THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Discipline of Media

Masters Thesis

The Challenges of Regulating New Media Technologies for
Children and Young People

Name: Marilyn Coleman
Student ID: a1171824
Supervisor: Associate Professor Mary Griffiths
Co-Supervisor: Dr. Michael Wilmore
Date: 21/01/2011
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a comparative study of the classification and regulation of media content in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. These three countries were chosen due to their historical links, common language and similar problems.

The main purpose of this thesis is to ascertain why, and how, media content is regulated for children and young people, and whether regulation is working, given the easy access to new technologies. Further: can such media content, when viewed alone, be regulated?

In order to do this comparative study, a clarification of what new media technologies are is given and what is currently accepted to be the status of childhood. The thesis firstly investigates therefore, the present concept of childhood, how it compares with the past and why there is a need to make a special case for children. It examines the differences between adulthood and childhood and at adult-child relationships from the classical period to the present day. From the present study, it is apparent that, since the earliest recorded history of children, childhood has been seen as a formative time of life.
The thesis investigates the need for regulation of media content and compares, in contrast, how the free market has simply transferred responsibility of regulation from that of the government, to that of private corporations, and put the onus of ensuring that one’s choices are informed, into the hands of the individual.

The current status of research on the effects of media influences on children and young people is examined. There is divided opinion on this matter which lies between what has been labelled by Egenfeldt-Nielsen and Smith (2003) as ‘the ‘active media perspective’ and the ‘active user perspective’. The former believes that causes of behaviour are external, whereas the latter believes that consumers are more than passive recipients of media and bring with them much contextual background.

Existing regulations of media content are examined from Australia, New Zealand and the UK. In all three countries there are regulatory bodies that implement various Broadcasting Acts and classification boards that classify films, videos, and other content.

Comparisons show that the UK and New Zealand regulation makes specific mention of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child within their Broadcasting Code and Act respectively. Australia however, does not do so, but it does refer to it in the Broadcasting Act in respect to protecting children from ‘distressing and harmful’ material (The Attorney-General's Department 2000).
Three studies concerning the use of media by children and young people, undertaken in recent times by the three countries are compared. In particular the studies show that much time is taken up engaging with media technologies (over 4 hours per day in the UK and Australia). This is a considerable amount of time in a child’s life and deserves due attention, especially considering the difficulty in regulating content.

It is found that the challenges of regulating the new media technologies arise mainly from the fact that governments are unable to legislate outside of national jurisdictions. While the governments of all three countries have made it illegal to publish restricted material, they are unable to prevent this material being published online overseas.

As an alternative to regulation, media literacy programmes are examined. These programmes provide education about how to stay safe online and to protect one’s privacy and security online. It has been found that all three countries have produced various programmes.

From this study it is concluded that:

- An international approach, possibly auspiced through the United Nations, could prevent offensive and harmful material being published online;

- The Australian government can use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to justify its filtering software on the Internet;
The Australian government has begun to introduce a media literacy programme into schools but could include such programmes into the National Curriculum.
DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University or other Tertiary Institution to Marilyn Coleman and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Mary Griffiths, for her guidance, suggestions and support. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Dr. Michael Wilmore for his suggestions. Finally I would like to thank my husband, Dr. Chris Coleman for his unfailing encouragement and support of my work.
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introductory Background

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1989 states that ‘the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth’ (General Assembly of the United Nations 1989, p.1). Article 17 of this declaration acknowledges the important role performed by the mass media and that the child should have access to information from a variety of sources, both national and international, to promote ‘his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health’ (General Assembly of the United Nations 1989, p.5). In order to achieve this, in addition to other clauses, parties should ‘Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being’ (General Assembly of the United Nations 1989, p.5).

This thesis investigates how well Australia, as a liberal western democracy and a signatory to the convention on the Rights of the Child, is providing guidelines to protect children from information and material that might be injurious to their well-being. This is particularly in relation to current regulation of media content and classification policies, and with special regard for new media technologies. It will also
compare the situation in Australia with that in other English speaking countries including New Zealand and the United Kingdom. These countries were chosen due to their historical links, common language and similar problems that face all three countries. It is interesting to note the similarities and differences in these issues and the methods used to tackle them. From an Australian perspective, it gives an idea of how Australia is placed in relation to how well, or otherwise, it is handling the difficulties that arise from the influx of new media technologies and the associated problems of regulating media content therewith contained. Prior to doing the comparative study I felt it necessary to clarify what new media technologies are and a definition is provided in chapter 2.

My background as a teacher is in educational psychology and while I am aware of media policy history and analysis, I have drawn predominantly on the behavioural, sociological and psychological disciplines. I have also worked in the media industry providing information for parents regarding films that their children might see and am therefore aware of the concern that parents have for their children. I have also found that there are many different concepts and expectations of childhood that need to be explored. Children are the future and this is such a broad and important issue, that it warrants taking an interdisciplinary approach.

The regulation and classification of media content is often seen as a contentious issue, which provokes wide-ranging and conflicting opinions. Libertarians on the one side, uphold freedom of information and the right to choose, while conservatives on the
other side believe in restricting what media can be consumed by the public. This thesis is not an attempt to enter into the debate with regard to what media adults choose to watch, listen to or otherwise consume, rather it is the intention of this thesis to concentrate on how media content is classified and regulated for minors, that is, those under eighteen years of age.

The main purpose of this thesis is to ascertain why, and how, media content is regulated and whether regulation is working, given the easy access to new technologies. A further question concerns whether the media content that children are accessing and viewing can be regulated, when they are alone.

Further issues arise in determining up to what age it is necessary to protect children from ‘harm and offence’, what actually constitutes harm and offence, and to what extent, media content can adversely affect children. While investigating the regulation of media content with particular regard to children, it is firstly important to understand what is different about children, to gain a definition of childhood, and why they need special treatment as distinct from adults. In chapter 3 I will discuss the need for a special case for children, which will include a description of the concept of childhood. It will also address various differences between childhood and adulthood as well as give an historical account of adult-child relationships from antiquity to the present day. I will also discuss the influences of nature and nurture.
Chapter 4 discusses the benefits of regulation against the free market and neo-liberalism, which have shifted the locus of control from government to private individuals.

In Chapter 5, I investigate the current status of research on the effects of media influences on children. Two paradigms, one psychological and one sociological, dominate this field. They are the ‘active media’ and the ‘active user’ perspective respectively. Both will be discussed as they influence government policy in this area.

In chapter 6, I compare and contrast the regulation of media content and the way regulation policy is formulated in these countries. I will analyse any differences in the above, and investigate the reasons for them.

In chapter 7, I look at three comparable studies undertaken in recent times by the three countries, Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. These studies investigate the types of media devices and content that children and young people are using and accessing, together with the amount of time spent using media.

Chapter 8 discusses the difficulties relating to the regulation of new media technologies and what the three different countries are doing in this regard.
Chapter 9 investigates media literacy programmes that have been put in place by all three countries as an alternative to regulation.

Chapter 10 draws together the conclusions from the research and discuss whether Australia is providing sufficient guidelines to protect children from harm and offence in the new digital world. Children today, have much more access to media devices, much of it unsupervised, resulting in great difficulty in regulating access to media content particularly when there is no adult supervision. The conclusions will therefore attempt to develop some suggestions for what can be improved on.

1.2 Research Questions

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, how well is Australia adhering to this convention in protecting children from media content, particularly within new media technologies, that might be injurious to their well-being?

Further, how does Australia compare to similar countries such as the UK and New Zealand in this matter?

The new media technologies have changed the way that media is consumed by the public. The convergence of broadcast and communication technologies in particular, has greatly changed the way media content is viewed. Films that have been classified
by classification boards can be restricted to audiences at the box office but can now be downloaded directly to an individual’s home computer. Individuals can upload home made movies to share on public Internet sites such as MySpace, blurring the boundaries between public and private communications. The responsibility of regulating media content therefore appears to be moving from government to the individual. Given the acknowledged difficulty in regulating media content, this thesis would like to address the following questions:

- How are three different countries, with historical links and a common language, Australia, the UK and New Zealand, dealing with regulation of media content, particularly in relation to children and young people under 18?

- Why does each jurisdiction judge it to be necessary to regulate media content for under 18s?

- Can media content be regulated in an individual’s home?

- Is there a need for media literacy education about what children view alone?
1.3 Aims/Objectives of the Project

In order to answer the research questions the thesis aims to:

1. Identify and define new media technologies.

2. Identify and describe the need for regulation of media content by analysis of current debates including:
   2.1. The need to protect children and young people under 18 including an historical analysis of the concept of childhood and the need for a special case for children.
   2.2. Regulation versus the free market and neo-liberalism.

3. Investigate the current status of research on the effects of media influences on children and young people under 18.

4. Identify the existing regulations of media content in Australia and how they compare to those in the UK and New Zealand.

5. Using existing comparable studies compare the use of media technologies in the 21st century by children and young people under 18 in Australia, the UK and New Zealand and its relevance in their lives.

6. Investigate the challenge of regulating new media technologies, including how regulation policy is currently formulated and what it actually covers.

7. Investigate current media literacy programmes in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom including government and non-government organizations that provide such programmes.
1.4 Significance/ Contribution to the Discipline

It is clear from existing studies (for example: Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, Media and communications in Australian families 2007; Broadcasting Standards Authority (2008), Seen and heard : children's media use exposure, and response; Ofcom (2006, 2010), Media literacy audit report on media literacy amongst children), that children and young people in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom spend a lot of time each day watching the television and movies and surfing the Internet. Increasingly, much of the time spent watching or interacting with media is alone, particularly watching the television in the UK. Roberts and Foehr (2004) believe that anything that takes up so much time in the lives of children and young people should not be ‘dismissed as simply a pastime or a diversion. Anything that plays this much of a role in the lives of children deserves our attention’ (Roberts and Foehr 2004, p.203).

This thesis compares and contrasts how different English speaking countries approach the issues arising from the new media technologies and children. It also compares and contrasts the regulation of media content and demonstrates how regulation policy is formulated in the three different countries. It analyses any differences that might exist and evaluates the reasons for these differences.

From this research I hope to find ways whereby Australia, as a society, can maintain a balance between being able to take full advantage of all of the capabilities and
advances that technology has achieved with the new media devices, while at the same time accepting our responsibility, as a society, to ensure that children are protected from any harm that may occur through the misuse of these technologies.

1.5 Theoretical Framework and Methods

In order to do this research I have provided an overview of both qualitative and quantitative research, which is appropriate to this thesis. Qualitative research has many advantages including the ability to take into account varying viewpoints and practices which are different because of the ‘different subjective perspectives and social backgrounds related to them’, (Flick 1998, P.16) and which have a bearing on the outcomes of the research. In looking into how children and young people use media, it is important to take into account diverse cultural and social backgrounds, which affect their behaviours.

Qualitative research has also allowed me, as a researcher, to reflect on my observations and impressions and to take them into account when drawing conclusions.

Quantitative research is used to gain the data needed to compare the current use of media technologies by children and young people in the twenty first century.
This thesis was undertaken as a desktop analysis, using investigative tools such as the Internet, electronic databases, published books, newspaper and journal articles, to research and discover the necessary information.
Chapter 2 WHAT ARE NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES?

The term ‘media’ has, in the past, usually referred to mass media, i.e. a means of communicating to the masses. It was associated with print media, film media, broadcasting media, recording media, advertising media, electronic media, etc. What is new about the ‘new media technologies’ is that they use a digital format into which all of the traditional forms of media can be converted. This has made all media available to digital computers and has hence led to their convergence with communications technologies such as telephone networks. Digital media enables all types of media content such as text, sound, and images to be stored and sent electronically in the form of binary data or strings of 0’s and 1’s. In this digital format, all media can easily be distributed through networks such as those based on broadband fibre-optic cables and satellite systems. The user is now able to access all forms of media simultaneously and this has led to the development of multimedia formats, which combine traditional forms of media along with new forms such as web pages.

Another major difference with new media technology is its interactivity or the ability to send information as well as receive it. New media gives users ‘the means to generate, seek and share content’ (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002, p.9). Thus consumers of new media technologies are now ‘users’ of the technologies as they surf the web, write emails, use online databases, enter chat rooms, do online shopping, etc. In the past consumers of the old technologies were more of a passive audience in that they watched the television, read the newspapers, listened to the radio, etc. (Lievrouw
and Livingstone 2002, p.10). New media technologies are, therefore, technologies that have the properties of ‘convergence, digital networking, global reach, interactivity and many-to-many communication’, and which use ‘a media form which has allowed its users to be the producers as well as consumers of content (Flew 2005, p.xv).

Several studies of new media’s impact on society (for example: Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002, Flew 2005, Webster (2002)) have occurred over the past few decades. Generally, researchers are polarized as to whether new media technologies are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for society. Technological determinists are of the opinion that technology drives society and impacts strongly upon it. It has been a belief that ‘technologies have an overwhelming and inevitable power to drive human actions and social change’ (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002, p.6). Social science challenges this belief and holds to the theory that society is more self-determined and ‘can shape and remake technologies to suit’ (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002, p.6). Social science has tried to balance the ‘effects-type approach’ with deeper and more critical levels of analysis to understand how practices and perceptions of new media fit ‘within a broader institutional, economic and cultural context’ (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002, p.5).

New media are therefore, ‘both the instrument and the product of social shaping’ (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002, p.8). An example of social shaping of technology is the QUERTY keyboard. It was never ‘decisively established as the best way to organize letters for typing purposes’ but the Remington Company had started mass-
producing typewriters with QUERTY keyboards in the late nineteenth century and it was decided it would have been too costly to retrain typists and so QUERTY stayed (Flew 2005, p.41).

Webster (2002) does not agree with the technological determinists. He does not believe that the proliferation of information, engendered by the new media technologies, signals ‘the emergence of a new type of social system’ (Webster 2002, p.23). Webster (2002) does not accept the ‘assumption that quantitative increases in information transform – in unspecified ways – into qualitative changes in the social system’ (Webster 2002p.27). In fact, he believes that the new media technologies have become dominated by entertainment, which, by its nature, is populist and the antithesis of an informed or information society (Webster 2002, p.27).

It is important to put new media technologies into perspective, by locating them within society and to ‘map the changing media environment in relation to the human activities which in turn, structure that environment’ (Livingstone 2002, p.17).

There are many other contributing factors that affect social systems such as ‘climate, mineralogical deposits, economics, education, war’ (Webster 2002, p.28) and so forth. Flew (2002) states that ‘technological changes should not be understood independently of other social, cultural, economic and political changes’ (Flew 2005, p.19).
Flew (2002) describes a three-tiered approach to defining technology. At its base level, it is simply a tool or a physical object; beyond that is its contextual use or its application; at the top level is its ability to transform systems of knowledge and social meaning. All of which point to ‘the interaction between physical objects, contexts of use, and systems of knowledge, indicating that technologies inevitably intersect with culture (Flew 2005, p.26).

Flew (2002) describes this concept of ‘cultural technologies’ in which culture and technology intersect and interact with one another as a broader approach than the dualistic one of the new media technologies being either good or bad for society.

Thinking about new media as cultural technologies draws
attention to the social and cultural shifts associated with
the distinctive properties of these technologies, but it also
draws attention to the social and cultural continuities that
provide the contexts of operation of these new technologies
(Flew 2005, p.39).

Therefore, the debate about whether technology determines society or society ‘shapes’ technology is less important than the fact that technology and culture inevitably interact and as a society we have to find ways to deal with this.
2.1 The Impact of New Media Technologies

The debates about the benefits and harm of new media technologies are ongoing and often focus on children and how they impact on their physical, social and emotional well-being. Children are often seen on the one hand ‘as the avant-garde of media users’ and on the other hand as the ‘ones who are most at risk from new developments’ (Buckingham 2002, p.77). Children are also the focus of this thesis, and therefore the latest studies on the effects of media technologies will be further investigated in chapter 5.

As can be seen, the issue is not as simple as whether the new media technologies are beneficial or harmful to children, it is more about how social attitudes adjust to the technological cultural shifts and make the most advantageous use of them. This thesis, therefore will investigate ways of making policy for children’s use of new media technologies in order to protect them from harm and offence, taking into account all of the latest research concerning children and their uses of these technologies. The concept of childhood and the need for a special case for children is argued in the following chapter.
3.1 The Concept of Childhood

In 1989 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was established as an internationally legally binding document for all countries that adopted it. All but two countries, the United States of America and Somalia, have ratified it. The Convention followed on from the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, which was adopted by the General Assembly and incorporated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1959. It recognises that children are part of the ‘human family’ and are thus entitled to fundamental human rights regarding their economic, moral, political, civil and social well-being.

The Geneva Declaration proclaimed that ‘the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth’ (General Assembly of the United Nations 1989, p.1) and defines childhood as applying to those under the age of 18. While investigating the regulation of media content with particular regard to children, it is important to understand what is different about children and childhood and why they need special treatment as distinct from adults. In terms of regulation of media content, the age at which a child is defined varies depending on the situation. In regards to television, and radio broadcasting Ofcom and the ACMA define a child as under 15, whereas New Zealand defines a child as under 14. Ofcom goes further however in
that the principle of its broadcasting code is to protect the under eighteens (Ofcom, 2009, p.7). In present terms therefore, 15 is seen to be a standard age at which childhood ends. This hasn’t always been so as shall be seen when looking at the concept of childhood throughout time.

The fact that it was necessary for the United Nations to declare the Convention on the Rights of the Child would imply that children have not always been afforded such rights and as we shall see, have indeed been subject to much cruelty and abuse. However, the fact that what is perceived as a concept of childhood in this age might differ somewhat from what has previously occurred, does not mean that childhood did not exist as some would believe, but that it is different.

Much has been written about the history of childhood from our present day perspective and most of it is conflicting opinion. The main problem is the lack of written historical evidence about children, however much has been gleaned from legal documents, pictorial works and church records. Cunningham (2005) believes ‘childhood cannot be studied in isolation from society as a whole’ as there are many factors that impact on childhood including economic, demographic and political factors (Cunningham 2005, p.3). It is often these factors that force societies to place different constructs on the concept of childhood. I should like to discuss here firstly what it is that separates childhood from adulthood and, secondly, adults’ perceptions of children and whether that has changed dramatically over time or if there has been some continuity in adult-child relationships from the classical period to the present
day, with a main emphasis on Western society. The scope of this work does not allow for a complete historical representation of the history of childhood, just an overview. This is important in order to gauge how contemporary but dynamic norms of childhood impact on current policy-making.

Thirdly, I would like to address the subject of ‘nature versus nurture’ as this directly affects one’s point of view as to whether external influences can affect the development of children’s behaviour.

3.2 Childhood versus Adulthood

There are many differing views of what separates childhood from adulthood. Does our present day concept of childhood being ‘a formative influence on the construction of a self-identity’ differ greatly from previously held beliefs of childhood or was childhood always seen as ‘a time marked by its deficiencies’? (Cunningham 2005, p.v11). A view of childhood presented by the Christian church, is one of innocence and purity, that is, a time of pre-pubescence or of no sexual relations (Lett 1999, p.21). In contrast however, a protestant viewpoint was that children were all born in sin and only baptism could save them (Lett 1999, p.25). Cunningham (2005) quotes Norbert Elias who wrote The Civilizing Process, which theorized that the more civilized adults became the further distance separated them from childhood. Yet another theory is one presented by John Locke in Archard (2004) who believed that while a child is born with the ability to reason, it is the maturation process that will
develop a child into a fully rational adult (in Archard 2004, p. 7). The final viewpoint of childhood I would like to address is one of age, or stages of life.

3.2.1 Childhood – formative or deficient?

Balthazar Gratien in his book *El Discreto*, a treatise on education published in 1646, wrote, ‘Only time can cure a person of childhood and youth, which are truly ages of imperfection in every respect’ (Ariès 1960, p.128). This view could be what led Cunningham (2005, p.viii) to ask, when did childhood begin to be seen ‘as a formative influence in the construction of a self-identity, rather than a period of life marked in many ways by its deficiencies’? There is much evidence however, that childhood has long been seen as a training period thus inferring that it is indeed a formative time in a human being’s existence. Alexandre-Bidon, writing about childhood in the 13th century, states that children of both peasants and artisans were trained in the skills of their parents from a very early age. There is evidence of toys from the period that children played with, such as miniature tea-sets, some with traces of burning suggesting that children might have practised cooking, miniature ovens, mills, waterworks, amongst other artefacts (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.75). The life of the child then ‘consisted partly of preparation for adulthood, through play, and especially through playful imitation’ (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.75).
The above sketch is taken from The Ages of Man, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Propriétaire des Choses, Lyon 1482, and shows children at play with various toys while the adults look on.

In addition to training in skills needed for the future, there is also evidence that parents were concerned with the moral training of children. Alexandre-Bidon states that ‘peasants were as concerned as nobles with educating their offspring in good morals and standards of behaviour’ (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.81).

During the Pre-Christian era, there are many examples in the Old Testament that show that the Jews of this period saw childhood as a time of training. While the source is
clearly a religious text, the bible is also recognised as a history of the Jewish people and their society. The book of Deuteronomy outlines many of the statutes and commandments of the Jewish beliefs and it explicitly states ‘and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:7). The book of Proverbs is full of sayings about how to bring up children, again implying that childhood is a formative period. Some examples include ‘train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it’ (Proverbs 6:22). ‘My son, hear the instruction of your father, and forsake not the law of your mother’ (Proverbs 1:8). ‘My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction for whom the Lord loves he corrects; even as a father the son in whom he delights’ (Proverbs 3:11-12).

In the classical world of the Romans and Greeks, it appears however that children were not afforded the same status. Children, as well as women and slaves, were all ‘marginal to society, not fully part of it’ (Cunningham 2005, p.23). Cunningham states that children ‘in so far as they are discussed’ are ‘seen in terms of their deficiencies, the adult qualities which they lack’ (Cunningham 2005 p.23). Some boys in Roman society in rich families however, did attend schools, which were usually small one-room schools, with one teacher.
Golden (1990) writes that children in classical Athens were ‘regarded as physically weak, morally incompetent, mentally incapable’ (Golden c1990, p.4-5) and children were only valued for their potential. It should be noted however, that there is a great lack of written evidence about children from this period; therefore caution must be taken in drawing conclusions.

