A Qualitative Study of Avid Cinema-goers

UK Film Council

Research conducted by Stimulating World Research
November 2007

Contents

Executive summary

Background
- The research aimed:
    - to build a detailed picture of what an avid (avid cinema-goer and consumer of film, previously 'film buff') is and the factors that help create them;
    - to draw on avids experiences to provide insights into the cultural value of film.
- The fieldwork was conducted in two stages, involving interviews and focus group discussions with people that met strict selection criteria (based on their film viewing habits and age, gender & location).

Defining avids
- Avids identities are bound up in film. It is who they are: a constant that frames and informs their perception of themselves and the wider world.
- Avids often use the word 'obsession' to describe their relationship with film. While they still find entertainment value in films, their engagement goes beyond this.
- For avids, cinema offers more than stories told in light and sound, seen once and soon forgotten. Films offer the pre-eminent way of seeing and interpreting the world.
- Avids are very frequent cinemagoers and regularly attend film festivals and seasons.
- They are drawn to independent cinemas and film is central to their social life.
- Avids have a collector mentality and spend a great deal of time reading up on film and hunting for hard to get titles.
- They follow particular directors and take an interest in those parts of the world featured in their favourite films.
- It is common for avids to cite a particular film as the formative influence on their development. Often the film in question is said to have 'really moved them', caused them great excitement ('it blew me away') or provided a powerful point of identification ('that is me'). However, their initial introduction to film is usually through a cinema viewing of a mainstream title.

Types of avids
- There are sub-divisions within the broad audience group 'avids'. Three types of avids are discernible: *summits, specialists* and *scatterguns*.
- Summit avids are the most widely knowledgeable and tend to work in the film industry or film education/journalism. They are often interested in the business of film and may regard Hollywood as an interesting cultural phenomenon worthy of study.
- Specialist avids tend to be the most obsessive, often dismissive of films they do not deem worthy of consideration and they have a pronounced collector mentality.
- Scattergun avids enjoy film as one (albeit important) component of their varied cultural diet.
- The best way to encourage more summit avids is to promote career opportunities in the film business. Specialist avids need early nurturing, through film clubs for young people, discounted film admissions/merchandise etc. Because of their eclectic tastes

and willingness to sample, scattergun avids are popular targets for marketers. Therefore promotion and marketing campaigns need to be mounted in the places they like to frequent: bookstores, art galleries, music festivals and bars. Efforts should be made to re-connect them with their love of film when other influences are at the fore.

The film journey
- The journey to becoming passionate about film can be broken into a number of stages, equivalent to different levels of engagement with film.
- This is referred to as 'the film journey' and comprises the following stages: *film as entertainment, film as identity, film as culture* and *film as career*.
- The youngest audiences approach 'film as entertainment'. Between the ages of four and eleven mainstream films (e.g. *Star Wars*, *Grease*) tend to be central in promoting interest in cinema.
- During teenage years film can become entwined with identity formation, helping to define 'who I am' ('film as identity') This is the age when people start to actively look beyond mainstream film choices.
- The key trigger that helps make people take this step is the trusted opinion former: family members, friends, film clubs, inspirational teachers and cultural icons.
- In early adulthood people may begin to conceive of 'film as culture'.
- At this stage people start to look beneath the surface of film and subject it to critical analysis. They begin to look for films that offer an alternative to the mainstream and to move out of their comfort zone. It is often a key 'milestone movie' that prompts a move into this stage.
- 'Film as career' is the stage where people move into the film industry (including working in film education and journalism). It tends to be 'a dream come true' and something people have strived and worked hard for.

