Families' Uses of the Internet

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Abstract

This thesis explores how families explain and justify their uses of the internet within the home. It focuses on three key purposes for which the internet is used - education, work and leisure – and discusses these in the context of power relations within families. Whilst previous research exists in relation to children's and adults' internet use, there is little which investigates use embedded within the context of everyday family life. An added dimension of this research is in its exploration of how internet use changes over time. The findings are drawn from qualitative data based on longitudinal research carried out with 17 UK families. The data collection consisted of in-depth interviews, diaries and observation carried out over a two year period.

The study challenges the rhetoric, rife within the public domain, that the internet is transforming our daily lives, revolutionizing leisure, education, learning and working at home. Instead, families view the internet with ambivalence, and incorporate it into the pre-existing routines of their lives in mostly rather banal and narrow ways. Furthermore, not only are some family members struggling to learn the functional, critical and creative skills and competencies to be able to use the internet in the first place, but parents' regulation strategies may also be preventing children from developing abilities to use the internet safely. A further concern addressed here is that inequalities in access persist between families and within families connected to the internet. Whilst the changes within the sample families are more related to employment and education than family breakdown, these changes prompt shifts in families' uses incrementally at key points in addition to the day-to-day fluctuations that occur. This, therefore, reflects the dialectical relationship between the medium and the individual through which use is configured; and it is ultimately this relationship that determines what the internet can become.

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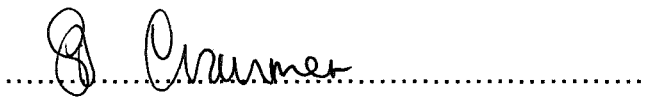
I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.



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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Rhetoric

Discourses around technology tend to be polarised. On the one hand are people who emphasise the positive, claiming that we are undergoing a period of dramatic and revolutionary change, facilitating improvements in all aspects of our lives. On the other hand, some people stress the negative, claiming that technology is threatening our way of life and undermining institutions such as the family and childhood. Moreover, these contrasting views are often overstated, informed by a form of technological determinism which assumes that technology brings about changes in and of itself.

The belief in the positive and progressive potential of technology is shared at the highest levels of government. In April 2005, Tony Blair spoke of the transformative potential of information and communication technologies in light of the five millionth customer connecting to broadband via BT:

> Broadband has the ability to transform the way we live our lives – whether in business, education or in how we use our leisure time. [...] Most significantly of all, [...] the adoption of broadband technology will enhance the UK's ability to compete in the modern knowledge economy. (Blair, 2005)

Such is the Government's confidence in information and communications technologies (ICTs) that £6 billion has been invested over the last three years to improve public services and presumably boost economic prosperity. One of the key target areas for this 'revolution' is education. Government policy has sought to harness the presumed benefits of ICTs to improve schooling. In 2003, Charles Clarke, then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, announced that a package totalling £862 million was to be invested in ICTs for schools and colleges (Clarke, 2003). More recently, Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced a £1.67 billion investment in his 2005 budget speech to enable schools to move on from 'blackboard and chalk' (Cross, 2005). Moreover, benefits are presumed to extend to adults too. In the 2003 e-summit, Tony Blair identified ICT as a means of remedying the so-called skills crisis

where it is said that '7 million adults in Britain lack functional literacy and numeracy skills' (Blair, 2002: 1).

Likewise, educationists, such as Seymour Papert (developer of the 'Logo' programming package) have urged parents to utilise computers to benefit their offspring. He argues that children love and, therefore, assimilate technology more quickly than their elders, consequently challenging hierarchical modes of learning and allowing children's creativity and learning to be enhanced through engaging in 'hard fun' (Papert, 1996). Similarly, other commentators such as Don Tapscott argue that the 'Net Generation' have an active relationship with technology in contrast to their passive television-viewing baby-boomer parents. He claims that whereas previous broadcast media were 'unidirectional', 'controlled by adults' and 'hierarchical, inflexible, and centralised', new media are 'interactive, malleable, and distributed in control' (Tapscott, 1998: 26). He believes that this will lead to fundamental changes in the traditional hierarchies of society that, in turn, will increase liberty and democratisation making for more active citizens. These claims are matched by advertisers' rhetoric, for example:

> With BT Broadband, your kids will actually enjoy doing their homework... learning has never been so much (shock horror) fun. (BT Advertisement, 2003)

In addition to the educational claims made for ICTs, they are seen to bring benefits to society in terms of both work and leisure. The benefits are thought to be made possible through increased work-life balance alongside easier access to leisure resources. For instance, the Department for Trade and Industry launched the Work-Life Balance Campaign in 2000, the first in a series of government initiatives aimed at promoting the growth of flexible working practices. Through shifts to home-based teleworking, for example, workers are said to reduce stress and travel, improve their productivity and job satisfaction and more easily balance work and home demands. Telecommunications companies have advertised complementary services aimed at encouraging this kind of work flexibility whilst presumably enabling internet users to optimize how they spend their increased leisure time.

In contrast to the utopian visions of the internet and other ICTs, there are those who stress the darker side of the internet. For example, fears for children's safety are frequently ascribed to the internet in the media and backed by public service organisations. In 2003, a MORI survey conducted on behalf of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) produced the headline: '90% of Adults Worried About the Threat Posed to Children by Paedophiles in internet chat rooms' (2003). NSPCC internet safety expert, Chris Atkinson said:

> Professionals, child protection experts, including the NSPCC, and parents must keep up if we are to provide the most effective services to children and help protect them from technology-wise paedophiles. These sex offenders go to great lengths to ensnare their victims and will try any means at their disposal to gain access to children. (NSPCC, 2003)

The Government has responded to the perceived threats by establishing the Internet Task Force (March 2001) followed by the launch of the Internet Safety Campaign (January 2003). At a cost of £1 million, the campaign aims to educate and warn children and parents about the risks online. A web site (www.thinkuknow.co.uk) outlines the potential pitfalls and how to act should something happen which makes a child 'uncomfortable'. The Government also introduced a law against 'grooming' in order to charge adults who have made contact with children over the internet, and who would presumably then commit further crimes through face to face contact.

In addition to anxieties posed by threats from paedophiles, there are also concerns about the access the internet provides to pornography and other sites deemed to be inappropriate for children. Donna Rice-Hughes, author of *Kids Online: Protecting Your Children in Cyberspace* has described the two primary online dangers as 'sexual predators' and 'free and easy access' to inappropriate material including pornography, violence and hate sites (Rice-Hughes, 2001). Moreover, fears are not just limited to children's uses of the internet. In 1998, the Anti-Defamation League said that the internet was facilitating terrorist activities:

> Terrorism and the internet are related in two ways. First, the internet has become a forum for terrorist groups and individual

> terrorists both to spread their messages of hate and violence and to communicate with one another and with sympathizers. Secondly, individuals and groups have tried to attack computer networks, including those on the internet, what has become known as cyberterrorism or cyberwarfare. (1998)

Less potent fears also exist in relation to addiction to the internet and particularly aspects of use such as online gaming. The concern that online players become more aggressive is underpinned by fears that society is becoming more violent and unsafe in general. Whilst the stereotype of the male game player, as a 'nerd' or 'geek', is often linked to the image of the internet addict, *Caught in the Net* by Dr Kimberley Young outlines a broader range of 'on-lineaholics', which include all types of people from all walks of life. Her study of the issues surrounding internet addiction is underlined by common anxieties that the internet contributes to the breakdown of marriage and family life and increases social isolation.

What these brief examples have shown is the widespread rhetoric that exists around using the internet in both private and public spaces. However, there is currently little empirical research to inform our understanding of these issues. What this thesis adds to our current knowledge of internet use, therefore, is an exploration of home internet use specifically within the context of family life[1]. In particular, it will explore the purposes for which the internet is used at home - education, work and leisure - in the context of families' power relations. Before outlining the study in more detail, I will briefly explain how my study fits in with evolving media research traditions.

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[1] The original tenet for this study was to investigate home uses of the internet from the 'perspective of the family'. However, this phrase does not adequately account for the divergent standpoints held by different family members which form a key focus of the study. For this reason, I am using the phrase 'within the context of family life' to better acknowledge that whilst members will be influenced by the 'existing values, practices and interests of the family itself' (Facer et al. 2001), views held within families are neither unified nor coherent.

Questions of use and interpretation

In beginning this thesis, I was particularly influenced by David Morley's study, *Family Television* (1986). As Morley explains, his study brought together previously exclusive research traditions: questions of interpretation from literary/semiological perspectives and questions of use from sociological 'leisure studies' perspectives. He argues that the project sought to overcome this 'unproductive form of segregation' believing that combining both kinds of issues would allow the pursuit of 'urgent questions' about the television audience. Morley's central thesis was that 'changing patterns of television viewing could only be understood in the overall context of family leisure activity' (13). Specifically, he built on 'the 'uses and gratifications' approach in asking 'what people do with the media' but taking the 'dynamic *unit* of consumption to be more properly the family/household rather than the individual viewer' (15). In turn, this allowed for questions to be raised about the management of the television set in the home, decision-making processes and discussions around content. Moreover, by exploring the context in which television commonly operates, differences of power, responsibility and control within the family and how these could change over different times of the day and evening could be understood: not only within families, but also between families in different socio-economic contexts. He reasoned that it is only '...in this context – that of the wider fields of social and cultural determinations, which frame the practices of viewing – that individual "choices" and "responses" can be understood' (16). Since Morley's study, there have been further developments within this field, particularly focusing on media in domestic settings. The influence of these studies can be seen in the emergence of what has been called the 'domestication' framework (Haddon, 2004) developed by Silverstone et al. (1992) which seeks to understand the social uses of media within and between households. (See Chapter 2 for further discussion).

Morley's study and the debates which have followed since then have highlighted several potential pitfalls of adopting a contextual approach. These have focused on the more common problems associated with generalising from rich contextual data in qualitative research to more specific difficulties regarding method. Morley acknowledges some of these drawbacks in the 'Afterword'

section of the book. For example, he states that although he argued for the family as the 'unit of consumption' for television, '... there is a tendency in the interviews to slide back towards a parallel analysis of "gendered individuals" rather than a fully-fledged analysis of the dynamics of the family unit' (Morley, 1986: 174). He notes that his original intention to analyse patterns of viewing behaviour in terms of social background and family 'lifestage' were ultimately reduced to one dimension of analysis – '... the effectivity of gender as an influence on viewing behaviour' (175). Moreover, the difficulties of engaging children in somewhat complex whole family interviews as intended led to compromised strategies of interviewing both parents together, only occasionally including older children and then interviewing younger children separately at the end. Morley says the outcome of this was that children's perspectives became much more marginal to the analysis than he would have hoped. Further criticisms of Morley's study have related to his neglecting to describe how his sample families were selected and the lack of reflection about his relationship with respondents. In Ang's rereading of *Family Television,* she questions his approach:

> We do not get to know how he found and got on with his interviewees, nor are we informed about the way in which the interviews took place... how did the specific power relationships pervading the interview situation affect not only the families, but also the researcher himself? (Ang, 1989: 110)

Even so, this general shift within media research to a more contextual approach (as represented by Morley's study and later 'domestication' studies) has influenced my study. My thesis shares a central concern with the context of the family for understanding media, in this case, the internet, in relation to patterns of use and how families interpret these uses.

Whilst the study draws on a range of diverse research traditions and theoretical perspectives, in very broad terms what I am doing is most closely aligned to the paradigm of 'interpretive sociology' in its concern with meaning and action. This follows from Cohen and Manion's (1994) assertion that a key aim of the interpretative paradigm (within social psychology and sociology) is to '... understand the subjective world of human experience... to understand from within' (36). These authors detail how this approach can be thought of as

'behaviour-with-meaning' in that behaviour is deemed to be 'intentional' and, as such, 'future oriented'. They say that interpretive researchers set out to understand interpretations of the world around them yielding data which is 'glossed with the meanings and purposes' of respondents. This 'glossing' generates theory which highlights understanding in people's 'multi-faceted' behaviour, '... as varied as the situations and contexts supporting them' (37). However, where my approach departs from the characteristics of the interpretive paradigm is in its focus on the family as much as the individual perspective. Cohen and Manion, for instance, contend that focus on the individual is a defining principle of the interpretative approach. However, my data collection methods and methodology are designed to get inside the family as much as towards understanding each individual family member's subjectivity and their explanations of the world around them. A further departure is that interpretative perspectives are said to rely on emergent theory, grounded on data generated solely by the act of research. Whilst this is true of the more iterative thematic categories I developed during the analysis, these categories also emerged as the result of the recursive process of moving between both previous theory and my data in order to produce a reliable interpretation (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). However, whilst taking account of these differences, I would argue that my research remains broadly within the interpretative framework whilst also drawing primarily on more local traditions particularly from Media and Cultural Studies, family sociology, the 'domestication' framework and the field of the 'social shaping of technology', to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Having explained how my study has been influenced by developing research traditions, I will briefly outline how I carried out the study and, in turn, introduce the key themes.

Data collection

Between 1998 and 2003, I conducted 52 interviews with 17 families comprising 33 parents and 44 children at their homes in and around the London and

Sheffield areas (see Appendix 1)[2]. The data collection consisted of four main stages: the first, a semi-structured interview with the family together; the second, a diary I gave to each family to record all computer and internet use for one month; the third, an observational interview of one child/young person and parent separately carrying out their usual activities on the internet and held one month after the initial interview; the fourth, a further semi-structured interview with the family together, held two years after the initial interview.

I contacted families via placing advertisements in the newsletter of the University I was studying at[3]; personal contacts and my old school website; and 'snowballing'. The families ranged in size from the largest having six children, to the smallest having one child. The youngest child in the study was aged three, the oldest, eighteen, at the time of the first interviews. My main criterion for inclusion was that families should allow for the comparing and contrasting of both generational and gender differences. In practice, this led to most of the families being nuclear. An exceptional lone parent family, the Bonds, were included as the presence of a male child, Billy (aged 15) alongside his sister, Sally (aged 13), provided both generational and gender contrast to their mother, Christine. The sample also included two remade families. All the families were predominantly white with just one parent being minority ethnic. Parents' occupations ranged from non-salaried to affluent, middle-class professional employment. These differences were reflected by the broad range of housing types that the families lived in, which ranged from small council and ex-council houses to semi-detached and much larger houses in a range of urban and rural locations. Major changes did occur in the families' constitution in two cases during the two-year research period: the Bradshaw parents divorced and the

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[2] In addition to the detailed description of each family provided in Appendix 1, I have also introduced the main features of each family in Chapter 4.

[3] It was my original intention to place advertisements more widely than within the University I was studying at. However, having trialled a range of methods, it appeared that recruitment of families was more likely to occur when a friend, work/study colleague or member of my family introduced me to potential respondents. In this case, I switched my energies to this form of recruitment.

Craine parents separated (though were in the process of reconciling at the time of the third interview).

Each audio-taped interview was transcribed in full and analysed using NVivo, software for analysing qualitative data. I will more fully discuss the strengths and weaknesses of my methods and methodology in Chapter 4.

Aims and Key Themes

The overall aim of this study is to explore behaviour and its associated meanings in relation to families' home internet use[4]. Whilst previous research exists in relation to children's and adults' internet use, there is little which investigates use embedded within the context of everyday family life. In common with Morley et al.'s work outlined above, it aims to examine the organization of media, in this case, the internet, within the home, how decisions around use are made, explained and justified. An added dimension of this study is in its exploration of how internet use changes over time. Issues of power are best understood in relation to the various reasons for which the internet is used - education, work and leisure. For this reason, the thesis is mainly organised around these themes alongside complementary chapters on internet literacy and regulation. I will briefly introduce each theme at this point:

Time and space for the internet

Frequent claims are made for the internet in terms of its potential for transforming our social lives, increasing and enhancing our leisure time. This study will explore families' uses of the internet for leisure within the context of a more general discussion about how the internet fits into the ways in which time and space function within family life.

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[4] The main focus of the study was on the internet accessed via the home computer which reflected the main platform for use of this medium at the time the study began. However, research and interview questions were designed to take account of developments within the field, such as the move to accessing the internet via other platforms: televisions and mobile phones, for instance. These are reported in Chapter 5: Time and space for the internet.

Education

The role of technology in both formal and informal education has been the focus of considerable debate in recent years. The rapid diffusion of the internet into the home, particularly sold to parents on the grounds of its educational value, deserves further investigation. This study will explore families' discourses in relation to the internet, education and learning, the value that families ascribe to it and how it is used for education and learning in practice.

Internet Literacy

Many parents invest in the internet for home on the promise that the skills and competencies needed to use this medium effectively will produce benefits in terms of schooling and employability for children, and further studies and current/future employment for adults. This study will explore the skills and competencies needed and how far these are developed within families.

Work

The internet is often sold to parents on the grounds that they will be able to reap the rewards of home working, as a means of balancing work and family life. Yet, the internet is also seen to be contributing to the blurring of the boundary between work and home, thought to negatively influence family life. The study investigates influences on and patterns of bringing salaried work into the home, the value ascribed to it and how it is used for work in practice.

Regulation

Negative claims about the potential risks posed to children and young people using the internet have become widespread in the UK. Nevertheless, there has been little research into how parents view risk on the internet, how their attitudes influence approaches to regulation and the strategies they use to mediate internet use by children and young people within the context of family life. This study explores how issues of power, control and responsibility emerge in relation to uses of the internet.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have set out contrasting views of technology as characterised within both positive and negative rhetoric surrounding uses of information and

communication technologies, such as the internet. I have shown how these arguments have been inflated by politicians, educationalists and advertisers to ascribe positive and transformative potential to these new media, whilst child protection bodies, doctors and other commentators have warned of threats from hate groups, paedophiles and internet addiction.

What this study has set out to do, therefore, is move beyond these technologically determinist viewpoints, which assume that technology is able to bring about changes in and of itself, and reach a more balanced point of view. Through longitudinal, qualitative research, this thesis will draw on broadly sociological and media research traditions to explore how families explain and justify their uses of the internet within the home. In particular, it will be organised around the purposes for which the internet is used - education, work and leisure - in the context of families' power relations. In the next chapter, I will outline in more detail theoretical perspectives and empirical literature in order to analyse how families use the internet within the home.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

Introduction

This thesis brings together a range of theoretical perspectives and empirical literature in order to analyse how families use the internet within the home. This chapter will mainly focus on locating the study theoretically, outlining why an interdisciplinary approach is necessary before summarizing approaches from family sociology, Media and Cultural Studies - in particular, what has become known as the 'domestication' framework (Haddon, 2004) - alongside perspectives derived from the field of the 'social shaping of technology'. Whilst Chapter 3 will more substantially review literature relating to old and new media use within families and in turn, introduce the key texts relevant to understanding families' uses of the internet, the majority of the internet-related literature review will be found within the data chapters.

Justifying an interdisciplinary approach

Adoption of an interdisciplinary approach is inevitable in order to research how families use the internet since this is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which is simultaneously psychological, sociological and technological/media-related. As noted by Lievrouw and Livingstone, for new media scholars, it is '... essential, to be able to look across terminologies, descriptive and explanatory tools, illustrative cases, even assumptions about everyday life' (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002: 1). Authors of studies closely related to this one have inevitably had backgrounds in a range of different disciplines and have brought these different perspectives to bear by adopting interdisciplinary approaches in order to consider media within the social context. For instance, Livingstone has drawn on approaches from the fields of developmental and social psychology, cultural and sociological studies of childhood and youth, media uses and gratifications, the sociology of leisure/consumption, diffusion research and reception studies in order to investigate children and young people's changing media environment (Livingstone, 2002b). The authors of *ScreenPlay* adopted 'diverse perspectives' in order to explore 'living and learning with computers in the home' from the child's point of view (Facer et al., 2003: 4) In addition to seeking to 'follow the child', they combined approaches drawn from research in

the field of Media Studies that looked at how other technologies had become 'domesticated', acknowledging how the environment influences the perceptions and uses of the computer; Cultural Studies, to address the computer as a 'consumer good'; sociology of childhood, particularly recent studies which recognise that there are changing and increasingly complex 'geographies of childhood'; and contemporary socio-cultural psychology which addresses the fact that is it 'us 'plus' the computer that is involved' in whatever activity is undertaken. Finally, *Cyberkids* (Holloway & Valentine, 2003), which explored children's online identities, communities and sense of their place in the world and how this relates to their offline geographies, included approaches drawn from the sociology of childhood and literature on the social uses of technology. These examples illustrate the importance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach to studying the social uses of technology. I will now justify my study of families before situating my study within wider media research perspectives.

Why focus on families?

Public concern in the UK and US over the last twenty years has focused on changes to family life, families' increasing diversity and the oft-presumed consequential decline of family values. However, as Silva and Smart have maintained, family life at the end of the twentieth century is characterized by both 'continuity' as well as 'diversity' (Silva & Smart, 1999). Moreover, the family remains a powerful social institution alongside education, economics, religion and politics which has retained its influence on attitudes, feelings and behaviours (Gelles, 1995).

Cheal (2002) has argued that the main reason for studying families is their diversity. He points out that no one can have personal experience of all types of families, therefore, it is necessary to have sociological research to describe family variations and compare experiences of family life. Moreover, as close family members shape our feelings, interests and beliefs when we are young, they influence the kinds of adults we become. He notes how sociological approaches can help us to understand how individuals' 'activities and personal characteristics' are developed through living with other people; how '...families of different kinds, in different places, produce different outcomes' (2).

Recently, a challenge to family studies has been mounted in relation to what has been seen as the comparative neglect of children's perspectives in sociological research (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 1990; Mayall, 1994; Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgitta, & Wintersberger, 1994 in Holloway and Valentine 2003). These studies have tended to emphasise 'children's agency in the outside world, as well as inside families and other adult-dominated institutions' (Brannen, 1999: 143). Whilst these studies have undoubtedly brought important dimensions to our understandings of children and childhood, studies of families retain their relevance in order to contextualise this newer field of study.

Changing families?

As noted above, today's families are characterised by both their enduring significance as a major social institution and in their increasing diversity (Gelles, 1995; Silva & Smart, 1999). Yet, the amount of change within and across families is often overstated, particularly in popular rhetoric for political ends (Silva & Smart, 1999). As Silva and Smart point out, statistical evidence shows that most people still marry and have children at some point in their lives, though the average age of marriage has risen, people have fewer children and have their children later. Nevertheless, whilst nuclear families continue to dominate numerically, Silva and Smart note that the prevalence of diverse families means that the structure of two-parent families can no longer be taken for granted.

Changes to families have led to definitions becoming problematic, especially when taking account of historical and cultural variations. Berger and Berger (1983), for instance, have emphasised that the term 'family' should be replaced by 'families' to reflect their diversity. Moreover, Gelles distinguishes family from families by contending that the former concerns 'family' as a social institution whilst the latter refers to 'families' as a wide range of social groups and the way that people live their lives (Gelles, 1995). Contemporary definitions of families tend to place emphasis on their structures (such as who their members are and the relationships between them) and functions (activities which fulfil certain of their members' needs). These factors distinguish families from 'households': spatial categories where individuals or groups of people are bound to a

particular place. An example of the structural model is provided by Cheal: 'For our purposes, a family is considered to be any group which consists of people in intimate relationships which are believed to endure over time and across generations' (Cheal, 2002: 4). Groups, such as social workers and other family-related workers, often define families by the functions carried out by their members, such as, physical maintenance and care of group members; addition of new members through procreation and adoption; socialization of children; social control over members; production, distribution and consumption of goods and services and finally, maintenance of motivation and morale through love (Zimmerman, 1988). Recent debates have tended to focus on the 'intimate connections' between people rather than on their formal ties, arguing that in the context of the fluid and changing definitions of families, 'the values of caring and obligation' are what continue to bind people together (Silva & Smart, 1999). Moreover, it is suggested that the social structure of families is less important than the 'actual practices' of 'doing' family life (Morgan, 1999). Whilst these accounts draw on the more positive benefits of families, others have argued that families can also operate dysfunctionally; and that families are inherently anti-social in that they place higher priority upon private interests rather than on the public good. Additionally, it has been noted that families are more functional for some members than others due to the power relations and struggles that inevitably take place therein.

How do families operate within society?

The relationship between the state and the family is the subject of contentious and ongoing debate (Muncie, Wetherell, Langan, Dallos, & Cochrane, 1993). The traditional role of the family was seen to be as an educational organisation, a unit of production and consumption, and a religious and political clan. Since the inception of corresponding social institutions for education, economics, politics and religion, the family's role has evolved into that of a generalized social agent. Some argue that the family as social institution is essential for the maintenance of society in facilitating the moral development of children who grow up to be decent, law-abiding citizens. As Katz notes, families' current role is to bring up children fit to understand and affiliate with these external social institutions (Katz, 2003). Other theorists, such as Graham Allan (1985), have

argued against this reductive 'loss of function' thesis. He notes that in most cases of illness the main support will be families whilst the National Health Service is often used only in a limited way consisting of a brief visit to the doctor and the exchange of a prescription. Similarly, it is families who foster the desire to learn and encourage and support commitment to the educational institutions. Cheal (2002) has argued that, in this way, families are dependent on other social institutions and vice versa.

Authors such as Silva and Smart (1999) have taken theories of the two-way relationship between the family and other social institutions further in claiming that the boundary between the private and public spheres is fluid. They argue that sociological analysis of family life has begun to reject the assumption that the family is separate from other social institutions in any case. Whilst feminists were critical of what has been called a 'false analytical distinction' back in the 1970s and 1980s, it has become accepted in the 1990s that the family is not best analysed as an 'institution' nor in practice separate from other social processes (Silva & Smart, 1999). As noted above, Morgan's perspective on this is to emphasise the concept of 'family practices' to convey the 'de-institutionalization of the family and the blurring of the boundaries which have been assumed to separate families (or the private sphere) from other social institutions (or the public sphere)' (Morgan 1996 in Silva & Smart, 1999: 2). Silva and Smart contend that whilst the choices individuals make may appear increasingly self-directed and fluid, in practice they are closely connected to social conditions that continue to produce anxiety and inconsistency. They argue, for instance, that politicians advocating the strengthening of family ties might better serve society through the strengthening of economic and cultural supports for 'caring' in order to address what families 'do' rather than what form they take.

Families' ideologies and diversity

As mentioned previously, the last few decades have seen increasing diversity in family composition in the UK when compared with 50 years ago. Besides nuclear families, other types exist which include 'extended' families (where more than one generation of parents cohabits with their children), lone parent families (where one parent raises children living on their own or with relatives),

cohabiting couples, same-sex pairings, adoption, fostering, separation, divorce, remarriage and step-parenthood. Yet, UK Government policy initiatives, reflected by rhetoric in the public domain, continue to emphasise the nuclear family comprised of a legally married couple with children living at home as the norm and the best environment for raising children, from which other family types deviate. Family ideologies of so-called 'normal' families are based on conceptions of idealised ways of living, companionate marriage and the notion of the 'good mother' or 'good father' (Cheal, 2002: 72). The ideology of companionate marriage is that love provides the reason and justification for the modern family and everything that members of it do. Popular notions of 'intensive mothering' and 'intensive parenting' practices stress that self-sacrifice and commitment are required to raise a child by focusing time and energy on every aspect of the child's welfare and development particularly during the child's early years (Cheal, 2002: 104). Furthermore, egalitarian and democratic relationships between wives and husbands are favoured. Yet, as Cheal notes, this idealized form may hide power struggles where violence is rewarded by increased 'dominance and control' (Cheal, 2002: 84).

Moroever, Coontz, writing about families in the US, argues that the stereotypical 1950s family, characterised by a male breadwinner and female homemaker, represents a 'historical fluke' (Coontz, 1992). She points out that this type of family, considered to be 'more predictable and settled', persists in the form of 'yearning and nostalgia'. She maintains that it existed only in contrast to families in the decades before and after the 1950s as the result of a range of social changes and was narrowly confined to the white middle-class in any case. Moreover, she argues that most people at the time understood the 1950s family to be new. For the first time, 'men as well as women were encouraged to root their identity and self-image in familial and parental roles' (Coontz, 1992: 27). Mintz and Kellogg (1988) concur with this by contending that parental behaviour included 'a radical new self-consciousness about child rearing' (217). They argue that since the 1960s, parents have become increasingly anxious about raising their children at the same time as the proportion of children growing up in nuclear families has declined, and furthermore they say that:

> Today's children and adolescents, many believe, are caught between two difficult trends – decreasing parental commitment to child nurture and an increasingly perilous social environment saturated with sex, addictive drugs, and alcohol – that make it more difficult to achieve a well-adjusted adulthood (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988: 218).

Though this may be overstating the situation to some extent, particularly in using terminology such as 'saturated', there is clearly a common discourse around families where parents are held responsible for society's ills.

Families and social change

As we have seen, it has been argued that the trend for changes to the family during the last 50 years is noticeable only in its contrast to a period of unusual conformity during the 1950s. The nuclear family became popular in Europe and North America during the years of post World War II reconstruction due to an exceptional and short-lived combination of economic, social and political factors (Coontz, 1992). This period provided the basis for the early definitions of the family within the growing field of sociology and the 'standard social scientific model' for families in Anglo-American countries from which governments collected data. Growing up in a nuclear family, the typical family member was considered to follow a cycle of three life stages; leaving the home of origin, getting married and having a first child. In contrast, more complex family types have emerged since the 1950s. No longer is it the norm for women to stay at home as full-time homemakers. Moreover, the family life cycle has been replaced in relevance by the study of family 'transitions', moving from one condition to another along a 'life course trajectory' indicative of the increased diversity of people's lives.

Economic, social and cultural changes are also considered to have brought about changes since the 1950s in relation to 'evolving employment patterns, shifting gender relations and increasing options in sexual orientations' (Silva & Smart, 1999: 1). Extensive secularisation, for instance, has led to increased tolerance for unmarried couples and cohabitation, less discrimination against those following alternative lifestyles and so on. Cheal (2002) argues that there has been a 'decline in conventions' whereby the influence of cultural

expectations has decreased and the consensus of what is or is not acceptable has diminished.

Irwin argues that diversity in family arrangements can be understood in terms of a 'growth in individualism and a change in the nature of the social, or moral ties that bind individuals and groups in contemporary society' (Aries 1980, Beck 1992, McRae 1997 in Irwin, 1999). Cheal defines individualisation as a 'style of decision-making in which individuals respond only to their own immediate situation' (Cheal, 2002: 33). He notes that in discussions of individualisation there is the suggestion that growing complexity in the life course is related to how people think about themselves and their family life:

> In an individualized world, people self-consciously reflect upon their own needs and their plans for the future as the bases for social action. Goals of inner self become prominent. Personal relationships are looked at either as opportunities for, or as obstacles to, certain kinds of self-development (Cheal, 2002: 33).

To return to Irwin, she argues that the increase in individualism is producing a 'new kind of marketised family in which prior social, or moral, arrangements are dissolved' (Irwin, 1999: 32). Furthermore, the emphasis on individualism is seen to contribute to the new forms of diversity in family structure and increased autonomy of individuals to be authors of their own biographies and lifestyles. In relation to the ties that bind individuals, Morgan argues that the tendency for 'do-it-yourself' biographies does not necessarily lead to the 'parallel life courses of sets of relatively atomized individuals' (Morgan, 1999: 14). Instead, these biographies are 'woven together, often loosely and for short periods of time' (14), hence the importance of models of 'family *practices*' to account for families' routines and customs rather than relying on their *structures*.

How does power operate in families?

Muncie provides a useful summary:

> Power within families covers many spheres. Power depends on social status, on knowledge and competence, on the capacity to accumulate and control resources, on the threat and capacity for violence, on established habits and traditions, and on ideology and cultural beliefs which will legitimate the authority of some family members over others (Muncie et al., 1993: 225).

Some inequalities between family members are legitimised. Often these power relations reflect those within society as a whole whilst others are the result of external factors coming into the home and influencing families' organisation. In terms of the former, it is accepted that parents should exert authority over their children as the social norm both for children's 'own good', and for the smooth running of the home (Muncie et al., 1993). Whilst child-rearing involves parents exercising power through regulating behaviour, it also sets out the structures in which children live and influences, hopefully positively, children's sense of themselves. In relation to the latter case, inequalities may be the result of external factors that then influence allocation of resources within the home. For instance, society attaches more value to paid work in the market economy than unpaid work which can, in turn, lead to greater inequalities within the home. Pahl has noted that an 'imbalance in economic resources has the potential to create an imbalance of power within marriage' (Pahl, 1991 in Cheal 2002: 110). Yet, this occurs in many couples as women's responsibility for childcare and the home may restrict their access to the labour market and limit their opportunities for well paid jobs and promotion (Muncie et al., 1993).

Time and space have also been noted as representing inequalities in families. For instance, women consistently spend more time on unpaid work than men do, and on childcare, care-giving and volunteer work (Cheal, 2002). Cheal has also argued that women and men interpret 'caring' differently with women expressing it through time spent looking after children whilst men will see it in terms of economic provision. Moreover, Muncie et al. claim that mothers may derive power from their control over the daily routine and their 'children's lives, their domestic knowledge and competence, and also from the emotional relationships women build with their children and their partners' (Muncie et al., 1993: 225). Conversely, this may leave men and fathers dependent on their partners for nurturance whilst 'somewhat excluded from the central family relationship and thus out on a limb' (225).

The allocation of space within the home is another means of gauging power relations as the physical design of the house reflects dominant conventions, conduct of relationships within households and the relationship of households to the outside world (Madigan & Munro, 1991). For instance, houses built from the

1950s onwards have abandoned parlours and instead been built with 'through lounges'. These have consisted of lounge/dining rooms that run from front to back with windows at both ends with an adjoining functional workspace, the kitchen. Madigan and Munro argue that this organisation differs from houses built in the 19th to mid 20th centuries that were demarcated according to their inhabitants' different roles. For instance, men were seen to frequent the front public areas whilst women, children and servants, populated the back, private spaces. The through lounge reflects the more democratic model in which the modern family is portrayed as mutually supportive and marriage as a partnership of equals.

Why focus on families and media in the home?

Since the separation of home and work that took place with industrialization (for men at least), the home has increasingly come to symbolise a refuge; a private haven from the stresses and strains of the work place, in which the family can recuperate. Allan argues that improved quality of housing combined with the ideology of the conjugal marriage and the more democratic model of the family has fostered the identification of the home as the family's 'natural habitat' (Allan, 1985). Moreover, Franklin (1989) states that people have increasingly withdrawn from public life into their homes driven by a sense of powerlessness in their work, political and public life. He describes the home as a 'sphere of autonomy and control which would restore to them a sense of identity, attachment and belonging' (Franklin 1989 in Morley, 2000: 25). Likewise, Putnam's (1990) research into the meaning of the home has thrown up terms such as: 'privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort and control' (Putnam 1990 in Morley, 2000: 24). However, family researchers such as Muncie et al. (1993), have challenged the more idealised notions of the home and family by pointing out that: '... any adequate conception of the modern family must also raise such issues as the inherent tensions in the child-parent relationship, the sexual division of labour and domestic violence' (28). Similarly, whilst Cheal defines the home as a '...private space in which family members can interact with one another without external interference' (Cheal, 2002: 157), he acknowledges that this can also provide opportunities for unseen domestic violence.

Social planning, market economies and developments in transport have all encouraged increased home ownership and the move to suburban living, for example, through tax relief on mortgage interest, slum clearance programmes, rent controls and the expansion of building society activities (Allan, 1985). These combined with government improvement grants have led to less crowded, warmer, cleaner houses in residential areas with inside amenities. Added to this have been increases in the quality and quantity of domestic goods to improve the appearance of the house in terms of carpets and furniture alongside purchases that improve household efficiency, such as washing machines and vacuum cleaners. As Gullestad (1993) has noted, a great deal of effort has gone into making home the right kind of place in which to foster family 'togetherness, comfort and security'. As a further consequence of this shift, the home has increasingly become the key site for the provision of leisure and entertainment (Golding & Murdock, 1983; Livingstone, 2002b). Muncie et al. (1993) note that it is particularly through increased patterns of consumption that the family has become more privatised. No longer is it necessary to visit the pub or other public facilities for physical comfort or entertainment as the development of home entertainment technology, radio, television, hi-fi, video, computer and games console have all encouraged people to stay at home.

In relation to children and young people, Livingstone observes how the home is becoming increasingly 'media rich' at the same time as there is a seeming decline in public leisure facilities, after school facilities and 'street corner culture' (Livingstone, 2002b). Parents' fears for their children's safety outside the home have driven a retreat into the perceived safer space within the home (Livingstone & Bovill, 1999). Moreover, Livingstone makes a strong case for considering media within the context of the family rather than within other types of households due to their constitutive role in family life. She quotes Goodman: '... the family is a small boundary-maintaining, natural group in which the behaviours of any one member affect the behaviours of other members and the system as a whole' (Goodman 1983 in Livingstone, 2002b: 184), and notes that research has recognized a wide range of ways in which media and the family are interrelated. Furthermore, she argues that media are '... an increasingly significant means through which commonality and individuality among family members is constructed' (Livingstone, 2002b: 199). She claims that the

potentially individualising qualities of media leads to ambivalence in families about their uses underpinned by anxieties about family togetherness and 'good parenting' (also see Chapter 9). Furthermore, she reasons that these issues highlight important differences between asking about media in the home and media within the context of family life.

Research perspectives

Having justified adoption of a family centred approach to studying media in the home, and provided perspectives drawn from family sociology, it is also necessary to situate this study within Media and Cultural Studies and wider technological research perspectives. As observed by Haddon (2004), theoretical 'frameworks, tools and approaches' have evolved alongside the growth in empirical research in this field. Particularly relevant to this study are approaches derived from Media and Cultural Studies looking at the social uses of media – notably the 'domestication' framework – as well as developments in the field of the 'social shaping of technology'.

Media

Early research into the media audience focused on the notion of 'effects'. This approach emphasised the potential harm of the media, portrayed as a one-way process acting upon the minds of passive recipients as unwitting targets (McQuail, 1997). The challenge to this perspective, based upon the notion of a consumer who is more or less active and 'in charge' of their media experience led to the development of approaches based upon a model of media 'use', focusing on the 'origin, nature and degree of motives for choice of media and media content' (McQuail, 1997: 18). This was later crystallized into the 'uses and gratifications' model (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Rosengren, Palmgreen, & Rayburn, 1985). The main emphases of this approach were on the social and psychological needs, motives and circumstances of individuals' media use for information, relaxation, companionship, diversion or escape whilst encompassing the wider social functions of, for instance, facilitating social cohesion and control in functionalist sociological terms (Wright, 1974). Critics of this model included Elliott who argued that the concept of 'need' in uses and gratifications approaches is problematic as a psychological formulation (Elliott,

1974). For instance, individuals are encouraged to identify gratifications from which their needs are inferred without provision of independent evidence for the 'existence and importance of the intervening mental states and processes' (251). Moreover, 'needs' are abstracted from dimensions of temporal and spatial organization. He argues that uses and gratifications approaches do not take account of how the availability of some television programmes is based on their familiarity and the social meanings of this type of output and, in turn, how this impacts on selection. In broader terms, he criticises the approach on the grounds that it fails to challenge the status quo. He makes the case that the 'intra-individual' processes 'can be generalised to aggregates of individuals, but they cannot be converted in any meaningful way into social structure and process' (Elliott, 1973: 6). Moreover, he suggests that uses and gratifications approaches mean that conclusions about mass communications are abstracted from culture and social structure and therefore, bypass the problems associated with the differential distribution of power and opportunity in society.

Recognising the limitations of the uses and gratifications model led researchers to develop Cultural Studies approaches that sought to address the issue of social power (see Gray, 1992 and Lull, 1990 for useful overviews of the field). Morley, for instance, employed the uses and gratifications approach combined with the Cultural Studies perspective in his research into how television is used and content interpreted by its audience in *Family Television* (1986). He sought to explore how far individual interpretations could be mapped onto the socio-economic structure. Gray describes in *Video Playtime* (1992) how Morley drew on the work of Lull and Bryce in considering the 'place and significance' of the television within family and household relations. She notes how their work provided valuable insight into the social use of television. Lull (1980), for instance, distinguished between the structural and relational uses of television, the former implying environmental and regulatory use, and the latter, the creation of practical social arrangements. Gray describes how the approach:

> ...emphasises the importance of attending to the social dimension of television viewing and to the ways in which the dynamics of domestic life, and the relationships of power within that environment, affect the practice of television viewing. It insists on investigating the microcosm of the household in terms of the ways

> in which its members, in different permutations, organise space and time within its geography (Gray, 1992:11 after Lull 1980).

Since the early 1990s, television research has tended to focus on particular genres and readers rather than on the social organisation of television use in the home (e.g. Corner, 1996; Hill, 2004; see Tulloch, 2000 for overview). Exceptions to this, which have built on Morley and Gray's work, include Buckingham et al.'s research into the social dynamics of television use (e.g. Buckingham, 1996; Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; Moores, 1996); Gillespie's study of how cultures are shaped and changed through people's recreative reception of the media (Gillespie, 1995); Mackay and Ivey's research into everyday uses of media in the home (Mackay & Ivey, 2004); and from the US, Hoover et al.'s study of the everyday uses of media and families (Hoover, Clark, & Alters, 2004). In relation to new media, the influence of research into the social uses of television can be seen in the emergence of the 'domestication' framework, which will be outlined in the next section.

Domestication

The 'domestication' framework was developed by Silverstone et al. (1992) in the early 1990s, building upon earlier studies of the social uses of television, and has been widely applied to the study of media and communication technologies (see below for examples). This model sought to understand the social uses of media within households and in relation to the public domain. Silverstone et al. (1992) developed a framework in which:

> ...households are conceived as part of a transactional system of economic and social relations within the formal or more objective economy and society of the public sphere. Within this framework households are seen as being actively engaged with the products and meanings of this formal, commodity– and individual-based economy. This engagement involves the appropriation of these commodities into domestic culture – they are domesticated – and through that appropriation they are incorporated and redefined in different terms, in accordance with the household's own values and interests (16).

In short, the framework outlines a model aimed towards understanding the nature of the relationship between private households and public worlds and the role played by ICTs in that relationship. Silverstone et al. argue that the

household can be understood as a *moral economy,* where the economic activities of household members within the domestic setting and in the wider world '...are defined by a set of cognitions, evaluations and aesthetics, which are themselves defined and informed by the histories, biographies and politics of the household and its members' (18). In this way, 'artefacts and meanings, texts and technologies' cross the unstable boundary of the public and private spheres where they 'mark the site of the crucial work of social reproduction... via the mesh of class position, ethnicity, geography and the rest' (19).

Silverstone et al. define four phases in the dynamics of the household's moral economy in the transactional process: *appropriation, objectification, incorporation* and *conversion.* Through these dimensions they offer a framework potentially able to open up some of the 'realities of the significance of information, communication technologies in and for everyday life; and to the realities of how they are transformed, or in many cases rejected, at the point of consumption and, just as significantly, thereafter' (27). Though I will not be applying the four components of the framework to my analyses in detail, outlining the constituent parts is useful for gaining an overall understanding of this model, which will broadly underpin the thesis. To briefly summarise, *appropriation* occurs at the point at which an object, technology or message crosses the threshold from the formal to the moral economy, for instance, the point at which the computer becomes owned and, therefore, consumed by the household or individual. Significantly, this process is or can be central to an individual's or household's self-definition and how they distinguish themselves from or align themselves to, each other. The dimension of *objectification* occurs in 'display'. For material objects, this may be in the appropriation and exhibition of an artefact alongside others, to 'signify together as an expression of the systematic quality of a domestic aesthetic which in turn reveals, with varying degrees of coherence (and contradiction), the evaluative and cognitive universe of the household' (23). For non-material artefacts, such as media content, objectification may occur through negotiation and incorporation into the temporal structure or fabric of the household. Furthermore, media content may be objectified in household conversation, for example, discussion of particular television programmes, though which individuals and households perform identity and self-representation. *Incorporation* focuses on how objects are used.

The authors argue that whatever the reasons for the purchase, to become functional a technology must be incorporated into the routines of daily life. For instance, it may release time for other things (Gershuny, 1982), enable time-shifting or time to be better spent. Whilst *objectification* mainly identifies the spatial aspects of the moral economy, *incorporation* is concerned with the temporalities. Questions of both age and gender may be foregrounded in *incorporation,* for instance, where a technology is located and when and how it is used and by whom are key dimensions of the household's moral economy. Silverstone et al. point out that together, the *objectification* and *incorporation* of objects, technologies and texts provide the basis for the 'constant work of differentiation and identification within and between households' (25). *Conversion,* like *appropriation,* refers mainly to aspects of the relationship between the household and the outside world whereas *objectification* and *incorporation* are principally aspects of the internal structures. *Conversion,* therefore, takes place across the boundary with the outside world through which the household 'defines and claims' status for itself and its members. For example, teenagers may use their consumption of computer games as a means through which they join a peer-group culture. Through this symbolic display, the individual expresses criteria of judgement and taste in addition to the extent of their material resources.

Features of the 'domestication' approach have been widely applied to the study of the uses of media and communication technologies in the last decade or so. For instance, Lohan studied men's and women's different relationships with and uses of the telephone in domestic settings in Ireland (Lohan, 1998, 2001); Haddon carried out empirical research into the factors shaping telecommunication practices in British households (Haddon, 1997); Lally examined the role of the computer in contemporary domestic life in Australia (Lally, 2002).; Anderson researched domestication of ICTs in the UK with particular respect to age and gender differences in access to and usage of ICTs and their influence on social relationships (Anderson, 2002). In relation to children, Facer et al. explored 'living and learning with computers in the home' from the child's point of view in the UK (Facer et al., 2003). Furthermore, a growing number of internet studies are emerging, which are also broadly influenced by this framework, for instance, the Annenberg National Surveys on

the internet and the family in the US (Turow & Nir, 1999, 2000); Bakardjieva and Smith's research into how non-professional internet users 'domesticate' and 'creatively appropriate' the internet into their everyday lives in Canada (Bakardjieva, 2005; Bakardjieva & Smith, 2001); and with specific focus on children and young people, Holloway and Valentine's *Cyberkids* (2003) and Livingstone and Bober's study of young people online (Livingstone & Bober, 2003; 2004), both in the UK. Some of the findings of this research will be discussed in Chapter 3 and in subsequent chapters.

Silverstone et al.'s (1992) framework accedes that technologies are both 'shaped and shaping', but argues that the balance between the two is a matter for further theoretical and empirical enquiry. To consider this further, I turn to the field of the social shaping of technology in the next section, which has sought to understand this relationship. Before doing so, however, I would like to pause here to consider the 'internet' and 'use'. Without wishing to essentialise the qualities of the internet, what I mean by the 'internet' is, to borrow from Hargittai and DiMaggio, 'not a fixed object, but rather a protean family of technologies and services' (2001: 5) through which 'users' can, in theory, gain 'access' to the web, chat rooms, instant messaging, email and so on. Bakardjieva (2005) argues that the wide range of 'services' that the internet can offer renders it an 'open' technology. Whilst acknowledging that this is a somewhat problematic distinction, she claims that a division can be made between technologies with a high degree of openness to interpretation (such as, the computer and internet) or those technologies allowing less choice with regard to function and application (such as the vacuum cleaner). Furthermore, this highlights the relevance of Gibson's concept of *affordances* which in Bakardjieva's words: '... refers to what a technical environment offers relative to the person or group perceiving or recognising that quality of the environment' (see Gibson 1979 in Bakardjieva, 2005: 19). She argues, therefore, that particular 'actors' may then bring to the technology 'new, sometimes unforeseen, potentialities of this technology' (19).

The relationship between 'actors' on the one hand, and the technology as 'actor' on the other is the subject of much debate as will be seen in the next section. In light of discussion of 'actors' in the field of the social shaping of technology, a

note is needed to qualify inclusion of the terms 'uses' and 'users' in the thesis to describe people's relationship to the internet. Authors have previously considered the problematical nature of how to characterise people's relationship to new media. It has been noted that 'uses' is an inadequate term in view of its association with the tradition of 'uses and gratifications' research (Livingstone, 2002b; Mackay & Ivey, 2004). Lievrouw and Livingstone argue that whilst the term 'audience' was and to some extent still is adequate for mass media research, it fits weakly with the field of new media (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002). They explain how in a number of important ways, audiences are becoming 'users':

> audiences are being relocated away from the screen, their activities contextualised into the everyday life world. They are also becoming 'users' because they are grappling with the meaning of new and unfamiliar media objects (i.e. as technologies, or consumer goods), and this is not only in their homes but also in schools and workplaces (10).

Moreover, Livingstone argues in *Young People and New Media* that 'audience' fails to capture the wide range of different activities possible, described as 'communicating, viewing, reading, listening, writing, playing' (Livingstone, 2002b: 8). She claims that the term 'user' can be useful, however, to capture research questions focused more on media as technologies, as 'consumer durables' and as 'domestic products' than they are to understand how people engage with, typically, broadcast content and other questions that have dominated the research agenda over recent decades. She concludes that as people's relationship to media is being understood in terms of using, consuming and owning, both 'audience' and 'user' retain a heuristic value. Similarly, Bakardjieva reasons that 'users' is a more 'open' term than 'consumers' which renders invisible a wide range of significant productive practices. It is with these considerations in mind, that I retain the terms 'uses' and 'users' in this thesis as shorthand for the process through which individuals embed or 'domesticate' the internet into their everyday lives.

The social shaping of technology

In common with early studies into media audiences, initial research into uses of technology was dominated by accounts that emphasised 'effects' or 'impact'

models. These technologically determinist accounts offered narratives through which new technology was presumed to impact either positively or negatively on society, replacing what had gone before and producing unsurprising effects assumed to be more or less the same everywhere (Bingham, Holloway, & Valentine, 2001). To this day, technological determinist accounts have persisted to an extent in academic research (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002) and particularly in populist accounts used to explain material and social change (Winston, 1995). As with early studies of television audiences, such accounts fail to take account of the social context of use. Bryson and de Castell (1994) have called this 'an artifactual view' where technology is detached from the 'normative social context'. Similarly, Woolgar emphasises that 'uptake and use of the new technologies depend crucially on local social context' (Woolgar, 2002). As noted by Thrift: 'What is missing from technologically deterministic accounts... is any concerted sense of new electronic communication technologies as part of a long history of rich and often wayward social *practices* (including the interpretation of those practices) through which individuals have become *socially acquainted* with these technologies' (Thrift 1996 in Holloway & Valentine, 2003: 12). On the other hand, scholars have warned against adopting the opposite position whereby technology is viewed as a 'neutral tool' whose impact is wholly determined by users' intentions (Bromley, 1997). Taking this approach fails to acknowledge the 'interpretative processes' that occur in the practices through which we become socially acquainted with technologies: the various stages of development and domestication in the home or workplace (Bingham, 1996; Thrift, 1996). Bingham describes how technologically and socially deterministic perspectives imply either strong technological objects acting upon weak societies or strong societies projecting various political, gender or class interests onto weak objects. Ackrich writes of these as the 'traps' of socially determinist or technologically determinist approaches which, she notes, are 'symmetrical' (Ackrich, 1997).

Whilst various areas of theory and research coexist under the label of the 'social shaping of technology', they share the perspective that technologically determinist accounts inadequately account for the human dimension of technology use (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Williams & Edge, 1996). Furthermore, the new or impermanent nature of these technologies means that

the research itself may influence the design, implementation or use to a greater extent than would be the case for older, more established technologies (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002). Lievrouw and Livingstone point out in relation to new media that through the early history of adoption and everyday use and the research that attends and evaluates it, a role is played in the process of social shaping and therefore, the social consequences of the technology. As Bingham explains: 'These otherwise different approaches share the view that technological artefacts do not possess capacities in virtue of extrapolation from previous technical states of affairs: but rather that the nature, form and capacity of a technology is the upshot of various antecedent circumstances involved in its development (mainly taken to include design, manufacture and production). These antecedent circumstances are said to be 'built into' and/or embodied in' the final product; the resulting technology is 'congealed social relations' or 'society made durable' (Bingham, 1996: 50).

Grint and Woolgar (1995) group together the technologically and socially deterministic perspectives under the terms *essentialist or anti-essentialist.* The former they describe as 'technical attributes [that] derive from the internal characteristics of the technology'. The latter encompass a broad range of perspectives including 'social shaping' (e.g. MacKenzie, 1990), 'constructivist', social construction of technology' (e.g. Bijker & Law, 1992; Bijker, Hughes, & Pinch, 1987) and what they call 'designer technology' (e.g. Winner, 1980). Lievrouw notes how the sociology of scientific knowledge has influenced the social studies of technology field by identifying 'critical points of contingency' in the course of scientific research when results could have been interpreted differently, thus emphasising the social practice of 'interpretative flexibility' (Lievrouw, 2002). Researchers within this field have concluded that scientists' 'own beliefs, opportunities and relationships are as important in the establishment of scientific facts or truths as the natural phenomena that they study' (Knorr 1981, Latour and Woolgar 1986 in Lievrouw, 2002: 185). Lievrouw details how Bijker et al. (1992; 1987) working within the field of the 'social construction of technology' have drawn on the notion of 'interpretative flexibility' to review choices available to designers, developers and users in the process of technological development. They have used this framework to produce research into 'large technical systems' such as supercomputing (MacKenzie,

1991) and electrical power grids (Hughes, 1983) (see Lievrouw, 2002 for further examples). Lievrouw points out that by emphasizing society's influence on technology rather than the reverse, advocates of the social shaping of technology field have sought to transcend 'one way' or linear accounts of technology and society and challenge notions that progress is irreversible. She adds that Actor-Network theory has been particularly persuasive in trying to overcome the linear causality issue noting how this approach rejects both technologically and social constructivist arguments. Advocates of this perspective (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1993; Law & Hassard, 1999) argue that the world cannot be straightforwardly divided up into the material and the social (Bingham, 1996). Moreover, they reason that society is produced in and through 'patterned networks of heterogeneous materials in which the properties of humans and non-humans are not self-evident but rather emerge in practice. In other words, "...the social and the technical always co-develop' (Holloway & Valentine, 2003: 13).

Critics of constructivist theories have argued that they inadequately explain the roles of structure and agency (Bakardjieva, 2005). Bakardjieva argues that: '...constructivist theory pays no heed to the enduring features of the social system and the deep-seated political biases that can underlie the spectrum of technological choices, or in other words, to the constraining dimensions of social structure' (Bakardjieva, 2005: 11). She notes that feminist scholars, for instance, have accused constructivists of rendering women invisible and gender irrelevant in the shaping of technology (see Berg and Lie 1995, Cockburn 1992, 1993, Gill and Grint 1995 in Bakardjieva, 2005: 11). She concludes that these limitations 'prevent it becoming the sole framework for conceptualising user agency in the case of the internet' (14). It is through agreement with this view that I am also including perspectives drawn from Cultural Studies in my approach, in order to take account of the differences in socio-economic status of my sample families. I also follow Holloway and Valentine's lead in recognising that the internet is not an object with a pre-given set of qualities that are fixed in time which produces a predictable set of effects (Holloway & Valentine, 2003). Instead it is a medium which materialises for families in the same way that they argue it materialises for children as 'diverse social practices and which may thus have as many everyday translations as the contexts in

which they are used' (see Bingham et al. 2001 in Holloway & Valentine, 2003: 14). To quote Holloway and Valentine, '...we understand computers [the internet] and their users to be in a relational process of coming into being, in which each is transforming and transformative of the other (Holloway & Valentine, 2003 after Ackrich 1997).

Conclusions

This chapter has outlined and justified the theoretical approach taken to studying how families explain and substantiate their uses of the internet. It has shown how perspectives from family sociology, Media and Cultural Studies, particularly what Haddon terms the 'domestication' framework (Haddon, 2004), combined with approaches from the field of the 'social shaping of technology', have created a framework for examination of families' uses of the internet. These approaches have shown, specifically, how individual and family agency shape interactions and relationships with media or technology so that they can be understood as being in a co-determinous relationship to each other.

The next chapter will review literature relating to old and new media use within families, and introduce the key themes of the thesis and the main texts relevant to understanding families' uses of the internet.

Chapter 3: Review of the Literature: Families, Media and the Internet

Introduction

Having located the study theoretically in Chapter 2, this chapter will begin by discussing previous research in relation to old and new media in families. These studies are useful for understanding the underlying structural and social dimensions of media use. Moreover, they provide significant insights into what are likely to be the most important issues for understanding families' internet use. The second part of the chapter will present my key research questions and themes and set the scene for the data chapters. Whilst this section will introduce the key texts for understanding families' uses of the internet, the majority of the literature review will be found within the data chapters as noted earlier.

Media and Families

Media and the organisation of family life

It is recognised that the structural (e.g. time and space) and social (e.g. power relations) dimensions of media use are closely interwoven. However, they are separated out here for the purpose of analysis.

Television research has indicated the importance of time and space boundaries within families for understanding the influence of media on family context. For instance, the boundaries between one activity and another and between private and public spaces are significant for understanding the family environment (Leichter et al., 1985). Studies have found that different ways of perceiving and managing time exist between households, best represented by opposite points on a continuum. At one end of the spectrum, families view time as a scarce resource and not to be wasted, whilst at the other, families see it as in abundance and to be filled. Attitudes may vary within families depending on whether it is holiday or work time and also between different generations. Media research has frequently drawn on Edward Hall's concepts of 'monochronic' and 'polychronic' time to highlight these differences: 'Monochronic time (M-time) and

Polychronic time (P-time) represent two variant solutions to the use of both time and space as organizing frames for activities... M-time emphasizes schedules, segmentation, and promptness. P-time systems are characterized by several things happening at once. They stress involvement of people and completion of transactions rather than adherence to preset schedules' (Hall, 1976: 14).

Building on this, Jordan (2003) has established that patterns of temporal organisation vary according to socio-economic status and influence parents' socialisation of their children to use media, particularly when viewing television. She found that more affluent parents whose jobs demanded a high degree of self-motivation, such as professors, lawyers and writers, were more likely to instil notions of managing time on their children than parents whose jobs were less autonomous and more externally controlled. Whilst, parents in the former category were likely to instil in their children their view of time as a precious resource, not to be wasted on excessive viewing, the latter were more likely to have rules centred on programme content.

Other studies have established that television influences the scheduling of family activities (Leichter et al., 1985). More recent research by Gauntlett and Hill noted that television is 'at the very least a catalyst for forms of organisation of time and space... a primary determining factor in how households organise their internal geography and everyday timetables' (Gauntlett & Hill, 1999: 16). An example of this would be family members who deliberately schedule a meal to be eaten alongside viewing of a favourite television programme.

In terms of spatial organisation and traditional media, previous studies have shown that it is a combination of the architectural characteristics of the home and the family's spatial organisation which determines the television's situation (Leichter et al., 1985). Bryce and Leichter (1983) found that television sets '... more visually and aurally accessible from the centres of social interaction were on more often... were viewed more often and were available for family mediation than were sets in socially isolated locations' (Bryce & Leichter, 1983). Leichter et al. found that furniture is arranged for ease of viewing television rather than for conversing or interacting with other family members (Leichter et

al., 1985). Similarly, Lindlof and colleagues found that rooms were frequently arranged around television sets (Lindlof, Shatzer, & Wilkinson, 1988).

The centrality of television in the home led one author to dub it the 'electronic hearth' (Tichi, 1991). However, recent studies have drawn attention to the increasing number of multiple television sets to be found in the home and the correspondingly altered ability of the family to centrally locate themselves around the television (Lawrence & Wozniak, 1989; Wartella & Mazzarella, 1990). Livingstone has noted that whereas television brought the family together around the hearth, the growth of domestic technologies has enabled 'the dispersal of family members to different rooms or different activities within the same space' (Livingstone, 1992: 128). Moreover, this situation has led to claims that parents are less able to oversee the programme choices being made by their children (Huston et al., 1992). Silverstone argues that this fragmentation of viewing and engagement in other media activities such as listening to music threatens the future of families:

> ...parents and children can be seen to occupy separate domestic times and spaces, isolated by personalised stereo systems... passing each other like ships in the night in a jamming fog of electronic communication and information overload (Silverstone, 1991: 5).

In relation to new media, research by Frohlich et al. (2003) into home uses of the computer has shown that there are both similarities and differences between old and new media. Whereas television raised anxieties around excessive viewing, similar fears exist in relation to overuse of the computer. For instance, one respondent described a need to limit his own uses as follows: 'They offer a lot as long as you know when to put the brakes on. Because you could spend your whole life, day after day (on it)' (Frohlich et al., 2003: 305).

As with television, these authors found that there were extensive negotiations occurring around computer use between all family members, children with children, children with parents and between parents around issues of access. Different time patterns of use can be observed with peak times being just after dinner in the early evening for children to type up school projects and parents to do work and accounts. Competition for the computer leads to informal rules for

prioritisation of use. For instance, the first to go to bed may gain priority in order that they have time to use it before their bedtime. (Rules and authority will be further discussed in the next section.)

In spatial terms, Frohlich et al. (2003) found that the preferred position amongst families for the computer was a dedicated office. However, where office space was unavailable, the family tried to find somewhere to site the computer where it would be accessible but quiet, to allow for concentration. All the computers in their sample were situated either in offices, dining rooms or kitchen/dining areas or parents' bedrooms. Interestingly, they found some association between the location of the computer and the activities participants intended to use them for. For instance, those wanting to play games preferred having the computer in a family room whereas those wishing to use the computer for household accounts wanted the computer in the dining room, the place where bills normally got paid. Moreover, the mood and the privacy of the location were influencing factors. Office type rooms, with a private and work-oriented feel to them, were thought most suitable for work and organisational type uses. Other rooms, like the living or family rooms, were viewed as '... more public and playful in character and therefore suitable to shared uses relating to fun, interest and self-expression' (Frohlich et al., 2003: 314). Frohlich et al. note that the moods of kitchens and dining rooms tend to be more ambiguous as they are public and associated with relaxation, but also used for work related purposes. However, they conclude that children's bedrooms are probably the most ambiguous rooms in the house as they are used for private and shared activities relating to both work and play.

This section has shown how media use structures (and is structured by) the home both temporally and spatially and that whilst differences exist between media, there may be similarities as well as diversity in how they influence organisation within the home. This next section will focus on how families negotiate uses.

Media and power in families

Andreasen (2001) has observed that family rules tend to predict television use more than television rules; and that approaches to regulating children's television viewing are linked to the values and beliefs which shape the home.

As Jordan reasons, mediation strategies with television and other media may reflect parents' ongoing interest in 'socializing children to the larger norms and values of the family system' (Jordan, 2003: 156). This has been borne out by further research in this area, including Hoover et al.'s recent and extensive study of media use within the family (Hoover et al., 2004). These authors conclude that parents, and in some cases, their children, construct their accounts of media use '... consistent with what they envisioned about their families' collective life and practices' (174). Moreover, media use is part of a 'delicate balancing act' through which parents seek to manage the pressures on family life in the light of self-conscious parenting. Hoover et al. call this self-consciousness 'reflexive parenting', to refer to parents who were '... mindful of the presumed influences that came between them and their children, particularly those influences over which they felt they had little control' (9). They argue that within this context, media become one of the 'lightning rods for parental anxieties' (9). In practice, this meant that most of the parents (in their sample of 62 families) sought to 'police' both content and time spent watching television. Media use emerged as 'an important, concrete expression of the more general project of self-aware parenting in a world defined by risk and change' (175). However, it was noted that family rules were often 'intentional' rather than practised: even the strictest parents were not consistent in how they regulated media use. A further important finding was that parents believed in the notion of media 'effects' particularly where younger children were present. They borrowed from what Hoover et al. termed 'public scripts' about media effects, focused around violence and sex, and felt a need to explain how they negotiated these in light of past experiences in accordance with the family's 'philosophy of life'. This finding relates particularly well to understanding families' uses of the internet in the context of contemporary fears circulating around its association with paedophilia and pornography in the UK context. Critics have expressed concern that by over emphasising children as either vulnerable or delinquent, discussion of parental regulation has been inflamed into moral panic rather than recognising the agency and good sense of children (Buckingham, 2002; Oswell, 1999) and displacing onto families other concerns about issues in society better addressed elsewhere (Drotner, 1992).

Earlier studies have considered in detail the strategies through which parents sought to mediate their children's media use. Van Den Bulck and Van Den Bergh, for instance, note that parental guidance is not always aimed at reducing or restricting media exposure (Van Den Bulck & Van Den Bergh, 2000). Bybee, Robinson and Turow (1982) for instance, conceive of three different kinds of guidance: *restrictive guidance* occurs when parents restrict children's viewing; *evaluative guidance* occurs when parents discuss children's viewing with them, explaining how some things are not real or adding perspective, particularly to advertising; *unfocused guidance* occurs when parents simply sit with the child as s/he watches television, positively encouraging certain viewing behaviours or discussing what the child has seen. In the recent report on media literacy for Ofcom (Buckingham et al., 2005), it is argued that these can be condensed into two main types of mediation: regulation (rules about the amount or type of viewing); and 'active' co-viewing and discussion.

In terms of the former, it has been noted that parents exercise their authority through rules and regulations. Lull, for instance, reports that viewing may be given or taken away as either 'reward or punishment' (Lull, 1982b). Other researchers have commented on the practice of parents prohibiting and recommending programmes for their children. In line with recent findings by Hoover et al. (2004), many parents restrict programmes with violent (Cantor, 1999) or scary content (Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseilles, 1999). Buckingham noted that for some parents, the concern is not that their children may copy violent behaviour but that they might be upset or disturbed by it (Buckingham, 1996). Holz (1998) has found that children with television sets in their bedrooms are less likely to be governed by rules formulated by parents and are more likely to watch programmes that their parents would not approve of. This situation could be the result of parents considering television viewing harmless or even positive so that they allow the television to be used outside of their sphere of control.

