

# **Media Use Audit for BC Teens: Key Findings**

Report prepared for distribution to BC Schools

Stephen Kline and Jackie Botterill

Media Analysis Laboratory, Simon Fraser University

May 2001

## Introduction

We all live in a media saturated world. Communication technologies—telephones, radio, television, the internet—have become so seamlessly embedded in our everyday life that we rarely reflect upon how many hours we spend with media, what our media preferences are, how they differ from others, and our concerns towards the media. But, the corporations that advertise to us monitor teenage media culture closely and regularly, yet, it costs thousands of dollars to find out what teen’s favourite TV programmes are or what web sites they surf.

This is why we at the Media Analysis Laboratory of Simon Fraser University developed the *Media Use Audit for BC Teens*. In this second wave of this audit, we surveyed 728 BC teens to explore several key issues and concerns relating to media consumption. The audit was designed to survey not just one medium, but the total context of media use. We asked about older media such as phone, radio and television and radio, as well as new media—videogames, personal computers and the Internet. We also sought to be sensitive to the social context that shapes media use (family, friends and schoolwork). In this report, we present what BC teens told us about their media use.

## Executive Summary

BC teen's lives are saturated with media. Teens report they spend over 1/3 of their time each week with media of some kind. There is a thriving 'bedroom culture' in BC with 85% of teens reporting they have two or more media in their bedrooms. We found that teens that had access to media in their bedrooms were more likely to spend more time playing with them. Given the amount of time they devote to it, it is not surprising that 78% of the sampled teens regard media as addictive. Those media considered the most addictive were videogames, television, and chat lines.

Music remains central to teen culture, as it has been since Elvis first swung his hips. The difference is that today's teens have access to music through a vastly expanded network of technologies. Teens report spending a good deal of time (over 15 hours per week) listening to radios, CDs and walkmans, but music television and downloading music from the internet are also highly revered leisure activities. Television still occupies a great deal of attention (over 12 hours per week); however new media (computers, videogames, internet) are increasingly making their presence felt, particularly in the lives of boys.

Compared to their homes, schools remained a relatively media free zone, however, BC teens report increasing access to wired worlds at school. Still, the Media Audit found little evidence that teens actually used the Internet and interactive media for educational purposes. Teens consistently reported they used electronic media for entertainment: Educational television programs, videogames, and using the Internet for homework consistently ranked at the bottom of teen's media preferences. Teens also spent little time reading (5 hours per week), and derived little pleasure from current events in either the press or on television.

A digital divide was revealed in youth media consumption habits. Boys reported that they were more likely to have access to, enjoy and spend more time with videogames, computers, and the Internet. Just like television, boys new media preferences show an inclination towards combat, action adventure and sports.

BC teens showed little concern about advertising in their media, yet kids may not be as savvy as some web business pundits have claimed. Neither sex enjoyed Internet shopping, or bought goods or used credit cards very much on line. Many were willing to provide private information, reported being less concerned about security on the Internet than their parents, and considered it unnecessary to know the real identity of the person they chatted with on the Internet. Teens report the Internet, was the medium in which they were most likely to be exposed to inappropriate violent and sexual content. They also noted that surfing the Internet was a significant disruption to their sleep, homework and chores.

About 40% of BC teens claimed to be subject to no media restrictions at all. BC teens report their parents more heavily regulated their Internet activities, than any other media. They were twice as likely to experience rules concerning their Internet activities than for either television or videogames. Boys were more likely to have their videogame play regulated in some way, but girls were 10% more to be restricted from chat lines.

Despite the prevalence of media in their lives, teens continue to value social contact: They ranked hanging with friends their most prized leisure activity and while they would happily give up sleep, home work or chores to be with their media, they were less likely to trade off a social opportunity to spend time with friends or family. This was particularly true for girls who seemed to use media to extend their social connections. Girls liked the phone, e-mail and chat lines more than boys.

## Media Audit Findings

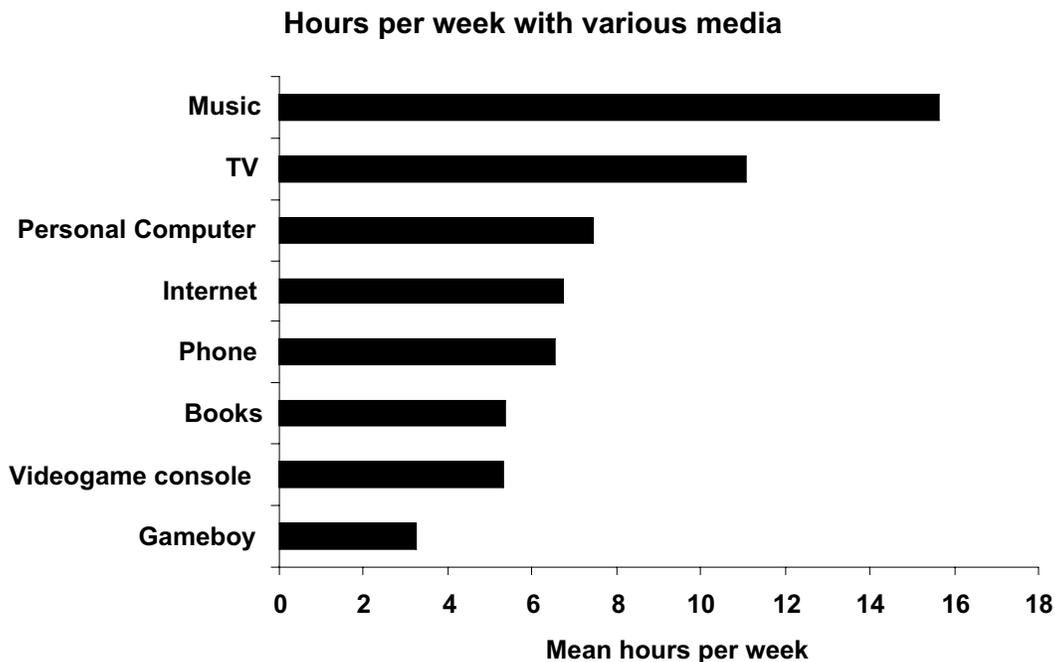
The findings of the Media Audit are reported in five sections.

- The first section explores how much and where BC teen use media.
- Second, leisure and media preferences, tastes, and experiences are examined.
- Third, we reveal how addictive teens think various media are and the relationship between media and other activities such as schoolwork, chores, sleep and time with friends and family.
- Fourth, we report teen's attitudes towards commercialisation, Internet security and anonymity, and their encounters with violent and sexual content deemed inappropriate.
- Fifth, we reveal the type of rules teens are subject to in their media use.

Previous studies have noted that males and females differ in their media consumption. Therefore, in what follows we present total, as well as gender specific media use.

### Media Saturation: Where and How Much Media?

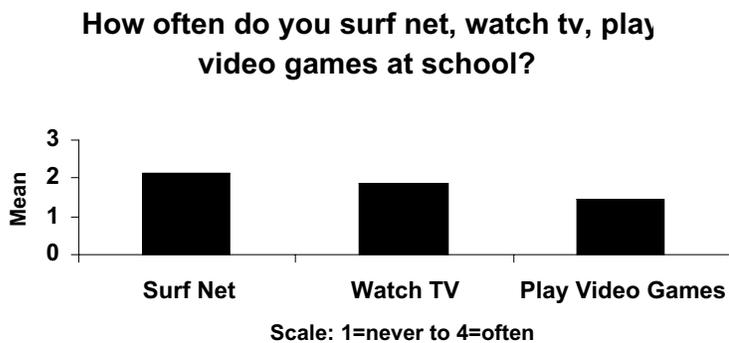
Many studies have noted that our homes, communities and schools have become increasingly saturated with media. To explore this issue we measured both where and how much media young people use. The average amount of time with media was 61 hours per week, or 36% of teens total time. To put this in context, this is twice as much time as they spend at school (30 hours or 18% of total weekly time) and more time then they spend on average sleeping (56 hours or 33% of total weekly time).