The value of film
- The research identified a number of elements that combine to form the unique selling point for film (it is the combination of these elements that stands film apart from, for example, literature, music or the visual arts):
  Film can be informative and reveal essential truths about the human condition; it has immediacy and when viewed at the cinema provides an immersive experience; it is accessible; it is a widely shared cultural experience; and it is a doorway to other cultural spheres.
- Closely allied to these attributes is the value that film brings to people's lives. The fieldwork suggests this value has personal and social/community dimensions.
- On a personal level film enables people to escape their worldly cares, it gives inspiration, helps people through their rites of passage, supports identity building, provides knowledge and promotes understanding in an accessible way, and (not least) gives considerable enjoyment.
- On a social/community level film can be the common thread that binds us into wider networks *("we all watch films and it gives us something to discuss")*. Film is also felt to encourage tolerance and promote understanding of other peoples,

cultures and ways of life.
- Above all, film is considered to have a unique cultural value because it is a remarkably accessible, inclusive and universal medium, with its appeal spanning generations and crossing national and linguistic boundaries (to a certain extent this also applies to television, but that tends to be perceived as a more mundane and parochial cultural form).
- Because of the powerful effect of stories told in light and sound (which connect with us via our dominant senses of sight and hearing), film is able to confront people with the real world whilst also speaking to their imaginations.

Possible interventions
To help people progress through the film journey:
Film as identity
- Promotion of niche/alternative films on television;
- Foreground themes of sex, violence and horror ('hooks') as a way into subtitled films;
- Offer cinema admissions concessions for younger audiences and support the development of school film clubs.

Film as culture
- Promote the Internet as a research tool;
- Support film societies, particularly in formal education contexts (schools, FE and HE institutions);
- Provide forums to meet actors, writers and directors;
- Provide and promote access to specialised films (e.g. through the Digital Screen Network).

Film as career
- Better communicate the range of career opportunities in film;
- Cross promote film through other academic subjects;
- Provide more opportunities for enthusiasts to meet industry insiders (e.g. Q&As, workshops etc.).

To harness the power of formative years:
- Encourage parents and educators to foster an interest in film among young people.
- Film offers fantastic benefits for young people. Are parents and others aware of this? Just as parents are encouraged to help children read and expand their minds what about the role of film?
- Encourage young people into the cinema – for the experience just as much as the actual film.
- As part of this, vibrant film societies at school and universities are essential.
- By their very nature young people are cash poor. Deals of any kind on film entrance and related merchandise would help encourage them to consume.

To promote viewing opportunities:
- For many, seeing films on TV first fostered a love of film. Seasons of black and white movies were often cited.
- Are there enough important films being shown on free to air services and in a way

that is accessible?
- Late night can suggest 'illicit' and 'my world' for teens and young adults- are there enough adult oriented film seasons that would appeal to aspirant youngsters?
- People living in the suburbs can crave cinemas that show 'intelligent film'. The digital screen network should address this, along with support for community based film society activity.

1 Introduction

The UK Film Council's Distribution and Exhibition Department has two primary functions; to help ensure that UK cinema audiences have access to the widest possible range of films at cinemas UK wide and to encourage audiences to increase their propensity to view less mainstream films. In order to help achieve these objectives it has two major funding tools: the P&A Fund which helps distributors widen their release plans and solidify their marketing efforts; and, the Digital Screen Network which is designed to harness new technology to reduce some of the financial barriers that face distributors when releasing films not targeted at the wide mainstream market. These advantages include lower individual film copy costs and the possibility of negotiating more flexible booking and programming strategies with cinemas.

The department recognised that a greater understanding of the cinema audience is a necessary condition for unfolding strategies to develop new audiences for less mainstream films and encouraging audiences to be adventurous with their viewing choices. Consequently, it commissioned an original piece of research aimed at producing a more detailed picture of the cinema-goer in terms of his/her motivations, propensity to be experimental, early experience of film, and general impression of film as both a cultural as well as entertainment offering. This research uncovered an audience typology that helped to inform the department's ongoing audience development activities. Briefly, the cinema types uncovered were as follows:

Mainstream: unlikely ever to view anything other than major 'Hollywood' style blockbusters.

Mainstream plus: generally mainstream, but apt to see less mainstream films on a few occasions.

Aficionados: tend to view a mix of films, including major foreign language titles, and can be encouraged to become even more adventurous in their viewing choices.

Film Buffs[1]: eschew mainstream films in favour of more extreme, esoteric, challenging and difficult subject matter (specialised) films.