In relation to the latter, 'active' category, earlier studies found that parents tended to 'co-view' television programmes in order to monitor their children's choices and provide opportunities for discussion of content (Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday, 1989; Messaris, 1983). More recently, Buckingham and Bragg

(2004) have termed this approach 'pedagogical' in that parents seek to enhance children's '...own reflective capacities through debate and discussion, rather than insisting – in a more hierarchical way – on parental rights to impose moral values' (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004: 216). In their research into media portrayals of sex and personal relationships, they found that parents were rarely 'purely prohibitive', but adopted a more 'democratic' or 'child-centred' approach, emphasising choice and self-reflection.

In relation to the implementation of the different patterns of guidance, it has been found that mothers and fathers tend to differ in regulating children's television viewing. Whilst it is typically mothers who set the rules and restrictions that govern children's viewing, fathers may 'un-do' these instructions (Jordan, 1990; Schmitt, 2000). Women's greater input here may be due to mothers playing a greater role in the supervision of children's everyday activities (Hochschild, 1989). Moreover, research has also found that mothers and fathers differ in their ways of interacting with their children, particularly regarding the child's sex, to the point where gender can be seen as a significant predictor of differential parental mediation (Van Den Bulck & Van Den Bergh, 2000).

Previous research has also found that 'differential' power is afforded to members of the family according to their various roles, encompassing both gender and age (Lull, 1982a). In relation to the selection of television programmes, Lull argues that decisions are often complicated, interpersonal communication activities involving intra-familial status relations, the temporal context, the number of sets available and rule-based communications conventions (1982a). In addition, Buckingham and Bragg (2004) have pointed out that there are practical difficulties for regulating viewing in larger families in particular, where it can be difficult to prevent younger children watching programmes that older siblings have permission for. Furthermore, parents admit they could be vulnerable to 'children's various tactics of persuasion' (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004: 214).

Brody and Stoneman (1983) observed that differences occur when children watch television in the absence of parents. They found that older children might assume a more managerial and teacher-like role. Similarly, MacKeogh (2001)

highlights the generational and gender lines along which family hierarchies operate and adds to these. She argues, for instance, that the age of the child can influence behaviour with the eldest child possibly owning more tacit power. Furthermore, she suggests that the status of family members can change: for instance, when someone becomes ill, their influence may increase. In conclusion, she notes in relation to television viewing that: 'One of the main commonalities between families, is that struggles are not between equals' (para 2.2).

Research in relation to the sharing of the home computer has similarly observed family systems of implicit and explicit rules in operation (Frohlich et al., 2003). Frohlich et al. reported widespread competition for concurrent use made more severe in larger households. They commented on their surprise at the strength of feeling they found about rules and regulations in relation to the sharing of time spent on the computer, the security of work documents that parents feared could be deleted by young children, and children not understanding reasons for their use being limited. They found that parents often generated rules influenced by their underlying fears that the computer could either dominate family life or that of particular individuals. In terms of sharing out how time is spent on the computer, the researchers describe how adults arbitrate between their children on the basis of task priority, followed by the usual bedtimes of the children, then by imposing time limits, often of 30 minutes. Adults gave way, for instance, to their children unless their own work was more important and they frequently waited until later in the evening when their children had gone to bed. This often resulted in parents working into the early hours of the morning. The exception was that if their work was urgent, it took precedence over children's games playing. This method of prioritisation had implications for parents in terms of their own tiredness from having stayed up late to complete work-related tasks. It also prevented them having time left over for recreational computer uses such as playing games. The researchers found that the common pattern of daily use in families was as follows: the mother used the computer during the day between the housework, childcare and part-time work; the father, later in the evening when children had gone to bed. Where both parents worked, negotiation took place between the adults about who got the first turn on the computer after the children went to bed with priority frequently given to whoever

usually went to bed first. A further dimension to this was the conflicting wishes that emerged between the generations relating to the location of the computer. The parents had, for the most part, sited the computer according to their own preferences and convenience, usually in a public space. The children, by comparison, wished for the computer to be sited in their own bedrooms, for their convenience.

Many researchers have drawn attention to the influence of the gendered structures of the home on media use. In the 1970s, Oakley established that whilst women perceived the home as a workspace, men viewed it as a site of leisure (Oakley, 1974). To return again to Lull's US study mentioned above, he claimed that familial relations, like all social relations, are inevitably power relations (Lull, 1982a). He reported that it is the structural differences, in this case male power underpinned by the difficulty for women in constructing any leisure time for themselves that creates these inequalities in the home. He observed that the father was seen to be and was named by the other family members as the person who most often controls the selection of television programmes. This lead Lull to conclude that 'the locus of control in family selection processes can be explained primarily by family position' (Lull, 1982a: 809).

Likewise, building on this and similar studies, Morley's (1986) study of television in families found that differences between women and men's viewing included programme preferences, viewing styles and guilt and pleasure. For example, in relation to the study's key finding that women and men have different viewing styles, men reported that they view television attentively whilst women described their viewing as more distracted. Moreover, women portray their viewing as a social activity, involving ongoing conversation, during which they carry out at least one domestic responsibility at the same time. Morley reports how they go as far as to say that to watch television to the exclusion of all other activities would be 'an indefensible waste of time, given their sense of their domestic obligations' (Morley, 1986: 150). Morley's study also found that none of the women in the sample families used the remote control regularly and that husbands frequently changed channels during their wife's attempts to view. This led Morley to claim that the remote control 'is a highly visible symbol of

condensed power relations' (Morley, 1986: 148). In conclusion, he defines masculine power as the 'ultimate determinant' on occasions of conflict over viewing choices. The only exceptions, where male needs were not prioritised, took place when men were unemployed and the rest of the family was granted priority.

Gray's (1992) research into women's uses of the Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) in the home also found evidence of unequal distribution of domestic labour and available spare time in most of her sample households. Furthermore, she found that women consistently described an inability to relax until they have satisfied their family's requirements. Interestingly, this was equally the case even when partners and children were not present. One of the respondents described how she regulates her own viewing: 'If I was watching television through the day, I think I would feel guilty...I mean it isn't that my husband's coming home saying... I don't mean for that, I'd just myself feel that I was cheating. I sort of look upon it as a job, you know, it is my work really... like you go out to work, but this is my job and I think if I'm sat I'm not doing my job, that is, just in my own mind' (Gray, 1992: 63).

In relation to the VCR, Gray found that women frequently made little contribution and had little power over the choosing and hiring of videotapes: they rarely visited the video shop to hire tapes. Moreover, women were more likely than other family members to allow their programmes to be taped over when other tapes were full. Gray reported many other subtle differences in VCR use through which women were disempowered and their choices undermined. For instance, women frequently referred to their programme choices, particularly soaps and dramas, as 'silly' or 'badly acted'. Gray argues that by accepting the masculine hegemony of defining their tastes as 'low status', women diminish their negotiating rights because their husband's choices are already established as more prestigious.

Whilst Morley's (1986) study in particular has become widely influential, particularly in relation to the differences that emerged between women and men's television viewing practices, more recent research by Gauntlett and Hill (1999) has challenged its findings. For their study, they interviewed 500

respondents over a period of five years about the role played by television in their lives. They concluded that many of the respondents rejected the notion of 'different viewing interests'. Contrary to earlier findings, both younger women and many men criticized daytime television. Moreover, many men watched and were fully engaged in soap operas, refuting previous claims of soap opera as a women's genre. However, men did tend to use the remote-control more than women (in agreement with Morley) but in consultation with other family members.

Nevertheless, other recent research carried out into new media has suggested that the structural differences between women and men in the home do continue to influence access. Green's (2000) study of women's leisure uses of ICTs found that women's 'free' or 'uncommitted' time is frequently perceived as a family resource. Moreover, women were found to prioritise their children's pursuits at the expense of their own leisure. Additionally, Burke's (2003) research into women's use of home computers in the UK, US, Australia, Canada and Asia based on 150 self-completed online questionnaires found evidence redolent of Gray's findings in terms of guilt and access. Whilst online access was a prerequisite for participation, Burke found that 25 percent of women had access limitations or feelings of guilt about using the computer. The majority of these women (83 percent) were living with children ranging from single infants through to four or five older children or teenagers. They reported that change in the distribution of household chores would have most impact on increasing their access. One respondent commented on her husband prioritising his use of the computer above her own though she was clearly more limited in her time due to childcare: 'My partner is also in academia. He prioritises his work over mine every time even when I am working to a deadline. I work at college as much as I can although child care responsibilities mean I can't often work during the evening or weekends because my partner has the computer' (Burke, 2003: 331). Within the 25 percent who reported feelings of guilt or restricted access, 10 - 15 percent said that they often felt guilty about using the computer. One woman who had her own private study area with sole access described how feelings of guilt still impact on her: 'But my own experience is that I always feel guilt: I should be spending time with my husband and son' (Burke, 2003: 332).

Burke reported that tolerance of access was conditional on length of time spent and the potential neglect of relationships and responsibilities. She concluded that many of the women for whom access is currently not a problem, have overcome hurdles and managed the problem through 'unobtrusive manoeuvring'. One participant described this process as 'inner computer time scheduling', to describe the internal decision-making processes that occurred in prioritising and managing time. Furthermore, she notes that: '... when he expresses an interest in using the computer I automatically place his request above my own. Unfortunately, I don't seem to include the fact that he may be playing a game or surfing the web rather than doing programming work as part of my inner computer time scheduling process' (Burke, 2003: 334). Another participant comments on how she regulates her time to balance her use with the demands of her family: 'In general I don't have a problem with computer access. But I think that is largely because I self-regulate my time so as not to intrude on the rest of the family' (Burke, 2003: 334). Whilst Burke's findings appear to show the continuation of the inequalities found in earlier studies and the enduring unequal distribution of responsibilities and resources within the home, the research is necessarily one-sided in omitting to compare women's with men's points of view. A similar study from the male perspective might equally find that men experience feelings of guilt and compromised access when using the computer at home.

Research has shown that money is another potential source of conflict in relation to the use of media in families. O'Sullivan's (1991) study of domestic television reception in the 1950s and early 1960s shows that it was usually the male who decided to buy the television receiver. O'Sullivan argues that this was the result of male control over the purchase of large items of household expenditure combined with the traditional link between masculinity and gadgetry. Likewise, Lohan (1998) explored home uses of the telephone six months after the transition from day-time unmetered calls to metered calls in Ireland. Her data showed that whilst women may be more frequent users, men own the phone economically and culturally. Lohan found that the phone was often in the man's name. Moreover, even where the woman arranged to pay the bill, it was often the man who authorized payment. Lohan also found that women frequently used the word 'guilt' to describe their telephone use. In the

following excerpt, the respondent talks of how the introduction of day-time metered calls has impacted on her own strategies of self-regulation: 'I can't phone people after six o'clock because I feel guilty about it and I can't phone people during the day because I can't afford it. My bill has been halved but I'm not happy with it' (Lohan, 1998: 165). Lohan points out that women's position is contradictory because whilst they have responsibility for the management of the household, they do not have authority over it. In addition they often felt accused by the cultural notion of 'women = talk = telephone' particularly as many of their uses were for household management and organisation of members' lives. In relation to the computer, very little systematic analysis of the financial negotiations involved in purchase has been carried out. Lahtinen (2000) reports that children and fathers were more 'active' in the process of purchasing the computer but is not more specific on the financial negotiations involved.

This section has briefly outlined how (old and new) media are accommodated within the structural and social dimensions of the home and how power operates in relation to the family and media. Before I move to introducing the key themes of the thesis, I would like to briefly discuss how families' uses of the internet are likely to be influenced by their socio-economic status.

The influence of class

As noted earlier, one of the key aims of Morley's (1986) *Family Television* project was to understand how social background could influence patterns of viewing behaviour. He argues that the cultural resources which are available to individuals govern their cultural competencies, which in turn, significantly influence their programme selections. Gray (1992) reports that Morley drew on the work of Bourdieu and others in arguing that these 'competencies' are unequally distributed within society and that cultural competence is 'determined outside the sphere of television – by family socialisation and education' (Morley, 1986, in Gray, 1992:10). Morley refers to this process as 'audience availability' to describe how audience competence is differentially distributed across the social structure. Gray reasons that this opens up 'the important inter-discursive space which encircles the viewing subject and her or his relation both to social structures and to particular popular genres' (1992: 10). However, Gray says that ultimately Morley was unable to 'operationalise' this theoretical model (as he

admits himself in an 'Afterword'). Gray says that this was due to the sample of families being dominated by those with working-class/lower middle-class backgrounds, thus restricting the project. This meant that as 'class slipped out of focus, gender emerged as the strongest structuring element in viewing practice' (Gray, 1992: 11). The study did find, however, that higher education was significant in determining programme preferences. Gray describes how Morley found that access to cultural capital through education appeared to increase women's preferences for 'quality' texts whilst they were also more likely to dislike soap operas. This finding was repeated in Gray's own (1992) study into women's uses of the VCR. She argues that access to education, with its association with class, leads 'educated' women to reject the viewing of soap operas in order to distance themselves from products perceived as being of 'low culture'. Therefore, educational and cultural capital become factors in explaining differences between women.

New media researchers such as Lally (2002) and Facer et al. (2003) have similarly drawn on Bourdieu to explain differences in how individuals and groups make use of ICTs (see also Selwyn, 2004 in Chapter 6). These authors have drawn particularly on Bourdieu's (1977) notion of *habitus* to explain how individuals experience disorientation when faced with new cultural environments. They have also drawn broadly on Bourdieu's (1986, 1990) work distinguishing between three forms of capital to understand social class. These are economic capital (material), social capital (networks of family, friends and acquaintances) and cultural capital (embodied in the form of knowledge, objectified in the form of books, paintings, and other artefacts and institutionalised, in the form of qualifications).

Lally reasons that everyday life is largely 'improvised' by individuals on the basis of past experience and present expectation. Therefore, 'structured crystallizations of practice' tend to reproduce themselves and conform to 'usual', 'right' practices. In Glennie and Thrift's (1996) words: 'Together, these resources generate a 'sense of belonging', a feeling that the agent does not have to qualify as a member of a network, being already competent in its spaces and times'. (41). Lally argues, therefore, that this gets played out through familiarity with 'the appropriate forms of discourse and practice in

contemporary technological culture' (166). This means that an individual's competence to 'belong' within a particular space, such as the technological arena, depends on their having the necessary social, economic and cultural resources to engage. Moreover, a further consequence of this is that when opportunities are offered to encourage individuals and groups into the technological sphere, the disorientation that may result from entering a new cultural environment may act as a deterrent in the first place or a barrier to learning during the course. Gorard et al. (2002), for example, found that initiatives to widen participation in lifelong learning in the UK, drawing on ICTs, tended to recruit the 'usual suspects': 'younger, employed, professional, male, qualified, already learners, who have access to the relevant technology at home' (9).

Facer et al. (2003) drew on Giddens' (1984) concept of 'structuration' to explain young people's differing relationships to technology. In particular, these authors note that features of social life, such as gender and class, are not merely social structures acting upon individuals and groups but 'powerful sets of rules and sets of resources that we draw upon in our day-to-day lives' (Facer et al, 2003: 128). These are drawn on 'wittingly or unwittingly' so that their importance is reproduced in our own and other people's lives. Facer et al. reason that these social structures:

> ... provide us with key resources in the identities we create for ourselves; they give us definitions of what we ought to do, be and feel. But when we use them as a resource, we are also reproducing them by acting them out and giving them a social reality. (129)

They argue that social structures of gender and class influence the meanings assigned to computers in young people's lives through the rules and resources they are able to draw on. To further understand social class, they draw broadly on Bourdieu's (1986, 1990) three different forms of capital to argue that access to these different resources through social class differences will influence how young people interpret the role of the computer in their lives. Moreover, this was borne out through their research. They found that computer use and access is significantly influenced by economic capital: the 'low and ambivalent' users in their sample came from families in the lowest socio-economic group.

Differences in social and cultural capital had a major impact on how children came to value and work with computers in their homes though not always evenly. For instance, whilst some not so well off families were able to support their children through social networks, others could not. Some families were able to employ very traditional forms of cultural capital allowing them to "read' the educational significance of the computer in sophisticated ways' (153). They conclude that within the field of ICT, differences in families' resources which in turn influence how they support their children's engagement with it, shows how social class is both articulated and lived within everyday life.

Clearly, these factors will also influence how families use the internet. Although I will not be applying this framework to my analyses in detail, it is helpful for understanding the resources available to the different families in my sample, and how these may influence families' varying relationships to the internet. The next section will introduce the key themes of the thesis.

Introducing key themes

In the section above, I demonstrated how power is manifested in families in relation to media with regard to the organisation of time and space, rules and regulations, according to the practices and values of the family. Whilst issues of power will be a recurring theme throughout the thesis, they need to be understood in relation to the different purposes for which the internet is used - specifically education, work and leisure. Accordingly, the thesis is organised around these themes with two additional underpinning areas emerging as important for understanding families' use: internet literacy and regulation. Discussion of each of these themes below will set the scene for the five data chapters. In addition, previous relevant studies will be selectively and briefly drawn on to show their importance to the study, whilst the majority of the literature review is to be found in the appropriate data chapters.

Time and space for the internet

Many claims have been made for the internet in terms of its potential to transform our social lives and both increase and enliven leisure time. From shopping to downloading music to emailing friends to joining online

communities to creating our own websites and so on, the internet is seen to enhance our lives. These assertions are ripe for enquiry.

Previous media research problematises the notion that women and men enjoy equal access to leisure time in the home (as noted above). For this reason, I will consider leisure within the context of a more general discussion about how the internet fits into the ways in which time and space function within family life. Moreover, authors such as Lull argue that personal attributes such as gender, age, generation, sexual orientation and personality impact on television viewing with men preferring sport, action-oriented and information programmes whilst women prefer dramas, music, dance and comedy based programmes (Lull, 1982a). Other researchers have challenged this gender determination by pointing out that education undermines such findings where '... by virtue of educational background, [the female] is in the dominant position in terms of cultural capital' (Morley, 1986: 163). Gray's findings in relation to the VCR concur with this, particularly where the woman has benefited from Higher Education. It will be interesting to explore how far personal attributes are also an indicator of leisure-related internet uses shaped by the gendered politics of the household, not only for parents, but also for their children.

There is already relevant literature in this field specific to leisure uses of the internet. The major UK studies are useful for considering children's uses: *ScreenPlay* (Facer et al., 2003); *Cyberkids* (Holloway & Valentine, 2003) and *UKCGO* (Livingstone & Bober, 2003; 2004). For adults, relevant UK studies include the *Digital Living* programme which examined the 'impact' of the internet on the everyday lives of UK citizens (Anderson & Tracey, 2001) and more recently, *The Internet in Britain* from the Oxford Internet Institute provides useful background (Dutton, di Gennaro, & Millwood Hargrave, 2005). Moreover, studies from the US and Canada such as Bakardjieva's (2005) study of adults' uses of the internet within families and households; the Pew Internet and American Life Project (see www.pewinternet.org) and studies collected in, for instance, *The Internet in Everyday Life* (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002) and (the mainly US sourced) *Wired Homestead* (Turow & Kavanaugh, 2003) analyse users' activities online and how these fit into the context of everyday life. Whilst these studies are useful, my thesis will look more closely at the

issues involved in leisure-related uses within the context of family life. Questions include:

- What factors influence uses of the internet for leisure? How do these factors inter-relate and overlap to determine the extent of individual use?
- How do uses of the internet for leisure fit into the context of the ways in which time and space function within family life?
- How is the internet used for leisure and/or carried out in leisure time?

Education and Learning

In recent years, the role of technology in both formal education and informal learning has been the focus of considerable debate. At the same time, the rapid diffusion of the internet into the home (particularly where children are present), sold to parents on the grounds that it is useful for education and that so-called 'interactivity' is synonymous with learning, warrants closer investigation.

Previous media research shows that the internet has followed a common pattern of dissemination. Television, for instance, was marketed to families as an educational medium in the early years of its development (Melody, 1973). Yet, research into television use has shown that the context of viewing in the home is significant for children's learning. Studies found that parental co-viewing and commentary can enhance children's understanding (Reiser & Tessmer, 1984; Reiser & Williamson, 1988; Salomon, 1977). As an example, plot clarifying has been shown to improve children's abilities of comprehension (Collins, Sobol, & Westby, 1981). Conversely, research has also shown that despite the long hours spent watching television with other members of the family, there is generally limited interaction in relation to either the medium or its content (Bryce & Leichter, 1983). Similarly, the context of use for the home computer has also been shown to be significant for learning. Giacquinta et al. found that the 'social envelope' of parental scaffolding plays an important part in this, yet that many parents lack both the skills and time to effectively support their children (Giacquinta, Bauer, & Levin, 1993). Moreover, Facer et al. found that the computer is incorporated into the 'existing values, practices and interests of the family itself' (Facer, Furlong, Sutherland, & Furlong, 2001: 5). In

relation to education and learning, this means that families' general orientations and their pre-established practices are likely to influence the learning potential of media, a finding that will most probably transfer from other media to internet use.

In looking at the internet and education and learning, it is important to take account of relevant studies that have considered internet use within the home sphere. Again, these include several major projects from the UK in relation to children, for instance, the *ScreenPlay* study (Facer et al., 2003), *UK-Children-Go-Online* (UKCGO) (Livingstone & Bober, 2003; 2004) and *Cyberkids* (Holloway & Valentine, 2003). Similarly, research from both the UK and the US in relation to adults and learning has informed this study. For example, work carried out at the University of Cardiff (Gorard & Selwyn, 2003; Gorard, Selwyn, & Madden, 2003; Selwyn, 2004; Selwyn, in press) in the UK; Haythornthwaite and Kazmer's study of adults and distance learning (2002; 2000) and the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Lenhart, Simon, & Graziano, 2001) in Canada and the US. Whilst these previous studies are useful to build on, they are mainly either adult or child-centred in their approaches rather than considering uses and experiences in relation to the family. Where this study will add to current knowledge, therefore, is in its explication of internet use and related meanings being created within the context of family life. Key questions in relation to education and learning include:

- How is the internet perceived in relation to education and employability?
- How is the internet used for homework and to support adult study?
- How do socio-economic factors influence uses of the internet for education and learning?

Internet Literacy

In addition to the perceived educational advantages of using the internet, many parents invest in the internet at home sold on the promise that this will help to develop the skills and competencies needed to effectively use this medium. These skills are seen to support children's schooling and future employability and parents' studies and current employment.

In terms of media research, this is an area where previous studies are necessarily patchy, and with good reason dependant on the qualities of the particular media. The level of skill needed to turn on and watch television, for instance, is relatively low compared with the skills and competencies required to effectively operate a computer. Yet, previous research into home uses of the VCR has found that differences do exist between women's and men's levels of competence (Gray, 1992). Gray notes that very few of the women in her sample learnt how to work the VCR on their own, with their knowledge usually mediated through their male partners. Moreover, men's continued and regular use of the VCR increased their familiarity and ease, perpetuating this gender gap. The reasons women gave for this included a lack of 'technical' know-how; laziness and lack of motivation to learn; shortage of time; and recognition that their learning would lead to further demands being made on them in order to service the needs of others. Moreover, in relation to home computer use, as noted above, both parents were found to lack the skills and time needed to effectively support their children's uses (Giacquinta et al., 1993). Giacquinta et al. note that, in particular, women's lack of computer experience was of particular concern as they were typically the primary care givers. Gaps in competence could also be important in the development of internet skills within the family context.

Studies have sought to understand the specific skills and competencies that are needed to effectively use the internet (Buckingham, 2001; Buckingham et al., 2005; Livingstone, 2003a). Whilst these will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7, it is worth mentioning here that these skills have been defined as not only the functional and technical skills required to access the internet but also the critical and production skills needed to evaluate and create content. Again, there is already valuable research in this area from Facer et al. (2003), Livingstone and Bober (Livingstone & Bober, 2003; 2004), Holloway and Valentine (2003) and Kiesler et al. (2000). However, the current study extends other research by looking in more detail at the context of family life for the development of the skills and competencies needed to effectively use the internet. Questions include:

- What skills and competencies are needed to use the internet?

- How are these skills and competencies developed?
- How do parents and children perceive their own skills and competencies?

Work

Besides the presumed educational benefits that seemingly motivate families to invest in an internet-connected computer, the advantages of being able to work from home are often used to promote sales to parents. Home-based working has been packaged as socially progressive: a means of successfully balancing work and family life. On the other hand, the internet is seen to contribute to the increasing blurring of the boundary between work and home with its associated negative influence on family life. Once more, these claims need to be examined more closely from within the context of the family home.

Media research in this area is again necessarily unevenly spread. Television is generally perceived as an entertainment medium rather than for work; and studies which have related television and the VCR to work (see, for instance, Gray, 1992; Morley, 1986) have focused on the enduring inequalities in the division of labour responsibilities between women and men at home (Doucet, 1991; Oakley, 1974). These disparities could, in turn, impact on the availability of time at home to carry out salaried home working. However, previous research into the home computer has found extensive use of computers to support (particularly professional) employment for both men and women (Lally, 2002). Furthermore, the 'computerized home' takes on some of the character of the office through the importing of 'organisational routines' and practices, such as setting up home 'offices' and creating mailing lists for Christmas cards, etc. Lally argues that the mere presence of an employment-related computer in the home is to some extent blurring the home/work boundary.

The research mentioned above provides a useful context, particularly with regard to the gendered structural relations of the home and the blurring of the home/work boundary, for considering internet use within the home for work purposes. There are also studies focusing specifically on internet use which are relevant, most of which emanate from Canada and the US. These include Bryant's (2000) study of work, gender and the 'information superhighway';

Haythornthwaite and Kazmer's (2002) study of distance learners, home and work; studies from the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Horrigan & Rainie, 2002a, 2002b; Howard, Rainie, & Jones, 2002); Nie and Erbring's (2000) study of the internet and society ; Salaff's (2002) study of home-based working and Bakardjieva's (2005) study of adults' uses within families and households. Examples from the UK include Ellis's examination of the challenges of work/home boundaries for 'ambient intelligence' (2004). Whilst these studies overlap with my study, they do not examine in depth the role played by the internet in families' home working practices. In particular this chapter examines the different patterns of digital and non-digital working including '*digital overflow*: the practice of using the internet in order to bring work into the home to meet the demands of the intensified workplace' (Cranmer, 2002: 3). Key questions include:

- What influences parents to bring work home?
- What are the different patterns of home working and how do these relate to the organisation of time and space within the family context?
- How is the internet used for work in practice?
- To what extent are the spheres of home and work blurring?

Regulation

The questions outlined above have in common a need to challenge popular rhetoric and marketing that claims that the internet will positively transform our lives in new and exciting ways. The final issue to be addressed here differs in that it is seeking to challenge the equally deterministic but negative claims that have led to moral panic in the media; and the advocation of protectionist approaches from the UK Government and from Child Protection Agencies such as Childnet International, the Internet Watch Foundation and NCH. Yet there has been little research into how parents view these issues, how their attitudes influence their approaches to regulation and the strategies they use to mediate internet use in their children's lives.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, parents have developed extensive practices through which to organise, mediate and regulate their children's (and their own) television viewing and home computer use. These habits reflect, for example, families' differing attitudes to time in relation to their own anxieties about over-consumption. The explicit/implicit rules and regulations that parents and children use in negotiating internet use will, as with television and the home computer, probably represent parents' attempts to socialise their children to the families' existing 'practices, values and interests' (Facer et al., 2001).

Again, the recent major UK studies into children's internet uses are relevant to considering regulation within the home: the *ScreenPlay* study (Facer et al., 2003), *UKCGO* (Livingstone, 2004; Livingstone & Bober, 2003; 2004) and *Cyberkids* (Holloway & Valentine, 2003). Also, studies mainly from the US collected together in *The Wired Homestead* (Turow & Kavanaugh, 2003) are useful. However, what is missing from the literature thus far is an in depth account of how internet use is influenced by parents' orientation to regulation. Key questions include:

- How do parents' attitudes to risk influence their approaches to regulation in relation to internet use?
- What approaches do parents deploy to regulate internet use in relation to time, space and technical strategies?
- Do parents have the competence to regulate effectively?
- How do children and young people subvert parental rules?

Conclusions

This chapter has set the scene for the data chapters by outlining current family theory in order to situate my sample families within the context of contemporary UK society. It has drawn on previous research to show how the underlying structural and social dimensions of family life influence how media are used. Furthermore, it has drawn on these perspectives, and also rhetoric within the public domain, to forge a new and interesting set of questions in relation to internet use within families. Whilst a range of significant texts for this study has

been introduced, I have argued that this study differs from previous research in its adoption of a family-centred rather than child or parent/adult-centred approach. This perspective, therefore, will enhance our current understanding of internet use through its examination of internet use and its related meanings as created within the family setting. The next chapter will begin this investigation by focusing on the methodology deployed to investigate families' uses of the internet in depth.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will outline the qualitative research design I used in order to explore how families explain and justify their internet use. Firstly, I will introduce the sample and the longitudinal research design. Secondly, I will explore the research design in more depth discussing the benefits and limitations that emerged. Thirdly, I will discuss the methodological perspective which underpinned these methods specifically in relation to family research theories and ethics.

The sample

Between 1998 and 2003, I conducted 52 interviews with 17 families comprising 33 parents and 44 children at their homes in and around the London and Sheffield areas. Initial interviews were carried out as follows:

1998: the Hills, Bonds

1999: the Kendals, Powell-Drummonds, Liangs, Goldings, Burnleys, Archer-Hughes, Manders-Shorts

2000: the Dunne-Osbornes

2001: the Craines, Jacksons, Parkers, Bradshaws, Prowses, Bournes, Grants

I have summarized the main features of each family in Table 1 in addition to the detailed description of the families provided in Appendix 1. For brevity, the information given here refers to the initial interview only with the exception of the type of internet connection included for both first and third interviews: dial up (DU), intermediate narrowband (IN), anytime (ANY), asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL), and broadband (BB). For a full description of these categories see Chapter 5.

Table 1 The Sample (Recruited 1998 – 2000)

1 **The Hills**
Mother (Community Nurse)
Father (School Teacher)
6 children (aged 4 – 11)
Online since 1996 (2 years*)
DU: DU

2 **The Bonds**
Mother (University Manager)
2 children (aged 13 – 15)
Online since 1997 (1 year)
DU: ANY

3 **The Kendals**
Mother (Academic)
Father (Co. Finance Director)
2 children (aged 9 – 11)
Online since 1996 (3 years)
DU: BB/DU

4 **The Powell-Drummonds**
Mother (Senior Academic)
Father (Senior Academic)
2 children (aged 12 – 14)
Online since 1999 (0 - 1 years)
DU: ANY/DU

5 **The Liangs**
Mother (Credit cont./Student)
Father (Company Accountant)
2 children (aged 10 – 12)
Online since 1997 (2 years)
DU: DU

6 **The Goldings**
Mother (Administrator/Student)
Father (Town Planner)
2 children (aged 11 – 15)
Online since 1999 (0 - 1 years)
DU: DU

7 **The Burnleys**
Mother (NHS Executive)
Father (Housing Director)
3 children (10 – 13)
Online since 1999 (0 - 1 years)
DU: IN

8 **The Archer-Hughes**
Mother (NHS Executive)
Father (Management Consult.)
3 children (aged 12 – 14)
Online since 1994 (5 years)
IN: ANY

9 **The Manders-Shorts**
Mother (Health Practitioner)
Father (Actor)
2 children (aged 11 – 15)
Online since 1995 (4 years)
DU: DU/ANY

10 **The Dunne-Osbornes**
Mother (Psychotherapist)
Father (College Manager)
1 child (aged 10)
Online since 1997 (3 years)
DU: BB

Recruited between 2001 – 2003

11 **The Craines**
Mother (Unsalaried/Student)
Father (IT Technician)
4 children (aged 3 – 10)
Online since 1998 (3 years)
AD: BB/AD

12 **The Jacksons**
Mother (Unsalaried/Student)
Father (Care Assistant)
4 children (aged 6 – 15)
Online since 1998 (3 years)
DU: DU

13 **The Parkers**
Mother (Unsalaried/Student)
Father (Retired Engineer)
1 child (aged 11)
Online since 1998 (3 years)
DU: DU

14 **The Bradshaws**
Mother (Unsalaried)
Father (Sales Director)
3 children (aged 4 – 11)
Online since 1997 (4 years)
ANY: ANY/DU

15 **The Prowses**
Mother (Social Worker)
Father (Engineer)
3 children (aged 13 – 18)
Online since 1998 (3 years)
DU: DU

16 **The Bournes**
Mother (Civil Servant)
Father (Building Director)
2 children (aged 7 – 12)
Online since 1999 (2 years)
DU: DU

17 **The Grants**
Mother (Health Visitor)
Father (Music/Teacher/Painter)
2 children (aged 12 – 14)
Online since 1998 (3 years)
DU: ANY

*'This figure refers to the length of time each family had been online at the point of the initial interview.

I contacted families via placing advertisements in the University newsletter newsletter of the University I was studying at[5]; personal contacts and my old school website; and 'snowballing'. For the pilot, I talked to the Hill and the Bond families in the London area, followed by a further 15 families split between the London area (ten families) and the Sheffield area (five families) for the main study. The families ranged in size from the largest, the Hills, with six children, to the smallest, the Dunne-Osborne and Parker families with one child each. The Parker family, exceptionally, also had two grown up sons but their sons were not included in the study as they had already left home. The youngest child in the study was Sasha Craine (aged 3), the oldest, Abigail Prowse (aged 18) at the time of the first interviews. Most of the families were nuclear with one lone parent family and two remade families included (see below for discussion of recruitment of the sample). All the families were predominantly white with just one parent being minority ethnic. Parents' occupations ranged from non-salaried to affluent, middle-class professional employment. These differences were reflected by the broad range of housing types that the families lived in, which varied from small council and ex-council houses to semi-detached and much larger houses in a range of urban and rural locations. Major changes did occur in the families' constitution in two cases during the two-year research period: the Bradshaw parents divorced and the Craine parents separated (though were in the process of reconciling at the time of the third interview).

The data collection consisted of four main stages:

- The first stage consisted of a visit to each family's home to carry out an audio-taped, semi-structured interview with the family as a whole to understand the day-to-day realities of using the internet within the home. Questions focused on acquisition, ownership and location of computers with or without internet-connections, the social organisation around the internet-connected computer, how each family member uses the internet

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[5] As noted earlier, my original intention to place advertisements within University newsletters and other more anonymous methods of recruiting were put aside as it became clear that a key factor in getting families to take part was that someone they knew could introduce me to them.

and their uses of complementary media, such as games consoles. (See Appendix 2). I also collected general demographic material, such as children's ages, parents' employment and so on. Interviews generally took place within a 'family' room such as the lounge or large kitchen and took between 45 and 90 minutes.

- At the end of the first interview, I gave each family a diary for every computer in the house. I asked them to record all computer and internet use they made on a daily basis for one month. I provided notebooks with columns headed: 'Date, Uses, How long? Who?' and asked them to be kept by the computer to be filled in at every use. (See Appendix 3.)

- At the end of the month, I returned to each family home. I collected the diaries and conducted a video-taped (also audio-taped) semi-structured interview with one child/young person and parent separately whilst they showed me a range of their usual activities on the internet. Questions were designed to deepen my understanding of people's uses and associated attitudes, particularly the affective dimensions of use, the general context for use, levels of familiarity and competence and how the web is navigated. This interview was less structured than the first, in that family members were encouraged to lead me through their day to day activities. However, in order to both engage them in the task to begin with and to collect this particular data, I asked them to talk me through their bookmarks/favourites lists before showing me what they usually did when they went online. I asked them why they undertook these particular actions and what they liked/disliked about them and about the internet in general. In particular, I asked them to tell stories and anecdotes about good/bad experiences they had had online alone or with their families. (See Appendix 4.) During the course of the observation, I also asked about their diary entries and those of other family members to clarify particular points and to try to assess the accuracy of this record. I also sometimes asked to look at the computer's 'history' facility but only where respondents seemed particularly comfortable with the observation. Interviews took place wherever the internet-connected computer was

situated, therefore, in studies, dining rooms, bedrooms, lofts, etc. They generally took around 45 minutes to one hour per family member.

- After a break of two years, I returned to each family home to complete the final stage of the data collection. This took the form of the first interview, a semi-structured audio-taped interview with the family together. Questions focused on the same areas as in the first interview with an added section on mobile phones which had particularly come to the fore during this period and could have influenced their use of the internet. (See Appendix 5.) Throughout the interview, I particularly focused on any changes that had occurred during the intervening two year period, in general and in relation to the internet, reminding them of what they had said two years earlier and encouraging them to reflect back on their past activities in comparison with the present. Again, I encouraged them to tell anecdotes about their experiences online. Interviews took place in shared family spaces and took between 45 and 90 minutes.

Each audio-taped interview was transcribed in full and analysed using NVivo, software for coding qualitative data. Having briefly described the overall research design, I will move to exploring some of its benefits and limitations that emerged during the research in the next section.

The research design

Recruiting the sample

As many writers suggest, and Hey specifically comments, '... research in the real world is lived as a series of rapidly unfolding and occasionally unpredictable events about which one has to make practical decisions' (Hey, 1997: 41). Within my study, this was never more so than during the recruitment of the sample. As Hey also found in her research into girls' friendships, I had committed myself to accessing a space designed to keep 'intruders' like myself out. Families have highly protected boundaries (Daly, 1992). This meant in practice that I had little control over my sample as recruitment was onerous and I could rarely afford to turn potential respondents away. Successful strategies for contacting families included placing advertisements in the University newsletter, personal contacts,

my old school website and 'snowballing'. It has previously been noted that snowballing can be particularly useful when potential subjects are difficult to identify and locate (Greenstein, 2001; Miller, 1986). In my study, this technique produced three of the families overall. A general principle for successful recruitment appeared to be that a more direct contact needed to exist between me and the potential family for them to come forward. This generally took the shape of a mutual friend, work or study colleague or member of my family. This was borne out by the failure of any of the more anonymous methods I tried such as door to door leafleting, advertisements in shop windows and posted on local area websites, advertisements placed in schools via the Head teacher and even a short article, asking for participants, that appeared about my study in the local newspaper.

The difficulties I encountered in recruiting families were not a disaster in terms of gaining a representative sample as, in keeping with qualitative research, I was not concerned with generalisation so that typically, my sample could be small. As Morley and Silverstone (drawing on Hammersley and Atkinson) say, '... the objective is not to identify universal laws, but rather to produce "detailed descriptions of the concrete experience of life within a particular quarter and of the social rules and patterns which constitute it"' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983 in Morley & Silverstone, 1991: 154). Also, as only nine percent (2.2 million) households were connected to the internet in 1998 (Office for National Statistics, 2005) when the study began, the 'connected families' were unrepresentative of the UK population as a whole in any case. Whilst my original intention was to recruit families who had only recently acquired a home internet connection, the difficulties I experienced in recruiting meant that this had to be compromised. In practice, the case study families included families who had been connected for anything up to five years by the time of the first interview. However, I did achieve my second criterion for inclusion, that each family must have both generational and gender differences within it. For instance, I included the Bond family as the presence of Billy (aged 15) provided both generational and gender contrast to his mother, Christine. In practice, this particular criterion led to most of the families being nuclear including two remade families. A further intention was to recruit roughly the same number of boys and girls for the study overall, and I roughly achieved this with 22 girls and

19 boys included in the study. The locations of the families were again somewhat ad hoc, brought about through having to cast my net further afield in drawing on my personal contacts. When each family agreed to take part (usually through a third party), I contacted them and verbally outlined the study and their part in it. We then agreed a date for the first interview. I confirmed this by sending a more detailed summary of the study via email so that they also had details in writing.

Although, as noted earlier, my sampling strategy was not intended to produce a representative sample, the approach I took rather limited the diversity of the families who took part in the study and a future study should take account of these reflections. For instance, relying on personal contacts produced a nearly all white sample including just one minority ethnic father. Moreover, my decision to select families on the grounds of contrasting both gender and generation produced mainly nuclear families. Given the increased diversity in family types as noted in Chapter 2, in particular, that two-parent families can no longer be taken for granted (Silva and Smart, 1999), it would have added a further dimension to include a wider range of types of families. However, it is worth emphasising that the families included did comprise two remade families, a family with adopted children, one lone parent family and two families where parents subsequently separated, in one case, divorcing within the two year period of the study. Three of the less affluent mothers were recruited via their tutor on their Higher Education course. An unforeseen consequence of this, therefore, was that the knowledge and experience they gained on this course put them in a rather different position to other less educated parents in their economic position so that they were not typical examples of their class. This becomes apparent in Chapter 7: Internet Literacy, when considering their skills and competencies and particularly, their ability to help their children to use the internet at home.

The obstacles I faced in recruiting families, and thus, the slow pace at which this progressed, led to the emergence of two distinct cohorts. Whereas professional parents were well-represented in the initial cohort of ten families recruited for the study (between 1998 and early 2000), families recruited later (2001), were more diverse in socio-economic status reflecting the spread in

ownership of the home internet during this time. (See Appendix 6 for discussion of classifying the families.) An issue that then arose, therefore, was of the comparability of data collected from families recruited over a three year period given the technological and other changes that occurred. Whilst it is difficult to assess the full impact of the staggering of the initial interviews, I would like to briefly acknowledge the social, cultural and technological shifts that took place during this period. For instance, during the period of data collection, a cultural shift that took place was in how the internet was understood. More specifically, it was in the process of developing from new phenomenon to becoming an integrated part of many people's lives. Moreover, material, objective changes also took place: the costs of computers were falling and faster unlimited internet access was growing in popularity. In the public domain there was a growing focus on the risks associated with internet use, particularly for children in the form of contact with paedophiles and exposure to pornography. Increased fears about, for instance, talking to strangers in chat rooms, coincided with the development of applications for instant messaging. These packages facilitated contact with members assumed to be known to the user through face-to-face offline contact and whose names are added to a personalized 'buddy list' by the user. Other further online changes that occurred during the period are commensurate with what has been called Web 2.0, the move to the 'second generation of services available on the world wide web that lets people collaborate and share information online' (Wikipedia, 2006). This includes the growing popularity of 'blogs' for publishing online journals; 'wiki' open editing software through which users can create and edit web page content using any web browser; and sites such as My Space (www.myspace.com), a 'social networking' site which offers a range of services such as weblogs, user profiles, an internal email system, web forums and groups.

Whilst acknowledging the issues that arose from recruiting families over a three year time frame, I identified a set of characteristics in Chapter 5 which could account for uses irrespective of fluctuations over time. These interrelated and overlapping factors: level and quality of access; hierarchies of use; regulation; motivation; competence; and so-called 'free' and 'uncommitted time' move the thesis beyond being a purely historical document. Moreover, I also took account of the shifts that took place over the period in the analysis of data. For instance,

in Chapter 9: Regulating the Internet, I categorised parents by their orientation to regulation: more specifically, whether children were allowed to use the internet autonomously or not, with or without parents' deploying 'spy' methods of surveillance such as checking history files, etc. In grouping families by this method, I sought to overcome making rash judgements about parents' orientation to regulation based on measures such as the forbidding/allowing of chat room use, which would have been influenced by the temporal context to some extent and, in particular, the growing awareness of internet safety concerns and risk. The issues which have been discussed here are also pertinent to the longitudinal dimensions of this study, therefore, I briefly return to them below.

Introducing a multi-method, longitudinal design

As is typical in qualitative research, I adopted a primarily interview based multi-method approach consisting of two audio-taped interviews, a diary and a video-taped observation over the duration of two years. As has been noted by many previous authors, using multiple methods or 'triangulation' is desirable because each method may reveal new and different dimensions to the subject under scrutiny and validity is strengthened by the corroboration of data collected in a variety of ways (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993). Moreover, in adopting the methods I did, I was able to capture not only dominant family orientations but also more divergent parent and child perspectives at different points in time. A question for the research design, therefore, was whether to interview each family member separately in addition to the whole family interviews. Ultimately I opted for what might be called an observational interview with one parent and one child. By this I mean that I sat alongside respondents whilst they used the internet, asked questions about their activities, watched and video-taped their activities. In a sense, this represented something of a compromise. It would have been interesting to remain in situ for much longer and observe families' unsolicited behaviour. However, this was impracticable due to time and other restraints.

Nevertheless, though I was compromised to some extent in the form that the observational interview took, I was keenly committed to the notion of collecting observational data. Growing reservations about the reliability of self-reporting in

interviews have led critics to claim there is a need for more observational studies (Buckingham et al., 2005). Given that one of the aims of my study, for instance, was to understand levels of internet literacy competence, it was particularly useful to observe internet use in practice rather than rely only on respondents' own assessments. The pilot study, however, had shown that each of the observational interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour, requiring families to be online for most of this time. This meant that to interview all members of each family separately in this format would have increased both the time and financial burden that I was imposing on each family unless I had reduced my questions and limited participant's responses more severely. Ultimately I made the decision to interview just one parent/one child in each family on the basis of these practical considerations. Whilst a larger study would be useful for capturing the full range of perspectives of each family member within the household, my design was effective in collecting data representative of dominant family perspectives enhanced by perspectives also drawn from individual members of the family.

I chose semi-structured interviews throughout the study so that respondents could provide their perceptions about internet uses and how they explain these in their own words (following Copeland & White, 1991). Moreover, it has been noted that interviews are particularly useful for understanding both individual and group perspectives, which was my intention (Fontana & Frey, 1998).

The longitudinal dimension of the study also added a useful and unique perspective compared to most current internet use research. I will discuss this below in relation to its particular relevance for family studies. However, it is worth noting here that Larzelere and Klein (1987) have termed a typical longitudinal study with two or more collection points separated by longer time gaps of (usually) months or years (such as this one), a *multi-occasion design.* They note that three major problems can emerge from such designs – sample attrition, testing effects and the consistency of the meaning of measures over time. I will discuss these in relation to my study below.

Having introduced the overall research design, I will discuss what happened at each stage of the study and the benefits and limitations of adopting these approaches in the next section.

First and third audio-interviews

An unanticipated aspect of conducting family research in my case was that my own family became involved in various stages along the way. For instance, my husband, Steve, offered assistance throughout all the interviews, operating the tape and video-recorder, following up when he felt I might have missed something that needed further enquiry during the interviews and as a means through which I avoided the 'lone worker risks' that can befall workers (and students) going into homes of people they do not personally know. At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself as a doctoral student who was studying families' uses of the internet for my PhD. I introduced Steve, firstly, as my husband and, secondly, as my 'technical assistant' who would operate the tape recorder. I also added that as he was familiar with both the interview format and subject, he might pitch in occasionally if he thought I had missed something important. Steve and I tried to locate ourselves within each family's home so that we (and the tape recorder) were central to and facing all members of the family. I reminded respondents of the aims of the interview and the project, asked them for permission to tape the interview (given in all cases) and thanked them for their participation. Reflecting on advice from authors such as Copeland and White (1991), that researchers relying on self-report measures should consider what can be done to encourage subjects to present their views and values honestly rather than presenting themselves in a positive light, I emphasised to participants that there were no right or wrong answers to my questions, but that what I most needed from them was their opinions.

During the interviews, I tried to keep the atmosphere friendly and informal. To some degree I think this was helped by the naturalistic setting of being in the family's own home where hopefully, both parents and children feel at ease. Also, being accompanied by a 'lay' family member rather than another researcher helped to make the interview less ceremonious. In general, most participants were good humoured and talkative on the subject of their uses of the internet. I adopted a conversational approach which Fontana and Frey (1998) describe as being on the level of the respondent and engaging in a 'real' exchange with 'give and take' and 'empathic understanding' (see also Daniels, 1983 in Fontana and Frey 1998). I adjusted the order of my questions to try to

stay true to the more naturally flowing sequence of events that opened up during each interview, checking at the end that all my areas of interest were adequately covered. I also let participants wander off the subject to some degree as often these instances provided the most meaningful insights into how the internet fitted into their everyday lives. Allowing participants this space became particularly important when the services provided by the internet moved on apace. For instance, it was a young person during an interview who first alerted me to the increasing importance of instant messaging, a long time before it was reported in either the research literature or in the press or on television.

Interestingly, the pilot study showed up most of the issues that I would face and seek to overcome during the collection of data for the main study. The pilot comprised the first two families that I recruited as I undertook the first three stages of the research design. Obviously, I could not wait two years to trial the final interview and test out the long term dimension. Whilst the pilot study prompted only small modifications to the order and wording of the initial questionnaire and observational interview proforma, the most important aspect of the pilot was in gaining an understanding of the issues involved in conducting research in the 'naturalised' setting of the home. These raised particular issues in relation to power and hierarchy between the researcher and the family. Whilst feminist writers in particular have argued that interviewers should aim to establish non-hierarchical relationships with interviewees (see Oakley, 1981 for instance), within the family home this can become a struggle for control between the researcher and members of the family in terms of both expectations and needs. For instance, I had told one family before I visited that I would like to interview the whole family together (naively envisaging a large room where each family member sat quietly taking their turn to speak). In reality, the parents stood together (with Steve and I also standing) in one of the children's bedrooms having excluded their six children who they said would make the interview difficult. When I did persuade these parents to allow their children to join us, it was indeed mayhem with only partial answers achievable and often inaudible. I found that as a polite and privileged visitor (having recognised at this stage the difficulties I was going to have in finding families who would allow me to cross the protected boundary of the home), I was in a

fairly weak position as far as controlling both the environment and the family's behaviour within it. My experience as a researcher tells me that this is never more so than when interviewing families in their own homes. In future interviews, I became much more forthright in insisting that all members of the family be present and engaged (as exclusively as could be achieved) from the beginning of the interview. Whilst most families responded well to this as far as they could (young children's behaviour was rarely predictable), I never lost my unease at imposing my wishes on them within the sanctity of their own homes.

Other issues which emerged in the pilots and the subsequent main study were common to conducting any kind of group interviews, not just those in families. These were in line with those outlined by Fontana and Frey (1998) as follows: firstly, the interviewer must keep one person or a small coalition of people from dominating the group; second, reserved interviewees must be encouraged to participate. In particular, the emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression leading to a kind of 'group think'. Therefore, the researcher must manage the group dynamic in addition to the script of questions. These issues were present in many of the interviews where one person (usually a parent) sought to dominate or act as 'spokesperson' (Daly, 1992) often with the result that children became withdrawn and sometimes bored. In these instances, I tended to target less talkative participants and either draw them into the general conversation or address questions to them as individuals. This was successful in many cases though not all where children seemed particularly unsure of themselves and addressing them individually caused embarrassment. In some cases, the separation of the child from their parents in the observational interview brought more fruitful responses though one or two children remained shy and unforthcoming throughout. I will return to aspects of the observational interview below but at this point, discuss the second method, the diaries.

Diaries

I included diary keeping in my range of methods as a triangulation method to both add another dimension to the data collection and corroborate data collected by other means. In particular, I wanted to understand temporal patterns of use, types of use and which family members tended to use the

internet the most or least and so on. I asked families to fill in both computer and internet activities as it emerged in the pilot studies that both parents and children were sometimes confused as to which activities they undertook on and which offline. Also, some on/offline actions take place simultaneously such as the parent who reported playing games whilst waiting for a work-related website to load. Unfortunately, the inconsistency with which both adults and children reported filling in the diaries undermined their usefulness as a research tool. All too often, parents told me at the stage of the second interviews (when I collected the diaries) that entries were both erratic and unrepresentative. To give an example, one parent listed 'AOL' under 'uses' each time he used the internet which told me that he had been online and when, but little of his activities whilst connected. For these reasons, I have discarded the diaries from the main analysis of the study concluding that the sole purpose they served was in providing a further vehicle for discussion during the observational interviews. (See Appendix 3 for diary excerpts.)

Observational interviews

A further and different means of collecting data was the observational interview which I carried out one month after the first family interview. As previously noted, concerns about the reliability of self-reporting in audio-interviews has recently led to the promotion of observational studies. Problems such as social desirability responses (when respondents feel the need to make a good impression by providing researchers with what they think are correct or socially acceptable responses), and reactivity (the extent to which people's actions are influenced by knowing they are participating in a research study) are well known (Greenstein, 2001; Larzelere & Klein, 1987). Greenstein argues that studies of family life are particularly predisposed to social desirability issues due to 'strong social norms about what constitutes a good family or good parenting' (Greenstein, 2001: 90). Larzelere and Klein reason that it is possible to minimise these problems by means such as obtaining data separately from two or more family members to cross check such distortions (Larzelere & Klein, 1987). Yet, they argue that whilst the social desirability bias is typically considered for self-reporting measures only, it is hard to believe that respondents do not similarly modify their behaviour when participating in

observational studies. This argument strengthens the case for adopting a multi-method approach rather than relying solely on audio- or observational interviews.

For the observational interviews, I set up the video-camera so that the respondent and computer screen could be clearly seen, and their activities observed. I also audio-taped these interviews as the pilot studies showed that the video-camera microphone lacked the sensitivity of the audio-recorder. Also, the audio-tapes were much more easily transcribed using an Audio-typing system than was possible from the video-tapes. I asked respondents to show me what they usually did whilst acknowledging to them the somewhat artificial nature of the situation. Copeland and White (1991) have commented that it would be 'unsound' to ask people, and particularly, children, to be 'natural' in interviews. They have suggested, however, that a number of steps can be taken to reduce the issues of social desirability and reactivity. For instance, they suggest that the researcher should choose a task for respondents that will interest them. The argument goes that the more engaged in the task they are, the more family members will forget that they are being observed and their actions will be more 'realistic' and 'typical'. Also, the researcher should keep the camera and microphone out of sight. On the first point, I found that asking family members to show me their bookmarks/favourites list and talk me through them in order to understand who had added them and how they related to people (or family) interests, work or schooling provided a useful opening gambit. As Larzelere and Klein comment, an engrossing activity may well cause participants to 'forget' that they are being observed (Larzelere & Klein, 1987). I asked both parents and children to begin the interview with this task as I wanted to understand the meaning of these bookmarked sites to the individual, not just through a parent or child's hearsay. This activity appeared to work well in helping to relax the participants whilst also providing useful data. Occasionally, it proved less helpful (for putting respondents at ease) when they were unaware of the bookmarking facility and were surprised to find that other family members had previously explored and used this option, evidenced by websites having been added. Copeland and White's second point about hiding the video-camera was impossible. It was often quite difficult to find a suitable place for the camera (particularly when the computer itself was located in a small space). I can only

assume that these authors were thinking more of laboratory type settings when making this suggestion.

Generally the observational interviews went well: respondents appeared fairly relaxed and happy to share their online activities. Indeed they often overran 45 minutes, the time I had originally allotted to the task per person. I left it to each family to volunteer which parent and child would take part in this exercise but was pleased to find that a good balance was achieved between both female and male parents and children taking part in terms of gender and age (of children). One issue which did emerge in about half the families was the reluctance of parents to leave their children alone with myself and Steve, perhaps reflecting the child's preference too. My intention had been to interview each child/young person and parent separately but some parents were unhappy about this and stayed anyway. The reasons for this were not always apparent but they appeared to include the following: some parents did not want to leave their children alone with relative strangers particularly where children felt nervous about being interviewed; some parents saw the interview as an opportunity to find out more about their child's uses without resorting to covert 'spy' tactics; some parents felt their children were not able to use the internet on their own due to their lack of internet skills; some parents sat with their children online as they always did; some parents wanted to keep an eye on the cost of a dial-up connection; some parents and siblings were automatically present due to the computer's location in an established public, shared space. This compromised the original research design which was regrettable but again emphasises a point made earlier, that it is not always possible to impose your research requirements on families within their own homes. The failure to interview some children separately also highlights more general issues relating to conducting interviews within families.

Overall, I felt that my study achieved an understanding of dominant family perspectives on how internet use is explained and justified within the context of 'doing' family life. To expand on this, my interviews with individuals enhanced my understanding of how individual perspectives related to the governing family view. However, this 'view' was compromised to some extent by the issue of how families represent themselves to the outside world. In a sense, each of the

family interviews was a consensual performance where more fundamental differences of opinion were unlikely to surface. Whilst, for instance, some disagreements occurred and were tolerated by family members within the family interviews, particularly in the form of teasing or a gentle undermining of other people's views, more confrontational challenges between family members, where things became unpleasant, were rare. It appeared that within the family interviews members were often content to be perceived of as having 'healthy' disagreements whilst more deep-seated differences of opinion, where they existed, remained unspoken. This placed a limit on the kinds of data I was able to collect. Moreover, a further limitation was that family members may have felt that they could respond only in ways they believed were acceptable to other members of the family. This meant that whilst the research design was able to capture rich data highlighting the 'official' family perspective, it may have been less successful at investigating less acceptable uses. For example, whilst accounts were given (usually by parents) of children carrying out searches on keywords, such as 'sex', history files that showed visits to 'young teen' sites, and the subversion of parental rules by children visiting chat rooms, there may be an unexplored dimension of internet use within families, by parents as well as children, which includes visits to porn sites and sex-related chat rooms, for instance, which the design did not reveal.

The disagreements which occurred in family interviews appeared to be useful for revealing individual perspectives, especially for identifying dissenting voices, where an individual or individuals disagreed with the view being espoused. Yet, to emphasise the point made above, these were only permissible within certain limits rather than being seen as a serious challenge to familial relationships or parental authority, for instance. The issue of power is important here, not only for understanding who challenges who, but also in raising questions about how the researcher interprets these findings. Moreover, it is interesting to consider these examples in order to understand inequalities in power between family members. In the following example, for instance, Peter Golding is moderately undermined by his wife, Lisa, in response to his account of using the internet at work to look at news sites:

> Peter: [....] And I guess at work there are sites that I just click into just for the fun of it, the BBC, or The Guardian or ...

Lisa: That's not what we hear. Arsenal, Arsenal!! Football Italia. What are you talking about 'the BBC, The Guardian'? [laughs]

Peter: Or the Italian football paper. [....]

(Mr and Mrs Golding, int. 3)

To some extent, it appears that Peter concedes this point as he follows up Lisa's challenge with his reference to an 'Italian football paper'. The example shows how, within limits, Lisa is comfortable challenging her husband within this family interview, and that his good humoured response acknowledges both the point she is making and her right to make it. I have flagged up further examples of families' disagreements in the data chapters as they are potentially illuminating for understanding families' uses of the internet. They can also be useful for shedding light on power inequalities within families and I have highlighted examples of this where pertinent.

A final further issue to mention briefly that arose in the observational interviews was about participants' boundaries and how far to get involved (Daly, 1992). For instance, on occasion Steve and I saw respondents struggling to find solutions to internet and computer problems that we could both explain and rectify. In these cases, we adopted two approaches: where a difficulty was preventing an interviewee from being able to continue the interview or show us something that they felt represented their usual activities, we allowed a number of minutes to pass before making suggestions and then tried to help them to access whatever they were trying to, with their permission. In other cases, where the difficulty did not appear to be interrupting the interview to the same extent, we deferred one or two suggestions to the end and hoped that this would help them in future. The observational interviews were again conducted in the manner of 'give and take' and 'empathic understanding' so that we hoped our 'help' did not undermine respondents and make them feel less secure about their internet literacy skills in general, or exposed during the interview. I will discuss other ethical questions that emerged below.

Multi-occasion design

As I mentioned above, my study constitutes what Larzelere and Klein (1987) call a *multi-occasion design*, which investigates causal influences over a long period of time (months or years). My study was also originally intended to be

what Hill terms a *segmented longitudinal panel* (1964) in that it was designed to 'bracket' a crucial transition in the family, the transition to having the internet at home. However, as I previously mentioned, difficulties in recruiting the sample compromised this objective so that I included both newly and longer-term connected families in the sample. Larzelere and Klein (1987) point out that longitudinal designs are particularly useful for carrying out research in families due to their time ordered nature. They argue that the family is distinctive from other social groups in the duration that family members are in close association with one another. Moreover, other studies have found that members of ongoing groups, such as families, interact differently from those which are newly formed (Gottman, 1979; Hall & Williams, 1966). Larzelere and Klein conclude from this that methodologies need to describe and explain the unique kinds of relations that emerge over time in families. They also note that the estimated time researchers allow for causal influences to occur become important conceptual issues in studies concerned with explaining family experience.

In general, I think the longitudinal design of my study added an important new dimension to how we understand internet use. The time lapse of two years was appropriate for understanding changes to the medium and changes within each family, particularly regarding children's maturity. Although the study did not track participant's uses at regular intervals throughout the two year period, I would argue that the changing focus and organisation of the second and third interviews added a further dimension justifying the 'multi-occasion' design label rather than being seen merely as a repeat of initial interviews. The initial audio-taped interviews, for instance, were carried out with the whole family to gain an overview of how the internet fitted into everyday contemporary life. The second video-taped interviews were observational, conducted where possible with a parent and child alone, and much more focussed on gaining a deeper understanding of individual perspectives. The third audio-taped interviews again added a different perspective. Whilst the questions were based around those asked in the initial interviews, an extra dimension was that I reminded them of their responses in the first and second interviews and asked them to reflect back on what they had said. This latter process was extremely useful for highlighting both changes and stasis that had occurred or been maintained in the interim and how participants explained and justified their responses.

Whilst the two year period of the study added this extra dimension, it was not such a long period that my sample diminished greatly though attrition, described by Larzelere and Klein (1987) as being caused by residential change, non-cooperation, illness or death or that the internet developed unrecognisably. Practically, it was also an appropriate length of time for fitting into the time span of the doctorate programme (particularly given the difficulties in recruiting families to take part in the first place). The attrition rate was fairly low in that (as mentioned above) my sample included one divorce (the Bradshaw family) and one separation (the Craine family). Rather than excluding these families, I chose to interview Ros Bradshaw and her children separately and then conducted a later interview with her ex-husband. Whilst these interviews necessitated both sensitivity and discretion, they yielded extremely interesting and useful data about how internet behaviour may be influenced by family breakdown. The Craine parents had separated during the intervening two year period but, although living apart, were in the process of reconciliation by the final interview. They agreed to meet together as a family for the interview, and again, their separation provided note-worthy data. In one family, the Kendals, the father became seriously ill and though recovering from surgery at the final interview, he took part and provided extremely helpful data on how his illness had influenced his use of the internet. None of the sample families refused to co-operate in the final stage of the research, and often Steve and I were welcomed back into their homes as if we were old friends, surprising given the two year gap which existed since the previous interview. In general, the ongoing nature of my research, and particularly its multi-occasion design, greatly increased the rapport and trust that was possible with respondents as our relationship built over this longer time period and they felt more at ease with the process. The longitudinal design also allowed me to see changes which had been facilitated by the research itself. Often, some aspect of use had changed after the first month, by the time of the observational interview. It appeared that the initial interview had provided the space for families to reflect on their own uses and associated behaviour and changes occurred as a result. In the Bond family for instance, at the first interview, Bobby (aged 15) and Sally (aged 13) complained that their mother prevented them from accessing the computer when they got home from school by having a password on it. This had been

introduced after Bobby and a friend had accidentally erased the computer hard disk a while earlier. By the second interview, the password had been removed as Christine Bond (their mother) said that she felt her children were sufficiently mature to have access on their own following discussion of this in the first interview.

Larzelere and Klein (1987) claim that other disadvantages of multi-occasion designs include testing effects and problems with the consistency of the meaning of measures over time. The first of these, testing effects, was not an issue in my study as it refers to how people who have previously been research participants often yield systematically different data from new participants. Larzelere and Klein maintain that such differences can be due to reasons, such as familiarity with the research process and boredom. As my study was concluded after two years it did not necessitate ongoing revisits to the sample families that could have raised these issues. The second point that Larzelere and Klein mention may have relevance here, however. They point out that the meanings associated with particular 'measures' of variables may change over time through cultural historical changes, maturation and changes in wording. For example, movements such as feminism may modify perceptions relating to women's roles in society (cultural historical changes), meanings of a word such as 'sex' may change for parents in relation to their children as they grow up (maturation) and, finally, wording may change in subsequent stages of longitudinal data collection to improve clarity and to take account of changes in meanings that have occurred across time (in addition to changes in actual differences across time). As outlined above, social, cultural and technological changes occurred during the research period which potentially impacted on the comparability of the families recruited over a three year period. These factors are also relevant to considering the meanings of 'measures' over time. As noted by Lievrouw and Livingstone (2002), issues regarding change have particular significance for studying new media, described as a 'moving target' (2002). To recap, for example, the internet was developing from a new phenomena into an integrated part of many people's lives over this period; there was an increased focus on internet risks combined with a proliferation of information provided for parents and children to help avoid these dangers. Moreover, there were changes such as the falling price of computers and the availability of faster

internet access during this period and technological shifts, such as the introduction of instant messaging.

Analysing the data

As I mentioned earlier, the research design was modified several times throughout the study for practical reasons. The diaries, for example, were eventually used mainly as a discussion tool during the second interviews rather than for their intended use as a data collection tool due to families' reporting their inaccuracy and incompleteness. Similarly, whereas I had intended at the start to closely analyse the observational data I had collected in the second video-taped interviews, ultimately I did not pursue this to the extent I had planned. Whilst I drew on the audio and visual data of these interviews to deepen my understanding of uses and attitudes, particularly the affective dimensions of use, the general context for use and levels of familiarity and competence, I put aside my original intention to ask questions of the data about how users navigate the web. Realising through literature searches and reading that theory in this field is already well established within the human-computer interaction field and would have opened up a whole new area of study, combined with a surplus of interesting audio data collected for the thesis, I did not pursue this particular objective.

