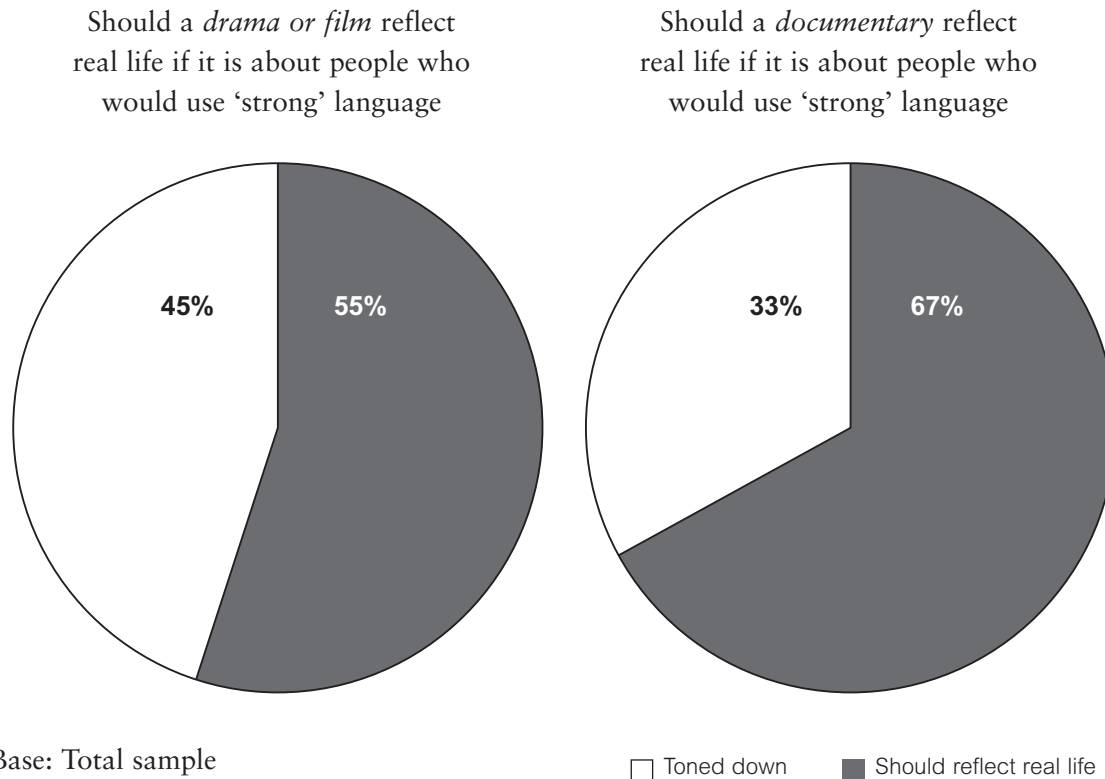
Base: Total sample

[12] *Film versus Drama: Relative Acceptability of the Two Genres on Television*; Counterpoint Research with Pam Hanley; ITC, 1998.

[13] *Regulating for Changing Values*; Institute of Communication Studies; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1997.

Respondents were also asked how realistic different types of post-Watershed programming (drama and documentary) should be if the programme portrayed people who would swear in real life. As Figure 2 shows, respondents were clearer that documentaries should be true to life, while drama did not have that immediate right. This is due, in part, to the fact that drama is scripted and words are ‘put into’ characters’ mouths.

**Figure 2: Swearing and offensive language and types of programme shown after 9.00 p.m.**



*‘I think documentaries, sort of the nature of them, are explicit, they cover areas that, yeah, if you’re interested in a topic you’re going to see things that are going to shock you in a documentary normally. If you want to see, you tape it ... I think they have to be on late at night ...’*

(Group 4, female churchgoers with young children, C2D, Aberdeen)

While there were few demographic differences apparent for documentaries, women and older respondents felt more strongly that dramatic material should be toned down. Conversely, parents felt more strongly than the sample as a whole that real life should be mirrored, regardless of the genre.

**Table 16: Should a post-Watershed drama reflect real life if it is about people who would use ‘strong’ language?**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>18-34</i>	<i>35-54</i>	<i>55+</i>	<i>Households</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>years</i>	<i>years</i>	<i>years</i>	<i>with</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>children</i>
Reflect real life	55	62	47	67	64	32	64
Tone down	45	38	53	33	36	68	36

Base: Total sample

### Channel of transmission

The channel of broadcast also played a role in the expectations of participants.

**Table 17: Are there any channels on which swearing and offensive language is more acceptable?**

	<i>Total</i>
	<i>%</i>
BBC1	*4
BBC2	9
ITV	10
Channel 4	42
Channel 5	42
Cable/satellite	48
Don't know	24

Base: All who expect swearing and offensive language on certain channels

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

At the top of the pyramid was BBC1 - this was expected to be the most ‘responsible’ of the channels as it is paid for by the licence fee and, therefore, ‘owned’ by all. It was expected to set an example for other channels to follow. As the data show, few respondents felt that ‘strong’ language on BBC1 was acceptable. When the converse question was asked - ‘*On which channel is language particularly less acceptable?*’ - BBC1 headed the list, with an overwhelming 92% mentioning the channel.

*‘Everyone feels like they’ve got a right about what goes on because of the television licence.’*

(Group 2, single female, aged 18-24, C2D, South Wales)

The quantitative data suggest these attitudes flow over into attitudes about BBC2. Nine per cent said it was more acceptable to hear ‘strong’ language on BBC2. In contrast, 65% said it was ‘less acceptable’ - a marked difference from BBC1 (92%).