Having studied the research it became clear that although this latter group was relatively small in number (c 300,000), it was nevertheless influential in driving admissions and hence programming policies in a number of cinemas, and its members were likely to expand their personal interest in film to a professional interest by electing to work in the industry.

In the light of this combination of commercial, cultural and creative aspects, it was decided to investigate film avids in greater depth by means of a further piece of qualitative research. This report presents the findings.

---

[1] Although the term 'buff' was used in the original unpublished research by Stimulating World, subsequent work has renamed this group as 'avid cinema goers' or 'avids'

2 Methods

2.1 Introduction
The study was conducted in two stages: the first to establish a picture of what a film avid is and what motivates them, while the follow up stage looked in greater detail at the film journey, how film enhances avids' lives and what this reveals about the wider cultural value of film.

From the outset the research was intended to be qualitative in nature, enabling the researchers to gain a deeper and more rounded understanding of film avids than was available from earlier studies.

The fieldwork required participants to provide biographical and film viewing details, so it was necessary for the research design to take account of the fact that people can be unreliable witnesses. The research team was aware that in group discussions participants might wish to present themselves in a socially (or culturally) acceptable light by either under- or over-representing their viewing of specialised films and in the managed presentation of their beliefs. This unreliability might be exacerbated by participants' inability to accurately recall past behaviour, thoughts and feelings.

In order to overcome these challenges a number of techniques were employed to ensure participants contributed unselfconsciously to group discussions and gave more considered and grounded reports of their viewing behaviour. Full details of the methods used, including how avids were recruited, are described below.

2.2 Recruitment
In stage one, participants were recruited to four focus groups in London (two), Manchester and Edinburgh. Each focus group comprised around ten film avids.

Suitable individuals were initially identified through the British Film Institute (BFI) mailing list and responses to local advertising at participating cinemas in Edinburgh and Manchester. Volunteers were asked to complete an online survey about their cinema going habits (frequency of cinema visits, types of film seen etc.) and key demographic information.

In order to ensure participants were avid consumers of specialised film they were asked whether they had seen at least five of the following films (all of which were recent releases at the time of the fieldwork): *A Very Long Engagement, Downfall, The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou, Melinda & Melinda, The Chorus, A Good Woman, Maria Full of Grace, Assassination of Richard Nixon, Bullet Boy, 2046, The Machinist, 5x2, The Consequences of Love, Bombon el Perro, The Sea Inside, Ong Bak: Thai Warrior, The Woodsman, The Edukators, Somersault and Tarnation.*

Individuals that met the selection criteria were asked to take part in the focus group discussions. The age and gender composition of the groups was as follows:

Table 2.1: Stage one focus group composition

Group	Age/gender	Location	Other characteristics
1	18-24 male & female	London	Two in each group doing film-related course
2	18-24 male & female	Edinburgh	
3	25-34 male & female	London	Two in each group pursuing a film career
4	25-34 male & female	Manchester	

Additionally, six one-to-one interviews were held with a film lecturer (Glasgow), a film journalist (London) and four film avids (London urban and suburban, Edinburgh and Manchester).

In stage two, six focus groups were recruited, two each in London, York and Cambridge. Participants were recruited in the same way using BFI and City Screen mailing lists for the initial call for volunteers. Table 2.2 gives the composition of these latter focus groups:

Table 2.2: Stage two focus group composition

Group	Age/gender	Location
1	18-24 male & female	London
2	18-24 male & female	York
3	18-24 male & female	Cambridge
4	25-44 male & female	London
5	25-44 male & female	York
6	25-44 male & female	Cambridge

2.3 Stage one
In exploring what makes someone a film avid, the focus groups and one-to-one interviews sought to understand film in the context of participants' lives as a whole. Discussions and interviews were structured and moderated to address the following questions:

Avids' relationship with film
- What is it about their makeup that made film particularly attractive to them?
- Do they watch film in a detached way or do they get fully engaged with the narrative and 'lost' in the experience?
- Where do avids get their information and 'film fix'?
- What do they think of the emergence of DVDs?
- How do avids relate to cinema and are their needs being met?
- What implications does this have for the way avids like to be communicated with about film (e.g. through marketing)?