All tapes were transcribed either by me (in the earlier stages) or later, professionally. I extensively checked and edited the latter group of tapes so that they conformed to the former before transferring them to NVivo, software for analysing qualitative data.

The first basic level of analysis consisted of coding for the original questions that I had asked during the interviews. From responses to these questions and my field notes, I collected together demographic information on each family in order to describe and generally categorise them. Preliminary headings included parents' employment, family composition, children's ages and gender, location of the internet-connected computer, the length of time they had been online at the point of the first interview, the number of computers that were connected to the internet and so on. As noted by Punch (2005) these kinds of pre-specified, descriptive codes require little or no inference beyond the data itself. However,

whilst this data overlapped with the key concerns of my study - education, work and leisure in the context of families' power relations and the ways in which time and space function within family life - I needed to develop thematic codes in order to deepen my analysis. For this purpose, I read across the transcripts (thematically) and coded anything relating generally to these themes. The next stage was to read the data within each of these general themes and where ideas emerged and recurred, develop appropriate codes. These emergent codes tended to surface in the reading of the first four or five transcripts and take a more defined shape as reading progressed. Checking out developing codes in further transcripts lead to their modification and redefinition until I was satisfied that I had defined the phenomena usefully. Huberman and Miles (1998) describe this process as 'iterative' in that it involves a succession of question and answer cycles that '... entails examining a given set of cases and then refining or modifying those cases on the basis of subsequent ones' (186). Punch (2005) notes that in contrast to descriptive coding, this level of thematic coding is more analytic, requiring more interpretation and inference beyond the data. My experience bore this out. On the one hand, my codes were descriptive, to describe factual responses to questions such as 'where is the computer?' e.g. 'in the dining room'. On the other, coding was more interpretative. For example, in this excerpt Lisa Golding infers that she lacks either skills and/or confidence when searching compared with her younger son, David:

> Lisa: David has just started secondary school and he's really at ease with the internet, and really likes being on it. I'm hoping that he will think of it on his own and he might think, internet, I'll have a search and see if I can find anything. I'm sure he'll need some guidance but we'll guide each other because, the search thing, I don't find the search thing very helpful.
>
> (Mrs Golding, int. 2)

This mix of both descriptive and thematic coding in the study highlights that my analytical categories are both 'deductive' (I started with them) and 'inductive' (I gradually got to them) (Huberman & Miles, 1998). Huberman and Miles argue that both deductive and inductive paths are 'legitimate' and 'useful'. Richards and Richards (1998) acknowledge that whilst qualitative research is frequently presented as 'working up' from data, through the 'building [of] new understandings from "thick descriptions"; reflecting on and exploring data

records, discovering patterns...' (213) and so on, most approaches also work 'down' from theory as they '... incorporate, explore, and build on prior theoretical input, on hunches and ideas or sometimes formal hypotheses' (213). This was true of my research as I moved recursively between previous theory and my data to ensure my interpretation of the data was reliable.

Having coded the data both descriptively and thematically, I moved to the analysis. This took the form of what Huberman and Miles (1998) term the 'typical and wide use of comparison/contrast' and 'clustering'. Within each main theme, I considered the data coded to each sub-topic and compared and contrasted it across each of the different families. I took account of families' overall orientations (where a more unified perspective emerged) and also the similarities and differences which emerged between individual family members. As noted by Huberman and Miles, clusters may be arranged along some dimension, such as 'low to high conformity', etc. In line with this, I grouped families, for example, by their overall orientation to the theme of the chapter – for instance, by their orientation to education in the education chapter and so on. By clustering, I tried to give a more nuanced analytical account of the families and, therefore, avoid the pitfall cited by Huberman and Miles of '... aggregating out the local webs of causality and ending with a smoothed set of generalizations that may not apply to any single case' (194). However, I should point out that these family types do not map onto each other. The *established* parents in Chapters 6 and 7, for example, do not correspond with the *high regulation* parents in Chapter 9. Moreover, in Chapter 5, no single determining factor emerged that could usefully be applied across the families. Therefore, I grouped families as seemed most appropriate under each subheading: by gender and generation in relation to time; by location of the internet-connected computer in relation to space; as characterised by their activities in relation to leisure uses, again seeking to avoid over generalizing. In writing up, I organised each chapter by theme and used the sub-topics developed during coding as headings to organise each section.

As I mentioned earlier, I carried out the coding and analysis using NVivo. However, any discussion here of the advantages of using this software, and of its perceived limitations, should be taken in light of the fact that I used mainly its

code and retrieve processes rather than what Richards and Richards (the developers of NVivo) refer to as its abilities for managing '... concepts, and for constructing and expressing theories' (Richards & Richards, 1998: 242). In this case, one of the main advantages of using NVivo over manual coding and retrieval methods was in its flexibility. The development of my thematic codes was tentative and involved extensive exploration, testing and retesting before I was satisfied they represented a good fit. An advantage of using NVivo, therefore, was in the ease with which I could modify coding and change and relabel 'nodes' for this purpose. I also found it helpful that NVivo allowed for nodes to be labelled but also more fully defined which proved important when time had lapsed between coding episodes, a point also noted by Punch (2005). The drawback to this, however, was that particularly for an anxious and novice researcher, NVivo affords the opportunity to never finish the study as nodes can be endlessly tweaked and changed! A further point raised by Richards and Richards (1998) is that by grouping together coded passages under particular nodes, critics have argued that the data is decontextualised from the original transcript. As I found it easier (particularly on the eyes) to manually code directly onto each printed out transcript and then transfer this to NVivo, it meant that I repeatedly saw the full context. This changed at the analysis stage where I worked from convenient print outs of particular nodes thereby 'fracturing' the data from the full text. However, by that stage, I was familiar with each interview and could either remember or easily 'chase' the original context. A further advantage of using NVivo is said to be that it speeds up coding. However, probably due to the manual method for coding that I used, this was not the case. I could, of course, have used NVivo's search facilities to find particular words and concepts but I rejected this possibility as respondents used a wide range of expressions in interviews and I did not feel that searching by key words on transcripts would have adequately captured all the relevant data. In conclusion, therefore, I found NVivo a useful package for coding and retrieval but I did not do justice to its more extensive affordances for linking concepts and constructing theories.

This section draws to a close the discussion of my methods for collecting and analysing data. The next section explores my relationship with respondents in the sample families.

Reflections on the researcher's role

Whilst my intention in this chapter is to defer discussion of my methodological approach to the third and final section, one point I would make at this stage is to do with the 'human construction' of social research (Punch, 2005). As Punch outlines, '...both the substantive concepts and the methods research uses are ways of describing the social world for particular purposes, not just abstract and neutral academic tools.' (135). In other words, the way I conceived this study, the data collection methods, the means of analysis and interpretation all shaped the findings. Postmodern and feminist researchers have increasingly emphasised reflexivity as the 'role of researchers in interpreting, representing and producing knowledge from the voices of research subjects' (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004: 38). They have questioned how 'unconscious, emotional and intersubjective processes' may influence the research process (Walkerdine et al. 2001 in Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). For instance, Daly (1992) has remarked on how the researcher's own family experience will play a role in the collection and analysis of data by stirring personal responses. I became most conscious of this happening at the interview stage. For instance, in the initial stages I realised that I was privileging the voice of the youngest child in each family to some extent over the other siblings. I think this was to compensate for a feeling resonant from my childhood that as the younger child my views had sometimes been taken less seriously than my older sister's. On another occasion, one of my respondents was discussing how she had used the internet to find information about the kind of cancer suffered by a friend, which she had found useful and supportive. Recognising the practice being described and reminded of my own similar experience, I found myself struggling to keep my emotions in check. Somehow blocking these feelings set off an immediate and somewhat debilitating migraine that threatened to wreck the remainder of the interview. Fortunately I was able to keep going and finish the interview whilst reminded of how the 'human' struggles with the 'professional' in conducting interviews 'close to home'.

Daly (1992) has also noted that gender may influence how respondents carry out their roles in interviews, how researchers' level of comfort with persons of the same or other gender may enhance our research and how we may also

consider respondents of the same or opposite sex more or less credible. In the earlier interviews it was interesting how many of the male parent respondents appeared to address their responses to my husband, Steve, though I had clearly signalled that this was my study and Steve's role was as support. This was particularly the case when fathers chose to emphasise the more 'technical' aspects of their computer and internet knowledge, seemingly trying to 'talk techie' to my husband. My assumption was that they had taken on board the traditional alignment of masculinity with technology (Wajcman, 1991) and, therefore, projected technological know-how onto Steve rather than myself. Ironically, Steve, as a computer specialist, was indeed in a stronger position to engage in 'techie speak' than myself but kept this hidden from respondents so as not to encourage this diversion. In later interviews, this ceased to be an issue causing me to speculate that perhaps as I gained more confidence at interviewing and introduced my subject in a way that made clearer the social rather than the computer science approach, so this kind of exchange with Steve become rarer. Also, it was equally possible that class background and education played a part. Some of the initial respondents, the affluent, professional, middle-class early adopters of the internet, appeared to be more at ease with Steve, privately educated and with a south east accent, than myself, a comprehensively educated 'interloper' from 'up North'. They addressed their responses to him rather than to me as I struggled to maintain my control over the situation. Buckingham and Bragg have noted in their study of young people, sex and the media, that '... the power relations of the interviews were certainly not clear-cut or hierarchical in one direction only' (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004: 39). It seemed that in my earlier interviews, there was more of a three way power relationship materialising. Conducting interviews in family homes inevitably accords more status and hierarchy to family members, yet as researcher I was also holding some of the cards, having set up and being in control of the research process to some extent. Yet, there was also this third dimension of having a white, middle-class male with me that was shifting the ground too to some extent. Interestingly, in the later interviews with families encompassing a wider range of socio-economic groups and from around the area I grew up in, this ceased to be an issue. I felt much more at ease with these families and they directed their responses to either me alone or

both of us together rather than focusing solely on Steve. It is difficult to say whether my growth in confidence as a researcher influenced this transition or whether class, educational background and regional accent played the greater part. However, what was clear was the versatility that researchers need to be able to call on to appear credible to respondents and an awareness of how personal characteristics and background, such as, gender, social class and ethnicity, will influence our relationship with respondents when we do (or more often do not) represent a good 'fit' with their backgrounds and experiences.

Methodological approach

For this study, I adopted approaches drawn from qualitative social research methodologies defined by Denzin and Lincoln as '... multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 3). Denzin and Lincoln explain how qualitative researchers emphasise the social construction of reality, the personal relationship between the researcher and the subject of interest and the 'situational constraints' that shape inquiry. They outline the different stages of this construction as the researcher approaching the world from within a distinctive interpretative framework (ontology), that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined (methodology, analysis) in particular ways. As Morley and Silverstone point out, drawing on Ang, research is always a matter of interpreting and constructing reality from the position of the researcher, not a positivist endeavour '... seeking a "correct" scientific perspective which will finally allow us to achieve the utopian dream of a world completely known in the form of indisputable facts' (Ang 1989 in Morley & Silverstone, 1991: 161).

Nelson et al. (1992) describe the methodology of Cultural Studies as a *bricolage;* Denzin and Lincoln, the researcher as a *bricoleur* who produces '... a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 3). The outcome of these characteristics is that research such as the present study cannot be easily

identified within a unified methodological paradigm. For this reason, I have drawn on family research theories to provide an interpretative framework as these appear both the closest fit and highlight significant conceptual issues relevant to the process.

Daly argues that families are a 'distinctive focus of study' (Daly, 1992). She notes that several characteristics differentiate families from other social groups:

> ... privacy; a collective consciousness that is not readily available to non-family members; relationships rooted in blood ties, adoption contract, or marriage and intended to be permanent; shared traditions; intensive involvement, ranging from the most violent to the most intimate; and a collage of individual interests, experiences and qualities (Daly, 1992: 3).

Whilst quantitative methods traditionally dominated the field of family research (Copeland & White, 1991), the supremacy of these approaches (90 percent of marriage and family research was quantitative by the mid-1980s) led to calls for increased use of qualitative research methodologies (LaRossa & Wolf, 1985). Since then an expansion has taken place in the field of qualitative family research, here defined by Gilgun as:

> ... research with a focus on experiences within families as well as between families and outside systems; data are words or pictures and not numbers; the data are conceptualized, collected, analysed, and interpreted qualitatively; the subjects and informants of the research are persons who mutually define themselves as family, are in committed relationships, have a shared sense of personal history, and who usually but not always have legal and biological ties (Gilgun, 1992: 24).

Various authors have made strong arguments in favour of qualitative family research as a means of considering the meanings, understandings, perceptions and subjectivities in and about families (Greenstein, 2001; Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993) and '... the processes by which families create, sustain, and discuss their own family realities' (Daly, 1992: 4). Gilgun points out that in qualitative family research, as with ethnography, the sorting through of the 'piled up structures of inference and meaning' and the implications of 'thick description' for understanding families are 'enormous' (Gilgun, 1992). Moreover, there have been developments in appreciating the different conceptual levels

important for developing family research. Larzelere and Klein (1987) argue that a recurring issue for the conceptualisation of research is the most appropriate level of analysis defined by Copeland and White (1991) as the individual, the dyadic and the family levels. They (and other authors) argue that family research outcomes should not be understood as the sum total of individual members' traits and functioning (Copeland & White, 1991; Larzelere & Klein, 1987) but by the building of a 'composite family picture' (Daly, 1992). Moreover, Copeland and White maintain that it is important that family researchers do not confuse these levels, therefore attributing characteristics measured at the family level, for instance, to individuals and so on. Within my research, for example, the first and final family group interviews prioritise the family level, whilst the observational interviews and diaries foreground individuals. Even so, and highlighting the complexity of this framework, parts of my study (in particular, Chapter 9), inevitably reflect parents' attitudes, practices and meanings to a greater extent than those of the whole family as it is parents who instigate these regulatory measures and strategies.

Ethics

There are limitations of qualitative social research in families which relate to ethics and for this reason, I will discuss these together. As Copeland and White (1991) point out, for instance, a basic principle of research, that anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured about what respondents say, is undermined when other family members are also present in interviews. As they contend, this modifies the kinds of questions a researcher can ask and researchers need to be particularly solicitous to the effect of the study on the family. Many authors note that it is indisputable that there will always be aspects of family life which remain hidden from researchers (see Daly, 1992; Greenstein, 2001; Morley & Silverstone, 1991 for instance). However, it is important to respect families' boundaries and not take advantage of power imbalances between the researcher and respondent to press them to over-expose themselves. As Daly reasons, even where informed consent is given by respondents who have been provided with enough information to make an informed choice about whether to participate or not, the flexibility to pursue ideas and insights that emerge in interviews means that a qualitative researcher cannot always know in advance

and explain to respondents what will be examined as part of the research (Daly, 1992 after LaRossa and Wolf 1985). In my interviews, I tried to pay careful attention to participant comfort levels but there were inevitably occasions where I felt that individuals had been unfortunately exposed by other members of their own families. An example of this was in one family where the mother reported that she found herself frequently 'out of tune' with both her husband and children's passion for computer games playing. When she openly expressed this in interview, she received a barrage of abuse for being 'old fashioned'. This brought the following response which suggested her anger had been stirred up during the interview:

> Alison: And what I find very difficult, and that's me, and I know that Christmas is a very very difficult time, you know, for me. I can cope with it when we've got all sorts of relatives over Christmas and Boxing Day but then by, you know, January 1st or whatever, I can't wait to get back to work. It's like being in a household of morons. But I hate it because it holds no interest for me what so ever, I have to drag them out to do things.
>
> (Mrs Burnley, int. 1)

Other examples of this kind of exposure occurred when parents alluded to children's searches for 'sex' on the web during the family interviews. I did not tend to follow these up with the individuals concerned due to my own discomfiture that they had been embarrassed in this way. Similarly, during the observational interviews, opening up the 'history' facility proved awkward on occasions as parents discovered sites showing naked young women which embarrassed them. Other issues of concern which arose during the data collection included the need to use due sensitivity when video-recording to avoid viewing and taping private emails; the discretion that was called for when interviewing the divorced couple separately; and intimate information about my sample families which was passed to me by third parties. Where respondents indicated that information was 'off the record', I accepted this and excluded this material whilst recognising that these instances represented good examples for understanding private/public boundaries (Daly, 1992). Of course, pseudonyms have been applied in all cases throughout my thesis to protect participant identity.

Conclusions

This chapter has traced what Punch has referred to as the 'audit trail' (Punch, 2005) by introducing the longitudinal research design, discussing its benefits and limitations and methodological perspective. The process of transparency is an important aspect of validating research, particularly in light of its 'human construction' and how the conception of the study, the data collection methods, the means of analysis and interpretation all shape the findings. Yet, what this chapter has also shown is how the practical constraints of carrying out research may ultimately influence the research dependent on the issues encountered. For instance, due to reasons explored earlier, some aspects of the multi-method data collection approach were compromised. This resulted in mainly interview data being analysed rather than the original wider repertoire of diaries and video-taped observational material. Whilst this is regrettable, I would argue that the extensive audio data, encompassing two interviews with the whole family and two separate interviews with family individuals carried out over a span of two years, has compensated to some extent. Moreover, the recursive process through which the data was systematically collected and analysed, whilst taking account of previous literature in relation to families and the internet, has preserved the validity and reliability of the study, particularly in interpreting causal effects.

Having discussed the methods and methodology deployed for this study, I will now move to the first data chapter, and discussion of leisure within the context of family life.

Chapter 5: Time and Space for the Internet

Introduction

There are many reasons why families connect to the internet at home, amongst them education and work, which I will discuss in later chapters. In this chapter, I am going to focus on leisure within the context of a more general discussion about how the internet fits into the ways in which time and space function within family life.

As outlined in Chapter 1, many claims have been made by politicians, educationalists and advertisers about the internet's capacity to transform and enhance our social lives through increasing and improving our leisure time. Indeed, a growing body of evidence suggests that both adults and children have seized upon these opportunities and are making extensive use of the internet for leisure. Yet, the concept of 'leisure' is not so easily defined. Typically, it is seen as the antithesis to and withdrawal from work, whereby the individual becomes involved in some kind of pleasurable activity, without sustaining social responsibilities. Drawing on Coalter (1989), Aitchison notes that ironically leisure is more often described by what it is not than what it is, for example, leisure is '... frequently defined as not being paid work or employment or not being necessary household chores, child care or caring' (Aitchison, 2003: 41). She questions such definitions (following on from de Grazia 1962), in finding explanations of leisure as 'free time', 'freely chosen time' or 'time free from the constraints of everyday life' unduly simplistic. Moreover, she argues that it is important to recognise that leisure cannot be '... extracted from the rest of life and studied in isolation as leisure theories, policies and practice are all shaped by the wider structures and cultures of society' (46).

Likewise, previous studies in relation to media and leisure, for example, have drawn attention to how enduring structural inequalities within families question whether the home is the peaceful haven for women to relax in that it is often presumed to be for other family members (see also Chapter 3). Thrane (2000) has highlighted a growing number of studies focusing on how 'gender, employment status, household work, and socio-demographic variables affect the amount of time spent on leisure activities' (Thrane 2000 in Aitchison, 2003:

42). Woodward et al. (1988), for instance, list the determinants of women's leisure as social class, level of household and personal income, employment status, age group, marital status and stage in the family life cycle. Whilst this study found that the main constraints on leisure were in the form of a lack of resources such as time, money, safe transport and childcare, limitations were felt most keenly by women with unemployed partners, single parents and married women with children under five. More recently, Green et al. (1990) found that women's access to free time and leisure activities was structured by social class and income level, age and ethnic group, work and domestic situation. These and other studies have been challenged to some extent on the grounds that they fail to sufficiently acknowledge women's agency to change their own lives, implicitly promoting a 'victim mentality' (see Wearing, 1998 for instance). However, Green and Adam's later work takes account of these criticisms, drawing on Ormrod (1994), for instance, in showing the importance of conceiving of gender as process, enabling women to perceive gender identities as realisable rather than given, '... flexible, negotiated and constantly changing'. They argue that this approach has enabled feminists to '... retain the integral politics of change within feminist theory through an emphasis upon human agency and creativity in relation to technology' (Green & Adam, 1998: 296).

Whilst this study will investigate leisure uses of the internet for all members of the family, and will not primarily focus on women's leisure, the literature referred to above is useful for considering differences that emerge within and between families in their temporal and spatial organisation. As yet, there are few studies exploring how these dimensions influence internet use generally. This study will extend current knowledge, therefore, by discussing how the internet fits into contemporary family life and, in particular, uses of the internet for leisure.

Families' organisation of time for the internet

Unsurprisingly, there are differences between how much time - how long and how often – family members spend on the internet, within and between families. Previous research into uses of the internet have pointed up that gender, educational level, lifestage and age influence the activities engaged in by online users (see, for instance, Anderson & Tracey, 2001; Boneva, Kraut, & Frohlich,

2001; Dutton et al., 2005; Facer et al., 2003; Howard et al., 2002; Livingstone & Bober, 2004). It is not my intention to review this literature in depth here, but to examine how these are played out via a range of interrelated and overlapping factors which include level and quality of access; hierarchies of use; regulation; motivation; competence; and so-called 'free' and 'uncommitted time', which combine to determine the extent of individual use. Moreover, all of these features are open to either permanent change or temporary fluctuation. Whilst this range of factors will similarly influence families' uses of the internet for the purposes of work and education, it is within the sphere of leisure that they show up most clearly. In this section, therefore, I will show how patterns of everyday leisure uses of the internet are influenced by the interplay of the factors listed above with regulation and competence being considered in more depth in later chapters.

Time spent online

Each family in the sample was asked to identify which member of the household spent the most time online (in terms of both frequency and length) for the purposes of leisure. In these reports it was often necessary to take account of home working and educational practices evident in most homes when analysing responses, especially as activities may be hidden within families between family members: for instance, where users mask their instant messaging activities with educational sites such as Bitesize (see Chapter 9). However, in each family, a predominant user emerged in relation to leisure uses. These were split between fathers (in six families) and oldest children (three girls and five boys in eight families), whilst only three mothers were the main leisure users in their families. Nevertheless, its not helpful to label these users 'enthusiasts' as the extent of their time online was relative to other members within each familial household and reflective of divergent overall family uses. For example, whereas the highest user within the Bond family, Bobby (aged 15), said he limited himself to two hours online every day, the highest user in the Jackson family, Phil (15), is online much less according to his sister. Jodie (aged 10) reported that Phil went online: 'about five times a month, even more'. Whilst I attempted to capture a more detailed snap shot of how much time was spent online by each member of the family through the collection of diary data, ultimately I felt that I could not

rely on this (see discussion in Chapter 4). Therefore, I have used the qualitative interviews instead to build up a picture of everyday patterns of use.

Fitting the internet into everyday life

Holloway and Valentine (2003) have noted how the economic and temporal realities of children's lives constrain the nature and length of their online activities, an assertion which presumably is equally applicable to adults' lives. Moreover, they argue that most children use ICTs in a 'balanced way'; integrated into their lives rather than 'displacing other activities'. Livingstone agrees on this latter point, arguing that media use 'patterns are fitted to the structures of everyday life, rather than vice versa' (Livingstone, 2002b: 106) and supportive of individualised family timetables. This means that whereas older media, such as television and radio, for instance, may influence how households organise their everyday timetables due to the scheduling of programmes (see Gauntlett & Hill, 1999, for instance), new media are more likely to be fitted into pre-existing routines and habitual practices reflecting implicit structures of family time. For the most part, my findings concur with this. The majority of accounts from the sample families describe how internet activities are fitted around existing day to day offline activities, such as meal times and bedtimes, for both adults and children. The following two examples show how this process is enacted for both children and adults:

> Alison: She won't come downstairs to breakfast until she's checked her emails.
>
> Julia: No, no that's not true. I'm down, I come down, switch the computer on so that it does all the loading and stupid things like that and then as I come down after brushing my teeth and everything like that, I click the internet and go down and make my packed lunch so that when I come up, the internet's already on and I haven't had to wait around.
>
> (Mrs Burnley and Julia, aged 13, int. 1)

Similarly, Mrs Bourne explains how she limits her use of the internet by fitting it around her established daily timetable:

> Sue: Oh right, so you deliberately pick a time when you knew that it had a close to it?

Fiona: Yes. Or it was lunch time. Just before lunch time and I knew I'd have to have something to eat. You know I've got to stop now because I've got such and such to do.

(Mrs Bourne, int. 3)

Interestingly, the first of these excerpts, also provides an example of a mild disagreement within a family interview which can shed light on how behaviour and power relations are manifested in uses of the internet (see Chapter 4: Methodology). In this example, Alison infers that her daughter, Julia, is rather obsessive about checking her email, always checking it before breakfast. Julia rejects this somewhat defensively by arguing that her behaviour is not driven by compulsion, but by efficiency, as she fits checking her email in around her morning routine. This routine appears to be both complex and well-rehearsed which suggests that she is very keen to check her emails before school. In terms of what is revealed in relation to power relations in this exchange, there is a suggestion that 'won't come down to breakfast' infers that Julia refuses to acquiesce to her mother's wishes. However, it may also be that Mrs Burnley uses this phrase to emphasise her daughter's enthusiasm for checking her email rather than that she is wilfully disregarding her mother's wishes every morning. The relations remain ambiguous in this case.

Several of the children and young people gave examples of arranging a time with their friends, typically between homework and bedtime, to schedule chatting via instant messaging. Roland Kendal (aged 11), for example, describes how he and his friends agree a time in advance: 'we schedule time for it'.

Exceptionally within the sample, there are examples of individuals (adults and older teenagers) allowing their internet use to displace their sleep through using the internet late into the night to pursue a hobby or interest:

Sue: That's one of the things I'm trying to get at. How does this fit into the rest of your life?

Anita: Sometimes it takes over in the middle of the... you know, if I come up at say nine or ten o'clock sometimes, occasionally, about once a month, I can be here 'til the early hours because I get hooked on something like all those erm... it was a while ago now but all these... these took over,

> these looking for these smooth Salukis [pedigree dogs]. I was here at God knows what time. Middle of the night.
>
> (Mrs Jackson, int. 2)

I will discuss accounts of individuals losing track of time whilst pursuing leisure activities on the internet more fully in the section below relating to time pressures. However, at this point, having shown how internet uses for leisure purposes are, for the most part, fitted into the established routines of everyday family life rather than disrupting habitual daily timetables, the next section will explore how uses are structured around economic constraints to some extent through differences in level and quality of access.

Level and quality of access

There are material differences between families which influence both the quantity and the quality of access that is available to family members[6]. These variations hinge to some extent on wealth and family composition which influence the provision and sharing of these relatively expensive and somewhat limited resources. Added to these factors are differences in families' ideologies: the families' 'existing values, practices and interests' (Facer et al., 2003); parents' philosophies about child-rearing; and their attitudes to technology. These factors influence both the provision of material objects within the home and the 'hierarchies of use' (Silverstone, 1993) through which the moral economies of the household are constructed. My focus in this section is on how far financial constraints structure the day to day patterns of internet use time and whether this is changing; and how level and quality of access influence

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[6] As noted in Chapter 1, the internet is accessible via a range of different platforms such as televisions and mobile phones. Whilst the main focus of the study is on the home internet-connected computer, I also noted that a small number of families had made limited use of these other platforms. To summarize: the Craines had occasionally used their mobile phones to obtain sports results. In common with the Grant family, they had also tried out using the internet via the television but had found uses slow and impractical and thus abandoned these attempts. Whilst many respondents could in theory have connected to the internet using games consoles equipped with modems, in practice, none of the respondents had set these up to do so.

motivation to use the internet. The following section will focus on how hierarchies of use influence access to the internet for leisure.

Whereas I have earlier noted that internet use for leisure tends to be fitted around pre-existing patterns of day to day life, a further dimension of how uses are timetabled is determined by internet pricing structures. Within my sample families, I identified five different modes of access, dial up (DU), intermediate narrowband (IN), anytime (ANY), asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL); and broadband (BB). To summarize, the schemes differ as follows:

- dial up (slower connection: pay by the minute);
- intermediate narrowband (slower connection: pay by the minute during the day, unlimited use for a set fee between six pm and eight am on weekdays and all day at the weekend);
- anytime (slower connection: 24 hours, seven days a week for a fixed monthly fee);
- ADSL (faster connection: pay by the minute during the day, unlimited use for a set fee between six pm and eight am on weekdays and all day at the weekend);
- broadband (faster connection: 24 hours, seven days a week for a fixed monthly fee),

Appendix 1 shows the schemes that each family signed up to at both the initial and final interviews, but in brief, seven families started and remained with DU access throughout the study, four families moved from DU to ANY; two families moved from DU to BB; one family remained with ANY throughout, one family moved from DU to IN, one family moved from IN to ANY, one family moved from ADSL to BB. By the third interviews, therefore, only three families in the sample were experiencing faster, unlimited time, internet connections. Moreover, nine families in the sample retained connections that were largely limited to off peak times. This typically constrained users' leisure activities (and to a lesser extent educational and work pursuits, see later chapters) as in most of the families these time constraints were reportedly adhered to. Vivien Bourne

(aged 14), for example, says that she will 'never go on before six'. Furthermore, the internet pricing structures experienced by these families in the sample are modelled around standard business hours as per the telephone (Lohan, 1998) with the associated compromises for individuals (particularly women, children, retired and unemployed users) who may be home earlier in the day. The important point to recognise here is how these pricing structures are imposing an internet use timetable on home users with off peak access arrangements.

Whilst within the sample families, only a minority of families moved to broadband during the data collection period, it is worth noting national trends to see if a more recent shift is taking place in relation to access modes. Survey data from the 2004 UKCGO survey found that 24 percent of children live in a household with a broadband connection (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) whilst the recent report, *The Internet in Britain* reports that 36 percent of households surveyed were using broadband (Dutton et al., 2005). (I have been unable to find survey data relating to the midway IN and ANY schemes.) Although these figures suggest higher broadband connectivity than found in my sample, the case remains that there are significant numbers of UK families and households experiencing slow and restricting internet access with its associated characteristics. Whilst I have so far mainly focused on the timetabling of internet use, at this point I will move to other aspects of the level and quality of use, such as connection speed, which influence time spent online.

As mentioned above, the decision to enhance (or downgrade) the home internet connection is not purely a financial one, but based on a range of economic, social and cultural factors. Whilst there are no surprises in terms of which of the sample families upgraded to broadband during the study - two affluent families and one family where the father is a computer specialist and hobbyist - it was perhaps more unexpected that some other families did not upgrade despite apparently having the necessary economic resources to do so. Upgrading had often been talked about but a combination of the expense involved combined with other more pressing needs meant that this had not been pursued. In the Bourne household, for instance, where the computer was upgraded during the data collection period, I received a typical response:

Sue: Have you upgraded to broadband?

Fiona: We've sort of discussed it but we just. This is what we do instead [referring to new extension]. You know other things take over.

John: Priorities.

Fiona: Yes. Well that's really expensive at the moment.

(Mrs and Mr Bourne, int. 3)

My sample also contained families whose economic resources would not stretch to securing improved and faster access through both upgrading the connection and/or the computer. Livingstone and Bober note the subtler aspects of the digital divide beyond whether families have an internet connection or not:

> No longer are children and young people only or even mainly divided by those with and without access [...] children and young people are divided into those for whom the internet is an increasingly rich, diverse, engaging and stimulating resource of growing importance in their lives, and those for whom it remains a narrow, unengaging if occasionally useful resource of rather less significance. (Livingstone & Bober, 2004: 53)

Whilst Livingstone and Bober's findings relate specifically to children and young people, my data show that parents are also affected by these same issues. In the low income Jackson family, for instance, internet access was marginally worse at the final interview than at the initial interviews. Anita Jackson describes how two computers shared between the family became just one by the time of the final interview in 2003:

Anita: This [computer] is down here. The other one's broken, we've thrown it away.

Sue: Right.

Anita: So we've just got this one now.

Sue: Yes.

Anita: Which is still the old Windows 95.

(Mrs Jackson, int. 3)

Anita Jackson goes on to explain that the age of this computer causes her significant difficulties in carrying out both on and offline activities. Moreover, her son, Phil (aged 17) the main user in this household for leisure purposes, now prefers to use the computers provided at college for all his activities due to the low level and quality of access at home. Compare this to the situation in the more affluent middle-class Dunne-Osborne household where surprisingly, given the low level of internet use reported at the initial interviews, the family have upgraded the computer and added broadband during the interim to increase connection speed and free the standard telephone line:

> Sue: Okay, so why did you go for broadband?
>
> Michael: Erm because it's erm, because of the speed really. Erm, and erm, there was kind of a series of decisions at the same time which was all about getting a new computer, Adele wanted Sky television and we were trying to separate out, that's the other thing, it separates out the phone line from the computer. Erm, because Gail works from home and at the moment, we only have one external phone line so the capacity of broadband means that we're on, on the computer and we don't block the phone line.
>
> (Mr Dunne-Osborne, int. 3)

In conclusion, it appears that whilst economic resources alone do not predict whether or not families upgrade their internet connections, they clearly have a part to play in the decision-making process.

As in the example of Phil Jackson preferring to use college access to the internet rather than slow home access, speed of connection can influence motivation. In the initial interviews, Ben Archer-Hughes (14) emerged as one of the most enthusiastic users of the internet, using the internet every day and engaging in a wider number of activities than most other users in the sample: extensive web surfing and researching, downloading various types of media, sending and receiving emails, visiting chat rooms and talking via instant messaging, playing online games and creating a number of different websites around his interest in games playing. Observation of Ben on the internet also revealed a higher level of confidence and proficiency than many of the other participants. Yet, at the stage of the final interviews, his interest was waning to some degree which he says is due to the slowness of the computer:

Ben: Yeah. As the computer got more and more out of date downstairs we started using it less and less and then when we get a new one we'll start using it again.

(Ben Archer-Hughes, aged 16, int. 3)

This example shows how individual motivation to use the computer and internet for leisure purposes can fluctuate and change over the course of two years, in this case influenced by computer/internet speed. Whilst respondents often talked of these changes as if they would be permanent (though not in Ben's case), a much longer study would be needed to assess the validity of these claims. (For an account of how changes in lifestage or lifestyle, for instance, changing jobs, educational circumstances and so on, trigger changes to individuals' patterns of time use, access to the internet and the different applications and services see Anderson and Tracey (2002).)

The place of leisure within hierarchies of use

As noted earlier, through the negotiations and conventions that take place within families, households construct 'hierarchies of use' through which moral economies are manifested (Silverstone, 1993). These underlying values and beliefs will undoubtedly influence whether internet use for leisure purposes is considered to be a valid activity and, therefore, how much priority is given to it in the competition for what can be seen as a scarce resource.

In line with earlier studies around organisation of uses of the computer (Facer et al., 2003; Frohlich et al., 2003), most families prioritised educational uses for homework, with parents' work or university study coming second, and leisure uses consigned to the back of the queue. I will not discuss education and work uses in detail here as they will be pursued in later chapters. These priorities combined with power differences between individuals influence access to the internet in general and how it is fitted into the patterns of everyday life. In the following example, Ros Bradshaw shows how internet access is negotiated around children's ages, meal and bedtimes:

Ros: We usually say. Abby [aged 10] can do it between five and six, after tea, for an hour or whatever and then Lori [aged 13] goes on it after that. [....] And then I can also do it later when they've gone to bed.

(Mrs Bradshaw, int. 3)

Although the data show that most parents, like Mrs Bradshaw, seek to provide equal access to the internet for children through the placing of time limits, for instance, the demands on older children to carry out homework mean that their uses can be privileged to some extent. This can, in turn, work against access being available for younger children to carry out leisure-related activities online. Deborah Hill provides an explanation of how children are prioritised in the Hill household in order of their ages combined with the necessity to carry out homework:

> Deborah: Yeah, no proper use, you know, do school work on it. I think Heather [aged 14] and Adam [aged 12] are both at Secondary School so they tend to use it. [....] He [Darren, aged 11] doesn't. No, he uses it after Heather and Adam he's the next one that uses it. It's done in order.
>
> (Mrs Hill, int. 3)

This example shows how task priorities can privilege older children's uses according them more tacit power. This is redolent of MacKeogh's (2001) finding which shows that in television viewing patterns, family hierarchies operate along generational lines with the eldest child typically owning more tacit power. Yet, in the case of the internet, it is children's ages combined with task priority (for homework) which privileges their uses, not purely age.

There are also examples in the data of parents trading on their generational status. Julia Burnley (aged 15), for instance, describes her frustration that her father (a keen games player) will not engage in the more democratic system of turn taking that his daughters regularly practise when engaging in leisure activities:

> Julia: Yeah. I hate it when he's on the internet computer especially when... when Joy really goes upstairs to bed and I'm like 'oh, please can I go on the internet?'. He's like 'no, I'm on it'. Right. 'But I have to go to bed before you.' He's like 'so'. And I'm like 'no, but it's my turn'. And by that time Mum, Joy and Gemma are already in bed so it's just me and him arguing, and he always wins.
>
> (Julia Burnley, aged 15, int. 3)

In this section I have briefly shown how families' values and beliefs underpin the hierarchies of use which are manifested in uses of the internet and which will be discussed in later chapters. Whilst children's ages, generational status and task priorities may underline who or what activities are prioritised, fitted into the established patterns of everyday life, gender has not emerged as a significant influence. Yet, this could be the outcome of more subtle differences in opportunity being accorded to family members. This next section, therefore, will consider how time constraints influence individual's uses of the internet for leisure.

Not enough time?

In the introduction to this chapter, I referred to the gendered politics of the home and how structural inequalities within families may influence whether women and men have time to use the internet for leisure. As noted by Aitchison (2003), evaluating free time available to women has been one of the dominant foci of the leisure constraints literature. To summarise briefly, previous studies have found that women find it hard to switch off from their responsibilities at home and tend to fit their leisure activities into a fragmented time scale where large blocks of time are unnecessary and activities can be quickly ended when household responsibilities resume (Gray, 1992; Morley, 1986: see also chapter 3). In contrast, men in employment seem to be more able to distinguish between their work and leisure/relaxation pursuits (Parker 1971, 1976 in Deem, 1986). Moreover, research has also found that women with paid employment outside the home are better able to compartmentalise their time and perceive leisure differently from women who are totally dependent on a male income and whose unpaid work is not easily compartmentalised (Deem, 1986). Women with dependent children have, likewise, been found to have less free time than those without; and those under 25 and over 45 (without dependent children) have most free time (Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1985). Bearing in mind these and the determinants of leisure time referred to in the chapter's introductory comments, it is worth briefly reviewing the profiles of the sample families. The families include 17 mothers and 16 fathers, with Christine Bond being the only lone-parent in the sample (though one couple divorced and another separated during the study); the families were at similar lifestages though with the proviso

that children's ages varied; in terms of mother's job status and associated income: nine were employed full-time, four part-time and four unemployed; fifteen of the fathers worked full-time and one was retired.

As anticipated by the reading of previous literature, mothers in the sample reported greater constraints than fathers on the time they had available to use the internet for leisure. Whilst full-time working mothers were particularly likely to describe time limitations as a barrier to use, several of their part-time and unemployed counterparts also cited time as an obstacle. This finding contradicts those of previous studies which have found that women in paid employment can more easily compartmentalize and identify available time for leisure. However, this is a complex issue as mentioned earlier, due to the interplay of factors which influence whether internet activities take place or not: level and quality of access, hierarchies of use, regulation, motivation and competence. In relation to motivation, for example, respondents' perceptions varied as to whether they saw it as a saver or waster of time. It is therefore very difficult to isolate one structural factor, that of time, and definitively say that inequalities within families prevent women using the internet. Moreover, previous research into styles of working on home computers has categorised the relationship with the computer as either 'instrumental' or 'expressive'. Instrumental uses of the computer are 'concrete', carried out to achieve a particular goal and/or as a means to an end. Expressive uses suggest an orientation to the computer itself, where the 'computer itself was a goal' (Aune 1996). In terms of the internet, therefore, family members are likely to have different attitudes towards this medium which will influence their behaviour. Internet enthusiasts, for example, will seek to use the internet more often (and possibly have broader uses) due to an intrinsic interest in using the technology itself, whereas other users will probably use it more often as a tool to carry out their everyday activities.

Taking different users' levels of enthusiasm towards the internet into account, therefore, where women do give time as the reason for their non-participation in leisure-related internet activities, it is presented within the context of a combination of factors such as having more important home or childcare priorities, seeing using the internet as something which wastes and/or steals

time, but also having different leisure interests, and, interestingly, not seeing the internet as a leisure pursuit in the first place. It is clear from the data, for example, that some women in the sample perceive the internet as a tool merely for carrying out salaried work (either at home or in the work place). They, therefore, do not choose to spend their free time using it for recreation. Other women perceive it as both a work tool for salaried work and as a tool for fulfilling family responsibilities, but not as a pleasurable or relaxing activity in itself. Fiona Bourne provides a good example of this:

> Sue: How about you Fiona? How do you use the internet?
>
> Fiona: Sparingly. Yeah it's just... If... if there's something that I need to find out for the family basically for the holidays or research. Family stuff.
>
> (Mrs Bourne, int. 1)

Moreover, Fiona Bourne reports that she does not use the internet much because 'it's a waste of time', 'you can lose yourself for hours and hours' and she does not have 'that much time' and would rather be getting the ironing out of the way. She does not find it very 'enthralling' in any case: 'it's too much akin to work'. For leisure and relaxation, she would choose to do 'some flower arranging or something like that'. This example, and those that follow, suggest that whilst the internet is a tool which facilitates leisure activities and may take place within leisure time, it is not intrinsically a leisure pastime in its own right for all but a minority of 'expressive' users. In this then, it is fundamentally different from other leisure media, such as the television and video, but more closely aligned in its functionality to the telephone.

Green et al. (1998) have noted that a key question is whether women are the consumers of new multimedia for leisure or whether they are enabling its use by other family members as part of their domestic care roles. It would seem that Fiona Bourne is an example of a mother supporting her family through her internet activities rather than for her own leisure pursuits. In this, she is typical of many mothers in the sample. Previous studies have suggested that women's leisure time is fragmented and activities are popular which require little preparation and can be fitted into the gaps in women's lives that occur between household responsibilities. It is then surprising that mothers in the sample did

not, for the most part, describe grabbing five minutes online for their own purposes or to facilitate their families' leisure. It may be that slow and unreliable connection speeds prevent this, as many of the respondents described having to make several attempts before a connection could be secured. At the point of the third interviews, for instance, Suzanne Kendal mentions the speed of the broadband connection making a 'quick' query more accessible:

> Suzanne: Yeah. And it has also helped using the internet, so for example you might want to find out what the weather forecast is, it is very quick. And because we have got the constant internet access, we don't have to worry about phoning in and spending money, in a sense, it is on all the time or it could be on all the time, so we quickly just look at something like that.
>
> (Mrs Kendal, int. 3)

A minority of mothers (with both DU and BB connections), such as Suzanne Kendal, reported devoting both extensive time and effort to pursuing leisure via the internet. Interestingly, only one of these women worked full-time, suggesting that women in paid employment (perhaps already spending long hours in front of computers in the workplace) are reluctant to connect to the internet as a means of recreation after a day's paid work whereas women with more time at home may do so, mainly for web searching or emailing activities. Mothers using the internet for leisure also tended to express a keener interest in using the internet in general, though I would label only Sheila Manders-Short an expressive, hobbyist computer/internet user who sees the internet as a goal in its own right rather than as a means to an end.

As noted earlier, fathers within the sample were less likely to cite time constraints as a barrier to their use of the internet for leisure. Only two of the fathers referred to time pressure as an obstacle to use. Using arguments redolent of those cited by his wife above in relation to losing track of time, James Bourne, referred to how '... two or three hours would just disappear trying to do it' [use the internet]. Michael Dunne-Osborne, also in common with his partner, Gail Dunne-Osborne, places using the internet down his list of leisure pursuits saying that he would much prefer to play the guitar or carry out DIY than use the internet for pleasure. In common with mothers, fathers also express ambivalence towards perceiving the internet as a means of pleasure or

relaxation in any case. Jeff Hill, a teacher, for example, says that he would never just browse on the web for pleasure, but would always approach it with a clear purpose in mind (the main activities he reports carrying out online are educational, work-related or family oriented). Whilst some of the fathers used the internet in general, and the web in particular, for activities facilitating their families' leisure, such as researching and booking holidays, keeping social contact with friends and family through email, for instance, they did not express their activities as supporting the family in the same way that mothers did. Moreover, there was a greater tendency for fathers to stress their hobbies and personal interests through the web sites they reportedly visited for sports results, music and cars, (again only a minority of fathers appeared to be expressive, hobbyist users), when compared with mother's visits to more family oriented health information sites. Nevertheless, fathers also frequently described carrying out life administration activities[7], banking and so on, which are likely to be supportive of the whole family. Added to this were the responsibilities they assumed for setting up, housekeeping and trouble shooting the computer(s) and internet connection(s) (see also Chapter 7). This observation suggests fathers' orientations to the family, manifested through uses of the internet, may be expressed in different terms to mothers' but nevertheless emerge through the data. Moreover, it appears that their uses are similarly 'instrumental' and functional rather than 'expressive'.

In exploring time spent on leisure activities on the internet it is important to take into account families' different conceptions of time. As mentioned in Chapter 3, media research has drawn on Hall's concepts of 'monochronic' and 'polychronic' time to highlight differences between family schedules. Jordan (2003), for example, has established that patterns of temporal organisation vary with more affluent parents with jobs demanding higher levels of self-motivation being more likely to instil notions of managing time on their children than

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[7] Lally uses the term 'life administration' to describe the range of word processing, database, spreadsheet and accounting functions undertaken on home computers in households (Lally 2002). Here I am using it more specifically to describe internet functions undertaken to support household and family responsibilities.

parents whose jobs were less independent and more externally controlled. From my data, it is not possible to draw such clear distinctions as attitudes to time that emerged within and across families suggest differences are more closely aligned to gender and, to a lesser degree, generation than socio-economic factors. Only a minority of fathers, for instance, said that they shared their partner's anxieties about being online in terms of time pressure (as opposed to the cost). Examples of these couples, Fiona and James Bourne and Gail and Michael Dunne-Osborne are mentioned above. Children who expressed similar anxieties to their parents', or more often mother's, concerns were usually female, particularly older teens, who cited homework as an increasing factor in decreasing their leisure time online. It may be that the cost of using the internet in the UK, which has led to strict time constraints on time online in any case, has skewed data emerging which would reflect similar outcomes to those reported by Jordan (2003) above. However, findings in relation to older teens' leisure time being constrained by homework more than younger teens is redolent of Livingstone's (2002b) claims in relation to children's options for disposable leisure time. She notes that activities which compete with media for children's time are influenced by age, gender and class. For younger children, therefore, choices are between media and friends, playing outside, indoor hobbies and formally organised clubs. For teenagers, choices are more between media, friends and homework. Moreover, particularly middle-class children appear to reflect their parents' concerns about wasting time when activities are not viewed as educational by the child themselves.

The data in my study bore out these previous findings in relation to gender though less so in relation to class. Particularly amongst the older girls, for instance, there was an awareness of time and that it should not be wasted. The following example of this was provided by Vivien Bourne (14) when she says that she tries not to spend 'too long' online:

> Sue: What's too long?
>
> Vivien: Much longer than an hour really unless I'm doing something for school. It's just MSN because there's not really anything to it. I'm not really doing anything while I'm on it I'm just talking to people, so I try not to stay on that for much more than an hour.

Sue: When you say you're not really doing anything what do you mean by that?

Vivien: Well I'm not achieving anything by being on it. I'm just like talking to whoever's on. [...]

(Vivien Bourne, aged 14, int. 3)

Whilst youngsters like Vivien describe their activities online as 'relaxing' and something to avert 'boredom' emphasising their more enjoyable and fun aspects, for the most part young people's behaviour is also reported as functional rather than expressive. For instance, whilst talking to friends may be pleasurable, the internet is facilitative of these activities as with the telephone, not a means of gratification in its own right. Similarly, playing games online is made possible via the internet in its affordance as alternative games console, but the motivation is to play games, not due to an interest in the internet itself. Exceptions could be said to include a minority of youngsters, such as Ben Archer-Hughes and Tony Archer-Hughes (both 14) in the remade Archer-Hughes family, who are both expressive, hobbyist users drawing on a wide range of services and engaging in practices of both production and consumption online. There was also a suggestion that a small number of other young people, such as Phil Jackson (15), from a low income family, had the interest to become hobbyist users if only access was not so limited. There are also instances of children aimlessly browsing the web, and perhaps these occasions are the closest we see to the internet being used as a leisure tool in its own right. However, most of the time, young people's leisure uses are not characterised by an 'expressive' interest in the internet in its own right.

Having examined the interplay of different factors which influence whether parents and children find time to use the internet for leisure purposes and whether the internet is intrinsically perceived as a leisure activity in any case, I will move on to look at the related subject of space.

Families' organisation of space for the internet

Not enough space?

Authors of previous studies relating to the location of the computer and internet within the family home have noted that the siting of these objects and artefacts

is a material expression of the families' interpretations of technology (Bakardjieva, 2005; Facer et al., 2003; Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Livingstone, 2002b). Physical zones within the home, for instance, carry certain expectations and meanings (Ling & Thrane, 2001). In relation to home uses of the computer, Frohlich, Dray and Silverman (2003) found that the preferred location for the computer was in a dedicated office. Where this separate space was unavailable, families tried to site the computer where it was accessible but quiet, to allow for concentration. In their sample, the computers were all situated in offices, dining rooms or kitchen/dining areas or parents' bedrooms. They also found some association between the location of the computer and activities participants intended to use them for: office type rooms were thought most suitable for work uses; living or family rooms were thought to be more 'playful' in character and more suited to leisure uses. Not only did the location of the internet-connected computer highlight values and beliefs held for the family but also revealed underlying ideologies of family togetherness versus individuality (also see Facer et al., 2003; Livingstone, 2002b).

In researching adults' uses of the internet within families and households, Bakardjieva (2005) found that the situation of the internet-connected computer was dependent on the overall structure of the home (number of rooms, computers, and residents), the activities associated with the computer, the identity of the main user (where one exists) and the extent of use by other family members. Moreover, she found that symbolic ownership of the internet in the home is a significant influence on its uses: a question of '...who the privileged user of the medium in the home was, or who had the most legitimate access to the connection and the space and time allocated to it' (Bakardjieva, 2005: 160). She notes that whilst other members of the family may not necessarily be denied access to the internet, they may in any case 'exclude themselves'. In her study, this pattern of exclusion typically occurred along gender lines with some men establishing 'wired basements' from which women excluded themselves due to 'interiorized cultural attitudes regarding the role of the woman in the home and the relationship between women and technology' (161).

The locations of the internet-connected computers within the sample families are summarised in Appendix 1[8]. In brief, at the point of the first interviews, eight internet-connected computers were located in private study/office spaces; a further six were located in communal spaces such as dining rooms and lounges; the remaining three were in parents' bedrooms. This finding reflects survey data collected for the UKCGO project (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) which found that computers used for internet activities tend to be located in private rather than public spaces within homes. However, changes to the locations of the internet-connected computers in the sample families by the third and final interviews weaken this finding as the majority of households (11) had located an internet-connected computer in a communal dining room or lounge. These changes had been facilitated by the introduction of additional computers with internet connections into communal spaces or the resiting of the original or a replacement (upgraded) computer to the new location[9]. Whilst less affluent (working-class families) such as the Jacksons (mentioned earlier) had moved their existing computer to a new situation in the lounge, more affluent families such as the (more middle-class) Powell-Drummonds had added four new internet-connected computers during the interim (two in parents' studies and two in their sons' bedrooms) to improve both parents' and children's access. Whilst two other families, the Craines and the Bonds, had also introduced internet-connected computers into their sons' bedrooms, only one family, the Manders-Shorts had introduced the same into their daughter's bedroom. In relation to internet-connected computers, these findings broadly reflect those reported by Livingstone (1998) that more boys than girls, and children from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have computers in their bedrooms than those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, she argues that middle-class households are more likely to have multiple computers

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[8] Whilst the main focus of my questions was on the internet-connected computer(s) in each household, I collected data relating to the number and location of other computers in the home to understand the context more fully.

[9] Some families had also invested in laptops. To gain an understanding of how they fitted into the home, I asked where they were most often situated when connected to the internet.

which allow for independent access unreserved for work or general use purposes. An exception to Livingstone's findings occurred in the less affluent Craine household, where despite the family's lower level of available resources, Aaron Craine (12) has an internet-connected computer in his bedroom. In this case, however, it is his enthusiasm for technology coupled with his father's work as a computer specialist and hobbyist which has facilitated this move. Nevertheless, the pattern of upgrading and adding extra computers in the sample broadly reflects, for the most part, socio-economic factors.

To extend this analysis further, I will discuss the locations of the internet-connected computers, the power relations which emerge in relation to the decision making processes involved in positioning the computer, and how location influences uses more generally.

Offices and studies

As noted earlier, eight internet-connected computers were located in office/study spaces at the point of the initial interviews. In only one household, a mother, Amanda Powell-Drummond (senior academic), had taken the decision to connect her already established work computer in her study for the whole family to use, but otherwise the decision to place these computers in offices was taken mainly by either fathers or by both parents together. In these families, it was the strong association of the computer with work and, in all but one family, an orientation to home working that determined its location combined with having the space to establish a private office. Unlike in Bakardjieva's (2005) study, where the location of the internet in the private spaces of the 'wired basement' was clearly drawn along gender lines, in my sample more private, privileged uses of the internet were secured for both mothers and fathers through their home working practices, typically with negative consequences for other members of the family. In Chapter 8, I discuss these processes in more detail and how work-related uses of the internet-connected computer privilege particular users and activities whilst discouraging frequency of use by other members of the family and compromising the actual activities which they can carry out. However, it is worth noting here that this situation, whereby only one computer was available for general uses although located in a work-oriented location, proved particularly open to change. At the

point of the final interviews additional computers had been purchased in four of the households and placed in a communal space to facilitate children's easier access and to ring-fence the original or additional upgraded computer for work and parents' uses only. This decision had usually been taken by parents though often also due to pressure from their teenage children to enhance their access. It suggested that some parents had recognised the problems associated with the work-inscribed computer and acted accordingly to increase access to the internet for other family members, whilst also protecting their own privileged uses where they could afford to.

Dining rooms and lounges

In the six families where the internet was communally located in, typically, the dining room or less often, in the lounge, the decision to place the computer centrally was reportedly either taken by parents, particularly mothers, or as the result of consensus from the whole family, particularly in households with older teens. This finding reflects that of Bakardjieva's (2005) study to some extent. She notes that in households where women had taken the lead role in appropriating the internet, the internet connection was more likely to be in a central, public place. Reasons for the central location were said by parents to be for easier sharing and access for all members of the family; to oversee children's uses (also see Chapter 9) and the size of the house not enabling space to be found elsewhere. Mrs Burnley also said that communal use facilitated skill sharing. Whilst several mothers expressed strong resistance to the computer being in the lounge due to noise from the television distracting from computer use and vice versa, one mother was adamant that the computer should be placed in the 'family room' to privilege family togetherness. In this household, unusually, comfortable armchairs had been positioned in front of low tables housing three computers, thereby helping to construct these as leisure rather than functional and work-related objects. In some of the other households, children had successful lobbied their parents to move the computer from a previously private space to a central location (before the point of the initial interviews) giving the reasons for this preference as liking the warmth and more social situation of the dining room or lounge. Whilst Livingstone (2002b) has previously noted that younger children prefer being in the shared spaces of

the home, particularly with parents present, my data suggest that younger children and older girls also prefer using the internet in these shared spaces. Sally Bond (13) says that 'It felt kind of like isolated upstairs and because the room is cold as well, it didn't feel like it was kind of friendly did it?'. Holloway and Valentine have previously noted that girls' uses of computers are encouraged by their physical presence in the midst of the family (Holloway & Valentine, 2003). This theme is emphasised by Sally at the third interview, when she is 16. She says:

> Sally: I like it, I like being downstairs because I like being around people, so if I have the computer on, I have the radio on or the TV on at the same time, just because it's sort of nice. When I use the internet I am not always like focused 100 percent on it because I mean Bobby [her older brother] uses it to play games and stuff, and has to focus on it. But I like to just browse, so I wouldn't want to sit in a quiet room and just use the computer.
>
> (Sally Bond, aged 16, int. 3)

This account shows how Sally likes to complement her internet use with other media, a practice which a number of youngsters made reference to. The downside to using the internet in a communal space for young people, however, is the associated loss of privacy that occurs from both parents and siblings. Sally says that she '... will turn the screen away from everybody else'. Caleb Kendal (13) refers to how his brother, Roland (11) dislikes him 'spying' on him when he is using instant messaging. By the point of the third interviews, all communal computers had remained in the same rooms as at the initial interviews, though Aaron Craine (10) and Bobby Bond (18) had also acquired internet-connected computers in their bedrooms.

In relation to how the location of the internet-connected computer influenced access, responses were mixed in this group. Around half the parents felt that the location of the computer had no influence on who used the internet. Mothers often recognised that their children preferred to use the computer and internet in warmer, more sociable spaces and had located the computer accordingly. Whilst I have already mentioned that spatial strategies for regulating the internet meant that some parents situated it in a space where they could oversee children's activities online, a further dimension of this for mothers was

emphasising that the central location of the computer was essential for their own access. Mothers, particularly those with younger children, typically said that this was so that they could supervise their children generally whilst they were online themselves. Angela Craine, with four children ranging from three to ten, provides an example:

> Angela: But I wouldn't have the option of leaving them here and going elsewhere, do you know what I mean? I need it to be central so that I am in the middle of it all (laughs). Yes, it definitely would change my use, I wouldn't use it so much.
>
> (Mrs Craine, int. 1)

Parents' bedrooms

In a small minority of three households, the internet-connected computer was situated in the parents' bedroom. This decision had been taken by two fathers, whilst in the Jackson household the decision had been taken by both parents together. Reasons for this choice ranged from a perceived need to protect the computer from damage by very young children, the small size of the house, the need for a quiet space in which to work and study, again, a keenness to avoid the noise conflict with the television in the lounge, and resistance to having a 'utilitarian looking' object in a leisure space. Ling and Thrane (2001) have previously noted that computers are typically not seen as a 'natural element' in the living room, particularly as they seem to carry with them the character of a 'functional or a working area'. By the point of the third and final interviews, however, all three households had relocated their internet-connected computers to a central, public location reflecting the trend noted also for families with a computer situated in a private office space. The decision to move the computer from the bedroom to the dining room or lounge was usually taken by parents, sometimes having been influenced by their children, to increase access for all members of the family. Previous reservations about situating the computer in these communal spaces were not always overcome. Freya Liang, for instance, said that she found the noise from the computer annoying and remained unhappy that the computer was now in the dining room. It may also be that parents enjoy their privacy too. Mrs Liang described her liking for the computer's seclusion at the point of the initial interviews as follows:

> Freya: I've typed out some pretty near the knuckle jokes but, when the children come in the room, I sort of put the screen up and 'out, out!' - send. Yes, if there was someone looking over your shoulder all the time, at what you were doing, then you'd have to be a bit more circumspect. So, for me, yes, because I have a certain degree of privacy then yes it does influence the way I use it.
>
> (Mrs Liang, int. 1)

Regarding the question of how the location of the internet influenced who used it, two of the families reported in the initial interviews that its situation was of no consequence for access perceiving that the internet was freely accessible to their children notwithstanding being located in a more private setting. In the Jackson household, for instance, it was said that the decision to move the computer to a communal space before the third interview was due to the father's sleep being disturbed by his wife's night-time course working rather than an acknowledgement that its position was discouraging access to other members of the family. In the Bradshaw household, however, Ros Bradshaw's account at the initial interviews suggested that the internet-connected computer's location prevented her uses because she could not leave her children alone during the day time; in the evening, she did not wish to sit alone upstairs. By the point of the third interviews, by which time Ros had also divorced her husband, the computer was now centrally located to allow her easier access.

Individuality versus family togetherness

Bakardjieva (2005) argues that the location of the internet-connected computer in a household is indicative of the meaning of the medium for the family and the micro-regulation of its use. She notes that 'By placing the device in a particular way, the families I studied were defining its properties' (160). She describes how one of the main dimensions of 'interpretation and regulation' articulated in these decisions was 'constituted by the choice between individuality versus togetherness of use' (160). She asserts that the values underlying these preferences were for the privacy of individual family members against the need to reaffirm 'family collectivity' by engaging in joint activities. Furthermore, she argues that where women played the central role in leading internet appropriation, decisions to place the computer centrally and in a public space

reflected gendered approaches to fostering 'togetherness, or at least mutual awareness' (160). This, she argues, is hard to sustain in view of the technology inherently facilitating individual rather than collective engagement based on the '...personal computer with its single-person operated input and output devices' (160). Previous authors have similarly commented on the dimensions of underlying ideologies of individual and togetherness that constitute home media use. Facer et al. (2003), for example, have noted how locating the computer in a public space affords parents the opportunity to 'discuss and learn' with their children, notions which are redolent of those cited in relation to mediation of children's television viewing (see Bryce & Leichter, 1983). Moreover, Holloway and Valentine comment that the locating of the computer in a shared family space encourages the family to gather around it, acting, as television did before it, as a kind of '...glue that binds some families together' (Holloway & Valentine, 2003: 110). Drawing on previous work by Christensen et al. (2001), they describe how perceptions of family togetherness for children may be constituted by being together with their family in the same room whereas for parents, it is more likely to be the outcome of 'shared activities designed to promote togetherness' (Holloway & Valentine, 2003: 113). Moreover, Livingstone and Bober (2004) report that the nature of a particular room may not necessarily dictate the context of use. For instance, a teenager may wait until other members of the family have gone out before embarking on internet use in the living room. In their study of children's uses, they found that 79 percent of children reported using the internet mostly on their own. In light of these previous studies, I will consider whether families in the sample engage in activities carried out with other members of their families or individually. Again, I will consider these in relation to the location of the internet-connected computer: the office or study, the communal dining room or lounge or parents' bedroom. In later chapters I discuss how collaborative efforts may occur as the result of help being given with homework and particularly, skills sharing in relation to using the internet. Moreover, I will discuss how parents may sit with their children to oversee their activities for regulatory purposes. In this section, however, I will focus mainly on activities where family members use the internet together for leisure.

In analysing the collaborative uses of the internet for leisure on computers located in private office spaces, I was surprised to find frequent examples of joint pursuits taking place between parents and their children, siblings and children's friends. This suggests that placement of the computer in a more secluded place does not necessarily mean more isolated use as I had anticipated. A particularly unanticipated finding was that parents are more likely to use the internet-connected computer together in a private space than on the centrally placed computer, for instance, searching for holidays together. Though some of the examples suggest that one more confident internet user may be 'helping' their partner to some extent, examples also suggest that it is the process of joint decision making related to, say, holiday planning, which explains their mutual exploration. It may also be that, the need for parents to visit a separate more private space, in which to carry out mutual online activities, fosters closer physical proximity and therefore, is better recalled by the couple than behaviour which takes place within the wider communal spaces of the home. Parents also use the internet with their children. Whilst most of these examples refer to 'helping' (parents of children and vice versa), there are occasionally instances of parents and children playing online games together for pleasure, such as Tim Grant (12) and his father, Robert, playing games accessed via the Cartoon Network site. More often, however, there are examples given of siblings and friends playing online games, downloading music or browsing the web. Gender does not seem to be an indicator of behaviour with both boys and girls describing these activities.

In homes with internet-connected computers placed communally, reported joint activities seldom refer to parents carrying out mutual activities with each other. Indeed instances of parents' collaborative activities are mainly related to contact with their children and mainly for homework or 'helping' purposes. Examples given are much more frequently concerned with siblings going online together for online games and browsing the web. Interestingly, examples of joint activities in communal spaces are reportedly less likely to take place with friends. It may be that when friends visit, children prefer to take them to the private spaces of the home rather than the communal, therefore making the internet situated in a private office space more attractive than those in family spaces and overseen by parents. Again, gender does not emerge as an

influence on findings. Examples of 'playing' online suggest that pleasures include co-directing games as in this example from Angela Craine describing how her four children play together:

> Sue: Do you use the internet with more than one person at a time? Do the children use it together?
>
> Angela: Yes, all four of them crouch around saying, 'no go that way, no go that way'.
>
> (Mrs Craine, int. 1)

This pattern of mainly sibling activities taken together is also reflected in the households where the internet-connected computer is situated in the parents' bedroom. This is surprising in light of the findings above that private spaces such as offices appear to encourage parents' joint activities and those between their children and their friends. However, as there are only three families in this group, a larger study would be needed to confirm findings.

In this first section, I have considered how families fit the internet into their everyday lives and the range of structural constraints and more individual factors that may influence uses. Having outlined the context for use, the second section will focus more specifically on leisure uses.