The qualitative research suggests that BBC2 was seen as a minority channel with less appeal for children and targeted at adults, while BBC1 is clearly perceived as a mainstream channel with a broad constituency. However, it seems that the BBC brand affected attitudes here as well.

*‘BBC has got a reputation, hasn’t it, as being like one of the most credible TV things in the world.’*

(Group 1, male, aged 16-18, C1C2, Irish roots, Manchester)

It could also be a recognition that, because a programme is designed for an adult audience, there is not a necessary expectation that the content has to be more ‘adult’ or that it will contain ‘strong’ language.

In the qualitative research, participants expected ITV to have fewer restraints placed upon it than BBC1, but its place as a mainstream channel meant that it was expected to avoid controversy. Therefore, a relatively small proportion of respondents (10%) said it was more acceptable that ITV programmes contain swearing and offensive language.

Channel 4 was also recognised as being a minority interest channel, with a broader audience than BBC2. It had a reputation among participants for offering controversial and challenging material, which led to an expectation of higher levels of ‘strong’ language than might be found on the three channels mentioned above. Two in five respondents said ‘strong’ language on Channel 4 would be more acceptable. Men were far more likely than women to say such material was more acceptable on both Channel 4 and BBC2, while such clear demographic differences were not noted for the other channels.

**Table 18: Are there any channels on which swearing and offensive language is more acceptable?**

	<i>Total</i> %	<i>Male</i> %	<i>Female</i> %
BBC2	*9	*13	*4
Channel 4	42	46	35

Base: All who expect swearing and offensive language on certain channels

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

Channel 5 was described by participants as offering ‘tabloid TV’ and the high volume of perceived adult content and film led to an expectation that it would contain significant amounts of ‘strong’ language. Two in five respondents said such material on Channel 5 would be ‘more acceptable’.

*‘Everyone knows what Channel 5 is good for.’*

(Group 12, gay men, single/partnered, C1C2, Manchester)

*'That's like Channel 5, late at night.'*

(Group 1, male, aged 16-18, C1C2, Irish roots, Manchester)

The non-terrestrial channels lie at the foot of this pyramid of expectations. The key difference for participants was that these were paid-for channels and, thus, those who bought into them were doing so 'voluntarily'.<sup>14</sup> Viewers could simply stop buying if the content of a service displeased them. The quantitative research supported this view - nearly half of the sample said 'strong' language on these services was 'more acceptable' and only 7% said it would be 'less acceptable'. Those who bought such services were far more likely to say that 'strong' language was more acceptable on these channels: 61% compared with 40% of those who received only the free-to-air services.

However, it should not be assumed that acceptance equals approval. When asked if swearing and offensive language on subscription services were all right because those who subscribe 'know what they're getting', the sample split (45% agreed and 55% disagreed). The fact that a respondent bought into additional services did not make a difference to responses to this question. This supports recent research which suggests that certain cable or satellite-delivered channels had as rigid criteria applied to them by respondents as the free-to-air channels.<sup>15</sup> What were important were the expectations created by the different style and tone of each channel.

**Table 19: Swearing and offensive language doesn't matter so much on cable and satellite channels because people know what they're getting when they subscribe to them**

	<i>Total</i> %	<i>Those receiving terrestrial channels only</i> %	<i>Those subscribing to satellite/cable services</i> %
Yes	45	46	43
No	55	54	57

Base: All who expect swearing and offensive language on certain channels

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

Most respondents (69%) disagreed with a statement which asked them if they avoided certain channels because they expected them to contain swearing and offensive language.

[14] *Likely to Complain? Free-to-air versus subscription channels*; Pam Hanley with Linda Free; ITC, August 1998.

[15] *British Social Attitudes*; National Centre for Social Research, 2000.

## Context and intention

*'I just think anything is appropriate after nine o'clock if it's in the right context, I don't think you should just have meaningless swearing for no reason, but if it's relevant, yes, fine.'*

(Group 1, male, aged 16-18, C1C2, Irish roots, Manchester)

Research shows, consistently, that respondents are more likely to accept or approve of programme content if they can see it is editorially justified or they can appreciate the intention behind it.<sup>16</sup> If material is felt to be included in a programme 'gratuitously', then it is far less likely to achieve audience support. Equally, programme-makers and performers are thought to use 'shock tactics' to create a response.<sup>17</sup>

*(Re. pop star swearing) 'Where the thing was little bit sort of ... he planned it kind of, didn't he? You know, as if they are trying to get a reaction.'*

(Group 9, male with older children, C2D, South Wales)

Participants were far more likely to accept swearing or offensive language in situations in which genuine surprise was expressed, or in dramatic sequences where the stresses of real life were being portrayed. They accepted that even racist or derogatory terms could be used if they were used for 'appropriate' dramatic effect.

*(Re. clip from television soap opera where racist term was used) 'Because at no point during that, even though I don't know what happened afterwards, at no point during that did I get the sense that they were trying to say that what he said was OK. It was quite obvious from the way it was portrayed that he was in the wrong and what he was saying was not acceptable to anybody, and so it's not offensive. I mean it is offensive, it's an offensive expression, but in that context, I wouldn't ...'*

(Group 4, female churchgoers with young children, C2D, Aberdeen)