Music on various media (radio, CD, Walkman) consumed 16 hours of leisure time per week, followed by television (12.3 hours per week). Computers and the Internet also garnered a good deal of youth's leisure hours. Both boys and girls tended to spend similar amounts of time with music and television, however, there were noteworthy differences in their use of other media:

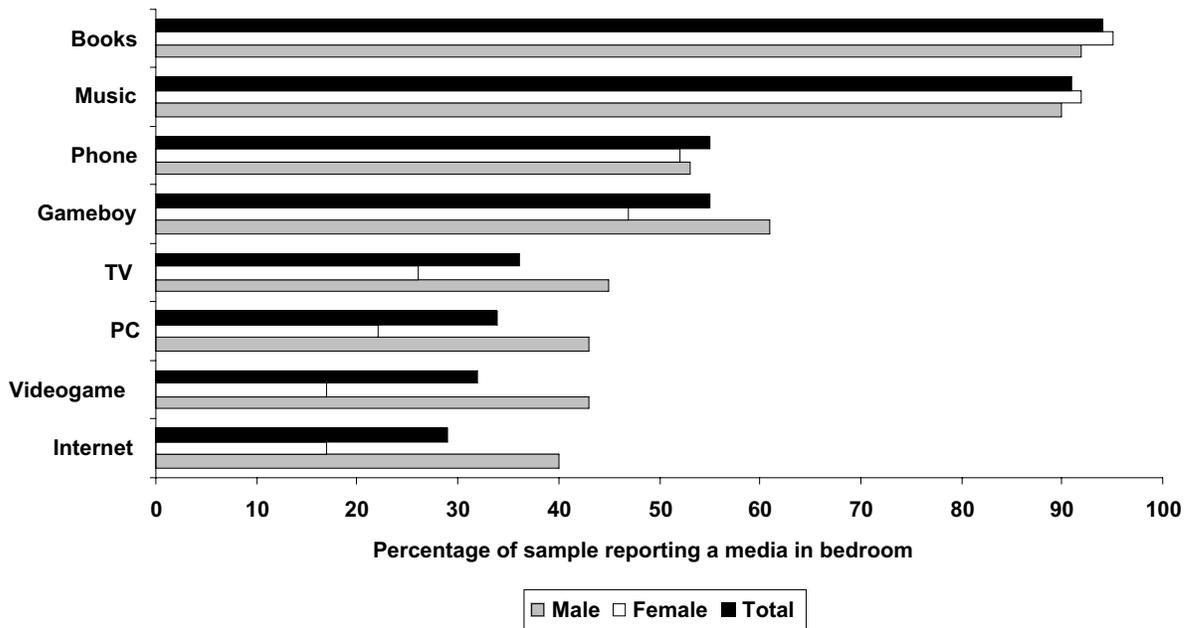
- Girls read more and spent more time on the phone.
- Boys spent more time with new media especially TV, gameboys, videogame consoles, computers and connected to the Internet.

We found that schools remained a relatively media free zone: TV viewing and playing videogames were relatively rare in BC schools. But the recent efforts to 'wire' schools have begun to change that. BC teens reported they surfed the net at school more than they watched TV or played video games.



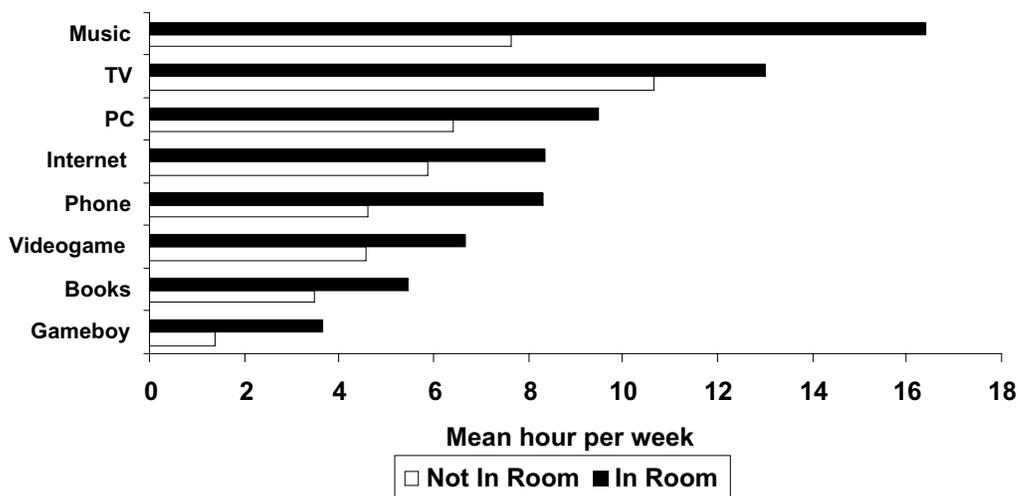
By way of contrast, BC teens were very likely to use media in their homes, confirming that the domestic sphere has become the key site of media use. A recent British study of young people's media emphasized that teens increasingly have access to media not simply in their home, but in their own bedrooms. To assess whether a 'bedroom culture' existed in BC, we asked teens what kinds of media they had in their rooms. Only 4.3% reported having no media in their rooms. Over 80% reported having two or more media in their rooms (14% had six or more). Open the door of BC teens bedrooms and you will inevitably find books and music (94% have books, 91% have music), where as Internet connections remain more rare (30%). The chart below presents the type of media that make up BC teens' bedroom culture.

### Presence of Various Media in Bedroom



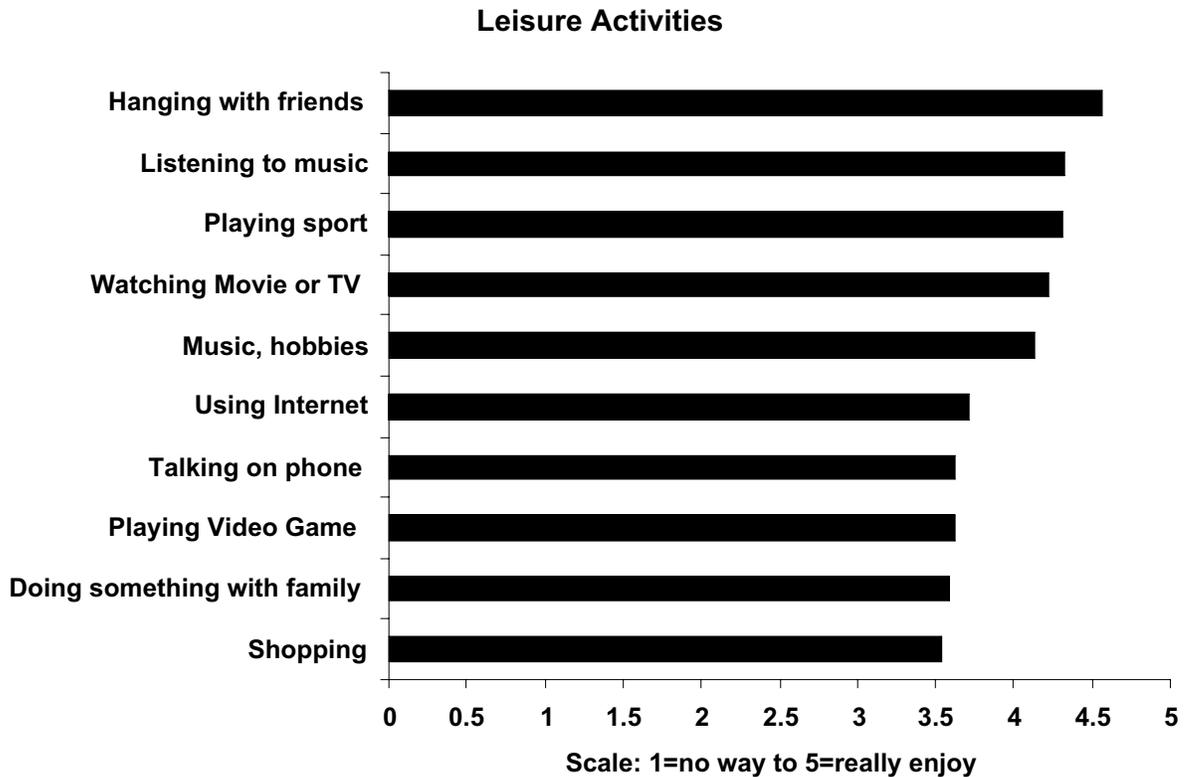
Some media were more gender neutral than others, with males and females almost equally as likely to have books, music, and phones in their rooms. Yet, we also found important divisions between boys and girls access to electronic media. Overall, boys enjoy a richer bedroom culture than girls, being more likely to have gameboys and television in their rooms. There was a considerable ‘digital divide’ between boys and girls access to new media. Twice as many boys report having ready access to videogames (43% vs 17%), PC’s (43% vs. 22%) and internet connections (40% vs. 17%) in their rooms than girls. Access to media in their own room consistently related to propensity to use them more.