During the early Middle Ages it was believed that childhood was a formative period of life. According to Lett (1999, p.39) it was believed that very young children possessed ‘a sort of unconscious memory’, that everything children saw or heard made an impression on them. It was believed that the soul of a child was like ‘clay or soft wax in which everything leaves an indelible mark’ (Lett 1999, p.39).
Humanism, which began in 15th century Italy, quickly spread to other parts of
Europe. An influential humanistic thinker of the time was a Dutchman named
Desiderius Erasmus. He wrote a great number of books on child rearing and early
education in the 1520’s, which continued in popularity into the nineteenth century
(Cunningham 2005, p.45). Erasmus was passionate in his belief in the importance of
teaching young children and that learning should occur in a manner that was
encouraging and enjoyable for all (Cunningham 2005, p.44). Erasmus believed that
‘nature had implanted in children the seeds of a desire for knowledge, and a power of
memory greater than at any other age’ but they needed to be formed to bring out the
best possible character (Cunningham 2005, p.43).

During the seventeenth century John Locke, ‘one of the most important and
influential figures in the history of English-speaking philosophy’ (Archard 2004, p.1)
wrote Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693). While not purporting to be a
treatise on education, it came to be viewed as such and as a well-respected opinion on
child rearing. Locke believed a child to be a white paper or wax, similar to the beliefs
held during the early Middle Ages, to be moulded or formed into the person. He did
not believe that a child was a tabula rasa or blank slate as far as abilities or
temperament were concerned, only in respect to ideas (Cunningham 2005, p.60).
Locke imagined the ‘minds of children as easily turn’d this or that Way, as Water it
self’ (Locke 1889, p.2). I shall return to Locke later but suffice to say that he was a
firm believer that early childhood was indeed a formative period.
3.2.2 Childhood – an Age of Innocence

While children might have been considered of little importance during the classical period, the Christian era, through its belief that all people are equal in the eyes of God, accorded children a higher status. There is a dichotomy however, which presents some confusion, in that on the one hand children are thought to be ‘nearest to God’ and have a ‘purity which derives from their having arrived only recently in the world’ (Archard 2004, p. 46), while on the other hand is the belief that children are born inheriting the sinfulness of man. The innocent child is ‘one without fault or sin, innocent of evil’ but inevitably degenerates as it grows up and ‘away from an original perfection’ (Archard 2004, p.46).

The early Middle Ages was a time of profound religious change. Christianity taught a belief in a compassionate God, one who did not require parents to sacrifice their children, and thus rapidly spread throughout the Roman Empire. The new religion intensified the search for purity, which was defined at the time as ‘a distancing from the flesh’ (Lett 1999, p.22). Children were attributed with this quality and therefore ‘occupied a special place in Christian thinking’ (Lett 1999, p23). Christ also taught about the innocence of children: ‘Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say to you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven’ (Matthew 18:10). He also taught that it was necessary for all to return to a childlike state in order to enter the kingdom of heaven: ‘Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 18:3). During monastic times three qualities were always praised in
children and which ‘a monk must devote himself to regaining: innocence, humility and purity’ (Lett 1999, p. 21). From the first centuries of the Middle Ages the theme of the Massacre of the Innocents, which referred to the slaughter of infants by Herod, was developed and ‘continued to be enormously successful throughout the entire course of the medieval period’ (Lett 1999, p.22). The day of the Innocents was celebrated on the 28th December each year.

The opposite view of children being ‘born in sin’ came from the clergy, who had no children of their own. The belief was that only baptism could save a child from its sinful nature and, in England in the ninth century, civil and religious law required infants to be baptised before they were one month old (Lett 1999, p.25). Puritanism, which developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, believed that children were ‘essentially prone to a badness which only a rigid disciplinary upbringing could correct’ (Archard 2004, p.46).

This fundamental difference can be summarised as the child is born good but corrupted by society or the child is born unruly and requires society to educate and constrain the child ‘to secure proper behaviour’ (Archard 2004, p. 47). Either way the belief was that a child’s behaviour developed throughout childhood and was formed by external influences.
The Romantics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries upheld the innocence of childhood as the ideal. Blake and Wordsworth in particular, celebrate the innocence of childhood and attach to it a sense of ‘wonderment and joy’ of the world (Archard 2004, p.47). Adulthood is presented as a corrupted condition in which ‘religion, desiccated rationalism and utilitarianism predominate’ (Archard 2004, p.47). Wordsworth also provides a nostalgic view of ‘lost innocence’ and ‘a regret that maturity brings knowledge but leaves behind a joyful imagination and intuition’ (Archard 2004, p.47).

Although not a new idea, and, according to Cunningham there were policies in place prior to the nineteenth century ‘which emphasised the need for protection and segregation of children and for making them dependent’ (Cunningham 2005, p.139), it is this view of an innocent, carefree childhood that came to be seen as important to preserve and gave rise to the need to protect children from the influences of the world.

### 3.2.3 The Civilising Process

One of the concepts Cunningham raises is the distance that separates childhood from adulthood. He quotes Norbert Elias, who wrote *The Civilizing Process* in Switzerland, 1939, and who believed that the more civilised adults became, the further the distance between them and children. Elias equated civilisation as a control of basic instincts and thus, during the Middle Ages, because adults were not greatly ‘civilised’ there was little distance between them and children (Cunningham 2005, p.4). Philippe
Ariès’s *L’Enfant et la vie familiale sous l’Ancien Régime* (1960), published in English as *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) was the first of many written histories of childhood. Ariès’s book came to be recognised within the social sciences as an important and authoritative work (Cunningham 2005, p.7). Ariès believed that ‘in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist’ (Ariès 1960, p.125), a point which has been much debated and challenged. Ariès’s thesis was based on the ideas of Elias and saw this distance between childhood and adulthood increasing as society became more civilised. In contrast to Ariès, Lloyd de Mause, in his work *The Evolution of Childhood*, saw a linear progression of childhood evolving from something that was very base and abusive under the ancient regime, to becoming more civilised in the modern world. De Mause, therefore saw a convergence between childhood and adulthood. While these are interesting ideas and certainly held sway during the 1960’s and 70’s, a new paradigm began in the 1980’s with Pollock (1983) who challenged the theories of change that Ariès, Elias and de Mause had proclaimed. Pollock instead concentrated on parent-child relationships rather than childhood itself and found ‘that continuity rather than change was the most important fact about those relationships’ (Cunningham 2005, p.12). Pollock also maintained that these ideas were more about theories of concepts of childhood rather than the actualities of childhood, which she saw as being more relevant (Cunningham 2005, p.13).

### 3.2.4 Childhood –the Age of Reason

John Locke, the seventeenth century philosopher, held surprisingly modern views concerning children and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* could be considered
as the ‘earliest manifesto for a ‘child-centred’ education’ (in Archard 2004, p.1). Originally written as a letter of advice to his friend Edward Clarke on how best to bring up and educate his young son, it has become a highly respected viewpoint about childhood in general. Locke believed that children should be reasoned with and not simply beaten into submission. His view was that children, although born with an innate sense of reasoning, acquire the ability to reason fully through education and it is the acquisition of rationality that identifies adulthood. The main aim of education was to ‘produce a virtuous person, and the essence of virtue was the subjection of one’s character and appetites to rational self-control’ (in Archard 2004, p.2). He believed the education of virtue was both ‘possible and necessary’ and that it was not ‘independent of education and socialisation. It had to be taught’ (in Archard 2004, p.5-6).

Locke did not believe that children were born with an innate sense of knowledge of ideas and principles or innocence and goodness and that these needed to be taught through education. He did believe however, that children were born with a particular nature in regards to temperament and disposition (Archard 2004, p.5), and he believed both nature and nurture helped to develop the child, a view that is generally accepted today.

Locke also saw the absence of reason as what disqualified children from citizenship. It is due to this lack of reason where Locke saw the need for parental authority although he did not believe that parents owned a child but were responsible for his/her
upbringing. Locke believed the onus was on the parents to display through their behaviour ‘that rationality which is distinctive of their adulthood’ (in Archard 2004, p.7). It is necessary for parents to make choices for their children because to do otherwise ‘before he has acquired the reason to guide him is a cruel barbarism’ (in Archard 2004, p.13). Locke believed it was necessary to deny a child his freedom in order to bring him to ‘a state of maturity wherein he can exercise his own freedom’ (in Archard 2004, p.13). For Locke then, the gaining of reason was a child’s passage to adulthood and the liberty that brings.

3.2.5 Stages of life

In his book *Centuries of Childhood*, Ariès quotes from an old source entitled *Le Grande Propriétaire de toutes choses*, which was originally compiled in Latin in the thirteenth century and translated into French in 1556. It was an encyclopaedia of twenty volumes and a sum of the combined knowledge at the time, which was thought to be limited and should therefore be shared with the world (Ariès 1960, p.17). The sixth volume deals with the ages of life of which there are seven corresponding to the planets:

- The first age is childhood, which begins at birth and lasts until seven years of age. It is a time when teeth are planted but not yet ‘well arranged or firmly planted’ and thus the child is unable to talk well or form words properly.
The second age is puerita, when the ‘person is still like the pupil in the eye’ and lasts to 14.

The third age is adolescence, the time when a ‘person is big enough to beget children’. The ‘person grows in this age to the size allotted to him by Nature’. It lasts until 21 according to one source but another says 28 or can continue till 30 – 35.

The fourth age is youth, the central position in the ages. It is the time when a ‘person is in his greatest strength’ and lasts until 45 according to one source or 50 according to others.

The fifth age is senectitude, half way between youth and old age. A person is not old but has passed his youth.

The sixth age is old age, a time when old people ‘have not such good sense as they had, and talk nonsense’. It lasts until 70 according to some, death according to others.

The seventh or final age is senes in Latin: the old man is always ‘coughing and spitting and dirtying’ (Ariès 1960, p.19).

While this may seem contrary to modern beliefs, it was relevant at the time and an attempt to classify the various stages that human life passes through. What is interesting here is that childhood appears to end at the age of seven. At the time of Justinian, Roman law specified three ages of childhood: infantia, when children were incapable of speech; tutela impuberes, prior to puberty and when children needed a
tutor; and *cura minoris*, a time after puberty but before the age of majority when children still required the care of a guardian (Archard 2004, p.34). Many cultures mark the passage from childhood to adulthood with initiation ceremonies and this is usually around the time of puberty.

Developmental theory of the twentieth century also attempted to classify the various stages of human development. Two well-known theorists are Freud and Piaget, both of whom saw childhood in terms of developmental sequences. Development is the ‘inevitable unfolding’ and each stage must be gone through before progressing to the next (Archard 2004, p.42). It is equally applicable to all children regardless of social context.

The age of majority is of course the legal age when children officially pass into adulthood and in the twenty first century, this is, in most countries, the age of eighteen but it is twenty-one in some countries (and varies from 16 – 19 in a few). This marks the age when children become legally responsible for their own actions and can enter into legally binding contracts, vote, drink alcohol and marry without anyone’s consent. It is also the time when children cease to be dependent on their parents (at least in law). Dependency and proper protection are the desired states of childhood from a Romantic’s point of view according to Cunningham (2005, p.139) and which cease to be necessary once a child reaches the age of majority.
The chronological stages of life describe the physical and cognitive development of the child and knowledge of this subject has greatly increased during the twentieth century. However it appears that the socially constructed ideals of childhood attributes lead us to the present state of proclaiming the rights of children to a safe and protected childhood.

3.3 Adult-Child Relationships from the Classical Period to the Present Day

3.3.1 The Jewish History

Some of the earliest written history comes from the Jews, who, according to Johnson (1987) are ‘the only people in the world today who possess a historical record, however obscure in places, which allows them to trace their origins back into very remote times’ (Johnson 1987, p.7). The bible is the source of this knowledge and historians have previously dismissed most of what was written before the time of King David as a medley of fact and fiction. After David, the account can be authenticated by court histories and records (Johnson 1987, p.6). Modern scientific archaeology however, using the ancient texts as a guide, has tended to ‘restore the value of the early biblical books as historical narratives’ (Johnson 1987, p.7). The purpose of this thesis is not a fact-finding exercise however, but rather an investigation into the social lives of the people and particularly children of that time and the bible gives quite a good overview of this. The history of the Jews is important
also because both Christianity and Islam are derived from this ancient form of monotheism and both influence present day culture in the West and the East.

There are numerous mentions of children throughout the Old Testament and this allows us to derive an overview of the life of children extending back to around the time 4000 B.C. In the time of the Patriarchs, the head of the family had total rule over his household, including the power of life and death. The most famous example is the story of Abraham and Isaac in which Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18). Other examples are Abraham’s banishment of his son Ishmael (Genesis 20:14) and Judah ordering the death of his daughter-in-law (Genesis 38:24).

Children however, were much longed for and prayed for (1 Samuel 10, 11; Genesis 25:21). They were considered a gift and a reward from God (Genesis 33:5; Psalm 127:3) whereas to be without children was seen as a reproach and an affliction (1 Samuel 1:5; Jeremiah 22:30). Children were subservient in the household and were taught to fear and obey God firstly (Deuteronomy 30:2; Proverbs 24:21), then their parents. They had to honour, obey and respect their parents, as well as the aged in the community (Proverbs 6:20; Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:3, 32). Rebellious children were dealt with harshly as it says in Proverbs 13:24 ‘he who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him’. However, the practice of sacrificing children to the gods of the neighbouring nations was considered an abomination to the Jewish people (2 Chronicles 33:6; Deuteronomy 12:31).
In Jewish society then, children were much wanted and cared for, as seen in the following passages, ‘can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born? (Isaiah 49:1) and ‘as a father has compassion on his children so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him’ (Psalm 103:13). Children, however, were brought up in a disciplined, God-fearing fashion. Childhood was seen as a time of training and learning but not much is written about how children actually spent their time. It seems as though they worked from a young age. David was a shepherd boy, thought to be about the age of twelve, when he went to fight Goliath. He was the youngest of eight sons and spent his days tending his father’s sheep (1 Samuel 17). Girls also worked in their father’s fields as the daughters of Midian who drew water from the well to fill the troughs to water their father’s flock (Exodus 2:6). Children were under their father’s rule until they were married, but these marriages were arranged by their parents and only amongst Jewish families (Genesis 24:49; Exodus 22:17).

We thus have a picture of a patriarchal society in which children, on the whole, were desired and looked after within the family structure.

3.3.2 The Classical World

A common element with the Jewish history from the same period was the power of the father, known in Roman law as *patria potestas*, over all of his descendants. This included the powers of life, death or abandonment of his children, as well as rights...
over property. It was a model that extended into the public sphere of absolute government. According to Cunningham, however, this power was not often put into practice and the ‘exercise of powers of life and death was extremely rare’ (Cunningham 2005, p.22). Infanticide has been seen by some writers as a hallmark of child rearing during the classical period, along with abandonment, the sale of children and wet-nursing (Cunningham 2005, p.18). The extent to which infanticide occurred is hard to assess. De Mause concluded that abandonment of children was paramount to infanticide as there were no institutional arrangements such as foundling hospitals during the classical period. However this has been challenged by John Boswell in his account *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (1988) who believed that many abandoned children were taken in and raised by ‘the kindness of strangers’. He came to this conclusion because one of the greatest fears of a Roman man was that when he visited a brothel, the prostitute might be his own daughter, abandoned and raised by strangers (Cunningham 2005, p.19).

The sale of children was usually problematic as these children, often sold to pay off debts, were often taken into slavery and prostitution. This occurred throughout the Roman and Hellenistic Mediterranean world (Cunningham 2005, p.19). There was nothing in Roman law to prevent the sale or abandonment of children, however, Boswell suggests that not all of these children would have found themselves in such abusive circumstances. Many abandoned children for example, would have been taken in by and ‘passed off as the legitimate child of a woman who had been unable to
conceive or who had had stillbirths or whose baby had died’ (Cunningham 2005, p.19). Abandoned babies and babies of slaves were wet-nursed, a practice which continued until the twentieth century, particularly amongst the upper classes, as the best alternative to mother’s milk until bottle-feeding became safe (Cunningham 2005, p.20).

The practices of infanticide, sale and abandonment of children have led to the belief of an indifference towards children during the Classical period. De Mause in particular, saw it as a time of much physical and sexual abuse of children. There is evidence however that there were close and loving relationships between parents and their children. According to Golden, ‘the weight of the evidence seems overwhelmingly to favor the proposition that the Athenians loved their children and grieved for them deeply when they died’ (Golden c1990, p.89). Cunningham describes a child’s sarcophagus found at Agrigento, Southern Sicily, which dates back to the first or second century A.D. It depicts a ‘child at play, learning to read and then the deathbed scene, with the parents and grandparents manifestly grieving over their loss’ (Cunningham 2005, p.21). The following picture of an Ancient Greek vessel shows a family in a tender and loving display,
Many of the practices of child rearing and the ways of thinking about children and childhood during the classical period have ‘carried an authority which would have been influential in the period up to at least 1900’ (Cunningham 2005, p.18-19).

Although there is not a great deal of written history about children from this period, it would seem that childhood in the Classical world, was not seen as a state to be valued in itself, but that it was part of a process of growing into a valuable adult and a reliable citizen.

3.3.3 The Middle Ages: fifth – fifteenth centuries

Paternal power continued well into and beyond the Middle Ages, however the rise of Christianity saw the absolute power of the father being replaced by the absolute power of God the father. Even before the Christian era, the power of the father had begun to wane, when, in the second century B.C., a child was granted the right of appeal, against an abusive father, to a magistrate who could grant the child his freedom (Lett 1999, p.7). Legislation by the first Christian emperors in the fourth century allowed for the revocation of paternal power in cases where ‘the father exposed (abandoned) the child, offered his daughter for prostitution, or was himself involved in incestuous behaviour’ (Lett 1999, p.7). In 374 A.D., the Christian emperors Valentinian, Valens and Gratian, passed a law that made infanticide illegal and a crime punishable by death (Cunningham 2005, p.25). Nonetheless, paternal
power was still regarded as highly important, as shown by Canon 22 of the Council of Orleans, May 541, which states that daughters were forbidden to marry without their father’s permission ‘under pain of excommunication’ (Lett 1999, p.7).

Abandonment still occurred during the Middle Ages, particularly up until the tenth century (Lett 1999, p.18). The birth rate was quite high due to the absence of any reliable means of contraception, but so too was the death rate. The infant mortality rate was as high as 200 to 400 per 1000 births and scarcely one out of two children survived long enough to have children of their own (Lett 1999, p.32). No birth control meant that destitute parents often resorted to abandonment of babies, a practice which was encouraged by the church providing the child was left in a place where they could be easily found and given to ‘one of the faithful’ to raise (Lett 1999, p.18).

During the high Middle Ages children were often kept as slaves. Accounts from Spain at the time show that the Visigothic landowners ‘possessed hundreds of subjects, often children or adolescents who seem to have been particularly badly treated, victims of cruelty, mutilation, indeed even castration, a kind of human livestock’ (Lett 1999, p.36). Some of these children were born into slavery, some were victims of raids and wars and some were sold by destitute parents (Lett 1999p. 36-37). While the majority of slaves were white during the Middle Ages, there were many Moors and Turks sold, as the church sanctioned the acquisition of such children from infidel families (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.93). Young women and girls ‘were a particularly sought after commodity’ and were generally well cared for to protect the buyer’s
investment (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.93). Alexandre-Bidon (1999, p.78) believes the number of children forced into servitude, was however, quite low.

There is no doubt that children were put to work at an early age during the Middle Ages, although no-one actually knows at what age that occurred. It appears that children helped their parents from a very young age gaining skills to take over their parent’s roles. Some accounts imply that children were introduced into a profession once they had learnt to talk (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.76). Children were assigned tasks considered safe, such as looking after younger children, housework, collecting wood shavings from the carpentry floor, gathering kindling and picking fruit and vegetables from the gardens (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.77). During the tenth century girls are seen helping their mothers fetch water, make cloth, wind skeins of wool and serve at the tables (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.77).

Children too, were often hired as ‘cheap labour’ during the fourteenth century, which continued into the nineteenth century, assigned to such tasks as hollowing out tunnels in the mines, (see following picture) and cleaning wells by being lowered into them in buckets (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.77).
Legal records show that young girls working alone, were often violated by men, raped by an employer, a farmhand or a nobleman and, once dishonoured, they were left with little recourse other than prostitution (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.108). Prostitution and paedophilia of young girls, often aged 10 – 14 but sometimes younger, were quite widespread (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.108). Working children ‘were an undeniable social reality’ (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.p.95), however contracts from the last two centuries of the Middle Ages, stipulated that children were to be looked after, fed and clothed and given a bed to sleep in (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.85). Wages were very low, sometimes none at all, but child labour was not considered a burden, rather a training to secure them work later in life (Alexandre-Bidon 1999, p.92).

While it may be true to say from our present perspective, that children during the Middle Ages had a difficult life, it does not mean, as Ariès believed, childhood did
not exist in medieval society. Since the beginning of the Christian era, children have held ‘a special place in Christian thinking’ (Lett 1999, p.25). Fathers were now exhorted not to provoke their children to anger and there was a ‘stress on parental duties and responsibilities’ (Cunningham 2005, p.26). Lett (1999) refutes Ariès claim that mothers did not care for their children during the Middle Ages and quotes many examples of anguished mothers having to be separated from their child for one reason or another. During the twelfth century, according to some accounts, young children were strictly supervised by their mother who always paid them ‘the utmost attention’, taking the baby everywhere with her, to church or out into the fields (Lett 1999, p.55). Accounts are also relayed of extremely distressed mothers whose child has been injured or died. While maternal love is often seen as ‘more excessive, more restrained, more instinctual and more visceral’ than that of the father, there are also many accounts of fathers in the Middles Ages demonstrating their love for their child (Lett 1999, p.56). Lett (1999, p.58) quotes from accounts of miracles that clearly show fathers who ‘suffer and shed abundant tears over the sickness or death of their child’.

The following images of tombs from the 16thC show the families of Sir Edward Denny and wife Margaret Edgecumbe and William Doveridge and Mary Davenport, with their obviously well cared for children beneath.
One of the main differences about childhood in the Middle Ages was that they lived in a ‘mixed age environment’ and were socialised early into communal life.
There was a sense of childhood being a separate stage of human existence but there was no physical separation. There was no concept that the ‘world of childhood should be kept separated from that of adults’ as there would be in centuries to come (Cunningham 2005, p.32).