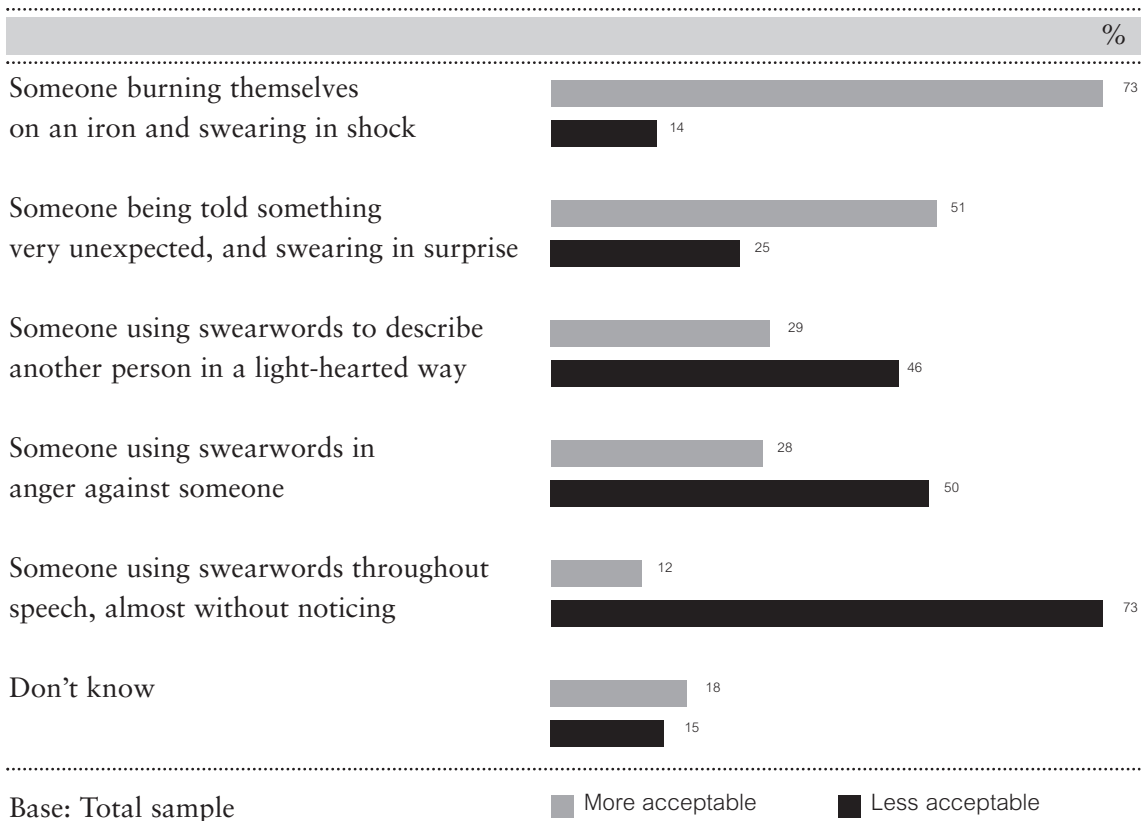
But using derogatory terms for their own sake, or to laugh at others' expense, was not acceptable. There was also a dislike of the use of language just to titillate or to get 'cheap laughs'.

Figure 3 supports this. Seventy three per cent of respondents said the use of 'strong' language in shock, as an expletive, was the most acceptable use (73%), while using swear words as a matter of routine was least acceptable (mentioned also by 73% of the sample).

[16] Briefing Update 6, *Matters of offence*; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2000.

[17] *Sex and sensibility*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1999.

Figure 3: Acceptable ways of using swearing and offensive language on television



Any form of directed abuse was not felt to be acceptable by significant proportions of respondents, even if the terms were used in a light-hearted way (46% said such use was 'less acceptable').

*'The first clip was a live show and that couldn't be helped. But I think that the person who said it didn't do herself any favours by saying it. She certainly didn't come across very well by saying it, but I didn't blame the actual programme itself.'*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)

The same questions had been asked in 1998, and a similar order had been noted. The only significant change in terms of strength of response was in the use of swear words as part of routine, normal speech. In this study, 73% of the sample said it was less acceptable, while, in 1998, 86% had said this. It is not clear why this change has occurred unless it is a reflection of the extent to which such language is perceived as being used as 'normal' speech in daily life.

*'I think if someone's shouting it out at someone else then I think it's offensive. If someone drops their shopping bags and their eggs crash all over the floor and they say a swear word then I don't find that offensive. It's not offensive, but it's just a shame really.'*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)



## Offence caused by swearing and offensive language on television

Respondents were asked about their attitudes towards causing offence to others, and the personal offence they might feel, by the use of swearing and offensive language in television programmes.

When asked if material should be shown that contained language that would not personally upset or offend them, but might upset those from other groups, such as minority ethnic groups or people of different religions, more than two thirds of the sample (68%) thought such content should not be transmitted.

**Table 20: If it did not upset or offend you, but you knew it would considerably upset particular groups of people, such as ethnic minorities, should it be shown?**

	%
Yes	32
No	68

Base: Total sample

Respondents were less clear when it came to upsetting other people who were not from a specific racial or religious group. The majority (59%) still said it would not be acceptable to upset others, even if the respondent would not be personally upset or offended by the language in the programme.

**Table 21: If a programme contained language that did not upset or offend you, but which you knew would considerably upset other people, is it acceptable to upset others?**

	%
Yes	41
No	59

Base: Total sample

Gender and age differences come to the fore. Men (46%) were more likely than women (35%) to say such material should be transmitted. Similarly, more of those aged 18-34 (52%) agreed that the programme should be shown than those aged 55+ (23%).

*'Sometimes I feel bad for my gran when there are things on telly that she's watching and they say things like, "Oh, that's Irish." If they do something back to front, they say "It's Irish" and when she's watching it, I just feel sorry for her.'*

(Group 1, male, aged 16-18, C1C2, Irish roots, Manchester)

By contrast, respondents were asked if it was acceptable to transmit a programme that might offend or upset them personally, but would not offend others. The view among respondents that people had a right not to be upset or offended did not carry through into their attitudes about themselves and three in five said it would be acceptable to transmit the programme.