Connecting to the internet for leisure

Previous studies have emphasised how adults frequently cite education and work as key motivations for connecting to the internet (Lally, 2002; Livingstone & Bober, 2003; Selwyn, in press), whilst children and young people additionally refer to the communication and entertainment opportunities provided by the internet (Livingstone & Bober, 2003). Bakardjieva's (2005) research into 'ordinary' non-professional adult users of the internet at home found three distinct motivations: responding to outside pressure (for instance, for work or university study), buying into dominant discourses (curiosity combined with an 'abstract impulse' to join the 'network society') and coming up with applications of one's own (a concrete need, such as emailing a distant relative, for instance). For the most part, my data reflect these previous findings. Whilst the parents in the sample typically cite education (either for themselves or for their children)

and work as the primary reasons for connecting to the internet, some parents also describe how their curiosity about the internet combined with anxiety about 'missing out' influenced their decision to go online. Moreover, in line with Bakardjieva's finding, some parents connected for a specific purpose, such as in this example provided by Nick Prowse in relation to shopping:

> Sue: And, if you can think back to when you thought about getting connected to the internet, can you remember why you wanted it?
>
> Nick: There just seemed to be a lot of things in the papers, on the television, that you know, if you want to know about these goods that we do, come to whatever .com.
>
> (Mr Prowse, int. 1)

Children's reasons for wanting to connect to the internet, however, were much more focused on entertainment, for instance, they described how games, chat rooms, emailing friends, sports and music sites were the key motivations to be online. Homework was rarely mentioned and when it was, it was never given as the primary reason. Having considered family members' motivations and intentions when connecting to the internet, the next section will consider their uses for leisure.

Typology of internet uses for leisure

In seeking to categorise the different services offered via the internet, I drew on a range of typologies such as those developed by the Oxford Internet Institute and the UK Children Go Online Project in the UK; and the Pew Internet and American Life Project in the US, used for the analysis of survey data (see, for example, Dutton et al., 2005; Howard et al., 2002; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Livingstone & Bober, 2004). The divergences in these typologies illustrate that categorisations of the different services afforded by the internet are a question of interpretation due to the overlapping and blurring nature of many of the services. Furthermore, these services are changeable, with newer sites such as My Space (www.myspace.com) representing a convergence between previously distinct services such as email, weblogs, forums and groups. Added to this are discrepancies in how members of the sample families describe the particular services they use compared with definitions found within the sites and

functions themselves and those prevalent in the research literature. For instance, Ben Archer-Hughes (aged 14) says that he frequently visits *Furcadia* a 'chat programme'. Yet a visit to the *Furcadia* site (www.furcadia.com) shows that its creators have labelled it a 'fully graphical, massively multi-player online social game'. Similarly, when Damien Powell-Drummond (aged 16) referred to using *Napster*, my assumption was that he was listening to and downloading music. Yet, later questions revealed he was also making extensive use of its chat rooms. These examples show how respondents' descriptions of their activities for leisure on the internet cannot always be taken at face value but require further exploration to understand more fully. In categorising uses I have taken account of how the family members themselves conceive of their activities. In the case mentioned above, for example, I have labelled Ben Archer-Hughes a 'chat room' user rather than a games' player as this is how he constructs himself and his activities.

In order to elucidate the categories of internet leisure activities engaged in by family members, I have broadly clustered uses into activities mainly carried out via the web: creation/production, downloading, games playing, information retrieval and shopping; and communication activities which require a wider range of internet services.

Creation/Production

Whilst recognising that defining creative and production uses on the internet is a contentious issue, (for example, Ofcom's definition of 'media literacy' defines writing in media as a 'creative' ability *per se* (see Buckingham et al., 2005 and Chapter 7 for further discussion)), this classification is more selective and includes the activities of web page construction and writing weblogs.

Downloading

This refers to the downloading (file transfer) of media such as music, films, videos, games, webshots[10] and software.

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[10] Free online photo sharing. For instance, see www.webshots.com.

Games playing

Amongst the respondents, these included the playing of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), such as *Furcadia*; multi-player games such as *Counter-Strike;* and free online games such as cards, bridge, puzzles, and games attached to other media-related sites like the Cartoon Network and the official Harry Potter site.

Information retrieval

These are activities which are, on the one hand, carried out for pleasure or to facilitate leisure activities via the web, and, on the other, behaviour which is supportive of families' functioning and welfare:

General interest/pleasurable activities might include:

Current affairs: checking news headlines and stories;

Entertainment: fun sites (e.g. www.minger.com, www.amused.com), *Friends Reunited,* games sites, television related sites;

Going out: theatre/cinema times, museums and art galleries;

Hobbies: gardening, sports, music, reading, fashion/clothes;

Day trips/holidays: researching holiday destinations, train/flight times, maps, hotels, tourist sites.

Family oriented activities:

Health: usually relating to illness suffered by self, friends or family;

Life administration[11]: online banking, checking and paying bills, HP checks.

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[11] As noted previously, following Lally (2002) I am using life administration to describe internet functions undertaken to support household and family responsibilities.

Shopping

This category includes both 'window shopping' on (mainly) commercial websites to investigate products and compare prices and so on; and making online purchases of food, books, CDs, ring tones, etc. This category may overlap with 'Information Retrieval', for example, when respondents move from finding information in order to choose holiday destinations, for example, towards purchasing flights and other tickets.

Communication

This category describes communicative asynchronous uses of the internet: email, newsgroups and message boards; and synchronous methods: chat rooms; instant messaging (IM) and video conferencing.

Families' uses of the internet for leisure

My intention here is to briefly outline the uses of the participants in my sample for leisure and/or carried out in leisure time in order to start building up a comprehensive picture of internet behaviour within the home. Later chapters will discuss uses in relation to work and education. For this reason, this section is necessarily descriptive in order to provide this background information.

Within a minority of the sample families, there were common uses of the internet focused around particular hobbies and interests. For instance, three of the four members of the Golding family were keen cyclists, reflected by the prolific cycling related *information retrieval* activities that were reported and observed. Similarly, members of the Jackson family were keen on keeping exotic animals, again reflected by their online behaviour. The father and two older sons in the Archer-Hughes family were internet enthusiasts, indicated by the extent and range of their internet activities. However, in the remaining families, leisure activities were disparate, not easily grouped together by a single all-determining factor. For this reason, leisure uses of the internet will be discussed according to the services and functions drawn on - as characterised in the above typology - rather than by family clusters as in the other data chapters.

Creation/Production

Recent survey data from the UK drawn from just over 4000 interviews found that 14 percent of internet users have their own websites whilst just five percent kept a blog (Dutton et al., 2005). Likewise, researchers in the US found that 13 percent maintain their own web site whilst between two percent and seven percent publish a blog (Lenhart, Horrigan, & Fallows, 2004). Moreover, Doring's review of thirty empirical studies suggested that men created more home pages than women (Doring, 2002). Yet, out of seventeen families in my sample, only one mother and three fathers had their own websites, two of which (of the fathers' websites) were purely for leisure (the remaining two being produced to support home-based businesses). Furthermore, none of the parents or children keep a blog with the exception of Aaron Craine (aged 10) whose father set one up for him which he kept for a short while around the time of the first interview. Amongst the children in the sample, web sites were even more scarce with only Ben Archer-Hughes and Tony Archer-Hughes (both aged 14) having a web site. Findings here are comparable to those drawn from the UKCGO project which showed 34 percent of daily internet users have set up their own website (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). As Bober (2004) has previously noted, home pages have not yet become significant to young people in their lives; and seemingly not yet in adults' lives either, according to the available data. This is perhaps unsurprising given the predisposition towards functional uses of the internet for leisure as seen in the earlier section of this chapter on time and space. With only a minority of adults and young people seemingly engaging with the internet as an intrinsic leisure activity in itself, then it is likely that only a similarly small number of users would be motivated to build a website unless they had a purpose for this (such as work perhaps).

Downloading

The recent report, *The Internet in Britain* (Dutton et al., 2005), reports that 54 percent of adults of working age download or listen to music online. Yet, amongst my sample, only one father said that he downloaded music, and also software. One mother reported downloading 'wallpaper' for her computer. It may be that downloading music is a developing activity, therefore, emphasised to a greater degree in more recent data. Alternatively, it may be that adults are

listening to music online, radio and samples of CDs, for example, rather than transferring music files to their computers (the survey cited above lists both activities together).

Figures from the recent UKCGO project found that amongst children between the ages of 9-19 who used the internet at least once a week, 45 percent said that they downloaded music whilst 30 percent said that they watched or downloaded video clips. In my sample, downloading was more in evidence for children than their parents. Although the youngest children in the 3-7 age group did not engage in downloading, around a third of the older children in both the 8-12 and 13-18 groups were regularly downloading files. There were subtle differences between boys and girls. Less girls than boys reported downloading files in general, and whilst downloading music was common to both groups, girls also engaged in downloading web shots, screensavers, wallpaper, and occasionally websites to the desktop to save being online. Whilst many boys engaged in these activities, they also tended to download games and games demos, video clips and cartoons.

Games playing

Recent UK studies suggest that online games may be an important arena for adults, although available figures diverge somewhat between adults and parents in their findings. Whilst *The Internet in Britain* (Dutton et al., 2005), for instance, reports that 48 percent of users play games online, the UKCGO project (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) found that less than half that number, 19 percent of parents who have ever used the internet, play games. Amongst my sample, games playing is particularly rare, reported by only two mothers and one father in total. Freya Liang, for instance, has played bridge online, Angela Craine plays card games and Melvin Bradshaw gambles with fictional money trading stocks and shares. I can only speculate as to why this level is so low particularly as several parents reported that they did play offline computer card games and video-games such as *Civilization* and *Tomb Raider*, but yet did not commit to online games. It may be that this is not seen as a valuable use of the internet in these households, particularly where dial up accounts were paid by the minute. Also many online games (though not card games) require subscriptions, which may put parents off.

In line with studies that report that children and young people are more likely to exploit the 'fun' opportunities afforded by the internet (Howard et al., 2002; Lenhart et al., 2005), games were popular with roughly half the children in the sample. This figure is lower, however, than that found by the UKCGO project, recorded as 70 percent of children between 9-19 playing games online (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). This difference may be due to my sample including younger children (the youngest in my sample was three at the first interview) as a much bigger proportion of the intermediate 8-12 age group children in my sample were playing games online than in the younger and older groups. Whilst Padadakis (2003) claims that boys are more likely than girls to play games, there is no corresponding gender division in my data, where both girls and boys say that they play games online within each age group. In line with findings in the recent Ofcom report (Buckingham et al., 2005), the most widely played online games amongst my sample are puzzle and card games. As noted in the report, this is probably due to the fact that they do not require a large investment of time, do not charge subscriptions and do not require broadband (Jones, 2003). The games played tend to be accessed via television and film related web sites, for instance, *Sesame Street, Tweenies* and *Harry Potter.* Three of the older boys were engaged in playing massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), such as *Furcadia* (though as described above, one of the players of this described it as a chat room). One boy played the multi-player game *Counter-Strike.*

Information Retrieval

Findings in relation to parents' uses of the web for *information retrieval* are unsurprising in the light of previous research. Redolent of findings from the US (see, for example, Papadakis, 2003), most parents explored a range of sites that reflected hobbies and personal interests, travel plans and going out, and life administration sites, such as banking, paying bills etc. Whilst there were subtle gender differences in terms of the kinds of information being sought, these were undramatic and in line with findings from the US that women were more likely to look for health information, men for sports news (Howard et al., 2002). Moreover, looking for holiday information came out particularly strongly for both mothers and fathers within the sample. Parents' reported uses suggest

that whilst they use the web to facilitate a wide range of entertainment and leisure activities, they also use it to support the organisational responsibilities and concerns that are part and parcel of being an adult and a parent.

Findings from my data in relation to children and young people's uses of the web for *information retrieval* also, for the most part, confirm previous research. It has been found, for example, that activities reflect existing interests already established in children's lives (Facer et al., 2003). In relation to surfing the internet, studies such as *Cyberkids* (Holloway & Valentine, 2003), have listed popular activities as finding information about sport, music and film celebrities, fashion, hobbies and leisure activities (see also Lenhart et al., 2005; Van Rompaey, Roe, & Struys, 2002). Noting that media use acts as a significant marker of age (Livingstone, 2002b), I divided the children and young people in the sample into three age groups, 3-7, 8-12 and 13-18 to compare their *information retrieval* activities. The predominant web activities for both boys and girls in the youngest group, for instance, were entertainment sites and hobbies. In particular, television related sites such as CBBC and CITV plus animal and games sites were in evidence. For the middle group of 8-12 year olds, uses were again dominated by entertainment and hobby sites, particularly those related to television programmes and films. However, these older children were more likely to focus on music than their younger counterparts, with boys also likely to describe visiting sports and games related sites more readily than girls. In the oldest group, predominant activities were entertainment and hobby sites with teenagers also likely to visit sites relating to going out, specifically for cinema times. Again, gender differences were subtle with girls more likely to visit clothes and fashion sites, boys more likely to focus on games and sports. As with the middle group, interest in music sites was strong for both sexes. The UKGCO study (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) has shown how children and young people use the internet to a greater extent than their parents for entertainment and leisure uses such as games, music and communication. This finding is reflected in my sample in parents' and children's uses of the web for *information retrieval* purposes. Children's responses, for instance, suggest their activities are more hedonistic, focusing on the individual pursuit of pleasure rather than on organisational responsibilities or social concerns (such as seeking current affairs and/or health information). Moreover, the absence of these particular

activities in their accounts represents a departure from previous survey data from the US, suggesting that teenagers, including younger teens, are just as likely as adults to search for news and current affairs information (Lenhart et al., 2005; see also Roper Starch Worldwide, 1999). However, it may be that these kinds of activities are carried out by young people in relation to education rather than in their leisure time, a distinction that may not emerge in quantitative studies (see Chapter 6).

Shopping

Reports from the US and the UK have noted that online shopping is proliferating (Dutton et al., 2005; Howard et al., 2002). In the report, *The Internet in Britain*, survey data showed that nearly all adult users of the internet use the internet to find out about products online and almost 75 percent make purchases. The authors report that shopping has become 'an important aspect of the internet' for many users. Howard et al. (2002) found that roughly the same number of men and women are buying products online and making travel reservations. These patterns of behaviour are reflected in my data where both mothers and fathers in most of the families reported engaging in online comparisons of prices and making purchases. Whilst parents buy a diversity of products, from washing machines to furniture, the most common uses included buying books, CDs/DVDs/videos, weekly food shopping, travel-related bookings, concert, theatre, cinema and sports tickets. Less often families had purchased clothes online. The families who did not shop online usually had strong feelings or reasons against doing so, for instance, anxieties about credit card fraud or, in one case, not possessing a credit card.

Children's level of looking for products and buying online was, however, in the sample much lower than their parents. This is surprising in view of studies from the US which suggest that there are growing numbers of teens shopping online (Lenhart et al., 2005). Moreover, the UKCGO project found that 40 percent of youngsters who go online at least once a week report that they look for products or shop online (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). Among my respondents, only two boys and two girls (all from the older 13-18 age group) said that they had made actual online purchases: software, videos, concert tickets and ring tones. However, several more referred to checking out product information before

visiting offline shops to make a purchase. It appears from my data that despite the increase in the extent of parents' online shopping, young people continue to visit shops in person as they do not have access to either their own or their parents' credit cards.

Communication

Studies from the US have tended to emphasise email as the internet's 'killer application' due to the high proportion of users who communicate with it (Copher, Kanfer, & Walker, 2002; Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002), although other studies have emphasised that seeking information or completing transactions over the web are equally dominant activities (Rainie & Kihut, 2000). The UKCGO project found that whilst 78 percent of British parents had used the internet for email, figures for using instant messaging (15 percent) and chat (6 percent) were significantly lower (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). These patterns of use are broadly reflected within the sample. Whilst the majority of parents use email at home, only a very small minority also used instant messaging, chat or newsgroups/message boards. The parents who did not use email at home for either leisure or work activities belonged mainly to the same group who did not use the internet at home at all. Changes over the two year period between the initial and later interviews also occurred. For instance, some parents had managed to overcome technical problems with setting up email accounts which had been a barrier to use in the earlier interviews. Two parents had also given up using email in the interim: Freya Liang, for example, said that ending her distance learning course had also taken away her reason for sending social emails; Derek Parker had become disillusioned with email due to the high amounts of spam that arrived in his inbox. Four parents from the same two families in the sample were using instant messaging at both the initial and later interviews. These parents were drawn from the second cohort of families interviewed between 2001 and 2003, reflecting the increasing appropriation of instant messaging around this period. Interestingly, none of the parents from the earlier cohort had begun using instant messaging when I returned for final interviews between 2000 and 2001, though some of their children had (see below). Only four parents had posted messages in newsgroups or on message boards. Unsurprisingly, these were parents who expressed a particular interest

in technology and the internet in particular, such as Duncan Craine (IT Technician), making their wider uses of the different functions of the internet available for communication understandable. Moreover, and exceptionally within the families, Duncan Craine had also introduced video-conferencing to his family as a means of communicating with his children following separation from his wife.

The UKCGO project found that amongst children between the ages of 9-19 years who use the internet at least once a week (84 percent of all 9-19 year olds), 72 percent send and receive emails, 55 percent send and receive instant messages, 21 percent use chat rooms and 17 percent use message boards. Moreover, previous research from the US suggests that young people are more likely to use instant messaging and chat than are adults and parents (Howard, Rainie, & Jones, 2001). Research has also suggested that girls may be more drawn to chatting than boys are (Papadakis, 2003; Van Rompaey et al., 2002). Amongst my sample, I again divided children and young people into three age groups to compare and contrast their uses (see above). In the youngest group of 3-7 year olds, uses of the internet for communication were virtually non-existent. An exception occurred in the Craine household, again possibly as the result of the father's (temporary) separation from the wife and family during the interim period of the interviews. This excerpt from the final interview with the Craine family includes Angela Craine explaining how Sasha (aged 5) is using instant messaging:

> Angela: Yeah. You message Dad don't you? [...] I don't always know about this and then she'll walk into the kitchen and say to me how do spell 'fetch'? And then she'll go back in here and she goes... And she'll be having a conversation with. And I haven't got a clue.
>
> (Mrs Craine, int. 3)

In both the intermediate group of 8-12 year olds and the older group of 13-18 year olds, uses were very similar. For example, few differences were reported between boys' and girls' uses. Most of the youngsters of both genders described using email; instant messaging appeared particularly popular for children in interviews that occurred during and after 2001, in line with other studies showing that following its arrival, many children preferred to use this

mode of communication as an alternative to chat rooms (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). A minority of young people visited chat rooms and these were frequently described as one-offs, egged on by friends. However, in my sample, there was a suggestion that boys were more likely to visit chat rooms as a consequence of their access through games and music sites. Finally, it was noticeable that posting messages in either newsgroups or on message boards was entirely absent.

Conclusions

In the first part of this chapter, I outlined previous research suggesting that structural constraints upon women's free time could influence time available to use the internet, particularly for leisure uses. However, the data revealed that it was difficult to examine time as an isolated factor structuring parents' and particularly, mothers' internet use due to the range of interrelated and overlapping factors such as level and quality of access, hierarchies of use, regulation, motivation and competence, which combine to determine extent of use. Nevertheless, it was interesting to note that mothers were only rarely named as the main user of the internet for leisure within families. Moreover, the different patterns of temporal organisation that emerged from the data suggested that mothers and older girls were most likely to express awareness of time pressure and that it should not be wasted.

Examining how lack of time to use the internet for leisure could influence mothers, fathers and children's activities also lead to questioning of whether the internet is indeed a leisure activity in its own right in any case. Whilst the analysis showed that the internet facilitates leisure and is carried out in so-called free or 'leisure' time (generally fitted around the pre-existing routines and practices of everyday life), activities for parents tended to be, for the most part, functional. These included organising family leisure activities and fulfilling family obligations, rather than the internet being seen as a pleasurable activity in itself. Furthermore, children's and young people's uses of the internet for entertainment and leisure emerged as similarly ambiguous. Whilst young people were more likely to say that internet use was 'relaxing' and countered 'boredom', the internet tended most of the time to be used as a tool to facilitate

other activities such as communicating with friends, playing games online, downloading music, etc where motivation stemmed from a wish to fulfil a particular purpose rather than the aim being simply to use the internet for its own sake. For both parents and children, there were exceptions but examples of hobbyist, expressive users were few and far between.

In relation to the spatial organisation of the home, in the initial interviews, the majority of internet-connected computers were located in private spaces, mainly in offices or studies. This was due to the strong association of the computer with work and an orientation to home working by either mothers or fathers or, rarely, both parents. Typically, this ensured that one parent's uses were prioritised, often with negative consequences for the rest of the family. However, over the two year period of the study I noted a general trend towards siting the 'family' internet-connected computer in a central, public location. This was said to increase and enable easier access for all members of the family; and to enable regulation of the internet and children generally. There were also suggestions that, as in Bakardjieva's (2005) study, mothers were also keen to nurture 'family togetherness'. Whilst younger children and particularly older girls seemed to prefer to use the internet in a communal space overall, they appeared to miss the privacy associated with using the internet in the more secluded spaces of the home (as did other young people). Some of the mothers expressed a similar ambivalence. Whilst they had often led the decision to site the internet-connected computer centrally, they found it an intrusion into the lounge or dining room due to the potential noise conflict between the computer and the television and the computer's 'utilitarian' appearance.

Findings in relation to using the computer with other family members and friends were surprising as it emerged that these more sociable uses tended to be more prevalent if the internet-connected computer was in a private, office space rather than a communal location. I can only speculate as to the reasons for this but it may be that the private location fosters a more intense hands-on (or more likely, sitting together) experience for respondents. This may be recalled more easily in interviews than internet uses which take place in more public, central spaces where there may be ongoing and taken-for-granted discussions around the sharing of activities. A larger and possibly more

ethnographic study would be needed to observe families' interactions around the internet-connected computer in situ over a longer time period to confirm these findings.

Finally, having explored the temporal and spatial context for use, I outlined families' leisure related activities online. These were predictable for the most part and reflected previous research which has suggested that activities reflect existing interests established in children's lives (Facer et al., 2003). My study found that this was also true for parents though with the proviso that their activities also included activities designed to support the functioning of the family. In contrast, children's pursuits were more hedonistic, aimed at their own pleasure rather than at family or wider concerns such as current affairs, etc. However, most parents' and children's goals were instrumental rather than expressive in that they had a clear purpose online rather than engaging with the internet for its own sake. This approach seemed to be the underlying cause of a lack of engagement in the production of websites or blogs where only a small minority of internet/computer hobbyists had found a purpose and/or the motivation to be able to do this. In line with previous findings in relation to parents, information retrieval and email were reportedly the most extensive uses with shopping becoming increasingly popular. Gender differences for parents were subtle, emerging mainly in relation to the different sites visited rather than the services being used for adults. For children, gender also tended to influence the choice of websites visited and additionally the types of files downloaded. Whilst both girls and boys downloaded music, screensavers etc, boys were more likely to also download games demos, video clips and cartoons. Age was also a marker: older children's predominant uses for leisure were reportedly information retrieval, email and instant messaging. However, only a small minority of children under eight were using the internet at all and usually for television programme related games playing.

Having focused on leisure in this chapter within the context of how the internet fits into contemporary family life, I will move to an examination of internet uses for education and learning.

Chapter 6: Education and Learning

> Bring history to life with Broadband from BT. To make your children's homework truly inspiring, get Broadband from BT. With a connection that's up to three times faster than some broadbands, educational websites are more involving than ever before. (BT Advertisement, 2004)

Introduction

Many parents have invested considerable resources into securing home internet access sold on the promise of its educational benefits for their children, in terms of both current learning and future employability. Yet, as parents are constantly being reminded, achieving optimum benefit for your child is not simply a matter of buying a computer, modem and connecting to an ISP but instead being under continual pressure to upgrade to the latest must-have innovation. In addition to aggressive marketing by advertising companies, educationalists such as Seymour Papert (1996) argue that networked computers facilitate new forms of learning, and that by engaging in more 'natural' forms of 'home-style' self-directed learning, children will gain the benefit of their 'hard fun'. Government accounts that emphasize the importance of ICT skills, particularly the internet, for the economy reinforce the presumed benefits:

> Between 1998 and 2004 the Government has made available over £1.8 billion to increase access to ICT in schools, providing a solid foundation for additional investments in skills more broadly and lifelong learning. (Office of the e-envoy *UK Online Annual Report*, 2003: 18)

These statements strengthen common-sense notions within the public domain that ICT skills are important for young people and will benefit their learning. Despite the lack of direct evidence that home access to the internet benefits children's education (Livingstone & Bober, 2003), parents and policy-makers have been sufficiently convinced of its potential to invest heavily in resources aimed to support their children's current learning and future employability. The pattern of internet connectivity is following that of the home computer; computers are more frequently found in households with children, with education being cited as one of the key motivations for their acquisition (Facer et al., 2003; Gorard & Selwyn, 2003; Lally, 2002; Livingstone & Bovill, 1999;

Selwyn, 2004; Selwyn, in press). Yet, as Lally points out, parents with home computers tend to express the educational benefits for children in terms of vague notions of 'computer literacy', reflecting what Buckingham has identified as the 'uncertain pedagogy of the home computer' (2002).

This chapter will examine these issues in relation to the internet. In particular, it will explore families' discourses around using the internet within the home for education and learning purposes; how the internet is used to support homework and adult study and whether or not new styles of learning are emerging. The main focus here will be on how internet use supports formal education provided by schools, colleges and universities.

Equal benefits?

The home is increasingly being emphasised as an important site for education with parental involvement viewed as a prerequisite for educational success (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003). This is seen as a 'curricularisation' of family life, where children's leisure and daily activities are transformed into a form of educational 'work' (Ennew, 1994; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). Having a computer with internet access represents one of the means through which parents seek to ensure their children's current educational achievements and future prospects. However, it is unlikely that simply providing access to a computer connected to the internet at home will even out other inequalities. There is an established field of sociological research that shows how class differences are reproduced through learning and education. Writers such as Reay (1998) and David et al. (1993) have particularly focused on the role of the home as both a cultural and material site of class reproduction. Moreover, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that when ICTs enter the home, they are incorporated into the 'existing values, practices and interests of the family itself' (Facer et al., 2001: 5). They fit in with 'pre-existing structures and patterns of education and learning activity' (Selwyn, in press). This means that the potential benefits of ICTs for education and learning may not be accessible to each family in equal measure.

As noted in Chapter 3, researchers have drawn on Bourdieu's concept of different forms of capital to explain relationships to ICTs and, likewise, the

orientation towards education (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu argues that groups and individuals are able to deploy at least three different kinds of resources – economic, social and cultural capital. Selwyn (2004), for example, uses this approach to identify the influence of the various forms of capital on the ability of individuals and groups to make meaningful use of ICTs. He points out that economic resources play a central role in determining whether people own and have access to a technology; cultural resources determine how they engage and make meaningful use of that technology; and social resources determine the networks of 'technological contacts' who become sources of advice. I will not be applying this framework to my analyses in detail, however, I draw on it here to show how this approach uses Bourdieu's theory to further understand the relationships and resources brought to bear when engaging with ICT beyond a simple analysis of class.

Families' orientation to education

All the parents interviewed were clearly committed to their children's education. However, differences did exist between families in their experiences of and orientation to education; what Bourdieu and Passeron refer to as 'educational capital' (1977). These can be broadly summarised as follows. Within the two-year period of study, some families were in a much more overtly *transitional* state than others as far as education was concerned, and this was apparent from the impact that their improved prospects were making on the rest of their lives. These tended to be the lower income families who were living in the North of England. Parents were usually in manual and unskilled occupations and had missed out for whatever reason at school. The internet had often been acquired in these families in the late 1990s to support parents' education with the wish to also support their children's. Various funding initiatives such as the European Social Fund combined with the UK Government's drive to widen participation in Higher Education, had resulted in these families currently experiencing some degree of social mobility. The Jackson family, for instance, had survived a long period of poverty and debt that had begun in the mid-1980s with the miners' strike. Ken Jackson had been on strike at the time of their first son's birth and they had been plunged into serious long-term debt. This was followed by several years of not working through ill health before redundancy

and unemployment. Things were now getting better. Anita Jackson was just completing a degree at the local University and was also working as a volunteer Literacy teacher. Ken Jackson had recently acquired a paid job as as a full-time care assistant for people with learning difficulties. They lived in a small house with their four children, Phil (aged 15), Adrian (14), Josie (10) and Alice (6). When I returned for my final interview at the two-year point, it was clear that their situation had continued to improve. Anita was now employed part-time as a Literacy and Numeracy teacher and was steadily gaining the qualifications needed to continue teaching in this area. Ken Jackson was continuing to work as a care assistant. Although Anita Jackson and the children were very enthusiastic about the computer and the internet, no upgrading had taken place.

The second group of families are categorised as *improving* to take account of parents' current engagement in education. These tended to be families on higher incomes, living in both the North and South of England who had achieved some upward mobility in their lifetimes. Often one parent had gained professional status securing the family's comfortable lifestyle. However, the other parent, typically the woman, was now catching up on her education (a degree or professional qualification), as the children became more independent, and she felt that she had the time and energy to do so. Unlike the *transitional* families, the *improving* families were not experiencing the same degree of upwardly mobile shift as the result of their new qualifications, the one professional salary having usually provided the means for this already. In these families, the internet had frequently been acquired to support parents' current education as well as their children's in the mid to late 1990s. Lisa Golding, for example, was completing a History Degree via a distance-learning course whilst working as a part-time Administrator in a University. Peter Golding is a full-time Town Planner for the local council. They live in their own medium-size home with their sons (Piers aged 15 and David aged 11). At the two-year point, Lisa Golding had completed her degree and taken a different part-time job with more responsibility in a different University. Peter Golding was in the same job and Piers was applying for University. Despite the family's continuing enthusiasm towards the computer and internet, no upgrading had taken place in the interim.

The final group of families are categorised as *established* to take account of parents' long-established educational status. These are the affluent middle-classes where often both parents work full-time in professional jobs. They are all situated in the South of England, mostly in London. Interestingly, in this group, it is typically the children who have taken the more active role in the drive to connect to the internet rather than it being provided on the parents' instigation. Some of these families are the 'Early Adopters' having connected to the internet as early as 1994 though others connected from the mid to late 1990s. Typically none of these parents is currently engaged in either higher education or upgrading their professional qualifications. Where education was mentioned as a reason for connecting to the internet, it was in relation to supporting their children's learning, not their own. For instance, the Kendal family lived in a large house in a London suburb. Suzanne Kendal is a part-time Academic. Phillip Kendal is a full-time Company Director. Their two sons (Caleb aged 11 and Roland aged 9) are privately educated. When I returned at the two-year point, Suzanne Kendal had taken a full-time post with more responsibility. In the interim, the family had upgraded the computer and acquired a broadband connection.

These categories are obviously ideal types and some families in the sample would not so easily fit into them. Nevertheless, what they do show is how parents' orientations to education differ as the result of a range of factors: access to resources, their own educational status and employment, philosophies of child rearing and children's different experiences of schooling (see Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003). To draw on Reay's work, social class here functions as a trajectory – it is about where you have come from, where you have passed through and where you think you are going (Reay, 1998). The *transitional* and *improving* families show that many of the parents are still progressing towards their educational goals via current 'second chance' opportunities unlike the *established* families where the main focus of education is for their children.

Discourses around the internet and education

Current learning and future employability

All of the parents interviewed voiced positive support for their children's education though this was often expressed through the rather narrowly defined aspect of homework searches in relation to the internet. The homework example is underpinned by parents' broader concerns about enhancing children's current learning and future employability. Valentine and Holloway summarise parents' expectations as follows:

> Adults (both parents and teachers) imagine that by extending their knowledge terrain and horizons beyond the boundaries of the place where they live, children's educational, and implicitly therefore, children's employment opportunities will be enhanced. (Valentine & Holloway, 2002: 151)

Whilst use of the internet does undoubtedly give access to a broader landscape, in my data there is little evidence from the families that they anticipated that their children's knowledge and employment prospects would be enhanced by the spatial and ideological widening of their life-worlds from local to global reach. Responses were posited more prosaically in terms of children having the skills and familiarity to support either present schooling or future opportunities. Interestingly, temporal differences emerged in how far parents interpreted the benefits of the internet for their children. The *established* parents, in common with the other groups, saw the present benefits in terms of homework research alongside generalised expressions around the need to 'keep up'. Lally writes that parents' conviction that their children need computer skills is borne out of the universal belief that computers are going to be at least as important in the future as they are today (Lally, 2002). However, there were examples of the *established* parents also tending to look further ahead in a more concrete manner. This involved reflecting on and projecting their current work conditions into the future and the need to develop children's skills and competencies to prepare for similar work environments, as shown in this example from Mrs Burnley, a more middle-class respondent:

> Alison: ...But, in my work, everything is just going more and more and more towards computers so I want them to be able to be comfortable with

that and as computer literate as possible. So yes, I would much much rather that they played with the computer than watched telly.

(Mrs Burnley, int. 1)

In this and other examples from the *established* families there seems to be an underlying expectation from the parents that the child's trajectory would be into a similar level professional job to their own. Ball writes of this as 'futurity': moving from the present to a particular 'kind of class and social location in the future' (Ball, 2003). He argues:

> Middle-class ontologies are founded upon incompleteness, they are about becoming, about the developmental self, about making something of yourself, realizing yourself, realizing your potential. These parents envisage certain sorts of futures for their children. They see themselves as having the responsibility to make these futures possible through their actions and planning in the here and now... (Ball, 2003: 163)

In contrast, the expectations of the *improving* and *transitional* families were less tangible and much more fixed in the present. The computer with internet connection had typically been provided for the immediate, to help with homework and/or in preparation for the imminent move to secondary school. Any allusion to the future was in vague terms of 'keeping up', as shown by this example from more working-class Mrs Craine:

Angela: Very yeah. I think it's priceless. Especially for kids now. You know education system as it is it's all geared to computing and what have you. I think it's absolutely vital that they have some form of contact.

(Mrs Craine, int. 2)

As this example shows, whilst such parents are concerned for their children's present education, and make general references to the future, they do not map out their children's future with the same certainty nor seek to prepare their children for the future in terms of specific skills and competencies in the way that the *established* families do.

Formal and informal learning

As mentioned earlier, the home is increasingly emphasised as a vital site for education. Sefton-Green argues that it is important to acknowledge the wider

'ecology' of learning, not just that taking place in formal settings (Sefton-Green, 2004). He argues that the learning that takes place in a range of different settings contributes to the capacity to learn the formal knowledge that is valued in society. He identifies some unresolved questions regarding informal learning. Does it refer to how, where, or what we learn or the relationship between the activity and what is valued as knowledge today? Does it mean learning that occurs in a different way from in schools, in a different place, about different things or anything that is learnt that is not currently valued by our education system? To clarify, he identifies two continua, the first contrasts formally organised learning, such as a lecture, with the casual, 'accidental' learning that might take place through playing a computer game. The second contrasts formal settings (schools), through to intermediate learning spaces (museums and galleries), through to social structures (families and friendship groups). He argues that formal and informal learning can take place in both formal and non-formal spaces. Moreover, part of the problem in researching informal learning lies in the difficulty of studying the cognitive dimension of learning, the learning going on in an individual's mind.

In the current study, it proved difficult to determine how parents value informal and formal learning as this is not a discourse familiar from the public domain that individuals are rehearsed in speaking about. However, in one sense, when parents acquire the internet at home and talk about this as supporting their children's learning and education in the home, they are undeniably sanctioning informal learning – in the sense of learning taking place outside of the formal setting. Moreover, the vague sets of skills, notions of familiarity and resources for homework, popular in the discourse around reasons for acquiring the home connection suggest that they implicitly value this environment as an informal site of learning. The statements of parents do suggest that they see benefits in having the internet at home, for example, due to the time it would give them to explore it further for themselves, in addition to uses such as supporting their children's homework. As Mr Liang describes:

> Jeremy: Erm yes, I was fascinated by the internet really. We have it at work so I just thought, get a bit of a look at it at work but I didn't really have the time to really explore it and I thought with my home computer I'd get a bit more time to look into various things that are offered on the Net and I

thought it would be a good thing for the kids, useful for the kids sometimes, to researching certain things for homework.

(Mr Liang, int. 1)

This example shows how this parent thought that by bringing the internet into the home he would have more time at home to learn about what was on the web. What does not emerge from the data, however, are clear hierarchies according different value being given to formal and informal learning. On the one hand, there are examples where parents highlight that they think that school learning is better. Mrs Bourne, for example, ascribes her daughter's superior internet literacy skills to the fact that she has had the benefit of formal teaching at school whereas Mrs Bourne has not had the similar benefits of training at work:

Sue: And was I right in hearing that Vivien shows you?

Fiona: Yes. Because obviously she's had a formal... Or she's receiving a formal training in it when she goes to school, it's what they do. And it's developing all the time. [....] Whereas I don't. I've got the facility at work but I don't get the kind of training that Vivien gets.

(Mrs Bourne, int. 1)

Similarly, the Powell-Drummond parents brought in an IT tutor to support their younger son's learning, preferring this formal approach to the sharing of knowledge within the household. It is possible to speculate on the reasons for this: at various points in the interviews these parents did voice concern at the level of their own skills, and they also mentioned their shortage of time due to their full-time senior academic roles; also it may be that they preferred the more formal approach. Buckingham and Scanlon (2003) found that for parents with pressurised lives, one solution can be to throw money at the problem: paying for educational goods and services may offer the promise of educational advantage which they may feel unable to secure on their own behalf or in their own time. Other parents favoured the approach of letting their children 'play' on the computer in the hope that this and their school contact would see them through. The relationship between home and school learning will be discussed further in the course of the chapter, but briefly, what is clear is that parents and children often ascribe their internet skills to 'tinkering about' or what has been referred to

as 'rational recreation' – a seemingly purposeless activity through which individuals develop ICT skills (Haddon, 1988). As put by Mrs Hill, when describing her daughter, Heather's internet competence:

> Deborah: More playing with it you know like Jeff [her father] said if you get yourself into a situation, then you just get yourself out of it. And I think that's how Heather [age 14] had done it really you know sitting here and just like...
>
> (Mrs Hill, int. 3)

It is worth noting here that which category the family belonged to was not significant in attitudes to informal and formal learning. Most of the parents in the *established* families tended to allow their children to learn how to use the computer and internet at home without formal tuition, whether or not they were receiving IT lessons in school, as much as the parents in the *improving* and *transitional* categories. I will return to how parents and children develop their skills in the chapter on internet literacy, but what I wanted to give a sense of here was the implicit acceptance of the notion of informal learning that parents give in importing the internet into the home.

Interactivity and passivity

Livingstone (2003a) points out that attempts to specify what is technologically new about the internet are underpinned by notions of 'interactivity'; which are seen to distinguish new media from older media. Moreover, recent work by Buckingham and Scanlon has emphasized that interactivity has become a 'key term in the marketing of educational goods and services' particularly with regard to educational software where it is:

> ... assumed to motivate and engage the learner; to offer learners choice and control over their own learning; and to encourage the autonomy and even the 'emancipation' of learners. (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003: 125)

Yet, having examined a range of educational software, they conclude that the interactivity afforded by most educational software is impoverished and little more than a 'marketing promise'. In my interviews with families, statements about the intrinsic positive qualities of the internet are often related to the affordance of interactivity. These observations are just as likely to be made by

members of the *established* as the *improving* and *transitional* families. The range varies from those families where interactivity is assumed to be implicitly educational to those where using the internet is, at the very least, said to be better for their children than watching television motivated by a belief that watching television is 'passive'.

> Phillip: I think being on the computer is much more active than sitting there watching the TV, because it is interactive it is not just entirely passive.
>
> Sue: Interactive in what sense? The fact that you are putting stuff in and getting it out?
>
> Phillip: Yes, you are having to make decisions all the time, and you are driving it to a large extent. So in that sense, it is active, and to get the most out of it, you have got to be a bit like a detective, you have got to hunt, hunt quite hard to find exactly what you want.
>
> (Mr Kendal, int. 3)

Whilst Mrs Kendal construes the internet as positive due to the 'good stuff' available online, it is interesting that Mr Kendal measures its usefulness by its interactivity combined with the skill and tenacity required to locate information. In a sense, he turns one of the potential frustrations of using the web, that of the challenge to find what you're looking for, into a positive.

In contrast, children and young people mobilise discourses around interactivity/ passivity to try to gain more access to the television. In this extract, Julia argues against the split her mother is making between the advantages of interactive versus so-called passive media, in this case the computer versus television:

> Sue: You said that you'd [Mrs Burnley] rather they were using the computer than watching television, could you elaborate?
>
> Julia: She [her mother] thinks TV's no good, it's full of rubbish but she thinks that the computer, you can at least get a little bit of information off which is total rubbish because TV's very educational, just as educational as the computer because you can play rubbish games on the computer which doesn't teach you anything.
>
> Sue: Would you agree with that?
>
> Alison: I think TV has a role to play in the education of children. I do not believe in sitting you know watching for hours on end. I'm very happy for you to play, play the computer.

(Mrs Burnley and Julia, aged 13, int. 1)

In common with other youngsters during the interviews, Julia draws on debates around the educational qualities of television against the playing of 'rubbish games' in her argument to challenge her mother's limiting of her viewing. The examples above show how notions of interactivity have been embedded in the discourses around the potential benefits of the internet versus older media for both parents and children.

Internet and books

Another area for discussion in families is in relation to how parents and children perceive of the use of the internet against that of books. This issue surfaced frequently in the interviews, mainly unsolicited, suggesting the prevalence of this debate. Previous research by Buckingham and Scanlon found evidence of the ongoing struggle between 'new' and 'old' media (2003). They found that whilst several mothers expressed a personal preference for books, fathers tended to be seen as experts on computers. Livingstone and Bober's (2003) study of children's internet use has also provided evidence that children prefer using the internet to using books: 'a 'boring' world of libraries and indexes'. However, the study also found that older teenagers tended to return to the value of books particularly as they become 'more serious about their school work'.

In my study, there were no significant differences accorded to the value of books versus the internet between the different family types, and gender differences were also weak. One exception to this was in the regret that mainly mothers express about their children's lack of interest in reading and orientation towards books in general whether it is for relaxation or for homework. Christine Bond relates this to the widening of children's opportunities compared with her own upbringing:

> Christine: Neither of them are great book readers in the way that I would like them to. Because I read a lot and I was brought up reading a lot. But neither of them are actually into reading. They do far more visual stuff than I. [....] They do it for school but they don't seem to do it as a pleasure at all and I just kind of think well maybe they'll grow into it when they get older. I mean they're both excellent readers. But they don't read for pleasure. Which I think is a real shame but you know you can't force kids to do that can you?

(Ms Bond, int. 2)

Other mothers voiced similar regrets whilst acknowledging, as Christine Bond does, that compared with books and libraries, they can understand why the internet and other media were more appealing for their children. Her reference to the 'visual' is particularly interesting in the light of recent theories about the turn from verbal to visual modes of representation (see Kress, 1998 for instance).

In relation to children's homework, some parents voice reservations about the internet compared with books due to a perceived lack of authority of some web pages, described by Mr Grant as follows:

> Robert: I think that a book is more authoritative than the internet because on the internet you're never sure who's put it there and whether they know what they're talking about.

(Mr Grant, int. 3)

With reference to their own studies, many parents tended to express a preference for using books to support their learning rather than web searches unless looking for very up to date information. Mr Craine, for example, described how an advantage of using the web is that: 'You've got reports before they're published, you know, it's immediate. Got up to date information' (Mr Craine, int. 2).

The data suggested that for some parents, problems using search engines effectively undermined the potential benefits of using the internet for homework or study to some extent and influence their preferences. Moreover, in contrast to Livingstone and Bober's (2003b) finding that children prefer using the internet to search for information rather than use books and libraries, some children in my sample reflect their parents' views. Caleb Kendal (age 11), an enthusiastic user of the internet for leisure-related activities, said that he preferred to use information from books for homework due to the internet being 'too general' and 'too detailed'. However, again his and other young people's views appeared to be influenced by problems searching and narrowing down results. These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Edutainment

Several authors have commented on the increasing blurring of education with entertainment in the marketing of computer software. Buckingham and Scanlon describe edutainment as a 'hybrid mix of education and entertainment' (2003). They point out that advertisers and developers have sought to corner a dual market by justifying their products to parents as valid education whilst convincing children of their pleasure and entertainment value. Their findings in relation to the unfulfilled 'marketing promise' of these products have been detailed above. Likewise, studies by Facer et al. found that children did not enjoy consuming these products, experiencing them as 'work' due to parents imposing on them the requirement to use them (Facer et al., 2003). In relation to the internet, edutainment here refers to examples that emerge when children visit websites to which parents and children ascribe educational value in some way. No noticeable differences were observed across the family types. Mrs Bourne and her daughter, for example, interpret her daughter's use of a 'lemonade' game on www.bored.com as 'home economics' and capable of developing Vivien's budget skills:

> Vivien: I don't know. I like that Bored.com cos you can find lots of interesting stuff. Like that lemonade games that I tried to get on, it's... They give yer twenty dollars and then erm we have to buy paper cups, ice, lemonade and sugar. And you have to decide how much lemonade, how man-... How many lemons you're gonna put in, how many cups of sugar, how many ice cubes and stuff and then they like have a little screen and your lemonade stands there and there people walking past and the weather changes. So it's like erm consumer... what's the word?
>
> Fiona: Customer service?
>
> Vivien: So it's sort of like telling you how to use money and stuff like without wasting it. Like say if you've got two hundred things of... Cubes of ice and they'd all melted 'cos it was really like because no-one wanted it.[....]
>
> Fiona: No. It's... it's... it's like... like home economics isn't it? It's... it's an economic thing isn't it? It's... it's how to best utilise your money isn't it? It's like when you go to the supermarket and it's is it better to buy one get one free...
>
> (Mrs Bourne and Vivien, aged 12, int. 2)

This extract shows how in the discourse around the lemonade game, Vivien is able to mobilise educational benefit for herself. This is fully backed up by her

mother who is also convinced, and seeks to convince me, of the educational benefits of the game, suggesting her approval for this activity.

Equally, there are examples in the data of children and young people accessing sites for homework support, which are then subverted into fun uses. Bobby Bond, for instance, found a French translation site to help with his homework but discovered that its 'literal translations' are not effective for homework but for humour:

> Christine: We thought we'd discovered the perfect thing. We thought homework would never be the same again after this. [....]
>
> Bobby: Yeah. But it does work but it does literal translations. [....] What do you do in your spare time came up as 'how's your brother-in-law?'
>
> (Ms Bond and Bobby, aged 15, int. 2)

What these examples show is how education and entertainment blur into and afford the possibility of complementing each other. These uses appear to be sanctioned by parents as valid uses of the home internet. Compared with previous findings into edutainment computer software, these young people do derive pleasure from edutainment. This may be due to the different conditions at work here, for instance, the motivation for these activities stemmed from the young people themselves, not from their parents providing opportunities and sometimes applying pressure in an attempt to enhance their education. In the instances described above, the so-called educational benefits are incidental and a bonus for both parents and children.

Children and young people's uses of the internet for homework

Context

The term homework is usually taken to mean 'any work set by the school which is undertaken out of school hours for which the learner takes the primary responsibility' (Hallam, 2004: 5). As Hallam adds, homework may also be undertaken on school premises as well as in the home or elsewhere. (See also Cowan & Hallam, 1999.)

Since the introduction of the National Curriculum in the UK in 1988, there has been increased focus on homework as a means of raising attainment. The 1994

Ofsted report (1994), for instance, concluded that where homework was 'treated seriously' by staff and pupils 'it had the potential to raise standards, extend coverage of the curriculum, allow more effective use to be made of lesson time and improve pupils' study skills and attitudes to learning' (Hallam, 2004: 25). In the light of this, the (then) DfEE introduced national guidance (1998) on the amount and kind of homework tasks that might be set. Schools were encouraged, in particular, to develop homework strategies that involved parents in their aims. These guidelines appear to have had an impact: studies have indicated that there has been an increase in the number of schools that have set up homework policies (Birmingham, Keys, & Lee, 1999) and in the guidance issued within schools regarding time allocation for homework, marking and feedback (Felgate & Kendall, 2000).

Yet, research in general showing that homework raises standards of achievement is inconclusive (Cowan & Hallam, 1999; Hallam, 2004). Authors of previous studies have highlighted the difficulty of identifying a clear 'homework effect' on achievement in the light of other mediating factors, such as home and family background, commonly associated with educational success (Weston, 1999). Hallam (2004) notes, for instance, that a particular area for concern is the relationship between homework and attainment for pupils from different groups with different levels of social capital: girls and boys, ethnic minorities, high and low attainers. Some types of homework may have advantages for those with access to particular facilities and resources and thus disadvantage those who do not (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003). As these authors suggest, learning at home is neither unproblematic nor socially neutral.

A key factor in the mediation of homework within the home is the involvement of parents. In recent years, there has been increased emphasis on encouraging parents to become involved in their children's education (Cowan & Hallam, 1999). Parents tend to see the setting of homework as important and perceive that they have a role to play in supporting their children in carrying out their homework. There is a good deal of evidence that their expectations are extremely important in determining the time spent on homework though again research is inconclusive as to whether parental participation in homework raises achievement (Chen & Ehrenberg, 1993; MacBeath & Turner, 1990). A recent

study by Buckingham and Scanlon (2003) found that 88 percent of parents indicated that they sometimes or always helped with homework, with this number declining as children got older. Interestingly, they found that middle-class parents were more likely to say that they always helped their children with homework than working-class parents were. Brown's (1993; 2000) analysis of the Impact project, a primary mathematics home schooling initiative, highlighted how the process of parental participation could reinforce the reproduction of existing social inequalities through schooling. The forms of interaction and participation fostered in the project, which encouraged parents to work with their children on homework and provide feedback to the teacher on how they performed, lead to assumptions by teachers of the value placed on schooling by parents. As concluded in a similar study by Lareau (1989), the relations between teachers and parents, expected and encouraged by schools, drew heavily on the class culture of the middle-classes rather than that of the working-class parents who were more likely to be ill at ease in their interactions with school staff. Further studies have concluded that some parents may say they are inadequate in dealing with the academic demands of homework (MacBeath & Turner, 1990). Others report that they find homework makes too great a demand on their time (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burrow, 1995), particularly for single parents (Reay, 1998) and mothers (MacLachlan, 1996). Critics of homework in the US, such as Kravolec and Buelec (2000) argue that homework has a detrimental influence on the family. They maintain that despite parents' '... best intentions, the most perfectly organized homework schedule, a "quiet place to study", and rigid homework rules, homework disrupts family life beyond a tolerable limit' (18).

Notwithstanding these kinds of criticisms, as noted earlier, it is clear that the home remains seen as an important site for education with parental involvement viewed as vital for educational success (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2003). Furthermore, the internet-connected computer is seen as one of the ways through which parents seek to ensure that success.

Using the internet for homework

Several studies have highlighted the extensive uses of the internet at home made by young people to support formal education in the form of homework. In

the UK, Livingstone and Bober found that among the 84 percent of 9-19 year olds who use the internet daily or weekly (at home, school or in other locations), 90 percent use it to do work for school or college. Furthermore, 60 percent of 9-19 year olds in full-time education view the internet as the most helpful tool for getting information for homework. Qualitative data uncovered that young people conduct a 'quick search' to support their homework and avoid a trip to the library (Livingstone & Bober, 2003). In the US, findings from the Pew Internet & American Life Project (Lenhart et al., 2001) were similar with 94 percent of young people between the ages of 12-17 who have internet access saying that they use the internet for school research; 78 percent say they believe the internet supports their school work; 47 percent say it helps them 'a lot'.

Within my sample, most examples given in relation to internet use for homework were grouped around young people aged between 11-15, with or without the help of a parent or sibling. Where there are examples of younger children using the internet for homework, these are always undertaken with the close support of a parent or older sibling (see below for further discussion of family homework support). Older teenagers often said that they used the internet for homework whilst at school, in private study lessons, for instance. Whilst issues of level and quality of access do impact on uses of the internet for homework, what did not emerge strongly from the data were significant differences in the breadth of searches undertaken by members of the different family types. It is possible that the prioritising of education within families may override the usual concerns and regulatory practices relating to cost in many families. Furthermore, there were examples of *transitional* and *improving* families downloading sites to their computers to keep costs down, to be discussed in more detail below. In this section, I will firstly explore how young people find resources for homework on the internet, how levels and quality of access influence uses, how the material found is deployed in practice and how other members of the family are involved in supporting homework.

Resources

The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2001) categorised activities to support schoolwork as follows: online study aids where users can, for a fee, download branded study aids such as Cliff's or Monarch Notes or they can

search for free web pages that contain the content they need; research for papers and projects where users conduct online searches that take the place of a visit to the library; use instant messaging or email as a homework helper where online teenagers turn to friends, classmates, and teachers for help; websites about schools or classes where schools disseminate information about the school, subjects and activities; websites as schoolwork where users create a web page for a school project and finally, net cheaters where users cut and paste from a website and present the work as their own (either free content or charged). The uses of the internet to support homework within my sample families are more narrow in range (though these categories do more closely reflect the wider uses found for adult study below). There were no examples of family members paying fees to access particular websites, and the impression was that the families would not countenance paying such charges. Rhiannon Grant, aged 16, gives an example of how encountering sites that need payment can be a source of frustration:

> Rhiannon: Erm I'm in the sixth form. Not too bad really. I keep finding these really good websites but you have to pay for them. They've got like actual course work examples on it, that I can copy. [laughs]
>
> (Rhiannon Grant, aged 16, int. 3)

Most examples focused on using the web to search for information (textual or visual), either through entering key words into search engines or returning to sites considered reliable and useful and often stored on favourites/bookmarks lists (see Chapter 7 for discussion of the evaluation of the reliability of websites). Frequent examples are given for searching for images either alone or to complement text, again reflecting theories of the turn from verbal to visual modes of representation (Kress, 1998). Adele Dunne-Osborne, aged 12, gives a typical case of a homework search:

> Adele: Just, you press search, yes? And this thing comes up on the side, yes? Which says that you can type in what you want to search. So I just typed in 'artists', yeah? And then when I went to it, there was this page where you had all these options to go to and I chose them and then it wrote: 'type in your artist' so I wrote Georgia O'Keefe and then I got this bit of information and some sketches of her.
>
> (Adele Dunne-Osborne, aged 12, int. 3)

Young people tend to use a range of differently oriented sites according to their purpose, through either returning to sites they know or as the result of random searches. With random searches, they usually do not recall in interview the source of the information they found and it is in these searches that most issues arise about the ability to evaluate. The so-called 'trusted' sites they return to again and again may include educationally-oriented sites, for example: www.infoplease.com, www.learn.co.uk and the BBC's revision site, Bitesize; culturally-oriented sites: National Gallery, British Museum, Hampton Court; and commercially-oriented sites for shopping outlets such as Argos and Amazon. Vivien Bourne, aged 12, for instance, likes to use the Argos site to find pictures to complement her written work.

Vivien also gave an example of a work sheet, set by her music teacher, which gave the URL to a particular site on which she was asked to search for answers to music-related questions. This appeared as an unusual practice amongst the other young people in the sample and may reflect Vivien's attendance at a 'technology college' which prioritises uses of the internet more highly. Moreover, it is interesting that Vivien also emerged as one of only two youngsters who said that they had tried using email to support their homework, though, in Vivien's case, this had been unsuccessful:

> Vivien: Yeah. But if I'm like... I once I didn't understand this maths question and Mum didn't understand it either so I came on here to try and find the answer. Like I sent emails off to these teachers and stuff. This... On this er Channel 4 website but...
>
> Fiona: They weren't er available though, all of the teachers.
>
> Vivien: No. If you want to find out about your homework come on and chat on Tuesday evening.
>
> (Vivien Bourne, aged 12, and Mrs Bourne, int. 2)

Lori Bradshaw, aged 11, had also used email to support her homework through sending her homework to school for printing. No other young person mentioned using email or instant messaging to help with their homework. This reflects previous UK research which has shown that there seems to be little tradition of working with friends on homework, apart from an occasional telephone call to

clarify issues, that could have potentially transferred to internet use (MacBeath, 1996; MacBeath & Turner, 1990).

Finally, in this section, I will briefly mention the widespread use of revision sites as they represent a different kind of activity from the sites visited to locate information for homework. Bobby Bond, aged 18, had used www.examcentre.com for past papers to help with his recent A-levels. Many of the young people said that they had used the BBC's Bitesize site to support their SATS, GCSEs and A-levels and would return to them in future, for further help. Sally Bond, aged 16, says:

> Sally: GCSE Bitesize is very, very useful because it has revision bits so you can learn for revision and you go on to a test, and it tests you.
>
> (Sally Bond, aged 16, int. 3)

Socio-economic constraints on homework uses

In the introduction to this section, I noted that, for the most part, socio-economic background did not influence homework uses due to the prioritising of education in the home. However, there were examples in the *transitional* and *improving* families of parents encouraging the downloading of sites to the computer to save the cost of being connected and thus limiting the interactivity afforded by being online in the first place. Whilst these practices relate to both leisure and educational uses, the examples provided relate to revision and homework uses, and it is for this reason that I include them here. In the (*improving*) Grant family, Rhiannon, aged 14, mentions that the last time she used Bitesize, she had downloaded the pages she needed to Word to save money. Anita Jackson, a member of a low income *transitional* family details how members of her family are encouraged to click on sites to download them to the computer; and how she used this established method to print out the relevant GCSE pages from Bitesize for her oldest son, Phil, aged 15:

> Anita: What we tend to do is erm, six o'clock is cheap time so I make them wait 'till six and we tend to have say half hour blocks and I'll say you can use it for half an hour. Click on anything you want to click on in that half hour and then you can look at it you know in the first ten minutes or so, click on everything then you can work off line for the rest of the time. [....] But I've done it when I printed up BBC education, I did all the GCSEs. And I spent one whole night clicking on and loading up every site without reading it, but

> every page. And then I spent the next night sort of printing them all up. So rather than read it you just click on it, let it load. Click onto the next one, let it load. So I mean I'm assuming that saved time, money. Yeah. Well we used a full colour cartridge! A ream of paper.[....] And then he hardly looked at it. He preferred to watch the videos instead.
>
> (Mrs Jackson, int. 2)

This shows how Mrs Jackson uses initiative in negotiating the relatively high cost of internet access so that her children will not, as she sees it, lose out. Unfortunately, in doing so she limits whatever level of interactivity is possible and as she says herself, the print outs fail to engage her son. This example shows how budgetary restraints, in families committed to education, mean that levels and quality of access are lowered to such a degree that the internet loses its interactive quality and presumably, limits the potential it affords for learning.

Raiding the internet?

As part of the UK-Kids-Go-Online project, Livingstone and Bober (2004), consider whether young people in the UK between the ages of 12-19 who go online daily or weekly, copy work from the internet into their homework; they name this a 'less approved' activity. The study found that 21 percent admit to having copied work for a school project and handing it in as their own. Likewise, in the US, the Pew Internet and American online project (Lenhart et al., 2001) found that 18 percent of all online teens say they know of someone who has used the internet to cheat on a paper or test. Whilst the latter study considers such activities to be cheating, or as in the former study, at the very least, 'less approved', Facer et al. (2003) have debated whether it is time for a reconsideration of these concepts. They note in their study that young people operate a 'shopping list' principle for homework, identifying 'nuggets of information' that they need to complete an allotted task, in turn, using a range of strategies to conceal rather than acknowledge sources. Yet, the authors recognise a conflict here between the internet as a powerful information tool and educational resource, encouraged by parents at home, but which translates into a form of cheating when it enters the context of the school. On the one hand, they cite teachers' concerns that work submitted may be copied from a digital source without the young person's engagement in the material. On the other, they draw on Snyder who points out that 'being literate in the context of

these technologies is to do with understanding how the different modalities are combined in complex ways to create meaning' (Snyder, 2001: 119). They argue that understanding how to combine different textual resources to develop new voices may be an important feature of a new definition of literacy today and that, for example, copying could be considered as a form of 'creative transformation' or representation of the object being copied. To explore these issues further, I shall outline the range of ways that young people deploy the information they find for homework in my sample, and how both young people and their parents view these activities.

Family type was not an indicator of the practices undertaken by young people with the information they found on the web to support their homework or with how these practices were viewed by themselves and their parents across the sample. Common uses included copying and pasting both text and images into projects and school books, and printing out text and images and submitting them in their original form. Less common references were made to locating text and then putting it into the young person's 'own words', using science information to 'back me up' when writing theory, researching how to work out a maths problem and applying it successfully to homework, finding poems and adding them to an English assignment to strengthen the conclusions, finding images, printing them out and painting them, and looking up colours on a French translation site.

The openness and eagerness with which most young people give their accounts of common internet homework practices in interview, mostly in front of their parents, suggests that these uses are known to parents and sanctioned by them. Nor do most of these young people appear to have any consciousness that their copying and pasting could be conceived of as cheating: the dominant family belief is that the school encourages and receives this work as legitimate and parents view it as valuable. An example of this is provided by the (*established*) Burnley family when Julia, aged 13, describes the teamwork that goes into her younger (twin) sisters' homework:

> Julia: And then to generally find the search engine and then put in the number, and then... Or the... the words and then Mum will say...Says

> oh this is good, and generally like, yeah, and they copy it and put it into Word documents.
>
> (Julia Burnley, aged 13, int. 3)

Obviously, this represents a gap between how young people and parents in my study perceive the situation and the concerns of teachers found in the study carried out by Facer et al. (2003). In some ways, the differing attitudes are understandable. Not only do young people give examples of their teachers encouraging uses of the internet for homework, but the sources of information and images they retrieve may be easily recognizable even if they remain unacknowledged. I am thinking here of where young people complement their written work with images of well-known paintings or submit print outs from the web which are obvious versions of web pages. However, for some materials and practices, there still exists a grey area of copying and pasting into projects and schoolbooks that could give rise for concern.

A minority of young people and their parents did voice either an awareness of the issue of copying and pasting and/or concerns about how the internet was being used for homework. Andrew Manders-Short, aged 11, describes how he used the online Encyclopaedia Britannica to complete his homework:

> Andrew: Which was very useful for my homework. Well erm I printed some of it out and then I copied it, well not copied it but I put it into my own words in my erm, into my book and it really helped. I got loads of information. I mean just... This one paragraph was loads of information for me. It just completed my homework for me.
>
> (Andrew Manders-Short, aged 11, int. 2)

The way that Andrew corrects himself in this excerpt implies his awareness of the issues involved in copying out information directly from a website. Further concerns arise for parents in homework uses. In Growing up Digital (1998), Tapscott advocates a paradigm shift in learning from 'absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn'. He argues that in a world of rapid change, the important skill is being able to access what you need and synthesize it to 'higher level structures'. These claims appear somewhat unrealistic compared with parental concerns about how deep their children's level of engagement goes with the material they find on the web for homework.

As Selwyn (in press) says, there is a thin line between 'learning' and 'acquiring random snippets of information'. Lisa Golding, for instance, is keen for her sons to learn how to navigate the web, but concerned about the depth of learning that it affords compared with a book:

> Lisa: The other thing I still have a problem with, and I really need to get out into the 21st century, is that I still think ... it is not that it is too easy ... well, it is too easy, [....] If David needed to do some homework and research a particular artist, lets say, I don't know, who, I can't think of one... and you know that you can go onto the internet and go into a virtual gallery and pull off every bit of work he has done or print off his life history, or his biography, and I have still got that niggling worry that they will not know how to use a library or book. [....] It's like he [Piers] just said "I've got to find out about something for history. About the Jazz Age we're doing in America. And he winds me up by saying "I'll just go and look up and I'll click on the Jazz Age and I'll print it all off and I won't read it." He said that to me yesterday morning because he won't go to the library. He says that just to annoy me.
>
> (Mrs Golding, int. 2)

This except shows both Lisa Golding's reservations about the potential lack of engagement her son has with the material researched, and that her oldest son, aged 17, has taken these concerns on board and now mobilises them to 'annoy' her.

In this section, I have shown the range of common and less common uses deployed by young people for their homework and the level of most parents' and young people's acceptance of these practices and also their concerns. In general, most parents are very enthusiastic about the internet, borne out by the encouragement and backing they give their children towards using it. The next section will discuss how parents are involved in supporting children's homework.

Family homework support

As detailed earlier, the home is increasingly emphasised as a site for education where parental involvement is viewed as necessary for young people to achieve educational success. An aspect of research carried out by Solomon et al. (2002) was to explore the habitual patterns of homework practices which evolve in families around dimensions of gender and ability and which underpin who helps. They found that the division of labour for homework support was often

based on aptitude for particular subjects and that these were frequently based on traditional gender differences in ascribed subject abilities. In particular, and relevant to this study, the authors write that fathers commonly claim expertise in particular academic areas, such as, technology. In this section, I will explore the issues of who supports homework in families in relation to using the internet and the strategies by which they do so.

In the sample families, who helps with homework undertaken on the internet frequently reflects the level of expertise of each member of the family (see Chapter 7). The data suggest, for example, that most young people (in the age range of 11-15) in *established* families, whose skills are more developed and internet uses more autonomous, tend to be more likely to undertake their internet–related homework with minimal support. Younger children tend to be supported either by parents or older siblings (or both as in the earlier example of the Burnley family's teamwork). In the Bourne family, Jackie, aged 7, recalled that Vivien, aged 12, had helped her to find out information about trams for her history homework. The mapping of patterns of competence onto the member of the family who supports homework means that the findings of the study undertaken by Solomon et al. (2002) are not borne out in relation to homework undertaken specifically on the internet.