### 3.3.4 Fifteenth to twentieth centuries

These centuries saw a period of considerable change. At the end of the Middle Ages children worked from a very early age and this continued well into the nineteenth century. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, regular schooling was compulsory in nearly every country in Europe (Cunningham 2005, p.81). There were many movements during this time that saw changing attitudes to the need to educate children. During the Middle Ages schooling was only for a minority and often this did not take place in a school. The Renaissance of the fifteenth century in Florence, in particular, developed a culture in which children held a special place in society. They were seen as the future of the state and therefore needed to be brought up properly. Early education was seen as important and fathers had the primary role of teaching their children their letters (Cunningham 2005, p.42). Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch humanist, was well known throughout Europe and his ideas on early education quickly spread (Cunningham 2005, p.43). Erasmus based his beliefs on classical authorities, which as early as the first century A.D., had stressed the importance of early education, ‘building on the child’s natural wish to learn’ (Cunningham 2005, p.45).
The eighteenth century is usually seen as the crucial transformation of ideas about children and childhood (Cunningham 2005, p.58). John Locke’s writings about childhood, Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693) and Rousseau’s Émile, although at odds with their approaches to early learning, took a more child-centred view. Childhood was now seen as an important stage of life in itself, rather than part of a process in developing the adult. This more sensitive attitude to childhood was indelibly placed into history through the romantics of this period, in particular Wordsworth and Blake. Romanticism, according to Cunningham, ‘embedded in the European and American mind a sense of the importance of childhood, a belief that childhood should be happy, and a hope that the qualities of childhood, if they could be preserved in adulthood, might help redeem the adult world’ (Cunningham 2005, p.72).

Industrialisation in the nineteenth century was a time of great change and an end to the ideas of the Romantics’ happy childhood for most children. For centuries children had worked alongside their parents at home, in the fields, in trades and crafts and when, at the end of the eighteenth century, the textile industries moved from home to factory, ‘it was natural to look to children as a key component of the workforce’. The following pictures show an entire family gathered in the living room where all but the smallest children are working on pillow lace and another picture of small children working a textile factory.
Families were left with little option but to send their children to work in factories as they were depended on quite highly to subsidise the family income. During the course of the nineteenth century the textile industry became the largest single industrial occupation (Hopkins 1994, p.73). Urbanisation also increased during this period.
creating more of a demand for factory work. The masses, who had previously been known as the lower orders, became the working classes (Hopkins 1994, p.7).

Much has been written about the terrible conditions children had to work in and the very long hours that they worked. Reform was slow to come and after many attempts to reduce the working hours for children, a bill was passed in 1847, which limited the hours a child could work in a day to ten (Hopkins 1994, p.77). Ill-treatment of children was also quite common with reports of beatings occurring on a regular basis (Hopkins 1994, p.79). The conditions in the factory were also very poor, unventilated, hot, dusty and dirty (Hopkins 1994, p.80). It was due to these poor conditions and the fact that children’s health was being adversely affected, that reformers worked hard to improve conditions for children. The Workshops Act of 1867 placed restrictions on employment of children in domestic industry (Hopkins 1994, p.90). Then in 1876 and 1880 Acts were passed making attendance at school compulsory for children aged five to ten. This was raised to twelve by 1899 (Hopkins 1994, p.219).

The nineteenth century then, brought great change with the Industrial Revolution and a better economic situation. This allowed society to educate children and take them out of the paid work force, with the realisation that children would be better equipped to contribute usefully to the economy (Hopkins 1994, p.314). Compulsory schooling also brought a fundamental change to the experience, and thus concept, of childhood.
Thus far I have looked at the various attributes of childhood and what it is that makes them separate from adults, such as childhood being: a formative period; a time of innocence or guilt depending on a catholic or protestant viewpoint; further separated from adulthood due to the civilizing process according to Ariès or closer to adulthood according to de Mause; a time to develop innate reasoning skills through education into rational self-controlled adulthood, according to Locke; and finally a developmental process that is characterized by various stages.

I have also given an overview of the history of childhood from the earliest written records of children’s history to the current time. The most contentious issue is whether there has been great change in the nature of childhood or continuity. The earliest writers of the history of childhood such as Ariès and de Mause believed there had been great change in the experiences of childhood and that, according to Ariès; childhood didn’t even exist in the Middle Ages. These theories were later hotly debated and challenged, in particular by Pollock (1983), who believed there had been much continuity in parent-child relationships throughout time. Pollock also believed it was very difficult to ‘formulate any one theory on parental care in the past – there was a great deal of individual variation’ (Pollock 1983, p.270.). Also as Cunningham (2005) stated, there are many factors that directly impact on the experiences of childhood, such as economic, demographic and political elements. This leads directly to the next topic of ‘nature versus nurture’ and whether external influences affect the behavioural outcomes of children.
3.4 Nature versus Nurture

The topic of nature versus nurture has long been a subject of debate. The belief in eugenics, popular in the early twentieth century, came into disrepute after World War II due to its association with Nazi Germany. Sociologists have since tried to downplay the role of genes and looked to external causes to explain human behaviour. However, recent research in biological, psychological and social Sciences suggests ‘all measurable outcomes are the products of both biological and environmental influences’ (Bradshaw and Ellison 2009, p.2). Fester (2004) believes there is ‘strong evidence’ that behaviour and personality are shaped by both nature and nurture (Ferster 2004, p.1619). Ferster states that genes can ‘profoundly affect complex behaviours’ while ‘early experience can alter adult behaviour through its effect on development’ (Ferster 2004, p.1619).

Freese (2008) posits his ‘ubiquitous partial heritability thesis’ in which he believes that ‘genetic differences are partial causes of the overwhelming majority of individual-level outcomes of interest to psychological and social science’ (Freese 2008, p.2). However, while Freese believes that genes can influence gene-environment interactions, he does believe that social environments can have a positive or detrimental effect on the outcomes for the individual. (Freese 2008, p.24). That is to say, external influences such as parental influence, position in family, educational opportunities, socio-economic status can all determine whether an individual’s strengths are encouraged and supported. Social influences will also affect how an
individual’s behavioural traits are channelled or modified for pro or anti-social outcomes.

It is a basic tenet of modern psychology that experiences in early childhood shape and mould a personality and thus, human behaviour in adult life. One of the reasons for this is that the plasticity of the human brain and its development continue well into adolescence and beyond. It is known that at birth, the brain is one quarter of its adult size and that the ‘white matter’ (major connections and fibre bundles) increase steadily throughout childhood and adolescence, while grey matter (neurons and local connections) display a ‘characteristic ‘rise and fall’ pattern’ during the same period (Johnson 2008, p.2). The growth of white matter continues to the age of sixty, while the thinning of grey matter continues to around the age of thirty (Johnson 2008, p.3). The brain also has the ability to adapt to its environment which means that significant changes in childhood environments may be incorporated into the brain ‘at multiple levels and time scales’ (Johnson 2008, p.5). In human beings, development processes of the brain are more prolonged than for other primates, continuing into teenage years, thus allowing ‘much more scope for brain structure and function to be sculpted by experience’ (Johnson 2008, p.6). This is an important factor as it directly relates to the impact of media content on the developmental process of children and adolescents and which shall be discussed further in chapter 5.

Byron (2008) incorporated the literature review of brain development by Johnson into her report, commissioned by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, to investigate
the risks children face from the Internet and video games. She draws from a Biopsychosocial model to understand individual differences in children (Byron 2008, p.30). This model recognizes that there are several influences on childhood behaviour, both intrinsic and extrinsic: biological factors such as temperament; psychological factors such as attitudes, thoughts and emotions; and sociocultural factors such as parental influences, beliefs and ideologies (Byron 2008, p.30). Sameroff (2010) explains more fully the Biopsychosocial model in the following diagram:

![Biopsychosocial Model](image)

**Figure 9 Biopsychosocial Model  (Sameroff 2010, p.13)**

The grey and black circles in the model represent the biopsychological self, which are self-regulating systems. These interact with the external regulating systems represented by the white circles and include ‘family, school, neighborhood, community, and overarching geopolitical influences’ (Sameroff 2010, p.12).
Recent research over the past decade using brain-scanning technology has further advanced the study of molecular genetics and this is being integrated into psychological research. Sameroff (2010) believes that it is no longer a case of nature versus nurture but rather that both work together and ‘mutually constitute each other through their unity and interpenetration of opposites’ (Sameroff 2010, p.15). Sameroff (2010) describes this as a ‘unified theory of development’, which provides an integrated way of interpreting individual differences in human beings.

There seems to be conclusive evidence that it is no longer a simplistic approach of one viewpoint versus the other but it is recognised that there are many influences, both intrinsic and extrinsic that help shape and mould an individual. While genetic factors are unchangeable it is certainly possible to change external factors to provide better outcomes for all.

### 3.5 The Need for Regulation of Media Content for Children and Young People

The history of children and childhood is complex and to do an in-depth investigation is beyond the scope of this work. As the main aim of this thesis is to investigate the regulation of media content with regard to children, the purpose of this chapter is to see why it is important to understand what is different about children and childhood and why they are thought to need special treatment as distinct from adults.
As stated previously, I have looked at the various attributes of childhood and what it is that makes them separate from adults and I have given an overview of the history of childhood from the earliest written records of children’s history to the current time. The most contentious issue is whether there has been great change in the nature of childhood or continuity.

It would appear that there have been, throughout time, some changes and yet some continuity in the concept of childhood. One of the greatest changes in the concept of childhood has been the introduction of compulsory schooling, which occurred in the nineteenth century. This has afforded childhood a separate status, unique to the experience of being a child. The age at which compulsory schooling ends has steadily increased and in South Australia was extended to seventeen in 2009. This has coincided with a lengthening of the experience of childhood, and the transition from child to young adult by the end of school life.

The greatest continuity has occurred in the concept of childhood being seen as a formative period. Since the earliest recorded written history of children, childhood has been seen as the time when human beings learn more than at any other time. It is a time when characteristics and behaviour are formed and as such is an impressionable time in life. Recent research (Sameroff, 2010, Freese, 2008) shows that both internal and external influences can have an impact on childhood development. This is an important point, as it is the very reason that media content is indeed regulated for children. It is also for this reason that childhood is a time when children are dependent
on adults to make decisions for them and according to Pollock (1983), the majority of parents accept the responsibility to protect and socialise their children (Pollock 1983, p.271). It is therefore necessary to place some restrictions on what young children watch and listen to in the media.

Australia, New Zealand and the UK all have a classification system to give advice as to what media is suitable for children and young people, which will be discussed in further detail in chapter 6.

The question then arises as to what age children should be allowed to make decisions for themselves. The transitional stage of adolescence, between childhood and adulthood, is seen as a time of more independence and greater responsibility in decision-making. It is during this period that the regulation of media content becomes more contentious as more young people aged 13 – 18 want to make their own decisions as to what they want to see and listen to. The Classification Board in Australia has taken 15 as the age when young people can decide what they want to see at the movies with the exception of R rated films. Given the history of children and childhood, this would seem a reasonable age to let young people make their own decisions in this regard.

However, policy-making in ground as contested and complex as this, which involves the scientific, social and religious lines of western thought which this chapter has
described, along with common-sense perceptions of children and childhood, presents particular challenges for contemporary society, and policy-writers in particular. When children’s media consumption is at issue, fresh challenges emerge.

This chapter has argued the need for a special case for children in regards to regulating media content that children and young people are able to access. The following chapter looks at the role that governments play in regulating the media industry as opposed to allowing un-regulated, free market principles to control the same industry.
Chapter 4 REGULATION, THE FREE MARKET AND NEO-LIBERALISM

This chapter will look at how regulation of media content has been influenced by free market forces and has moved from being under tight control by the governments of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom to a situation where the same governments now have a light regulatory hand. Since the neo-liberal era of the 1980s, democratically elected governments have steadily delegated their responsibilities for regulation to the media industry. Unfortunately, media content is produced for the market in general and is driven by market forces. This has made it necessary for parents and care providers to take on more responsibility for regulating what children and young people see and interact with in the media.

A neoliberal democracy is ‘a political system based on the formal right to vote, but in which political and economic power is resolutely maintained in the hands of the wealthy few’ (McChesney 1999, p.78-70). This chapter discusses how corporations have lobbied governments for greater freedoms to operate in the market rather than be regulated by democratically elected governments. It also discusses how the concept of a democracy as rule by the majority is under threat from free market forces. Thirdly, it discusses the need to balance the rights of the individual within a democracy with the need to sometimes relinquish those rights for the common good.

Freedom of speech has always been held as a basic principle of western, liberal democracy. In Athens, the forerunner of modern democracy, the right to be heard
from the Areopagus, was an essential element of Athenian democracy, although this was not extended to all. The defence of the freedom of expression to protect individual rights or to uphold democracy has been assured in International Courts and treaties and by national constitutions (Guilherme 2006, p.69). The Inter-American Court on Human Rights states:

*Freedom of expression is a cornerstone upon which the very existence of a democratic society rests. It is indispensable for the formation of public opinion...[and for] the community, when exercising its options, to be sufficiently informed.*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, article 19, states:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression: this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to see, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

Freedom of expression, and by extension, freedom of the press, is seen to be fundamental to an electoral democracy. There are several reasons for this. Firstly it ‘enshrines the principle of the press as part of the democratic process’s intrinsic system of checks and balances’ (Guilherme 2006, p.70). In other words, the media have an important role as a watchdog over the state. Secondly, it provides citizens with information needed to make informed decisions. Thirdly, it provides a public
forum for debate, which lies at the core of a healthy and robust democracy (Guilherme 2006, p.69-70).

There is however a problem with each of these points, which I will discuss further, created by the deregulation and the concentration of ownership of the media industry into what, it can be argued, is an oligopoly today. This directly reflects on the fourth reason for the freedom of the press, which is the central role that the media play in setting the public agenda. This is an important point as the more self-regulation the media industry has gained the more it influences the public agenda. It also determines what media content the public has access to and therefore, restricts individual choice to within parameters set by them.

Firstly though, I would like to discuss what is meant by a democracy and how the free market came into being. A representative democracy, such as we have in Australia, the UK, New Zealand, the United States and much of the western world, was at one stage thought to be the rule of the majority, in which citizens elect members to represent them in parliament. Robert McChesney (1999, p.5) however, argues in his book *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, that in the United States, democracy only means that citizens have the right to vote and have no say in policy making. McChesney believes that neo-liberalism is rampant in the Western World and is associated with the rise of Reagan and Thatcher. Neo-liberalism ‘posits that society works best when business runs things and there is as little possibility of government interference with business as possible’ (McChesney 1999, p.5).
Historically the wealthy few have always desired to limit democracy and until the nineteenth century, many western democracies only allowed property holders to vote. McChesney (1999, p.78-79) argues that power still rests with the wealthy few. The rationale of a liberal economic model therefore, is to allow the market place to determine how businesses operate and to deregulate industries to allow a free market.

What has occurred in recent times is that ownership of mass communications (that is, broadcasting of news and information through newspapers, on the radio, television and distribution through the Internet) has become so concentrated that ‘freedom of expression has been transformed, in large measure, into the freedom of those who determine the content broadcast by mass media outlets’ (Guilherme 2006, p.48). This is a global phenomenon in which the media conglomerates such as Disney and Murdoch’s News Corporation, exercise significant power and have increasingly more self-regulation and less state regulation over them. The problem with self-regulation is that the ‘state surrenders its authority and responsibilities even when self regulation fails’ (Guilherme 2006, p.60).

During the 1990’s, due to the passing of the 1996 Telecommunications Act in the United States, and similar Communications Acts throughout the western world, there was a huge market takeover of various media companies which saw fewer owners controlling the nation’s newspapers, television and radio stations, telephone companies and cable systems (Chester 2007, p.2). These powerful media conglomerates have spread throughout the world, overriding national interests. Does
the free flow of communication best serve national interests or does it undermine the ‘capacity of weaker countries to structure their national media systems, and to formulate their own national communication policies according to their own interests?’ (Gurevitch 1997, p.205). In April 1998 the High Court of Australia ruled against the legality of Australian media content quotas stating that ‘international treaty obligations override the national cultural objectives in the Broadcasting Services Act’ (Fell 1998, p.14).

The Australian Broadcasting Authority, now the Australian Communications and Media Authority, oversees the control of media ownership and believes that regulation is necessary for the effective functioning of a democracy, which ‘requires a diverse ownership of the daily mass media to ensure that public life be reported in a fair and open manner’ (Parliament of Australia 2006). Media ownership laws haven’t changed in Australia since the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, but there is pressure to further reduce the restrictions on current media ownership, which is hardly diverse in Australia (See Communications Law Centre 2005). It does seem that a robust democracy is in fact under threat from free trade market interests. As McChesney puts it ‘the wealthier and more powerful the corporate media giants have become, the poorer the prospects for participatory democracy’ (1999, p.1). This statement is true today and perhaps even more so.

Referring back to the reasons why freedom of speech is essential to democracy, one could argue about whether a press that is controlled by private business interests is...
able to act as a watchdog of the state. News organizations have found themselves ‘firmly ensconced within giant corporate empires, imprisoned by a structure that force[s] them to respect rather than challenge government and commercial power’ (Chester 2007, p.2). Historically this view of the media as watchdog derived from a period when the state was ‘unrepresentative, corrupt and potentially despotic’ and freedom of speech and the press was seen as imperative to defend the populace against the absolutist state. Also media that is independent of the state is not independent of the corporate powers which control them. Therefore it seems that rather than increasing freedom of speech, deregulation of the media industry has had the opposite effect.

It is important and preferable therefore, for democratic governments, which are charged with safeguarding citizen interests, to regulate the media industry so that access to information is unbiased. It should be the role of a duly elected democratic government, which represents the will of the people, to maintain control of regulation of the media industry, rather than a selected few private individuals determining what information and media content the public has access to.

Regulation of media content broadcast on television and radio has traditionally been the responsibility of the elected government. This is so in Australia by the Australian Communications and Media Authority; in the United Kingdom by Ofcom and in New Zealand by the Broadcasting Standards Authority. These regulatory bodies and their roles are discussed further in Chapter 6. In Australia, the ACMA also regulate the
children’s television standards which operate in a multi layered framework of co-regulation. Government regulation ‘coexists with industry codes such as the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice and voluntary industry codes such as the Australian Association of National Advertisers’ Code for Advertising to Children’(ACMA, 2008, p.8). In New Zealand regulation of television content is the responsibility of the Broadcasting Industry while the Government is responsible for administering broadcasting standards and makes decisions on formal complaints. In the United Kingdom television broadcast content is regulated by the government through the broadcasting licensing system which is also the case in Australia.

In the traditional media formats of television and radio, regulation of media content has been steadily moving from government to industry self-regulation. At present however, all three governments are committed to maintaining standards for children’s television programming.

The next point of providing citizens with the information needed to make informed choices is also challenged by the concentration of the media industry. The executive officers of many media conglomerates have strong allegiances to a particular party or ideology, for example the Murdoch Corporation which has a right wing leaning, and therefore cannot provide an unbiased viewpoint. In addition politicians can be in partnership with particular media outlets, which creates conflicts of interest (Chester 2007, p.5). In the United States, media companies have developed formidable political machines to lobby governments to act in their favour. According to Chester
(2007, p.4), media companies ‘have their own lobbying offices, hire well-connected political consultants, and are members of influential trade associations.’ In the last few years almost one billion dollars has been spent by media giants lobbying the Federal Government for favourable rulings (OpenSecrets.org 2008). They have certainly lobbied to gain the freedoms they have today and the deregulation of the industry is a direct result of that.

The media industry is by and large a profit-seeking commercial enterprise and has thus become ‘an integral part of the capitalist political economy’ (McChesney 1999, p.15). As such, it is more likely to present right wing views in its publications. According to Curran (1996, p.95) in the 1992 British elections, the Conservative party gained the support of 70 per cent of the national daily papers but only 42 per cent of the vote. Chester agrees that concentration of the media industry has ‘greatly reduced the ability of reporters and producers to meaningfully inform the public’ (Chester 2007, p.2).

The third point about the media being ‘a public forum’ also needs scrutiny. Due to the fact that the media giants are driven by profits and ratings-driven policies, ‘information is now delivered at such a speed that it regularly trumps analysis and deliberation’ (Chester 2007, p.3). Of course, in order for there to be any public deliberation, the public needs to gain access to the media. The older media technologies of television, radio and newspapers provided some monitored public access, such as letters to the editor, and talk back on radio. Now that the old media
technologies have converged with the new digital media technologies, the Internet has provided a vehicle for such deliberation, although there has been no public debate about how it should be deployed or organized (McChesney 1999, p.122).

The Internet was originally designed for military purposes and later extended to the public by the introduction of the World Wide Web. This was designed by university scientists ‘with the explicit intent to create an open and egalitarian communication environment’ (McChesney 1999, p.129). However since the beginnings of the World Wide Web which started up in 1993, commercialisation has become part of the Internet, which is subject to corporate power, as the US government decided to opt out of any control and leave it to business (McChesney 1999, p.129). This is no different today.

According to Chester (2007, p.184), the cable and phone industry has a near monopoly on broadband provision, and as such, can deny any competitor access to their lines. Thus media giants could ‘threaten the potential of the internet to serve democracy’ (Chester 2007, p.184). All web content can now be ‘monitored, classified and controlled’ by the cable and phone companies, who want to tie up the lines and control what goes down them (Chester 2007, p.186). They want to limit ‘peer to peer’ technology (which allows sharing of files such as music, video, etc., in a more democratic fashion), which they see as a threat to them. Chester (2007, p.187) states that Google’s chief wrote to Congress in 2005 to warn that allowing Internet service providers to segment their offerings, reserving huge chunks of bandwidth for
themselves, was not good for consumers or the economy. Edward Whiteacre, CEO of then SBC, now AT&T, replied to Business Week, ‘Why should they be allowed to use my pipes? The Internet cannot be free in that sense, because we and the cable companies have made an investment’ (Crockett 2005).

Again, this focus on market needs proves that it would be preferable for governments to regulate the content of the Internet rather than big business, if some content is regarded as socially harmful. The cable and phone companies have also successfully prevented communities from setting up their own networks, even fighting it in the Supreme Court in the US (Chester 2007, p.188). So far, the new media technologies, with so much potential to nurture and foster democracy, are instead being used to target consumers with a stream of advertising and marketing strategies. The media giants are offering ‘interactive, intelligent and personalised systems for entertainment’ but it won’t ‘meaningfully foster civic expression, robust journalism, and diversity of ownership’ (Chester 2007, p.191). It is hard to disagree with this view given the amount of advertising that appears on most web pages.

I now come to the fourth point of the central role the media play in setting the public agenda. It cannot be overstated how much influence the media has in setting public opinion through the newspapers, the television and the radio. According to Gurevitch (1997, p.217) ‘Global television plays a significant role in the construction of world opinion’. In a paper presented to the College of Communication, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, Jay Blumler. (1989) stated:
The news media are not only a selectively-focusing and agenda setting force in international affairs, they are also a world-opinion defining agency. For, at present, they virtually have a monopoly over the construction of world opinion, its agenda of prime concerns, and its main targets of praise and blame. At present, at least, what they tell us about what world opinion apparently holds on a certain matter can rarely be double-checked by international opinion poll results.