**Table 22: If a programme contained language that personally upset or offended you, but would probably not offend many others, should it be shown?**

	%
Yes	62
No	38

Base: Total sample

Men were more likely to say this (67%) than women (57%), as were younger respondents (72% of those aged 16-34 agreed with this, compared with 65% of respondents aged 35-54 and 47% of those aged 55+).

If respondents had admitted that they themselves were very/fairly often upset by swearing and offensive language on television then they were less likely to agree that it should be shown, regardless of their personal feelings (36%).

Respondents were also asked how frequently they had been upset or offended by swearing or offensive language in television programmes. Most could not think of many occasions, with one in five saying 'never'.

**Table 23: How often would you say you personally have been upset/offended by swearing or offensive language in a television programme?**

	%
Very often	12
Fairly often	19
Not very often	26
Rarely	21
Never	22

Base: Total sample

Women (39%) and older respondents (52% of those aged 55+) were more likely to say they had been upset ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ often than other groups. In contrast, 32% of men (and only 13% of women) and 35% of those aged 34 and under said they had never had such experiences.

Throughout the quantitative study, if respondents had said that they had been personally upset or offended by swearing and offensive language on television, they were more likely to feel negatively about all issues connected with such material. Conversely, those who said they had never been affected in this way were more accepting of ‘strong’ language.

Similar responses were elicited from the total sample to a question asking about the embarrassment caused when watching a programme, with other people, that contained ‘strong’ language. The previous research had found that embarrassment could often lead to offence, or at least discomfort.

**Table 24: How often would you say you have been embarrassed by swearing or offensive language in a television programme because you thought other people you were watching it with might be upset or offended?**

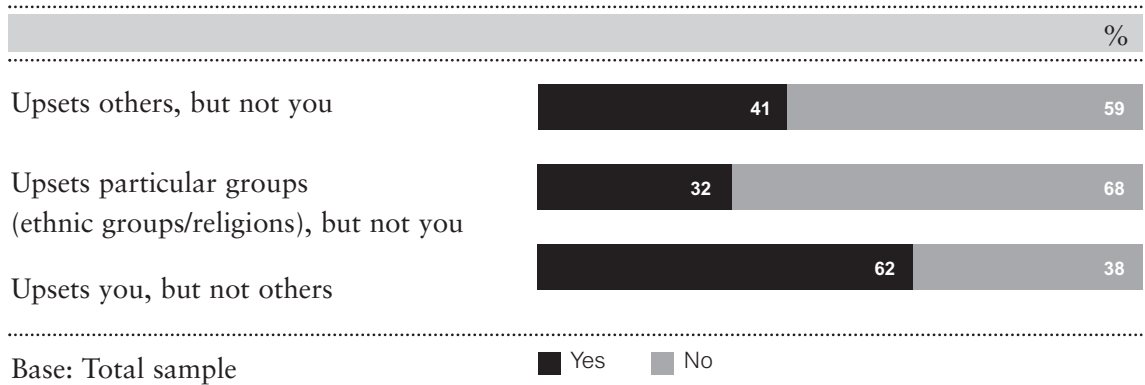
	%
Very often	10
Fairly often	23
Not very often	28
Rarely	20
Never	18

Base: Total sample

One third of the sample said this had happened ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ often. Once again, women (39%) were more likely to have experienced such embarrassment. Men were substantially more likely to answer ‘never’ (24%, compared with 13% of women). Those with older children (aged 12-15) were also more likely (37%) than those with younger children (29%) to say they had experienced such embarrassment very/fairly often, although it is unclear if the embarrassment was caused when they were watching with children.

In summary, respondents felt it was more acceptable that a programme containing swearing and offensive language should be broadcast, even if it was personally upsetting. They were less supportive of such a broadcast being made if it upset others, particularly those from defined groups within society.

**Figure 4: Should swearing and offensive language be broadcast if it ...**



# Chapter 3: Advertising

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## Swearing and offensive language in television advertising

*'But as an advert, for what they're using it for, to advertise ... it's inappropriate even as an adult, because there are an awful lot of ways of saying, this is a really great film, without having to resort to swearing, or being offensive.'*

(Group 4, female churchgoers with young children, C2D, Aberdeen)

When the use of swearing and offensive language in television advertisements was addressed, it was found that participants were far less tolerant. Even words that were considered relatively mild in themselves were thought to be unacceptable in commercials. Ninety two per cent of respondents agreed with the current policy that says there should be no swearing or offensive language used in television advertisements at all.

This strength of feeling comes from the recognition that advertisements cannot be predicted. There are not the usual cues of context or programme storyline, although scheduling offers some 'consumer advice'. However, even when presented with a suggested proposal that 'strong' language would only be transmitted in post-Watershed advertisements, most respondents (81%) still said it would be unacceptable.

The vast majority of the sample (97%) wants television advertising to have rules governing its transmission. When asked specifically whether swearing and offensive language were more or less acceptable in television advertising than in programmes, respondents split almost equally. Forty five per cent said there was no difference between the two genres, while 54% said it was less acceptable for television commercials to carry 'strong' language.