In the *improving* families, the spread of parental involvement in supporting homework is more evenly shared between mothers and fathers with fewer examples of older siblings helping their younger brothers and sisters. This finding again reflects that level of competence can predict who helps with homework undertaken on the internet. As will be shown in Chapter 7, expertise in *improving* families is more likely to be spread across the different members of the household with young people, therefore, much less likely to be autonomous users. In these families, therefore, the role of supporting homework fell to one parent or the other, or both, on a habitual basis. Where the mother was said to help the most, this was due to possession of the appropriate skills combined with being on hand, for instance, where the mother is a home-worker or employed part-time and at home more often. Similarly, the fathers who most often provided internet homework support were the home-workers and/or the family members who possessed considerably more internet literacy skills than

their partners. In half the *improving* families, a pattern emerged of mothers giving offline help whilst fathers gave online help. The Grants provide an example where use of the computer and internet interrupts the established (offline) pattern of support:

> Maria: Yeah. And I... I tend to be the one that helps Tim with his homework if it... Well for homework on a daily basis so it would... I would automatically...
>
> Robert: And I'll tend to help Rhiannon with her stuff because she needs... 'Cos I do lots of image editing and stuff like that.
>
> (Mrs and Mr Grant, int. 1)

This example shows how the activity influences who provides the support in drawing on parents' different aptitudes in line with the study by Solomon et al. (2002). However, the possession of some mothers' internet-related competencies overall within the *improving* families has undermined the commonly found traditional gendering of technology, to some extent.

Amongst the *transitional* families, a different pattern emerges with mothers giving more homework help, both on and offline. Occasionally, there are examples of older boys in these families helping out their younger siblings, particularly where the older boy is a committed user and 'helping out' could secure him extra internet access. The ability of these mothers to help hinges on their possession of the appropriate internet skills to be able to provide support combined with their being on hand more often because of their part-time work hours. In the Parker household, for instance, Mrs Parker sits with her daughter, Sian, aged 11, to help her 'if she is searching [for] something for school, we will get together and have a look'. There is also a suggestion later in the interview, that Mrs Parker is keen to supervise Sian's uses due to her own anxieties about internet content (to be discussed further in Chapter 9). The finding that mothers give more homework help in these families clearly conflicts with the study carried out by Solomon et al. (2002) in its finding that technological expertise is more frequently claimed by fathers. This is due in this case to these mothers' recent participation in Higher Education courses. It does, however, reflect previous research by Haythornwaite and Kazmer (2002) which focuses on distance education but is relevant here, and has noted how students gain more

experience online then, in turn, 'leak' out their capabilities and uses into other worlds, such as home and work, in this way. These authors point out that new online learners benefit from a 'dual' education, learning both the educational content of the programme and a grounding in the use of technologies for work and social interaction (Haythornthwaite et al., 2000).

In the section above, I have explored how parental (and sibling) involvement supports homework use from the point of view of who provides help and the strategies through which other family members seek to help. I have also shown how levels of competence govern which member of the family will tend to help out when homework is internet-related, and they are on hand, and therefore, do not necessarily follow the gender stereotyped patterns found in some previous research (see Solomon et al., 2002).

Reproducing class differences?

In the introduction to this section, I drew on contemporary understandings of homework to provide a context for this study. I outlined how, on the one hand, there is increased focus on homework in the UK with associated parental involvement as a means of raising standards. On the other, there is a lack of conclusive evidence showing that homework is able to raise standards, particularly given the inherent difficulties in measuring this due to the varying levels of cultural, economic, educational and social capital. A key question for this study, therefore, is whether class differences are being reproduced through use of the internet for education and learning. Results here are mixed. All parents in the sample appear oriented towards their children's education with few differences emerging between the different family types in how children and young people find appropriate websites and what they do with what they've found. Yet, differences do occur when considering the help given by parents (and siblings) with homework which are influenced by the relative affluence of the family. For instance, children in *established* families require less help with the internet than their counterparts in *transitional* and *improving* families, presumably having developed more sophisticated internet skills through higher levels of access. Whilst parents' approaches to regulation of the internet may well have played a role in this (see Chapter 9), the influence of socio-economic status is borne out by the finding that in both *transitional* and *improving* families,

there are examples of parents and children downloading websites to the computer, or in one case, printing them out, to limit time online and therefore, save money. Moreover, it is possible that the internet, in these cases, becomes a source of further stress for parents. Not only do parents feel they are responsible for monitoring their children's completion of homework with or without the internet but they also feel obliged to provide adequate support for them to do so. In the case of the internet, this represents relatively expensive and ongoing charges for some families. Moreover, as we saw in the example of Anita Jackson spending whole nights downloading the GCSE pages from the Bitesize site and printing them out, the internet for homework can add to parents' workloads and take time from the family. This data is redolent of Kravolec and Buell's (2000) finding that homework has the potential to disrupt family life beyond what they call 'a tolerable limit'. Furthermore, in line with earlier research (MacBeath & Turner, 1990), there are examples in the data of parents feeling inadequate when unable to help their children with difficult homework. These instances refer to homework *per se* rather than occurrences of parents and siblings lacking the internet literacy skills to adequately support homework activities (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of this). Yet, in these cases, the internet was often viewed as a resource through which parents could help their children as in the example given of Vivien Bourne and her mother emailing a maths problem (though with fruitless results).

What the examples above show overall is that whilst socio-economic status does not appear to influence the kinds of activities that children and young people carry out on the internet for education and learning, it may well influence the extent of their use and the level of interactivity afforded. In relation to levels of parental stress and the detrimental effect that homework can have on the family, the internet appears as both help and hindrance, acting as a resource for both parents and children but also having the potential to stir parental anxieties around the depth of learning it affords and to disrupt family time. In the next section, I will explore how parents use the internet for their own studies, returning to these issues in the conclusions.

Parents' uses of the internet to support adult studies

Whereas figures in relation to children's and young people's homework use are relatively straightforward, corresponding figures for adults' internet use to support formal education in the home are more ambiguous. One of the reasons for this is the wide range of possible interpretations of what constitutes learning. The Pew Internet and American Life project, for example, included research for job training in their study. They found that 53 percent of adult internet users have gone online to do research for college or job training and that, on any given day, eight percent of adult internet users are online doing research for these same purposes (Lenhart et al., 2001). Selwyn (in press), for instance, conducted research to understand 'adults' actual level of use of ICT's for educative purposes in the home' (5). However, though internet activities were specifically looked at in the study, web search categories included not only study but also work and business. My study then differs from these in looking specifically at the internet to support both on and offline formal educational courses in the home and particularly, how adults' uses differ in comparison with their children. This section will briefly outline how adults are engaged in formal education within the sample, which aspects of the internet they use and how they deploy these resources.

Within my sample, six mothers were engaged in degree courses and one father was undertaking a Masters; four of the degrees were undertaken at local universities (the degrees full-time and the MA part-time); whereas the remainder were undertaken part-time by mothers, via distance learning courses. I am excluding other shorter courses in this section as they tended to be in IT skills and, as such, will be included in Chapter 7. The family members engaged in Higher Education were members of the *improving* and *transitional* families. Again, as with the children, the prioritising of education seemed to take precedence over the usual cost concerns, with the proviso that there remain instances of family members downloading web pages to their computers as a way of saving money (with the resultant loss of interactivity). In the Craine family, where cost concerns were sidelined as the result of needing to meet deadlines, Angela Craine explains how this would occur:

Sue: When would you normally do it? Do you wait until the kids have gone to bed or?

Angela: It depends, I tend to snatch time wherever I can because if I'm researching something, particularly from the internet, I try to do it in an evening obviously 'cos it's cheap, it's free on the erm what do you call it, the scheme that we're on with BT. It's free in an evening, but if I'm working on something to a timescale and I've got to get it finished then I'll do it during the day, whenever. It just depends really.

(Mrs Craine, int. 2)

The example also shows how the priority for this mother is to fit in her course work whenever she can rather than sticking to the usual budgetary restraints around using the internet; to 'snatch time' as she calls it (see Haythornthwaite & Kazmer, 2002 for further discussion of how learners juggle the competing demands of courses with their multiple 'social worlds'). Having briefly outlined the sample, and considered the influence of access on adult study, I will look next at what internet resources these adults deploy.

Resources

As mentioned earlier, adults use a much wider range of internet resources to support their studies than their children do. These reflect the development of UK university websites as an important resource for students. In a sense, the provision of these websites acts as scaffolding for users to learn the potential for the internet to support their studies. The range of uses are closer to those used by US school students, as seen in the findings from the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Lenhart et al., 2001) detailed above, than their own children's activities. There are examples of UK adults using most of the categories listed in the Pew report, more specifically, research for papers and projects; instant messaging (and email) as a homework helper; websites about schools or classes and websites as schoolwork.

Across the different family types (*transitional* and *improving*), there were not significant differences in the range of resources used by adults to support their studies. Most of the parents, for instance, recalled searches for information they had made, closely related to their courses, in common with their children. However, there were far fewer examples of searching for images. Many of the mothers expressed their dissatisfaction with searching in general, because they

frequently failed to find 'exactly what I wanted to know'. Often, they blamed their difficulties on their lack of competence and said that they preferred to use books. One mother, studying a Women's Studies degree, also said that she felt the proliferation of commercial material on the internet was making it much harder to sustain and find sites relating to women:

> Sandra: Yes, but I find that the internet has changed over four years that I have been using it, websites have changed. Search engines still have, when I first went into it, it was purely for information, academic information, which was quite easily found. But I find now it is not, it is more focused on shopping, entertainment. And those interesting sites that were there maybe four years ago, aren't there anymore, the focus of it has changed to leisure and sport and entertainment hasn't it?
>
> (Mrs Parker, int. 1)

In part, her frustration may have stemmed from the disappearance of a university website dedicated to a module she had completed on Feminist Theory (and set up by one of her tutors). In common with most adults studying in the sample, Mrs Parker had made a great deal of use of this type of resource in preference to having a 'trusted' list of sites established on the favourites/bookmarks list as some of the young people did (including Mrs Parker's daughter). The sites included on the module website were seen to be recommended, so that issues of evaluation did not arise as far as the respondents were concerned.

In contrast to the young people discussed above, the parents interviewed did not relate instances of copying and pasting from the web into their coursework or projects; most examples given were of information being incorporated into documents that pulled together a range of materials from different sources. This was suggestive of a greater degree of manipulation or 'creative transformation' than was implied by several of the children's quotes, requiring engaging with them in more depth. Angela Craine explains how she would search using the internet and incorporate the material she found into her coursework:

> Angela: Just basically reading news but when I'm researching or doing another social policy essay it will give me a report about education action zones. I took a lot of information out of the Guardian. I used, you know, the quotes and things from politicians and what have you. [...] Because I've

> been editing erm a report and I've been trying to get all the information together [...]
>
> (Mrs Craine, int. 2)

Whilst allowing for the possibility that adults are more sophisticated than children in how they present themselves to an interviewer, the examples given were, for the most part, suggestive of using a range of online resources, not simply the copying and pasting recorded in the interviews with some of their children. This would reflect Selwyn's (in press) finding that ICTs do not facilitate 'new' forms of learning *per se*, but instead facilitate learning with older forms, such as encyclopaedias, for example, but with less success. This was borne out by most of the parents in the study though Angela Craine remains an exception in how effectively she considers her internet searches when compared with offline resources.

Most of the mothers in the sample of adults studying formal education emphasised the importance of their peers for sustaining their commitment and motivation. These relationships were obviously a source of enjoyment and a means of preventing the feelings of 'isolation' often ascribed to studying, particularly when the course is via distance learning. The internet was seen as a positive means of sustaining these relationships between face-to-face meetings and for adults, in a way that went beyond the Pew categorisation of instant messaging as a homework helper where 'online teens turn to friends, classmates, and teachers via instant messages or email' for help with difficult homework (Lenhart et al., 2001). Whilst they did submit essays and receive feedback from tutors via email, their uses more closely reflect Haythornwaite and Kazmer's conclusion regarding relationships with peers:

> When off campus, students reinvent physical proximity as virtual proximity, appropriating technology and the opportunities afforded them by class and programme structures to socialise and work with people they met on-campus, for example, by engaging in near-synchronous email exchanges. (Haythornthwaite & Kazmer, 2002: 439)

Despite the enthusiasm shown for these online contacts, the continuing importance of face-to-face communication was also emphasised in examples

given by mothers of their need to meet in person, alongside their email contact. The most pointed of these came from Sandra Parker who explained that when her Women's Studies course had unexpectedly introduced an online module, her peers had met weekly in any case:

> Sandra: Yeah. I had. Well we've... We'd... we'd done a module erm... We did a module on erm the internet erm feminist tradition, second level. Er I found it very isolating. We actually erm met every week because we couldn't you know... And that's the only problem with Open University [for a further course of study] isn't it really, you are isolated and you do have to erm motivate yourself which I always find I'm better motivated with a group of people!
>
> (Mrs Parker, int. 2)

It is interesting to consider whether these relationships last after the end of the course. By the stage of the third interviews (nearly two years after the course had ended), this group of women were still in regular contact. Sandra Parker remarked, for example, that the only difference was that the emails had got much longer as the result of having more news to catch up on during the longer periods apart. In contrast, Freya Liang had also made extensive use of email to stay in touch with a particular group of students she had met face-to-face during a summer school as part of a distance learning course. But, at the two year stage, she had lost contact with them when the courses they had in common ended. She explains this loss of contact in terms of the work involved in sustaining these contacts combined with shortage of time:

> Freya: Doing the course kept me going into email on a fairly regular basis and then I stopped my course so I didn't have any reason to go in and. [....] I would reply to people's emails to me but I wouldn't initiate it. Erm and it just became another chore that you've got to do. Oh, I haven't got time for that, grrr.
>
> (Mrs Liang, int. 3)

Finally, in this section, I will briefly mention that two of the members of the sample were required to publish a web page as part of their courses. These mothers, Sandra Parker and Anita Jackson both achieved this without having any prior experience, but neither had sustained their page nor felt motivated to continue using these skills (see Chapter 7 for further discussion of website building). Having explored the much wider range of uses made by adults using

the internet to support formal study and their deployment of these resources when compared with their children, the next section will draw conclusions.

Conclusions

At the opening of this chapter, I outlined how educationalists, advertisers and to an extent, the UK Government, emphasise the potential of the internet as a means of harnessing educational benefit. Papert (1996), for instance, claims that the internet facilitates children's engagement in more 'natural' forms of 'home-style', self-directed learning. Close examination of the discourses surrounding internet use has shown how this rhetoric has become embedded in 'common-sense' notions surrounding the internet, motivating families to get connected and, as seen in the sample families, establishing concepts such as 'interactivity' as synonymous with learning.

This chapter has sought to challenge the rhetoric by looking in detail at the use of the internet in practice to support formal learning: homework for children and study for parents. What has emerged is that the majority of children and young people's uses are quite limited and in many respects banal. As Selwyn (in press) has noted in relation to adults: 'the computer was not facilitating 'new' forms of learning *per se*' (12) but replacing established forms, such as the use of encyclopaedias, with computer and internet use. Likewise, the data show that in the sample families, only the narrowest of uses are being made: children conduct web searches (with associated issues of copying and pasting); they use Revision sites to prepare for exams; they seldom use email to seek advice. The minority of parents engaged in Higher Education seem to use the internet a little more broadly to support their studies: accessing the resources provided on university websites; conducting web searches for research; engaging in instant messaging and email to stay in touch with their peers and tutors and occasionally, publishing their own web pages. It appears that their wider uses are facilitated by the demands of the course, for example, the requirement to write a web page as part of the curriculum, combined with a liking for peer contact to sustain motivation and support when this is not easily available offline, for instance, during distance learning courses. As noted by

Haythornwaite and Kazmer, email affords a means of establishing 'virtual proximity' when students are off-campus (Haythornthwaite & Kazmer, 2002).

Whilst uses across all the families in the sample appear limited compared with the rhetoric, a further cause for concern is how the internet is emerging as a means through which class differences are being reproduced in its use for education and learning by children and young people. All the families in the sample are oriented towards education and the discourses surrounding educational uses of the internet in the sample families suggest few significant differences in attitudes to how the internet can support education. Yet how this is played out in practice differs greatly, in this case reflecting the relative affluence of the family. It is mainly the older children in the *established* families, for example, who have enjoyed a level and quality of access which has allowed them to develop skills and competencies to use the internet autonomously, so that their homework research is 'self-directed'. This meant that whereas the children in the *established* families need only minimal support from their parents for internet-related support with their homework, less affluent families are also caught in the double bind of having to give children more support online whilst also having to more severely monitor internet use.

This is a further dimension of the subtleties that exist in relation to the digital divide, and how level and quality of access may influence learning and education both in terms of supporting course content and internet literacy. Cost saving measures, such as downloading websites to the computer, also presumably undermine the so-called interactive qualities of the internet and seemingly, the potential it may afford for learning. The next chapter will draw on these arguments, and look more closely at the skills and competencies needed to effectively use the internet and the factors that influence their acquisition.

Chapter 7: Internet Literacy

> I wouldn't have said that any of us really know, we know how to find a site if we've got an address. Every search I've ever done has failed.
>
> (Mrs Golding, int. 1)

Introduction

In the last chapter, I examined discourses around education and the internet in families and how the internet is used at home to support formal education at school, college and university. An issue that arose from the data was whether children and adults have the competence to use the internet effectively to support their studies. This chapter will explore the skills and competencies needed to effectively use the internet and how far these are developed within families.

What skills and competencies are needed to use the internet?

In recent decades, a debate has focused on the skills and competencies needed to use digital technologies effectively – so-called *digital*, *computer*, *internet* literacies and so forth. Buckingham (2001) argues that children and young people need more than just functional skills to be able to evaluate and use information critically, to be able to transform it into knowledge, to stay safe and be empowered to become producers in their own right. Likewise, Livingstone (2003a: 3) has defined media literacy as the ability to 'access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts'. Both authors have sought to widen the remit of schools to teach not just the functional skills and competencies needed to use the internet but particularly the critical literacies which they emphasise as equally important. These views have recently been consolidated in a report on children and young people's 'media literacy' for Ofcom focused primarily on television, radio and mobile telephony as well as the internet (Buckingham et al., 2005). The report is organised around Ofcom's definition of 'media literacy' as 'the ability to *access, understand* and *create* communications in a variety of contexts' (5). The report offers the expanded definition of these three components as follows:

> 'Access' refers to the ability to locate media content that is appropriate to one's needs (and to avoid content that is not). It involves the manipulation of hardware and software, and the gathering and application of information about what is available. 'Understand' refers to what users do when they have located content. [....] 'Create' extends the notion of literacy from 'reading' to 'writing' in media, although it also entails abilities both to access technology and to understand media forms and conventions. (Buckingham et al., 2005: 6)

The report draws attention to the unevenness of the focus of research carried out into these three key areas relevant to internet literacy. Much of the research so far has focused on access, both in terms of the physical availability of the pre-requisite equipment in a location where the level of use facilitates the development of skills; and children and young people's possession of the *functional* skills and competencies needed to gain access to content. The report argues that barriers to the development of this kind of functional media literacy are primarily barriers to *access*. Whilst barriers of social class and economic status are the most well-established of these, as we saw in Chapter 5, the organisation of time and space within the home combined with a range of other factors also play a part. In relation to the skills and competencies needed to *access* media content, a fair amount is known about how young people locate material, but less about what Ofcom calls understanding: what they do with it when they find it. Previous research tends to be based on fairly small case studies; larger and longer studies would be helpful to explore this issue further.

It is argued in the Ofcom report that there is a particular need for research about children's abilities to evaluate internet content; particularly in relation to their awareness of the commercial motivations of producers. Whilst children may have more experience with the internet than their parents, they may lack the 'real-world' experience with which media representations can be compared; making it more difficult for them to detect inaccuracy and bias. As yet, there is little research about how children make judgements about the reliability of information they access via the internet and how they deal with unwelcome or distressing content. A further area where little research has been carried out is how children and young people interpret and understand the design of web pages and the ways in which links within and between websites are organised.

Burn and Parker (2003) and Buckingham and Scanlon (2004) have analysed the structure of 'edutainment' sites aimed at children including factors such as: the mixture of verbal and visual elements; the navigational structure of sites; the forms of interactivity on offer and the ways in which users are addressed. However, this research needs to be complemented by analyses of how children engage with such sites.

In relation to how children and young people *create* on the internet, the research tends to focus on educational settings, both formal and informal, rather than the home. Another issue is that 'creativity' is not easily defined in relation to the internet where 'communication' may blur with 'production; 'interactivity' with 'consumption'. As stated in the Ofcom review; 'There is clearly a continuum here between activities that might be seen as forms of 'interaction' and those that involve 'creation', such as the production of websites, images and videos.'(Buckingham et al., 2005: 23). There is a growing body of research around teenagers' online productions, particularly homepages and weblogs. However, most of it has focused on the 'building of community' and 'identity work' rather than on the skills and competencies needed to undertake these activities. One of the issues here is how the key concepts of *access, understand* and *create* interrelate. Whilst it is fair to assume that the experience of production might 'impact back' on people's behaviour as 'consumers', for example, in developing their critical literacy skills, it is difficult to locate research that proves without a doubt that this is the case. Likewise, research has not yet confirmed how the knowledge acquired as 'consumers' informs users' experiences as producers, though it is fair to assume that building a website, for example, would involve the kinds of skills and understandings already considered.

A final point to add here refers to the methodological issues flagged up by the Ofcom report (Buckingham et al., 2005) in relation to this study. It is noted in the review that a good deal of the research in the general media literacy field is based on self-reporting. This reflects a general problem for researchers. Buckingham (1993), for instance, has argued that there are often significant discrepancies between what parents say about media use in the home compared with what children say. However, in this instance, self-reporting

becomes particularly problematic when used as a method for assessing 'levels' of media literacy. Both children and young people's and their parents' expressions of their levels of expertise and helplessness may be unreliable indicators of the possession of skills and competencies. Indeed there are examples of this noted by other authors and included in this chapter. By way of overcoming this limitation, the Ofcom report recommends the use of more observational or ethnographic studies to explore how media literacy is used within everyday life. For this study, I collected observational data for this purpose, which I drew on to inform the audio interview data in relation to respondents' levels of competence and familiarity. However, I did not complete a full analysis of the observational data for reasons explained in Chapter 4.

This introduction has drawn on the report for Ofcom (Buckingham et al., 2005) to outline three key components of the skills and competencies needed to effectively use the internet. Whilst the report was organised around the Ofcom definitions of access, understand and create, the corresponding terms of functional, critical and creative dimensions of internet literacy will be used in this chapter. The chapter will explore these literacies in relation to how far they are developed in or outside the home: at school, work or through formal education; how skills may be enhanced within the home and how tensions arise; how family members perceive their own levels of skill; their awareness of and competence in evaluating websites and, finally, positive and negative influences on home website production.

The relationship between school and home in developing children's and young people's (functional) internet skills and competencies

The Government has invested large sums of money in linking schools to the internet: over £1.8 billion between 1998 and 2004 (*UK Online Annual Report*, 2003). Yet, the UK-Kids-Go-Online study has shown that nearly one third (30 percent) of pupils between ages 9-19 report they have not received lessons on using the internet (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). However, the majority who have been 'taught something' report having received 'a lot' (23 percent), 'some' (28 percent) and 'just one or two' classes (19 percent). This report also found that the age of the child is significant. Teenagers have greater access to the internet at school than the youngest group (87 percent of 9-11 year olds) or the oldest

group (83 percent of 18-19 year olds). Young people also access the internet at other sites with 64 percent of 9-19 year olds having used the internet in someone else's house, public library, via a mobile phone, in an internet café, in a parents' work place, via a games console, via digital TV and at their own work place. These figures are useful for understanding the school/home/other location as sites for the development of skills and competencies for young people. Livingstone and Bober argue that schools are central to redressing the digital divide, for they can 'equalise the effects of inequalities in resources at home'. However, the earlier part of the same study, utilising focus groups, suggests that the home is where young people 'gain most in confidence and expertise, making inequalities in home use of continuing significance' (Livingstone & Bober, 2004: 17). Amongst other studies reflecting the limitations of school-based learning of new media, Buckingham (2001) says that compared with the exhilarating experience of multimedia outside school, many children complain that use in schools is far too limited and restrictive. Facer et al. conclude in *ScreenPlay* that over-prescriptive and linear practices limit school-based learning of ICTs (Facer et al., 2003).

The young people interviewed for this study tend, on the whole, to credit the internet skills and competencies they possess to home learning rather than to their school experiences. The skills they describe tend to be the functional skills and competencies needed to operate the internet rather than critical and creative skills. The reasons they give for the home development of these skills centre on having earlier access to the internet at home than at school and that access at home is more easily achieved than at school. Ben Archer-Hughes (aged 14), a highly motivated user who has built several websites at home, for example, says that his skills developed through using a computer since he was five and that internet use at school has lagged behind his home experiences:

> Ben: [....] I've been basically on a computer since I was like five so I guess it just comes. It's cool though, I like it. [....]Yeah so... But my teachers just finally allowed us to go on the internet at school and so.
>
> Sue: Right so you've learnt all this at home in other words.
>
> Ben: Yeah yeah.
>
> (Ben Archer-Hughes, aged 14, int. 2)

Other young people credit their skills development to the home sphere due to difficulty gaining access to the internet at school which is restricted to use in breaks or after school rather than in mainstream lessons. Moreover, there is some mention of equipment and modem speed being quicker at home than at school for these youngsters, for example, Caleb Kendal, from a more middle-class family:

> Sue: Have you used this much at school?
>
> Caleb: The school has the internet but I don't particularly use it, because, well, it's, I can just use it at home. It's, the internet isn't that advanced at school.
>
> Suzanne: Are you allowed?
>
> Caleb: Yes, but you have to get permission from a member of staff.
>
> (Mrs Kendal and Caleb Kendal, aged 11, int. 2)

Where there is evidence that children have gained knowledge from IT lessons, it tends to be related to word processing, spreadsheets and presentation software rather than internet skills.

One of the girls in the sample, Sally Bond, said that she attributed her internet skills to home learning due to her brother's abilities and patience when compared with a teacher she finds unsupportive:

> Sally: Because I don't. I mean we have IT lessons but I really hate the teacher and she gets really cross with you if you don't do something right. And she doesn't understand that she knows everything about the computer and we don't. So she just jumps straight in. But Bobby's much more helpful though he's not actually that helpful [?all talking] [....] I prob-. I like finding things out. I found out quite a few things. Like I found out how to change the screen and stuff like that. But I wouldn't have found out anything about the internet without Bobby because he just sort of helped me with my stuff.
>
> (Sally Bond, aged 15, int. 3)

The role of siblings and parents in learning how to use the internet will be discussed in the section on the sharing of knowledge in the home, but here what is important is that provision of the home computer alongside learning support compensates for Sally's school experience. It is fair to assume that

without the home computer, her skills would be weaker than those she has developed there and her motivation towards the computer and the internet (she is a keen user) would be much more limited. This is significant in terms of equalising the digital divide: in cases where some young people have no or very limited access to the internet at home, unpleasant school experiences could deter further use.

There is evidence in the data that some parents believe becoming familiar with the computer and internet at home is helping their children to 'get ahead' at school. Mr Bradshaw relates how his daughter Lori's abilities and skills on the home 'machine' puts her ahead of the class at school:

> Melvin: Oh I know I know she... Well she [Lori, aged 12] knows her way round this machine better than me I'm sure. I mean she's ahead of her class on ICT [....]
>
> (Mr Bradshaw, int. 2)

It is perhaps not surprising that where children and young people attribute their functional internet skills to school learning, the issues are the same but in reverse. For instance, young people in the sample who experience earlier and easier access to the internet at school rather than at home, regard school as the site of their skills' development. The children and young people in the three *transitional* families fall into this category which bears out Livingstone and Bober's hypothesis that school access is particularly important for those children within families who have no or more limited access. However, some *improving* families and several young people from *established* families also attribute their skills to school, suggesting that it is not a simple matter of socio-economic conditions. One of the *transitional* families, for instance, the Craine family, unusually within the sample, have an ADSL connection which allows them unlimited high-speed access after 6pm and at weekends.

However, to summarise, the data highlight that level of access to the internet is important for developing functional skills. Moreover, this can be limited at home by a range of factors, beyond that of cost, which could influence use by *transitional* families more; such as the pressure on the computer from other members of the family, parental regulation and the young person's engagement

in other activities. Damien Powell-Drummond (aged 14), for instance, is raised in an *established* family where his affluent parents have senior academic positions. It becomes clear at the first interview that his skills have been imported from school, probably because the family have only recently acquired a computer with internet access:

> Amanda: Well, you seem to know about it all from school don't you?
>
> Damien: Yeah.
>
> Amanda: I mean, we haven't really had to explain it to Damien at all. He just seemed to, he actually already knew all types of techniques that we didn't know about from school...

(Ms Powell-Drummond and Damien, aged 14, int. 1)

Where the computer with internet connection has been established at home for a longer period, functional skills development may remain attributed to school learning where access at school is greater. For instance, Phil Jackson, aged 17, a member of a low income family, credits his skills to having access to the internet at school and later college, combined with the space and time to practise:

> Sue: What about the kids? I mean how did you all learn it?
>
> Phil: Practice. I mean we have computers at school basically and then you just like spend a lot of time just working your way through it, learning, and making mistakes on it. In internet you just save. You just try something, if it don't work you try something else till it works. I mean but. And then at college we did computers more so I got a bit better at using a computer. Last year. This year at college we haven't done any computer studies but I spent a lot of time on research and trying to find stuff on the internet. And I. And then I've been helping a friend make a website.
>
> Sue: Do you learn by doing it?
>
> Phil: Yeah.

(Phil Jackson, aged 17, int. 3)

This excerpt is taken from the two year point interview, by which stage the Jacksons have had the internet in their home for five years. Yet, it is clear that Phil ascribes his skills development to his access at school and college rather than at home. This may be due to the extremely low level of access he is

allowed at home as a consequence of the high cost of dial up access for this family which severely limits his use despite his motivation to learn. This is borne out by his sister, Josie, aged 10 in the initial interviews, who is the only person in the sample to express a preference for using the internet at the local library, 'cos it's free', whilst concurrently having the internet at home. What is also interesting in the excerpt above, backed up by several other respondents, is that where children and young people do draw on examples of internet related skills development through school use, it is ascribed to informal out of classroom activities rather than IT lessons, such as in breaks, after school clubs and so on where children are more likely to be allowed to choose their own activities. This suggests that the new styles of learning potentially emerging at home may also be available within informal school spaces.

The examples above show that the reasons children give for crediting their functional skill development to the different spheres of home and school are more complex than the socio-economic factors that may influence level and quality of access. Whilst availability is clearly important, so is the support afforded by the environment; whether in practice that means having someone on hand to ask for help or the time to 'practise' informally. Having considered the sites of children's functional skills development, I will now move to that of parents.

The relationship between work and/or education and home in developing parents' (functional) internet skills and competencies

Most of the parents I interviewed claimed to possess internet skills and competencies. As with their children, these tend to be functional rather than critical and creative skills. These are developed through either education and/or work with some evidence of skills being self-taught in the home to support both. Within the *transitional* and *improving* families, there was strong evidence that undergoing a Higher Education course had been the reason behind getting to grips with the internet. These parents were mainly mothers who were taking up the opportunity mid-life to 'catch up' on their education. Some of the parents had embraced the internet for their courses whilst others, it seemed, felt it had been rather forced onto them. Mrs Hill for instance is very clear that she made

the choice to learn and to overcome her previous status as 'technophobe' in the initial interviews, whereas, Mrs Jackson felt that she had no option:

> Sue: Perhaps I shouldn't remind you of this but last time I came Jeff [her husband] described you as a technophobe but what I'm hearing is that once you had the opportunity to learn you have learnt.
>
> Deborah: That's right. Yes.
>
> Jeff: No no I rephrase and I'd say once you were forced to learn you learn.
>
> Deborah: No I wasn't forced I mean all this work. No it wasn't forced you know it's a choice you either go on it or you don't basically.
>
> (Mrs and Mr Hill, int. 3)

In Mrs Jackson's case, an online module was introduced without warning during her degree course which she found difficult and unprepared for:

> Anita: Erm... which is where I came in really because I couldn't use a computer 'till then. I'd done basic word processing as part of the access course, but I hadn't done anything else and as well as doing the module I had to learn how to do the comp...use the internet. [....]Yeah. And it was erm... well it was, we were thrown in the deep end and I think there I learned all the bad ways of doing it because we weren't taught, we were just shown roughly how to go about and then we were left to our own devices and I think that's where I've learned a lot of bad...
>
> (Mrs Jackson, int. 2)

These two cases show how these women have been encouraged in one way or another to acquire internet skills not previously developed through work or home access. Other 'second chance' learners had used online University internet tutorials or attended formal courses to support their education. In other families, parents across all types of families had attended evening classes under their own volition to try to bring themselves 'up to speed'. The Bourne parents had done this together but in the other cases, interestingly, it was just the fathers who were updating their skills. These were fathers whose occupations did not bring them into contact with computers and felt they needed formal education despite their already established access to the internet at home. Richard Manders-Short, for example, an actor, was deterred from using the internet (and computers in general) at the time of the initial interviews. He

ascribed this to the pressure already on the computer from other members of the family combined with error messages such as 'Bill Gates telling me I had committed an illegal operation'. At the two year point, he has attended an adult education course and is now a keen user:

> Richard: Erm I went to do the course because I felt as though I really did have to get up to speed and I was interested. And then I got in touch with a relation in the States and I found it absolutely wonderful being able to email. And then once I got into that I sort of started to get into the web and I've found that absolutely fascinating and humorous and very useful as well...
>
> (Mr Manders-Short, int. 3)

In this case, it is a tangible need to learn inspired by finding email useful that initiates Mr Manders-Short's attending of a course. Above, I pointed out that Sally Bond's unpleasant experiences of school IT lessons could have deterred her from using ICTs in future if supportive home access had not been available to compensate. Similarly, Ken Jackson, has also been put off by attending a short introductory course, but home internet access has not helped him to overcome the resistance the course produced in him. He 'fumbles' through at work and at home asks his son, Phil, to look up information for him. He explains how the course put him off:

> Ken: Yeah. I fumbled through like a. I fumble through at work you know. It is a fumble through you know but I started at college and there was so much IT. Well the bloke who took it, I didn't. He. Everybody else started. He imagined everybody had reached t'same level and there was some of us in t' group who got farther and farther behind because it were like throwing somebody some car keys and say drive to Newark. Well if you didn't know how to drive t'keys are no good to you.
>
> (Mr Jackson, int. 3)

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus*, Lally (2002) makes the case that an individual's competence to 'belong' within a particular space depends on their having the necessary social, economic and cultural resources to engage. The example above, therefore, could be read in terms of class. Mr Jackson, from a more working-class family, provides a response suggestive of the 'disorientation' outlined in Chapter 3 which can occur when individuals

encounter new cultural environments and are unfamiliar with the appropriate 'discourse and practice' needed to facilitate learning.

In terms of parents interviewed who claim to have learnt how to use the internet at work, four paradigms emerge across the family types. These consist of: self-employed home workers who are largely self-taught at home; employed workers who travel to a separate workplace and have taught themselves to use the internet informally on the job; workers who have taught themselves functional skills at home in their 'freetime' that they import to a separate work place; and those who have been formally trained at a separate workplace and can potentially bring these skills home. As pointed out by Facer et al., knowledge building at home will inevitably draw on experiences at work and school (Facer et al., 2003). Presumably, this relationship is bi-directional, with skills travelling between home and work/school and vice versa.

The workers who have been trained to use the internet at work tend to belong to the professionals in the *established* families. Amanda Powell-Drummond, a senior academic, described how she had undertaken a one-day training course to improve her internet skills. Other professionals, for example, Michael Dunne-Osborne, College Manager, said that his skills were the result of his daily contact with the internet in the course of carrying out his job, though he had not found time to receive formal training.

Despite the tendency of *established* parents in professional jobs to have developed internet skills either through training or 'on the job', exceptions did occur. Gail Dunne-Osborne, for example, a full-time self-employed Psychotherapist, finds that she can manage without it in her work and is not motivated to give up what she sees as precious leisure time to learn.

> Gail: I mean that is, time pressure, the time that we get together we want to socialise or do some gardening or something. In another way it would be nice for us both to learn more about the internet and stuff but that is not a priority.
>
> (Ms Dunne-Osborne, int. 1)

Similarly, Mrs Burnley, a full-time public service director, lacks internet skills as she relies on her secretary for these skills and functions.

These examples show the wide range of means and motivations through which most parents gain functional internet literacy. Assumedly, as with their children's skills, these become a resource potentially available for other members of the household to draw on. In the next section, I will look more closely at this process of dissemination and how it may enhance use for members of the household.

Enhancing the development of internet skills and competencies within the home

In the previous chapter, I briefly visited Bourdieu's concept of the different forms of capital and their relationship to ICT. In particular, social and cultural forms of capital are relevant to this discussion of how families generate 'technological capital' within the home. When Giacquinta et al. (1993) researched the home computer and learning, they found that the 'social envelope' of parental scaffolding is important for children's learning. Yet, many parents lack the skills and time available to adequately support their children. In particular, women's lack of computer experience is particularly significant in children's progress as typically, they are the primary care-givers. Before I explore how families share and enhance their knowledge within households, I need to identify where expertise is situated within the home. The section above shows how all the households in the sample have at least one person who considers themselves to have the skills and competencies to use the computer and internet; in many cases both parents believe they have these skills to some extent. Again, the skills owned here are functional rather than critical or creative. In addition, many of the children have developed their own skills and competencies either at home or school and may not be reliant on their parents in any case: indeed, it could be that children are supporting their parents' uses. Livingstone and Bober's (2003) report highlights how children consider themselves to be the internet experts in their homes in spite of having computer literate parents. They claim that children's willingness to experiment may make this a lasting reversal of the generation gap which, in turn, accords them unparalleled social status and domestic power. On the other hand, Holloway and Valentine's study (2003) found that it was not always the case that children had more knowledge overall; their technical competencies may exist in different fields of computer and

internet use allowing for the emergence of more equitable knowledge sharing. They found that some parents' skills far exceed those of their children particularly where parents carry out high-level ICT functions in their jobs.

Within the sample families, I found expertise varied to a greater or lesser extent across family types depending on which activities were in question. Across all family types, for instance, it was nearly always the father in the family who was responsible for the setting up, housekeeping and troubleshooting of the computer. Tasks such as file management, making backups, installing virus software, setting up email accounts and fixing the computer when there is a problem, emerge as gendered in many households, Indeed there was even evidence from female members of the household that these skills were viewed as more 'technical' compared with their own 'soft' uses of word processing and emailing, for example.

In terms of use of the standard office programmes, such as Word, Excel and so on, the site of expertise did not significantly vary across the family types; there was a consistent spread of skills across the different members of the household. It was as likely for mothers and children to emerge as the 'office' experts as the fathers. As detailed in the section above, these skills were likely to have developed through home use, imported from work and school or through Higher Education.

The most interesting finding overall was the tendency in *established* families to consider one of the children to be the expert in relation to the internet. This was in contrast to the *improving* families and the *transitional* families where the skills were more likely to be spread across the different members of the household. Shields and Behrman (2000) have noted that many of the assumptions made about computers and education tend to be drawn from research in 'primarily affluent households' as family members develop their skills through regular, sustained use of the computer. It is possible that early research showing that children's computer and internet skills outstrip parents' skills may also have been collected in well-off families focused around the early adopters. Certainly, the children's expertise in *established* families appears, in many cases, to be the result of having relatively more frequent access to the internet, when

contrasted with children in less affluent families, combined with having parents who work full-time and do not have the time and motivation to spend their leisure time experimenting and developing their skills to catch up with them. In the Bond family, Bobby (aged 15) is said by his mother to be 'definitely the one who's got the knowledge' in their household. By contrast, she talks of how although she uses the internet (particularly email) for work, she has not found time at home to develop her wider skills:

> Christine: Yeah. I use it erm... I use it to get my emails from work sometimes, but other than that I don't use it very much. I might sometimes work at home and then I would use it for writing whatever work I was doing. [....] There's quite a lot of web pages and stuff I see and I think oh I must look that up because it's like stuff that I like. But I never really get round to it 'cos I don't know how to use it. If I knew how to use it properly I'd use it a lot more, I think.
>
> (Ms Bond, int. 1)

Home use is credited as the site of skills development for children growing up in most *established* families. An exception is Vivien Bourne (aged 12) who has gained her status as family 'internet expert' through schooling. She attends a 'technology college' where ICT skills are prioritised; and this is much valued and encouraged by her parents.

In contrast, the functional skills to use the internet in *improving* and *transitional* families are spread more evenly across the different members of each household. In families where mothers and fathers are cited as the internet 'expert', children's access tended to be more restricted than in *established* families, reducing the opportunities for children to learn for themselves and compete with their parents' level of competence. These restrictions were related to the cost, the demand for the computer from other members of the household and aspects of supervision. Parents' engagement in further study had often encouraged the development of wider sets of skills, including creative skills, than the mainly functional skills developed in the workplace. One of the working-class mothers, Anita Jackson, for example, refers to the necessity to build a website as part of her degree course:

> Anita: And then we did one on the internet and I haven't. I had no idea how to use the internet at all. So like you I spent weeks learning how to

> use the internet before I could actually do the course on the internet. [....] And part of the thing was to design a website! I hadn't got a clue! You know I'd just never been on the internet at that point.
>
> (Mrs Jackson, int. 3)

In addition to the development of greater levels of functional and creative skills facilitated through attending a course of Higher Education, which serves to balance parents' skills with their children's, a further consequence of adult study is that it reduces the availability of the computer with internet to the children through the prioritising of adult education over children's recreational uses.

In some families, there exists what Kiesler et al. (2000) refer to as a 'family guru', the person to whom the others turn for help. In my data, I have identified gurus in families where one person takes the main responsibility for setting up and maintaining the computer, and who is described as the family's computer and internet expert. In combining these three categories the gurus that emerge are nearly always male as a consequence of the gendered approach taken to setting up the computer (as detailed above). Also, in some families, whilst the guru may know more than the other members of the household, it cannot be assumed that this means they have a high level of skill. In practice, their knowledge may not amount to very much by their own account. The data show ten male gurus and two female. The only significant finding in relation to the different family types is that within the *established* families, the gurus' functional skills are likely to have been developed in the course of work as well as home interest whereas the gurus in the *improving* and *transitional* families have typically gained their skills in the course of study as well as work and home. The guru is usually an adult, but where a child is the overall expert, skills are learnt at home in the *established* families and at school/college in the *transitional* families. Interestingly, there are no child gurus in the *improving* families, due to the lead taken by parents in setting up the computers.

In Kiesler et al.'s study, it was found that the emergence of family gurus had mixed consequences for others in the family. Whilst the guru's expertise generally kept the hardware and software running and supported other family members to solve particular problems, they often monopolized the machine, personalised them and rendered them less attractive to other family members.

In my study, there are two kinds of gurus, those who facilitate uses for the other members of the family (enabling gurus) and those who dominate (monopolising gurus). Again, gurus do not fit into family types with enabling and monopolising gurus as likely to be adults as children, men as women. In the Craine family, for example, Duncan Craine is a full-time IT technician in a computer outlet. As his wife, Angela, explains when I ask if anyone spends time explaining the internet to anyone else:

> Angela: Yes (laughs) all the time. 'Duncan?' yes constantly. It's an ongoing, as I say Duncan has done lots of courses and things, and been working with them as well, he is a lot more informed than we are, and it is a case of 'Duncan, what am I doing wrong?' 'why doesn't that do what I want it to do?' and it is a case of like, you know, coaching me through it, and same with Aaron and Jodie.
>
> (Mrs Craine, int. 1)

Mr Craine is an enabling guru, whereas other child and adult gurus in the study tend to use their expertise less altruistically, leading them to take over and hog the computer. In the Jackson household, for example, Phil Jackson's siblings say that they *do* learn from him but often, it is at the cost of their internet time which in this household is severely limited due to cost. His mother explains the process:

> Anita: Alice goes on it, can't get what she wants, so she might ask Phil. Yeah. To help her. And then she'll come and she'll say, 'Mum, he won't let me back on', you know what I mean?
>
> (Mrs Jackson, int. 3)

Phil Jackson also takes responsibility for setting up the computer, running the software, file-management, installing screensavers and so on, which combined with his internet expertise affords him a greater level of control over the computer compared with his parents and siblings. Facer et al. (2003) note how individuals may use their expertise to control both the computer uses and, to an extent, other people's access through deciding, for example, what uses are prioritised, software installed, and, in relation to the internet, what favourites or bookmarks are added and retained.

Despite the presence of gurus in over half the families, the exchange of knowledge is multidirectional in most households whatever the type of family. The overarching factors are a combination of who is most conveniently placed, whether they have the particular skills to be able to help and whether they have the time. The Golding family, for example, provide a good example of a typical pattern of multidirectional exchange within the family, appropriate to their functional skills. The mother, Lisa Golding, calls on her husband or younger son for help with word processing and her elder son for help with spreadsheets; she helps her elder son with word processing and with showing him how the web can help with his art homework; her elder son shows her younger son how to search for information on the web. Even in a family with a guru, the skills exchange persists beyond the help provided by the 'expert'. In the Hill family, for example, Jeff Hill is the authority on the computer and internet to the extent that, on a recent occasion, he was called back home from work to sort the computer out when his wife feared she was about to lose an essay she'd word processed. Yet, on other occasions, it is Heather (aged 14) who helps her mother with the internet as she has the skills to do so and is on hand to help. This shows how the guru may have the most expertise in terms of overall skills but support is more widely circulated within the family in any case. Other commentators have reported the role reversal which can occur around ICTs such as the internet, but the finding from my data, in common with Holloway and Valentine's study (2003), was that parents' and children's competencies in different fields allows for the 'possibility of knowledge sharing' across the family. They note that this finding reflects Papert's (1996) recommendation that families seek to nurture a positive family learning culture.

As mentioned earlier, Giacquinta et al.'s (1993) research found that the 'social envelope' of parental scaffolding was undermined by parents' lack of skill and in particular the lack of time and skill of women as the primary care-givers. This has not been borne out in my data with the exception of the gendered approach to setting the computer up and the ascribing of these skills as more 'technical'. Mothers are just as likely as fathers in being able to support their children across the various family types. In the rare cases where a skills lack does prevent a parent supporting a child, this is just as likely to be a father as a

mother. In these cases, or when a parent does not have time to help, they will often delegate this role to the elder sibling. In most of the families, the oldest child is considered to have more skills and competencies than younger children due to their greater amount of experience online. Within the Bourne family, for instance, Vivien (aged 14) supports her younger sister, Jackie (aged 9) with homework through having a combination of more time and knowledge:

> Vivien: Or she'd go to Mum and then she'd ask me. Mum would ask me to help if I can.
>
> Sue: And that's because you've got more time I presume?
>
> Vivien: Yeah.
>
> John: And she's more experienced than Mum.
>
> Vivien: She'd come to you [their mother] probably with her homework and then you'd say: 'Help Jackie with her homework'.
>
> (Mr Bourne and Vivien, aged 14, int. 3)

Later in this interview, Vivien explains that she is teaching Jackie to use search engines and that generally, Jackie is picking this skill up quickly. This kind of initiation appears to be important for getting some children online in the first place. There is evidence in the data (particularly in the first interviews) that younger children in families may be frightened, or at the very least lack motivation, across all different family types. In an *established* family, the Powell-Drummonds, for instance, there is the implication that Martin (aged 12) has not gone on line as no-one has spent any time encouraging him with his parents relying on school to initiate him as they did with their older son, Damien (aged 14):

> Amanda: [...] We haven't really explained it to you very much, Martin, have we? In fact, you don't use it very much. I mean, you use the computer for games. Mm.
>
> Kelvin: You claim you know how to log on.
>
> Martin: Yeah, well, now I do. Anyway, because you taught me.
>
> (Ms and Mr Powell-Drummond, Martin, aged 12, int. 1)

It is not possible to say at what age parents deem their children old enough to use the internet unaided, as this varies hugely between families. A *transitional* family, the Craine parents, for instance, actively encouraged their children (ranging from ages 3-10) to go online, using young children's websites to overcome their reticence:

> Angela: We have been on all the BBC sites as well before we got the CD ROM, they used to go on the Tweenie web-site and Teletubbies web-site, and print pictures off to colour in and things like that. They haven't done that so much recently.
>
> Sue: How did they get started?
>
> Duncan: We had to force them to go on the internet didn't we, they were frightened to death of it. [....]
>
> Angela: No, she, at 18 months old, she knew what she was doing, that was the thing about it. She would go on and you could see her clicking to go onto the icon, so I mean, they are never too young, never.
>
> (Mrs and Mr Craine, int. 1)

In addition to the teaching of basics, such as logging on, and suggesting appropriate websites to encourage young people to go online, there are many other examples of the kinds of banal technical support being sought by both adults and young people in the data. For instance, there are frequent examples of family members helping each other to use search engines. Less frequently, there are instances of help being sought for building websites, accessing chat rooms and downloading music. Support is often needed when using the internet, particularly for homework, as discussed in Chapter 6.

The section above has shown how skills and competencies developed at home, work and school are circulated within the family. As noted before, the skills talked of tend to be functional suggesting that critical and creative skills are not yet seen as significant within most of the families. I have explored where expertise is considered to be situated and how family gurus may enable their families' needs or use their expertise to monopolise the computer with internet for their own ends. I have also shown the multi-directional sharing of knowledge in different fields that takes place within the family; particularly the role played by mothers, fathers and older children in providing ongoing support and help

with getting started. The implication of all this is that family support systems are helping both children and adults to develop their already sophisticated skills and competencies. But is this the case? What kinds of issues arise when members of the family seek to support each other's learning? Do adults and children feel that they have adequate skills? And what kinds of skills are they developing? Discussion so far has focused on the learning of functional skills, but where are the critical and creative skills that are needed for people to be able to evaluate and use information critically, transform it into knowledge and become producers in their own right? In the next section, I will examine this range of issues and later assess whether families' exchange of knowledge is helping them to learn.

Is everything in the family rosy?

In the discussion above, I mentioned how the presence of a guru in the family could be a mixed blessing due to their monopolising of the computer. However, it is not just the households with gurus that experience issues of power and control around the computer and internet, as these are a general feature of knowledge sharing in the home. In terms of sibling relationships, Facer et al. (2003) note in their study that the contacts between sisters and brothers are often characterised by a combination of support and rivalry with the computer entering into this already stormy relationship. In relation to children teaching parents, Holloway and Valentine (2003) comment that these role reversal situations involve 'reinterpretations' of power relations in the home. Whilst children frequently enjoy this position of power and use it to tease their parents, they are also irritated by their parents' slowness to pick up new skills. Equally, parents may be critical of their children's teaching skills. Whilst Kiesler et al. (2000) found that teenagers teaching parents was viewed by parents as a 'convenience', they also found that teens could be thoughtless and unsympathetic about their parents' struggles to learn. My data raise very similar issues relevant to all the family types. I shall divide these into the four potential dimensions of children helping adults, parents helping children, parents helping each other and the most acrimonious relations of all, children helping their siblings.

In my data, the situation of children showing their parents how to do something is frequently fraught with tension and blame on both sides. The Dunne-Osborne family provide an example:

> Gail: Yes, Adele just reminded me. It was trying to look up various travel agencies and things like Go, and again I ended up using the phone (laughs). One was we had some difficulty in ... at one point Adele thought the net was working because of the symbols that were flashing, and then we discovered it probably wasn't searching for what we put in. Anyway ... Adele ..
>
> Adele: You didn't log on properly.
>
> Gail: I didn't log on properly? We didn't log on properly. OK. So we had difficulties, but we used it in that way and then got frustrated.
>
> (Ms Dunne-Osborne and Adele, aged 10, int. 1)

In this example, Gail describes how a search for holiday information carried out with her daughter, Adele, was unsuccessful. Adele undermines her mother's account of events of using the internet jointly by shifting the blame squarely onto her mother's shoulders with the accusation: 'You didn't log on properly'. Gail appears taken aback by this, questions it and emphasises that it was a joint activity with joint responsibility in the phrase 'We didn't log on properly'. Possibly Adele feels criticised by her mother's description of: 'at one point Adele thought the net was working because of the symbols that were flashing, and then we discovered it probably wasn't searching for what we put in'. It may be that Adele is keen to present herself as technologically competent, and thus shifts the blame for the mistake to her mother. This exchange provides an example of the typical frustrations that can occur when children try to teach their parents and the uneasy power relations which manifest around uses of the internet within families in these kinds of situations.

Relationships where parents seek to help their children can be similarly problematic. Some children find that their parents may overwhelm them with information and go further than they can understand. Aaron Craine (aged 10) explains that he does not always take in what his father tells him about the internet:

Aaron: [...] But sometimes Dad will try to tell me how it works but sometimes, half of it just goes blah blah.

Sue: Too much to take in?

Aaron: Yeah.

(Aaron Craine, aged 12, int. 3)

In some families, there is also a tendency for some parents to sit with their children whilst they are online and talk them through their activities. In turn, this can prevent the development of children becoming autonomous and self-reliant users. Rhiannon Grant (aged 14), for instance, and her father, Robert, tend to work together. As the example in Chapter 6 showed, Rhiannon does not need to learn how to edit images she has downloaded for homework as her father will do this for her:

Robert: And she's too impatient to learn to do it herself!

Rhiannon: Yes. I'll make Dad do it really.

(Robert Grant and Rhiannon, aged 14, int. 1)

In the interviews, the instances where parents helped each other appeared more collaborative and less fractious; there was more of a sense of teamwork and a joint goal of needing to get something done. This meant that parents were as likely to carry out the task for their partner as they were to help them improve their skill. For example, in the Archer-Hughes household, Helen Archer-Hughes finds it difficult to narrow down searches. For this reason, her partner, Jay Hughes, tends to do this on behalf of both of them when booking their holidays:

Jay: Now the doing of that is very much a chore, it's going through the search engines, finding the sites, narrowing them down sorting out the wheat from the chaff and Helen can't stand doing that so I tend to do that.

(Mr Archer-Hughes, int. 2)

Not to idealise couple relationships, however, the data also show cases of parents, both men and women, who overly mystify the internet and retain control and ownership of the computer for themselves. In the Hill household, Jeff Hill keeps a very tight control on the computer by severely limiting his children's use and over emphasising its volatility to his wife, Deborah. In this

extract Deborah describes how she will need to learn how to use the internet for a course of study she is due to start soon:

> Deborah: Yeah Yeah. I use it more like, come September, I'll do a diploma, and er, I shall use it more then really. I will do. For research and things.
>
> Jeff: As long as it don't crash on you.
>
> (Mrs and Mr Hill, int. 1)

Finally, in this section, I will explore the outwardly most troubled relationships in the household, those between brothers and sisters and how they share their knowledge. As mentioned above, Facer et al. (2003) characterise these stormy relationships as a combination of support and rivalry. This is borne out in my data where there can be problems when older children help younger siblings. For example, older children may use the opportunity to help to take over the computer and internet (as mentioned above in relation to Phil Jackson); help is given by a sibling but the recipient is annoyed and critical of their sibling's inability to explain it in a clear way; the recipient may be irritated by what they perceive as being 'told what to do'. Interestingly, there are suggestions in the data that some children prefer to carry out the activity than teach their siblings how to do it, as a means of retaining tacit power. In the following extract, Julia (aged 13) comes clean about why she prefers to take over when helping her younger sisters, rather than explain:

> Julia: ... or sometimes it will be Dad and then, then I'll come and it's, it's not normally a matter of explaining, it's just of me taking the controls, doing whatever they want doing, and then leaving them alone and don't actually explain what I'm doing unless Mum says 'so what are you doing Julia?' and I'm like, 'oh doing this'.
>
> Sue: Why is that? Why do you prefer just to do it rather than to explain?
>
> Julia: Because that means that they rely on me more often to come and help them.
>
> James: And you can take over their case more often.
>
> Julia: Yeah.
>
> (Julia Burnley, aged 13, and Mr Burnley, int. 1)

Julia apparently enjoys the feeling of power that her expertise gives her and of being needed. She is not going to relinquish this power easily by passing her expertise on. This section has problematized what might have appeared from previous sections as the easy going and developmental aspect of sharing knowledge about the internet within the family. The next section will further emphasise these issues by examining competence in families.

Self-evaluation of skills and competencies

The sections above have explored where family members get their skills from and how sharing knowledge within the household may enhance these. However, the skills alluded to so far tend to be functional; the technical skills required for using the internet. This is in line with previous research, which suggests that children and young people already possess reasonably high levels of functional literacy compared with their relatively lower level of understanding. Yet, as Buckingham (2001) and others have argued, users need more than just functional skills to be able to evaluate and be critical of information they use and to become producers in their own right. Facer et al. (2003), found that children generally did have the functional expertise to locate what they were looking for, but not how to interpret, critique and manage that information; in other words, they were unable to move 'beyond information to knowledge and understanding' (165). In this section, I will look more closely at both functional and critical competencies as reported by respondents.

Having detailed the (mainly functional) skills and competencies in the sections above which are imported/exported to and from school, work, college and the home and the extent to which knowledge sharing is a feature of home use, it is interesting to find in the data, evidence of skills deficits emerging in reported uses of the internet. More specifically, these problems occur extensively when family members try to retrieve information from the web. This suggests that both formal learning and informal learning practices within and outside the home may be falling short of developing the functional and critical skills to effectively use some of the internet's capabilities. There were members within each family experiencing these problems with no discernible pattern emerging across the different family types. This finding contrasts with quantitative studies that found

that both parents and children say they are confident in their search skills (Livingstone & Bober, 2004); though the qualitative data collected in focus groups with children for the same study found similar limitations and information overload (Livingstone & Bober, 2003). This has been borne out in observational data collected for the same project, which has concluded that children frequently lack the skills to use search engines, browsers and URLs effectively. One conclusion that can be drawn from this, therefore, is that children's confidence may presently exceed that of their expertise and that further development is needed to enable children to gain more competence. Within my study, the gurus mainly presented themselves as the exception, confident in most aspects of use. Amongst the other members of the families, the naming of information search as their field of difficulty is also indicative of their narrow uses. For the most part, users are restricted to information retrieval, surfing and the communicational facilities of the internet, rather than the affordance it offers for publishing.

Respondents cited a wide range of difficulties they experience with web searching. These range from not knowing how to use search engines, to not being able to input key words that yield useful results, to not being able to narrow down searches that produce overwhelming amounts of data, to panicking when encountering a pdf file, for example. Often respondents were not aware of the potential to bookmark or add favourites to help them return to oft-visited sites. Even in the *established* families where parents and children more frequently considered the young person to be the internet expert, young people had difficulties identifying appropriate key words to put into a search engine. For young people, gender did not emerge as a significant indicator of difficulties in searching. Julia Burnley, aged 13, for example, is a keen user of both email and the web for finding out information. Yet, she experiences difficulty in knowing what key words will yield useful results:

> Julia: One thing I don't understand is how you surf because it's not like how there's like a button you can like you can like click on and say, 'I want to know what comes on after that', you have to like think of something that you actually want to look for especially and then go and type it down and I don't understand that. I know how to... [....] But if it comes to, like, I'm given an address then I can go and find it but I can't surf and Dad can just go and, I don't know, pull things up.

(Julia Burnley, aged 13, int. 1)

This example reflects Robinson's (1998) finding that children (and presumably adults) need the ability to use higher order thinking skills to navigate effectively; '...computer skills that are not only technical, but also social and cognitive' (149). However, while Robinson argues that it is the children from low-income families who are often at a disadvantage, due to the lack of parental expertise that enables them to become truly computer fluent, my data suggest that children in *established* families where parental support and expertise is available also struggle with this. It is also interesting to note that whilst it would be reasonable to assume that these skills will develop over time, this does not necessarily occur. Two years later, when Julia has almost three years of near daily use under her belt, she continues to experience the same difficulty:

> Julia: Erm but I can normally work out how to do it for myself when I go onto erm... When I go for searches but sometimes I find it more difficult to find, like the words that you need to get the right sort of information which Dad normally helps with ...[....]

(Julia Burnley, aged 15, int. 3)

This suggests that some young people may need further support to overcome such barriers. Similar problems with searching are experienced by Caleb Kendal (aged 11), as we saw above in Chapter 6 in relation to discourses in families: books versus the internet for learning. Caleb, named as the internet expert in his household, prefers to use books for homework rather than face being overwhelmed by the abundance of sites a search would yield. This problem of being overwhelmed is common amongst both parents and their children reflecting difficulties in both functional and critical literacies. For instance, web searches producing more prolific results suggest that the words or phrases put in may not define the search sufficiently well in the first place. At this stage, the user can simply abandon the search, more closely define what they're looking for via the search engine (if they know how to), go through however many entries have been found or look over the entries and decide what might be useful. The ability to glance over a list of results and evaluate what may be relevant and authoritative is a critical skill akin to that of evaluating the actual sites that are clicked on.

In relation to parents' competencies, what was particularly striking in the data is the propensity for mothers who use the internet (as opposed to the parents in the sample who say they do not) to report difficulties in searching. This is apparent in all family types. This is different to the children's responses which reflected difficulties being experienced for both genders. There are some men who also state they have similar difficulties but these instances are not so common. Facer et al. (2003) found in their studies that men and women, equally competent with the computer and internet, described their competencies in different ways. Whilst a mother said that she was a 'user', the father described himself as a 'techie' though they were evenly matched in terms of competence. It is possible, therefore, that these mothers are not necessarily any less skilled at searching but may express their skills with less confidence. Additionally, many of the fathers occupy the role of the family guru, reflecting their greater experience and confidence in many fields of internet use in any case. Where both mothers and fathers *do* cite difficulties using the internet, these are very similar to the problems experienced by the children. Helen Archer-Hughes voices her frustration that her searches are fruitless compared with her husband's experiences:

> Helen: You're always telling me 'You don't have to go anywhere near a library or anything, I can just go and do three words and it all comes up'. It might work for him but it never works for me.
>
> Jay: There is hardly a question. Whether it's a question that pops up socially or just something you think you'd like to know the answer to. [....] There is hardly a question that hasn't got the answer on there somewhere that you can find.
>
> (Mrs and Mr Archer-Hughes, int. 3)

It is worth noting that although Helen Archer-Hughes has been in a household with an internet connection for seven years at this stage (uncharged during evenings and weekends for the last six of these) plus using the internet at work, in common with other users, she continues to struggle to locate the information she is seeking, suggesting that she needs either more support or further time and motivation to experiment and practise.

This section has shown how respondents, such as Helen, tend to focus on web search in reporting the difficulties they experience and how family members appear to lack both the technical understanding of how search engines work combined with critical skills to evaluate the (often overabundant) results. I will explore this latter point in the next section.

Evaluation of websites

In the above section, I briefly made reference to the critical literacies needed to evaluate the outcomes from search engines in order to select from the results. In this section, I will look more closely at the issue of evaluation of websites as an example of how far parents and children's critical literacies have developed within this field. Buckingham (2001) argues that children need to be equipped to deal with the challenges of a progressively more market-oriented culture; they need to know, for instance, when commercial organisations and interest groups are targeting them and how 'advertising, promotion and sponsorship' may influence the nature of the information that is there in the first place. Previous research suggests that critical skills are, as yet, poorly developed. Facer et al. (2003) found that young people lacked both knowledge and interest about how information was produced for and within digital environments; these resources were 'often seen as originating not from people, organisations and businesses with particular cultural inclinations or objectives, but as a universal repository that simply existed 'out there' (86). They argue that children are generally 'ill equipped' for the online world. Likewise, Bevort and Breda (2001) found that children do not spontaneously question the credibility or trustworthiness of websites. ERICA (2001) cites research suggesting that the blurring of advertisements with other content on websites confuses children. Livingstone and Bober (2003) found that children's awareness of the motives behind the creation of websites and a critical approach towards their reliability and authority appears to be little developed. Findings from their data indicate that amongst the children they surveyed, almost half (49 percent) think information on the internet can be trusted, 38 percent trust most of it, nine percent trust 'not much of it' and one percent trust none of it (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). They conclude that few children are aware of the commercial or persuasive strategies at work but are optimistic that such skills are beginning to develop. However,

recently published research by Seiter (2004a; 2004b) shows that young people continue to experience difficulty in evaluating the information they find on the web and that young people who are very critical of mainstream advertising are less likely to recognise its use on websites or to accept it as a 'fact of life'.