### Media in room/not in room and hours per week of play



## LEISURE AND MEDIA: PREFERENCES AND EXPERIENCES

In a media rich culture, we have a variety of leisure activities to choose from. The Media Audit sought to measure what leisure and media activities BC teens enjoyed the most.

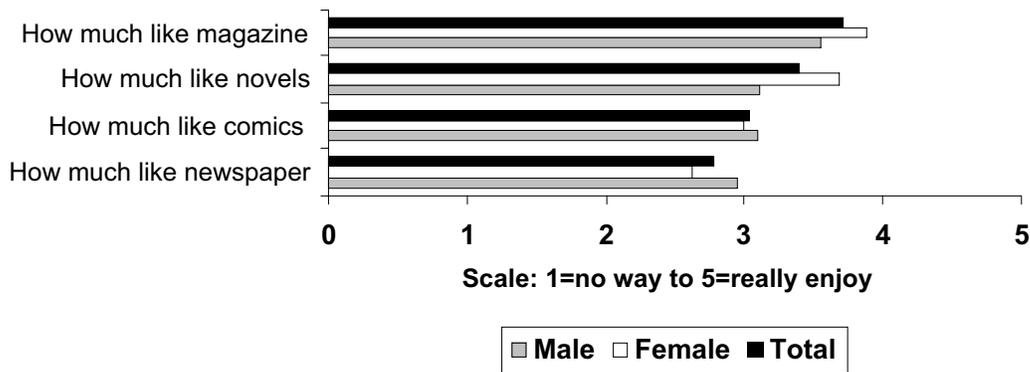


We can see that media use has become an important part of teen lifestyle, although hanging with friends, playing sports and hobbies continue to be highly enjoyable activities for teens. Overall, ‘hanging with friends’ and listening to music were the most enjoyable leisure activities for BC teens. Shopping and doing something with their families were least preferred.

Analysing leisure preferences by total scores masks important differences between boys and girls tastes. Girls liked shopping and talking on the phone far more than boys. They also derived more pleasure from doing something with their family. Conversely, boys enjoyed surfing the Internet, videogame play and television much more than girls.

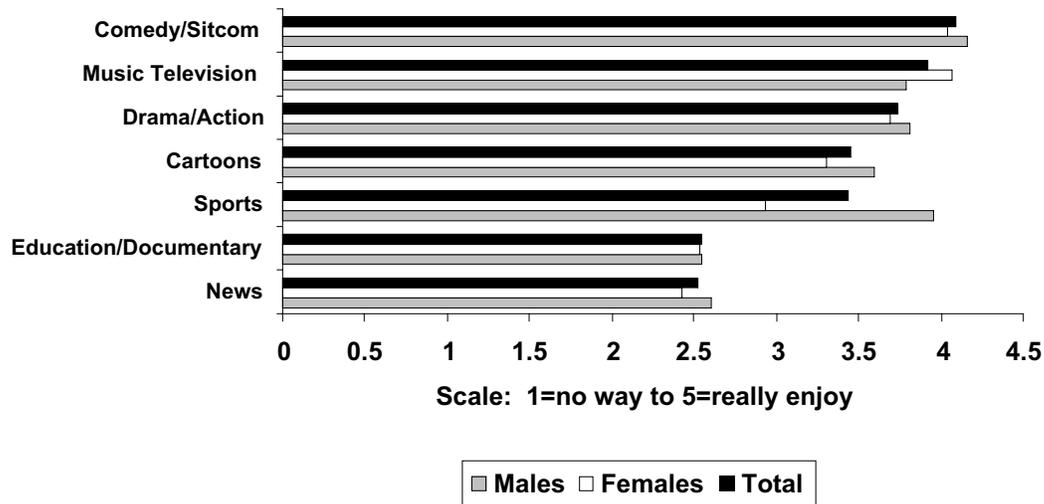
The audit measured the type of reading, television and videogames BC teens liked the most, as well as what they liked to do while on the Internet. The chart below outlines what types of reading material BC teens claim to enjoy most. Reading preferences differ for girls and boys. Magazine and book publishers seem to have been effective in garnering the interest of BC girls who reported magazines and novels were their most favored reading material, with girls enjoying them slightly more than boys. Newspapers were the least enjoyed reading material, however males liked the press slightly more so than girls.

### Preferred Reading Material



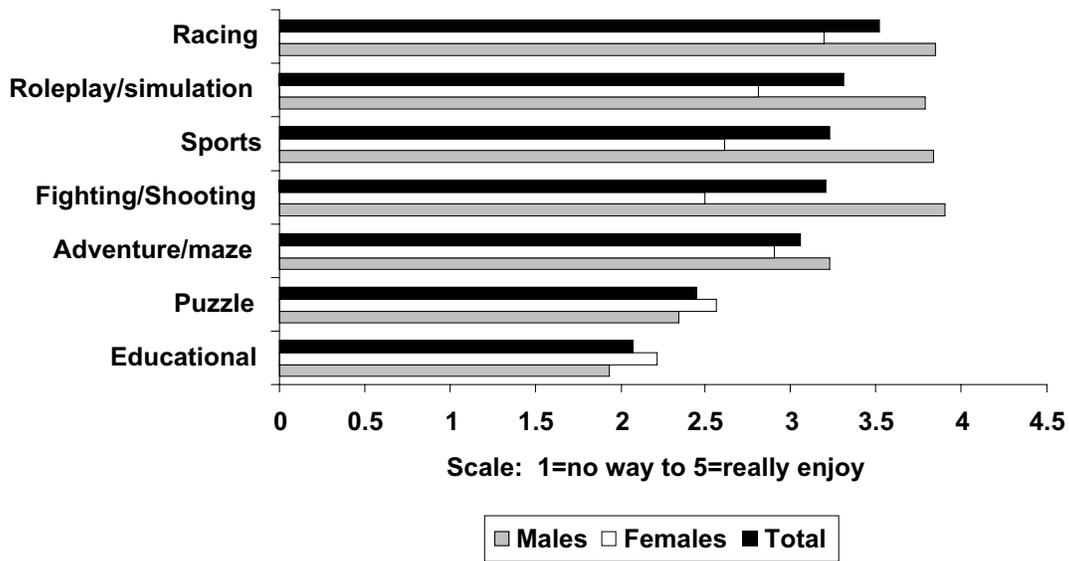
In Canada, we had originally hoped that television might fulfil a three-prong mandate: informing, educating and entertaining. From the audit it is very clear, however, that BC teens are most interested in television as an entertainment medium. Comedy or sitcoms, music television and action drama were the preferred television genres. Confirming other studies, teens liked adult orientated programming, such as sitcoms and action dramas, more than cartoons. Yet, music television introduced in the 1980s, and specifically targeted to music loving teens maintained its place of popularity. Overall, BC teens report educational/documentary and news were their least favourite television programs.