*'They have used it as far as they can go ... without doing actually anything illegal, and I think that's the way advertising is going, they are going as far as to the mark as they can without actually being illegal.'*

(Depth 2, Jewish family with young children, North London)

## Poster advertising

*(Posters) 'It will be seen by the spectrum of society. You cannot time-slot it.'*

(Group 7, British Asian male with older children, Moslem, C1C2, West London)

The qualitative research found that participants drew clear distinctions between 'open' print advertising, such as that found on billboards, and restricted advertising, such as that found in targeted magazines. This distinction is rather like that drawn between free-to-air (where easy access is assumed) and subscription television which is paid for and so 'selected'. Eighty six per cent of respondents agreed that swearing or offensive language on posters was less acceptable because 'you could not make a choice about what you saw'.

*'Yeah, I think in magazines it would be OK because, like, people who read more aren't going to care, but if it's up on a big billboard, everybody will see it.'*  
(Group 2, single female, aged 18-24, C2D, South Wales)

When asked to make a direct comparison with television and the use of swearing and offensive language, a majority of respondents (57%) thought poster advertising should have stricter controls (parents were even more likely to say this), although two in five said the rules should be the same across both media.

**Table 25: Rules on swearing and offensive language in poster sites should be more, or less, strict when compared with television**

	Total %	Households with children %
More strict	57	63
Less strict	*1	*1
Same	41	36

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

*'Posters are more offensive because it is written up and you keep seeing it rather than hearing it.'*  
(Group 13, Lesbian women, C1C2, Bromley)

A desire to protect children from seeing swear words or offensive language was apparent here as well. Most respondents (95%) agreed that there needed to be strict control on posters because children could see them. The qualitative research also found a low tolerance for the inclusion of any swear words or offensive language in this medium.

*'Really, you're just thinking about children aren't you, asking questions, "What's that word? I've never heard that word before." Especially kids who are learning to read because they want to read everything they see, don't they?'*  
(Depth 1, Irish family with young children, Manchester)

*'I don't like it because basically it's ... something that my son would look at, he would be like, "Oh, what's that?" - and he'd go like, you know, he could read that, no bother at all, without trying, and I just don't think it's appropriate.'*  
(Group 4, female churchgoers with young children, C2D, Aberdeen)

Many participants went further, saying the use of such language acted as a contributor to diminishing standards in society as a whole and suggested a lack of respect by the advertiser towards the consumer.

*‘That’s like putting it in your face whether you want it or not. No, I wouldn’t like it. I like to be able to choose these sorts of things.’*

(Group 10, female empty nesters, C2D, Aberdeen)

*‘If they’re putting a poster up that everyone can see, they have to recognise that everybody is not going to find it tasteful, so the best thing to do is exercise some caution and make sure it will please everybody.’*

(Group 10, female empty nesters, C2D, Aberdeen)

A number of recent poster campaigns have used asterisks or puns to avoid using whole words. In general, most respondents (58%) thought it made little difference whether or not asterisks were used. About one in three felt it made the poster more acceptable.

**Table 26: More acceptable if asterisks or puns are used to avoid whole words**

	Total %	Households with children %
More acceptable	29	32
Worse	13	11
Same	58	57

Base: Total sample

Some examples of poster advertisements which had used asterisks were shown in both the qualitative and quantitative studies. When presented with actual examples, more respondents (about two in three) felt such posters should not be allowed.

*‘Because he’d look at some of these and say, “What does that mean, Mum?” you know, “What are the missing letters?” And I’d have to come up with it quickly, and I’d have to be very quick to come up with something that fitted.’*

(Group 4, female churchgoers with young children, C2D, Aberdeen)

*‘If I saw a euphemism written down I guess it would be the same as seeing a swear word as far as I’m concerned, because I know what it would represent.’*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)

## Press advertising

Respondents more readily accepted the use of swear words and offensive language in the press than on posters in the street. However, over two thirds said there should be equivalent rules for both media, while one in three said the rules should be more strict for posters.

**Table 27: Rules on swearing and offensive language in poster advertising should be more, or less, strict when compared with newspapers**

	<i>Total</i> %	<i>Households with children</i> %
More strict for newspapers	4	*4
More strict for posters	29	31
Same	68	65

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

The tolerance for the use of such language in the popular ‘open’ press was quite low. Again, participants in the groups voiced a concern that children might be exposed to unsuitable material if they read newspapers that were lying around the house.

Respondents in the quantitative study were more likely to say that the rules governing language in newspapers should approximate to those for television programmes than had said the same for posters. Parents, perhaps, voiced slightly more concern (36% said the rules should be more strict), but the differences compared with the rest of the sample are not statistically significant.

**Table 28: Rules on swearing and offensive language in newspaper advertisements should be more, or less, strict when compared with television**

	<i>Total</i> %	<i>Households with children</i> %
More strict	32	36
Less strict	4	*6
Same	64	57

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.



Greater lenience was expressed by participants towards magazines targeted at defined audiences. It was believed that these publications generally were outside children’s interests and would not be accessed as easily (due in part to cost). It was also thought that the advertising within magazines was usually designed to match the magazine’s target audience, so the surprise factor is missing.

The questionnaire asked respondents if they felt that the rules should be more relaxed for the use of ‘strong’ language in targeted magazines, but most (70%) still said they should be the same as for other media. Similarly, respondents did not feel greater lenience should be shown towards magazine advertisements even if swear words appeared in articles in these targeted magazines. Indeed, only 16% said the rules could be more relaxed in this case.

When asked to compare magazines and television, the majority of respondents thought the rules across the two media should be the same.

**Table 29: Rules on swearing and offensive language in magazine advertisements should be more, or less, strict when compared with television**

	<i>Total</i> %	<i>Households with children</i> %
More strict	29	34
Less strict	5	*6
Same	65	60

Base: Total sample

\*Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

Parents were more likely to suggest that the rules for magazine advertisements should be stricter. This relates to the concern expressed by some participants that, like newspapers, magazines could be left lying around and so accessed by children.