Families in my sample ranged from those members with little or no awareness of the issues to those with a keenly developed sense of the influence of social, cultural and economic factors on the internet. Responses relating to the need to be critical tended to spring more frequently from parents and children in the *established* and *improving* families. However, this could be an indication that children in these families have more access to the internet in general, so that issues of evaluation become more customary, rather than it being due to *transitional* families having less awareness of these issues. Indeed, within the *established* families, there were examples of both children's know-how in negotiating their environment and of their naivety. Ben Archer-Hughes (aged 14), for instance, has a highly developed sense of the web's commercial orientation and recommends management software such as 'intermute' designed to block advertising pop-ups and so on. However, though annoyed by the same advertising tools, a younger user, Caleb Kendal (aged 11) has not developed his skills to the same extent and does not recognise that he is visiting a promotional site in the first place when he types in www.legomindstorms.com:

> Caleb: I've not been here for a while. Basically, you can get new models, new challenges, information...
>
> Sue: Is there a lot of advertising as well on there?
>
> Caleb: Not really, it's pretty much strictly lego. A lot of the sites that you go on to, you get these little boxes [advertising pop-ups] that are saying [inaudible] pain.
>
> (Caleb Kendal, aged 11, int. 2)

Other parents and children demonstrate their approaches and level of critical awareness towards websites that offered themselves as resources, particularly when using them for homework research. Anna Manders-Short (aged 17) for instance, prefers to use the web for art homework than history due to its greater

'reliability'. She recently searched on the 'Glorious Revolution' but rejected the results and used the library instead:

> Anna: [....] It was all, most of the stuff was things which, for people at school, like for younger age groups, so it was more basic, or, or just articles written by people that you weren't really sure if it was something reliable or if they really knew what they were talking about. Because you don't really know where the articles have come from and who's written them and if they actually are knowledgeable in that field.
>
> (Anna Manders-Short, aged 17, int. 3)

Anna finds it easier to search for sites for her art homework as she can download images from, for instance, the Tate Galleries, which she considers more dependable. Other children and parents similarly referred to using names of organisations they already know and trust as a means of evaluating sources. Buckingham and Scanlon (2003) note that in selling 'educational' software to parents, companies with established brand names in other media areas, such as the BBC, have a distinct advantage. This is borne out within my sample, with brand names being widened to include museums, art galleries and so on, not just media. Within the sample, children with a growing critical awareness on the web are typically around 11 or 12 years of age. Younger children tend to be less discerning though, in these cases, it is common for parents to oversee their homework and assess the validity of the sites they find for them. In the Burnley family, both parents talk of how they use sites with names they trust offline to support their children's homework and in their own web search. For example, James Burnley says:

> James: I tend to use the sites that have got some sort of name that I sort of recognize. They are authenticated by a different process from the web sort of. If it says the British Museum, I'm pretty confident about the content. [....] I find it fairly straightforward because you get... You get a big long list of references but you can frequently tell from the address if it's a university or something like that, and pick out stuff and...
>
> (Mr Burnley, int. 2)

Another approach is to recommend sites for your child's use. Andrew Manders-Short (aged 11), for instance, tends to limit his searches to sites like 'Guardian Unlimited' suggested to him by his mother as a good place to search for

information on homework such as the 'One-Child Policy in China'. This shows how parents are able to draw on their own cultural capital to support their children.

Whilst these examples show that there is a growing awareness of the need to be critical of websites amongst adults and children, some respondents contest this on the grounds of how they incorporate this information into their homework or based on the kinds of information they retrieve, namely, images. In the Bourne family, for instance, Vivien (aged 14) makes use of the internet to support homework, but argues that the context in which she uses it renders evaluation unnecessary:

> Sue: What happens if you're looking for something say about religious education? How do you know that what you're reading is a good source? How do you know that it's going to be reliable?
>
> Vivien: I don't. [....] No. But I wouldn't. Or. It's not as if I'd just take it off the internet and then pretend it was my own work. [....] It's only research so it doesn't really need to be perfect. But if I just take in some research that I've found. I mean they encourage us to use the internet at school.
>
> (Vivien Bourne, aged 14, int. 3)

One possibility here is that Vivien has not considered this question before and becomes defensive about her use of the web for research as she realises that she does not evaluate the reliability of what she finds. It is interesting that she draws on her school as justification for her research, seeming to take her school's encouragement to use the web as the approval she needs to justify using it uncritically though this issue of reliability may well not have been raised at school either. Another area where children and parents contest the need to be critical is where homework research is for images rather than information. In the Liang family, Howard (aged 12) says that he uses sites with 'serious names' as a way of evaluating content. Howard's mother, Freya Liang, then points out that he is generally searching for 'factual' information anyway, such as images, which she presumes are less contentious in any case:

> Freya: I think if Howard's doing homework, then he'll go for factual stuff, erm, it's not, not something where, uh, words are failing me. It's not something that's subjective, he'll be after a picture. So, he won't be after people's opinions.

(Mrs Liang, int. 1)

How the internet is used to support homework and adult study was explored in more detail in Chapter 6. What this section has considered is the level of critical awareness that exists, the strategies that have developed for evaluating web pages and whether, in fact, parents and children see a need to evaluate web pages in the first place. Overall, it appears that many parents are becoming more aware of the social, economic and cultural factors involved in website production and finding ways to help their children and themselves negotiate this environment. Whilst there are reasons for optimism in the evaluation strategies that some children are developing, particularly older children, there are also indications that some children have a very low level of awareness indeed. One way of building critical awareness may be to encourage both children and their parents to publish on the web themselves to gain an understanding of how and why sites are produced. The next section will explore this and the level of creative skills and competencies within the sample families.

Production of websites

At the beginning of the chapter, I drew on the literature review for Ofcom (Buckingham et al., 2005) on media literacy in showing the blurring in previous research between communication/production and interactivity/consumption, for example. I noted how the Ofcom review had suggested this field be viewed as a continuum: between activities that might be seen as interactive and those that clearly involve production, such as websites. For this reason, I am selecting the building of websites from the range of activities carried out on the internet within the sample families through which to examine a clear example of creative/production use.

In general, previous studies from the UK have found disappointingly low numbers of young people creating their own internet content (Facer et al., 2003; Livingstone & Bober, 2004). Yet, as Livingstone (2003a) argues, creating is an important requirement in defining media literacy:

> ... it is argued first, that people attain a deeper understanding of the conventions and merits of professionally produced material if they have direct experience of content production and second,

> that the internet *par excellence* is a medium which offers hitherto unimagined opportunities for ordinary people to create online content. (Livingstone, 2003a: 1)

Moreover, Livingstone emphasises that media literacy should form part of a democratising and empowering strategy to reposition the media user – from consumers of online information and communication to participating citizens. Facer et al. (2003) argue that low levels of children producing websites combined with the lack of understanding about how these information resources are produced raise questions about how far youngsters are 'information literate'. They also suggest that low levels of website production may also be attributable to wider societal and educational factors; their study shows only 20 percent of children have ever used computers for creating websites in schools. Moreover, research by Livingstone and Bober established a link between frequency of use and website production; they found that 34 percent of the children surveyed had set up their own web pages and that this was a more common activity amongst the daily rather than weekly users (Livingstone & Bober, 2004).

In my sample families, parents and children with their own web pages and sites are the exception. Out of 17 families, there are only four fathers and one mother, and two young people, in a reconstructed family, who create their own content[12]. However, those who have set up their own pages do so extensively, building elaborate sites to promote their businesses, interests and hobbies. The parents are represented across all family types whilst the two boys are raised in an *established* household. There are even fewer young people with websites in the sample than for parents (and lower than the 34 percent of children found in Livingstone and Bober's survey data (2004). Stepbrothers Ben and Tony Archer-Hughes (both aged 14), have their own sites, yet younger brother Joe does not, nor does Helen Archer-Hughes, their mother. This provides an interesting case study for why young people might be motivated to create web pages and why they might not under the same conditions and quality of

[12] As previously mentioned, Anita Jackson and Sandra Parker had been required to publish websites as part of their degrees. However, this was as a one-off presentation through the University that neither mother has since sustained at home.

access[13]. For this reason, it is worth looking closely at their accounts. During the first interview, Jay (father to Tony, stepfather to Ben) mentions that Tony (aged 14) has been teaching him to create websites for his business. Additionally, Ben (also aged 14), details several sites that he has created. This shows how the expertise is currently situated more with the older boys than with other members of the family and that the drive to build websites came from the brothers themselves. I ask Ben what motivated him to do so and his response combines the influence of his family and peers with a wish to promote his interests and himself:

> Ben: ...It's like wow I done it but everyone says you should build one and so I have...
>
> Sue: Who's everyone?
>
> Ben: Like all these people here er people at school and stuff [....]
>
> Sue: What did you get out of building a web page? Or website?
>
> Ben: Just I guess, it's just recognition. That's my web page, I did it. I'm so brilliant!
>
> (Ben Archer-Hughes, aged 14, int. 2)

Ben tends to create websites based around his interest in games playing and animation: for instance, one site he established was focused on the Dreamcast games console, which he imported from Japan ahead of UK availability. These types of sites have been termed 'self-presentation' or 'self-expression' sites (Chandler, 1998; Miller, 1995). By the point of the third interview, two years later, he is much more interested in the 'aesthetics' of web design but still builds sites, more recently for his girlfriend's father. Meanwhile, Tony is now building sites on a professional basis, subcontracted to him by his father. By contrast, Joe (aged 12) does not create websites. It may be that the environment for Joe to learn is not supportive. When I ask if anyone helps anyone else with the computer and internet in the household, Tony says:

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[13] The Archer-Hughes family took up an early cable offer and had uncharged access to the internet between six pm and eight am, from 1995. Any kind of unlimited access was unusual during this period.

Tony: Yes, we explain to him [Joe] because he is stupid.

(Tony Archer-Hughes, aged 14, int. 1)

As Joe may not be able to keep up with his technologically 'savvy' brothers, he may prefer to withdraw rather than suffer their insults. At the third interview, two years later, Joe uses chat but remains unmotivated to produce websites:

> Joe: I'm not into making a website, it's too much like hard work. [....] I'm into all the, go on and chat and stuff, but I don't see the point in making websites and stuff, it's just too hard and complicated.
>
> (Joe Archer-Hughes, aged 14, int. 3)

Though the functional and creative skills and competencies are present in the household and, in theory, there for Joe to draw on, it may be that to do so is an uncomfortable experience that he prefers to avoid. Also, his preferred pastimes may be different to his brothers, as siblings' interests often are. Their mother, Helen, is also uninterested in building a website, saying that for her the internet is for 'practical things' such as 'looking at particular sites'. I have used the example of this family to show how, even within a household with a strong culture and history of website building, it is not necessarily the case that everyone wants their own site. I have also shown how the dynamics that exist between siblings may influence the quality of the support available.

In the earlier stages of my research, I had assumed (wrongly as it turned out) that young people's practices for publishing websites would follow those of their parents as they have recently been shown to do with levels of use (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). I had presumed that where parents' skills and competencies were available for children and young people to draw on and realising through their parents' experiences the affordance of the internet for publishing, children would follow their parents into website production. However, my hypothesis did not take account of the fact that parents with their own websites are in two of the four cases, gurus who monopolise the computer, in turn deterring their children's uses rather than sharing their knowledge with them. I discuss parents with websites in more detail below but briefly, the younger children of these family gurus, Robert Grant and Sue Manders-Short, are both interested in having their own websites. Yet, it seems that having a parent with the relevant

skills and competencies has not facilitated them being able to do so. In the Grant family, Robert (father) says that this is because Tim (aged 12) wants to put games on, but these skills lie outside his father's current expertise. It is notable that Tim's father sees the responsibility for learning the skills and passing them onto Tim as his own rather than recognising Tim as an autonomous learner. Secondly, Andrew Manders-Short has tried to build his own web page but given up and is now struggling to find a topic suitable to provide the motivation to try again:

Sue: Have you tried producing your own web page?

Andrew: Yeah I have, but it didn't work out so I just sort of gave up with it.

Sue: Is it something you're going to go back to?

Andrew: It's very. I don't know. I might. I can't think of a an appropriate topic yet.

(Andrew Manders-Short, aged 11, int. 2)

What these examples show is that having parents who publish websites is no guarantee that children have the facility to do so. Likewise, there are other children (all boys) in the sample who expressed an interest in building a website but find other barriers to them doing so. At the first interviews, for instance, Bobby Bond (aged 15) is unable to access web space to publish to as he uses his mother's work internet connection; Caleb Kendal (aged 11) is waiting to see how his mother's attempts to publish work out before he has a go; other boys say that, like Andrew Manders-Short, they lack a topic to focus on. At the point of the third interviews, two years later, barriers such as lack of web space have been removed, yet these youngsters remain without their own web pages. This suggests either their lack of motivation and/or that home pages have not yet become significant to them in their lives (Bober, 2004). Amongst the girls, the reasons for not having a web page betray issues of identity and confidence about themselves in relation to the internet. Rhiannon Grant (aged 14) is keen to position herself as a non-'techie' like her mother and unlike her father who she considers a 'nerd':

Sue: You're not interested in having one?

Rhiannon: Not got anything to put on it!

Robert: Got pictures of yourself and tell everybody how cool you are.

Rhiannon: That's just sick.

(Rhiannon Grant, aged 14 and Mr Grant, int. 2)

One of the other girls in the sample, Valerie Prowse (aged 16) cites her lack of skills and ability compared with her peers, as a barrier:

Val: Yeah. I'm not clever enough to do that really. All my friends do like IT and things.

(Valerie Prowse, aged 16, int. 3)

There is also a suggestion that Valerie considers formal tuition in schools, 'like IT', is required to learn how to create web pages rather than teaching herself at home. Having considered children's motivations (or lack of them) to publish web pages and the barriers they encounter; I will now consider the development of parents' websites in the sample.

Two of the fathers, Jay Archer-Hughes (full-time self-employed Management Consultant) and Robert Grant (full-time professional musician, music teacher, IT teacher and painter) began creating websites to promote their businesses and services and, having learnt these skills, have now widened their remit to design websites for others professionally, though this is on an ad hoc basis rather than being a full-time change of career. The only mother in the sample to have a website, Sheila Manders-Short (full-time self-employed health practitioner) set up a website to disseminate a health-related technique she had developed and to encourage dialogue with other interested parties. She has recently developed one part of the site into a business which sells health products. All three parents are long-term computer hobbyists who looked on the internet as an opportunity to expand their interests:

Robert: I was a serious nerd beforehand, before I started getting into it with the music. But... but the reason I thought... I just thought to meself oh it's part of twentieth century life now, twenty-first century life, we might as well make the most of it, find out all you can and then choose which channel to go down.

(Mr Grant, int. 1)

All three speak very positively of the benefits of their websites to promote their work. The fourth parent, Duncan Craine (full-time IT Technician) is a computer hobbyist. He started a degree course in Applied Social Sciences but discovered through this that his true passion is computers. Since then, he has abandoned the degree and dedicated himself to learning and using ICTs. He has attended many training courses and now works in an IT position. His website represents his interest and commitment to computers built around his own hobbies and family. Each member of the family, his wife and four children, has their own web page that he has set up with a photograph and biography. His eldest son, Aaron (aged 10) has recently started to contribute to the site through his father's tutoring.

In the case of all four parents, it appears to be their interest in technology combined with the motivation to promote their businesses or services, plus develop their skills, which has initiated these sites. Within other families, one or two parents indicated that they would like to set up sites in the future though, at the point of the third interview after an interval of two years, none of them had done so. As so few parents have their own website, it is worth looking very closely at what motivates and enables those who do and what demotivates and obstructs those who do not. Suzanne Kendal (part-time university academic) said that as regional co-ordinator for a national organization, she would be interested in having a site in the future to promote their work combining both hobby and work-related interest. Teacher Jeff Hill said that he would be interested in having a site if home internet access was less expensive, suggesting that he finds infrequent access the main barrier. By the third interview, Freya Liang had considered setting one up to promote a business venture, but as the business did not progress, neither did the website. Often, pressurised parents will cite lack of time as the reason they are unable to go online but unusually, in relation to publishing web pages, the reasons given are overwhelmingly motivational rather than time restraints. It appears that websites have not yet become significant in adults' lives either, as Bober (2004) found in relation to children.

Conclusions

There is a prevailing myth that given reasonable access, time and motivation, everyone can learn to use the internet. A combination of the inbuilt pedagogies and 'rapid feedback' that the internet is thought to engender together with the assumption of readily available help in the home, developed there or in other settings, leads to the expectation that users can learn informally through experimentation. Yet close scrutiny of the development of skills and competencies within the home context has to some extent exposed this as a myth. Not only do some users have a limited notion of what constitutes internet literacy, perceiving of it as merely a set of functional skills for the most part, but issues of competence such as the critical skills needed to evaluate websites and negotiate the internet's commercial dimensions, are underdeveloped in many cases. Moreover, the affordances of the internet for publishing remain neglected by all but a minority of enthusiasts.

Even where users have reasonable access, time, motivation and family support, functional skills and competencies may remain limited and narrow. Moreover, the data suggest that they do not necessarily improve over time or through practice. Whether learning takes place at home, school and/or in the workplace, it is possible for users to get put off entirely by their negative experiences, a situation which may or may not be overcome by uses within other spheres of their lives. Moreover, users may become resigned to having only the narrowest range of skills and competencies, for instance, being competent email users yet remaining unable to conduct web searches. Furthermore, the sharing of skills within the home may not address this: tensions and inherent power struggles between family members can be a barrier to learning and generate a further source of family conflict. Even in households with enthusiastic and highly competent users (possessing a range of functional, critical and creative skills), there is no guarantee that skills will be passed on, or that other family members' uses will be facilitated.

Having contested assumptions that the skills and competencies to use the internet are easily learned within the home, the next chapter will explore attitudes and behaviour in relation to bringing work home.

Chapter 8: Work Uses of the Internet

> It is through the advent and advancing penetration of information technology into an increasingly broad range of work areas that the traditional boundaries of 'work' are being redrawn to the greatest degree. (Hardill, 1997)

Introduction

Current concerns in the UK media and government policy often focus on the 'macho' long hours culture of working, said to undermine relationships and lead to stress-related health problems. Since 2000, the UK Government's Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) has 'promoted the growth of flexible working opportunities in the UK by demonstrating the business case for work-life balance' (2004). Such initiatives are said to bring benefits to employers in relation to employees' reduction of stress levels, sickness and absenteeism whilst increasing retention levels, operating as a recruitment tool, improving productivity and performance, morale, commitment, loyalty and employee flexibility. Commentators have criticised these initiatives on the basis that Government documents offer little 'explanation or detail' of what work-life balance actually entails (Guest, 2001). However, when the planned 2003 European working time directive defined 48 hours as an appropriate maximum, it implied that those regularly working more than 48 hours a week have an imbalance (Guest, 2001). Professional and managerial workers in *high discretion* jobs (defined by Felstead and Jewson (2000) as requiring 'qualities of judgement, problem-solving, decision-making and originality') may also be more oriented towards working extra hours due to the more compelling nature of their work. Taylor found that two thirds of higher level professionals and managers said that they enjoyed job satisfaction compared with only 28 percent of skilled manual workers (Taylor, 2002). A study of dual career households in the UK, focusing on the strategies adopted to meet the demands of 'paid work careers' and 'household careers' in mainly managerial and professional jobs concluded that most of the individuals in their sample of 30 households derived great satisfaction from their jobs and were content to take work home, occasionally or regularly (Hardill, 1997).

Home-based working and, particularly teleworking[14], have been promoted as a means of successfully balancing work and home life. Armstrong (1997) has described the utopian visions of the future offered, particularly to women, in the shape of teleworking and the desire to juggle child care with work. This is particularly pertinent as research has highlighted continuing inequalities in the division of labour responsibilities between women and men (Doucet, 1991; Gregson & Lowe, 1993; Oakley, 1974), which, in turn, impact on the time available for salaried home working. Bryant (2000) has pointed out how home-based working is packaged as socially progressive: having the potential to 'harmonise' paid work and family responsibilities and offering a new 'flexibility' for workers to benefit from. Research has tended to conclude, however, that the advantages of being close to your work all the time are accompanied by disadvantages. Felstead and Jewson (2000) have talked of the 'myth of autonomy' that exists when home-based workers are caught between the 'twin pincers of management control strategies and the demands of the domestic division of labour' (111). The promise of more leisure time, control and contact with family turns into the reality of long hours, unpredictable workloads and family tensions.

Whilst some degree of increased personal control is possible through home working, the added flexibility that workers may enjoy obscures the considerable hidden work of managing the dual spheres of home and work (Salaff, 2002). The maintenance of the boundary between home and work is fundamental to any discussion of home-based working. Nippert-Eng (1996) has usefully shown how the relationship between home and work can be seen as a continuum with possibilities ranging from 'integration' to 'segmentation'. When fully 'integrated', home and work are the same, with no conceptual boundary to separate content or meaning. At the other end of the 'integration-segmentation continuum', aspects of work and home are experienced as completely separate. Nippert-Eng describes how this border is negotiated along multiple fronts, in

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[14] Teleworking is defined here as work carried out using telecommunications-related technologies, such as email, voice mail, teleconferencing and telephone conversations in a setting other than the formal work place (see Mokhtarian 1991).

multidimensional and dynamic ways, reflecting both unconscious and conscious work, and work which is both visible and invisible.

Recent studies have raised concerns that ICTs, and in particular the internet, may actually be increasing the blurring of the home-work boundary and negatively influencing work-life balance. Recent studies from the US have suggested that significant numbers of workers are extending their work hours into the home using the internet. Survey data from the Pew Internet and American Life project found that 14 percent of internet users report an increase in the amount of time spent working at home, which is especially prevalent amongst the 'veterans' (online for more than three years at March 2000) (Horrigan & Rainie, 2002a). A further US study has reported that more than a quarter of full-time and part-time workers using the internet regularly (i.e. for more than five hours a week at both home and work) have increased the time spent engaged in home working without decreasing the amount of time spent in the office. Only a small number of these, four percent, report that they are reaping the potential benefits of 'telecommuting' (Nie & Erbring, 2000). Previous research in relation to computer use (Aune, 1996) found that workers prefer to bring work home, reporting that it is more pleasant to continue working at home in the company of family than at the office. However, physical presence does not necessarily mean that the person is mentally available to the family, when they are focused on work.

This chapter will explore the role of the internet in home working practices in the sample families. It will examine the different patterns of digital and non-digital working including those engaged in '*digital overflow*: the practice of using the internet in order to bring work into the home to meet the demands of the intensified workplace' (Cranmer, 2002: 3). Under consideration will be orientation to home working; reasons for (and against) bringing work home in general; the specific role of the internet in carrying out work-related tasks; temporal and spatial patterns of home working; and the kinds of work-related activities carried out using the internet.

Working at home

Orientation to home working

Within the sample families, there are material differences in parents' work status, which when combined with attitudes to working at home, provide a useful framework for understanding different orientations towards home working. Table 2 shows those parents who run *home-based businesses* and those who are engaged in *salaried employment outside the home* (see Table 2). The parents are then sub-divided into three categories: *integration*, *negotiation* and *segmentation*. These types reflect parents' attitudes towards carrying out work within the home based on Nippert-Eng's (1996) concept of a continuum from *integration* to *segmentation* along the home-work boundary. For the most part, *integration workers* draw no boundaries between home and work; *negotiators* draw boundaries contingent on the particular circumstances they find themselves in; *segmentation workers* draw a clear line between home and work that they rarely, if ever, transgress. There are also a number of parents not engaged in salaried employment at the point of the initial interviews: Ros Bradshaw, Angela Craine, Anita Jackson, Derek and Sandra Parker.

Table 2 Categorisation of salaried parents by material differences and attitudes to home working

	Integration	***Negotiation***	***Segmentation***
Home-based business	Melvin Bradshaw, FT Sales Director Robert Grant, FT Musician/Teacher/ Painter Jay Archer-Hughes, FT Management Consultant	Gail Dunne-Osborne, FT Psychotherapist Sheila Manders-Short, FT Health Practitioner	
Salaried employment outside the home	Kelvin Powell-Drummond, FT Senior Academic Jeff Hill, FT	Christine Bond, FT University Manager Fiona Bourne, PT	Helen Archer-Hughes, FT Finance Director, NHS Duncan Craine, FT

	Secondary Teacher Phillip Kendal, FT Company Finance Director Suzanne Kendal, PT Academic Michael Dunne-Osborne, FT College Manager Amanda Powell-Drummond, FT Senior Academic Tessa Prowse, FT Social Worker	Civil Servant John Bourne[15], FT Building Director Alison Burnley, FT Chief Executive, NHS James Burnley, FT Director of Housing	IT Technician, Computer Outlet Lisa Golding, PT University Administrator Peter Golding, FT Town Planner Maria Grant, FT Health Visitor Deborah Hill, FT Community Nurse Ken Jackson, FT Care Assistant Freya Liang, PT Credit Controller Jeremy Liang, FT Company Accountant Nick Prowse, FT Royal Navy Engineer Richard Manders-Short, FT Actor

Reasons underpinning attitudes to home working and particularly uses of the internet for carrying out work related tasks will be analysed below. However, two observations can be made in relation to the data presented in Table 2. Firstly, it is perhaps surprising in light of the research above regarding the tendency of professional and managerial workers to work extra hours and be content to take work home (Felstead & Jewson, 2000; Hardill, 1997) that despite the overrepresentation of professional and managerial workers within the sample, a large proportion of salaried workers do not take work home. It may be that they prefer to continue working late in the office (see Maria Grant below). Secondly, within the sample, gender does not appear to be a factor

[15] The parents engaged in salaried employment work for a range of private and public institutions. The only exception is John Bourne who runs his own building construction company from an external office.

influencing uses of the internet for work. This is surprising in view of previous studies showing the inequalities in women and men's home responsibilities that could impact on the time available for working at home. However, it could be that amongst the professional households, outside help is bought in to carry some of the burdens of housework and child care (Gregson & Lowe, 1994). Indeed, an *au pair* was present at the beginning of one of the interviews in a middle-class household.

For *home-based business workers*, gender does appear significant but the small scale nature of this study means that this finding does not carry much weight. However, this finding does bear out research carried out by Goffee and Scase (1985) into women's business start-ups which highlighted that whilst an important motivation for starting a business for many women is a wish for 'personal autonomy', the major driving force is a need to earn a salary in a manner compatible with domestic obligations. They found that for women who were married with children at the time of start-up, businesses are strongly attached to a set of family relationships and often regarded as supplementary sources of income. Moreover, women tended to retain their domestic duties in addition to their business responsibilities, with help from husbands or partners in either sphere being highly limited.

To further illuminate orientations to work, I will provide brief examples of parents within each category to be further developed in the full analyses:

Home-based business

Integration: Jay Archer-Hughes is a full-time self-employed Management Consultant who works mainly at home. Several aspects of the data suggest that his home and work life is fully integrated: his extensive, unlimited work hours and the overlapping of the social with the professional in terms of his friends, for example:

> Jay: [...] Yes, again the work I do because I am self employed the people I know I tend to be social and professional with, so I will email people and it will be a purely social email sometimes, other times it might be work related.
>
> (Mr Archer-Hughes, FT Management Consultant, int. 1)

Negotiation: Sheila Manders-Short is a full-time self-employed Health Practitioner who runs her own business, including seeing clients in her home. Comments made by Sheila suggest that in spite of her work being situated in the home, she tries to keep some level of boundary between home and work by deploying a range of spatial and temporal strategies. For instance, she describes the physical barrier of the door as creating a separation from her workspace:

> Sheila: [...] You can just shut that door and the office is in there, the computer is in there, my table's in there, you can just shut the door and it is all in there, and you can come in here and forget about it.
>
> (Ms Manders-Short, FT Health Practitioner, int. 1)

Salaried employment outside the home

Integration: Tessa Prowse is a full-time Social Worker who appears to accept that bringing work home helps her cope with the demands of her pressurised job:

> Tessa: It's rather busy at the moment so yes, I do, I bring a lot of work home. [...] I tend to do about 15-20 hours extra work a week.
>
> (Mrs Prowse, Social Worker, int. 1)

Negotiation: Christine Bond, full-time Senior University Manager is a good example of a parent whose attitude to working at home is midway between *integration* and *segmentation.* In short, Christine's intention is not to carry out extra work at home except in emergencies. In reality, her responses throughout the interviews suggest that the frequency of 'emergencies' means that urgent work often impinges on her home life. She differs from Tessa Prowse in that she does not accept this as the norm but instead tries to maintain the boundary:

> Christine: But yesterday. Yeah. That's right. Yesterday was one of those days when I just. I knew that if I didn't put a day's work in yesterday I just wasn't going to get. I was going to go in tomorrow and be absolutely snowed under. So I spent almost a whole day yesterday working. But it doesn't. No. It doesn't happen very much. So yesterday wasn't really the. It was more of an exception.
>
> (Ms Bond, FT Senior University Manager, int. 2)

Segmentation: Maria Grant, full-time Health Visitor, has decided to take a deliberate stance against home working at the point of the initial interviews, preferring to stay late at her work place rather than bring her work home. This decision has been reflected in the rearranging of the spatial organisation of the home:

> Maria: [...] I just want to get a very firm demarcation between work and home. [....] And I was using it [the computer] occasionally for work. But I've decided not to work from home any more. So I've just made a decision to... We're...we're going to use that room for something else anyway... [....]
>
> (Mrs Grant, FT Health Visitor, int. 1)

In later interviews, it emerges that Maria has been successful in preserving this 'demarcation' though it does require her to stay late at work sometimes.

Orientation to home working – two years later

Using the same framework as in Table 2, Table 3 shows changes in parents' work status combined with their attitudes to working at home at the point of the third interview after a period of two years (see Table 3). Angela Craine, Deborah Hill and Derek Parker are unsalaried at the two-year stage.

Table 3 Changes within categorisation of salaried parents by material differences and attitudes to home working after 2 years

	Integration	***Negotiation***	***Segmentation***
Home-based business	Robert Grant, FT Musician, Music teacher painter/Web designer (no longer teaches IT)		
Salaried employment outside the home	Melvin Bradshaw, FT Taxi Driver Ros Bradshaw, PT School Governor Anita Jackson, PT Literacy and Numeracy teacher Phillip Kendal, FT Company Finance Director with official home based worker		Duncan Craine, FT IT Manager, Computer Outlet Freya Liang, PT Private Tutor Sandra Parker, FT Resource Centre Manager

	status. Suzanne Kendal, FT Academic Tessa Prowse, FT Children's Home Manager		

Most of the changes are self-explanatory, reflecting changes in responsibilities and jobs that have not impacted to any great extent on measures of *integration, negotiation* and *segmentation* combined with categories of *home-based businesses, salaried employment outside the home* and *non-salaried.* Changes that benefit from further clarification include Melvin Bradshaw whose business failed during the two-year period and who was working as a taxi driver at the point of the third interviews. As he continued to engage in home working practices as part of setting up a new home based business venture I have included him as an *integration worker* under *salaried employment outside the home.* Previously unsalaried parents, Ros Bradshaw and Anita Jackson, have both acquired part-time jobs and emerge as *integrationists* who bring work home. Sandra Parker has become a full-time Resource Centre Manager who draws a clear line between work and home as a *segmentation worker.* Deborah Hill has become a full-time student as the result of achieving a scholarship to upgrade her qualifications from Diploma to Degree. Although Phillip Kendal remains an *integration worker* (as at the initial interviews), it is worth noting that his company has granted him 'official home-worker' status, which means he works from home one – two days per week.

Bringing work home

As Salaff (2002) has pointed out, the extension of work hours into the home predated the introduction of the internet into the home. Indeed not all of the parents engaged in home working use the internet to carry out work-related tasks. In this section, I will analyse attitudes and factors influencing bringing work home and using the internet to carry out responsibilities.

The section is necessarily uneven in that reasons for establishing *home-based businesses* in the first place are outside the scope of the study. However light can be shed on how *home-based workers* view the role of the internet in

supporting their businesses. The internet users are in the majority: only one *home-based business worker*, Gail Dunne-Osborne (FT Psychotherapist), does not use the internet for her work. Other users see the internet as crucial to their work. Jay Archer-Hughes, for example, has normalised uses of the internet to the point where he takes it for granted as an everyday part of his job:

> Jay: I think for me it became part of my work, it is becoming part of everybody's work, so there is no option, it is not 'do you like it or not', it is part of it, just like the telephone and the fax, you need it, it is just there.
>
> (Mr Archer-Hughes, FT Management Consultant, int. 1)

His perception of the internet, in line with that of the other *home-based business workers* in the sample, contrasts greatly with the mistrust voiced by Gail Dunne-Osborne towards using email:

> Gail: [...] I don't feel very trusting somehow of the email. And there is something different emotionally that happens on a phone.
>
> (Ms Dunne-Osborne, FT Psychotherapist, int. 1)

A study by the Pew and American Life Project (Horrigan & Rainie, 2002b) reported that some occupations lend themselves more easily than others to 'telecommuting'. And, in an earlier paper, I speculated that the contrast in approaches, as cited here, was the result of occupational and work culture differences (Cranmer, 2002). This drew on recognition that Jay's business is predominantly computer based whereas Gail's is built on face-to-face contact. However, having reflected on this further in view of the context of Jay and Gail's overall uses of the internet, I now realise that personal attributes, such as orientation towards technology and the possession of the appropriate skills and competencies, also play their part. In short, whilst Jay is an enthusiastic and extensive user of the internet, Gail shies away from it. Although Gail does use the computer to word process documents and fliers, she describes her experiences online as 'frustrating':

> Gail: [...] I mean, several times I think when we have tried things, or when I have tried things, I have been frustrated. So I have had the energy to begin and then something has gone wrong, and it is like 'oh my god, I am doing this to save me time, it is taking me more time'.
>
> (Ms Dunne-Osborne, FT Psychotherapist, int. 1)

This point is further borne out by the extensive uses made by another *home-based business worker* in the sample, Sheila Manders-Short (FT Health Practitioner). Also a practitioner whose business is largely built around having face-to-face contact with clients, Sheila uses the internet comprehensively to support and promote her business. She also belies any conclusions about gender that we might draw. Moreover, length of time online does not necessarily make a difference. When interviewed after two years, the previous *home-based business workers* who used the internet remain committed to its use to support their businesses whilst Gail Dunne-Osborne remains firmly resistant.

The role played by personal attributes in home working will be returned to later. At this point, I will consider bringing work into the home by *salaried employees who work outside the home,* their reasons for doing so and the range of practical and personal issues that influence whether they use the internet at home to carry out work-related tasks. To distinguish the two groups of internet and non-internet users for work-related tasks, I will use the term *digital overflow* to describe the overflow of salaried work into the home using the internet (Cranmer, 2002) and the practices of *digital overflow workers* compared with *non-digital overflow workers*[16]. I outlined earlier the situation of workers along a continuum from integration to segmentation and Table 4 shows a combination of the workers in the *integration* and *negotiation* categories and their engagement in *digital* and *non-digital overflow* work.

Table 4 Categorisation of salaried employees who work outside the home and also engage in digital and non-digital overflow

Salaried employment outside the home	***Integration***	***Negotiation***
Digital overflow workers	Jeff Hill, FT Secondary Teacher Phillip Kendal, FT Company	Christine Bond, FT University Manager

[16] *Non-digital overflow workers* tend to limit the work they bring home to paper driven activities such as reading or writing by hand.

	Finance Director Suzanne Kendal, PT Academic Amanda Powell-Drummond, FT Senior Academic Tessa Prowse, FT Social Worker Michael Dunne-Osborne, FT College Manager	
Non-digital overflow workers	Kelvin Powell-Drummond, FT Senior Academic	Fiona Bourne, PT Civil Servant John Bourne, FT Building Director Alison Burnley, FT Chief Executive, NHS James Burnley, FT Director of Housing

The general reasons given for bringing work home tend to be the same for *digital workers* as for *non-digital overflow workers*. As concluded by Hardill (1997), mentioned above, individuals in professional and managerial work (over represented in my sample) derive satisfaction from their jobs and are content to take work home. The grounds respondents give include pressure of workload; needing peace and quiet without interruptions in order to concentrate, particularly for writing and editing; staying on top of the job; being 'snowed under'; bringing home a document to finish off. Exceptionally, James Bourne (FT Self-employed Building Director) said that he brings work home for reasons of confidentiality, for example, issuing letters that contain information pertaining to salaries that he writes by hand. The general tone of the responses overall was of acceptance towards bringing work home but one respondent talked of anxiety underpinning his motivation to do so and how this could lead to a downhill spiral impacting on his well-being:

> Michael: Erm, which is a different context from my work. The pressure for me to be working all the time often isn't coming from external directly, it is internalized. And erm I don't get enough sleep and I get into a cycle of not getting enough sleep so then I have the intention of doing some work in the

> evening but actually I'm too tired er and it gets worse because then I get more anxious because I haven't done the work that I thought I could have done and in my head I've planned what I have done, when I think I've done it almost you know because I've planned to do it.
>
> (Mr Dunne-Osborne, FT College Manager, int. 3)

This brings home the pressure of the long hours culture and work-life balance concerns raised by UK Government in both policy and initiatives (DTI, 2004).

Workers who practice *segmentation* (do not bring work home) also give a range of reasons for not doing so. These range from making a deliberate decision not to bring work home but instead to stay late in the office; simply not feeling required to work at home; security reasons; or that work tasks do not easily transfer to the home. Duncan Craine (FT IT Technician, Computer Outlet), for example, says that there is 'no need to' work from home (int. 1). For other workers, security may be an issue. For instance, Nick Prowse (FT Royal Navy Engineer), cannot bring work home due to the confidential nature of his occupation. Freya Liang (FT Credit Controller) said that her job entails chasing people who are late with making payments; she would not want to make these telephone calls from home.

Having briefly examined reasons for bringing or not bringing any kind of work home, I will consider why people use the internet in particular, *digital overflow,* for work-related tasks. One of the key questions in current research is whether the internet is adding to an increased blurring of the boundary between home and work. Lally (2002) argues that the sheer presence of an employment-related computer in the home is to some extent blurring the home-work boundary. Salaff (2002) has pointed out that when teleworkers absorb home office expenses for consumer durables and services, a merging of the spheres of family and work is already taking place. Similarly, Ellis (2004) argues that: 'existing telecommunications technologies such as laptops and mobile phones with internet capabilities, and remote access to office servers, already blur the idea of work taking place both in a geographically separate office and during set working hours' (1395). The US findings mentioned in the introduction to this chapter (see Horrigan & Rainie, 2002a; Nie & Erbring, 2000) suggest that the internet is contributing to the blurring of the home-work boundary. However, in

relation to carrying work home, it is a minority of parents in my sample who are using the internet at home to engage in *digital overflow.* A larger study would be helpful to confirm or invalidate this finding specific to conditions in the UK.

Ellis's (2004) conclusion in relation to employers providing 'remote access to office servers' is important in issues around *digital overflow.* It is likely that by facilitating the flexibility of being able to access email conveniently and quickly from home, employees will feel predisposed to do this. This suggests that some employers encourage a culture of home working. However, in spite of remote access, many of the respondents in the sample experience practical problems in retrieving and answering email from home. The kinds of practical difficulties that occur include not having access to address books and group lists from home; no facilities to archive and store messages in personal folders; email appearing to have been sent from personal rather than work email addresses; slower connection speeds and problems getting remote support from employers. How far respondents are willing to go to overcome these issues depends on their general attitude to home working and how far internet use is necessary to carrying out their duties. James Burnley (FT Director of Housing), a *negotiation worker*, says that he will not check email from home due to the slow speed of the connection combined with not being able to archive replies from responses sent from home. Michael Dunne-Osborne, an *integrationist*, for instance, also experiences comparable problems and though preferring to avoid checking email from home, will tolerate these inconveniences to avoid his email 'stacking up':

> Michael: [...] Actually doing it from home to work is a bit cronky. So I try and avoid doing that because it creates more work. But like tomorrow I have got to do it, because I want to look at that on Sunday and I am probably going to spend an hour or two editing on Sunday.
>
> (Mr Dunne-Osborne, FT College Manager, int. 2)

Ongoing improvements meant that some of the difficulties associated with emailing from home were overcome at the point of the third interviews. However, what is interesting here is that it can be seen how employees engaged in *digital overflow* have strong enough motivation to work from home using the internet to tolerate what might be seen to be the ongoing 'teething problems' of new technologies.

Checking email from home is not the only use of the internet for carrying out work-related tasks, of course, but it is the aspect of use most frequently mentioned by *digital overflow workers.* (A more detailed analysis of actual work-related uses, for instance, kinds of websites visited, is given below.) Some workers said that their inability to keep up with the constant flow of email they receive is one of the reasons why they work extra hours at home. Phillip Kendal talks of how he responds to email from home:

Sue: Do you work from home a lot?

Suzanne: If I can't clear my email at work then I'll quite often do a few.

(Mr Kendal, FT Company Finance Director, int. 1)

At the point of the initial interviews, neither of these two *digital overflow workers* was able to reap the benefits of teleworking to the point where they could avoid a trip to the office. This reflects the findings reported above (Horrigan & Rainie, 2002a; Nie & Erbring, 2000).

In contrast, Amanda Powell-Drummond (FT Senior Academic) was enjoying the benefits of teleworking, though the internet did not facilitate home working in lieu of office hours (see below for further discussion of work patterns) as she was already able to work from home. The internet was, however, bringing her more advantages for work than she had anticipated when her family had acquired the connection three months before the initial interview. For instance, unexpectedly the connection was much faster than that of her work server and crashed less than the work system she was used to. She was finding that home access could save her a trip to the office when an urgent email was needing to be sent/replied to and when meeting times were changed that could have meant a wasted trip. Amanda was also feeling reassured that when she was working at home, there was nothing 'desperately urgent' needing to be done that could not wait. Amanda's responses are indicative of responses given by other *digital overflow workers* though the fast speed of her home server when compared with work was exceptional.

As with email, urgency, convenience and coping with heavy workloads appear to be key reasons for *digital overflow workers'* uses of the web. Michael Dunne-Osborne (FT College Manager), for instance, uses the web to check out the

accuracy of information provided for students at his college; Amanda Powell-Drummond uses the web to prepare teaching materials and resources to support her academic work; Suzanne Kendal (PT University Academic) uses the web for travel information such as looking up train times and location information:

> Suzanne: Erm, these are the sites for work, the UK street maps site, I don't know if you've seen that but some of the best ... you can put your postcode in and it will give you a little street, such as, if you were coming to me, you could find out exactly where this road is and get a little print out of a...
>
> (Mrs Kendal, PT University Academic, int. 2)

Within my sample, the most prolific *digital overflow workers* all work in occupations related to education though there are also examples of workers in education-related professions who draw a clear boundary between work and home. It may be that educational institutions, such as Universities and so on, have been quick to respond to providing remote access and that academics and teachers have long since established home working as a regular practice. From this data, however, I can only speculate. A wider study would be needed to establish which occupations have a tendency to consistently produce *digital overflow workers.*

For *non-digital overflow workers,* the reasons given for not using the internet for home working also appear to be influenced by occupation/work culture but also by lack of remote access; desire to protect the home space from the demands of the workplace; screen fatigue; not being in possession of the required skills and competencies; and the technical and practical difficulties with remote access that I outlined above. For some workers it is not possible to carry out internet-related responsibilities at home because users are denied access to the system from outside their workspace as noted above. Fiona Bourne (PT Civil Servant), for example, works for the Inland Revenue, which does not allow remote access due to security reasons. Other *non-digital overflow workers* wish to preserve the sanctuary of the home by not allowing email to invade the home space. Whilst Christine Bond (FT Senior University Manager) does occasionally deal with email at home, her preference is not to, due to the emotional, stressful demands it makes on her.

> Christine: There's probably like fifty emails waiting for me on that machine but I actually will not look at them today because it's Sunday. But I'll wait 'till I get to work on Monday morning to do it because I'm damned if I'm going to spend my Sunday worrying about things that might have come up that I can wait until Monday morning to do.
>
> (Ms Bond, FT Senior University Manager, int. 1)

Respondents often talk of screen fatigue, whereby they are reluctant to use a computer beyond their allotted work hours having worked with them all day. It has previously been noted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project that repeated internet visits made during the work day are taxing people's stamina for evening surfing (Horrigan & Rainie, 2002a). Another reason for not using the internet for work at home is not being in possession of the appropriate skills and competencies as outlined in Chapter 7.

The examples in this section have detailed the reasons that parents who engage to some degree in work at home do not use the internet to carry out work-related tasks. Interestingly, the cost of providing home internet access to support *digital overflow* was not mentioned in the initial interviews although during this period the families were mainly paying for calls by the minute through dial up access. Perhaps as all parents engaged in home working are employed in professional and managerial posts of relative affluence, costs were not viewed as significant compared with the convenience afforded. Amanda Powell-Drummond (FT Senior Academic) did raise it in the third interview, however, as a reason for preferring to carry out the bulk of her internet usage in the work place by that stage. Suzanne Kendal (FT University Academic) also enthused about how broadband had improved her facility to work from home:

> Suzanne: [...] Now I am positively using email and communicating at that level with people in a way that I didn't before. So that has made me stay at home more. [...] But now we have got access over the internet, and again the internet is on all the time, so I don't have to worry about dialling in, the cost of it, it is just there all the time, and so it can go 'ping' anytime when I get an email and the person at work doesn't have a clue at whether I am at work or not in fact. Suddenly you will find that they have rung you and you are not there, no, I'm at home. So it's almost as if that's becoming more seamless in a funny kind of way.
>
> (Mrs Kendal, FT University Academic, int. 3)

Finally, within this section, I will briefly discuss the reverse practice to bringing work home, the role of the internet in the process of taking home to work. Survey data collected by the Pew Internet and American Life project (Howard et al., 2002) shows that on a typical day, at least a tenth of internet users who only have access at a separate work place use the internet to do something that is unrelated to work. What is not clear from their data, however, is how this compares with offline activities that were carried out before the introduction of the internet and whether these have been transferred to the internet. Haythornthwaite and Kazmer (2002) argue that people live in 'multiple social worlds' that interact and encroach on each other. As they point out, individuals do not leave behind all their responsibilities in one world as they move to another: people take work home from the office; take family-related phone calls at the office; read work-related email at home and whilst they are travelling.

Home-based business workers do experience different degrees of *integration* and *segmentation* as already mentioned in relation to attitudes to working at home (above). However, these are not experienced as crossing boundaries from the home-work space to a different work space, though they are present in aspects of the organization of time and space within the home and self-surveillance. In general, it appears that most of the salaried workers employed outside the home who engage in non-work activities on the job, apparently do so for leisure purposes rather than to support their immediate family responsibilities. Examples include emailing friends and distant family whilst at work; looking at websites related to adult study, house buying, news and football results. Interestingly, the most likely group to carry out non-work related activities on the job are the *segmentation* workers who do not carry work home. This finding may reflect their lighter workloads that do not necessitate bringing extra work into the home whilst also allowing time within the workday to use the internet for leisure. The infrequent examples of *integration and negotiation* respondents using the internet for non-work related uses on the job also suggest that the two-way flow between work and home is uneven: these workers appear to assimilate work into home more frequently than they integrate home-related, leisure practices into work. Another possibility is that this group of workers, mainly employed in professional and managerial jobs are less likely to admit their leisure uses and/or have greater investment in their

jobs. Indications were given by *segmentation* workers that they felt guilty about the online leisure activities they carried out at work. For instance, Lisa Golding's response when one of her sons mentions this:

> Lisa: We have it at work and it's freely available but I haven't ...
>
> David: I bet you have when your boss isn't there.
>
> Lisa: Shush, that's how I first discovered the Chelsea web site long before we had it, in my lunch break. No, I, I personally haven't used it for work purposes.[...]
>
> (Mrs Golding, PT University Administrator, and David , aged 11, int. 1)

This example is typical of the exchanges that occur around carrying out non-work activities on the job, particularly in Lisa's reference to carrying this out in her lunch break rather than during her work hours. Also, as mentioned in Chapter 4, mild disagreements such as this can be useful for understanding both internet use and underlying power relations between family members. In this example, David gently undermines his mother's representation of herself as a responsible worker. Whilst she acknowledges that he is right, she has used the internet at work for leisure, her defence is that it was for his benefit - he is a fan of the Chelsea football team - rather than for her own. Moreover, she then returns to her more responsible portrayal of herself by saying that this event took place in her 'lunch break' in any case. This example shows how this family are able to accommodate the mild undermining by a child of a parent's authority within the context of a family interview in a way which also enriches the data.

Other workers also stress that they carry out non-related work activities in their lunch hour or do not take a lunch hour; others imply that these activities take little from the workday by being 'quick' whereas longer uses would require home use. These examples, in turn, reflect employers' concerns about time being wasted at work through the internet being freely available to employees.

In this section, I have examined the range of personal, practical and technical qualities that influence the two-way flow of work-related activities for home and leisure being carried out on the job and their relationship to the internet. In the next section, I will consider the different temporal and spatial patterns of home-working practice.

Different patterns of home working and their relationship to time and space

Gant and Kiesler (2001) have traced the movement of workers from the home (before the 20th century) to a separate work place (during the 20th century) and more recently, back to the home (towards the end of the 20th century). They argue that these changes influence the differentiation of the social meaning of time and space, such as the nine to five weekday versus the weekend, and so on. Furthermore, they suggest that technology is bringing us back to an earlier time when boundaries between work and personal life were less distinct. This section will be concerned with the different dimensions of temporal and spatial organization for those parents engaged in running *home-based businesses* and *overflow* work in the sample families.

Haddon (2004) argues that the amount of telework being undertaken is difficult to measure due to its varying definitions, invisibility and often unofficial and casual nature. Whilst the overall number of full-time home-based workers is small (Gareis, 2002), the number goes up if irregular teleworkers are included, such as those who work one day or more from home a week. There is an extensive field of research into telework (see Haddon, 2004 for a recent overview) which can be drawn on selectively here, to provide a context to the analysis of the *home-based business workers* and to a degree, the parents engaged in *overflow* work. Findings by Hardill (1997) have been mentioned above, but to recap, he found that workers in professional and managerial jobs gained great satisfaction from their jobs and were happy to take occasional or regular work home. Research has also found that those engaged in *high discretion* work may be more easily motivated to work longer hours and/or may be content to bring work home (Felstead & Jewson, 2000; Hardill, 1997). A number of studies have found that whilst full-time teleworkers enjoy increased flexibility and control over their work hours, in turn, they find it difficult to stop working (Akselsen, 2001; Felstead & Jewson, 2000; Goldman, 2000). Salaff (2002) has pointed out that whilst teleworkers may feel empowered by working 'on their own time' from home, it puts them at the 'mercy of the project'. She argues that disassociating themselves from work is the biggest issue; 'teleworkers easily expand their work time to the point of self and often family

exploitation' (480). Often, this is done willingly due to the perceived advantages. For instance, in exchange for reduced travel time to the office, they split the time they would have spent commuting with the company. However, this trading of time often extends the workday particularly when they have worked their allotted hours but not finished the job. As Salaff points out, workers can easily pick up after dinner when the children are in bed, whether feeling refreshed or guilty. Self-employed home-based workers, in particular, may experience heightened work orientation underpinned by the added pressure of insecurity of income and unpredictable flow of work which can lead to work 'addiction' or 'obsession' (Armstrong, 1997).

Within the sample families, it is interested to note that attitudes to home working within the *home-based businesses* reflect gender (see Table 2) though with the proviso that a larger study would be useful to confirm these findings. Female participants appear to carry out practices of *negotiation* much more than their male counterparts (*integrationists*), which are also borne out in spatial organization (see below). Gail Dunne-Osborne (FT Psychotherapist), for example, is clear that she works to get enough money to live:

> Gail: Erm, I think, I have a sense of you could call it different things, you could call it, I will work but I work, I feel like I'm very clear, I'm working to get the money and I'll do, you know if I overwork it's about wanting to bring in more money so it's about, I love my work and I'm dedicated to it but it's also I'm clear that that's, I won't do more than I have to.
>
> (Ms Dunne-Osborne, FT Psychotherapist, int. 3)

This contrasts with Jay Archer-Hughes (FT Management Consultant), who finds it impossible to draw limits around his work hours:

> Sue: How do you organise your working day, do you do 9am-5pm?
>
> Jay: 7.30 am-10 pm (laughs) [....] No, there is no pattern, I couldn't tell you. [....]I desperately attempt to do that but I fail miserably.
>
> (Mr Archer-Hughes, FT Management Consultant, int. 1)

Jay's approach very much reflects previous research in relation to full-time teleworkers and those engaged in *home-based businesses* being unable to remove themselves from their work. There are a number of possible reasons for these differences, such as the dissimilar nature of their occupations, inequalities

in home responsibilities between women and men and so on. Indeed, as noted earlier, Goffee and Scase's (1985) study of women's business start-ups has shown that starting a business for many women not only reflects a wish for 'personal autonomy', but is also driven by a need to earn a salary in a manner compatible with domestic obligations. Moreover, women tend to retain their domestic duties in addition to their business responsibilities, where help from husbands or partners is highly limited.

However, there is some evidence that extensive work hours may cause difficulties within the families of parents running *home-based businesses* for fathers too. Robert Grant's daughter, for instance, grumbles about her father working 'all hours' on the computer as this confirms his 'nerd' status:

> Robert: Very sad. This lot think I'm sad. Think I'm... I'm a nerd. Oh you're a nerd Dad.
>
> Rhiannon: Well you think about it. Sometimes I like wake up in the night and it might be like two o'clock in the morning, Dad's on the computer!
>
> (Mr Grant, FT Musician and Rhiannon, aged 14, int. 1)

In relation to the parents working outside the home, the two patterns of *overflow* work can be divided into the following categories (following Mokhtarian, 1991):

- *Salaried employees working at home in lieu of in-office work (i.e. workers with formal and informal approval for working at home instead of travelling to the office)*

- *Salaried employees working at home after hours (i.e. bringing work home after a full day in the office or after they have fulfilled their part-time allotted work hours)*

These types are not exclusive: the workers who engage in work *in lieu of in-office* hours are the same parents, the *integrationists*, who engage in *working at home after hours.* However, there exist a larger number of both *integrationists and negotiation workers* who are not allowed or able to work at home during their allotted work hours. At the initial interviews, the *in lieu of in-office workers* are in the minority. Only three respondents are allowed to work at home and, interestingly, they are all university academics: Suzanne Kendal, Amanda Powell-Drummond and Kelvin Powell-Drummond. This suggests that the

responsibilities of their jobs combined with university employers' attitudes allow them a high degree of spatial and temporal flexibility (Hardill, 1997). The three *in lieu of in-office workers* tend to work occasional days at home on an irregular basis, particularly to concentrate on writing. Amanda Powell-Drummond and Suzanne Kendal also engage in *digital overflow* work (use of web and email) whilst Kelvin Powell-Drummond carries out *non-digital overflow* work. Within the group of s*alaried employees working at home after hours (integrationists and negotiators),* there was a range of hours being worked. For instance, at one end of the spectrum, workers such as Michael Dunne-Osborne (FT College Manager) and Tessa Prowse (FT Social Worker) engage in extensive extra hours of working. Redolent of Salaff's (2002) findings in relation to employees fitting extra work around their scheduled work day and family, Michael Dunne-Osborne describes his pattern of home working:

> M: [...] I tend to work ... very early in the mornings and after Adele has gone to bed. And at weekends we kind of juggle it around. During the daytime at weekends I don't necessarily use it [computer with internet] very much, unless Gail is working out of the house and Adele has gone out.
>
> (Mr Dunne-Osborne, FT College Manager, int. 1)

Whilst Michael implies he does not use the internet for home working so much at weekends, other examples he gives suggest that he is extensively engaged in both *digital and non-digital overflow work* during these times. In contrast to Michael's extensive hours, Fiona Bourne (PT Civil Servant), a *negotiator,* brings work home only rarely, for instance, when she needs to prepare for staff recruitment. She describes how when she leaves her part-time job mid-week, she is 'finished'.

At the point of the third interviews after a two-year period, the findings are much the same as those at the initial interviews. In relation to *in lieu of in-office workers,* the main change is that Phillip Kendal has been granted official home worker status. He describes how he finds this beneficial to carrying out his job:

> Phillip: Because I am only doing on average one day a week it is excellent, less travel, so you save an hour and a half, to two hours a day. You have a greater degree of flexibility within the day, if I wanted to start work at 7am or 7.30am I can do that. There are less interruptions, fewer people to bump into, so you get through a lot more work.

(Mr Kendal, FT Company Finance Director, int. 3)

His partner, Suzanne Kendal (FT University Academic), also continues to work at home *in lieu of in-office work,* as she did at the time of the initial interviews, and finds a balance of working between home and office is the most effective. The maximum she prefers to work at home is three days out of five. She says that if she goes beyond that, she finds working in a 'concentrated' way with few interruptions leads to both physical and mental fatigue. This comment is in line with previous findings from the Eurescom project (Akselsen, 2001). The study found that regular days at home combined with regular days in the office 'maximises the benefits of home working (greater concentration and flexibility for family) and minimises the problems of home working (social isolation and maintaining relationships with manager and colleagues)' (56).

In relation to *salaried employees working at home after hours,* the situation remained the same throughout the families except where changes in material circumstances had taken place, such as Anita Jackson/Ros Bradshaw finding work that they now bring home (see above). The overall consistency in the data over the two-year period suggests that attitudes to home working are entrenched and habitual rather than solely being dictated by the demands of the job. Tessa Prowse, for instance, has changed jobs in the interim, moving from social work to managing a children's home. During the third interview, she suggests that she works fewer hours than she did in the first interview, but her husband, Nick Prowse, contradicts this:

Sue: Last time I came you said you were doing an average of about 15-20 hours of work, extra work a week. Is that still the case?

Tessa: Yeah. Probably. It's gone down a wee bit.

Nick: Has it?

Tessa: Has it? No. Probably not actually!

(Mrs and Mr Prowse, FT Social Worker and FT Royal Navy Engineer, int. 3)

This exchange suggests that Tessa's extensive work hours may be an issue of some concern in this family as Nick is keen to make visible the extent of Tessa's extra work hours. This tension was demonstrated even more clearly by Michael Dunne-Osborne (FT College Manager) and his partner, Gail Dunne-

Osborne (FT Psychotherapist) in the third interview. Discussion of Michael's extensive home-working habits highlights the stresses in the family they cause and particularly Gail's concerns:

> Sue: I mean, is this a problem? Is this something that you talk about that worries you?
>
> Gail: Yes. [...] I have this image of Michael, if someone said to me where do you see Michael, my image is in the study, with the computer and like, you know, most mornings, I wake up, that's where Michael will be.
>
> (Mr and Ms Dunne-Osborne, FT College Manager; FT Psychotherapist, int. 3)

The image Gail conjures up is reminiscent of Aune's (1996) finding that whilst workers prefer to bring work home than stay late in the office, physical presence may not necessarily mean they are available to the family when they are focused on work.

The examples above have shown how attitudes to *overflow* work are reflected in parents' temporal organization and how families perceive a range of advantages and disadvantages to parents' home working practices. A further dimension to consider is how spatial organization also gets played out in practice (also see Chapter 5). Previous studies have noted that working at home can result in a lack of temporal and spatial boundaries between work and home with parents going to some length to conceal their presence from their young children (Armstrong, 1997). Similarly, studies have found that children have difficulty accepting boundaries between different worlds as barriers to interaction: they do not understand that a closed door means that you're not supposed to be interrupting (Haythornthwaite & Kazmer, 2002).

Within the *home-based businesses* in the sample, four of the five workers have a separate designated workplace in their homes in which to carry out their business. The exception is Melvin Bradshaw (FT Sales Director) who uses a laptop and is therefore mobile within the home. He tends to use the laptop in either the bedroom or the lounge depending on the time of day. During the daytime, he prefers to 'barricade' himself into the bedroom to guard against interruptions from the couple's three children; the youngest is four years old. In the evenings, he prefers to work downstairs where he can chat to his wife.

Melvin's explanations of his mobility within the home reflect a need for spatial boundaries in order to effectively carry out home working. This example highlights how the temporal interacts with the social to determine the location of the work-related computer.

The remaining *home-based business* workers *(both integrationists and negotiators*) enjoy a separate workspace, with internet-connected computer, in which to carry out their activities. Gail Dunne-Osborne is the only exception in that her workspace does not include a computer. In some cases, there is evidence that the need for a designated workspace formed part of the decision to buy the house. Such choices reflect the relative affluence of these more middle-class families to be able to afford a large enough property to house a separate workspace. This is the case for Jay Archer-Hughes (FT Management Consultant) and for Gail and Michael Dunne-Osborne (FT Psychotherapist/FT College Manager). Jay explains the process that took place:

> Jay: Let me explain how it worked. When we bought the house, we looked for a house that had effectively an office, it might have been advertised as a bedroom, but we knew we needed an office. So, when we bought the house we knew which room was going to be the office, but that would have been true of any house.
>
> (Mr Archer-Hughes, FT Management Consultant, int. 1)

In the Dunne-Osborne family, Gail's need was for a room in which to see clients whereas Michael chose a room to act as 'his' study, which would house the computer and his work-related materials. Gail Dunne-Osborne says that she would not want the computer in her client room for aesthetic and practical reasons:

> Gail: And in this house I actually wouldn't want it with clients in my client room, partly sort of visually and partly in case a client had a huge wobbly and smashed things up (laughs). It is very obvious that Michael uses the computer the most and also what we have got it on, will only fit in certain, oh I don't know, we could have it in another ...
>
> (Ms Dunne-Osborne, FT Psychotherapist, int. 1)

These examples show how parents' differing attitudes towards home working and their relationships to technology are reproduced through the location of the computer. In the case of Sheila Manders-Short (FT Health Practitioner), the

dynamic process of negotiation within the family is highlighted in the account given of the computer location and the separating out of her workspace that occurred. Richard Manders-Short, her partner, described how this happened:

> Richard: When Sheila started to teach we turned our front room, which was the living room, this was the dining room ... well it still is but then we had an extension. (laughs) And then we decided she would work in the front, so that then became a kind of workroom. And then when we were away on holiday I was sitting on a beach and I was thinking 'why is the computer back here, why isn't it in the front room?' and that was when we moved it wasn't it? Which was a good decision.
>
> (Mr Manders-Short, FT Actor, int. 1)

Sheila agrees it was a 'good decision'. In an earlier quote (see above) Sheila related how moving the computer to a separate workspace had allowed her to 'shut the door' on her work. She had improved her work-life balance by consciously creating a boundary between herself and her work within the home.

A potential disadvantage of placing the only household computer with internet connection in one person's work domain is that it may influence other family members' access. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Bakardjieva (2005) argues that symbolic ownership, for example, which privileges particular members' uses (in this case for work-related responsibilities), influence the 'space and time allocated' to them and their activities. Responses on this are mixed. Jay Archer-Hughes says the location does not make any difference, it would take 'armaments' to keep his sons out of the office: they tend to dip in out and out whenever he leaves the computer unattended. Other partners' and children's responses vary. Rhiannon Grant, aged 14, says that she does not like using chat when her father is present presumably due to the lack of privacy afforded by the location and her father's near constant presence (the office is also used by her father as a studio for his painting). However, Rhiannon does admit that she does not use the computer when he's not there as she is not confident about how to access it in any case. It's possible that her nervousness may stem in part from knowing it is Robert's work computer and would cause him serious problems if data were lost. Robert's comments suggest he is protective of the computer for this reason, which could influence other family members' access:

> Robert:...but what I'm worried about mainly is the fact that my computer, I use it for a lot of work and I've got loads of music and all me college files

and everything on that and sort of if they crashed it and ruined everything on there I'd be completely stumped for some things you know. I've sort of back... Started backing things up now a bit more sensibly you know but nevertheless it's still a bit nerve wracking, you know. [...]

(Mr Grant, FT Musician, int. 1)

Likewise, a similar impact can be seen in the Manders-Short household, where Richard Manders-Short says that he might use the computer more if he had his own, or if it was in a shared space rather than in Sheila's workspace:

Richard: Interesting question. Yes, I suppose it does in so far as Sheila's office is where it is, so she uses it most don't you? Predominantly, and I suppose that might have an effect on how it gets used, in so far as ... you know she uses it most and it has got her office stuff around it.

(Mr Manders-Short, FT Actor, int. 1)

This excerpt suggests that it is the computer's location in Sheila's designated workspace combined with a perception of the computer as Sheila's work machine that influences Richard's lack of motivation and use. Similarly, her son, Andrew, aged 11, says:

Andrew: You have got so much work stuff on there, I don't tend to play games on it anymore.

(Andrew Manders-Short, aged 11, int. 1)

The spatial dimension plus the social inscribing of the computer as work-related due to dominance of use by the *home-based business worker* undermines other family members' access, though in theory it is available for them to use. The prioritisation of the needs of *home-based business* or *overflow* workers will be discussed further in Chapter 9 in relation to regulation and the impact that may occur on monitoring of children's uses when the computer is placed in a private office space rather than a public area.

As in the families where a parent is running a *home-based business*, the families with at least one *integration worker* usually house the computer with internet connection in a separate workspace, such as a study or office, although there are frequently other non-networked computers available in these households. The non-networked computers may be either desktop or laptop computers. In the Powell-Drummond household, for instance, the computer

with internet connection to which the children, in theory, have access is housed in Amanda Powell-Drummond's office. Her partner, Kelvin Powell-Drummond, has a work-related laptop too, which he mainly uses in his study though his younger son also uses it to play games on, typically moving it to a more communal area. The location of the computers can be seen to bear a strong relationship to their inscribed social meaning as work-related machines. In a sense, situating the internet-connected computer within a private office inevitably ascribes it with work-related characteristics. It also suggests that work is prioritised within these families, which has a knock-on effect in terms of both access to the internet and the monitoring of children's uses. Again, there appears to be an impact of this prioritisation on other members of the family. Kelvin Powell-Drummond considers whether the situation of the internet-connected computer being in his partner's office has an effect on his use:

> Kelvin: Yes, I use the laptop, you know I might use the internet a bit more if I didn't feel I was usurping your space but that's okay because I don't really want to use it.
>
> Sue: So you think if it was placed centrally you perhaps would use it more?
>
> Kelvin: No, I like to be very quiet when I use machines, I don't like having lots of bustle around so if it was somewhere in a room where other people were, I wouldn't use it either.
>
> (Mr Powell-Drummond, FT Senior Academic, int. 1)

This excerpt gives the impression that Kelvin is influenced by the notion of 'usurping' Amanda's space. Yet, his requirement for a 'quiet' place works against the computer being placed in a public space in any case. Amanda's sons say that it does not impact on their use but with the proviso that Martin, aged 12, has not yet used the internet in any case (see Chapter 7 on Internet Literacy for discussion of how children get started). It is possible that in households where the internet-connected computer is in a separate workspace, not only is access an issue but also the skills and competencies that might otherwise be shared between family members (and therefore, might have encouraged Martin to go online) do not get passed on to the same extent as they would if the computer was situated in a communal area.