### Preferred Television Genres



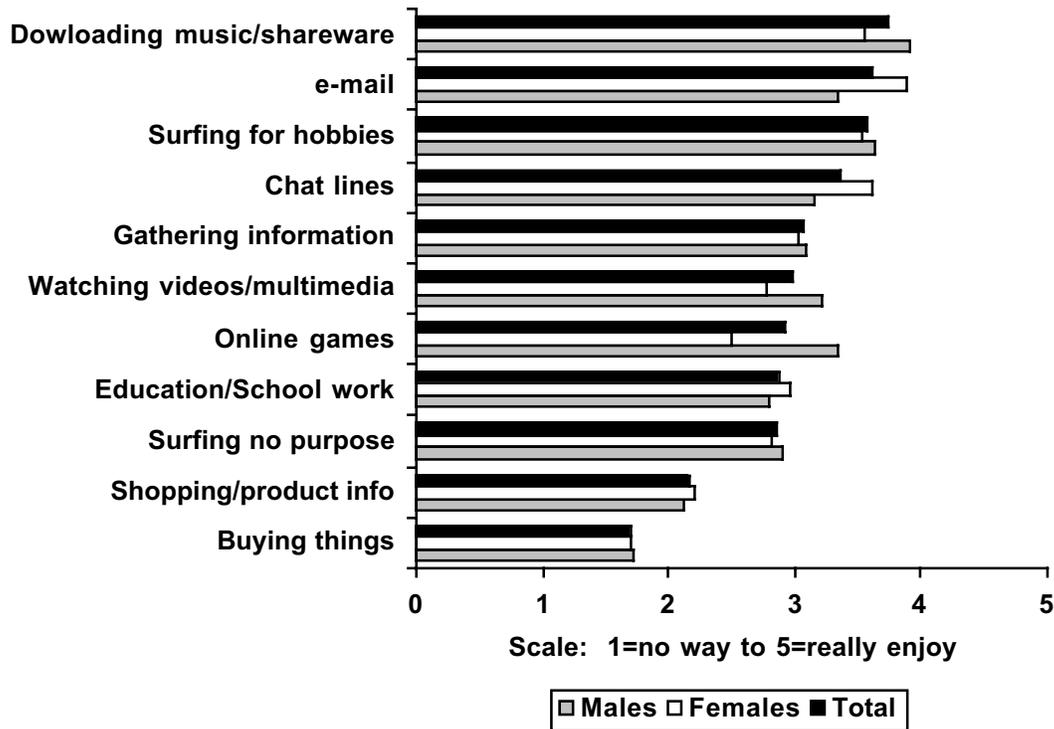
The video games BC teens enjoy most were racing, role-play, and sports. Yet, as revealed earlier, videogames are biased to male culture, as boys report they have more access, spending more time with and enjoying videogames more than girls. If we look just at girls' preferences, we find that although racing remains the number one favorite, adventure/maze games are enjoyed much more than either sports or fighting and shooting games. Similarly, if we look only at boys' preferences, their most preferred video games are fighting and shooting games. Indeed, nothing divided girls and boys more than their enjoyment of fighting and shooting games. Yet, boys and girls were much more united in their agreement that educational games were not particularly enjoyable.

### Preferred Videogames



What do teens do on the Internet? BC teens report that their most favorite Internet activity is the down loading music or other shareware applications, suggesting that teens love of music has transferred to new media. E-mail and surfing for hobbies also rank high. Teens reported little interest in using the Internet as a commercial medium to purchase goods, or gather product information. Teens were also selective in their Internet use, as many claimed that they did not enjoy simply surfing the net aimlessly. Using the Internet for educational purposes, however, was not of particular interest. Indeed, BC teens reported that they enjoyed gathering information for their own purposes more than using the Internet for schoolwork.

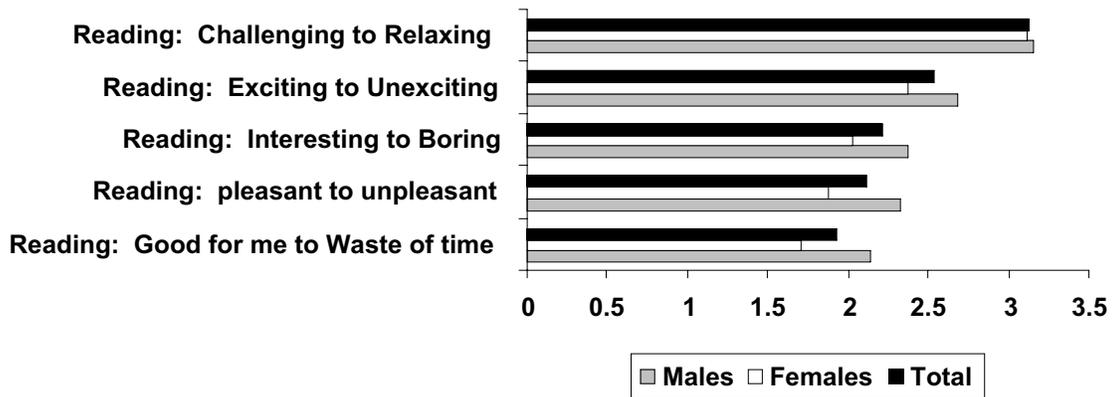
### Preferred Internet Activities



Earlier we learned about the digital divide between males and females’ access to, and use of, computer technology. By exploring BC teens Internet preferences, we also found key patterns of difference between what girls and boys enjoyed doing on the web. Girls enjoyed e-mail and chat lines. Whereas, boys preferred to use to Internet to play online games, watch videos and multimedia, and download music and shareware. If given the choice, boys would rather play videogames on line than either gather information or do homework.

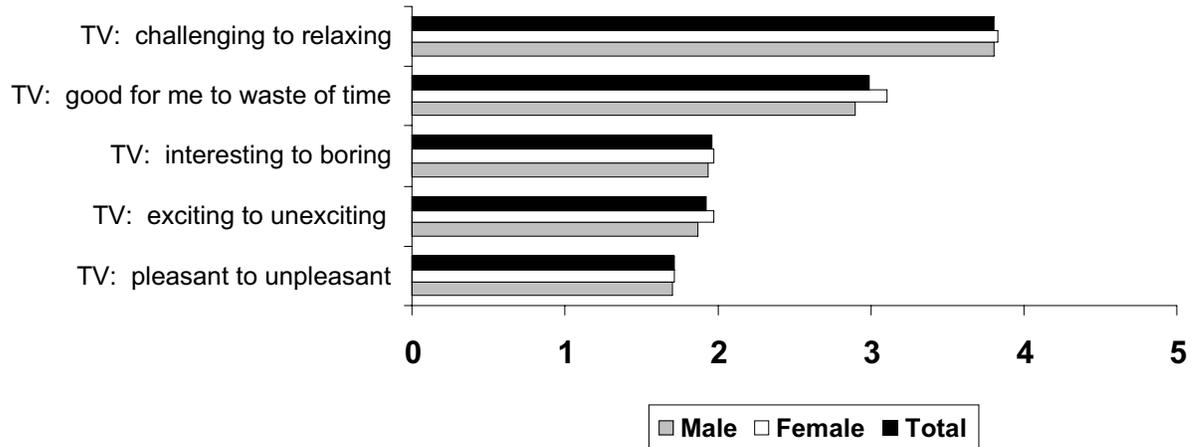
We asked BC teens what kinds of feelings they had when they engaged different types of media. Television was experienced as the most pleasurable and exciting medium. Yet, teens reported television, and particularly videogames, were a waste of time, and felt reading and the Internet were more constructive media options. From their point of view, reading and television were relaxing, video games and the Internet more of a challenge. Videogames were considered the most boring media of all.