### **Cinema advertising**

The greater the respondent’s sense that children, or others who might be offended, could avoid or be protected from unsuitable material, the greater the sense of comfort with material which might contain ‘strong’ language.

When asked about the use of swearing and offensive language in the cinema compared with television, smaller proportions of respondents (18%) said the rules should be stricter than had said the same for other media, and the greatest proportion (nearly three quarters) said they should be the same.

**Table 30: Rules on swearing and offensive language in cinema advertisements should be more, or less, strict when compared with television**

	<i>Total</i> %
More strict	18
Less strict	10
Same	72

Base: Total sample

This greater ease may come from a belief that access to the cinema and films is more clearly enforceable.<sup>18</sup>

*'I chose to go in that cinema and to watch that film. As long as it was rated accordingly, I don't have a problem with it. I think it's acceptable.'*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)

### **Advertising on the Internet**

The research also examined responses to advertisements containing swear words that might be placed on the Internet. Other work has shown that respondents are generally fearful of the Internet until they have used this medium.<sup>19</sup> The research presented here did not measure Internet access, but more than a third of respondents (and nearly two in five parents) said they felt the rules for the Internet should be stricter than they are for television. Fifty eight per cent said they should be the same.

**Table 31: Rules on swearing and offensive language on Internet sites should be more, or less, strict when compared with television**

	<i>Total</i> %
More strict	35
Less strict	6
Same	58

Base: Total sample

Far more respondents (nearly 70%) felt that the rules for the Internet and newspapers should be the same, perhaps reflecting the view that general access to both media is considered possible.

[18] *British Social Attitudes*; National Centre for Social Research, 2000.

[19] *Internet Regulation: The Way Forward?*; Independent Television Commission/Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1999.

**Table 32: Rules on swearing and offensive language on Internet sites should be more, or less, strict when compared with newspapers**

	<i>Total</i> %
More strict for newspapers	15
More strict for Internet	16
Same	69

Base: Total sample

However, the ‘open’ access to posters means that many more respondents were clear in their view that the rules governing posters should be stricter than for the Internet.

**Table 33: Rules on swearing and offensive language in posters should be more, or less, strict when compared with the Internet**

	<i>Total</i> %
More strict for posters	28
More strict for Internet	8
Same	63

Base: Total sample

*(Swear words on a poster) ‘To play it safe, you are better not using it at all and then you can’t offend anybody, rather than offending somebody.’*

(Depth 4, Black British family with young children, North London)



# Appendix 1: methodology

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## Qualitative

Fourteen two-hour group discussions and 15 one-hour depth interviews were conducted.

Respondents for the groups were recruited against the following criteria:

- Male/female
- Range of lifestages/ages
- Children in household, ranging from babies to teens
- UK white population/minority ethnic groups/Christian churchgoers

In each group, the following criteria were also used:

- All respondents to watch television regularly
- At least half the group also to be regular radio listeners
- Some to have cable/satellite/digital at home and watch it regularly
- A spread of viewing time from daytime through early evening, evening peak, post-Watershed to very late/early hours of morning
- A spread of attitudes towards the use of bad language on television (using a list of statements) from strong disapproval to strong approval

The geographical spread for the qualitative research was as follows:

- Aberdeen
- Manchester
- South Wales
- Surrey
- West London
- Kent

## Group Discussions

Group No.	Lifestage	Gender		SEC			
		Male	Female	BC1	C1C2	C2DE	C1C2D
1	Young singles aged 16-18	X			X		
2	Young singles aged 18-24		X			X	
3	Partners No children	X		X			
4	Parents with young children Churchgoers		X			X	
5	Parents with young children	X		X			
6	Black British parent with young children		X		X		
7	Parent with older children	X			X		
8	Parent with older children		X	X			
9	Parent with older children	X			X		
10	Empty nesters		X			X	
11	Empty nesters	X		X			
12	Single/partnered gay men	X			X		
13	Lesbians		X		X		
14	With physical disability		X				X

## Depth interviews

<i>Interview No.</i>	<i>Lifestage</i>	<i>Children's ages</i>	<i>Location</i>
1	Family (Irish)	2 - 8	Manchester
2	Family(Jewish)	2 - 8	North London
3	Family (Moslem)	2 - 8	Brighton
4	Family (Black British)	2 - 8	North London
5	Family	2 - 8	Aberdeen
6	Family (Jewish)	9 - 15	North London
7	Family (Moslem)	9 - 15	Hemel Hempstead
8	Family (British Asian )	9 - 15	Edgware
9	Pair with physical disability	None	Bromley
10	Pair with physical disability	None	Manchester
11	Pair with mental disability	None	Aberdeen
12	Pair with mental disability	None	Kent
13	Pair with learning difficulties	None	Aberdeen
14	Pair with learning difficulties`	None	Kent
15	Male, young, single (second generation British Asian )	None	London

## Quantitative

The quantitative survey was carried out by a face to face methodology with a quota sample of 1033 adults aged 18 and over. Interviewing took place in a total of 150 sample points across Great Britain between 29 July and 20 August 2000. Quotas were set for age (18-34, 35-54, 55+), sex and working status interlocked (men working full-time, men not working full-time, women working at all, women not working at all), and social grade (ABC1, C2DE). The data, once cleaned, were weighted by the same factors to make the sample as representative as possible of the adult population of Great Britain.