Since the arrival of the Internet, there is now more access to global media content but corporate media still has a responsibility to provide a fair and equitable broadcasting system. Of course media practices can either be socially responsible or socially irresponsible and Guilherme (2006, p.60) gives some examples of socially responsible practices, such as: ‘promoting citizenship, guaranteeing rights, confronting discrimination, expanding access to culture, strengthening democracy and monitoring public policies’. Curran (1996, p.103) believes that the media should give the public access to a ‘diversity of values and perspectives in entertainment as well as public affairs coverage’. He also believes that the media should enable individuals to ‘reinterpret their social experience, relate this to alternative conceptions of society and human nature, and question the assumptions and ideas of the dominant culture’ (Curran 1996, p.103).
In conclusion, it seems that the deregulation of the media industry has transferred the regulation of the industry from the state to private individuals. The concentration of ownership of the media industry limits its ability to act as a watchdog over the state, to disseminate unbiased and unrestricted information, to encourage deliberation and consequently, it hinders a robust democracy.

Whilst this is certainly a problem for adults in attempting to exercise their democratic rights, it is even more of a problem for children who are developing their political awareness and opinion. In the areas of television and radio broadcasting, this has been somewhat counteracted by government broadcasting with, in their charters, a requirement to act impartially and provide a balanced viewpoint. In the case of the Internet, however, there is no such body. It might be argued at present that the Internet is open to diverse views but, as it has been argued above, there is a move by corporate entities to subvert this under a smokescreen of self-regulation.

Danilo Leonardi, (in Guilherme, 2006, p.61) a researcher for the Programme in Comparative Media Law and Policy at Oxford University in his article ‘State Regulation or Self Regulation by the Industry’ believes that self-regulation is not deleterious if it operates within state regulation. Further, Leonardi believes that the State should emplace minimum standards that must be adhered to by the industry. Guilherme (2006, p.77) believes that tighter controls over broadcasting would help to protect the rights of minority groups such as children and adolescents and promote
freedom of expression by a larger number of voices. This is an important point and an underlying theme of this thesis.

There needs to be a balance between freedom of expression and protection of individual rights. Blandine Kriegel (in Guilherme, 2006, p.80), the author of the French Ministry of Culture’s report on the relationship between children and television content, stated that ‘In the case of a conflict of interest between the principle of freedom of expression and the principle of protection of children, the right of children should prevail’. As Guilherme (2006) states ‘true freedom of expression cannot be considered in isolation from human rights’ and it does not imply ‘an absence of regulation of that freedom’ (Guilherme 2006, p.83). In a democratic society it is therefore necessary to sometimes relinquish individual rights for the sake of the common good.
Thus far I have argued that, from an historical perspective, there is a need for a special case for children regarding regulation of media content, due to childhood being a formative stage of life. In this chapter I will investigate the latest research on the perceived effects of media influences on children. I have also argued that it is preferable for regulation to be controlled by an elected government rather than left to market forces or private corporations. Regulation is always a controversial issue and there is divided opinion in society as to how much media content influences children and thus how much regulation is needed. Effective regulation needs to be founded upon good research and this chapter will present the evidence in this field from the variety of viewpoints that exist at present.

The debate on the effects of media influences has been ongoing for at least the past five decades. Opinions are polarized between two research paradigms labeled by Egenfeldt-Nielson and Smith (2003) as the ‘active media perspective’ and the ‘active user perspective’. The ‘active media perspective’ researchers generally come from the North American psychology field and use the ‘behaviourist tradition’ which is the belief that the causes of behaviour are external. The methodologies used are usually laboratory studies, cross-sectional correlational studies and longitudinal correlational
studies. Their research is primarily aimed at finding evidence of direct harmful effects of exposure to violent media content.

The ‘active user perspective’ is derived from the field of social scientists who believe that consumers are more than passive recipients of media and bring with them much contextual background. They argue that reactions to media content are context-dependent and social and cultural factors have a strong influence on responses. Research from this orientation seeks to understand the user’s background and its influence on the interpretation of the response.

Those who hold to the ‘active user perspective’ tend to dismiss the active media research methodology as being laboratory experiments that do not hold true in the real world. As such they do not believe there is any real evidence of causality. Researchers from the Cultural Studies discipline, in particular, view the active media role as ‘antithetical’ and view it as being directed by ‘powerful elitists’ trying to ‘censure and censor the pleasures of less powerful groups, such as ‘working class’ adults or children (Gauntlett 1998; Rutherford and Bittman 2007, p.32; Buckingham et al, 1999 p.71).

These two research traditions ‘reflect basic theoretical and political differences’ (Byron 2008, p.26) and influence policy-making decisions by governments. In the UK and New Zealand, psychologists tend to agree with the ‘active user perspective’
whereas psychologists in the US argue strongly for the ‘active media perspective’ (Byron 2008, p.146).

Many studies have been done in the US that show a correlation between viewing violent media, particularly on a repetitive basis, and aggressive and anti-social behaviour among children and adolescents. (See Anderson, Ihori et al, 2010; Swing and Anderson 2007; Anderson, 2003; Anderson and Dill 2000; Eron, 1972; Huesmann, 2003). Such was their conviction that a joint statement was issued in 2000 by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) along with five other prominent medical groups, which stated, in part

*The conclusion of the public health community, based on over 30 years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children. Its effects are measurable and long-lasting. Moreover, prolonged viewing of media violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward violence in real life* (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000).

In Australia a more comprehensive approach is taken, to include research from a multi-disciplinary perspective rather than accepting the traditional polarized viewpoints. It is important to note that ‘media effects’ can be both beneficial as well as harmful and there is no doubt that media can be used very successfully in
educational programmes. Moreover, while effects research states there is a direct causal result between exposure to viewing media violence and aggressive behaviour in children, it is generally accepted that there are many other causes that effect behaviour such as individual psychological traits, gender, socio-economic status and parents’ educational level (Rutherford and Bittman 2007, p.12).

In 2007 the Australian Communications and Media Authority commissioned a review into the latest research ‘to understand the long-term psychological effect of the media on children, families and society’ (Rutherford and Bittman 2007, p.7). The findings of this report entitled ‘Media and Communications in Australian families 2007: a review of the research literature’ will now be presented, along with other recent research in this field to determine current opinion on this matter.
5.1 Research on the Effects of Film and Television

Television is ‘still the most pervasive and influential media in the lives of children and adults’ today (Rutherford and Bittman 2007, p 8). There is no doubt that children learn from television, both good and not so good, and there have been numerous studies over the years concerning the influence of television on children’s psychological well-being. Since the arrival of television in the 1930’s there has been concern about the effects of viewing violence and extensive research has been done into this matter (Anderson, 2003; Eron, 1972; Huesmann, 2003). As mentioned previously, psychologists from the media effects tradition use three methodologies for testing their hypotheses: laboratory experiments, cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies.

Laboratory experiments involve using an aggression indicator, such as the general aggression model (GAM) developed by Anderson and Bushman (Anderson and Bushman 2002, p.6). In simple terms, the GAM framework measures various inputs such as personality traits and situational factors such as aggressive cues, the ‘present internal state’ these create concerning ‘cognition, affect and arousal’, with the resulting behavioural outputs (Anderson and Bushman 2002, p.9 -13).

Cross sectional studies are surveys taken with individuals who display more serious forms of aggressive behaviour and provide a ‘snapshot of the relation at one point in
time between individuals’ habitual consumption of media violence and their aggressive behavior’ (Anderson, Berkowitz et al. 2003, p.84).

Longitudinal studies are those that are taken over a number of years and provide the best measure of any correlation between viewing media violence and aggressive behaviour. These types of studies are the most expensive to undertake however, and thus there have not been very many done. The consensus from these studies is that

Research on violent television and films, video games, and music reveals unequivocal evidence that media violence increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behavior in both immediate and long-term contexts (Anderson, Ihori et al. 2010, p.1, Anderson, 2003 #81, p.81).

Laboratory and field experiments have shown that ‘youths who watch violent scenes subsequently display more aggressive behaviour, aggressive thoughts, or aggressive emotions than those who do not’ (Anderson, Berkowitz et al. 2003, p.84).

Anderson et al (2003) also state that cross-sectional surveys over the past forty years consistently provide ‘evidence that the current physical aggression, verbal aggression, and aggressive thoughts of young people are correlated with the amount of television and film violence they regularly watch’ (Anderson, Berkowitz et al. 2003, p.86).
Longitudinal studies have also shown that ‘high levels of exposure to violent TV programs in childhood can promote aggression in later childhood, adolescence, and even young adulthood’ (Anderson, Berkowitz et al. 2003, p.88). A study by Eron et al (1972, p.11) found that ‘the violence of programs preferred by the male subjects in Grade 3 was even more strongly related to aggression 10 years later’. Huesmann et al (2003, p.15) found over a fifteen-year study that ‘children’s TV-violence viewing between ages 6 and 9, children’s identification with aggressive same-sex TV characters, and children’s perceptions that TV violence is realistic were significantly correlated with their adult aggression’.

It should be noted that most of the ‘media effects’ research acknowledges that ‘violent actions seldom result from a single cause; rather multiple factors converging over time contribute to such behavior. Accordingly, the influence of mass media is best viewed as one of the many potential factors that help to shape behavior, including aggression’ (Anderson, Berkowitz et al. 2003, p.83).

In addition to the concern of the effect of media violence on aggressive behaviour in children, there is also general concern about other media effects on health in general. Studies have shown that media can also effect sexual behaviour, body image, use of substances, eating disorders, sleeping disorders and consequent inability to concentrate at school (Strasburger, Jordan et al. 2010) (Rutherford and Bittman 2007, p.11).
Sexual content on television has grown ‘increasingly frequent and prominent’ (Kunkel, Eyal et al. 2005, p.5) with 70% of nearly 1,000 programs including ‘some sexual content, either talk about sex or portrayals of sexual behavior’ (Kunkel, Eyal et al. 2005, p.59). Strasburger et al (2010) found that television programmes aimed at teenagers contain more sexual content than adult programmes and with ‘little mention of the need for contraception or for responsibility’ (Strasburger, Jordan et al. 2010, p.6). Studies have shown that high levels of exposure to sexual content in the media can affect young peoples’ attitudes to normative sexual behaviour. There is some correlation between the amount of exposure to sexual content and earlier sexual activity, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (Strasburger, Jordan et al. 2010, p.6).

From an ‘active user perspective’, a British study on the topic of sexual content and the media undertaken by Buckingham and Bragg (2003) found that while children ‘frequently encounter sexual material in the media’ they are able to use ‘critical skills and perspectives when interpreting sexual content’ which increases with age and children’s experience with the media (Buckingham and Bragg 2003, p.7). They also found that children do learn about sex and relationships from the media but were ‘sceptical about some of the advice’ offered particularly ‘the use of drama to convey pre-defined moral messages’ (Buckingham and Bragg 2003,p.8). Rutherford (2007, p.238) found that Australian studies supported the ‘Active user perspective’ in regard to the effects of ‘sexual’ media.
In conclusion, in the summary of research on the effects of film and television on children, it should also be stated that television, in particular, is a very effective teaching tool and while this section has focused more on the ‘negative effects’, it can also be used for positive outcomes. Research has found that ‘watching educational television in early childhood is associated with enhanced academic performance in later life’ (Rutherford and Bittman 2007, p.211). Children and young people use television and other media to access information about sex and sexuality, which they are more comfortable with than discussing it with parents and/or teachers. Television viewing and talking about television is ‘an important part of social interaction and cultural literacy, particularly for older children (Rutherford and Bittman 2007, p.252). It is important therefore, for policy makers to maintain a balanced outlook with regard to the regulation of film and television.

5.2 Research on the Effects of Computers and the Internet

There is no doubt that computers and the Internet have had a vast impact on society today. The Internet in particular, has changed the way we do business, communicate with friends and family and is an extremely valuable research tool for educational purposes. Its global reach and ease of accessibility bring enormous opportunities for children and adults alike. Whether the Internet however is seen as the ‘instigator or the consequence of social change, and whether it is seen as offering the potential for societal improvement or as introducing a new agenda of problems’ (Livingstone 2009, p.1) is often a matter of debate. Public anxiety concerning children and the Internet is widespread and Livingstone believes it is due to three factors:
• The rapidity of the Internet’s development and its pervasive nature often causing difficulty to adults to adjust;

• The fear of the unknown and any new technology, exacerbated by media panics portraying the Internet as some ‘uncontrollable beast’ and a threat to their children’s safety;

• The fear of adults that their children know more about the technology than they do and are thus able to avoid parental authority (Livingstone 2009, p.151).

Nonetheless, it can be argued that some of these fears are justified, as there are certain risks involved with the Internet. In the current Internet environment, communication is interactive and young people going online can often place themselves at risk as well as generating a risk for others. A report into cyber-safety within Australia and internationally, was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy in 2009. Dooley et al., (2009) found some of the main areas of risks to children and adolescents were:

• Cyber stalking, grooming and sexual solicitation

• Cyber bullying

• Exposure to inappropriate and illegal content

• Promotion of inappropriate social and health behaviours
5.2.1 Cyber stalking, grooming and sexual solicitation

Cyber stalking, grooming and sexual solicitation of children and adolescents is, according to Livingstone (2009), one of the two most concerning risks to children on the Internet. The other is cyber bullying, which I will address in the next section. Cyber stalking is a term used to describe repeated harassment and threatening behaviour through the use of electronic media such as emails, text messaging, social networking sites such as Facebook and My Space and chat rooms. There is a paucity of studies in Australia however, concerning cyber stalking and grooming, due to the nature of the research and the ethical concerns that they may raise in dealing with minors. A recent Australian study on the incidence of adolescent stalking, involving 906 cases where intervention orders had been issued, found that 11% of cases involved cyber-stalking (Purcell, Flower et al. 2009, p.1). As this study was limited to adolescents it does not account for older people and the exact prevalence of cyber stalking in Australia is unknown (Dooley, Cross et al. 2009, p.28). A recent report by Sheridan and Grant (2007, p.1), which included respondents from the UK (53.1%), US (36.2%) and Australia (10.7%) found that 47.5% reported being harassed via the Internet. However, when Sheridan and Grant applied criteria that defined cyber stalking as originating online and remaining solely online for a minimum of four weeks, that figure reduced to 7.2% (Sheridan and Grant 2007, p.6). While cyber stalking is fundamentally not dissimilar to offline stalking, there are factors that make the Internet more attractive to certain types of predators, such as the anonymity it provides.
Grooming of children to procure sex by paedophiles is not a new issue, however, the Internet has brought a new dimension, again due to the anonymity it provides. Additionally the Internet can allow paedophiles: to contact multiple numbers of children simultaneously; to download huge catalogues of images and videos which ‘can be used to reinforce existing fantasies and develop new ones’; and to create their own images and videos (Dooley, Cross et al. 2009, p.45-46). A six-stage process of grooming, also known as cyber sexploitation, has been described and includes: ‘victim selection, friendship forming, relationship forming, risk assessment; exclusivity, and the sex stage’ (Dooley, Cross et al. 2009, p.46).

Of most public concern is that prolonged grooming encounters online can result in offline contact (Dooley, Cross et al. 2009, p.30). Notorious cases such as the Carly Ryan murder in Adelaide 2007, in which a 51-year-old man from Victoria used a fake Internet identity to lure her to her death, justifiably add to this concern.

The reality, however, is that this type of crime is quite rare. While Dooley et al., reported a statistic that found 20% of Facebook users regularly meet strangers offline, their research led them to conclude the number of minors who arrange offline meetings with online friends was more likely to be around 10 – 16% (Dooley, Cross et al. 2009, p.53).
A report from the US found that ‘Internet-initiated sex crimes account for a salient but small proportion of all statutory rape offences and a relatively low number of the sexual offences committed against minors overall’ (Wolak, Finkelhor et al. 2008, p.125). The target of online offenders is more likely to be adolescents rather than children, as young children do not frequent chat rooms and use social networking sites to the same extent as older children. Wolak et al., (2004) found that 99% of victims of Internet initiated sex crimes were 13–17 years of age. In addition, perpetrators of Internet initiated sex crimes were not usually paedophiles, who by definition seek out pre-pubescent children. Finkelhor et al., (2000) found 48% of sexual solicitations over the Internet were made by juveniles and 24% by adults, the majority of whom were in the 18-25 year old age group (Finkelhor, Mitchell et al. 2000, p.16). It could be concluded therefore, that the risk for children being contacted by paedophiles is quite small, although not non-existent. Research has also found that paedophiles use the Internet to make contact with parents to gain access to their children and to download pornography (Wolak, Finkelhor et al. 2008, p.119). The risk for young people however, is more prevalent and Wolak et al., (2008, p.12) recommend the need for ‘candid, direct discussions about seduction and how some adults deliberately evoke and then exploit the compelling feelings that sexual arousal can induce’. It also shows that there needs to be tighter controls over access to personal information and data available on the Internet.
5.2.2 Cyber bullying

Cyber bullying is emerging as one of the major risk factors for children and adolescents using the Internet. Cyber bullying is a form of covert bullying in an electronic medium and has been defined by Smith et al. (2008, p.376) as

*An aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual,*

*using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against*

*a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself.*

This implies a power imbalance and, as such, is not dissimilar to traditional forms of bullying. New media technologies provide various media for cyber bullying to occur such as text and video messaging and telephone calls using mobile phones, and social networking sites, chat rooms, websites, email, instant messaging and You Tube on the Internet.

Research is beginning to focus on the interchangeability of roles that young people play as both perpetrators of online bullying and victims of that behaviour (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.42). These roles have been described in which the child is either the *recipient* of online content, the *participant,* where someone makes contact with them or the *actor* where the child contacts someone (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.43).
Recent research in Australia has found that the prevalence of cyber bullying is not as high as traditional forms of bullying with 7-10% of students in years 4 – 9 reporting that they had experienced being bullied using technology over the school term (Cross, Shaw et al. 2009, p.xxiii). The study found slightly higher rates of cyber bullying amongst secondary students and students from non-government schools.

Recent research from the UK amongst secondary students also found that cyber bullying is less prevalent than traditional bullying but appreciable with 5-10% of students reporting being cyber bullied in the last couple of months (Smith, Mahdavi et al. 2008, p.382). Other reports have put this figure as high as 20% amongst 11-19 year olds (Livingstone and Hadden 2009, p.20).

Nevertheless, cyber bullying is of increasing concern as access to technology becomes more accessible and widespread. Furthermore, the nature of cyber bullying has the potential to do much harm to its victims due to several reasons:

- Personal and hurtful information can be published publicly and spread very widely in rapid time;
- Personal information and pictures can be manipulated and distorted to spread lies about a person;
- The victim cannot escape from the impact or even feel safe at home;
- It can be done anonymously without fear of repercussion.
In addition, Byron (2008, p.58) believes that behaviour online is often different to behaviour offline and that people ‘do not necessarily act according to their usual moral conscience’. This is true for communications between people known to each other as well as strangers. Research has also shown that 40% of children have made up things about themselves online, which would indicate that they believe it is all right to behave differently in cyber space (Byron 2008, p.58).

Another emerging factor is the issue of cyberbullying of teachers by students. While there has been no research to date in Australia, there has been growing concern amongst teachers and a call to ban certain websites that contain evidence of encouragement by students to cyberbully their teachers (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.46).

There have been several responses to combat cyberbullying by raising awareness of the problem and building resilience through the use of programs such as ‘Let’s Fight it Together’ which is part of the Cybersmart website run by the ACMA. A video produced by Netsafe in New Zealand entitled ‘At a Distance’ promotes the ‘role of the bystander in mitigating online risk’ (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.48) and provides strategies to deal with cyberbullying. In the United Kingdom the Teachtoday website provides strategies and information for teachers to combat cyberbullying which is also an increasing problem there as well as in other parts of Europe. The consensus seems to be that both children and adults need
to build resilience and to tackle cyberbullying by dealing with incidents quickly and effectively to minimise harm.

5.2.3 Exposure to inappropriate and illegal content

Internet content in Australia is governed by the Broadcasting Services Act (1992) and the following material is prohibited from being published online:

Any content that has been classified as RC or X18+ by the classification board.

Any content that has been classified as R18+ and is not subject to a ‘restricted access system’.

Any content that has been classified as MA15+ provided by a mobile premium service or a service that provides audio or video content upon payment of a fee and that is not subject to a ‘restricted access system’ (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009).

A ‘restricted access system’ is one that has had to verify that the recipient is the correct age to receive the information.

This does not prevent content that would be classified as illegal in Australia being published online overseas which, according to Dooley et al., (2009, p.79) is where most of the pornographic material on the Internet originates. This is particularly
problematic for children and adolescents who are exposed to pornography and extremely violent material online, whether accidentally or deliberately.

Recent research in Australia amongst 200 16-17 year olds found that 84% of boys and 60% of girls had been accidentally exposed to pornographic websites while 38% of boys and 2% of girls actively sought it out (Flood 2007, p.53). This is similar to research in the United Kingdom, which found 57% of 9-19 year olds had seen pornography on the Internet and this increased to 68% of 12-19 year olds (Livingstone and Bober 2005, P.23-24). The research also found that 36% of those surveyed had accidentally viewed pornography online, some had been sent pornographic junk mail and instant messages and 9% had been sent pornography by someone they knew.

Research from America of 1500 youth aged 10-17 years found that 42% had viewed pornography online and that 66% of those had accidentally found it (Wolak, Finkellor et al. 2007, p.2).

Little is known about the impact of exposure to pornography by children and young people as not much research has been done due to obvious ethical reasons. Byron (2008, p.51) believes that there is ‘a relationship between exposure to sexually inappropriate material and the development and validation of negative beliefs and ideas’. Peter and Valkenburg (2006, p.24) found in their study of 745 Dutch
adolescents aged 13 –18 a correlation between exposure to pornography and negative attitudes about themselves. Research amongst adults has found that exposure to pornography has a negative effect on ‘attitudes, beliefs, fantasies, desires and behaviour of those who use it’ (Byron 2008, p.51). Studies have found that men who access extreme pornographic material have negative attitudes towards woman, are pro-rape, lack empathy for rape victims and a ‘self-reported likelihood to use force or to rape’ (Itzin, Taket et al. 2007, p.34).

This thesis, however, is focused on the effects of media on children and young people and while, as previously stated, little is known about the effects of exposure to pornography, Byron (2008, p.51) believes that the impact of viewing unwanted pornography is greater for children who are just beginning to develop an understanding of their sexual development and learning about their own sexuality. She believes it could have a negative impact on their own sexual health and wellbeing (Byron 2008, p.51). Interestingly, Livingstone and Bober (2005) found that 45% of 18-19 year old Internet users who had viewed pornography (online or offline) now think they were too young to see it when they first did. This could indicate that there would be support, even amongst young people, for restricting access to this type of material to people aged 18 and over.
5.2.4 Promotion of inappropriate social and health behaviours

Other areas of concern for children and young people on the Internet are websites that promote unhealthy attitudes towards body image such as anorexia sites, sites that promote suicide or self harm, hate sites, the promotion of consumerism targeting children, the sexualisation of children in advertising, and the promotion of drug use. Children are more at risk of harm from these sites due to ‘the difficulties children have evaluating the quality, purpose and reliability of websites’ (Byron 2008, p.57).