In the households where both parents are *negotiation* and *segmentation* (and *non-salaried*) workers, it is striking how the computers with internet connections were almost all situated in non-work designated areas in the initial and later interviews (also see Chapter 5). Again, this reflects the findings of Frohlich, Dray and Silverman (2003) that reported some association between the location of the computer and the participants' intended activities. The computer with internet connection tended to be viewed as the 'family computer', situated in a communal setting (lounge or dining room) and rarely used for work-related activities. Where the computer had previously been situated in a parent's bedroom, such as in the Bradshaw family, it was now located in a communal space. In these families, the suggestion is that spatial location represents a more egalitarian approach to providing each member of the family with access rather than the prioritising of the work-related activities of the *home-based businesses and digital overflow workers* seen in the previous groups. (For further discussion of the general spatial aspects of the computer with internet connection see Chapter 5).

The examples given throughout this section show how work uses of the computer/internet influence both time and space aspects of use which can, in turn, impact on other family members' access and whether they perceive it as available to them for other uses. As seen in Chapter 5, communal locations have the potential to provide family members with more neutral access and the ability to carry out non-work related activities in a common space rather than in someone else's work domain. Next, I will look more closely at how the different services provided by the internet are used to support work uses.

Using the different services

Research has concluded that the internet has become an important job-related tool for those with a number of years of experience: they are much more likely to have carried out job search activities and use email in work-related communications (Howard et al., 2002). Previous studies have shown that using the internet is not a unitary activity or single entity, but a range of continually evolving services used differently by different people (Anderson & Tracey, 2001). For this reason, I will look in detail at the range of diverse uses that *digital overflow workers* engage in.

Cairncross (1997) has argued that the internet allows ideas to circulate to a broad audience and thus help entrepreneurs with good ideas to find investment and market viable products and services. This is particularly relevant to the group of *home-based business workers* in the sample most of whom make extensive use of a range of internet services to promote their businesses. The exceptions are Gail Dunne-Osborne who shies away from the internet (see above) and Melvin Bradshaw who has only recently become self-employed and primarily uses email. The other three *home-based business workers,* Sheila Manders-Short, Robert Grant and Jay Archer-Hughes use email and the web for retrieving information and publishing their own websites. Jay Archer-Hughes also uses newsgroups for exchanging industry information. For all four users of email, typical uses include networking; exchanging data; receiving newsletters from affiliations and so on. Robert Grant (FT Musician), for instance, uses email to keep in contact with other band members who live some distance away; to arrange meetings and concerts; to circulate programmes, band information and photographs; to exchange music files and sheet music; to support his participation in various musical societies and to contact students he teaches. Some emails arise as the result of the band's promotional website which leads to new bookings. In this way, it is the interplay of the different services, for example the website plus email, which facilitate further business.

Three of the *home-based business workers* have built their own websites. Jay Archer-Hughes has done this for a number of clients, containing procedures about how they carry out their businesses. Robert Grant's and Sheila Manders-Short's jobs have grown out of their hobbies and interests, reflected in their attitudes to their websites: not solely to promote business, but also their more general concerns. Sheila (FT Health Practitioner), for example, set up her website as a means of promoting her work method rather than to generate business:

> Sue: You might have covered this, but when you first set up your own website, was that to advertise your business?
>
> Sheila: No, not exactly, no. It was because I work in a way that is very unusual, which is working with small children and I've got a lot of information to pass on about that, so I made a website about working with children and the technique, which has been a great thing because I've had so much... I mean that has led on to an awful lot stuff, people finding that website and

> emailing me, and even someone from the States came over, didn't she, in the summer, and she spent three months trailing me around the school seeing what I was doing. So it was initially to extend the information base and to attract other information. [...]
>
> (Ms Manders-Short, FT Health Practitioner, int. 1)

Whilst Robert's site does generate business for his band, it also reflects his other interests as it contains photographs of his paintings and so on. Both Sheila and Robert have their own domain names.

Jay Archer-Hughes, Sheila Manders-Short and Robert Grant all make extensive use of the web to retrieve information and support their businesses. Again, Melvin Bradshaw is the exception, as he finds Search Engines ineffective, preferring only to input URLs for companies he knows. Typical uses include information retrieval; checking out competitors' websites and prices; expertise databases; filing tax returns; managing bank accounts; buying software to support the business; and in Robert's case, downloading music files.

Uses amongst the *salaried employees who work outside the home,* both *integration* and *negotiation workers* are limited to email and information retrieval via the web. Email constitutes the most extensive use. This reflects previous studies suggesting that email is the 'killer application' (Copher et al., 2002; Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002) particularly for people who are short of time (Weil & Rosen, 1997). Respondents' uses reflect those of the *home-based business workers:* networking, exchange of data, etc. Suzanne Kendal, for example, finds benefits in using email from home as follows:

> Suzanne: Erm, I would do that for work because I didn't want to speak to them or they might not be there. One colleague that I have a lot to do with doesn't answer his telephone usually so email is easier and it's there when he gets back. Or, sometimes if I want to copy it to people, that's something I might because I'm now doing quite a lot of administration work so like the meeting this Thursday which I've set up, erm, then that's the time when I'd...
>
> (Mrs Kendal, PT University Academic, int. 2)

Suzanne's description is redolent of research carried out by Sproull and Kiesler (1991) that found that the advantages of email include that it is speedier than postal mail, more convenient than telephone use and more efficient as a means of group co-ordination. Work-related uses of the web are typically carried out to

support job search; travel information; teaching; business information; online journals; university, company and government sites. Amanda Powell-Drummond (FT Senior Academic), for instance, uses the web to find material to support her teaching and research, makes extensive use of political theory related sites such as the US House of Representatives; UK political parties, other countries' government websites and so on. She tends to access these through her University site, which provides extensive links to these resources.

At the two-year point of the third interviews, the changes to work-related uses of the particular services afforded by the internet are minimal. Some are underpinned by changes in material status; for instance, Ros Bradshaw (PT School Governor) and Anita Jackson (PT Literacy and Numeracy Teacher) now use the internet to support their recently acquired jobs. The uses for the *home-based businesses* are similarly largely unchanged: each of these respondents uses the same services they did before. Previous studies by the Pew Internet and American Life project found that veteran users (online for more than three years at March 2000) report an increase in the amount of time spent working at home, which is especially prevalent amongst the 'veterans' (Horrigan & Rainie, 2002a). Whilst I have found evidence that changes to conditions, such as material differences, broadband connections and employer permission to work at home may increase time spent working at home, there is little evidence within my study that an expansion takes place in work-related uses: for the most part, respondents appear to identify the services useful to them at the outset and stick with them in the longer term.

Conclusions

Whilst the UK Government continues to promote work-life balance, what emerges from the data is that those workers engaged in *overflow work*, seem to accept their workloads, in the main, without resentment. This is redolent of Hardill's (1997) finding that workers derive satisfaction from their jobs and are happy to take work home, occasionally or regularly. The *digital overflow workers* presumably derive sufficient benefit from using the internet to support home-working to include it in their regular practice, whilst those who engage in *non-digital overflow* exclude the internet for the reasons we have seen.

What is surprising in the analyses overall are the low levels of *digital* and *non-digital overflow work* taking place. Considering previous findings (Felstead & Jewson, 2000; Hardill, 1997; Taylor, 2002), an unexpected finding was that only a minority engage in home working in a sample where professional and managerial workers are over represented, with many respondents maintaining a strong separation between home and work. However, the boundary is less well observed, it seems, when it comes to carrying out leisure activities within the workplace, particularly for the *segmentation workers.* Equally unanticipated in view of earlier studies (Doucet, 1991; Gregson & Lowe, 1993; Oakley, 1974), is that gender does not appear to be significant in predicting women and men's opportunities for carrying out home working and who is likely to be engaged in *digital overflow.*

Orientations to *digital overflow* and using the internet to support *home-based businesses* seem to be the outcome of a combination of material differences, attitudes to home working, work place culture and provision of remote services combined with personal attributes, such as orientation to technology and possession of the appropriate skills and competencies. On the whole, the role of the internet for work-related activities at home is rather commonplace and unsurprising when compared with the rhetoric. As noted by Anderson and Tracey (2002: 160):

> ...people are not doing anything particularly new, they are doing old things in new ways and finding that some of those new ways suit their lifestyles better.

Indeed, even in the longer term, there is little evidence of an expansion in uses occurring through familiarity with the internet: most respondents adhere to the uses of email and web search that they identified would be useful in the first place.

The respondents who engage in *digital overflow (and home-based businesses)* do so, presumably, to improve their 'lifestyles' but this should be set against the cost to their families. Not only may this pattern of home working render them unavailable but it also has the potential to undermine access to the internet for other members of the family, the monitoring of children's uses and the knowledge sharing of skills and competencies that may more easily occur in

communal areas. These potential barriers were more likely to be present in families that included a *home-based business* or an *integration* worker in the initial interviews, where work-related activities appeared to be prioritised. This was less likely to be an issue within families with *negotiation* and *segmentation workers* where computers were typically housed in communal areas. By the third interviews, after a period of two years, many of the families with *integration workers* had added new computers and/or moved the original computer with internet connection to a more communal, hopefully, more 'family friendly' space, ensuring better access for other family members and potentially, easier monitoring of children's activities. However, either through choice or necessity, it was apparent that the *home-based business workers* continued, in most cases, to dominate computer and internet use both in terms of time and space (see also Chapters 5 and 9). Having briefly touched on issues related to regulation in this chapter, the next chapter will examine how internet use is influenced by parents' orientation to regulation.

Chapter 9: Regulating the Internet

Freya: I remember one of the first things you explored as well.

Howard: By accident.

Freya: Yes, just type in s-e-x and look what happens?

(Mrs Liang and Howard, aged 12, int. 1)

Introduction

In this chapter I will investigate how families perceive and experience risk and regulation in relation to the internet. To begin, I will outline the major studies in this area noting also methodological issues that emerge in this context. I will then examine how parents' attitudes to risk and regulation differ and how this influences behaviour.

The risks

A series of reports, headlines and campaigns have alerted the UK public to the potential risks for children and young people of going online. Childnet International (Williams, 2000) has defined these risks as exposure to sexual and pornographic content, the incidence of exploitative and dangerous contacts, and issues of privacy, advertising and commercialism. Yet, a recent report for Ofcom on young people's 'media literacy' (Buckingham et al., 2005) found that children and young people's awareness of risk focuses almost entirely on contact with paedophiles and exposure to pornography, whilst the other more commercial dimensions of risk and exploitation go unheeded. UK based surveys show that children and young people are aware of the dangers in relation to pornography and paedophiles. The Cyberspace Research Unit (2004) reports that nine out of ten children report awareness of rules about not giving out personal details suggesting that safety campaigns have had some success. Nevertheless, the UKCGO (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) project has revealed that almost half (46 percent) of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week, say they have given out personal information, such as their full name, age, email address, phone number, hobbies or school name, to someone they met on the internet. As the authors note, this suggests that awareness of safety rules may not necessarily translate into safe practice. The

study also found that all categories of risk increase with age with the 'privacy risk' of giving out personal information most commonly taken by the 9-15 year olds.

A further cause for concern, which has worried parents, is the number of young people who are meeting their online contacts face-to-face. The Cyberspace Research Unit reports lower awareness of rules relating to face-to-face meetings with people met through online chat, for example, than awareness of rules about divulging personal information (O'Connell et al., 2004). Livingstone and Bober (2004) however, note that users who have made friends online and arranged to meet face-to-face have followed safety rules such as telling someone they are going to a meeting and taking a friend with them. Both reports indicate that where children have met up with online contacts, they've had an enjoyable time though in two exceptional cases, the person they met verbally abused them. As Livingstone and Bober have commented, 'the link between risks, incidents, and actual harm is genuinely tenuous: not all risks taken result in worrying incidents, not all worrying incidents result in actual or lasting harm' (2003: 157). However, as these authors have more recently observed, it is worrying that few children choose to tell an adult or parent about a meeting or take an adult with them, who might be better able to intervene in a potentially hazardous situation (Livingstone & Bober, 2004).

Research has also revealed that negative incidents occur online including unwanted approaches from strangers. There has been public concern about the growing incidence of unwanted or inappropriate sexual contact made to teenagers by adult strangers. In the US, the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001b) reports that nearly 60 percent of 12-17 year olds online had received messages (of any kind) from strangers. More recently, in the UK, the UKCGO study (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) found that one third of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week report having received unwanted sexual (31 percent) or nasty comments (33 percent) via chat, instant messaging or text messaging. Livingstone and Bober comment that it appears that in the considerable media attention devoted to other potential threats and safety measures such as not divulging personal information, going into chat rooms and to 'stranger danger' that the 'routine

unpleasantness of some online communication appears relatively neglected' (37).

One of the key issues, therefore, is how children and young people respond when they encounter unwelcome material online. The Kids.net survey (Wigley & Clarke, 2000) found that online materials were likely to have upset a quarter of children aged 7-16. The UKCGO survey (Livingstone & Bober, 2003) indicates that when children and young people encounter online pornography, they either leave the site, delete an email or pursue the image through looking at it, sharing it with a friend or going back to it. They found that children, particularly girls, tended to show 'annoyance and disgust' when being sent or shown pornography rather than being upset. Further survey data from the project (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) indicated that 61 percent said that they would tell their parents if something made them feel uncomfortable. When encountering pornography accidentally, the most common reaction (56 percent) was to leave the site immediately without looking at it. Similarly, 65 percent said that they deleted pornographic junk mail without looking at it. Livingstone and Bober note with concern, that only eight percent of youngsters had told a teacher or parent what they had found, though presumably this could mean that the material uncovered had not made them feel 'uncomfortable' (see above).

Parents' awareness and competence to regulate

The issue of parental awareness of the risks taken by children using the internet has been shown to be a key issue by the UKCGO study (Livingstone, 2004; Livingstone & Bober, 2003; 2004; 2005). The findings suggest that there is a significant gap between parents' and children's perceptions of negative and potentially risky encounters relating to online use in areas such as divulging personal information, encountering racist and pornographic material, face-to-face meetings, talking in chat rooms, receiving sexual and unwanted comments and the extent to which filtering/monitoring software is installed on home computers. For example, most parents (86 percent) whose child has home access do not allow their children to give out personal information online. Whilst 49 percent of children acknowledge this rule, nearly half (46 percent) of 9-19 year olds who go online regularly (at least once a week) say that they have given out personal information. Similarly, only seven percent of parents think

their child has received sexual comments online, and four percent think their child has been bullied online compared with children's reports of 31 percent in the former case, and 33 percent in the latter. Livingstone raises this as a serious concern noting that:

> Since parents appear to claim a greater degree of domestic control than they achieve, and than – from their children's reports – appear to be warranted, it may be that parents are more complacent than is wise, assuming rules are being followed when they are not or assuming that rules are not needed when they are. A greater degree of understanding between parents and children would seem to be called for (Livingstone, 2004: 16).

The role played by parents in regulating their children's online use is similarly called into question when considering their competence to do so. Parents may not feel equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to apply technical solutions such as filtering and monitoring software (which may not be the most effective means of regulating in any case). Similarly, parents' levels of online skill may not be adequate when compared with children's abilities where the 'expertise gap inverts the usually-higher levels of expertise and skill on the part of parents' (Livingstone, van Couvering, & Thumim, 2005: 41).

Constructing children and young people as victims

Abbott (1998) has pointed out how young people in particular have been constructed as potential victims of risk on the internet in terms of encountering inappropriate material, an approach which tends to clash with young people's 'sense of control or self-efficacy' (Perloff, 1983 in Holloway and Valentine 2003: 93) and their perception of risk in terms of the offline challenges they face. Burn and Willett (2005) have argued that whilst the dangers may be real, messages such as: 'don't give out your email address', 'don't go in chat rooms' and so on, treat listeners as objects of instruction and close down discussion. As noted by Livingstone (2002a), these prohibitory measures then constitute the kinds of adult attempts to constrain use of the internet that children have the expertise and motivation to subvert. Furthermore, Buckingham (2000) argues that measures restricting children's access to media are bound to fail, and children need to be prepared to deal with such experiences, not simply defined in terms of what they lack. Other research has found that risk is a necessary part of

development for adolescents in defining themselves as more mature than children, achieving social status, developing autonomy and facing anxieties. As noted in a recent report on children and young people's 'media literacy' for Ofcom (Buckingham et al., 2005), awareness of internet risks and presence of risk-taking behaviour, can then be seen as developmental factors contributing to increased media literacy.

Valentine and Holloway (2003) have similarly argued against views of children and young people which deny their status as social actors who are, to draw on the words of researchers in the field of social studies of childhood: 'active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of societies in which they live' (Prout & James, 1990: 8). Holloway and Valentine express concern that public and policy understandings of children's uses of ICT are built upon contradictory ideas about childhood and technology. Whilst 'boosters' celebrate children's command of technology, 'debunkers' raise fears that this technology places both the physical and emotional well being of children at risk. They argue that these discourses are problematic in that 'they essentialise the child category, denying children's diversity and their status as social actors, and because they rest on technologically determinist understandings of ICT' (see Holloway & Valentine, 2003: 72). Furthermore, they point out that anxiety around children's uses of new technologies can appear to be more about protecting children's 'innocence', and particularly the policing of the unstable boundary between childhood and adulthood that may come with access to information about sexual practices and alternative models of sexuality (Lumby, 1997), than with online 'stranger-dangers'.

Methodology issues

A final point to be raised is in relation to methodology. In the literature above, a key question raised is in relation to the discrepancies that exist between the views held and reported behaviour of children and young people and their parents. This reflects the general concern for researchers flagged up in Chapter 7 that there are often significant discrepancies between what parents say about media use in the home compared with what children say (Buckingham, 1993). It becomes particularly difficult to capture experiences that are private rather than

public. As stated in the Ofcom report on children's and young people's media literacy, children and parents' accounts differ due to the varying vantage points and different interests, because some behaviour is outside the bounds of what is seen to be acceptable and because some media use is conducted in private, even when media commodities are located in apparently public spaces (Buckingham et al., 2005). This is particularly pertinent to the area of regulation where young people's privacy and ability to subvert (implicit and explicit) rules may well form part of their use. It is likely in this case that what is recorded and analysed in the following sections represents parents' views of the attitudes, practices and meanings. These pointers are, of course, subject to 'social desirability' and other biases that influence data collected through self-reporting measures. Yet, in highlighting the consensus and disagreements that occur between parents, their children and their siblings within the interviews, combined with the separation of parent from child that occurred in the observational interviews at stage two to some extent, hopefully some of the limitations will be overcome, and enable this study to capture the private struggles, ambivalences and concerns that occur within families' negotiations around home internet use.

In this section, I have outlined the major studies, which inform our current understanding of regulation of the internet within families with particular attention given to the different aspects of risk, both perceived and empirical[17]. What appears to be missing from the literature is an in depth account of how parents' orientations towards regulation differ and how these are translated into practice. This chapter will draw on qualitative data to consider regulation in relation to parents' attitudes to regulation and risk; methods of mediation (including temporal, spatial and technical strategies); competence to regulate and, finally, children's subversion of rules. These attitudes and strategies highlight not only how parents seek to keep their children safe but also the

[17] There are perceptions of risk relating to uses of the internet by parents, of course, but these remain largely outside the scope of the study. An exception is the consideration of issues of critical awareness identified in Chapter 7.

'existing values, practices and interests of the family itself' (Facer et al., 2001: 5).

Orientation to regulation

Within the sample families, there are a number of material differences between families that influence how parents regulate their children's use of the internet in seeking to share what could be seen as limited resources. These variations include family composition; access to resources (particularly issues around the cost of being online); and parents' home working practices (as seen in Chapter 8). Moreover, parents' orientations towards regulation and the strategies they deploy differ considerably between households and reveal underlying variations in philosophies on childhood, views on technology and the threats parents perceive in the offline world which may be transposed onto the internet. As noted by Buckingham (1996), parents' regulatory attitudes and strategies reflect broader assumptions about child development and child-rearing: discussions about:

> when children are 'ready' for certain experiences, or about the balance between freedom and constraint, inevitably relate to parents' moral or ideological convictions; and of course parents also learn about such matters from their own family backgrounds, as well as from their experience with their own children (261 – 262).

We can only speculate as to what parents fear in relation to their children being exposed to pornography, 'radical sites' and so on and whether their views are underpinned by beliefs about media 'effects' and/or their children's safety. Yet, it is likely that the regulatory standpoints assumed by parents will influence their children's development, not only in terms of their technical expertise, but also in how far children are able to develop the 'coping' skills and competencies they need to manage their experiences online. Strategies of regulation, which seek to censor particular kinds of material and experiences, may prevent children from developing their own ability to make decisions, and learning how to negotiate what could be viewed as 'risky' to them. This finding has been confirmed by research carried out by BECTa into the field of internet safety practices in schools (2002). This project found that 95 percent of schools had installed filtering systems and schools also tending to rely heavily on supervised

internet access, with pupils only being allowed to visit websites recommended by the teacher. The report concluded that this could lead to a lack of awareness of 'good Internet Safety practice' when surfing the internet outside school and a lack of importance given to developing search and evaluation skills.

As noted in Chapter 3, research in relation to television viewing has suggested that parents can play an important role in mediating their children's viewing and in teaching them about television and media of all kinds (see Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; Messaris, 1986). Yet, as Livingstone and Bober argue (2004), children's activities on the internet are more difficult to monitor and access. Unlike the exchanges that may take place when families view together, the internet does not lend itself to facilitating discussion to the same degree as users take turns rather than sharing the experience. The dialogue that does take place is likely to be influenced by established communication styles within families. Chaffee et al.'s (1973) studies of family communication styles and their influence on politics within mass communication have been drawn on by writers such as Lull (1990) to understand families' relationships to media. They developed terms such as 'socio-' and 'concept'-oriented families to describe differences between families, which tend towards more 'democratic' and 'authoritarian' patterns of communicating. The latter adopt viewing practices which are seen to be more developmental, such as discussing programmes 'critically and conveying family values', whilst the former use television to 'promote family harmony and avoid conflict', a position seen to be less healthy (Buckingham, 1993; Walkerdine, 1997). Buckingham et al. (2005) note that parenting styles in the UK appear to be moving towards 'concept'-oriented. This trend was less obviously supported by data collected from my sample families. Whilst parents were keen to present themselves as fair and their regulatory practices underpinned by negotiation with their children, they also appeared to intervene to a fairly high degree in many of the families.

It is unfortunate that there is no neutral means through which to identify differences between families in their attitudes and approaches to regulation without drawing on such value-laden terms as 'democratic' and 'authoritarian'. In so doing, I have chosen descriptions consonant with how parents and children represent themselves and their actions. These approaches can be

seen as two ends of a continuum with attitudes ranging from 'high' to 'low' regulation, with 'medium' regulation parents adopting an approach reflecting a mid-way point along this spectrum. Interestingly, parents' orientation to regulation did not seem to be influenced by predictable factors such as socio-economic status or gender. Through the analysis of survey data, Livingstone and Bober (2005) concluded that age is the key demographic factor that influences parents in their regulation of online uses. In contrast, my qualitative study suggests that whilst age did influence some parents within the groupings, in that they allowed their children a greater degree of freedom as the result of the higher level of 'maturity' they were said to achieve by the third interviews, it did not determine which category a family belonged to. This was governed more by parents' attitudes to child-rearing, as noted above.

Parents' orientations within my sample can be broadly summarised into three categories as follows[18]. The first category, *high regulation* parents, consists of those families where children are not allowed to use the internet autonomously. Children in this group range from 4-14 years old at the point of the first interview. A parent must always be on hand to sit with the child and direct their activities. The second category consists of the *medium regulation* parents. Children in this group range from 3-18 years old at the first interview. *Medium regulation* parents do allow their children to use the internet autonomously. They may use 'spy' methods such as checking 'history' and other files after the child has been online, but they are unlikely to have installed filters or other parental control methods. The third category is the *low regulation* parents. Children in this group range from 6-15 years old at the first interview. They are allowed to use the internet autonomously. Filters and other methods of parental control are not installed and rarely do parents deploy 'spy' methods such as 'histories' to check out their children's activities. Instead, they will emphasise their child's right to privacy.

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[18] Whilst the main focus of this chapter is on parents' rather than children's orientations towards regulation, the categories *high regulation, medium regulation and low regulation* will be applied to the whole family to reflect the regulatory context within which all household members carry out their everyday uses.

Parents' attitudes to risk

Holloway and Valentine (2003) report parents' attitudes to risk on the internet in relation to children and young people's uses tend to reflect constructions of children as either emotionally competent or vulnerable to the potential dangers. They found that parents who were highly computer literate themselves were less panicked by children's uses and these attitudes were based on 'banal' rather than 'exoticised' understandings of technology. Other parents had taken some of the popular fears on board and argued the dangers of being online. Whilst some parents said that they trusted their children not to access pornography, other parents viewed this behaviour as to be expected for all children and particularly 'natural' for boys.

In addition to these binary constructions of children and young people, parents vary in whether they conceive of online and offline spaces differently. Holloway and Valentine describe how some parents represent the offline world, particularly the home, as 'a space of childhood innocence where children are assumed not to have access to pornography or other forms of sexual knowledge' (Holloway & Valentine, 2003: 94). In contrast, these parents perceive of the online world as threatening 'to contaminate the so-called 'real world' by invading and polluting the home with sexually explicit images and 'dangerous information' (94). Other parents do not represent online and offline spaces in binary terms, perceiving of the risks as being of equal measure. Other parents perceive online as less 'real' than offline, finding reassurance in the belief that online contacts are less authentic and therefore, less threatening than 'face-to-face' contacts.

Views held within the sample families reflect a similarly wide-ranging set of attitudes. The *high regulation* parents, for example, mainly construct their children as innocent and vulnerable, who lack the competence to be able to manage potential dangers. Although these parents say that they 'trust' their children, the internet is constructed as a dangerous space where 'devious people' lurk and entrap children onto their sites. Interestingly, the 'devious people' are not constituted for the most part as paedophiles preying on their children, though instructions are given to children in these families not to divulge

personal information, but of materials on the web that their children could find by accident and that would, presumably, corrupt them and their innocence. The kinds of 'risks' mentioned include pornographic, sexual, political, 'radical' and commercial sites as shown in this example from the Hill family:

> Jeff: I think the main reason is I'm not really keen... I like to know what they're accessing. I don't want them to access stuff that I don't know about. I mean whatever it might be. It might be a porn site, it might be er radical sites, it could be anything. But I just want to make sure I know what they're accessing. I want the control over what they're doing.
>
> (Mr Hill, int. 1)

Unexpectedly, compared with the findings of the study above, three of the fathers in the *high regulation* families are highly computer literate and yet, present the potential threat of the internet as 'exoticised' in Holloway and Valentine's (2003) terms. Also, and similarly surprisingly, the children being regulated to a high degree are between the ages of 4-14, when it might have been expected that only younger children would be so closely supervised. In the Hill family, for example, Jeff Hill says that their children should need less supervision when they are older (their eldest child, Heather, is currently 11). He considers that the children will be considered 'trustworthy enough to go on their own' when they reach about fifteen years of age. It appears that he is concerned that they would not currently be able to 'deal with the search engines and that' in a way that would prevent them negotiating the risks, described by Jeff as accessing 'unsuitable' sites.

A further final point to make is regarding the gender of respondents in this area of enquiry. As noted in Chapter 3, previous studies have found that mothers' and fathers' patterns of guidance in regulating children's television viewing differ: mothers tend to set the rules whilst fathers may undo these directions (Jordan, 1990; Schmitt, 2000); mothers take a greater role in supervising children's everyday activities (Hochschild, 1989). Whilst *high regulation* parents report no differences in attitude towards boys and girls, both genders are equally highly regulated, it is striking that in these families, it is usually the father who holds strong views about the internet and the risks cited above which necessitate such close supervision. By contrast, it is the mothers within the

medium regulation and *low regulation* families who relate their more liberal attitudes to regulation. This reflects Holloway and Valentine's finding in relation to computers that 'mothers tend to apply a more flexible interpretation of household rules than fathers, who are usually the disciplinarians' (Holloway & Valentine, 2003: 91). (See also Valentine, 1997; 1999.)

At the third interviews, attitudes are broadly the same in the *high regulation* families as before though there are indications that some children are allowed a little more independence and privacy. Tim Grant, aged 14, for instance, is allowed to use the internet unsupervised when his father is away though his father continues to check the sites he's visited on his return. There are also some changes to material circumstances in some families such as the Bradshaws, who have divorced during the intervening period. Yet, despite Melvin Bradshaw living in a different location to his ex-wife and children, he continues to tightly control access to the sites visited, remotely through the parental controls afforded by AOL.

Within the *medium regulation* families, children and young people are constructed as active agents, competent, 'sensible' and 'trusted' to be responsible on the internet and manage their own safety. Risks to the children are acknowledged, but parents downplay them and frequently compare them to the potential risks of the offline world. They also report that their relationships with their children are such that their children would report these encounters to them in any case so that they could help manage any potential threats. In the case where one 15-year-old boy was said to have searched for 'porn', this was played down as 'natural' behaviour for his age, as in the findings of Holloway and Valentine noted above (2003). In these families, the risks that are mentioned by parents tend to relate to visiting chat rooms, encountering 'unpleasant' or 'unsavoury' material, divulging personal information and searching for pornography. As noted above, in most of the *medium regulation* and *low regulation* families, it is the mother who relates the families' attitude and approach to risk and regulation, which presumably, the fathers in these families concur with. However, Suzanne Kendal relates how her husband's philosophies of child-rearing differ from her own. Her husband, Phillip, has

installed Cyberpatrol, a filtering system, which she is frustrated with. In this excerpt she contrasts their different attitudes:

> Suzanne: Oh, he's much more, operates the kind of Victorian father of thinking that, he reads it in the paper and he thinks the kids are going to be looking for porn sites or whatever and they probably are one day but not yet and part of me thinks that it's all part of a balanced family kind of thing.
>
> (Mrs Kendal, int. 2)

Her reference to 'balanced family kind of thing' reflects the kinds of explanations given within the other *medium regulation* families to their approaches. The difference of opinion between Suzanne Kendal and her husband reflects the findings reported above in relation to fathers being 'disciplinarians' within families. Also, Buckingham and Bragg's (2004) study of young people, sex and the media reported that mothers were likely to adopt a role in which they used media to address 'broader issues of ethics and personal conduct' (200). Suzanne's description of a 'balanced family kind of thing' would appear to infer this. Furthermore, when she says: 'he thinks the kids are going to be looking for porn sites or whatever and they probably are one day but not yet' is indicative of a belief held by parents in the *medium regulation* (and *low regulation*) families that younger children would not be motivated to search for porn sites, being motivated towards games and music. Moreover, at the two-year point, attitudes to risk and regulation in relation to the internet remain fairly similar to those found at the initial interviews in the *medium regulation* families. The responsibility of regulation was still on the child as 'trusted' and 'sensible' to be able to negotiate the potential risk of being online. Whereas some families had earlier forecast that older children might search for porn sites, there were no indications that this was the case now the children were older.

Within the *low regulation* families, the children are once more constructed as active agents, who can manage risk on the internet. In contrast with the *medium regulation* families, the children are almost expected to be looking up pornographic sites, particularly if they are teenagers, as in the following example. Here, Amanda Powell-Drummond explains her attitudes to her two sons' (12 and 14 years old) internet uses reflecting her tolerance for such uses even though she disapproves:

Amanda: Well, yes I am concerned, but I'm not, I sort of more or less trust them. That doesn't mean that I don't think that they look at things that I would prefer them not to look at, but ...

(Ms Powell-Drummond, int. 3)

Whilst teenagers' inclination to search for porn is naturalised, such parents assume that younger children would not be interested. Gail and Michael Dunne-Osborne, for example, are not concerned about the internet use of their 10-year-old daughter, Adele, at present but said they may consider a filter system in the future. Within the *low regulation* families, the risks that parents fear are reportedly few and far between. Christine Bond mentions that she would be concerned if she thought other users could discover her children's identities when they use chat rooms. Otherwise, the 'threat' within these families is perceived as being that internet use could get in the way of completing homework. As Christine Bond puts it:

Christine: I'm much more concerned about them doing their homework right than I am about them looking up the porn pages on the internet I would say.

(Ms Bond, int. 1)

The *low regulation* families tend to represent online spaces as holding the same risks as offline, reflecting Holloway and Valentine's (2003) finding noted earlier. Whilst Christine Bond thinks of the internet as providing the same access to pornography as her children would have buying porn off the 'bookshelves', Duncan Craine said that he thought the risks of what his children could encounter on the internet were no worse '... than they'd see looking out of the window before you can stop it' (Mr Craine, int. 1).

At the third interviews, attitudes remained mostly unchanged though some children were allowed more freedom as the result of being two years older. For instance, whilst the Powell-Drummonds had located a computer in each of their two sons' bedrooms using AOL's parental controls, in reality, these have been relaxed to allow for downloading music (see below for discussion of monitoring packages). Therefore, Damien (16) and Martin (14) were now enjoying access in a private, unregulated space.

Parental mediation

Temporal strategies

The UKCGO study (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) found that restrictive guidance is more common than evaluative with 42 percent of children saying they have to follow rules about how long, and 35 percent about when they can go online. Parents are largely in agreement with these figures: 43 percent say that they have set up rules regarding time spent online. Holloway and Valentine's (2003) study of home uses of the internet found that time allowed on the computer and the internet reflected differences in families' perceptions of time (see also Chapter 5). They note that for parents whose lives are governed by the 'dominant time economy, clock time is often to be budgeted, allocated, sold and controlled' (Holloway & Valentine, 2003: 114 after Adam, 1995). This means that parents consider that computer time should be spent 'productively' in educational activities rather than being 'wasted' on leisure activities. This may conflict with children's priorities, as it has been previously observed that children prefer to use the computer for 'messing around' rather than as an educational tool (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1998; Giacquinta et al., 1993).

As noted in Chapter 3, Bybee, Robinson and Turow (1982) outline three different kinds of guidance: *restrictive guidance* (when parents restrict children's viewing); *evaluative guidance* (when parents discuss children's viewing with them); *unfocused guidance (*when parents sit with the child as s/he watches television, positively encouraging certain viewing behaviours or discussing what the child has seen). In my sample families, the question 'how do you supervise your children's uses of the internet' tended to produce responses relating to *restrictive guidance* in the home designed to control use rather than *evaluative* and *unfocused guidance* strategies designed to encourage understanding and certain behaviours. However, the strategies of evaluative and unfocused guidance emerged to some extent in relation to parents' involvement in children's homework uses of the internet and development of internet literacy skills (see Chapters 6 and 7).

In relation to *restrictive guidance* and time in the sample families, there were surprisingly few rules, conventions or negotiations to be found within the *high*

regulation families[19]. This could reflect the parents' 'hands-on' approach to supervising generally, which through preventing their child's autonomous and private use precludes the need for time-related rules in any case. The main temporal concern in three of the four families in this group was relating to the cost of being online as they were paying for the internet by the minute. The fourth family, the Bradshaws, had joined a scheme where they could get unlimited narrow-width access for a fixed monthly fee. In the families paying for 'dial up' access, the internet was off limits outside of the 'cheap times' of after six pm in the evenings and all day at the weekends. Robert Grant, for example, said that he was presently paying around £4 a month for internet access so it would not be worth upgrading to a fixed monthly scheme. However, the impact of these restrictions was that children were discouraged from using the internet for uses other than homework, such as instant messaging or games. Where the internet was used for homework, which was encouraged to some extent, sites such as the BBC's revision site, Bitesize, were sometimes downloaded to the computer to keep the costs down (see Chapter 6). Mr Grant's daughter Rhiannon (aged 14) was clearly frustrated by this situation and wanted her parents to pay for a flat fee to facilitate her wider uses, such as visiting chat rooms and so forth. The Grant family were unusual amongst the *high regulation* families in that general time restrictions were placed on Tim, aged 12, due to his behaviour and health issues related to the computer and the television. His mother, Maria Grant, reported that Tim was limited to an hour of either games playing on the computer or watching television as computer games put him in a bad temper and looking at screens in general gave him headaches. Whilst previous studies have noted that families tend to limit use of the computer due to fears in relation to 'overuse' (Frohlich et al., 2003), this example seems particular to this family and child. Moreover, the Hill parents limit their children's time online as a means of restricting the websites their children visit. Jeff Hill says that he connects to the internet for his children and then allows them five

[19] In including the terms 'conventions and negotiations', I am acknowledging that families often do not operate by fixed rules, clearly articulated by parents to children, but by sets of conventions and series of negotiations that can highlight the system of values and beliefs that exist in the home.

minutes use on the basis that 'they wouldn't be able to get through too many sites...' This clearly has a negative impact on their opportunities for exploration and development of internet-related skills.

Within the *medium regulation* families, the dominant time regulation reported is the length of time children and young people are allowed to be online. In almost every case, this is due to cost, which means that these families limit uses to the cheaper times, as highlighted by the *high regulation* families. Another factor is the telephone, an issue in most of these households where being online prevents telephone use. The length of time the child is allowed to be online varies between families from twenty minutes to an hour. Lisa Golding explains that her concern about the telephone bill seems a bit 'silly' to her compared with other bills in the house but she does count the minutes because of it:

> Lisa: [....] I think it's more just being disciplined about not, I mean, you know, you're not, it's silly isn't it? I mean you turn the television on and you're using the electricity. You turn the internet on and you tend to think of it as ticking away like a taxi. I do anyway.
>
> (Mrs Golding, int. 1)

In contrast, Nick Prowse says that the cost of using the internet is not the biggest issue in his household: he says that the bills: 'pale into insignificance against others!' indicating the mobile phone and landline charges. In some families, a pattern of use and regulation emerges which is highly governed by the importance given to education and learning. For instance, in the Burnley household, children are only allowed to go online when homework, piano practice and reading have been completed suggestive of this family's middle-class values.

In the *low regulation* families, the issues are the same as for the *medium regulation* families with cost being given as the main factor for limiting time online. This can vary from ten minutes in the Jackson household, where the dial up connection means that the internet is paid for by the minute, to two hours in the Archer-Hughes household where the monthly flat fee means that the internet is free to use during 'cheap times', after six pm and at weekends. As we saw in Chapter 6, the consequence of this in the Jackson household is that uses are severely limited to ten minutes of downloading so that the bulk of use

is conducted offline. In the Archer-Hughes household, in contrast, the children make extensive use of the internet online. However, their uses are not totally unlimited: Helen Archer-Hughes says that her son's uses (Ben, aged 14) have recently been restricted as he became behind with his homework. Also, there is a suggestion that Helen and Jay both have concerns about 'overuse' as noted by Frohlich et al. (2003). Helen says that even if a flat fee enabled 'free' use, their sons would not be allowed to 'stick on there for 15 hours'.

In the above section, I have shown how parents' time restrictions on internet use are often the result of concerns about the cost rather than the content. The exceptions to this are to be found in *high regulation* families where anxieties about online content and contact, health issues, behaviour and overuse translate into severe time limits being placed on children. In *medium regulation* and *low regulation* families, concerns about cost tend to be alleviated in some families in the longer term by the introduction of monthly flat fees, whilst less-affluent families or those less inclined to encourage internet use remain on 'dial up' charges.

Spatial strategies

As noted in Holloway and Valentine's study (2003), parents deploy 'geographies of surveillance' by locating computers in public rooms, which enable parents to monitor their children's uses online through sustaining a 'Foucauldian gaze' over their uses of the internet. The UKCGO study (Livingstone & Bober, 2003) found that parents may emphasize an indirect monitoring role of their children's use of the internet: 63 percent say they keep an eye on the screen and 50 percent that they stay in the same room when the child is online. Yet, in some families across all three types in my sample, these measures are compromised by parents' work-related activities which necessitate the siting of the internet-connected computer in a private (office) space (as noted in Chapters 5 and 8). This prevents the easier monitoring of children and young people's activities that can take place in a public setting.

Within the *high regulation* families, the main method of surveillance is to sit with the child when they are online; in this way keeping tight control over the sites the child is able to visit. Exceptionally, within this group, the Bradshaw family

subscribe to AOL and use the 'parental control' mechanisms enabled by AOL to limit access to sites deemed inappropriate for their children's age group (see below for discussion of filters and other technical regulatory strategies). The computers are generally located in public rooms though this is not considered essential, as the child is not allowed to go online unsupervised in any case. Sandra Parker describes how she sits with Sian, aged 11, until she feels satisfied she has found a site deemed safe:

> Sandra: Well often school work, if she is searching something for school we will get together and have a look. And also I find with the internet I tend to you know supervise her, because you have to be so careful.
>
> (Mrs Parker, int. 1)

At the stage of the initial interviews, most of the *medium regulation* parents are using the internet-connected computer's location in a public space as the main form of surveillance of their children's uses. Lisa Golding provides a typical example of this in describing how she oversees her sons' uses (Piers, aged 15, and David, aged 11):

> Lisa: There they have constant access. We keep an eye on, I feel there is an element of control in it being visible.
>
> (Mrs Golding, int. 1)

In contrast, the Kendal family house their internet-connected computer in a private upstairs office space (due to the parents' work-related uses) relying for surveillance on the Cyberpatrol filtering system to regulate their children's uses (Caleb, aged 11 and Roland, aged 9). By the third interview, issues with the effectiveness of the filtering package have caused them to rethink these arrangements. A newer internet-connected computer is now situated in a public space downstairs, which it is said encourages the children to use it more whilst, as Suzanne Kendal said: 'It also gives us a degree of parental supervision'.

In the *low regulation* families, nearly all of the internet-connected computers are privately located, most frequently in upstairs offices (due to the work-related activities of parents) and in two cases, in parents' bedrooms. Whilst the Bond internet-connected computer is in a public space, their mother, Christine, says that this is to enable easy access rather than to monitor her children's activities.

She says that 'they're old enough to supervise themselves'. Unlike the parents in the *high regulation* and (to a lesser extent) *medium regulation* families, the *low regulation* families represent the other end of the spectrum, where parents do not oversee their children's uses by spatial controls whether through the computer's location or technical strategies.

These examples show the variance in the degree to which parents use spatial strategies to regulate their children's uses. Overall, the changes during the two-year period of the study are limited, often reflecting changes to resources that only exceptionally reflect changes in attitude to risk and regulation of children's uses. In the Kendal household, for instance, parents did say that introducing the internet-connected computer into a public location provided easier monitoring of their children's activities, but this was unusual. Whilst some parents relaxed restraints placed on their children as the result of their getting a little older and becoming more 'mature', as in the case of Tim Grant, the spatial organisation in most of the homes suggested that many parents maintained the same attitude to risk as they had done at the initial interviews, unchallenged by their own and their children's experiences during the intervening period. Having considered spatial strategies, I will continue in the next section by analysing approaches to what have been referred to as 'technical solutions' (Livingstone & Bober, 2004): the use of filters, parental control mechanisms and other technological methods of regulating children's uses.

Technical strategies

Recent studies have indicated that some parents deploy technical strategies in their regulation of children's uses of the internet. These range from methods that take place before the child or young person goes online, for instance, the installation of filtering software and subscription to parental control systems such as AOL which, in theory, prevent them visiting unsuitable sites; to methods that take place after the child has been online, such as checking sites visited through history files. Livingstone and Bober (2005) have named these 'covert' monitoring practices to distinguish from the social 'supportive' practices of *restrictive*, *evaluative* and *unfocused* guidance detailed above. From survey data, the UKCGO study has concluded, surprisingly, that such 'checking up' methods may be ineffective. They report that 'parental checking up and privacy

restrictions appear to have little effect on either opportunities or risks (and may even lead children to rebel against such practices)' (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005: 4).This is worrying in view of the efforts that parents expend on these measures: the UKGCO study found that 46 percent of parents reported that they had installed filters on their home computers; 41 percent said that they checked the computer after their children had used it; 25 percent reported checking their children's emails. However, children are much less aware of these strategies (Livingstone & Bober, 2004).

These figures seem rather high, particularly when compared with data from my (small scale) sample. It is possible that what we are seeing here is the result of what has been called the 'social-desirability bias' (Buckingham, 1996). Buckingham notes that discourses about media effects are often linked with discourses about the responsibilities of parents with unsupervised uses often being interpreted as an indication of 'inadequate parenting'. Parents may therefore wish to represent themselves as 'parents who supervise' when filling in quantitative surveys in a way that may go unchallenged when compared with data collected in qualitative interviews where family members may confront each other's responses. Livingstone and Bober also found, through the collection of qualitative data, that children and young people's perception of their own expertise in evading rules may be more supposed than real (Livingstone & Bober, 2003). One group of children reported that they used a particular search engine, which they believed did not record the sites they visited in the history file and therefore, would not be discovered by their mothers (who were said to carry out checks).

Amongst the *high regulation* families, filtering, parental control and post-use checking up mechanisms were untypical at the initial interviews due to the 'hands on' approach to supervision in the first place combined with beliefs that filtering systems do not work effectively in any case. Sandra Parker prefers to sit alongside Sian (aged 11) and supervise her surfing, adding 'educational sites' to bookmarks so that Sian can retrieve these rather than navigating the web herself. The exception in this group is to be found within the Bradshaw family who have subscribed to AOL's parental control system. As with the other *high regulation* parents, the threat being addressed here is in surfing the web

rather than in other services afforded by the internet. Melvin Bradshaw perceived the threats to be in relation to using search engines where you could fall prey to 'devious companies' and those spreading viruses 'like these anti-capitalists and animal liberation front and this type'. In the Bradshaw family, the parental control system is perceived of as a proxy supervisor, which Melvin and Ros rely on to supervise their children. In a sense, these parents are happy to divest their responsibility to an external source, which they say has the advantages of pre-defining appropriate settings for them (unlike a filter system), saving them from having to devise their own restrictions and making them feel 'safe' when Lori aged 11 (and the main child user in this household) goes online. On the other hand, their daughter becomes very frustrated with the blocking of what she (and they) often consider harmless sites, such as pages about the Isle of Wight and information about Inuits, needed for a school project. When this happens, her parents take back control by putting in their own passwords and sitting with her. This leads to ambivalence around what Melvin Bradshaw perceives to be the over-restrictive pre-determined settings on the parental control system.

At the third interviews, the situations are similar within the *high regulation* families. The Bradshaw family are again exceptional within this group: not only have they divorced during the two-year interim but they continue to use AOL's parental control mechanism. This has had interesting consequences for regulation of the internet in this family. In short, their method of proxy supervision has become remote. Melvin Bradshaw is residing at a different address yet still subscribes to AOL and controls his children's access rights through the AOL parental control mechanism in relation to their level of access (age setting) and time allowed online. Ros no longer has access to this account and has her own dial-up service through a different provider. The advantages of this arrangement were said by Ros to be that the split had not disrupted the children's email addresses and Melvin would be paying a flat fee for himself in any case. The disadvantages named by Ros were related to the children's access as they were unable to get online when Melvin was using the internet at his new address. Also, when their children encountered sites that were 'web restricted', she could no longer simply put in her password to overcome this barrier but had to move them to her account where she would be paying for

access by the minute. Lori, aged 13 at the two-year point, is now on the setting 'standard teenager' whereas Abby, aged 10, is considered to be a 'young teen'. Melvin Bradshaw said that his reservations about using this system were the same as at the initial interviews, relating to the mismatch of AOL's perception of teenagers' competencies rather than about the difficulties of the new arrangements.

In the *medium regulation* families, only one family had installed a filtering system. The other families report that they prefer to supervise by locating the internet-connected computer in a public space where they can 'keep an eye' on use (see spatial strategies above) again doubting the efficiency of blocking software in any case. Most of the families, however, deploy some level of post-use checking of history files to regulate their children's uses and, seemingly, to deter their children from searches they would discourage in the first place. The Kendal family, exceptionally in this group, have installed a filtering package (Cyberpatrol), which is seen to prevent their children encountering unwanted content. Again, this reflects the fact that the father, Phillip Kendal, is the disciplinarian and stricter with his sons than his wife, Suzanne, who appears more liberal (see section above on parents' attitudes to risk for further discussion of this point). As with the Bradshaw families' use of parental control measures, the Kendals are experiencing problems with this software, though perceptions of this vary. Whilst Phillip Kendal says that 'it's reasonably effective at blocking sites that the children shouldn't look at', Suzanne and their sons are much more critical of how severely and erroneously it impedes their searching. Suzanne Kendal calls it a 'real problem' and gives examples of it mistakenly blocking hotel sites in Canada and the *101 Dalmatians* film site. Interestingly, the software was toned down in its restrictiveness between the first and second interviews (a month apart) and removed altogether by the third (at the two-year point).

There are no filters installed on the *low regulation* families' computers at the initial interviews, reflecting parents' relative lack of concern about the perceived risks of the internet. Some parents had considered filters but rather than dismissing the idea, it appeared they had simply not got around to finding out

about or installing them. A typical example was found in the Dunne-Osborne family in relation to supervising ten-year old Adele's uses:

> Michael: I think it would be true to say that although I am the most used to the computer I am really not up with internet software and additional control mechanisms, all that stuff. So one of the things I do is I think 'oh yes that would be a good idea, I can't be bothered with that'. So it doesn't get done. I don't really follow all the latest developments.
>
> (Mr Dunne-Osborne, int. 1)

Within the Jackson and Powell-Drummond households, parents carried out infrequent checks of history files but these were used to monitor rather than to regulate (see below for discussion of what happens when 'inappropriate' content is purposefully obtained). By the third interviews, it seemed that these few examinations had been abandoned altogether with parents saying they no longer made any checks beyond those warranted by the cost:

In this section, what has emerged is that only exceptionally do families rely on filters and parental control mechanisms for supervising perceived threats that could occur thorough internet use. Parents who are concerned about their children's uses tend towards spatial solutions, that of placing the computer in a public space, rather than reliance on software. They also tend to use the post-use strategies for monitoring and regulating their children's uses to complement the spatial rather than relying solely on so-called technical solutions. In short, parents prioritise the social over the technical means of regulating their children. Where filters and parental control systems are used, they appear to be frequently unsatisfactory for both parents to some degree and particularly for children.

The parents in the *low regulation* families seem to be particularly unconcerned in considering what risks their children may be facing particularly when most of these computers are situated in private spaces. The changes that occur over the two-year period are small, suggesting that online experience or age does not greatly change parents' approaches to managing risk through technical solutions.

Parents' competence to regulate

Previous studies have suggested that where children's online expertise exceeds that of their parents, it may undermine competence to regulate. As we saw in Chapter 7, there are gaps between parents' and children's levels of (mainly functional) skill and competencies to use the internet across the sample families. Possession of such skills is influenced by personal attributes combined with opportunity. In general, children were reportedly the 'experts' in the more affluent (*established)* families where access was more freely available; adults were considered 'experts' in (*improving* and *transitional*) families of lower socio-economic status.

Within the *high regulation* families, there is at least one parent who is considered to have higher levels of competence than any other member of the family. The issue of whether parents had the time available to regulate children's uses emerged as important in some of these families both in terms of being able to oversee the child's uses and to develop the necessary skills to be able to effectively monitor their online activities. Bearing in mind that the hands-on approach to regulation in this group of families is particularly time-consuming, there was evidence that technologically competent mothers were postponing children's uses until the father was home and available to supervise presumably due to the competing demands on their time or their lack of motivation. Ros Bradshaw provides a typical example of this:

> Ros: I'd never log her on myself and leave her, even though we've got restrictions, we just wouldn't would we? I always say to her you wait till Dad comes home you know!
>
> (Mrs Bradshaw, int. 1)

Issues around parents having the time to supervise have previously been noted by Livingstone et al. (2005). Moreover, Valentine and Holloway (2003) found in their study that gendered patterns of expertise could influence access to the internet for some children through regulatory practices. For instance, they found that where the father is considered to be the most technologically competent, and the mother technologically incompetent or technophobic, children's uses were also likely to be deferred until the father returned home. In my study, I

found little evidence of this but did find that where a gap between the mother's and the father's expertise existed, children who were allowed to go online in the absence of the father had more freedom online. The Grant family provides an example of this. The mother, Maria Grant, uses the internet regularly at work but finds that she cannot log on at home. This impacts on her abilities to supervise 14-year-old Tim's uses when her husband is away:

> Maria: You see I don't know how to get on the computer. I wouldn't be able to do it at home [...] No. And if Tim tells me he's going on the internet for an hour when you're not here I just leave him to it all I do is call him in a hour so I have no idea what he's doing.
>
> (Mrs Grant, int. 3)

This highlights how the gap in expertise also becomes a gap in regulation. It could equally reflect this mother's lack of motivation to regulate so stringently, underpinned by more liberal attitudes towards regulation in any case. As mentioned earlier, Robert Grant does deploy post-use checking of history (and other) files on his return. Tim says that he can override this regulatory tactic by deleting the history files but as previously noted, these perceptions may be more imagined than real. His father certainly considers this to be the case.

In the *medium regulation* families, similar issues arise. Again, there is at least one parent in each family whose expertise exceeds that of the children and usually they are the person who carries out the technical checks and so on. In the Craine family, for instance, Aaron (aged 12) appears to be shocked when he learns during the third interview that his deleting of the history files does not cover his tracks. His father says:

> Duncan: Yeah. You discovered that, quite a while ago, that if you delete history it don't show what you've been looking at. He doesn't realise there's still a record elsewhere. [...] This is first time he knew that I knew! [...] Look at him now. He's thinking what the hell am I going to do!
>
> (Mr Craine, int. 3)

On the other hand, where a parent does know less than a child, children may exploit this to either take advantage of a parent's limitations by subverting online rules or belittling their lack of competence. In the Burnley household, for

instance, Julia, aged 13, is critical of her mother's attempts to limit the telephone bill:

> Julia: Yeah, just because Dad has once or twice said to me, 'you typing this online?' and now each time Mum comes into the room, 'is this online, oh get off, get off?'. She doesn't even know what she's talking about. She just picks it up off Dad and understands that it's a cheaper way to do, to write emails and insert things so that she decides to copy it. She doesn't know what she's talking about.
>
> (Julia Burnley, aged 13, int. 1)

These examples highlight how gaps in parents' and children's expertise can lead to uncomfortable power struggles within families which become particularly apparent around issues of regulation.

Interestingly, analysis of the *low regulation* group suggests that in some of these families, parents' more liberal attitudes towards regulation may, to some extent, be borne out of their own lack of skills and competencies as the result of their limited experience of using the internet (either through lack of access or motivation). It is striking that in these families, children and young people are frequently credited as having greater online expertise than both their parents or that the family as a whole is represented as having limited competence. Amanda Powell-Drummond demonstrates this when she describes her family's capabilities:

> Amanda: Erm, I don't know. I think we are all bumbling along really. I kind of sometimes think that Damien [aged 14] knows a bit more and then I think, no, I know more and then I think you know more [her partner]. I think the three of us are actually at quite similar levels.
>
> (Ms Powell-Drummond, int. 1)

As noted above (in the section on technical strategies), Martin Dunne-Osborne considers that his own lack of time prevents him gaining the necessary skills to oversee ten-year old Adele's uses more effectively. However, this approach also reflects a less concerned attitude towards perceived internet risks. An exception within this group of families, however, is to be found in the Archer-Hughes household where both Jay Archer-Hughes, father, and both older sons (Ben and Tony, aged 14) have possession of skills and competences which far

exceeded those of most other respondents in their breadth. It appears, therefore, that in this family the parents are truly unconcerned about their children's uses rather than being limited in their skills to regulate.

This section has analysed the influence of parents' and children's levels of expertise on parents' abilities to regulate and how the expertise gap can afford the possibility of a corresponding regulation gap. The data has shown how both skills and time are needed to supervise children's uses. In many families, both children and their parents consider that their expertise is greater with young people seeking to subvert their parents' attempts and parents assuming that they have the skills to either block or reveal these endeavours. Skill levels vary between parents with the parent with the most skill likely to take the lead on regulation. This can lead to problems for the remaining parent as their children may belittle their attempts to see through the lead parent's direction on regulation (as in the Burnley family). Where neither parent appears to have the requisite skills to regulate effectively, it appears likely they may adopt a laissez faire and unconcerned attitude to supervising, particularly if time to address this issue is in short supply.

Breaking the rules

This chapter so far has sketched out a range of ways in which parents present their attitudes to regulation and their strategies for maintaining their systems of values and beliefs within the home. However, as noted by Buckingham and Bragg (2004), regulation in the home is not a '...simple case of parental enforcement and children's acquiescence. Both media use and its regulation within the home are complex, negotiated, enacted and resisted practices' (186). They note that parents' accounts may reflect what parents hope for or feel as much as what actually happens, therefore revealing much about current definitions of 'good parenting' and the discourses through which parents account for themselves as parents. Furthermore, previous research by Buckingham (1993; 1996) concluded that when children and parents were interviewed separately, television viewing emerged as a site of struggle: whilst parents seek to regulate their children's viewing, children subvert (or claim to subvert) family rules. Buckingham concluded that this picture more accurately

reflected the 'messy compromises' of family life rather than the 'idealised' accounts offered by parents in interviews. Similarly, Valentine and Holloway (2003) have found in relation to computer and internet use in the home that children are able to 'dodge' parental regulatory strategies and appear unwilling to 'passively abide' by parents' rules: they 'duck and dive' to avoid time restrictions and visit forbidden sites. From the UKCGO project, Livingstone and Bober (2003) found in focus group interviews that children hinted at several reasons for carrying out practices that could be considered unsafe. They may seek the social status that could be gained by meeting people face-to-face that they had met on the internet; they may avoid discussing their encounters with unwanted content and contacts with their parents for fear of having their internet access withdrawn; in chat rooms, they may forget the risks whilst involved in interesting conversations; and finally, their sense of themselves as 'sensible' may make them feel safe in chat rooms. They also found that children and young people fiercely protect their privacy using a range of strategies to protect their personal activities from parental monitoring, for instance, switching between screens when parents look over their shoulders.

In my study, the data I was able to collect in relation to children's perceptions of parental rules and their strategies for evading them is limited. I used observation at the stage of the second interviews to examine what activities children and adults carried out on the internet. My original intention was to interview children separately and gain insight into their more private activities, but this proved more difficult than I had envisaged (see Chapter 4). For these reasons, the data I hold on children's subversions of parental rules mainly emerged in either parents' accounts or what children were willing to reveal in the family setting. These descriptions do expose, however, parents' views of these activities and a sense of the struggles and compromises that form part of everyday family life.

Within the *high regulation* families, only one case of children subverting parents' rules was mentioned (in a third interview) suggesting that in these households, parents' restrictions tend to be upheld due to the highly regulated patterns of use severely limiting access. The example that was given was representative of similar accounts given by parents across the sample in that it featured a boy (or

boys) looking at sites 'they shouldn't have done' in the company of friends, which their parent(s) uncovered through using technical strategies. Jeff Hill describes this event:

> Jeff: That's right yeah exactly. That's one reason why it is here. I mean there was a case where we went out and erm... And one of the boys accessed sites they shouldn't have done and then tried to hide it and unfortunately didn't know enough about computers as they think they do. And that was the next door neighbour's son as well had come in and they were both sort of involved. [....] But that was just one incidence I know cos I can trace back what they've been using and where they've visited. [....]I don't normally do it because I know where they've visited and it's pretty obvious.
>
> (Mr Hill, int. 3)

In common with all the cases of unauthorized use raised by adults, parents' expertise had been sufficient to overcome children's attempts to cover their tracks. We can only speculate about uses that parents were not able to uncover and so mention in interviews. It is possible that they are over-confident in their claims and children better able to subvert their rules than they realise! Following Holloway and Valentine's (2003) finding that children's subversion of rules tends to be gendered with boys more likely to look for pornography online and girls more likely to break the rules by talking to strangers, we can assume that in all probability, the sites that 'shouldn't' have been looked at in this example were porn sites. A common feature of such accounts is that children have broken parental rules when online with friends: they are seemingly more likely to engage in forbidden or discouraged activities in the company of others.

Parents with boys in the *medium regulation* families also describe occasions where their sons have looked at sites relating to sex in both the initial interviews and at the third interview stage, suggesting that these uses are typical and widespread. Unsurprisingly, children in interviews usually greet these accounts with embarrassment. Lisa Golding says to her sons, Piers and David (15 and 13): 'Don't start giggling or I'll have to talk about what happened' referring to their search for sex-related content on the web (see Parrott and Harre 1996, for theories about embarrassment in Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). There is less embarrassment around inputting personal data, though this is perhaps also as the child in this example is much younger. Angela Craine describes in the third

interview how she will not allow Emma (aged 8) to have her own email as she has already witnessed her giving out personal information on a website. Angela witnessed this herself through the spatial strategy of locating the computer in a public place and says: 'Because I was there. And actually saw her do it'. In line with research carried out by Turow and Nir (2003a) who found that children will throw caution 'out the window' when faced with a free gift, Emma was putting in personal information motived by the 'Cartoon Network site where you could win these prizes'. Redolent of Holloway and Valentine's (2003) finding that girls are more likely to break the rules by talking to strangers, Vivien Bourne (aged 14) admitted that she had been in a chat room at a friend's house despite knowing how her parents disapproved of chat room use. The following excerpt shows the role that friends are said to play when engaged in discouraged activities, 'egging' each other on and being 'stupid':

> Vivien: Yeah. It's kind of stupid because you're both egging each other on and just being stupid it's not. Whereas you could. You know I wouldn't do that in my spare time I just think it's sad to be honest talking to people you don't know about random things. There's just no point.
>
> (Vivien Bourne, aged 14, int. 3)

Vivien appears keen to disavow her motivation to engage in chat room talk and rather than disagreeing with her parents' ruling on this, she colludes in their thinking by denying any pleasure chat rooms might afford and presents herself as a sensible, mature teenager who can be trusted online. A separate interview with Vivien might shed more light on this and similar incidents. It is a limitation of family interviews that what could be most at stake for Vivien here is her continued access to the internet and this may influence how she tells her story rather than giving 'real' insights into her perceptions and behaviour.

In the *low regulation* families there are (again) examples of boys looking at sex-related web sites. There is a suggestion, however, that parents in this group may have more respect for their children's privacy and, therefore, do not pursue uses that they may not necessarily approve of. For instance, though Anita Jackson has seen in the history files that her sons (age 13 and 15) look for 'porn', she says that she does not issue restrictions based on what she finds:

Anita: So, they're aware I know if they have been on it, because I can check on the history now. But I don't supervise, I don't say 'you can't go on this' or 'you can't go on that'. They are just aware that I can check on what they have been on now.

(Mrs Jackson, int. 1)

Similarly, when Amanda Powell-Drummond encountered the 'young teen' site her son (aged 14) had been looking at whilst exploring the history file during the second (videotaped) interview, she was keen to protect his privacy (from herself and/or from us). Interestingly, she becomes very anxious about what she might find though it is difficult to assess how much of this is the result of being observed and videotaped. She says that she knows there is the 'young teen' site here because her husband checks the history but is 'terrified' about finding other sites:

Amanda: This is Kelvin, buying books [....] I don't want to go down any further because I'm terrified that I'll come across some nasty things, that he did tell me that he'd found 'young teens' [refers to Kelvin having previously found this site on the history].

(Ms Powell-Drummond, int. 2)

In line with Livingstone and Bober's findings (2003), there were cases where young people switched between windows to hide what they were doing or to protect their privacy. Generally, siblings rather than parents in this group of families identified these. This presumably reflects the private settings these computers were often situated in not easily affording parents the means to monitor children's uses, but other children could be present and involved in negotiating their turn. The examples given referred to children using their homework as a front for recreational uses rather than looking at so-called unsuitable content and so on. In the Bond household, for instance, Bobby (aged 18) says that Sally (aged 16) used to draw on homework to cover her use of MSN:

Bobby: Sally used to pretend she used to do homework, when homework involved MSN. So she used to pretend that she was doing Bitesize revision, and ...

Sally: Not all the time! No!

Bobby: ... you would look at the screen and it has got MSN on it and that is it.

(Bobby and Sally aged 18 and 16, int. 3)

To some extent, Sally concedes that she has used Bitesize to cover MSN when she says: 'Not all the time'. This appears a typical example of sibling rivalry which is useful for enriching the data within a family interview and for shedding light on the kinds of struggles which occur between sisters and brothers around uses of the internet. Again, it is a moderate rather than fundamental challenge to their relationship with Sally good humouredly acknowledging that Bobby's claim is true to an extent.