## Appendix 2: list of words<sup>20</sup>

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	% <i>saying</i> 'very severe'	% <i>saying</i> 'fairly severe'	% <i>saying</i> 'quite mild'	% <i>saying</i> 'not swearing'	<i>Ranked</i> <i>position</i> (2000) <sup>21</sup>	<i>Ranked</i> <i>position</i> (1998)
Cunt	83	13	3	*1	1	1
Motherfucker	79	15	4	*2	2	2
Fuck	71	22	6	*1	3	3
Wanker	37	37	22	4	4	4
Nigger	42	26	14	18	5	11
Bastard	33	33	25	8	6	5
Prick	26	36	29	8	7	7
Bollocks	25	32	34	8	8	6
Arsehole	22	34	36	7	9	9
Paki	34	26	16	24	10	17
Shag	27	28	32	12	11	8
Whore	26	33	25	15	12	13
Twat	26	27	27	19	13	10
Piss off	18	32	42	7	14	12
Spastic	32	24	16	28	15	14
Slag	19	31	33	17	16	18
Shit	16	26	49	9	17	15
Dickhead	16	24	44	16	18	19
Pissed off	14	24	47	14	19	16
Arse	10	21	47	21	20	20
Bugger	9	22	48	21	21	21
Balls	11	19	44	25	22	22
Jew	20	15	14	51	23	24
Sodding	7	18	45	30	24	23
Jesus Christ	14	13	27	46	25	26
Crap	5	15	48	32	26	25
Bloody	3	11	56	29	27	27
God	10	8	23	60	28	28

\* Denotes fewer than 25 respondents.

[20] Those responding 'don't know' are excluded from this Table.

[21] Based on mean where 'very severe' = 3 and 'not swearing' = 0.



## Appendix 3: programme clips

Clips of the following programmes were used in the qualitative research. Listed alongside is the swearing/offensive language contained in that particular clip.

<i>Programme clip</i>	<i>Programme type</i>	<i>Transmission time - hours</i>	<i>Language used</i>
Big Breakfast	Children's/Daytime Family Viewing	0700	Shit, fart
Live & Kicking		0900	Bloody hell
Live & Kicking		0915	Tits, shit
Jerry Springer		0925	Whore, slut, screw you
Trisha		0925	Spastic
Rugby World Cup		1230	Stroppy little frog
The Look		1600	Retard
Brookside		1705	Shag
Emmerdale		1900	Nutter
Loyalists		2000	Fucking, bastard cunt
Salesmen from Hell		2000	Wanker
The Bill		2000	Piss off, bastard, bollocking
Robbie Williams Live in Concert		2015	Fucking etc.
Brookside		2030	Nigger-lover, paddy, spudpicker, fit
Carol Vorderman's Better Homes		2030	Oh God, Oh my God
Always and Everyone	Post-Watershed	2100	Paki bitch
A Mind to Kill		2100	Bloody, bastard, flick, bugger, piss, fucker, bitch, prick, slag, dickhead, Christ, twats, tits, fuckings, fucking, fuck
Murder Most Horrid		2100	Christ
Dispatches		2100	Fucking cunt, shit scum
Gimme, Gimme, Gimme		2100	Git, fat con, kiss my arse, creep, bollocks, piss off, dirty bitch, bastard, bugger, stupid fat pig, long streak of piss, slag, bloody, fucking, mobile up your arse
Mark Lamarr Leaving the 21st Century		2130	Jesus, twat, shitty, fucking, Jesus, God, shit, fucking head in

Bob Martin	2200	Fucking, fuck off
Queer as Folk II	2200	A variety of language including faggot, shirtlifter, ass bandit, twisted bastard
Regeneration	2200	Jesus fucking Christ, Thank God, Oh my God
The Sopranos	2200	Fucking, shut the fuck up, psycho
They Think Its All Over	2205	Fudgepacker, shit, nice tits, in the crease
Da Ali G Show	2230	Punani, Raasciatt, muff
Jam	2230	Fucking
Kid in the Corner	2230	Fuck off
VIDS	0230	Twitching epileptic
Lucozade	Advertisements	Fat slags, written on screen
Miller Beer		Wear the fox hat
Sky		Blow the bloody doors off
Sternophonics		Get off your arse and buy it
Walker's crisps		Hot as hell

## Appendix 4: poster and print advertisements

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*Poster and print advertisements*

*Language used*

John Charcol	Bugger, bugger, bugger
James Worrall Hairdressing	Miss Olivia Twatface
Chrysalis Radio Group	Get the crap out of your ears
Fred Perry	It's only a bloody shirt
Fourth Estate	When you are a bit pissed
Entertainment Film Distributors	The spy who shagged me
EMI Records	You're f***ing no. 1, you stupid d****
Channel Four Television	It's the dog b*ll**ks
Harvey Nichols	'Oh shit' and 'Bitch'
EMAP Radio Limited	Who's Britain's biggest bullshi****r
Pork Farms	Don't be a salad tosser
British Eurosport	Bloody hell
EMAP National Publications	W**k mag?
Ryanair Limited	Expensive ba****ds!
Holstein UK Limited	Poncey arsed
Millin Publishing Limited	Get fit or feel sh**
Marstons Brewery	It makes other beer taste like cat's piss
Easyjet Airline	Piste off with high fares
EMAP Metro Limited	'Turn it fucking down' in sign language
Buena Vista International (UK) Ltd	Will simultaneously scare you shitless

## **Appendix 5: researchers' credits**

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**Tim Buchanan** is a Research Manager and has a degree in Politics and History from the University of Bradford. He has been with the Social and Political division of NOP since 1994 and has been responsible for running projects for central and local government, political and media projects for television and various studies for other public and private sector companies.