### Experience of Reading



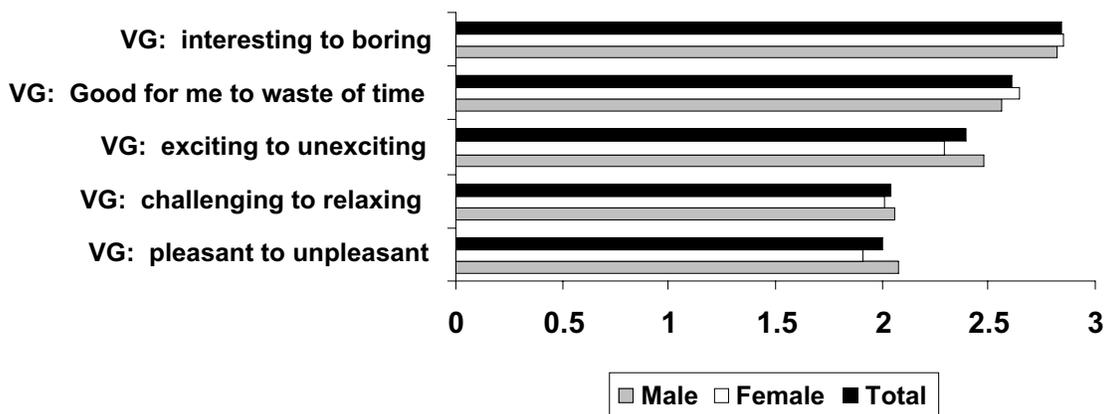
Girls found reading more exciting, interesting, pleasant and good for them then boys.

### Experience of Television

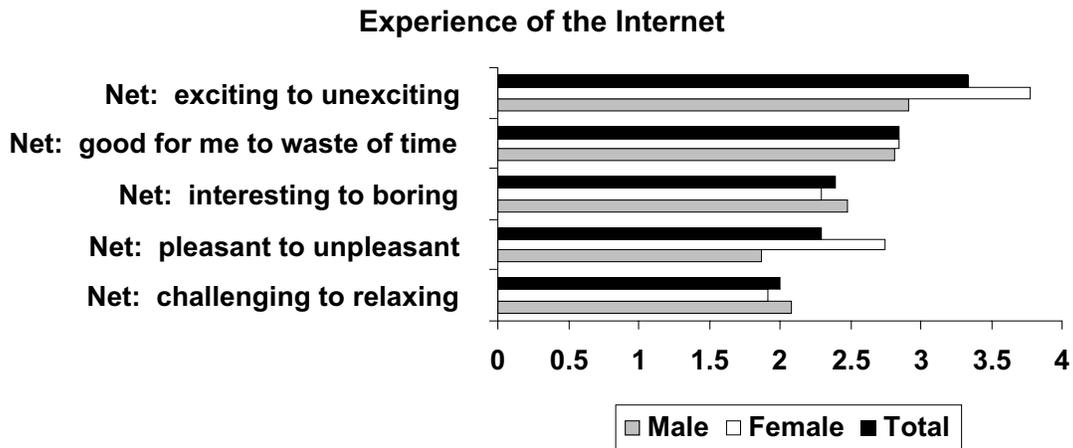


Boys and girls experienced television relatively the same, however boys found it slightly less of a waste of time, more interesting and exciting than girls.

### Experience of Videogames



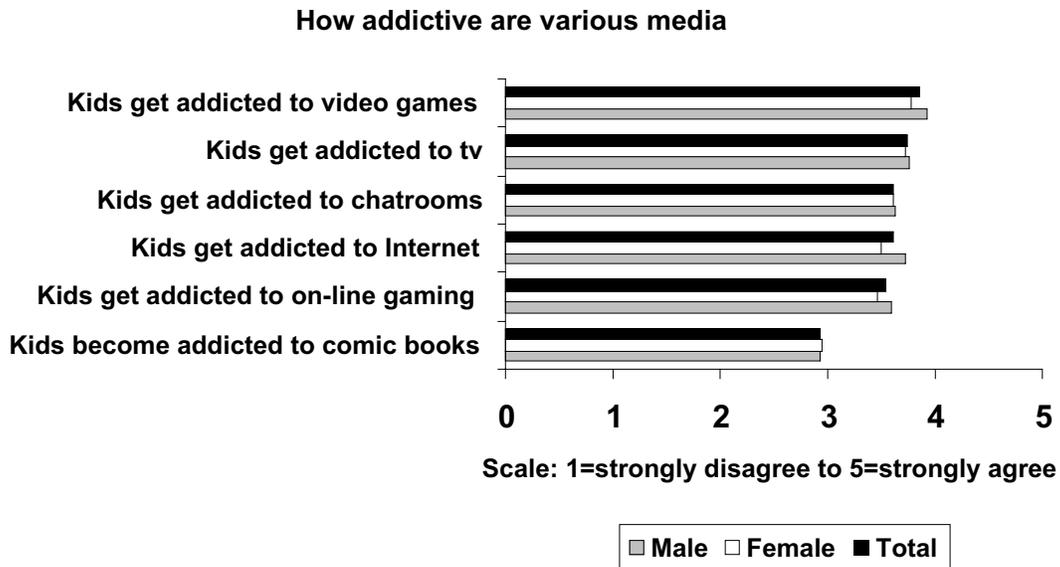
Boys found videogames marginally more exciting and pleasant than girls did.



Relative to the other media the Internet revealed the greatest divide in terms of male and female experience. Boys found the Internet much more exciting, interesting, pleasant and challenging than girls.