Little research has been done about the effects that these websites have on children and young people, with some research showing that some of these sites can provide support while other studies have found they can only do harm. Alao et al., (2006) found that ‘young people have a higher incidence of risk-taking behavior, co-morbid substance abuse, and depressive disorder’ and are thus more likely to be influenced by the Internet to commit suicide (Alao, Soderberg et al. 2006, p.2).

Pro-anorexia websites have also grown in recent years with the majority of users being girls and young women aged 17-22. These sites ‘normalise, control, justify and legitimise anorexia behaviours, through the sharing of information, risk management and support (Dooley, Cross et al. 2009, p.131).

Hate sites clearly contain offensive material and there are concerns that they are used to recruit members. Of particular concern are sites that deliberately target children
that contain racist material and include games, music and ‘history lessons’ (Dooley, Cross et al. 2009, p.107). Games such as ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ produced by neo-Nazi groups in which the protagonist runs through a ghetto killing black people and Latinos before descending to another level to kill Jews, and ‘Border Control’ in which the protagonist kills as many Mexicans crossing the border as they can, are readily available to play online. While these are not aimed at young children there are other online games that are. Today there are thousands of these websites and many of them actively recruit youth and young people. They offer disenfranchised youth a sense of belonging and identity, a purpose, excitement, justification for violence and protection (Gwinn, M.L., 2006).

Commercial content is another concern particularly for children who are most vulnerable to persuasion and exploitation by commercial interests. Commercial content is abundant on the Internet and includes games known as ‘advergames’ particularly targeting children. Byron (2008, p.58) states that

\begin{quote}
Given what we know about children’s difficulties with evaluating both the content and source of information while their brains are still developing the appropriate skills, it is clear that this kind of contact presents a potential risk to children.
\end{quote}

It is important to remember however, that the risks associated with going online must be balanced with the advantages that the Internet provides. One example is that
greater Internet use has been associated with higher levels of education (Livingstone and Hadden 2009, p.5). Furthermore, while not discounting the many risks involved for children and young people on the Internet, it is important for ‘children to become resilient, encountering and learning to cope with some degree of risk’ (Livingstone and Hadden 2009, p.5).

5.3 Research on the Effects of Electronic Video Games

Video games have certainly progressed from their early beginnings of simple games such as Pacman, to the current games, which contain extremely high quality graphics, making them very true to life. There is also no doubt that video games are highly popular with children who can access them on a variety of media including computers, games consoles, hand-held devices, I-Pods, mobile phones, etc. According to the Herald Sun, sales of video games in Australia had reached 1.96 billion dollars by November of last year and were expected to exceed the 2 billion dollar mark, an 8.3% increase on the previous year, despite the global economic crisis (Thom 2009).

Much has been written over the past thirty years about the effects of playing video games, in particular violent video games, on children. The interactive nature of video games involves children to a greater degree than merely being passive viewers of a television programme or film. The ‘rapidly changing visual and auditory stimuli’ capture and empower the player through reinforcement of mastery of the material by
immediate feedback and rewards (Swing and Anderson 2007, p.1). This process has the intended consequence of teaching certain skills to the player and is used successfully in education, business, and by the military. The US army makes use of simulation games to train soldiers in many combat related skills and have also used the commercial video game Doom to train marines (Swing and Anderson 2007, p.2).

Over the years there have been several highly publicized cases, which have partly attributed violent behaviour to playing violent video games. In 1997 Michael Carneal killed and wounded several students at his high school in West Paducah, Kentucky. Carneal had never held a real gun before that day but his marksmanship was better than most policemen according to Attorney General John Ashcroft (Associated Press 2001, Strasburger, 2010 #69, p.5). Carneal had learnt how to shoot from playing first-person shooter games. Again in 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Kiebold shot and wounded many students at Columbine High School before killing themselves. Harris and Kiebold enjoyed playing Doom and had a customised version with two shooters in it (Anderson and Dill 2000, p.772). Of course it is too simplistic to attribute the blame of these atrocities on video games alone, as there were other underlying factors. Carneal, for example, was schizophrenic. Lee Malvo, the adolescent who was charged with the fatal sniper shootings in Washington, D.C. also learnt how to shoot using simulated sniper video games. His attorney used this as a defence in his court case yet Malvo had a ‘history of parental abandonment, poverty, animal torture, and violent attacks with weapons’ (Olsen, Kutner et al. 2008, p.58, Miller, 2003 #91).
It can be argued that exposure to media violence is not the sole cause of youth violence and, as stated previously, there are many factors that contribute to the cause of aggression and violence within an individual. Trait characteristics such as temperament, poor early attachment, and neurological damage as well as environmental factors such as parental neglect or abuse, poverty and exposure to neighbourhood violence are some of the causes of aggression and violent behaviour in youth, making it difficult to identify any one particular cause (Olsen, Kutner et al. 2008, p.58).

Many of the studies again from the field of psychology demonstrate that there is a link between the amount of media violence children and young people are exposed to and the amount of violence in society. The Council on Communications Media (2009) cites a study of 365 paediatricians in Minnesota (Gentile, Oberg et al. 2004), which found that 98% of paediatricians expressed their ‘personal belief’, that ‘media violence affects children’s aggression’ (Council on Communications Media 2009, p.1496).

Anderson et al (2010) undertook a meta-analysis of over 130 research reports which included studies from both Western and Eastern cultural perspectives to examine the effects of violent video games on physically aggressive behaviour, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, physiological arousal, prosocial behaviour and desensitisation to violence. It included experimental studies, cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies and involved over ‘18,000 participants from multiple
countries, ages and culture types’ (Anderson, Ihori et al. 2010, p.161). The results from this study found that playing violent video games, regardless of the research design, ‘is a significant risk factor for both short-term and long-term increases in physically aggressive behaviour’, aggressive cognition and aggressive affect (Anderson, Ihori et al. 2010, p. 161-164). In addition, it found that playing violent video games increased physiological arousal, lowered prosocial behaviour and caused a decrease in empathy and increased desensitisation to violence (Anderson, Ihori et al. 2010, p.164-167). The study also found that the effects are significant in Eastern as well as Western cultures and it provided ‘further confirmation that playing violent video games is a causal risk factor for long-term harmful outcomes’ (Anderson, Ihori et al. 2010, p.167-169).

Desensitisation to violence is one of the outcomes of media consumption of concern in this thesis. It is a problem in society if individuals ignore relevant stimuli, which should prompt a reaction. Humans’ normal physiological reaction to the sight of blood, gore, severed body parts, and sounds of screams is usually aversive. This reaction ‘serves as an inhibition to violence’ and affects decision-making processes and behavioural choices (Swing and Anderson 2007, p.5). These automatic reactions also provoke sympathy and empathy towards a victim of violence thus reducing the risk of aggressive behaviour and increasing the risk of prosocial behaviour (Swing and Anderson 2007, p.5). Carnegiey et al (2007) found that playing violent video games reduced the players’ aversion to violence in real life. They found that playing violent video games ‘can cause people to become less physiologically aroused by real
violence’ and ‘that individuals who play violent video games habituate or ‘get used to’ all the violence and eventually become physiologically numb to it’ (Carnagey, Anderson et al. 2007, p.495). This could be detrimental both to the individual and to society (Carnagey, Anderson et al. 2007, p.490).

Other studies however, have found that playing violent video games can be beneficial for adolescents. Olsen et al (2008) found that, from a boy’s perspective, video games with violent content are more exciting. They found that boys enjoy playing violent video games for several reasons including: the ability to ‘express fantasies of power and glory’; the ability to ‘explore and master what they perceived as exciting and realistic environments’; and a means to ‘work out their anger and stress’ (Olsen, Kutner et al. 2008, p.70). They also found that playing violent video games gave boys the opportunity to compete with others and that they increased their status amongst other boys by the ownership or mastering of popular games, which is an important socialisation tool for boys (Olsen, Kutner et al. 2008, p.70). The boys in this particular study group were able to distinguish clearly between fiction and reality and did not feel that they were affected in any way by the violent content. They were however, concerned about the effect on their younger siblings, a factor commonly known as the ‘third-person effect’ in which other people are more susceptible to the influence of media (Olsen, Kutner et al. 2008, p.71).

An Australian study by Unsworth et al (2007) on the effects of playing violent video games on adolescents also found that in some cases, playing violent video games
could have a cathartic effect. This study involved 107 students from metropolitan schools in Melbourne. Unsworth et al hypothesised that there could be three outcomes on the state of aggression after playing a violent video game: increased aggression; decreased aggression; or no effect. They found this to be so but interestingly the results depended on two factors: the temperament of the player and the state of the player’s anger prior to playing the game. Players with an aggressive/labile temperament did show a short-term effect in their state of anger after playing the game. If the player with a labile temperament was angry prior to playing the game there was a decrease in the state of anger afterwards. Conversely, the player with a labile temperament who was not angry prior to playing the game showed an increase in their state of anger afterwards. The player with a stable temperament showed no immediate short-term effects after playing the game (Unsworth, Devilly et al. 2007, p.390). They concluded that while this study focused on short-term effects, it found that while playing violent video games increased anger in some cases, overall it seems to have no bearing on changing the personality or trait temperament of the player (Unsworth, Devilly et al. 2007, p.391).

There is still little agreement concerning the effects of playing violent video games, however most research seems to accept there can be ‘short-term effects on arousal, thoughts and emotions’ (Rutherford and Bittman 2007, p.212). Byron (2008) makes the point that ‘no firm evidence of harm is not evidence of no harm’ (Byron 2008, p.161) and that given that childhood is an important stage in the learning and development of the adult, there could be risks associated with playing games not
designed for them. Young children in particular, have difficulty differentiating fantasy from reality and Byron believes that what a child experiences while playing a video game could be ‘very important in determining children’s subsequent behaviour’ (Byron 2008, p.33). This is particularly so where violence is ‘normal’ for some children. Byron believes it likely that ‘longer term effects of negative or inappropriate content will be more likely to be seen in children who have similar negative experiences in the real world’ (Byron 2008, p.33). It is more important therefore, to determine the ‘probability of risk to the child’ (Byron 2008, p.27) and to do this it is necessary to take into account a child’s individual strengths and weaknesses. This will help to determine what might increase the ‘likelihood of harm’ to a particular child (Byron 2008, p.27).

In Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom video and computer games are classified in the same way as films to provide parents with information as to whether games are age appropriate. The United Kingdom has recently adopted the PEGI, European system, which includes classifications for 3+, 7+ and 12+ for children. Provisional ratings are also assigned to games for children 16+ and for adults 18+. Australia differs from New Zealand and the United Kingdom in that it does not have an R18 rated category for video games. It is interesting to note that research in New Zealand found that 62% of 15-17 year olds surveyed had played either a game classified as R18 or a banned game (Office of film and literature classification 2005, p.5). The research also found that one in five of those surveyed said that ‘age restrictions made them more likely to play the game’ while 76% said that the ratings
made no difference to them (Office of film and literature classification 2005, p.5). Another study of 310 Dutch youth found similar results. The study by Bijvank et al (2009) involved three age groups 7-18, 12-13 and 16-17. They found that restrictive age labels and violent content labels actually increased the attractiveness of the video games to all age groups even the 7-8 year olds (Bijvank, Konijn et al. 2009, p.874). It is important therefore, to ensure that children only have access to media that is appropriate for their age.

5.4 Research on the Effects of Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are increasingly becoming multi-functional and now third generation phones incorporate access to the Internet, the use of inbuilt cameras and the ability to send and receive messages, pictures and phone calls. Consequently, mobile phones allow children to access the Internet and social networking sites without parental supervision. This is a concern as all the risks associated with computers and the Internet, as mentioned previously, such as cyber stalking and solicitation, cyberbullying and the ability to access inappropriate and potentially harmful websites, are now present on a personal and portable device. In addition, the mobile phone has the ability to capture and record every moment of a person’s life and these images and videos can then be instantly uploaded to the Internet. It is clear that this ability is increasing the risk of cyberbullying, which has ‘become a major concern both for children, and their parents and teachers (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.44).
Another concern that is emerging with the use of mobile phones is the practice of ‘sexting’. This involves sending or posting nude or semi-nude photos and sexually suggestive messages. Little research has been done into this issue but a survey by Girlfriend Magazine in 2007 found that almost 40% of 588 teenage girls who responded had been asked to send nude or semi-nude photos of themselves over the Internet (The Age 2009). A report in The Age (2009) cites Maggie Hamilton, author of ‘What’s Happening to our Girls’ who uncovered much information about ‘sexting’ while researching her book. Hamilton found that ‘advances in technology and easy access to mobile phones and the internet are behind the trend, allowing kids to have a ‘secret life’ beyond the reach of their parents’ (The Age 2009). Hamilton also found that ‘easy access to online pornography was also changing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour’ (The Age 2009).

Several cases have occurred in Australia with children as young as eight taking topless photos of themselves and sending them electronically (The Age 2009). In Victoria thirty two youths were charged with child pornography offences in 2007 due to sending sexually explicit images of young people under 18, which is illegal (Battersby 2008). Any image of a minor in a sexually explicit or indecent manner is considered to be child pornography (Battersby 2008). This matter is currently being addressed as to whether it should fall into the same category as child pornography.

A similar survey in the United States found that 20% of teenagers overall and 11% of young teenage girls aged 13-16 had sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos or
videos of themselves and 30% of teenagers overall had sent or posted sexually suggestive messages (The National Campaign.org and Cosmogirl.com 2008, p.2). Amongst the teenagers who had sent sexually suggestive messages, the survey found that 66% of girls and 60% of boys did so to be ‘fun or flirtatious’; 52% of teenage girls did so as a ‘sexy present’ for their boyfriend and 40% of teenage girls did so as a ‘joke’ (The National Campaign.org and Cosmogirl.com 2008, p.5).

Hamilton believes however, that ‘far from being innocent fun and games, ‘sexting’ can have serious consequences for those involved’ (The Age 2009). She found that girls were coming into sexual assault units traumatised ‘as if ... they'd been raped’ (The Age 2009). A recent case in Ohio highlighted the worst consequences of ‘sexting’ when a teenage girl committed suicide after nude photos she had sent her boyfriend were circulated amongst students, who then taunted her about them (Kennedy Manzo 2009, p.2).

The Assistant Director of the Queensland Education Department, Patrea Walton, has said that ‘sexting’ is an increasing phenomenon in schools and that there is a need to support schools in addressing it (Chilcott 2009). Walton believes this is an issue not just for schools but for parents and society as a whole to work together to combat it (Chilcott 2009).
A further risk with mobile phones is the ease of identity theft and fraud. The mobile phone has become a portable device that users usually carry with them everywhere and store much information about themselves in the form of contacts, messages, photos, and music. Thus personal information becomes readily available which increases the risk of solicitation and grooming as well as identity theft and fraud.

Further functionality of mobile phones is happening through the use of technology enabling phones to be used as ‘mobile wallets’ for payment of services such as purchases from vending machines, making electronic payments, buying tickets online, paying for parking metres, online shopping and also as electronic keys for entrance into homes and offices (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.27). Again these additional functions give rise to risks of identity theft and fraud.

In conclusion, there are wide ranging negative, as well as positive, effects on children and young people when interacting with new media technologies. This chapter has mainly dealt with the negative effects but these must be balanced with the positive effects media can bring. Research has shown that watching educational television and using the Internet can improve academic performance and that children and young people feel more comfortable finding information, particularly on sexual matters, from the media rather than talking about it with their parents.
The negative effects from the media depend on whether one takes an ‘active media’ or an ‘active user’ perspective. It is important to remember however, that ‘no firm evidence of harm is not evidence of no harm’ (Byron 2008, p.161). While both perspectives have valid points, it is still necessary to protect children and young people from harm and offence, particularly when going online. The risks of cyber stalking, sexual solicitation, cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate and illegal content, are all serious issues that need to be addressed. It is a concern when a large number of young people believe that they were too young to see pornography when they first did. While it is necessary to teach children and young people resilience to what media content they may be inadvertently, or otherwise, exposed to, it is still necessary to find ways to prevent it happening in the first place. Whether this is best done through regulation or educational programmes will be discussed in chapters 8 and 9.
Chapter 6  A COMPARISON OF EXISTING REGULATIONS OF MEDIA CONTENT IN AUSTRALIA, NZ AND THE UK

Given the recent move from government regulation to self-regulation in the media industry, it is worth noting what regulation is in force today. This chapter investigates the current status of regulation of media content by the governments of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Such legislation is driven by the guiding principles of the UNROC and research such as that discussed in the previous chapter. A comparative study is helpful as it shows how the three countries have dealt with the issues of regulation by government and self-regulation by the industry. This shows how Australia compares to other similar countries in these matters.

In democratic societies there is a history of having some form of regulation and control over what is broadcast and displayed over the television, radio, in the press, and at the movies. While this is a polemic issue, there has been an attempt to maintain a balance between upholding freedom of speech and expression and the protection of individual rights. Human rights, and in particular the rights of children, including the right to be protected from harm and offence, must be maintained through regulating what is broadcast. In Australia, New Zealand and the UK there are regulatory bodies that govern what material can be broadcast and these are as follows.
6.1 Regulatory Bodies

In Australia, the Broadcasting Act of 1992, brought in a new flexible, regulatory system in which the Authority played a consultative role in the way programming content was to be regulated. It allowed the various broadcasting industry sectors to set their own programming guidelines, in the form of codes of practice.

The Authority is the Broadcasting Authority of Australia, which is now known as the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). Its mission is ‘to be known as an integrated, forward-looking, proactive and flexible organisation that is recognised as a leading communications regulator that supports and encourages an innovative and vibrant communications sector’ (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007). It thus provides an environment of self-regulation and competition within the broadcasting industry, which engenders a regulatory system within a democratic framework. ACMA is also responsible in ensuring that the broadcasting industry respects community standards and is responsive to audience and user needs.

In Europe, concern with the regulation of broadcast content in regard to the protection of children and adolescents, has been increasing since the 1980’s. In 1989 the European Union enacted the Directive on Television without Frontiers, which was later amended in 1987. This directive established a legal framework governing television networks in its member states. It ordered the member states to ensure that
television stations under their jurisdiction do not broadcast any programme that ‘seriously impairs the physical, mental, or moral development of minors under age 18, in particular programs that involve pornography and gratuitous violence’ (Guilherme 2006, p.139).

The United Kingdom, in particular, has a long history of protecting the rights of children in regards to the potential negative influence of the mass media, dating back to 1933 (Guilherme 2006, p.141). There have been several regulatory authorities in Britain including the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC), the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), Radiocommunications Agency, and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority. In 2002, the Office of Communications Act established Ofcom as a body corporate consolidating all regulators. Its duties, as set out in the act, require Ofcom to maintain plurality in the broadcasting industry, to ensure a quality, wide ranging network of communications throughout the United Kingdom and to protect consumers against offensive or harmful material and against unfairness and the infringement of privacy (Ofcom 2003). Ofcom operates on a principle of minimal intervention but with a willingness to intervene ‘firmly, promptly and effectively where required’ (Ofcom 2003). It strives to ensure that intervention is evidence-based and enacted in the least intrusive manner (Ofcom 2003). In 2005, Ofcom issued its Broadcasting Code, which defined the ratings criteria for television programming within the United Kingdom, with the exception of the BBC, which has its own internal criteria (Guilherme 2006).
In New Zealand, the Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) is the regulating body. It was established in 1989 when the Broadcasting Act was formalized which required broadcasters to maintain programming standards that are consistent with the observance of good taste, decency, the maintenance of law and order, individual privacy, and impartiality, among other aspects (New Zealand Government 1989). In 2007 the BSA issued a statement of intent outlining its mission and objectives. Its mission is to ‘support fairness and freedom in broadcasting through impartial complaints determination, effective research and informing stakeholders’ (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008). The BSA is not a censorship body but a reviewing organization with determination powers relevant only after a broadcast has occurred. It believes the two main issues in broadcasting are independence and fairness and it seeks to ensure the freedom of expression for broadcasters and audiences in delivering and accessing programme content and to foster public awareness of broadcasting issues to ensure fairness in broadcasting (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008).

Australia, Britain and New Zealand all maintain a regulatory system that allows the broadcasting industry to operate in a free market but with the authority to intervene if necessary. Of the three, Britain’s willingness to intervene firmly when necessary makes it the most assertive authority. New Zealand takes the most liberal position, while Australia lies somewhere in between.
6.2 Existing Regulations in Television and Film Broadcasting

6.2.1 Australia

In Australia, the Broadcasting Services Act of 1992 empowered the Australian Broadcasting Authority to impose conditions on a licensee requiring it to comply with the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice. The code covers content of material that is a concern to the community including:

- Program classifications;
- Accuracy, fairness and respect for privacy in news and current affairs;
- Advertising time on television;
- Placement of commercials and programs promotions;
- Complaints handling (Free TV Australia 2010).

The code operates alongside the ABA’s standards which regulate children’s programmes and Australian content of programmes. The code was revised in 2010 to place additional requirement on broadcasters and to cover the new multi digital channels.

The Broadcasting Services Act 1992 does not specifically mention the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, unlike New Zealand and the UK. The Act does however refer to it, as the guidelines state that when children are likely to be a significant part of the audience, the broadcaster needs to be aware of whether the matter would be ‘distressing or harmful to children’ (The Attorney-General's
The Guidelines also state that the broadcaster must take into account, when a programme is primarily directed at children, that the topic must be dealt with ‘in a manner that has sufficient regard to the healthy educational, emotional and physical development of children’ (The Attorney-General's Department 2000). This is in accordance with Article 17 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice divides each broadcast day into classification zones (see Appendix A), which are based on the majority viewing audience at that time, with particular regard to children. Only material which is suitable for a particular classification zone can be shown during that zone. The most stringent restrictions apply to the G (General) zone and the least restrictions apply to the MA (Mature Audience) and AV (Adult Viewing). Films are classified by the National Classification Board and must be adapted to suit the particular broadcasting zone. Children’s (C) and Pre-school Children’s (P) classification zones are moveable within bands laid down in the Children’s Television Standards. These zones overlap other zones and take precedence over them.