**Neil Lovell** is an Associate Director and has a degree in Classics from the University of Oxford. After time as a media researcher, he joined the Qualitative team in 1996, since which time he has concentrated on government, social and media work. In March 2000 he won the Market Research Society Conference Award for best application of research.

**Andrea Millwood Hargrave** joined the Broadcasting Standards Commission as Research Director in 1991. She has commissioned a varied programme of broadcasting research looking at areas within the Commission's remit. Previously she worked in the early satellite and cable television markets, as well as in commercial broadcast television. She graduated from the University of Durham with a Degree in Psychology.

**Nick Moon**, the Director of NOP Social and Political, and a Fellow of the Market Research Society, has a degree in History from the University of Cambridge. He has worked at NOP since 1977, predominantly in the area of social research. His clients include almost all government departments and he has conducted opinion polls for the media.

**Alison Palmer**, a Director of NOP Consumer, heads its Qualitative team, where the range of work spans social, government, consumer, media, broadcasting, interactive services and the Internet. Alison has an MA in Psychology from the University of Aberdeen and has been with NOP since 1982.

## **Appendix 6: Advertising Standards Authority**

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Established in 1962, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) promotes and enforces the highest standards in all non-broadcast advertisements by supervising the advertising industry's self regulation system. The ASA ensures that all who commission, prepare and publish advertisements in non-broadcast media in the United Kingdom observe the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion, written by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP). CAP comprises representatives from 20 trade and professional associations representing all sectors of the advertising and media industry.

The Codes require that advertising shall be 'legal, decent, honest and truthful', socially responsible and prepared in line with the principles of fair competition. They reverse the burden of proof applied in law: it is for advertisers to prove the claims they make; if they cannot do so, then the advertisement must be withdrawn. The ASA Council endorses the Codes, adjudicates complaints under the Codes and administers the Codes in the spirit as well as the letter.

Advertising Standards Authority  
2 Torrington Place  
London  
WC1E 7HW  
Tel: 020 7580 5555  
Fax: 020 7631 3051  
Website: [www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk)

## **Appendix 7: British Broadcasting Corporation**

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The BBC is required in the Agreement associated with its Charter not to broadcast programmes which 'include anything which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime or lead to disorder, or be offensive to public feeling'.

The use of strong language divides audiences. People of different ages, beliefs and cultures may have sharply differing attitudes towards it. The BBC gives very careful consideration to the use of strong language in its output and is constantly making difficult judgements about the potential to offend and the need for realistic portrayal of situations. The BBC commissioned this research to inform its understanding of the attitudes and tolerances of its viewers and listeners to strong language and to ensure it continues to get the delicate balance right. The use of the strongest language in its programmes is always a matter of referral to the highest level within the BBC.

Viewers and listeners with serious complaints about what is broadcast by BBC licence fee funded services on television, radio and online may write to the Programme Complaints Unit, Broadcasting House, London, W1A 1AA. The Unit, which reports to the Director-General, is commissioned to investigate complaints impartially and independently of the interests of the programme-makers. Appeals against its findings are considered by the BBC Governors' Programme Complaints Appeals Committee. BBC e-mail addresses are listed on [www.bbb.co.uk/talk](http://www.bbb.co.uk/talk)

## **Appendix 8: Broadcasting Standards Commission**

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The Broadcasting Standards Commission is the statutory body for both standards and fairness in broadcasting. It is the only organisation within the regulatory framework of UK broadcasting to cover all television and radio. This includes the BBC and commercial broadcasters, as well as text, cable, satellite and digital services.

As an independent organisation, the Broadcasting Standards Commission considers the portrayal of violence, sexual conduct and matters of taste and decency. It also provides redress for people who believe they have been unfairly treated or subjected to unwarranted infringement of privacy. The Commission has three main tasks set out in the 1996 Broadcasting Act:

- Produce codes of practice relating to standards and fairness;
- Consider and adjudicate on complaints;
- Monitor, research and report on standards and fairness in broadcasting.

This report is published as part of a programme into attitudes towards standards and fairness in broadcasting. This research, which was carried out by independent experts, is not a statement of Commission policy. Its role is to offer guidance and practical information to Commissioners and broadcasters in their work.

Broadcasting Standards Commission  
7 The Sanctuary  
London SW1P 3JS  
Tel: 020 7808 1000  
Fax: 020 7233 0397  
E-mail: [bsc@bsc.org.uk](mailto:bsc@bsc.org.uk)  
Website: [www.bsc.org.uk](http://www.bsc.org.uk)

## **Appendix 9: Independent Television Commission**

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Operating in the interests of viewers, the Independent Television Commission is the public body which licenses and regulates all television services broadcasting in or from the United Kingdom, other than BBC licence fee funded services and S4C in Wales.

The Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996 charge the ITC with tasks that include:

- setting standards for programme content, advertising, sponsorship and technical quality;
- monitoring broadcasters' output to ensure that it meets those standards and applying a range of penalties if it doesn't;
- ensuring that broadcasters operate in an environment which encourages innovation and widens viewer choice;
- ensuring that viewers can receive television services on fair and competitive terms;
- investigating complaints and regularly publishing its findings.

Each year the ITC undertakes an extensive audience research programme to help identify areas where viewer attitudes or behaviour may be changing. It liaises regularly with stakeholders, including consumer groups, and takes advice from its own advertising, schools, medical and religious advisory committees.

The Independent Television Commission

33 Foley Street

London W1W 7TL

Tel: 020 7255 3000

Fax: 020 7306 7800

Minicom: 020 7306 7753

E-mail: [publicaffairs@itc.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@itc.org.uk)

Website: [www.itc.org.uk](http://www.itc.org.uk)