How families prioritise different uses of the internet (such as for education, leisure and work) will be discussed in the next section. However, to conclude this section, I will summarise the findings. Firstly, what is apparent is that some parents believe that by severely limiting unaccompanied access to the internet, they mostly prevent their children from subverting their regulations. Where unaccompanied access is allowed, boys will typically search for sex-related sites that their parents uncover through technical strategies of looking at history files. There were no accounts from parents in my sample of girls similarly looking for sex-related materials, but instead there were descriptions of girls engaging in disapproved of chat room visits and divulging personal information online. How families responded to these incidents depended on their general orientation to regulation. In *low regulation* families, parents appeared less concerned about such activities and less likely to tackle their children about them, believing instead that children are entitled to privacy.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that whilst parental regulation of the internet is influenced by both material differences between families and their strategies for sharing what can be a limited resource, the dominant factors are more likely to be parents' attitudes to child-development and child-rearing, their views on the technology itself and the 'threats' they perceive their child could encounter through using the internet. Moreover, it is significant that parents' mediation practices emphasise *restrictive guidance* strategies to curb and control children

and young people's uses than rather more 'active' strategies, such as *evaluative* and *unfocused guidance,* able to help them to develop the skills and competencies they need to 'cope' online and observe safe practices. There are several issues here, not least being some parents' apparent incompetence to mediate uses of the internet whether it be through regulatory or developmental strategies due to their lack of both technical expertise and/or awareness of safe practices. Furthermore, when parents do sit alongside their children overseeing their activities, this appears to hinder both the development of their technical skills (see Chapter 7) and potentially their ability to cope with 'unwanted' material and encounters in the way that the context of family television viewing affords. The challenge for parents is how best to ensure that their children observe safe practices whilst allowing them the space to develop their skills and competencies.

In relation to material differences between families, it is interesting that socio-economic status is not a significant predictor of parents' attitudes to, and strategies for, regulation. Nor was the gender of the children, though differences were noted between parents in that some mothers in the sample adopted more liberal and broad-minded attitudes to their children's uses than some of the fathers (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; Holloway & Valentine, 2003). However, when it comes to the costs, both parents appear concerned to keep them in check. In relation to age, whilst older children, particularly late teenagers were often viewed as more 'mature' and restrictions slackened by the stage of the third interviews, parents' overall orientation to regulation prevailed. This meant that family categories did not correlate with children's age groups, and there remained a range of ages within each category. This finding contradicts that of Livingstone and Bober (2005) who found in their survey data that age is the key demographic factor influencing parents in their regulation of online uses.

In relation to the means for regulating children and young people's uses of the internet, this chapter has shown that most of the parents in the sample families preferred social means of regulation, such as the temporal and spatial modes of overseeing internet use, to the use of technical strategies. Where parents had installed filters, they were often found to be unsatisfactory and either adjusted to more liberal settings over time or abandoned altogether. In most of the families,

at least one parent considered their own internet expertise adequate to supervise their children's uses, whilst many children were equally confident of their abilities to subvert parents' regulatory practices. Furthermore, time was needed both to develop the skills to regulate and to supervise internet uses: where parents' skills and competencies were lacking, a regulatory gap would likely follow. Most children do not simply acquiesce to parents' rules in any case but subvert rules where possible to increase their internet access and/or to explore discouraged and forbidden parts of the internet such as porn sites and chat rooms. Parents may underestimate the frequency of these activities and be over-confident about their abilities to find out about them. How seriously they view these incidents appears to depend on their underlying attitudes in any case. Parents in the *low regulation* families, for instance, did not appear to pursue such matters, preferring instead to preserve some notion of their children's privacy.

Having considered regulation in depth, I will move to drawing conclusions for the whole study.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

> Is the internet a good or a bad thing?
>
> Good 83 percent (19627 votes)
>
> Bad 17 percent (4044 votes).(America Online Advertisement, 2006)

Introduction

At the outset of this study, I outlined the popular rhetoric surrounding the internet. As I suggested, this is often polarized between those who believe the internet is a positive force, revolutionizing all our lives for the better, and those who believe the internet is the scourge of contemporary living. Indeed, a discussion and survey running recently on the America Online website (see http://www.aol.co.uk/?redirect), complemented by television advertising, posed the question 'Is the internet a good or a bad thing?', headed by the following polemic:

> The internet has opened up a world of possibilities and opportunities to us all. But for all the amazing things you can do on the net, there are an equal number of abuses. Is it really worth it? (America Online Advertisement 2006)

Discussions which took place on the AOL website included questions such as: Has the internet made us happier? Is modern technology addictive? Is technology breaking up the family unit or bringing it together?

These examples epitomize the kinds of polarized discussions which have typically framed debates around the internet, provoking overly simplistic yes or no, good or bad type responses. What is not yet clear is how far the emergence of serious empirical research, combined with people's own experiences of using the internet and incorporating it into their everyday lives, is tempering the more inflated claims which have previously been made. In a sense, these public concerns reflect those that arose around older media, which focused, for example, on television 'effects', seeking to establish as 'unambiguous, objective proof' whether x does indeed cause y (Buckingham 1996). And, as with

academic consideration of these older media, comes recognition that building an understanding of the complex and nuanced nature of media use requires a methodology and method which goes beyond these simple yes/no questions.

In order to understand families' home internet use and the purposes for which the internet is used – specifically, education, work and leisure - within the context of families' power relations and family life, I deployed a longitudinal qualitative research design. By conducting 52 interviews with 17 families (33 parents and 44 children) at their homes, as both individuals and within their family groups, and through the systematic analysis of results, I have sought to build theory which could account for the complexity and potentially ambiguous findings that emerge in exploring home internet use within families. This study, consequently, does not aim to deliver definitive findings from which underlying predictions can be made, particularly in its acknowledgement of the 'human construction' of social research (Punch 2005) and the inconclusive nature of qualitative research. However, having carried out a thorough exploration and methodical analysis of uses of the internet within the context of contemporary family life over a two year period, I am able to offer the following suppositions. Though this is a far reaching study generating many conclusions, I have deliberately limited myself to ten key findings in order to focus on what is most important. The first five of these will summarise findings drawn from the data chapters whilst the remainder will focus on overarching concerns which have emerged from the study. A number of these conclusions are in contrast to rhetoric within the field as outlined in Chapter 1. This study, along with the previous empirical research drawn on for this study, seeks to challenge and contribute to the debate.

General findings

1 Use of internet is not revolutionizing our free time

My research has revealed how a range of overlapping and interrelated factors, such as level and quality of access; hierarchies of use; regulation; motivation; competence; and free time, combine to determine internet use. This account challenges the rhetoric, rife within the public domain, that the internet is transforming daily lives, increasing and enhancing leisure time and pursuits

(see, for example, Blair, 2005). Instead, most families within my sample incorporated the internet into the pre-existing routines and habitual practices of their lives and enhanced their established interests mainly in rather banal and narrow ways.

Furthermore, uses tended to be characterised as functional rather than expressive. For adults in the sample, this meant that they used the internet to organise family activities for leisure, and for the fulfilment of family responsibilities, rather than as a pleasurable activity in itself. Likewise, for the children and young people, the internet also emerged as a tool which facilitated other activities such as 'chatting' with friends, playing games and downloading music, for example, rather than as a goal in its own right. For both adults and children within my sample, exceptions were few and far between.

Moreover, close analysis of the data also challenged the more pessimistic claims made in relation to the internet and, specifically in its contribution to the erosion of family values and togetherness and ultimately, to family breakdown. The UK counselling service for couples, 'Relate', for instance, blames sites such as *Friends Reunited* for the surge in divorce rates (Barbour, 2005). Moreover, a recent academic study carried out by researchers at Stanford University found that the 31 percent of the US population who use the internet frequently, spend 70 minutes less daily interacting with their families (Dixon, 2005). The implication inherent in reports such as these is that the internet is contributing to family breakdown.

Conversely, in my study, it emerged that as families incorporated the internet into their homes in the longer term, they tended to situate the internet-connected computer in a central, public location. Whilst this does not necessarily mean that users were available to other family members whilst engaged on the internet, this repositioning was said to increase and enable easier access for all members of the family whilst enabling regulation of the internet and children generally. Mothers in my sample in particular appeared eager to nurture 'family togetherness' (see also Bakardjieva, 2005), often at the expense of more aesthetic concerns about the computer's utilitarian appearance. Nevertheless, where internet-computers were situated in private,

office spaces, there was also a suggestion that families gathered around them, implying that using the internet was actually triggering social interaction.

2 Use of the internet is not revolutionizing home education and learning

The potential of the internet as a means of harnessing educational benefit has been emphasised by educationalists, marketers, and to an extent, the UK Government (see, for instance, Blair, 2005; BT Advertisement, 2003; 2004; Papert, 1996; Tapscott, 1998). At the same time, we have seen the rapid diffusion of the internet into the home (particularly in homes where children are present), sold to parents on the grounds that it is useful for education and that 'interactivity' is synonymous with learning. This prompted a closer examination of how the internet was being used to support formal learning. Once more, the overarching conclusion drawn was that uses made by the majority of children and young people interviewed were predominantly quite limited and mundane. As with uses of the internet for leisure, the internet was being used as a tool to enhance established practices, in this case for learning, rather than to facilitate new forms of learning *per se (*see also Selwyn, in press). Likewise, whilst parents engaged in Higher Education within the sample used the internet a little more broadly to support their studies, again the internet was not facilitating innovative methods for gaining knowledge. However, these parents much appreciated the internet as a means of more easily establishing and sustaining relationships with peers when off campus, which were found to motivate and support their studies.

On the other hand, a cause for concern was how the internet emerged as a means through which class differences were being reproduced as used for education and learning by children and young people within my sample. Whilst all the families were positively oriented towards education, how this was played out in practice differed according to the relative affluence of the family. In particular, it was noted that less affluent families were more likely to deploy cost saving measures such as downloading websites to the computer, which presumably undermined the interactive qualities of the internet and seemingly, the potential it afforded for learning. Moreover, in my study, children in affluent families were more likely to have developed the skills and competencies to use

the internet autonomously, which meant that their homework research was much more 'self-directed'. The consequence of this for less affluent families was that they were mostly caught in the double bind of having to give children more support online whilst also having to monitor internet use more severely.

3 Use of the internet does not necessarily lead to internet literacy

Many parents invest in the internet at home in order to facilitate the development of the skills and competencies needed to effectively use the medium to support children's schooling and future employability, as well as parents' own studies and current employment (Buckingham, 2002; Lally, 2002). The assumption is that given enough access, time and motivation everyone can easily learn to use the internet informally through the inbuilt pedagogies and 'rapid feedback' that it is assumed to engender and the availability of support within the home (through skills being developed there or elsewhere). Yet, data from this study challenged this assumption. Although (as mentioned above) skills were found to be more developed in children who had enjoyed higher levels of internet access, even in homes where adequate access was available, users' functional skills remained mostly narrow and limited, not necessarily improved over time or through practice. Moreover, some users had become discouraged and deterred from using the internet over the longer term. Others had become reconciled to having only the narrowest range of skills, able to send emails perhaps, but at a loss when it came to web searching. My sample showed that sharing of skills at home did not necessarily remedy this issue as the inherent power struggles between family members became a potential barrier to learning and a source of further conflict (see also Facer et al., 2003, Holloway & Valentine, 2003). Even in households with enthusiastic and highly competent users, there was no guarantee that skills were passed on. In addition, users mostly tended to have a limited view of what constituted internet literacy in the first place, perceiving of it as a set of functional skills without having recognised the importance of the critical skills needed to evaluate websites and negotiate the internet's commercial dimensions. Furthermore, the affordances of the internet for publishing remained untouched, for all but a minority of expressive users.

4 Use of the internet is not revolutionizing home working

The advantages of being able to work from home are a further reason that parents in the sample connected to the internet. For parents in particular, advertisers have drawn on the notion of home-based working as socially progressive, a means of successfully balancing work and family commitments (Armstrong, 1997; Bryant, 2000). Nevertheless, on the other hand, the internet is also seen to be undermining family life through its contribution to the blurring of the work and home boundary (Nie & Erbring, 2000). Having considered home working activities in detail, I found that the numbers of workers engaged in *digital overflow* or non-digital home working were surprisingly low, which was particularly striking in view of the overrepresentation of professional and managerial workers amongst the sample. Many parents appeared to mostly maintain a strong separation between work and home, with the proviso that some engaged in leisure activities using the internet when at a separate workplace. Moreover, the influence of gender did not emerge from my study as a significant predictor of women's and men's opportunities for carrying out home working in general or engaging in *digital overflow*. Orientations tended to be underpinned by a combination of material differences, attitudes, work place culture and provision of remote services, and personal attributes such as orientation to technology and possession of the appropriate skills and competencies. Again, in line with the findings noted above in points one and two, the role of the internet for home working was predominantly viewed as rather commonplace and unsurprising by the parents in the sample when compared with the rhetoric. Moreover, there is little evidence that users broadened the range of applications and services that they used over time: it appeared that they identified their uses at the outset and then adhered to these.

Whilst parents in my study who engaged in *digital overflow* (and internet use carried out by home-based business workers) presumably enjoyed advantages in doing so, this could have been to the detriment of their family life. This was ironic given the claims made for the internet in terms of balancing work with family responsibilities. Not only were parents rendered unavailable to the family but bringing work home potentially undermined access to the internet for other members of the family due to the prioritised work demands (see also

Bakardjieva, 2005). This included situating the internet-connected computer in a private, office space which could then reduce parents' abilities to monitor their children's uses and engage in skills sharing. However, in the longer term this situation was often addressed by the introduction of an extra internet-connected computer, placed in a communal space.

5 Parents' regulation strategies may not be helping children and young people to develop their own skills and competencies to use the internet safely

Whereas the previous points have mainly focused on the positive claims made for the internet, the regulation question differs in its challenge to the equally deterministic, but negative claims that have led to moral panic about children and young people's safety in relation to this medium (NSPCC, 2003; Rice-Hughes, 2001). This study has shown that material differences between families and their strategies for sharing what can be a somewhat limited resource influenced parental regulation strategies. However, the dominant factor in how parents approached regulation was more likely to be their attitude to child-development and child-rearing, their view of the medium itself and their level of anxiety about the risks they believed their children encountered. Significantly, the onus of parents' strategies to mediate was mostly focused on curbing and controlling children's use than on more 'active' strategies which helped them develop the skills and competencies they needed to manage their own safety online.

Several issues arose from this in my study, not least that some parents appeared to lack both the technical expertise and/or awareness of safe practices to be able to mediate their children's uses, whether through regulatory or developmental strategies. Where parents' skills and competencies were lacking, a regulatory gap would often follow (see also Livingstone, 2004; Livingstone, van Couvering, & Thumin, 2005). Furthermore, the nature of the technology itself, inherently facilitating individual rather than collective engagement (Bakardjieva, 2005), does not lend itself easily to discursive practices which extend children's knowledge of the online environment. When parents in my study sat alongside their children closely overseeing their activities, this appeared to have mostly inhibited the development of children

and young people's technical skills and potentially their competence to cope with unwanted material and encounters in the way that shared family television viewing affords. The challenge for parents is to ensure that their children observe safe practices whilst also allowing them the space to develop their skills and competencies (see also Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005).

Whilst material differences between families may underpin approaches for sharing the internet-connected computer, interestingly, socio-economic status was not, for the most part, a significant predictor of parents' attitudes to, and strategies for, regulation in my sample. The gender of the child was also not a factor, although differences were noted between parents in that some mothers adopted more liberal and broad-minded attitudes to their children's uses than some of the fathers (see also Holloway & Valentine, 2003). However, when it came to managing and controlling the costs of being online, both parents appeared concerned to keep these in check. Whilst older children within the families, particularly late teens, enjoyed more freedom online as they were viewed as more 'mature' and regulations slackened to some extent by the stage of the third interviews, parents' overall orientation to regulation continued.

Most children and young people in the sample, meanwhile, did not simply acquiesce to parents' rules in any case but subverted them in order to increase their internet access, and/or sometimes to explore forbidden parts of the internet such as porn sites or chat rooms (see also Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Livingstone & Bober, 2003). Parents may underestimate the extent of these activities and be over-confident about their abilities to uncover them, though my study showed that how seriously they viewed these incidents depended on their underlying attitudes in any case.

6 Families' use of the internet fluctuates from day-to-day and shifts more fundamentally at key points

The longitudinal research design of this study sought to address the fact that the internet, like other forms of new media, is developing. Therefore, the methodology and methods were intended to offer an account of change over a two year period. Results overall were mixed. The data suggested, for example, that individuals tended to modify their internet use over time. The interests they

pursued on the web fluctuated, or they increased their online shopping activities, for instance, independent of obvious social changes that took place within the family itself. Moreover, the sample families modified provision of the internet in the home. For instance, new and improved computers were acquired with flat rate and/or faster internet connections or conversely, computers broke and families could not afford to replace them. Computers were moved from private to public locations or vice versa.

Above and beyond these examples, there were also significant changes in people's lives, such as separation and divorce, and other changes, such as to employment, educational circumstances and children's ages, for instance, which influenced the activities undertaken by individuals within my sample using their preferred applications (see also Anderson & Tracey, 2002). These changes were not necessarily predictable, and had both positive and negative outcomes. For instance, whilst some individuals experienced a reduction in their level and quality of access as the result of these changes, others gained. This meant that an important finding of this study is that in addition to the ongoing fluctuations that occurred in family members' uses on an everyday basis, there were also more fundamental shifts which took place incrementally, reflecting broader changes within people's lives.

However, even in light of the fluctuations and the life changes that took place within my study, for the most part the applications used by individuals to carry out activities remained the same throughout. Only exceptionally in the sample did changes occur to the applications used and activities undertaken as the result of social changes. In one case, a particularly motivated individual adapted the technology to the changing family circumstances, using video conferencing to enhance communication with his children after he had separated from his wife. In general, the appropriation of new applications and services, such as occurred through the introduction of instant messaging, were rare within my sample and unrelated to changes within families. Moreover, even in the case of instant messaging, it was only the children and young people in the sample who appropriated this new facility.

7 Inequalities in access persist between and within families connected to the internet

I have already referred to the gaps in internet-related resources which opened up between my sample families based on a range of economic, social and cultural factors. Yet, it is clear that for some families within the sample, without the adequate financial means to upgrade, the decision was based on economic necessity (see also Facer et al., 2003). This was indicative of the disparities which emerged between users in their level and quality of access. The recruitment of more socio-economically diverse families in the second cohort of the study seemed suggestive of the closing of the digital divide. This was particularly thought to be the case in light of the upward mobility of some of the sample families through the pursuit of education combined with the falling costs of computers and internet access. Yet, ultimately the gaps in access continued to exist, albeit less obviously. For instance, the pattern of upgrading and adding extra computers in the sample broadly reflects, for the most part, socio-economic factors. Less affluent families were also less likely to connect to broadband and gain faster, unlimited access which could, in turn, have a knock on effect in relation to the development of their skills and competencies. Structural inequalities within families, such as gender, may also have been an aspect of this. For example, it appeared that mothers in the sample experienced greater constraints on their leisure time than fathers did, mirrored by older daughters' similar time anxieties.

Of course, any explanation of the digital divide needs to take account of those individuals who choose to be digitally excluded (see Wyatt et al. 2002 for an account of internet use and non-use). Some sample family members, for instance, preferred to make no or only limited use of the internet at home, in spite of their apparent access. These individuals implicitly challenged the assumption that people will unequivocally embrace the internet as an intrinsically good thing, and that this will be played out through their extent of use and the applications and services which they choose to access. For families in my study, it appeared that these choices manifested in decisions about whether to upgrade internet connections and/or computers or not based on a range of social and cultural rather than purely economic factors.

8 Internet use is configured through the dialectical relationship between the medium and the individual within the context of the family

In previous sections of this and earlier chapters, I referred to the different applications and services which family members are able to access via the internet. Through the affordances of the internet, therefore, users are able - in theory at least - to access a range of applications such as the world wide web, chat rooms, instant messaging programmes, etc. Moreover, the services provided by the internet are not fixed, but tend to evolve materially at particular key points. Instant messaging, downloading music and social networking facilities such as My Space (www.myspace.com) are all examples of relatively new activities which are said to be becoming increasingly popular online. Moreover, increased concerns about children's safety online are an example of how cultural shifts can occur which can also have an influence. Added to these factors are the processes through which individuals uniquely configure their activities according to their level and quality of access; hierarchies of use; regulation; motivation; competence; and time; and which, as we saw above, were open to personal and social changes in the sample. This relational process through which individuals constructed their own inimitable online environment should lead us to question whether it makes sense to talk of a single entity, 'the internet', in the first place.

This discussion recalls the debate outlined in Chapter 2 drawn from the field of the social shaping of technology in relation to socially versus technologically deterministic accounts of uses. In this case, my study suggests that uses of the internet appeared to be the outcome of the dialectic between the affordances of the medium and the individual within the context of family life. As such, both the technology, in this case the internet, and the social, the family, afforded particular possibilities but were bound by certain constraints. In the same way that the internet was unable to transmogrify into whatever the individual would like it to be, individual uses were curtailed by particular constraints and circumstances as outlined above. Through this bidirectional process, influence was exerted – albeit at a 'micro' level - on what the internet could possibly become.

9 Material changes within families are related to employment and education much more than family breakdown

In the section above, I questioned whether it was indeed sensible to continue to consider the internet as a unified entity given its fluid and divergent nature. Likewise, the same question can be asked of the family given its similarly shifting and varied character. As outlined in Chapter 2, recent definitions of 'family' have emphasised the close connections between people rather than their formal ties, acknowledging that the values of nurturing and responsibility are what continue to bind people together in the context of the fluid and changing definitions of families. Furthermore, it is argued that the practice of enacting family life is more important than the social structure of families (see, for example, Morgan, 1999; Silva and Smart, 1999). This is suggestive of the increased diversity of people's lives and said to be accompanied by a growing individualisation of people's life goals (Beck, 1992; Cheal, 2002; Irwin, 1999).

Having already outlined how the transitions in people's lives influence their use of the internet, therefore, it is worthwhile considering the extent of change which occurred within the sample families. I settled on mainly nuclear families in order to compare both generational and gender differences, therefore, including only one lone-parent family. The remaining sixteen families were nuclear though they included two remade families. By the end of the study, fourteen of the families remained nuclear overall. All children (and their parents of course) aged two years over the period of the study. Only one young person crossed the threshold into adulthood (as defined by voting age) and gained work. Other material changes which occurred during the study consisted mainly of changes in employment, educational circumstances and moving house. Overall, about half the families reported changes in either parents' educational status or jobs. This outcome leads to the conclusion that within my sample overall material changes over a two year period in families' lives were more closely related to employment and education than family breakdown. Moreover, where parents separated and, in one case, divorced, the person who left continued to closely associate with the family with their ongoing responsibilities manifested in their sustained support of their children's internet access.

10 Attitudes to the internet are marked by their ambivalence

As reported earlier, families' uses of the internet within my sample tended for the most part to be functional except for a minority of enthusiasts who had a more expressive relationship to this medium. These functional uses tended to be accounted for in terms of convenience, efficiency, independence, immediacy, thrift and choice. And yet, responses on the part of both parents and children tended to be marked by their ambivalence between, on the one hand, the benefits of use, and on the other, the disadvantages. Taking each of the categories listed above, I will briefly summarise these points to demonstrate how these instances arose amongst my sample families:

Convenience: whilst many users alluded to the convenience afforded by email and instant messaging as a means of more easily communicating with friends and family, there was some ambiguity in responses as to the different qualities of these communication methods. For instance, some respondents said that they preferred to talk by telephone due to what they could infer from 'tone of voice'; which was obviously lacking in a written conversation.

Efficiency: saving time was frequently ascribed to uses of the internet families. Yet, for every perceived time benefit, there appeared to be a corresponding time waster. For example, whilst email was said to be quicker than phoning in some circumstances where a long conversation could have ensued, it was also frequently said that the telephone was more efficient for making day-to-day arrangements where a more immediate response could be received.

Independence: respondents reported that they liked being able to search for information on their own as opposed to relying, for instance, on a travel agent. The downside of this, possibly relating to a perceived lack of search skills for some users, was that they did not always trust the results of their searches.

Immediacy: an advantage of using the internet was seen to be in the access it afforded to up-to-date information, instantly available. And yet, experience of using train timetables, cinema and theatre information, for example, which had sometimes proved unreliable, had undermined some people's confidence and in

many cases led them back to using the telephone to check what they had found online.

Thrift: advertising campaigns and articles in newspapers and magazines have frequently focused on the potential money-saving aspects of using the internet. Some respondents referred to these benefits to explain their motivation for using it. For example, young people were likely to say that an advantage of instant messaging over using a mobile phone for texting, was that it saved money. For parents in the sample, booking holidays online and comparing prices generally before making a purchase were seen to be money savers. However, on the other hand, slow connections and what were viewed as expensive telephone bills covering internet charges, could offset these advantages.

Choice: an aspect of the internet which was frequently reported as an advantage was the facility it afforded to pursue common and specialist interests, particularly to find obscure information. In general, this was reported as a positive feature of the internet, with the proviso that, of course, there were concerns about the access it provided to pornography, for instance. Moreover, some respondents reported that their attempts to find so-called 'obscure' information had been much hindered by their problems in searching.

As can be seen from these examples, users perceived the internet ambivalently, as possessing both positive and negative attributes. Some of the negative aspects reported by respondents in the sample may have been as a result of the so-called teething problems which could have improved over time, either through technological advances and/or through users' experiences. Yet, it is a cause for concern that the longitudinal aspects of this study have shown that for some users in the sample, skills and competencies did not develop in the longer term through practice but that gaps in knowledge endured and continued to undermine how useful they found the internet in the long run.

Reflections on previous literature

In the introductory chapters, I outlined previous empirical research useful for understanding the underlying structural and social dimensions of old and new

media use. These studies offered insights into what were likely to be the most important issues for understanding families' internet use. In this section I will compare these previous findings with those drawn from the current study and how they confirm or challenge this previous work.

In Chapter 3, I outlined previous research which showed how patterns of temporal organisation vary according to socio-economic status and influence parents' socialisation of their children's media use, particularly television viewing. For example, Jordan (2003) found that more affluent parents whose jobs demanded high levels of self-motivation were more likely to instil notions of time management in their children than parents whose jobs were less autonomous. In my data there were examples where rules relating to time online were suggestive of middle-class values. An example of this occurred in the Burnley household when it was reported that the children were only allowed to go online for leisure when homework, piano practice and reading were complete. However, for most families, the overriding factor influencing time online was cost. This meant that families with less economic capital were more likely to severely restrict use (see also Facer et al., 2003), particularly for leisure purposes, though less so for education and work. Similarly, relating to the issue of cost, my data showed that UK internet pricing structures imposed an internet use timetable for families with off peak access arrangements. This finding confirms previous research carried out into uses of the telephone by Lohan (1998) which showed that telephone pricing charges, modelled around standard business hours, compromised uses for individuals (particularly women, children, retired and unemployed users) at home earlier in the day. For this reason, temporal patterns of internet use differed from time use patterns found for computers in earlier studies which showed that mothers were likely to use the computer during the day, fitted between housework, childcare and part-time work (Frohlich et al., 2003). However, my data confirm findings by Frohlich et al. that showed that uses of the computer tended to be fitted around established activities such as family meals rather than influencing families' everyday timetables due to the scheduling of programmes (Leichter et al., 1985; Gauntlett & Hill, 1999).

Previous studies have shown that the television's situation is determined by the architectural characteristics of the home and the family's spatial organisation (Leichter et al., 1985). Television sets placed publicly were viewed more often and were more available for family mediation (Bryce & Leichter, 1983). In contrast, the preferred position for a computer was found to be in a dedicated office space, suggestive of individual rather than collective engagement (Bakardjieva, 2005). Where office space was unavailable, the family tried to find somewhere where it would be accessible but quiet, allowing for concentration (Frohlich et al., 2003). These findings have aspects both in common and different from the spatial organisation of the internet-connected computer. In my sample, at the point of the first interviews, the computer's position depended on who used it and what it was used for. For instance, computers in private office spaces were associated with parents' work purposes; computers in dining rooms and lounges were placed there to facilitate sharing and monitoring of children's uses; computers in bedrooms enabled quiet concentration for adult study, for example. However, by the point of the third interviews, the majority of internet-connected computers were situated in communal spaces such as dining rooms or lounges, said to improve access and enable easier monitoring of children's activities. Interestingly, this pattern of internet use contrasts with previous studies into old media which have shown that an increasing number of television sets are to be found within the home and that families' orientation to be centrally located around television viewing has altered (Lawrence & Wozniak, 1989; Wartella & Mazzarella, 1990). Moreover, in the case of the internet, it appears that claims made about how the dispersal of domestic technologies around the home may be eroding families' engagement with media together (Silverstone, 1991, for instance), could be unfounded. However, on the other hand, as noted by Livingstone and Bober (2004) in relation to the internet, the nature of a particular room does not necessarily dictate the context of use. In their example, they suggest that a teenager may wait until parents have gone out before using the internet in the living room. This finding is borne out in my sample where, surprisingly, data suggest that more sociable uses of the internet were more likely to have taken place in private settings than in communal spaces.

Research into old media has found that structural differences in the home, particularly the unequal distribution of domestic labour responsibilities, make it difficult for women to carve out their own leisure time (Gray, 1992; Lull, 1982a; Morley, 1986). Moreover, Green's (2000) study of women's leisure uses of ICTs and Burke's (2003) study of women's use of home computers have shown the continuation of these structural inequalities. Redolent of Gray's earlier findings, Burke found that women using the computer experienced access limitations and feelings of guilt. My data confirm the findings of these studies to some extent. Mothers in the sample reported greater constraints than fathers on the time they had available to use the internet for leisure. Moreover, this was reflected by older daughters in the study who were more likely than their male counterparts to express an awareness of time pressure and that time should not be wasted. This scenario was complicated, however, by the reluctance of some mothers to view the internet as a leisure activity in the first place. This meant that whilst fathers described hobbies and personal interests such as sports results, music and cars they pursued on the web, women were more likely to visit family oriented health information sites rather than pursue separate interests of their own. Moreover, the data suggested the persistence of further inequalities, as noted by Morley's (1986) study. For instance, Morley reported that women's viewing styles differed from men's in that they watched television more distractedly, to view to the exclusion of all other activities being seen as 'a defensible waste of time, given their sense of their own domestic obligations' (150). In my data, some mothers, particularly those with young children, said that situating the computer centrally was important for their access as it allowed for the supervision of children whilst they were online. As none of the fathers made similar claims, this suggests the continuation of women's more distracted use of the internet, whilst simultaneously supervising children, in line with earlier studies suggesting women's more distracted television viewing style.

Lull (1982a) found that in relation to the selection of television programmes, decisions are often complicated, interpersonal communication activities involving intra-familial status relations, the temporal context, the number of sets available and rule-based communications conventions. Moreover, that differential power is accorded to members of the family according to their

different roles, encompassing both gender and age. Both Lull (1982a) and Morley (1986) report, for example, that in relation to television programme selection, masculine power is the main determinant on occasions of conflict over viewing choices. Likewise, Frohlich et al. (2003) observed a similar set of family systems of implicit and explicit rules in operation in relation to the sharing of the home computer. These included rules based on parents' underlying fears that the computer could dominate family life or that of particular individuals, and rules for sharing out computer time, usually based on task priority and bedtimes. However, where these authors depart from Lull and Morley is in the finding that in relation to computers, children's uses tend to be prioritised. This appears to be the outcome of habitual practices where parents gave way to their children unless their own work was more important and could be deferred until children had gone to bed. It is difficult to evaluate whether this is indicative of differences emerging in relation to how power operates around old and new media or other reasons such as parents' perceptions that using the computer is better for their children than watching television, for instance. Indeed, my data (reported in Chapter 6) support this by suggesting that parents consider using the internet to be more educational for their children than watching television. Furthermore, my analysis of how the internet is shared within my sample families suggests findings redolent of those reported by Frohlich et al. (2003). Rules for the internet are also based on task priorities combined with bedtimes, with homework for children, work and adult study uses prioritised over leisure activities. Likewise, parents are anxious about children's overuse, where phone bills could be particularly high in families with limited access deals. Moreover, high levels of anxiety about internet safety are exhibited in some of the sample families. This is in line with Drotner's (1992) observation that as each new medium is introduced, a moral panic ensues. In the case of the internet, levels of anxiety appear to be the outcome of parents' attitudes to child-rearing combined with their levels of anxiety about the risks their children could encounter online. Moreover, whereas recent television research has suggested that families adopt 'pedagogical' strategies (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004), my study suggests that the onus of parents' strategies to mediate the internet tend to be focused on restricting children's uses rather than on more 'active'

strategies which help them to develop their own skills and competencies to negotiate the risks they may encounter online.

The theoretical contribution of the study

This thesis has brought together theoretical perspectives from family sociology, Media and Cultural Studies, particularly the 'domestication' framework, and the field of the 'social shaping of technology' to examine how families explain and justify their internet uses. In the introduction to the thesis, I outlined the influence of Morley's (1986) *Family Television* project in conceiving of this study. In common with Morley's work, my research was concerned with the familial context within which media operates, in this case the internet rather than television. Like Morley, I was interested in families' media use within the context of differences of power, responsibility and control at different times of the day, not only within families but also between families in different socio-economic circumstances. However, my study departed from Morley's approach in that whilst he sought to understand changing television viewing patterns from within the context of family leisure activity, I focussed on three key purposes for which the internet is used – education, work and leisure – reflective of how the internet offers a wide range of services. Moreover, Morley's work was concerned with the family or household as a 'dynamic unit' rather than with the individual whereas the internet inherently facilitates individual rather than collective engagement (Bakardjieva, 2005). These limitations combined with the attributes of the 'domestication' approach meant that this framework provided a 'better fit'. In particular, its focus on the meanings of ICTs for people who 'individually and collectively also have a sense of identity' (Haddon, 2004: 4); social relationships around ICTs such as interactions, negotiations and conflicts; temporal and spatial dimensions of use and their display to others; and what ICTs symbolize and whether they represent threat or opportunity (see Haddon, 2004) were well suited to my aims. Moreover, as Berker et al. (2006) describe, 'Domestication represents a step away from the belief in the one-sided transformative power of technology' (5). Earlier formulations of the framework focussed on what has been called 'taming the wild', what happens when new ICTs are appropriated into the domestic sphere. However, British work using this framework has also gone on to examine the later careers of ICTs (Haddon, 2004).

The domestication approach provided a useful framework for exploring how families explain and justify their internet uses. Although I did not apply Silverstone et al.'s (1992) four phases in detail, my study provides a further example of applying the framework broadly to exploring ICTs within households, supporting and developing the detailed understanding it can provide. Whilst I did not challenge nor move on the domestication approach theoretically, my work provides an example of its application with the added dimension of investigating families rather than households. Moreover, in line with Haddon's observation (2004) that this approach has evolved from one which examined the processes that occurred when new ICTs arrived in the home to one which examines the later stages of processes around ICTs in the home, my work takes account of a range of temporal phases. There are families in the sample who had recently acquired the internet and families who adopted it some years prior to the study with other families at different stages in between. In all cases, the multi-occasion design allowed for the exploration of uses in the longer term, when, as Berker et al. (2006) describe: 'It is less about the short-term new or spectacular, but rather about the medium and longer-term impact and negotiation of technologies in everyday life. When the technology becomes an ordinary tool like every other tool' (3). A further departure in my study was that in choosing to look at the intra-family aspects of internet use within the context of family life, I focussed mainly upon the home sphere rather than the boundary between private households and public worlds. The home sphere inevitably overlapped with other social institutions such as education and work which are explored within the thesis to some extent. However, it would also have been useful to investigate further dimensions of the boundary. For example, whilst the social networks, such as the extended family, friends, neighbours, teachers and co-workers, also overlap with families' uses, they were beyond the remit of this study. This and other aspects of the relationship between the private and the public boundary should be picked up in future studies.

Final reflections

As with every research study, this investigation threw up interesting and surprising results deserving further investigation. In Chapter 6, for instance, I raised the issue of children's and young people's practices of using the internet

to support homework and in particular, the potential mismatch between teachers' and parents' expectations. A further useful study could examine both parents' and teachers' perceptions of uses of the internet for homework to raise awareness of the issues and become an integrated part of school homework policies and parental agreements. Furthermore, in Chapter 8, it was noted that a larger study would be helpful to confirm or refute the finding that only a minority of parents engage in *digital overflow* in the sample. Whilst my study was able to explore in depth the range of factors which influence home working practices, a large scale quantitative survey along the lines of the studies carried out by the Pew Internet and American Life project (Horrigan and Rainie 2002a) would be beneficial for further understanding the UK context and national trends.

Whilst the issue of the shifting nature of new media is ultimately irresolvable, this study has tried to account for it by adopting a longitudinal research design. However, in Chapter 5, I noted that a study of greater duration would also be useful for capturing the changes which occurred to respondents' internet use throughout their lives. Yet a longer study would also be more susceptible to problems such as sample attrition, testing effects and the consistency of the meaning of measures over time, as discussed in Chapter 4. Whilst life changes such as parents' separation and divorce and children leaving home could usefully form an integral part of the study, these changes would also make it difficult to track family members over time. Moreover, the potential pitfall of 'measures' of variables changing over time would be of significance in any study of the internet due to its changing qualities - although, again, this could be addressed as an inherent part of the study.

A further overarching issue which has arisen from the study is to the value of relying on self-reporting measures to understand internet use. The qualitative data have thrown up counter-intuitive findings such as, for instance, that more sociable uses of the internet within the sample families were facilitated by locating the internet-connected computer in a private, office space rather than a public, communal space. Moreover, the data collected in relation to respondents' self-evaluation of their possession of the functional skills and competencies to be able to use the internet, suggests there were differences

between some mothers and fathers in the sample which could have reflected levels of confidence rather than expertise. Issues such as social desirability, when respondents feel the need to make a good impression, are well-known and have led to the promotion of observational studies. To try to overcome these concerns, I incorporated observational data collection into my research design. Ultimately, however, the diaries became a discussion tool rather than being analysed in their own right due to their inaccuracy and incompleteness as reported by respondents. Moreover, the observational data became primarily interview data for reasons detailed in Chapter 4, relating to the scope of the study and the surplus of interesting audio data. The obvious way forward, therefore, would be to undertake an observational and more ethnographic study in the home to further investigate gaps within the findings. However, I suggest this with the proviso that incentives would need to be offered to participants given the difficulties I experienced in recruiting families to this study.

On a more positive note, however, the problems I experienced recruiting families lead to the participation of a more diverse range of families in terms of socio-economic status than I had originally anticipated. Whereas professional parents were well represented in the initial cohort of ten families, those families recruited later, in 2001, fortuitously reflected the wider spread of home ownership of the internet during this period. Although it was never my intention to collect a representative sample in the first place as, in keeping with qualitative research, I was not concerned with generalisation but with detailed descriptions of people's lives, the second cohort of families enriched the study by adding a further dimension.

Taking account of these considerations, I would argue that the research design went some way towards productively examining families' internet use and how family members justify and explain what they do. Moreover, as media use continues to become increasingly important in the home, with the home becoming ever more 'media rich', it is important that researchers are able to develop methodologies and methods which can adequately account for this sphere - and particularly for the role families play within this sphere - in their enduring significance.

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Appendix 1

Table 5 Key features of sample families (3rd interview data in brackets)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Deborah Hill	FT Community Nurse (FT Nursing Degree Student)	Mother	London	2 (4)	1, lounge-dining room (No change)	DU (DU)
Jeff Hill	FT Secondary Teacher/ PT MA Student (Withdrew from MA)	Father				
Heather Hill		11 (13)				
Adam Hill		9 (11)				
Darren Hill		8 (10)				
Kevin Hill		6 (8)				
Chris Hill		5 (7)				
Carlton Hill		4 (6)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Christine Bond	FT University Manager	Mother	London	1 (3)	1, dining room (1, laptop usually used in lounge, 1, Bobby's bedroom)	DU (ANY)
Bobby Bond		15 (17)				
Sally Bond		13 (15)				
Suzanne Kendal	PT Academic (FT Academic)	Mother	London	3 (5)	1, office (1 dining room, 1, office)	DU (BB in dining room, DU in office)
Phillip Kendal	FT Company Finance Director	Father				
Caleb Kendal		11 (13)				
Roland Kendal		9 (11)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Amanda Powell-Drummond	FT Senior Academic	Mother	London	1 (3)	1, Amanda's office (1, Damien's bedroom, 1, Martin's bedroom, 1, Amanda's office, 1, laptop usually in Kelvin's office)	DU (2 boys have Any, parents have DU)
Kelvin Powell-Drummond	FT Senior Academic	Father				
Damien Powell-Drummond		14 (16)				
Martin Powell-Drummond		12 (14)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Freya Liang	PT Credit Controller/ PT Degree Student (PT Private Tutor)	Mother	London	2 (4)	1, parents' bedroom (1, lounge-dining room)	DU (DU)
Jeremy Liang	FT Company Accountant	Father				
Howard Liang		12 (14)				
Kirsty Liang		10 (12)				
Lisa Golding	PT University Administrator/PT Student (Completed degree)	Mother	London	1 (3)	1, dining room (No change)	DU (DU)
Peter Golding	FT Town Planner	Father				
Piers Golding		15 (17)				
David Golding		11 (13)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Alison Burnley	FT Chief Executive, NHS	Mother	London	1 (3)	1, Lounge	DU (IN)
James Burnley	FT Director of Housing	Father			(No change)	
Julia Burnley		13 (15)				
Joy Burnley		10 (12)				
Gemma Burnley		10 (12)				
Helen Archer-Hughes	FT Finance Director, NHS	Mother	London	5 (7)	1, office (1, office, 1, dining room)	IN (ANY)
Jay Archer-Hughes	FT Management Consultant	Father				
Tony Archer-Hughes		14 (16)				
Ben Archer-Hughes		14 (16)				
Joe Archer-		12 (14)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Hughes						
Sheila Manders-Short	FT Health Practitioner	Mother	London	4 (6)	1, office (1, office, 1, Anna's bedroom, 1, laptop usually in Richard's office)	DU (ANY for office, DU for others)
Richard Manders-Short	FT Actor	Father				
Anna Manders-Short		15 (17)				
Andrew Manders-Short		11 (13)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Gail Dunne-Osborne	FT Psychotherapist	Mother	London	3 (5)	1, office (No change)	DU (BB)
Michael Dunne-Osborne	FT College Manager	Father				
Adele Dunne-Osborne		10 (12)				
Angela Craine	Unsalaried/PT Student	Mother	Sheffield	3 (5)	1, lounge, 1 laptop used by father (1, lounge, 1, Aaron's bedroom)	AD (BB for Angela and the children)
Duncan Craine	FT IT Technician, Computer Outlet (FT IT Manager, Computer Outlet)	Father				
Jodie Craine		9 (11)				
Aaron Craine		10 (12)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Emma Craine		6 (8)				
Sasha Craine		3 (5)				
(Separated by 3rd interview)					(1, laptop at father's home)	(AD for father)
Anita Jackson	Unsalaried/PT Student (PT Literacy and Numeracy Teacher/completed degree)	Mother	Sheffield	3 (5)	1, parents' bedroom (1, lounge)	DU (DU)
Ken Jackson	FT Care Assistant	Father				
Phil Jackson		15 (17)				
Adrian Jackson		13 (15)				
Josie Jackson		10 (12)				
Alice Jackson		6 (8)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Sandra Parker	Unsalaried/PT Student (FT Resource Centre Manager/completed degree)	Mother	Sheffield	3 (5)	1, office (No change)	DU (DU)
Derek Parker	Retired Electrical Engineer	Father				
Sian Parker		11 (13)				
Ros Bradshaw	Unsalaried (PT School Governor)	Mother	London	4 (6)	1, parents' bedroom (1, laptop, usually used in lounge-dining room)	ANY (DU for mother)
Melvin Bradshaw	FT Sales Director (FT Taxi Driver)	Father				
Lori Bradshaw		11 (13)				
Abby Bradshaw		8 (10)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Tom Bradshaw		4 (6)				
Divorced by 3rd interview)					(1, laptop at father's home)	(ANY for father and the children)
Tessa Prowse	FT Social Worker (FT Children's Home Manager)	Mother	London	3 (5)	1 in dining room (1 in girls' den)	DU (DU)
Nick Prowse	FT Royal Navy Engineer	Father				
Abigail Prowse		18 (20)				
Valerie Prowse		14 (16)				
Rachel Prowse		13 (15)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Family composition (listed in order of recruitment)	Parents' occupation/ study	Mother/Father or children's ages	Families' approximate location (ie London or Sheffield area)	Length of time online in years	No. of internet connected computers and position	Access type (see footnote for key to acronyms)
Fiona Bourne	PT Civil Servant	Mother	Sheffield	2 (4)	1, loft (No change)	DU (DU)
John Bourne	FT Building Construction Director	Father				
Vivien Bourne		12 (14)				
Jackie Bourne		7 (9)				
Maria Grant	FT Health Visitor	Mother	Sheffield	3 (5)	1, office (No change)	DU (ANY)
Robert Grant	FT Musician, Music/IT Teacher, Painter (Musician, Music teacher/painter/web designer)	Father				
Rhiannon Grant		14 (16)				
Tim Grant		12 (14)				

Access type: DU = dial up; IN = intermediate narrowband; AD = ADSL; ANY = anytime; BB = broadband (see Chapter 5)

Appendix 2

Families' uses of the Internet: first interview questions

1 **Computer acquisition**

Do you have more than one computer?

When did you get it? (or they?)

Who wanted it?

Why?

2 **Internet acquisition**

Did you get connected to the internet at the same time as getting the computer?

Who wanted it?

Why?

Do you think the computer is used more since getting it linked up?

3 **Position**

Where is the computer?

Has it always been there?

Who decided where it should go?

Do you think its position has influenced who uses it?

Do you think its position has had an effect on how it is used?

4 **Who uses the computer?**

Who uses the computer the most?

Is the computer usually used by one person at a time?

What happens when more than one person wants to use it? How do you resolve this?

Does anyone spend any time explaining how it works to anyone else? Can you think of any examples of one person showing another how something works?

Who knows the most about how it works overall?

5 **What is the internet used for?**

(Ask individually) How does each member of the family use the internet? World wide web? Email? Games? Etc?

Do you have hobbies or interests that can be pursued on the internet?

Is it used for work/homework and how?

Are there problems with using the internet for work, ie, do you get work emails at home?

6 **Rules about the internet**

Do you supervise the children's use of the internet?

If yes, why?

Do you have any rules about how it is used?

7 **Games**

Do you have any games consoles in the house? Ie, Playstations, Nintendo 64s, etc?

Where are they?

Who plays with them?

Appendix 3

Figure 1: Excerpt from Bradshaw diary

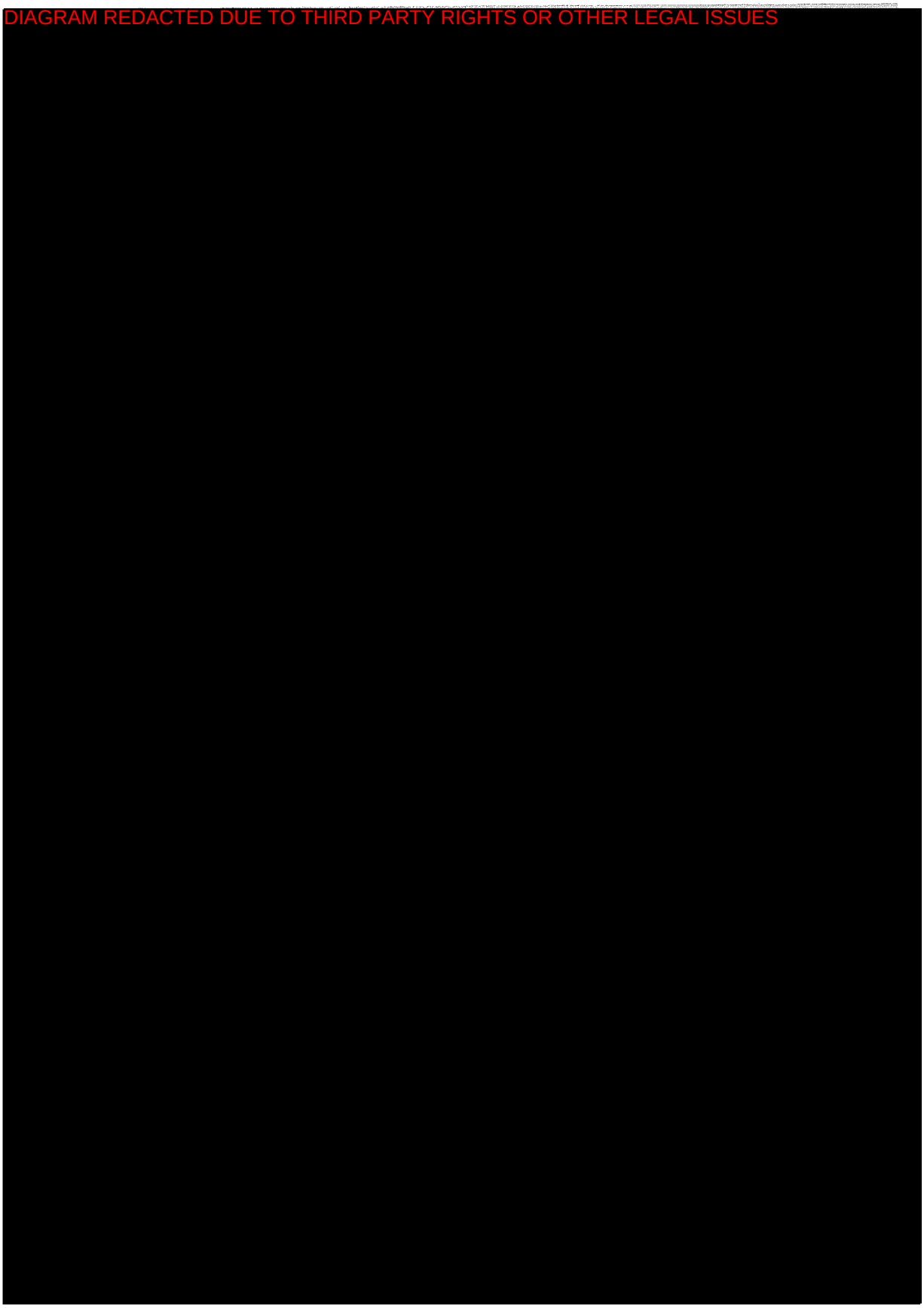


Figure 2: Excerpt from Burnley diary

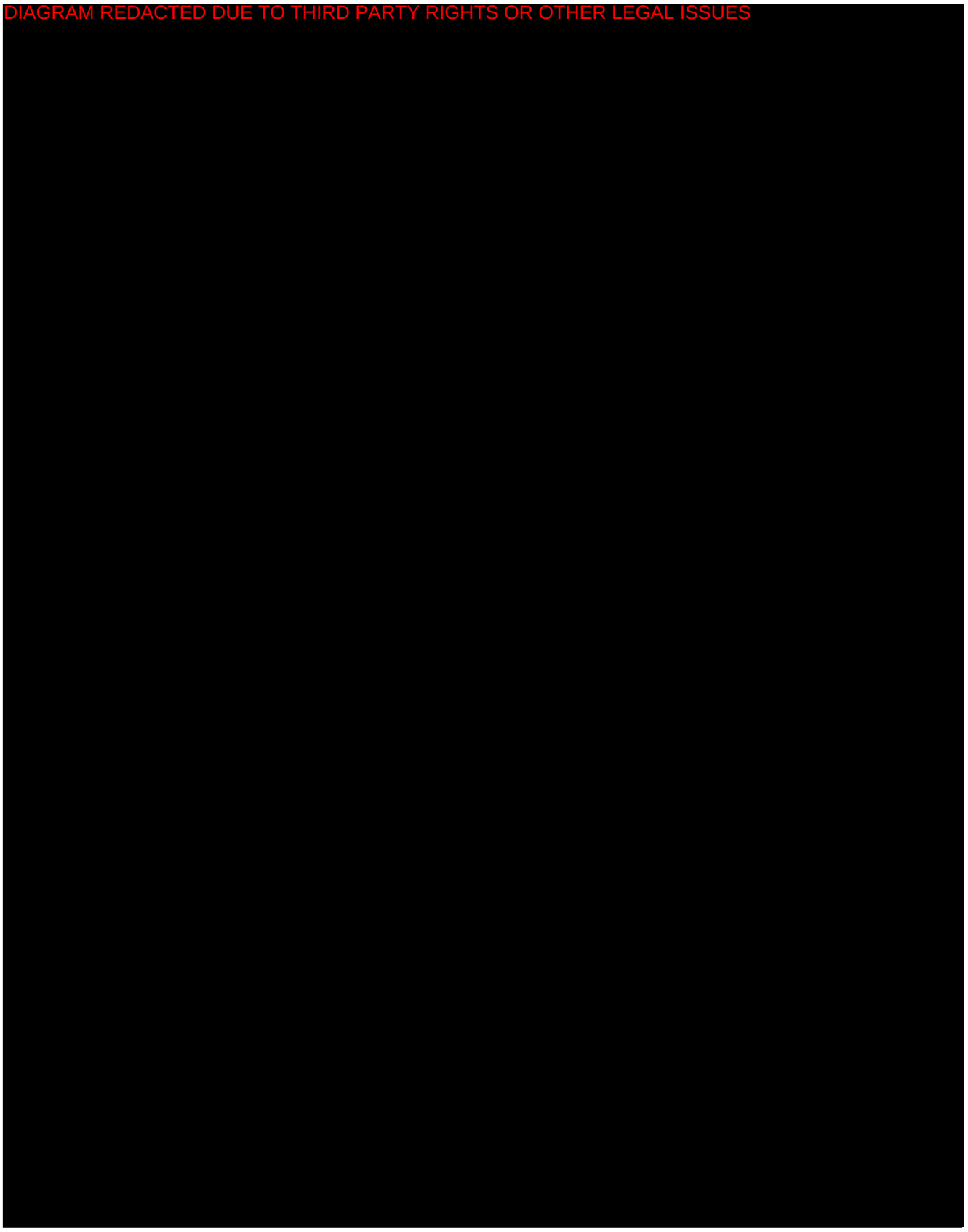


Figure 3: Excerpt from Manders-Short diary

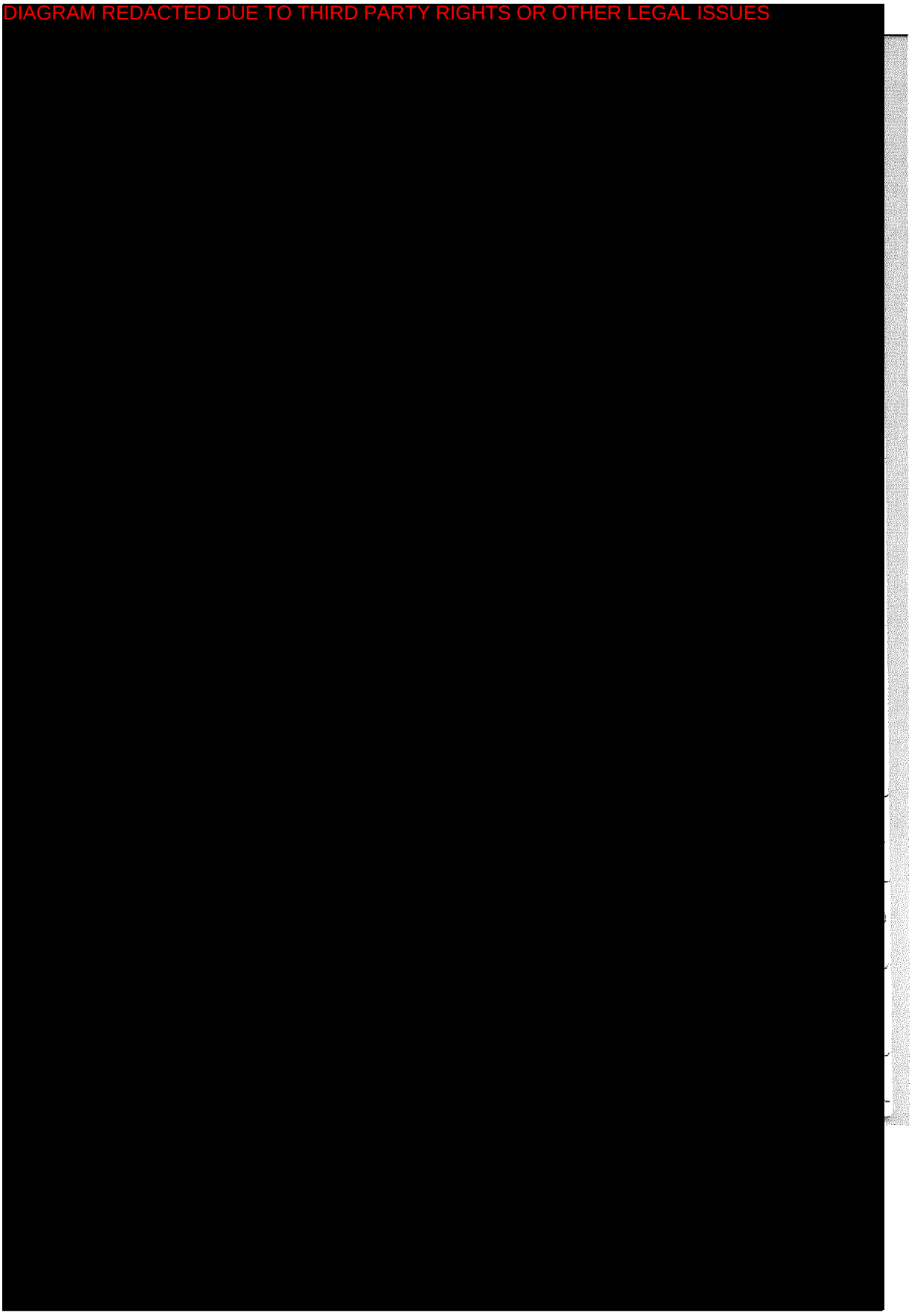
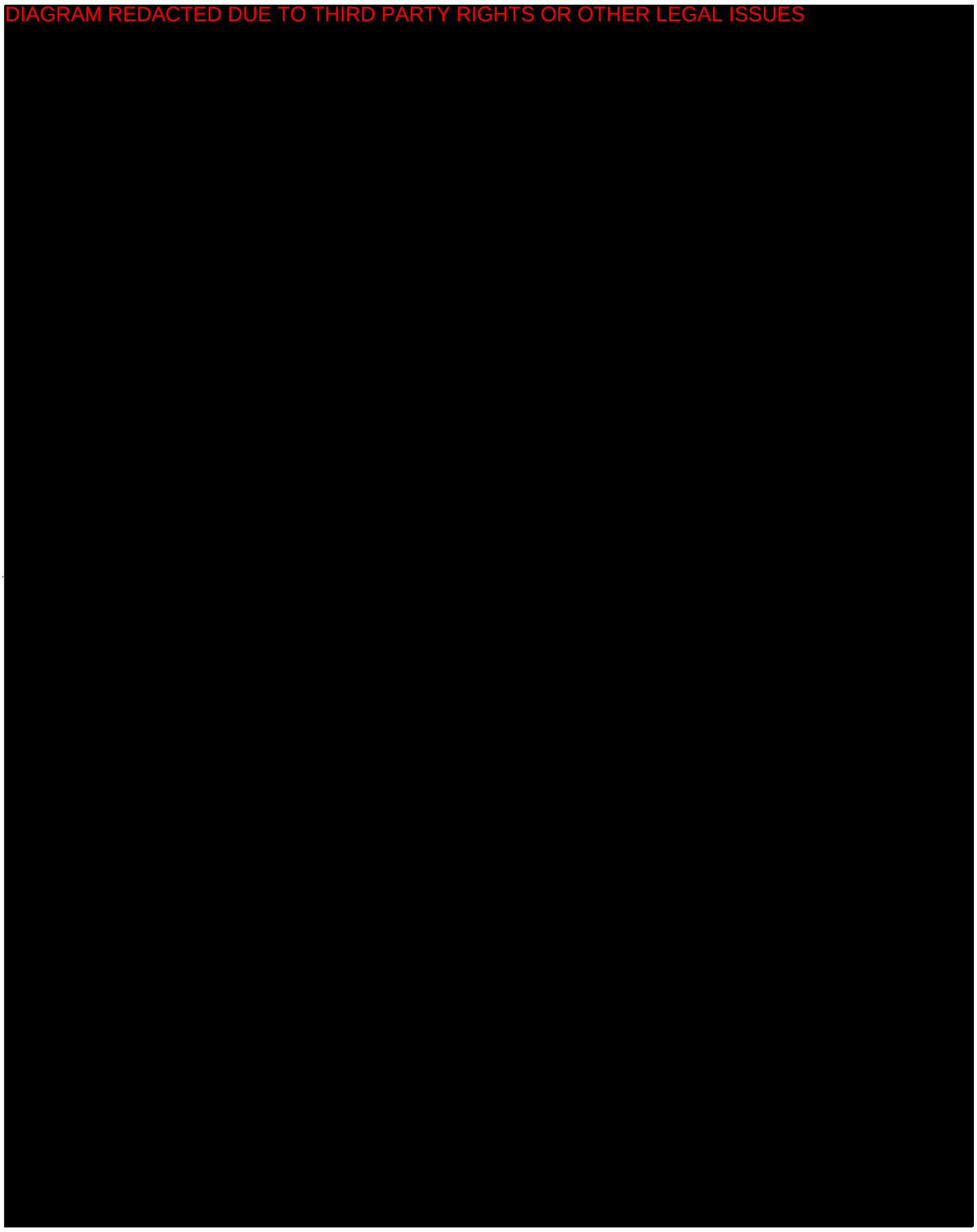


Figure 4: Excerpt from Craine diary



Appendix 4

Families' uses of the Internet: second interview questions and pointers

1 Ask them to do the observation alone if possible.

2 Go to favourites list and favourite sites (bookmarks).

Do they look at these regularly?

Do the bookmarks accurately reflect what they look at?

3 Ask them to show you what they do.

4 Why do they like doing it?

5 Try and get more personal/emotional response. Ask for examples.

6 What's the pleasure? What do you think is good (bad) about being able to do this?

7 Emails – if they prefer to speak on phone or email, why?

8 Ask for examples where possible.

9 What does the internet make possible?

10 Ask if they have any contacts who would take part.

11 Collect and discuss diary.

Appendix 5

Families' uses of the Internet: third interview questions

1 **Computer acquisition**

Are they using the same computer they were last time?
Do they have any new computers?
What's the set up in terms of connection to the internet?
Have they added new lines/quicker dial-up?
If new, why did they get it?
Who wanted/needed it most?

2 **Position**

(May have been covered in the question above.)
Is the computer in the same place?
Why has this changed?

3 **Who uses the computer?**

Who uses the computer the most?
Is the computer usually used by one person at a time?
What happens when more than one person wants to use it? How is this resolved?
Does anyone help anyone else in using it?
Who knows the most about how it works overall?

4 **What is the internet used for?**

How do each of you use it now? Hobbies/interests? Work/homework?
Have your uses changed over the past two years? Ie using it more in general/for hobbies/for work?
What does the internet make possible?

5 **Rules about the internet**

Is use of the internet supervised?

If yes, how and why?

6 **Games**

What games consoles are in the house?

Where are they?

Who plays with them?

Favourite games?

7 **Mobile phones**

Who has mobile phones?

Who sends text messages?

Do you think this has changed your email use?

What is the place of the computer in their lives?

Ask them to tell you stories about it, get to the affective/emotional and interpersonal dimensions of what goes on, the way it fits into the 'feel' of everyday life.

Appendix 6

Classifying the families

As noted in Chapter 4, my intention was not to recruit a sample from which I could generalise findings but with generating detailed descriptions of people's lives. In view of this and the manner in which I recruited some of the second cohort of families, I decided against classifying the sample families by occupation using the 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) (Office for National Statistics, 2000a; 2000b). Firstly, I discovered that classifying families by occupation is seen as both highly complicated and problematic by very experienced social researchers whom I consulted. In particular, making distinctions between so-called working and middle-class families, which could have been illuminating for this study, involves applying a relatively arbitrary line drawn between the SOC groupings to some extent. Moreover, whilst a strength of the Standard Occupational Classification is in its inclusion of 'typical entry routes and associated qualifications' associated with each occupation, having examined this document in detail, I found that it was not so helpful when considering how to group the families in my sample, particularly the less-affluent families. This relates in part to the manner in which I recruited several of these families through a university tutor teaching on an access to Higher Education course. The families I recruited via this method included parents not well accounted for by the Standard Occupational Classification. For instance, they described existing on fairly low incomes at the point of the initial interviews whilst one parent studied for a university degree whilst the other parent was engaged in low paid work or unemployed or retired. By the point of the final interviews, successful completion of their degree courses, plus securing jobs, had launched some of these families on a trajectory where their economic, social and cultural situation was rapidly changing. In these kinds of circumstances, I found that the Standard Occupational Classification structures and descriptions were inadequate in accounting for these circumstances as they associate the nature and duration of qualifications with particular jobs, rather than recognising degree level qualifications as cultural and social indicators in their own right. I, therefore, decided to put aside these classifications on the grounds that they were not helpful to this study. An

alternative method might have been to classify families based on criteria such as salary, etc. However, in light of the enduring problems that I experienced when trying to recruit families, I decided that to ask for this personal and sensitive information could risk jeopardising the family's participation if they chose to withdraw. I resolved, therefore, not to seek to collect this information on these grounds whilst recognising that it would have been useful for further understanding the economic situation of each family.