In addition, the Children’s Television Standards, which were reviewed in 2008 and revised in 2009, are incorporated in the Broadcasting Act 1992, and provide the following restrictions: C material must meet the criteria of suitability for children (excluding pre-school children) under the age of 14; P material must meet the criteria
of suitability for pre-school children. The criteria for suitability for C and P programming is as follows:

A children’s program is one which:

- is made specifically for children or groups of children;
- is entertaining;
- is well produced using sufficient resources to ensure a high standard of script, cast, direction, editing, shooting, sound and other production elements;
- enhances a child’s understanding and experience; and
- is appropriate for Australian children. (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.8)

(See Appendix A for programming time bands). A licensee is required to broadcast 390 hours of C and P material of which one third has to be P material each year. (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.8). There are also regulations concerning advertising and competitions during children’s programming time. Thus it can be seen that the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 has quite firm regulation of media content on Australian television, with particular regard to children under 14.

Television classification guidelines are based on the guidelines for film and computer games issued by the National Classification Board. The national classification scheme is based on the Commonwealth Classification (Publications, Films and Computer
Games) Act 1995 and a co-operative agreement between the Commonwealth, States and Territories. The Act contains a National Classification Code, which can be varied at times by Commonwealth, State or Territory Ministers, but must be adhered to before films and computer games can be published (National Classification Board 2008, p.2). Under the Act, there are several issues to be taken into account, such as ‘the standards of decency, morality and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults’ and the ‘literary, educational or artistic merit’ of the film or computer game. (National Classification Board 2008, p.4). Under the code, classification decisions are made with the principles that adults should be able to see, read or hear what they want, children need to be protected from material that could harm or disturb them and everyone has a right to be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that could be offensive (National Classification Board, 2008, p.4). The National Classification Board, therefore, see their position as one of advising the public of the content of a publication so that adults can make their own decisions and decisions on behalf of their children.

Films and computer games are classified according to the impact of various elements ranging from very mild to very high. The six classifiable elements are:

- Themes
- Violence
- Sex
- Language
- Drug use

- Nudity

The Act determines the various classification categories and the code describes them. They are set out in Appendix B.

Further information about the classification of films and computer games can be obtained from the brochure entitled Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games published by the Office of Film and Literature. It is available in downloadable format from the ACMA website.

Thus it can be seen that, in Australia, the older media formats of television, film and computer games are well regulated and that these regulations are regularly updated to maintain consistency with current community standards.

6.2.2 New Zealand

The Broadcasting Act of 1989, which established the Broadcasting Standards Authority, made broadcasters responsible for ensuring its programmes were consistent with the observance of good taste, decency, the maintenance of law and order, individual privacy, and impartiality. The BSA is responsible for administering the standards and encouraging broadcasters to develop appropriate codes of practice. The Free to Air Television Code of Broadcasting Practice (2009) explicitly states that ‘Broadcasters and the BSA also acknowledge that New Zealand is party to the United
Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’. According to Dominic Sheehan, the CEO of the BSA, The Convention is the ‘backdrop against which the child-centric provisions of the Codes are developed’ (Sheehan 2010). Broadcasting standards decisions also cite the Convention, which is used as a reference base. Social responsibility and the statutory right to freedom of expression are fundamental to broadcasters and to the BSA (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2006, p.3). The standards were revised and reissued in 2009.

The eleven standards with a brief summary of each are in Appendix A. Programme classifications and broadcasting times are also in Appendix A.

Further information on broadcasting standards and classifications in New Zealand can be found in the Free to Air Television Code of Broadcasting Practice handbook. This is published by the Broadcasting Standards Authority, New Zealand and is available to download from their website in PDF format.

Films, videos and publications are classified by the Office of Film and Literature Classification, which was set up by the Films, Videos and Publications Classification Act 1993 (The Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2010 #161). This is a Government body whose vision is that ‘New Zealand society is protected from the harm caused by the unrestricted availability of restricted and objectionable publications’ (The Office of Film and Literature Classification 2010). Under the Act
all films, videos and publications offered for supply or exhibition to the public must carry a label showing its classification.

The Act empowers the Labelling Body to issue labels for films, videos, DVDs and computer games it has rated or cross-rated G, PG or M from Australia or Britain. The Labelling Body must send anything that would receive a higher classification to the Classification Office for classification, after which the Classification Office will direct the Labelling Body to issue the appropriate label (The Office of Film and Literature Classification 2010).

Film labels are colour coded, much the same as traffic lights:

- **GREEN** means anyone can view a film
- **YELLOW** means that anyone can view the film, but the film may contain material, such as violence or sexual themes, which may offend or upset some people. Parental guidance is advised before children view the film.
- **RED** means that the film is legally restricted and can only be viewed by the audience specified. There are no exceptions to this restriction.

All labels have a rating or classification symbol and usually a descriptive note briefly explaining the nature of content in the film that may be of concern to viewers, for
example, whether the film contains violence or sex. A labelling system such as this allows parents to easily see what films are suitable for a particular age group.

Ratings are assigned to unrestricted films and are usually applied by the Film and Video Labelling Body. There are different levels of ratings, which can be found in Appendix B. More information can be found concerning classification of films on the OFLC website, http://www.censorship.govt.nz/index.html.

New Zealand therefore, has a strong commitment to upholding the 'Rights of the Child', in particular, with regard to the regulation of television broadcasting. The Government of New Zealand also maintains control of the Classification Board, unlike Australia and the United Kingdom, where the Classification Boards are independent bodies. The government of New Zealand therefore, has strong regulation and guidelines concerning the older media formats of television, radio, film, videos and publications, with particular regard for the protection of children.

6.2.3 United Kingdom

In the UK, the Government is ‘fully committed to children’s rights and the continued implementation’ of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to ‘make it a reality for all children and young people living in the UK’ (The
The Convention underpins legislation in the UK regarding children. Children are protected from harm and offence that can arise through broadcast material through the broadcasting licensing system and Ofcom’s standard codes. Ofcom, the broadcasting regulatory body in the United Kingdom, introduced a new broadcasting code in 2009, following a review consultation in June to September 2009. The Ofcom Broadcasting Code (the Code) came into effect on 25 July 2005 and as part of its duties and functions, Ofcom review the code from time to time. After discussion with stakeholders including broadcasters and consumer groups, it was decided to clarify some of the rules in particular relating to material of a sexual nature and competitions (Ofcom 2009, p3).

In setting out the code, Ofcom was concerned with upholding freedom of expression as a democratic right, but within a regulatory framework that sets out clear principles and rules for broadcasters. In so doing, the code provides broadcasters more freedom for creativity and adult audiences greater freedom in exercising their choices in an informed manner. At the same time, the code robustly protects children under 18 whom Ofcom considers too young to make informed choices for themselves.

One of the principles of the code is ‘to ensure that generally accepted standards are applied to the content of television and radio services so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion in such services of harmful and/or offensive material’ (Ofcom 2005). There are particular rules that apply in relation to people under 18 to ensure that they are protected from harm and/or
offence. Material that might ‘seriously impair the physical, mental or moral development of people under eighteen must not be broadcast’ (Ofcom 2005). Also children must be protected by appropriate scheduling of programmes on the television. The code stipulates a watershed time between 9.00pm and 5.30am. Material that is unsuitable for children cannot be shown outside of the watershed. The following topics are of concern when deciding the suitability or otherwise of material shown before the watershed:

- Drugs, smoking, solvent or alcohol
- Violence and dangerous behaviour
- Offensive language
- Sex
- Nudity
- Exorcism, the occult and the paranormal

The classification of films, videos and video games is the responsibility of the British Film and Classification Board (BBFC). The BBFC is an independent, non-government body, which classifies films on behalf of local authorities who licence cinemas under the Licensing Act 2003. The Board issued new classification guidelines in 2009 after wide consultation with the public, as it sees its role as one of reflecting public opinion. The revised guidelines also classify video works which are distributed by means of download or streaming over the Internet under a voluntary
scheme called BBFC.online (British Board of Film Classification 2009, p.4). The
guidelines are not a legal document and are intended for use in an informative
manner. They are set out in Appendix B. Further information regarding the
classification of films and videos in the United Kingdom can be found at the BBFC
website http://www.bbfc.co.uk.

Thus it can be seen that the United Kingdom, like New Zealand, is fully committed to
upholding the 'Rights of the Child' in regards to protecting children from harm and
offence in what is broadcast on the television and radio. The United Kingdom has
strong regulation concerning television and radio broadcasting and its film
classification is regularly updated to reflect current community standards as it is in
Australia. In all three countries, there is strong regulation concerning the older media
formats of television, radio, film, video and computer games, and publications. The
lack of regulation is one that concerns the new media technologies, in particular the
Internet, and its easy access to children and young people. The challenges of
regulating the new media technologies are discussed further in Chapter 8.

In the following chapter I will discuss recent reports undertaken by all three countries
concerning the use of media technologies in the twenty first century by children and
young people. These reports show the important role that media technologies play in
the lives of children and young people today and emphasise the need to have some
form of regulation over the new media technologies.
Chapter 7 A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE USE OF MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

This thesis mounts a comparative argument about how media is consumed and regulated by three English-speaking countries. This chapter begins by looking at the different types of media that children aged 6 to 15 have access to and the amount of time that is taken up by media activities. The data has been collected from various studies that were undertaken by the governments of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom between 2006 and 2010. The chapter highlights some of the problems arising from the pattern of media usage.

7.1 Reports into the Use of Media by Children and Young People in Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand

The data for this comparative thesis has been taken from the following sources: a report on Media and Communications in Australian Families 2007 (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007) which was commissioned by the Australian Communications and Media authority; Media Literacy Audit: Report on Media Literacy amongst Children, (Ofcom 2006) and which was updated in 2010 as UK Children’s Media Literacy (Ofcom 2010), which were commissioned by Ofcom (the Office of Communications in the UK); Seen and Heard: Children’s Media Use, Exposure and Response (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008) which
was commissioned by the New Zealand Broadcasting Standards Authority, together with the New Zealand eGeneration Study 2005: Kids and Teens Online (Reddington 2005). The data from both of the reports from the UK have been included to show developing trends. The contextual framework is as follows.

7.1.1 Scope of the reports

The three reports: Media and Communications in Australian Families 2007, Media Literacy Audit: Report on Media Literacy amongst Children, Seen and Heard: Children’s Media Use, Exposure and Response, took different approaches and were undertaken for different reasons. However, they all had a focus on the extent to which children and young people have access to, and make use of, media devices. This included their use of new media technologies, as well as the time spent using all media technologies. Their different approaches influenced the content of these reports, which, in some areas, made a comparative study more challenging. The scope of these reports was as follows:

*Seen and Heard: Children’s Media Use, Exposure and Response* was commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Authority of New Zealand (BSA) to gain an understanding of how ‘children felt about their broadcast media relationships’, how the media affects children’s behaviour and what concerns children, as opposed to their caregivers, about the media (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.1). The study involved face-to-face surveys of 604 children between the ages of 6 and 13, which
was a slightly younger age than the studies performed by the other two countries, and their caregivers. The BSA commissioned Colmar Brunton, an independent research agency, to perform the research, which was conducted between The 27th of August, and 23rd of November 2007. The study was done in conjunction with a literature review conducted in 2007 entitled *Children’s Media Use and Responses: a review of the literature* by Sue Jackson et al.

The objectives of the study were formulated on the results of the literature review which was based on the premise that much of the ‘media effects’ literature is presented as a ‘hypodermic model of media effects’ in which media messages are injected into children who absorb them completely and unquestioningly, as in the ‘active media’ model discussed in chapter 5. This has been challenged by constructivist theory and cognitive development psychology which believe that children are active viewers and selectors of media, bringing with them a lot of prior experience, knowledge and value systems in interpreting and constructing meanings from what they are viewing, as in the ‘active user’ model. The reviewers therefore wanted to focus more on the positive influences of the media such as ‘peer interactions, skill development, media literacy, and creative play’ (Jackson, Low et al. 2007, p.9). The reviewers were also confined to parameters set by the BSA, which excluded literature that was older than 10 years.
*Media Literacy Audit: Report on Media Literacy amongst Children* was commissioned by the Office of Communications in the UK (Ofcom) to provide an audit of children’s media literacy skills. It was done in conjunction with a media literacy audit of adults, as it is a responsibility of Ofcom to promote media literacy in the UK under section 11 of the Communications Act, 2003. Ofcom defines media literacy as ‘the ability to use, understand and create media and communications’ (Ofcom 2010, p.10).

Similarly to the BSA report, the Ofcom report was based on quantitative fieldwork and interviews with children aged 8-15 and their parents across the UK. Fieldwork took place between the 8th of June to the 5th of August, 2005 and was conducted by the research agency saville rossiter-base (Ofcom 2006, p.8). The Children’s Media Literacy Audit in 2010 included this survey as well as two others; a *Media Literacy Audit Tracker*, a quantitative survey of children aged 5-15 and their parents across the UK between April 2009 to May 2009 and September 2009 to October 2009; and a *Young People’s Media Usage* Survey, again a quantitative tracking survey of children aged 5-15 and their parents in 2007 and 2008 (Ofcom 2010 p.11). The methodology is expanded in the following section.

The reports focus on media literacy amongst children aged 5–15 but draw no conclusions. They provide background information on children’s ownership and access to various types of media devices and platforms. They examine each device individually to measure the extent of media literacy and then look at children’s
attitudes and preferences for different media platforms. The most recent audit also looks at children’s and parents’ mediation strategies, the knowledge, understanding and creative usage of media amongst 8-15 year olds and how children learn about digital media.

Media and Communications in Australian Families 2007 was commissioned by the Australian Communications and Media Authority as a research project to report on the results of two studies. It includes a national community research study into the use of electronic media and communications in Australian families with children aged 8 – 17 years of age, as well as a comprehensive literature review.

Its focus was to provide information on how Australian families manage and negotiate the usage of electronic media and communications in the home. It also wanted to look at the risks and benefits associated with the different types of media.

The research for the ACMA study took place between February and June of 2007. The methodology it used to collect the data is explained in the following section.

The literature review prioritises, but does not exclude, material prior to 1997. It covers research using diverse methodologies and theoretical approaches and draws from a
range of differing academic fields as well as looking at studies conducted by media regulatory bodies.

In contrast to the BSA report, it includes ‘media effects’ research but moves beyond the discipline of psychology to include research in the disciplines of communication and cultural studies, sociology, education, and public health.

It includes research from Britain, the US, Europe and Australasia with a priority on Australian research (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p. 209). The review is based on high quality research on both the benefits as well as the risks to children from media content and use.

The scope of the three reports concerning children, young people and the media differ therefore, in that New Zealand was researching the benefits of media technologies, the UK was assessing media literacy levels and Australia was researching the benefits as well as the risks of media technologies. These different approaches however, had little bearing on the outcome of this thesis as they all supplied the data showing the extent to which children and young people are involved with new media technologies.
7.1.2 Aims and purposes of the reports

The purpose of the BSA report *Seen and Heard: Children’s Media Use, Exposure and Response* was to find out what children in New Zealand think about and do with media. Its aims were to look at the access and demographic variations of family media environments; the social patterns of children’s media access and use; children’s thoughts and feelings about media; rules and protections placed on children’s access to and use of media; and parental concerns about their children’s relationships with media (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.1).

The main aim of the Ofcom report *Media Literacy Audit: Report on Media Literacy amongst Children* was to assess the extent of media literacy amongst children aged 8 –15 years of age across the UK. Ofcom recognizes the importance of electronic communications and that it plays a central role in everyday life in Britain. Electronic communications ‘underpin all businesses and are central to the working of a modern democracy’ (Ofcom 2006, p.1).

The purpose of the 2006 report therefore, was to provide stakeholders in the media arena with information regarding children’s media opinions and habits and thus enabling the targeting of resources appropriately (Ofcom 2006, p.7). Ofcom continues to provide frequent reporting on media literacy amongst children and young people, aged 5 – 15, to provide a broad overview ‘across the key platforms of ‘television, radio, the Internet and mobile phones’ (Ofcom 2010, p.10). In addition, Ofcom seeks
to find ‘emerging issues and skills gaps’ that will help Ofcom and stakeholders to promote media literacy (Ofcom 2010, p.10).

The aim of the ACMA report, *Media and Communications in Australian Families 2007*, in contrast, was ‘to understand the long term psychological effect of the media on children, families and society’ (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p. 209). ACMA, like Ofcom, recognizes the importance of media activities to all families in Australia and that they play an essential role in all families regardless of socio-economic factors.

While the research included self-report diaries and interviews with children, the report was focused on the family as a whole. Its purpose was to look at the risks and benefits that new media technologies provide and ways that parental intervention can negotiate access to and use of the various media platforms. It aims to provide a more balanced approach to the long-term influences of media on children and thus to society, rather than focusing on the negative aspects only (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.215).

**7.1.3 Methodologies used to collect data**

The methodology for collecting the data was different for each study but in each case interviews were carried out with both children and their parents.
The research for the ACMA study took place between February and June of 2007. The methodology it used to collect the data involved:

- In depth qualitative research with families
- A telephone survey of parents and children aged 8 – 17 years (n=751 households)
- A self-complete diary by the children living in these households (n=1003) (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.21).

The Ofcom data was collected by interviews with both parents and children as part of a media literacy audit of children. Fieldwork took place between the 8th of June to the 5th August, 2005 and was conducted by the research agency saville rossiter-base (Ofcom 2006, p.8).

A total of 1335 ‘core’ interviews were conducted in English with parents and children. 672 interviews were conducted with children aged 8 – 11 and 664 interviews were conducted with children 12 – 15, taking approximately 15 minutes and 25 minutes respectively. The interviews were conducted across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In addition, a further 201 interviews were conducted with children from an ethnic background (Ofcom 2006, p.63).
Included in the 2010 Media Literacy report was the Media Literacy Audit Tracker which was a quantitative survey that involved a total of 2131 in-home interviews with children aged 5-15 and their 2131 parents/carers. It extended from April to May 2009 and from September to October 2009.

Additionally, the Young People’s Media Usage Survey, a quantitative tracking survey, conducted in 2007 and 2008, was also included. This involved 3,696 in-home interviews with parents and children aged 5-15, conducted during 2007, with a further 2,066 in-home interviews with parents and children aged 5-15 conducted during 2008 (Ofcom 2010, p.11).

Similarly to the Ofcom study, the data for the BSA study was collected by interviews with both children and their caregivers in the home. It was again conducted by an independent research agency, Colmar Brunton and took place between 27th August and the 23rd November, 2007.

A total of 604 children and their caregivers were interviewed and these were selected by random to provide a representative sample of all children aged 6 – 13 years living in New Zealand. The researchers attempted to interview children and caregivers separately, but this was not often possible as caregivers mainly chose to be close by. 78% of parents chose to stay in the room with their children and 38% of those commented at some time during the child’s interview. However only 3% of parents
actually answered on behalf of their child (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.9). Some examples of parents’ comments when asked about concerns with sexual material include the following:

*The language used today – how can you teach children to be pleasant when they see bad examples on TV? I’m worried about him watching violence, or seeing adverts, for example, for Viagra during the news, which are not appropriate for him to see.*

*I am concerned about things like ‘Shortland Street’, which is on at 7:30pm, which shows teenagers sleeping around. Music videos which are bad for body image – skinny girls with hardly any clothes on* (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.75).

The survey therefore, sought to gain the opinions of children and young people, but responses by parents and caregivers were also taken into account.

### 7.2 Findings of the Reports - Ownership and Time use by Children and Young People

#### 7.2.1 Television and video

Television ownership is well entrenched in the Australian family household with more than 99% of households owning at least one, and the average household having three televisions. VCR’s are still widespread with 89% of households owning at least
one but DVD players have overtaken them with 97% of households owning at least one and the average household having two players (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.24).

In Australia, (after converting the data from hours and minutes per day to percent of hours per day) children aged 8 – 11 spend an average of 1.9 hours per day watching television and 0.4 hours per day watching DVDs, a total of 2.3 hours per day. (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.63)

Young people aged 12 – 14 spend an average of 1.92 hours per day watching television and 0.33 hours per day watching DVDs, a total of 2.25 hours per day. (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.63)

In the UK, television is similarly popular amongst children and young people with 99.6% of households with children having at least one. (Ofcom 2006, p.15) Additionally, digital television is quite widespread with 72% of children aged 8 – 15 having digital television at home in 2006 and this has increased to 92% in 2009 (Ofcom 2006, p. 10, Ofcom, 2010 #124, p.12). The Media Literacy Audit also provides figures of media devices owned by children aged 8 – 15. In 2006 19% of children aged 8 – 11 and 24% of young people aged 12 – 15 owned a VCR, while 18% of children aged 8 – 11 and 24% of young people aged 12 – 15 owned a DVD player (Ofcom 2006, p.12). The Media Literacy Audit 2010 includes data for
ownership of Digital Video Recorders, or DVR’s, which is 36% of 5 - 11 year olds and 43% of 12 –15 year olds (Ofcom 2010, p.14).

In the UK, (after converting the data from hours per week to hours per day) children aged 8 –11 spend an average of 1.88 hours per day watching television and 0.64 hours per day watching DVDs/videos, a total of 2.52 hours per day (Ofcom 2006, p.17). In 2009 this has increased to 2.24 hours per day watching television with no figures available for watching DVDs/videos (Ofcom 2010, p.33).

Young people aged 12 – 15 spend an average of 2.1 hours per day watching television and 0.68 hours per day watching DVDs/videos, a total of 2.78 hours per day (Ofcom 2006, p.17). This has increased slightly to 2.41 hours per day watching television in 2009 (Ofcom 2010, p.33).

Likewise in New Zealand, television ownership is ‘nearly universal’ with 99.5% of households with children aged 6 – 13 owning a television (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.11) and 65% of households owning more than one television (Jackson, Low et al. 2007, p.11). More than 79% of New Zealand households owned a VCR in 2007 and 92% a DVD player (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.11).

The amount of time children in New Zealand spend watching television is taken from a report entitled New Zealand eGeneration 2005: kids and teens Online, Reddington,
2005. After converting the data from hours per week to percent of hours per day children aged 6 - 17 watch an average of 1.6 hours per day watching television and 0.46 hours per day watching DVD’s/Videos, a total of 2.06 hours per day (Reddington 2005, p.15).

![Graph showing time spent watching television and videos](image)

**Figure 10** Time spent watching television and videos

### 7.2.2 Computer and Internet use

Computers are now almost as common as televisions in the home. In Australia 98% of households in 2007 have at least one computer with the average household having two. 96% of children and young people use a computer at home and 18% have a
computer in their bedroom (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.27).

In Australia 87% of children use the Internet at home (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.27). Young people in the 12 – 15 age group, who are generally at high school use the Internet more than children in the 8 – 11 age group. On average children aged 8 – 11 spend 0.87 hours per day using the Internet and another 0.06 hours per day using the computer offline (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.63).