## MEDIA: ADDICTION AND TRADE OFFS

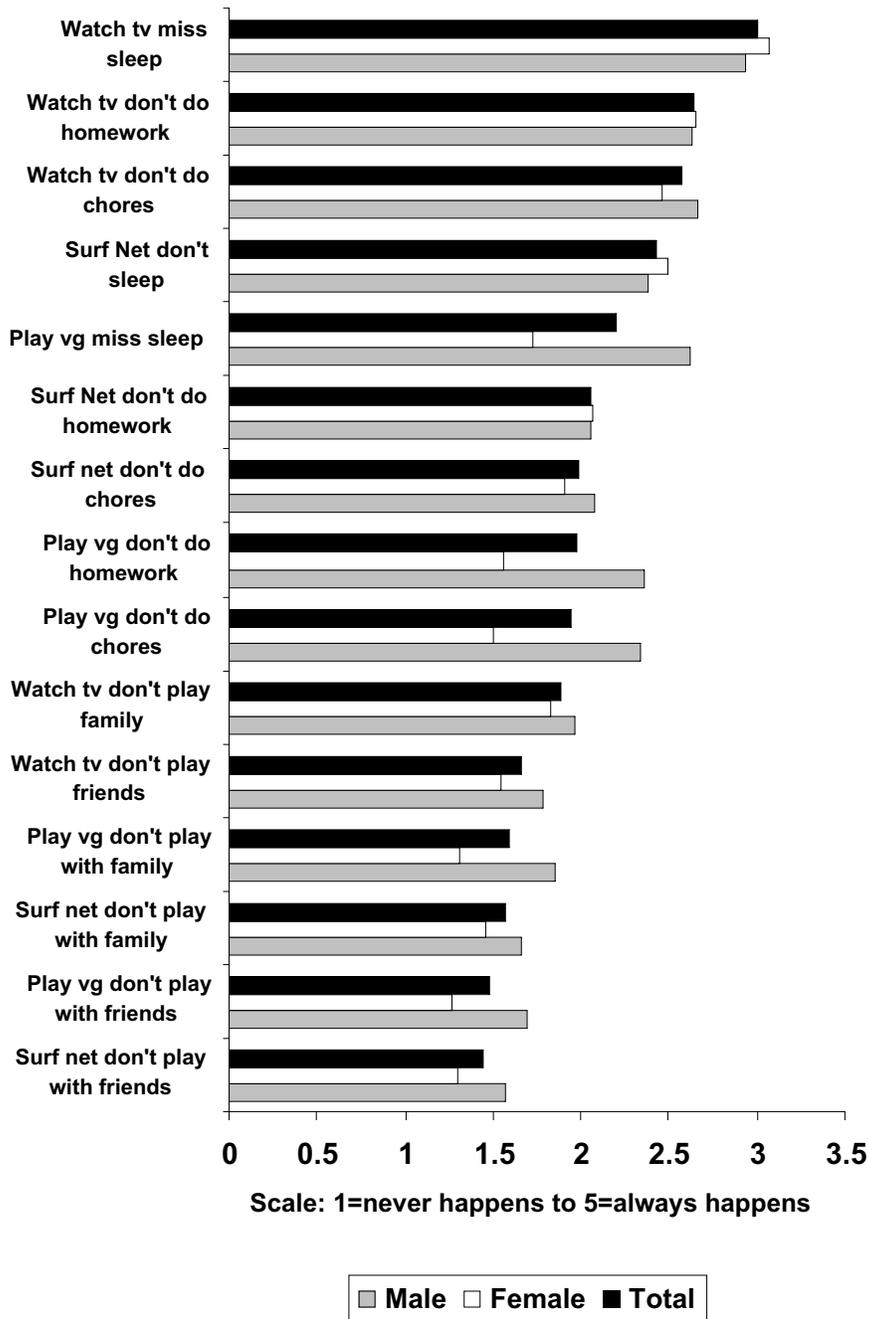
The power of media to secure young peoples attention has fueled concerns about media addiction. We asked BC teens what media they thought were most addictive to kids. Surprisingly, they agree that many media activities are addictive. Overall, videogames and television were considered the most addictive media and comic books the least. Boys were slightly more likely than girls to believe that the Internet and on-line games were addictive.



Since media consume a large proportion of young people’s leisure time, it is interesting to look at the tradeoffs made in the pursuit of mediated entertainment. To explore this issue the audit asked BC teens whether their use of television, video games, or the

Internet caused them to lose sleep, fail to do their homework or chores, or prevent them from engaging with their friends and family.

### Activities Displaced by Media



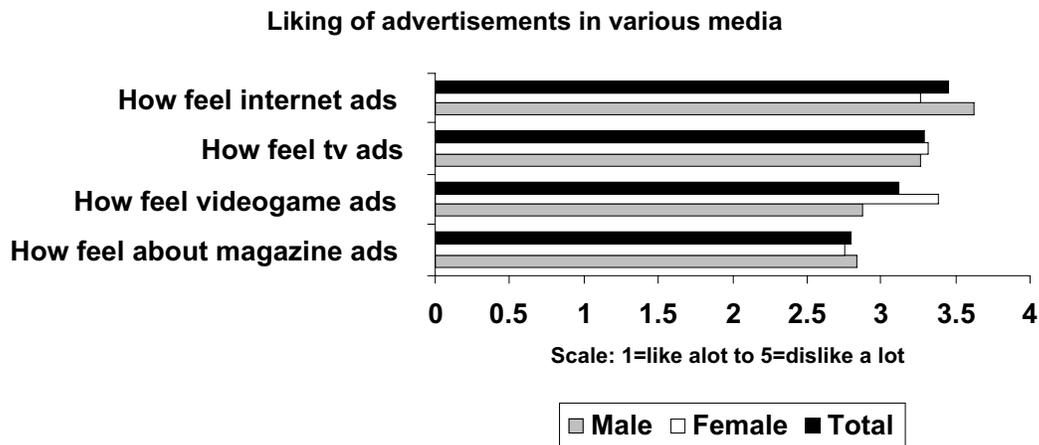
Because television is a widely used media might explain why students report it disrupts their activities the most, especially their sleep, homework and chores. BC teens also claim that surfing the net and playing videogames displace their sleep and chores. BC teen's report surfing the Internet actually hinders their ability to complete their homework assignments, a finding that suggests access to the Internet may not strengthen teen's

education achievement. Because they are heavier players, boys are more likely to report that they trade off sleep, homework and chores for videogame play. The findings also suggest that social life is less likely to be traded off for media use. Yet, boys were more likely to allow media to interrupt time with friends and family.

## MEDIA CONCERNS

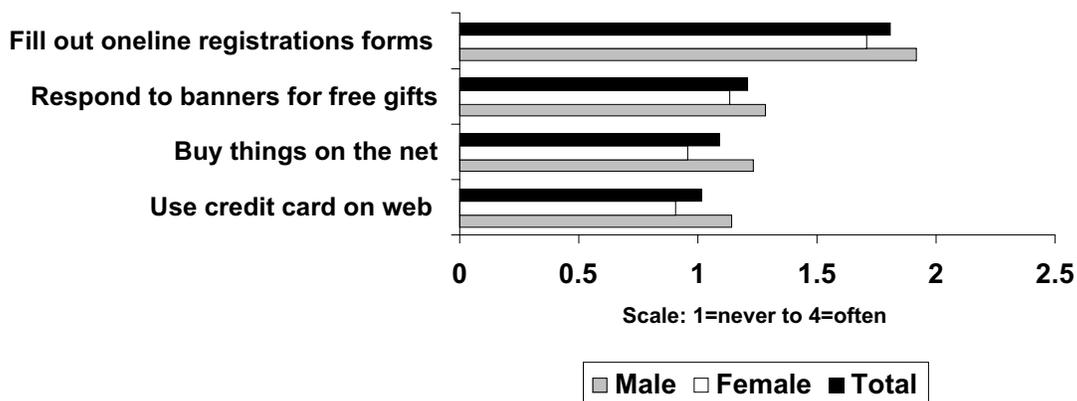
There has been a lot of public debate about the new media environment. To explore some of these issues, the Media Audit examined BC teen’s thoughts on media commercialization, Internet security and anonymity, and encounters with violence and sexualized content.

Teens have become a key media target for marketers and are exposed to a great variety of commercial messages. We asked BC teens how they felt about the presence of advertising in various media. Generally BC teens were ambivalent towards advertising with most stating advertising did not bother them. Internet ads were the most disliked of all advertising particularly by males. BC teens appreciated magazine ads the most. Boys disliked videogame ads less than girls.



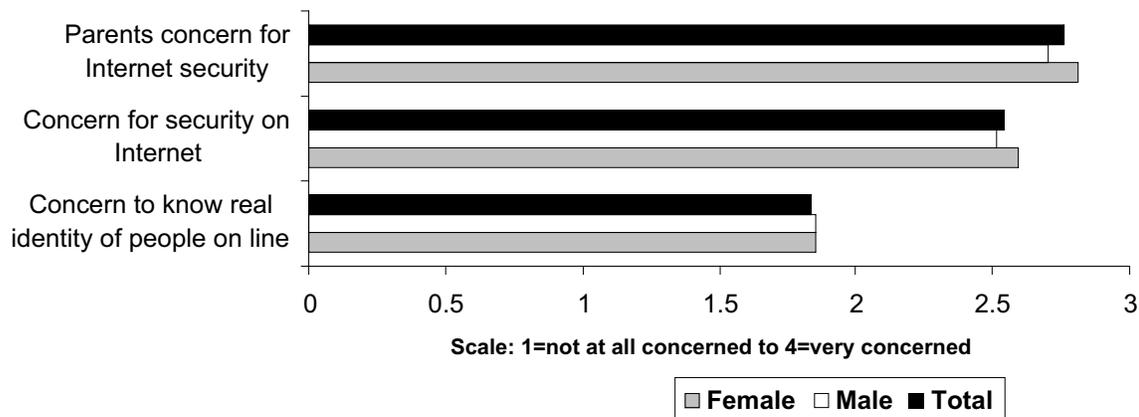
The Internet is a medium particularly well suited for disseminating as well as gathering information. The commercialization of the Internet has brought new opportunities for merchandisers to both encourage teens to purchase their goods and gather information about young people. The Audit attempted to measure whether teen’s bought goods on the Internet and how savvy they were as Internet consumers. We have already seen that neither girls nor boys found shopping on line enjoyable. Teens also reported they were unlikely to use a credit card or purchase goods on the web, although boys were slightly more inclined. Most teens also claim they never respond to banners for free gifts. They were however, more willing to fill out on line registration forms.

### Shopping on the Web



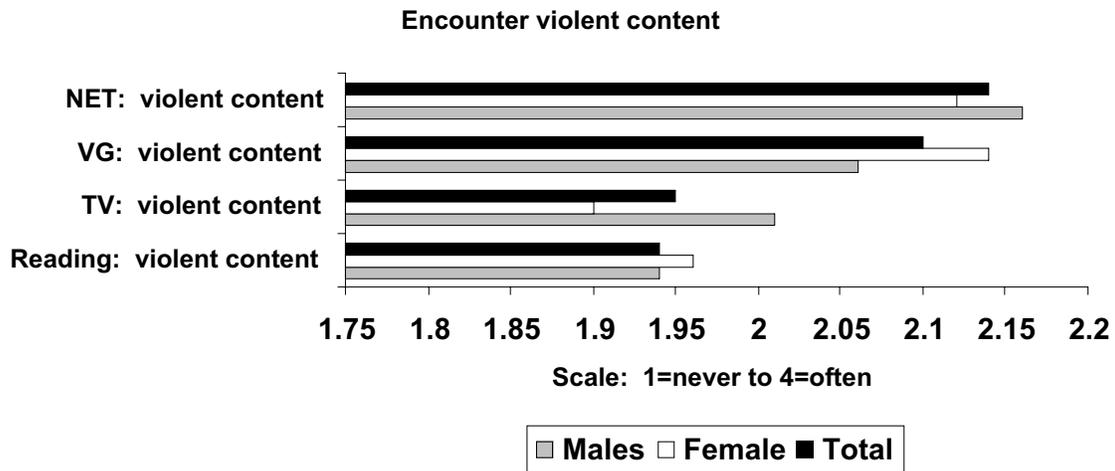
This willingness to provide personal information has been of primary concern in debates about new media because of the potential for this information to be used commercially. There has also been concern about Internet security because strangers can make direct contact with teens in chat rooms. We asked teens how concerned they and their parents were about security on the Internet, and how important it was to know the real identity of the person they communicated with in chat rooms.

### Concerns about Internet Security and Anonymity

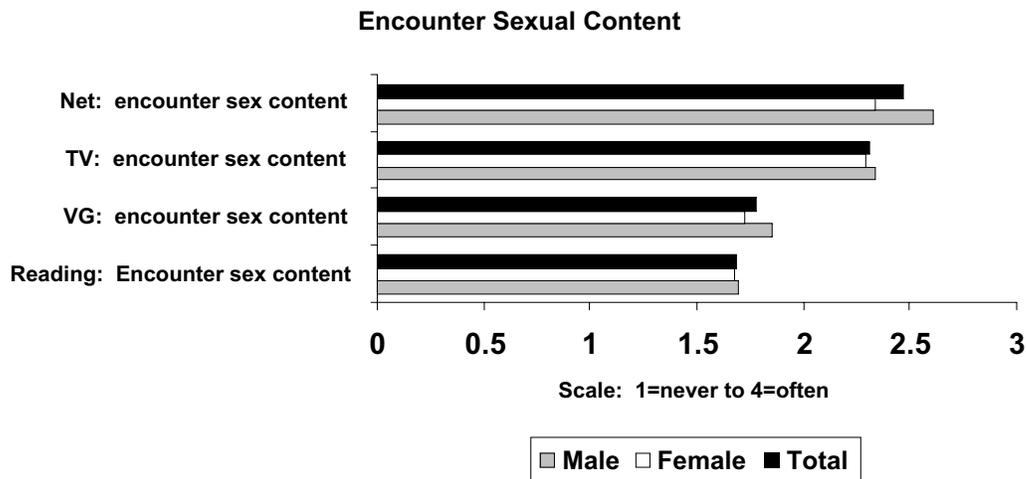


Teens reported that their parents were more concerned about Internet security than they were. Most teens, however were slightly aware that Internet security was an issue, and girls were slightly more concerned than boys. Few BC teens were very concerned about knowing the real identity of the people that they communicate with on line.

Parents, educators and researchers have also been concerned about the types of content young people are exposed to in their media use. There has been a widespread debate about the levels of violent and sexual material in children’s media. BC teens claim they were more likely to experience violent content on the Internet and videogames than on television or in their reading materials. Overall, boys report more inappropriate violent content than girls, which may be explained by their genre preferences.



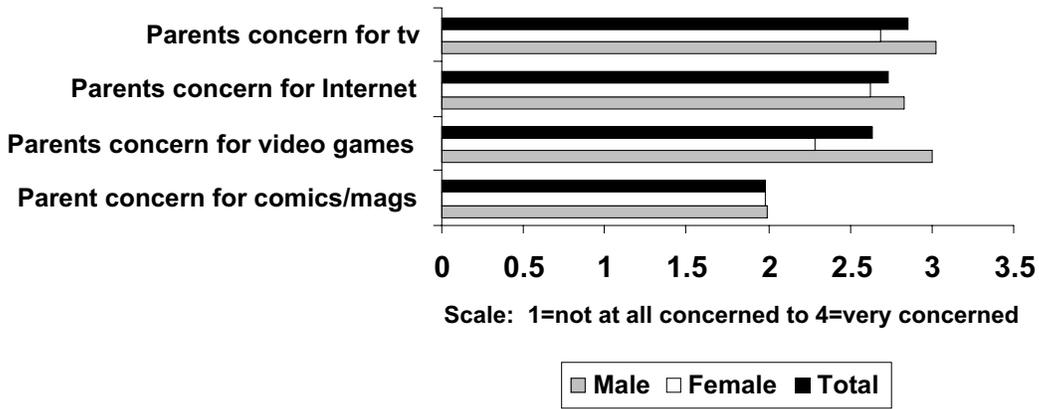
The Internet was also the medium in which BC teens reported that they were sometimes exposed to sexual content, with boys reporting more exposure than girls. Teens claimed that in their television viewing they were more likely to encounter sexual content than violence. The least sexualized content was encountered reading.