Young people aged 12 – 14 spend an average of 1.67 hours per day using the Internet and another 0.05 hours per day using the computer offline (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.63).

Access to the Internet in households in the UK has increased greatly from 64% of children aged 8 – 15 having access at home in 2006 to 83% in 2009 (Ofcom 2006, p.35, Ofcom, 2010 #124, p.14).

In the survey group in the UK, 48% of children aged 8 – 11 used the Internet at home in 2006 while 65% of young people aged 12 – 15 did so (Ofcom 2006, p.35). This has
increased in 2009 to 76% of children aged 8-11 and 83% of young people aged 12-15 (Ofcom 2010, p.15).

After converting the data from hours per week to hours per day, children aged 8 – 11 spent an average of 0.63 hours per day using the Internet in 2006 and 1.08 hours per day in 2009 (Ofcom 2006, p.38, Ofcom, 2010 #124, p.33).

Young people aged 12 – 15 spent an average of 1.14 hours per day using the Internet in 2006 and 1.95 hours per day in 2009 (Ofcom 2006, p.38, Ofcom, 2010 #124, p.33).

In New Zealand 88% of households with children aged 6 – 13 have a computer in the house (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.11).

62% of children in the survey group use the Internet at home. As in Australia and the UK, children in the 9-13 age group use the Internet more – 70%, while 48% of children aged 6-8 use the Internet at home (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.13). However, only 6% of all children use the Internet in their bedrooms (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.14).

The eGeneration survey found that 78% of children aged 6–17 had used the Internet in the last week (Reddington 2005, p.10). It does not state however, whether that is at
home or elsewhere. The average time children 6 – 17 spend using the Internet is 0.67 hours per day (Reddington 2005, p.15).

Figure 11 Time spent using the Internet

7.2.3 Mobile phone use

Mobile phone usage is quite prevalent in Australia with 97% of households having at least one and the average family household having three mobile phones (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.30). Ownership by children is not as high as in the UK however, but this dramatically increases around the age of twelve or about the time children start high school. 16% of 8-year-old children own a mobile phone compared to 57% of 12 year olds and 90% of 17 year olds (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.31).
Time spent using a mobile phone is 3 minutes per day for 8 – 11 year olds increasing to 19 minutes per day for 12 – 14 year olds (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.63). The most popular use of mobile phones is sending text/picture messages, then making/receiving phone calls and taking photos (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.31).

In the UK in 2006, 49% of 8-11 year-old children owned a mobile phone, and 82% of 12-15 year olds (Ofcom 2006, p.47). Mobile phone usage has also increased in the UK with 59% of 8-11 year olds and 93% of 12 – 15 year olds using them by 2009 (Ofcom 2010, p.16). In addition, 3% of 8-11 year olds and 14% of 12-15 year olds now use their mobile phones to access the Internet (Ofcom 2010, p.17). There is no data available on the time spent using mobile phones but there is data on what mobile phones are mostly used for. The most popular use of mobile phones in 2006 was for sending text messages then making phone calls, playing games, taking photos, sending photo messages, taking videos, accessing the Internet and sending video messages, in that order (Ofcom 2006, p.50). This has not changed much in 2009 with the exception that listening to music is the fourth most popular use, while playing games has dropped to fifth place (Ofcom 2010, p.30). Also in 2009 8% of 12-15 year olds use their phones to access websites including social networking sites (Ofcom 2010, p.30).

In New Zealand, as in Australia and the UK, mobile phone ownership is much higher in the older age group with 62% of 12-13 year olds owning a mobile phone, 25% of 9
– 11 year olds and only 5% of 6-8 year olds (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.5).

The most common use of mobile phones is to play games, closely followed by sending text messages, 82% and 81% respectively. The next most common use is making phone calls (47%) and taking pictures (43%) (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.5).

Children in the 12 – 13 year age group also use their mobile phones to send and receive picture messages (34%), surf the Internet (23%) and listen to MP3s (21%) (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.5).

The eGeneration study found that children aged 6–17 years old spend an average of 41 minutes per day sending text messages on mobile phones (Reddington 2005, p.15).

7.2.4 Time spent viewing alone

One of the concerns of each of the studies was the amount of time children and young people spend watching the television and movies and accessing the Internet on their own. While the incidence of having a television in a child’s bedroom is not as high in Australia as it is in the UK and New Zealand, access to the Internet in a child’s bedroom is similar.
In Australia, of children aged 8 – 11 years, 16.25% have a television in their bedroom, 8% have a DVD player and 9.25% have the Internet connected in the bedroom.

In the 12 – 15 year old age group, 21.25% have a television in their bedroom, 9% have a DVD player and 12% have the Internet connected in the bedroom. (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2007, p.50).

In the UK in 2006, of children aged 8 – 11 years, 71% had a television in their bedroom, (Ofcom 2006, p.16), 18% owned a DVD player, (Ofcom 2006, p.12) and 6% of children with the Internet at home have access to it in the bedroom (Ofcom 2006, p.37). In 2009, 67% of children aged 8-11 have a television in their bedroom with 20% having a digital television (Ofcom 2010, p.18). While this has decreased since 2006, the amount of children 8-11 with access to the Internet in their bedroom has doubled to 12% (Ofcom 2010, p.15).

In the 12 – 15 year old age group, 75% had a television in their bedroom in 2006 and this has slightly increased to 77% in 2009, with 31% having digital television (Ofcom 2006, p.16, Ofcom, 2010 #124, p.15). Of the same age group in 2006, 24% owned a DVD player, (Ofcom 2006, p.12) and 20% had access to the Internet in the bedroom. (Ofcom 2006, p.37). The number of young people with access to the Internet in the bedroom has increased to 31% in 2009 (Ofcom 2010, p.15).
In New Zealand 34% of children aged 12 – 13 years watch television in their bedroom, 22% watch DVDs or videos and 9% have Internet access (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.13).

In the 9 – 11 year old age group, 27% watch television in their bedroom, 9% watch DVDs or videos and 6% have Internet access (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.13).

In the 6 – 8 year old age group (not shown in chart for consistency with other countries), 24% watch television in their bedroom, 9% watch DVDs or videos and 3% have Internet access (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2008, p.13).

Figure 12 Media devices in bedrooms
7.3 Conclusions of the Reports

It is clear from the above data that children and young people in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom spend a lot of time each day watching the television and movies and surfing the Internet. Increasingly, much of the time spent watching or interacting with media is alone, particularly watching the television and browsing the Internet in the UK. As stated previously, anything that takes up so much time in the lives of children and young people should not be ‘dismissed as simply a pastime or a diversion. Anything that plays this much of a role in the lives of children deserves our attention’ (Roberts and Foehr 2004, p.203).

It is also clear that the lack of regulation of the Internet, and supervision in some cases, of the television and the Internet, means that children and young people are able to access material that would have been classified as unsuitable under the older media formats, which are more easily regulated. The difficulty in regulating the new media technologies is a challenge of the twenty first century and will be addressed further in the following chapter.
Chapter 8 THE CHALLENGES OF REGULATING NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

While regulation of the media industry has been moving from government control to self-control by the industry, the governments of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom still have ultimate control over the content available in the older media technologies. With the move from traditional broadcast media to new media technologies such as the Internet, 3G mobile phones and cable television, governments have been presented with new challenges for regulation. In particular, content is readily available from outside national boundaries and hence beyond national control. This chapter investigates the impact of these issues upon all three countries and concludes that an international approach is required.

In the past, as has been shown, it has been relatively easy to regulate the traditional media in the form of books, the cinema, videos, computer games and the television. In the case of books, videos and games, the onus has been on the seller to ensure that children are not allowed to purchase media that has been classified as inappropriate for their particular age group. The cinema was, and still is, legally obliged to ensure that cinema patrons are of the appropriate age to see any film rated MA15+ or R18+. The television in Australia has to comply with the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice as set out in the Broadcasting Services Act of 1992, which imposes conditions on a licensee regarding programming content. In addition, there are designated timeslots for broadcasting programmes suitable for the general public and
those that have been classified PG, M, MA or AV (adult violence). There are also
timeslots for programmes especially for children, which have been classified as C
(children’s) and P (pre-school children).

The advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web has brought with it new
challenges concerning the regulation of content. While it is illegal in Australia to
publish any material on the Internet that has been classified as RC or X18+ by the
Classification Board, and any material classified as R18+ or MA15+ that is not
subject to a ‘restricted access system’, such material that is published overseas is
easily accessible in Australia. The new 3G mobile phone, which has access to the
Internet, provides a personal and portable device that children can use wherever they
go, without adult supervision. Attempts to regulate the content of the Internet are
often met with great protests from civil libertarians. Nevertheless, the government in
Australia is currently committed to providing Internet filters in the interests of
protecting children from harm and offence.

In the UK a code of practice for self-regulation of content on mobile phones has been
developed. The code required mobile operators to appoint an independent
classification body to classify commercial content that is deemed unsuitable for
minors under 18. This classification is consistent with other material that would be
classified as 18 in films, magazines, video and computer games. All mobile phone
operators have content controls set as default to ‘on’ for pay-as-you-go customers and
the purchaser has to provide verification of age before the control can be turned off (Ofcom 2008, p.7).

The New Zealand Internal Affairs Department issued a new filtering system in March 2010 to specifically filter child sexual abuse images, known as the Digital Child Exploitation Filtering System. It is operated by the department in partnership with Internet service providers on a voluntary basis. It is also the role of the Department of Internal Affairs to investigate New Zealand websites and newsgroups to enforce censorship legislation (The Department of Internal Affairs 2010).

The debate about the ethics of censoring the Internet is ongoing. Civil libertarians such as Electronic Frontiers Australia see it as a direct attack on free speech and democracy. Hamilton (2008), however, states that ‘all but the most unthinking libertarians accept censorship laws that limit sexual content in film, television, radio, books and magazines’ so why not the Internet? (Hamilton 2008).

The Internet has no claims to a special status that make it exempt from the standards that are accepted as a ‘norm’ by society. It is not a ‘cyber utopia’ as some would claim they would like it to be. Moral standards are debated constantly and fluctuate from time to time. This is why the censorship boards in Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand all carry out research on a regular basis to find out what current community values and standards are and whether the current rating systems
accurately reflect public opinion. This was last carried out in Australia in 2008, New Zealand in 2007 and the United Kingdom in 2009. Each of these censorship boards is aware of the need to respond to changing social attitudes and adjust ratings accordingly. This is the basis for classification ratings in all three countries.

It is of use when considering limits on freedom, to understand the concerns parents have in regard to the new media technologies and, in particular, their children’s use of and access to the Internet. Flood and Hamilton (2003) found in a Newspoll that 85% of parents had strong concerns about their children viewing pornography on the Internet and 61% said they were ‘very concerned’ (Flood and Hamilton 2003, p.9). This poll also found that 93% of parents would support a system that automatically filtered out Internet pornography going into homes unless adult users asked otherwise (Flood and Hamilton 2003, p.9). The 2008 Eurobarometer survey found that parents of 6-17 year olds in the EU were ‘rather or very worried about their child seeing sexually/violently explicit images (65%), being a victim of online grooming (60%), getting information about self-harm, suicide or anorexia (55%), being bullied online by other children (54%), becoming isolated from other people (53%) and giving out personal/private information online (47%). A quarter of parents worry about all of these risks’ (Livingstone and Hadden 2009, p.18).

The increasing popularity of social networking sites has seen a corresponding increase in concerns about divulging personal information that could identify the child or its family in a public space. This is one of the key concerns that parents have about their
child’s use of social networking sites as they fear that a stalker or predator can use this information to find the child in real life (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.56).

It is important therefore, to mitigate the risks of going online so that the digital economy can continue to provide the financial, educational and social benefits that have become critically embedded in our daily lives. The ACMA has identified three ways to do this:

- Reduce the availability of illegal content
- Restrict access to illegal activity and content that might be considered inappropriate
- Build resilience to illegal activity and content that might be considered inappropriate (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.11).

The Australian Government plans to reduce the availability of illegal content and restrict access to illegal content with the introduction of content filtering at the Internet Service Provider (ISP) level. The government believes that ISP’s should take some responsibility to block illegal content on the Internet. ISP level content filtering is already occurring in countries such as Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden.
and the United Kingdom, according to the Government’s website (The Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy 2010).

At the time of writing, the current Australian Labor Government plans to introduce legislation which will require all ISPs in Australia to use filtering to block overseas hosted content that has been rated RC, refused classification, on the ACMA’s RC content list (The Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy 2010). This method of filtering is quite controversial, as many people believe it will be ineffectual due to the dynamic and constantly changing nature of URL’s, which appear on the list. Experience has also shown that such filters are easy to bypass. However, while it may not prevent access to RC content by those who are actively seeking it, it should prevent accidental exposure to children and minors.

Maintaining a balance between regulation of the Internet to protect children and young people from harm and offence and allowing free access to adults, can partially be helped by building resilience to online risk. This can be achieved through education, media literacy programmes and promotion of digital citizenship. Media literacy programmes will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Other methods to meet the challenges of mitigating the risks of going online and to foster trust in the digital economy, require a shared approach from multiple stakeholders. These include sectors such as government, industry, civil society and
online users themselves (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.17). An example of this is the establishment of the United Kingdom Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS), which includes members from industry, law enforcement, government departments and academia. It was established to oversee the implementation of recommendations from the Byron review (see Byron, 2008).

In Australia, the ACMA sees the government as having the role of setting out frameworks and standards that will help to achieve a safer online environment. Industry can help by ‘implementing safer and more secure practices in services’ as well as collaborating with the standards set by government (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.55). Users themselves can be more pro-active in taking responsibility for their behaviour online. Additionally, parents can supply parental controls on their computers at home to provide some protection for their children.

It is important to consider what Australians, as a society, think is appropriate for children and young people to be able to have access to in the form of what is currently considered to be restricted content. Perhaps those who are vehemently opposed to filtering the Internet would like to take a broader approach to censorship in general – do they believe that censorship laws should be erased completely? If so, how do we protect children and young people from harm and offence? On the other hand, it may be that regulation in its intended format, will not work and regulatory bodies need to look at other methods to protect children from harmful content. Perhaps an
international approach to regulation of media content over the Internet would be helpful. Members of the United Nations could make an international treaty to enforce Article 17 of the Rights of the Child. As most countries in the world are signatories to this Convention it would have almost global reach.

An international approach would also help to combat powerful commercial interests as it would hold more sway than presently is the case. How this would be implemented is a subject for further research.

On a more local level, another method to protect children from harm and offence is through media literacy or education of parents and children. There are several such programmes explaining how to stay safe online and these will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
I have argued the need for a special case for children in regards to regulation of media content. It has been shown that regulation of the older media technologies provides a level of protection for children despite the move from government to self-regulation by the media industry. The greatest challenges arise in regulating the new media technologies of the Internet and 3G mobile phones as described in the previous chapter. This chapter investigates an alternative to regulation which is education of children and young people in media literacy. Media literacy programmes aim to equip children and young people with the necessary skills to reduce the potential harm that the new media technologies might contain.

9.1 A Comparison of Media Literacy Programmes

Media literacy is a term that can mean different things to different people. Ofcom defines media literacy as ‘the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts’ (Ofcom 2006, p.10). Since then, the term digital literacy has been used to describe computer and ICT literacy. The digital economy has meant that the use of computers and the Internet has become ‘embedded in and critical for everyday financial and social activities’ (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.4). Digital media literacy skills are now necessary to engage in society and to operate in the 21st Century. The Digital Britain report (2009, p.5) states
Media literate people will be able to exercise informed choices about content and services and will be able to take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by new communications technologies. They will also be better able to protect themselves and those they are responsible for from potentially harmful or offensive materials.

This has extended the definition of media literacy to include skills to mitigate risks of going online to ensure that the public has trust and confidence in the digital environment. Media literacy then, will be addressed in this broader context in this discussion.

Governments in Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand have all taken on the responsibility of educating the public, adults and children, about the need for media literacy skills. The following section describes these and other non-government programmes.

9.1.1 Australia

In Australia, the ACMA has the role of providing information and advice to the community about ICT matters and consumer protection matters. Programmes administered by ACMA to promote media literacy include:
• Consumer and community advice across the areas of broadcasting, the Internet, telecommunications, and radiofrequency spectrum;

• Registration of broadcasting codes of practice

• A national regulatory scheme for online content

• The Cybersmart programme which gives advice about staying safe online

• Information on social networking

• Information about Internet security and safety (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009).

The Cybersmart program, which is managed by ACMA and is part of the Australian Government’s commitment to promoting online safety, particularly for children and young people aims to:

• Inform children, parents, teachers and library staff about cybersafety issues

• Educate audiences through information, resources and practical advice

• Empower children to be safe online (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009).

The program includes news and information about cybersafety issues, as well as resources to combat the problems that arise from using the Internet. Resources include videos such as ‘Let’s Fight it Together’ and ‘You’re Not Alone’ aimed at various age
groups to help children and young people deal with cyberbullying. Cybersmart also includes an outreach program, which provides professional development for educators and trainee teachers as well as presentations to parents and children. In addition, the program funds the Kids Helpline, a telephone number for young people to phone when they experience problems online, and a national telephone centre to provide advice for all Australians. There is also a Schools Gateway, which is a portal for primary and secondary schools to access all of ACMA’s resources concerning cybersafety (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009). The website is available at http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/.

Another Australian Government department that has media literacy programmes is the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. This department manages the Stay Smart Online programme, which provides advice to Australian users on how to secure their computers, their personal information and transactions online. It has advice for parents as well as interactive games and videos to support the education of parents, children, carers and teachers to stay safe online. It includes a free cyber security alert service, which can be downloaded and provides information about the latest cyber threats and vulnerabilities. Stay Smart Online has also developed an educational resource for primary and secondary students, the Budd:e, Education Security Package to raise awareness of e-security issues (The Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy 2010). The website is available at http://www.staysmartonline.gov.au.
The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy also manages the Net Alert Website, which also provides information about how to protect children online. It has a FAQ page and also provides advice on Internet Filters. It is available at [http://www.netalert.gov.au/home.html](http://www.netalert.gov.au/home.html).

**Non-Government Organisations**

The Australian Council of Children and the Media (ACCM) is a national, not for profit organisation whose aim is to support ‘families, industry and decision makers in building and maintaining a media environment that fosters the health, safety and wellbeing of Australian children’ (Young Media Australia, 2007). Its website provides information about the latest research into children and the media and strategies for parents to deal with any issues of concern that arise. It also includes a movie review section for parents to see in more detail what is in a movie before taking their child to see it. According to its annual report for 2009/2010, there were, on average, 31,000 visits per month to its children and media website. Testimonials from parents during the year include the following:

_I came across your site by chance and really liked your description of the film and which things would scare which age children. I wish I had seen it sooner and I will use it in the future to gauge which films might be appropriate for my daughter. I just wanted to take this time to thank you for the effort you appear to put into your reviews. You're doing a great job._

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I have always followed ACCM’s age recommendations and found them to be really useful, but in the case of Where the Wild Things Are I thought they must have it a bit wrong. Both of my sons (aged 8½ and six) loved the book so I couldn't see that it would be a problem for them to see the movie although the ACCM recommendation was 'Not recommended under 9 and parental guidance to 11 due to scary scenes and violence'. So I took them to see it. The older boy only just coped but the six year old was really frightened. So the review was spot on. I won't mistrust ACCM recommendations in the future (ACCM, 2010).

Its website is http://www.youngmedia.org.au.

Another non-profit organisation that provides media literacy programmes is Smart Online Safe Offline (SOSO), which is a collaboration between NAPCAN, ‘Australia’s leading advocate in preventing child abuse and neglect’ and Profero, a digital marketing group (Smart Online Safe Offline 2009). SOSO’s aim is to educate children and young people how to engage in the digital world in a relevant way while staying safe online by avoiding risks such as predators, stalkers, online fraud and theft and cyberbullying. Its website is http://www.soso.org.au/.

Dr. Darryl Cross, a psychologist who specialises in cyberbullying, has also recently launched a website to help parents deal specifically with this issue. It provides some
practical help and a free course for parents to help limit the effects of cyberbullying. As this is a relatively new website there are no figures to show the effectiveness of this programme. The website is http://www.cybersafetydoctor.com.au/.

9.1.2 The United Kingdom

The Office of Communications in the United Kingdom (Ofcom) has the responsibility to promote media literacy under section 11 of the Communications Act, 2003. It has achieved this mainly by doing continuous research into the media literacy levels of adults and children throughout the UK. Ofcom sees its role as providing leadership, setting the agenda, working in partnership with and acting as a catalyst for action for stakeholders (The Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Group 2009, p.9). A recent report entitled Digital Britain found that while there is a wide range of organizations providing media literacy programmes in the UK, both public and private, there was no ‘coherent national strategy’ and there were still ‘significant challenges to achieving the goal of a media literate UK population’ (The Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Group 2009 p.12). Ofcom believes that media literacy is critical for society to ‘embrace, engage and exploit the opportunities provided by a Digital Britain’ (The Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Group 2009, p.2).

Ofcom is not alone in its responsibility to promote media literacy in the UK; the BBC also acquired a duty to provide media literacy to the public in 2006. The BBC’s
Webwise programme provides a series of online guides for children and adults to keep children safe online. In addition to the safety component, the Webwise programme is a complete course on using the Internet, from how to connect your computer, configure web browsers, how to search online to how to get involved in online communities. Its website is at http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/. BBC online is the most visited and most trusted British content site in the UK (The Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Group 2009, p.7) and is therefore, well positioned to be a major provider of media literacy.

The BBC is a member of the newly formed UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS), which was formed as a direct result of the Byron Review Action Plan (2008). The Council consists of organisations from industry, charities and the public sector to work with various Government Departments, including the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) 2009). In 2010 the UKCCIS launched its ‘Click Clever Click Safe’ campaign, which uses the ‘Zip it, Block it, Flag it’ code. The website has Internet safety advice for children and parents including information about how to deal with cyberbullying. It also provides information on how to keep personal information safe online, how to stay safe using social networking sites and chatrooms and how to shop online safely. Its website is http://clickcleverclicksafe.direct.gov.uk/index.html.
Other joint public/private ventures that provide media literacy include the Get Safe Online website which is similar to the Stay Smart Online programme that offers advice to the public about how to protect computers and mobile phones against viruses and online attacks, identity theft and fraud. Its website is http://www.getsafeonline.org/.