## MEDIA CONCERNS AND RULES

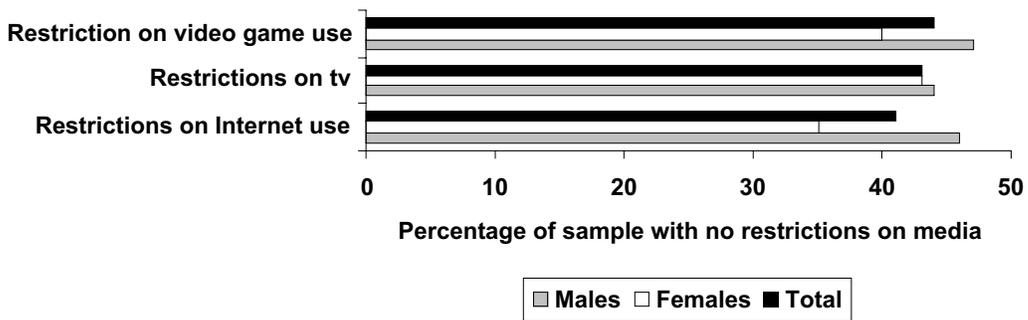
Given the debates about young people’s media use, the audit asked BC teens to report how concerned their parents’ were about their media use. They reported that their parents were most concerned about television and Internet use—least about comics and magazines. More so than girls, boys report their parents were more concerned about their television, Internet, and videogame use.

**Parents' concern over media use**



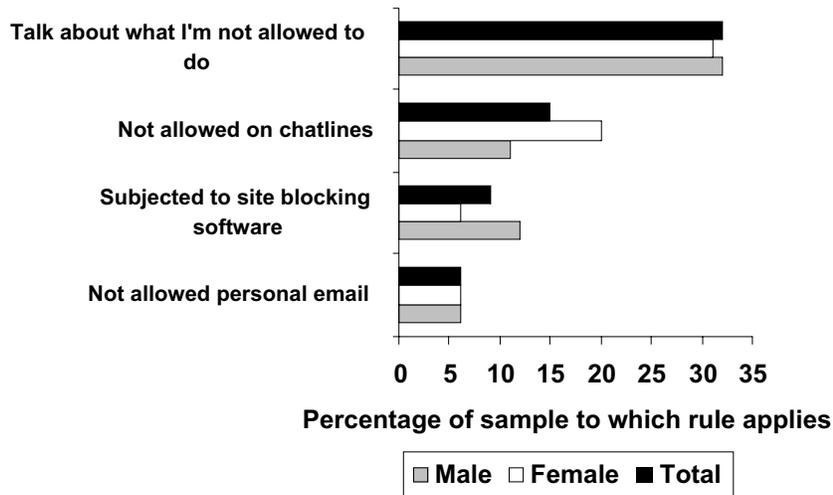
The Media Audit inquired whether media concerns were translated into monitoring and rules. Across media about 40% of the sample claim, they were subject to no restrictions. Boys reported that they were especially likely to have no restrictions placed on their Internet and videogame use.

**No restrictions on media use**



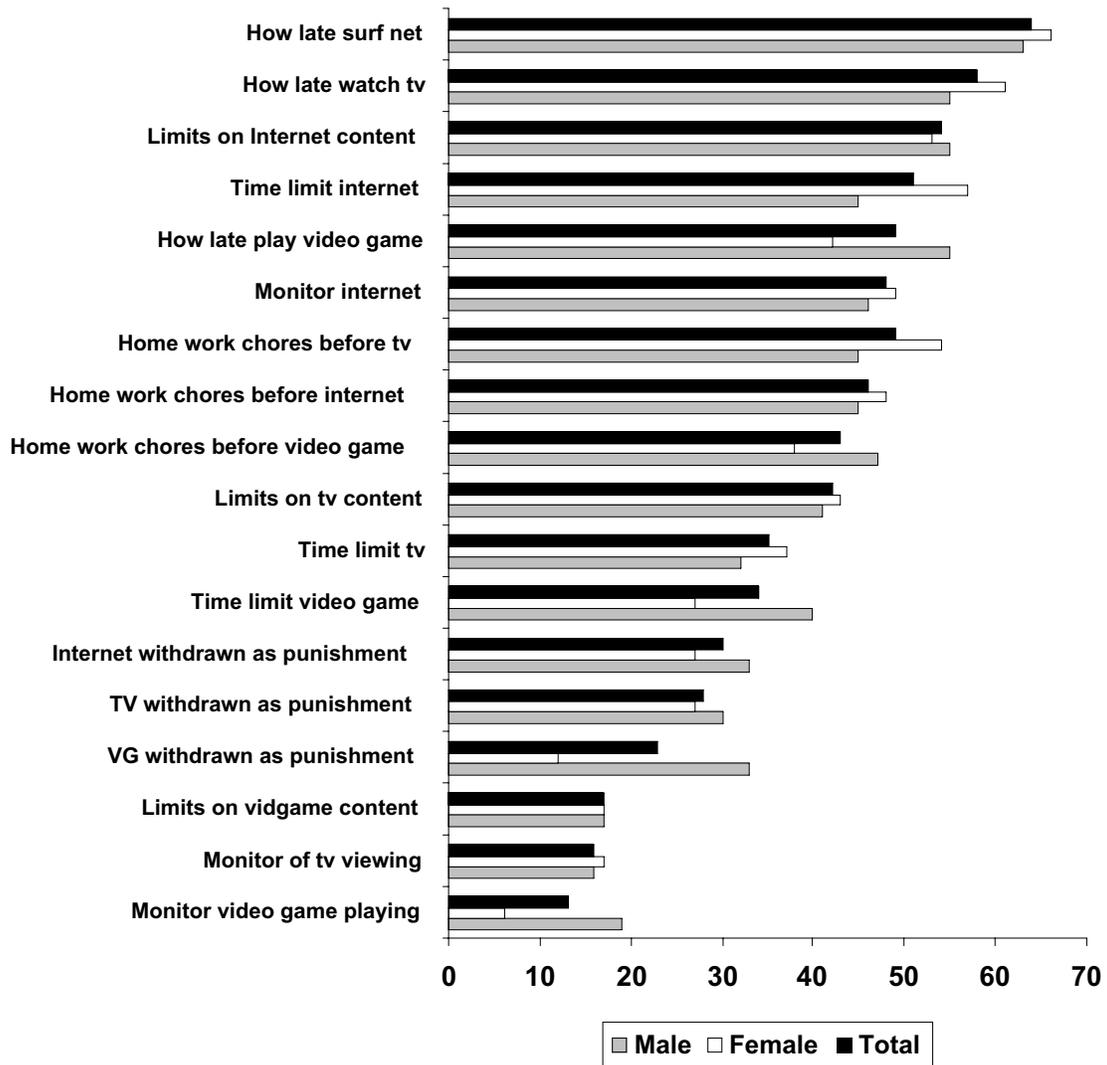
We probed further into specific Internet restrictions. Few BC teens report being subject to site blocking software (7%) and most were permitted to have personal e-mail accounts (98% were allowed). On average only 15% report they were not allowed on chat lines, however, girls were 10% more likely to be banned from chat lines than boys. Over 30% of this sample report that their parents talked to them about what they were allowed to do on the Internet.

### Internet Use Rules



While they were not likely to use site-blocking software, parents concerns about the Internet did translate into many other restrictions. BC teen’s report their Internet activities were more heavily regulated that any other media. They were twice as likely to experience rules concerning their Internet activities than either television or videogames. The preferred means of regulation include regulating how late they could surf the net and watch TV, and time and content limits. About 40% claim they had to finish their chores and homework before they could watch TV, play their videogames, or surf the net. Parents were less likely to withdraw the use of a medium as punishment. Boys were more likely to have their videogame play regulated in someway than girls.

### Restrictions placed on media use



Overall, teens feel the restrictions placed on their media use are fair.

### Are the rules placed on your media use fair?