The Child Exploitation and Internet Protection Centre (CEOP) which is the UK’s national law enforcement agency that focuses on tackling child sexual abuse, has a website called Thinkuknow which can be found at http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/. This site has resources including videos aimed at all age groups from 5 – 16 as well as parents, carers and teachers. It tackles all issues that children can confront online such as keeping personal information safe, knowing who to talk to, cyberbullying, social networking sites and chatrooms, for example. It also links, with permission, to New Zealand’s Hector’s World, an animated resource about cybersafety for young children.

In addition to the above programmes, Ofcom has developed media literacy programmes within the various nations. Ofcom Wales established the Wales Media Literacy network in 2007 to specifically promote media literacy throughout Wales. Its goal is ‘is to increase levels of media literacy in Wales – particularly amongst vulnerable and disadvantaged groups’ (Ofcom Wales 2007). The network involves many organisations that have roles to play in this regard including: ‘content
producers, broadcasters, platform and network providers, learning providers, academics, Government, parents, the voluntary sector and others’ (Ofcom Wales 2007). Similar networks were established in Scotland in 2008 and Northern Ireland in 2009.

Non-Government Organisations

Childnet is a non-profit organisation set up to work with others to make the Internet ‘a great and a safe place for children’ (Childnet International 2005). Childnet works in three main areas of media literacy that deal with access, awareness, protection & policy.

- **Access and promoting quality content**
  Helping children and young people to access all of the information and resources available on the Internet while using the net ‘constructively’ and to ‘showcase quality content and develop new projects’.

- **Awareness and advice**
  Helping children and young people acquire media literacy skills and give advice to industry, organisations, parents, teachers and carers about Internet and mobile safety.

- **Protection and policy**
  Working with others to ‘help protect children from being exploited in the online environments’ as well as ‘seeking to initiate and respond to policy changes’ (Childnet International 2005).
Childnet produces a website called Kidsmart which is one of the most comprehensive sites on the Internet for children and young people. It has information about being smart online, avoiding ‘net nasties’, online games, safe searching, chatting, digital footprints, music and file sharing and the best example of how to protect your privacy on Facebook.

Its website is http://www.kidsmart.org.uk/.

Childnet also produces several other websites for older children and adults such as the Digizen website which has advice and information on cyberbullying and social
networking; Chatdanger a site which gives advice about how to stay safe online while chatting using chat services, email, messenger and games; Blogsaftety which has advice for parents about young people and social networking sites; Sorted, which provides information about how to keep information secure online. The website is http://www.childnet.com/default.aspx.

9.1.3 New Zealand

The Department of Internal Affairs in New Zealand has, as one of its many roles, the duty to investigate New Zealand websites to enforce censorship legislation. In addition it takes a proactive role in educating children and adults on Internet safety issues. Its website provides much information about staying safe online including outlining the risks and guidelines for parents to keep their children safe. It also links to several websites that deal with Internet safety issues.

Mediascape is another New Zealand media literacy website. It is a joint venture sponsored by New Zealand Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA), the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), the Families Commission and the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology’s (CPIT) Foundation, and created, managed and edited by media scholars at the New Zealand Broadcasting School, CPIT (Department of communication and journalism 2007, p.63). Mediascape’s purposes are to share information about media in New Zealand, and to promote media literacy and research in media for all New Zealanders. It aims to ‘enable media users to make informed
decisions, create opportunities, link to each other and build new knowledge and ideas around media in New Zealand’ (NZ Department of communication and journalism 2007, p.63). Its website is http://www.mediascape.ac.nz/cms/.

NetSafe is a programme run by the New Zealand Internet safety group, which is an independent non-profit organisation. It is a multi-stakeholder, public/private partnership, which includes members from 'Government, Education, Law, Industry, Community, Parents and Caregivers, Children and Young people' (NetSafe 2010). It has a range of resources for children, young people, adults, parents, the business community and the school sector about cybersafety issues. Issues include protecting one’s personal information, cyberbullying, online fraud and identity theft, and protecting against viruses and online attacks. Its website is http://www.netsafe.org.nz/index.php.

NetSafe also produces Hector’s World, an animated cybersafety resource for children, parents and teachers. Hector’s World is an underwater cyberworld, which has a series of videos and activities aimed at young children to teach them how to stay safe online. It includes a button children can press if they feel unsafe and it covers what they’re seeing.
Figure 14 Hector's World Website

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 9-164 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 15 Hector's World website - 'You're not alone'

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 9-164 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.
Non-Government Organisations

The 20/20 Communications Trust is a charitable trust, which has the aim of helping all New Zealanders ‘benefit from the opportunities of the new digital era - especially from the internet.’ (20/20 Communications Trust 2010). Its Computers in Homes project (CIH) was developed to ensure that all New Zealanders had access to computers and the knowledge to use them. CIH began as a pilot project in Wellington and has spread throughout the country, teaching people in low-socio economic areas how to use computers and then to take home recycled computers. The project was intended to bridge the digital divide and has achieved an increase in both literacy and media literacy skills amongst the participants (Department of Communication and Journalism 2007, p.64).

Another community-based project is the SeniorNet not for profit organisation. It was established in New Zealand in 1992 with support from Telecom. Its aim is to teach older New Zealanders how to use computers, get on the Internet, use email and generally learn about new information and communications technologies (SeniorNet 2010).

ECPAT NZ is part of a global network of organisations and individuals who work together to eliminate ‘child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of
children for sexual purposes’ (ECPAT NZ 2004). One of ECPAT’s projects is the issue of Internet safety. Its website provides advice and information to parents and caregivers about online risks that children may face, as well as running information sessions and supplying Internet Resource Kits to schools which outline the risks. In addition ECPAT NZ has a website for children called Cyberkidz which is an animated website designed to teach children how to stay safe online. Its website is at http://www.cyberkidz.co.nz.

Thus it can be seen that there is much information available on the Internet to teach people of all ages how to use computers and the Internet in safe and meaningful ways. In addition there are community groups, particularly in New Zealand, who actually go out into the community to teach people of all ages these skills. It is interesting to note that both in the UK and New Zealand there are several public/private organisations that seek to involve many stakeholders from various sectors to provide these valuable resources. In Australia, it is mainly the government that supplies most of these programmes while there are a small number of independent organisations as well.

While there is great effort across the three countries to develop media literacy skills, in Britain, the Digital Britain report (2009, p.2) found that there was still a risk of some groups in society being ‘left behind’ in the digital age. This was so in terms of ownership of new technologies, awareness and access to content and services and confidence and competence in using the new technologies (The Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Group 2009, p.2). The report found that these groups would
become increasingly more isolated and disenfranchised unless more is done to address this. In order to ‘maximise the digital opportunity we will need to ensure a population that is confident and empowered to access, use and create digital media (The Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Group 2009, p.2). While this report is from Britain it is relevant for both New Zealand and Australia too.
Chapter 10 CONCLUSIONS

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that ‘the test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children’ (Moncur 2010). This thesis has been an attempt to find ways whereby as a society, Australians can protect children and young people from possible harmful effects that might be incurred from new media technologies and the impact that this may have on their future development and ability to be pro-social citizens in society.

The thesis has looked at the challenges presented by the new media technologies to protect children and young people from the possible harmful effects that can result from interaction with them. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1989 states in Article 17, parties should ‘Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being’ (General Assembly of the United Nations 1989, p.5). Australia, New Zealand and the UK are all signatories to the Convention and this thesis has investigated, in a comparative manner, how well these three countries are upholding the rights of the child in regards to protecting them from material and information that could be injurious to their well-being. It has been found that while both the UK and New Zealand specifically mention the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in their Broadcasting Acts, Australia does not do so. Australia does however, uphold the principles of the Convention, and makes reference to it, in the Broadcasting Act.
I have discussed the need for a special case for children, looking at what separates childhood from adulthood and at adult-child relationships from antiquity to the present day. Since the earliest recorded written history of children, childhood has been seen as the time when human beings learn more than at any other time. It is a time when characteristics and behaviour are formed and as such is an impressionable time in life. It has been found that there are many factors that influence behaviour, both intrinsic and extrinsic. The biopsychosocial model is used to explain the several different influences on childhood behaviour. This includes biological factors such as temperament; psychological factors such as attitudes, thoughts and emotions; and sociocultural factors such as parental influences, beliefs and ideologies (Byron 2008, p.30). While biological factors are set in place at birth, psychological and sociological factors are subject to external influences. It is a basic tenet of psychology that experiences in early childhood shape and mould a personality and thus, human behaviour in adult life. The consensus is that childhood is indeed a formative period and that external influences play an important role in determining the characteristics of the future adult. It is for this reason that each society regulates what children can see, view and play with on television, films and in video games, in order to minimize any potential harmful effects that might occur through exposure to content that is not age appropriate.

The thesis has shown that children and young people in Australia, New Zealand and the UK all spend many hours a day watching the television and videos and using the Internet. New media technologies therefore, certainly occupy a large portion of a
child’s day and, as previously stated, should thus not be ignored as a societal issue and policy concern.

Another major concern emerging from the thesis’ findings is the time children and young people in all three countries spend watching television and videos and using the Internet alone, unsupervised in their bedrooms. The advent of 3G mobile phones has added to this problem in that children and young people are now able to freely access the Internet on these personal and portable devices.

Given the amount of time that children and young people spend using media technologies, the latest research on the effects of media has been examined. It has been found that opinion is divided between two research paradigms labeled by Egenfeldt-Nielson and Smith (2003) as ‘the ‘active media perspective’ and the ‘active user perspective’. The ‘active media perspective’ researchers use the ‘behaviourist tradition’ which is the belief that the causes of behaviour are external, to formulate their views. They are adamant that exposure to violent material in the media has a negative effect on behaviour and there have been many experiments to prove this is so. Conversely, the ‘active user perspective’ is derived from the field of social scientists who believe that consumers are more than passive recipients of media and bring with them much contextual background. They argue that reactions to media content are context-dependent and social and cultural factors have a strong influence on responses. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that as Byron (2008, p.61) states ‘no firm evidence of harm is not evidence of no harm’. Even from an ‘active
user’ perspective, it is still necessary to protect children and young people from harm and offence, particularly when going online. The risks of cyber stalking, sexual solicitation, cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate and illegal content, are all serious issues that need to be addressed.

As childhood has been shown to be a formative and impressionable time in life it is also a time when children are dependent on adults to make decisions for them and most parents accept this responsibility. In Australia, New Zealand and the UK, it is also the Government’s responsibility to regulate what young children watch and listen to in the media. I have argued that there is a need to regulate media content by government, which is preferable to relying on self-regulation by the media industry and/or regulation by private corporations. This occurs in Australia, New Zealand and the UK through regulation of Broadcasting Acts and through the classification of films, DVD’s and video games by classification boards. Australia, Britain and New Zealand all maintain a regulatory system that allows the broadcasting industry to operate in a free market but with the authority to intervene if necessary.

Traditional media in the form of books, the cinema, videos, computer games and the television, have, in the past, been relatively easy to regulate. In the case of books, videos and games, there is a gatekeeper in the form of the seller, who must ensure that children do not purchase media that has been classified as inappropriate for their particular age group. There is also a gatekeeper at the cinema who is legally obliged to ensure that cinema patrons are of the appropriate age to see any film rated MA15+
or R18+ in Australia and corresponding ratings in New Zealand and the UK. The television in Australia has to comply with the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice as set out in the Broadcasting Services Act of 1992, which imposes conditions on a licensee regarding programming content.

The advent of the new media technologies has given rise to the difficulties faced in regulating the content therein contained. The only gatekeepers for the Internet at present are parents who can provide supervision and parental controls through filtering software. The arrival of 3G mobile phones has removed this final gatekeeper, as children are able to freely access any content on the Internet through this personal and portable device. In the UK mobile phone companies are restricting access to minors by placing the onus on purchasers of phones to prove they are over 18 before Internet filtering locks are removed.

In New Zealand the Internal Affairs Department issued a new filtering system in March 2010 to specifically filter child sexual abuse images, known as the Digital Child Exploitation Filtering System.

The current Australian Labor Government plans to introduce a filtering system that will block illegal content that is published overseas, at the ISP level. This is problematic in that the proposed method of blacklisting certain URLs will not
necessarily work. However this does not mean that nothing should be done. As Hamilton (2008) stated

_The laws that mandate upper speed limits do not stop people from speeding, does that mean that we should not have those laws? ... We live in a society, and societies have always imposed limits on activities that it deems are damaging. There is nothing sacrosanct about the Internet_ (Foley 2008).

The government in Australia has prohibited publication of material on the Internet that has been classified as RC or X18+ by the Classification Board, and any material classified as R18+ or MA15+ that is not subject to a ‘restricted access system’. This is also the case in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The problem arises from material that would be classified as illegal content in Australia being published online overseas. It seems there is a need for international co-operation to tackle this problem. At present Governments have the primary responsibility at the national level, to provide regulatory frameworks to provide safety, security and privacy issues online, however, ‘a trend to international co-operation is becoming evident in order to provide broader leadership and consistent approaches’ (Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 2009, p.3).
Given that most countries are signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it would seem that the United Nations would be the obvious place to ratify an agreement to protect children and young people from harmful and unsolicited material on the Internet.

In addition to regulation, there is also a need for media literacy programmes to raise awareness about the dangers of going online. At present there are many programmes on the Internet that educate both children and adults about the need to stay safe online and provide tools to help them do so such as the ‘Zip it, Flag it, Block it’ program from the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS). These programmes have been outlined in detail in the body of the thesis. However good these programmes are though,

*children can only be supported in managing the online environment if this is substantially regulated by law enforcement, interface and website design, search processes, content and service providers, online safety resources, etc. – just as they can only be taught to cross a road on which drivers and driving are carefully regulated* (Livingstone and Hadden 2009, p.2).
In conclusion, it seems as though Australia is struggling with the problem of how to protect children and young people from material that could be injurious to their well-being. This is also true in the UK and New Zealand. While great efforts are being made at national levels, governments are unable to legislate outside their jurisdiction.

The major conclusions of this thesis are:

- Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, despite their best efforts, are unable to uphold the United Nations Rights of the Child in protecting children and young people from harm and offence, given the acknowledged difficulties in regulating the new media technologies.

- It has been found that Australia makes no mention of the Rights of the Child in its Broadcasting Act, which it needs to do in order to come into line with other comparable cultures.

Recommendations from this thesis are:

- That an international agreement could be drawn up to prevent material that might be harmful to children and young people being published online.
• Australia could well justify its filtering software of the Internet, on the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the need to protect children. There needs to be further investigation however, of better ways to do this than the current use of blacklists of certain URL’s.

• The Australian Government could integrate the media literacy programmes that are already available into the national curriculum. At the present the ACMA works with the state education authorities to achieve a safe online environment. The national curriculum for Media Arts is currently being developed and it is hoped that media literacy programmes will be included in this.

Future directions for this research could investigate the feasibility of an international agreement to be drawn up for the purpose of regulating the Internet and how this might be implemented. Methods of how to successfully filter harmful material also need to be investigated. Future research could also investigate how powerful commercial interests can be brought on side in order to maintain a co-operative approach to the protection of children and young people amongst all stakeholders. Future investigation might include other English speaking countries such as Canada, the USA and South Africa. These countries have significant differences to the countries of the present study but would be worth investigating to see whether their experiences have any lessons for Australia.

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Finally, from my experience as a regular reviewer of films for children, I have seen the success of an education approach to media content. My colleagues and I provide advice about films concerning matters such as violence, coarse language and sex. We give advice to parents concerning suitability for different age groups, thus giving parents the tools for informed choice. Such an approach to the Internet might provide parents with a means of guiding their children to safe usage of this medium which has now become an indispensable tool in everyday life.
**APPENDIX A**

Television Standards and Time Zones

**Australia**

The Commercial Television Code of Practice Classification Zones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Broadcasting Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **G – General** | Weekdays: 6.00am – 8.30am 4.00pm – 7.00pm  
Weekends: 6.00am – 10.00am |
| **M – Not recommended for viewers under 15** | Weekdays: 8.30pm – 5.00am (Schooldays) 12.00pm– 3.00pm  
Weekends and school holidays: 8.30pm – 5.00am |
| **PG – Parental Guidance Recommended** | Weekdays: 5.00am – 6.00am 8.30am – 12.00pm  
3.00pm – 4.00pm |
| **MA – Mature Audience** | Everyday 9.00pm – 5.00am |
Children’s Television Standards Programming Bands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C Programming Band</th>
<th>P Programming Band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekdays: 7.00am – 8.30am</td>
<td>Everyday: 7.00 am – 4.30 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00pm – 8.30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekends: 7.00am – 8.30pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Children's Programming Bands
New Zealand

Broadcasting Standards Authority – Eleven Standards

1. Good Taste and Decency – Broadcasters should observe standards of good taste and decency.

2. Law and Order – Broadcasters should observe standards consistent with the maintenance of law and order.

3. Privacy – Broadcasters should maintain standards consistent with the privacy of the individual.

4. Controversial Issues – Viewpoints – Programmes which deal with political matters, current affairs and questions of a controversial manner must be balanced and impartial.

5. Accuracy – News, current affairs and other factual programmes must be truthful and accurate on points of fact and does not mislead.

6. Fairness – Broadcasters must treat any person or organization with which it is dealing fairly and justly.

7. Discrimination and Denigration - Broadcasters should not encourage discrimination against, or denigration of, any section of the community.

8. Responsible Programming – Broadcasters should ensure programmes:
   - are appropriately classified;
   - display programme classification information;
• adhere to timebands in accordance with Appendix 1;

• are not presented in such a way as to cause panic, or
unwarranted alarm or undue distress; and

• do not deceive or disadvantage the viewer

9. Children’s Interests – During normal children’s viewing time, usually up to
8.30pm, broadcasters should consider the interests of child viewers.

10. Violence – Broadcasters are required to exercise care and discretion when dealing with violence.

11. Liquor – Broadcasters must adhere to restrictions on the promotion of liquor appropriate to the programme genre being broadcast. (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2009, p.8-10).

Television Programme Classification

G – General Audience. Programmes which exclude material likely to be unsuitable for children. They may not necessarily be made for child viewers but must not contain any material that may alarm or distress them.

PGR – Parental Guidance Recommended. Programmes containing material more suited for mature audiences but not necessarily unsuitable for child viewers when subject to the guidance of a parent or adult.
AO – Adults Only. Programmes containing adult themes and directed primarily to mature audiences.

AO9.30PM – Adults Only 9.30pm – 5.00am. Programmes containing stronger material or special elements which fall outside the AO classification. These programmes may contain a greater degree of sexual activity, potentially offensive language, realistic violence, sexual violence, or horrific encounters.

Broadcasting Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Weekdays (not school or public holidays)</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G – General</td>
<td>12.00pm – 3.00pm</td>
<td>8.30pm – 5.00am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO – Adults Only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO9.30PM – Adults Only 9.30pm</td>
<td>9.30pm – 5.00am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Broadcasting times for classifications – New Zealand (Broadcasting Standards Authority 2009, p.11)
Film, Video and Computer Game Classifications

Australia

- **G** – General. This film is suitable for viewers of all ages but not necessarily made just for children. The impact of the classifiable elements should be very mild only.

- **PG** – Parental Guidance Recommended. Material in this category may be confusing or upsetting to some children and may require some guidance by parents or a guardian. It is not recommended for viewing or playing for children under 15 without parental guidance. The impact of the classifiable elements should be no higher than mild.

- **M** – Mature. Material in this category is not recommended for children under 15 but there are no legal restrictions. The impact of the classifiable elements should be no higher than moderate.

- **MA 15+** – Mature Accompanied. Material in this category is considered unsuitable for children under 15. It is a legally restricted category. The
impact of the classifiable elements should be no higher than strong.

- **R 18+ – Restricted.** Material in this category is legally restricted to adults only. The R rating applies to films only. Some sections of the adult community might find material in this category offensive. The impact of the material should not exceed high.

- **X 18+ - Restricted.** This classification category applies only to films and is restricted to adults over 18. It is only available for sale or hire in the ACT and the Northern Territory. This classification is a special category that depicts actual sexual intercourse and other sexual activity between consenting adults. No depiction of violence, sexual violence, or coercion is allowed in this category.

- **RC – Refused Classification.** Films that exceed the R and X classification categories will be refused classification. Computer Games that exceed the MA 15+ classification category will be refused classification. (National Classification Board 2008, p.13).

**New Zealand**

- **G - Unrestricted.** Anyone can be shown or sold this.
- **PG** - Unrestricted. Parental guidance may be needed for younger viewers.

- **M** - Unrestricted. More suitable for viewers over 16 years.

The Office classifies all films containing restricted material. The Office can classify according to age or purpose, or restrict a film's availability to a particular audience.

The following classifications are common:

- **R13** - Restricted. It is illegal for anyone to show or sell this to someone under 13 years of age.

- **R15** - Restricted. It is illegal for anyone to show or sell this to someone under 15 years of age.

- **R16** - Restricted. It is illegal for anyone to show or sell this to someone under 16 years of age.

- **R18** - Restricted. It is illegal to show or sell this to someone under 18 years of age.

- **R** - Restricted. R means that there is a special restriction. This is restricted to a particular group or purpose.

- **RP16** - Restricted. It is illegal to show or sell this to someone under under 16 years of age unless they are accompanied by a parent or guardian.
• RP13 - Restricted. It is illegal to show or sell this to someone under under 13 years of age unless they are accompanied by a parent or guardian.

A guardian is considered to be a responsible adult (18 years and over), for example, a family member or teacher who can provide guidance. (The Office of Film and Literature Classification 2010).

United Kingdom

• U - Universal Classification. Films in this classification are suitable for all and particularly audiences four years old and over. U films should be set within a positive moral framework and should offer reassuring counterbalances to any violence, threat or horror.

• 12/12A – Suitable for 12 years and over. No-one under 12 may see a 12A film in a cinema unless accompanied by an adult. No-one under the age of 12 may rent or buy a ‘12’ rated video.

• PG – Parental Guidance. Films in this classification are suitable for general viewing but some scenes may be unsuitable for young children. Parental guidance recommended for children under eight years.

• 15 – Suitable only for 15 years and over. No-one under 15 may see a ‘15’ film in a cinema. No one under the age of 15 may rent or buy a ‘15’ rated video.

• 18 – Suitable only for adults. No-one younger than 18 may see a ‘18’ film in a cinema. No-one under the age of 18 may rent or buy an ‘18’ rated video.
The BBFC regards the rights of adults to choose their own entertainment, within the law.

- R18 – Restricted to adults only. The ‘R18’ category is a special and legally restricted classification primarily for explicit works of consenting sex between adults. Films may only be shown to adults in specially licensed cinemas, and videos may be supplied to adults only in licensed sex shops. ‘R18’ videos may not be supplied by mail order. (British Board of Film Classification 2005)


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Broadcasting Standards Commission

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