Avids' disposition
- Do they have other passions?
- Are they 'collectors'?
- Do avids have a particular way of looking at the world?

On becoming an avid
- Going back in time, what factors were involved in them becoming a film avid?
- What were they thinking and doing that meant this interest was developing?
- How did friends, family and authority figures like teachers and lecturers feed in to this emerging passion?
- What triggers activated their interest in film?
- How much of this development process is down to nature and how much seems to be nurture?
- Have film avids' attitudes and behaviour changed over time?
- Do they believe they will be acting any differently in future, and why?

Location and access
- How does location (i.e. place of residence) shape and affect the experiences of film avids? For instance, is getting involved in film an emotional way out for someone living in a small town?
- How does a film avid not living in a major city get their 'fix' and support (in their film identity)?

Underlying all of these enquiries (although not directly articulated during the fieldwork) was the simple question: what can be done to encourage the development of avids?

In addition to the moderated discussion, focus group participants were asked to draw a 'film timeline', a technique that helps people to organise chronologically their experiences, making connections and promoting deeper reflection on past events. Participants were provided with a piece of paper and asked to jot down the key films they had seen, from their earliest memory onwards. They were also encouraged to elaborate on the theme by adding key influences on their developing tastes (e.g. key opinion formers, particular films etc.), and to identify where on the timeline the person first became passionate about film. The timelines served a dual purpose by stimulating focus group discussions and providing a resource for analysis by the researchers following the focus groups.

2.4 Stage two

Similar methods were employed in the second stage focus groups although the research questions had a different slant, geared more to exploring the timelines and also the value of film in avids' lives.

Thus value was approached during the discussions by asking participants to 'complete the following until you run out of thoughts: "What I personally get from film in my life is….."'.

Another technique involved asking participants to draw a concentric circles chart of their 'passions' with their main interest in the centre (e.g. film, art, books, sport, family etc.). As with the timeline, this enabled participants to create a physical map of their cultural life, highlighting connections and demonstrating their strength of feeling for film in relation to other important influences in their lives.

The discussion and interview transcripts were analysed by identifying common themes, allowing the main organising principles for reporting and making sense of the information to emerge from the material.

3 Results

3.1 Defining avids

The definition of a film avid prefiguring the research suggested film is a passion and plays a central part in avids' lives. The fieldwork reported here confirms this. Avids' identities are bound up in film. It is who they are: a constant that frames and informs their perception of themselves and the wider world. This section looks at how avids articulate their relationship with film and provides a profile of common avid traits.

We should not forget, however, that avids' relationship with film, and their ability to pursue their enthusiasms, changes over time. Avid identities are no more fixed than any other, and lifestyle changes, such as having children or moving into or out of employment, can have profound implications for their engagement with film. What follows is therefore not intended to present the immutable features of an 'avid persona', but rather to draw out the main characteristics that help set avids apart from other audience types.

3.1.1 Film is a passion

Avids often use the word 'obsession' to describe their relationship with film. While they still find entertainment value in films, their engagement goes beyond this. Certainly avids take pleasure in maintaining a critical perspective on what they see. But they also derive satisfaction from seeing films they might not actually like- films that help them to explore and challenge their tastes. And their tastes are not confined to specialised films. In discussion it is clear that avids may even find more crowd-pleasing fare (like the *American Pie* franchise) as worthy viewing for what such films have to say about popular culture. For avids, cinema offers more than stories told in light and sound, seen once and soon forgotten; rather, films offer the pre-eminent way of seeing and interpreting the world.

Careful analysis of the research transcripts reveals the elements that fuel and sustain avids' passion for film. Avids love:

- Going to the cinema <u>at least twice a week</u>
- Going to <u>every night</u> of film festivals and seasons
- Deals/special offers for film entry
- Q & As with directors *("you feel like you are one of them")*
- Independent cinemas
- Discussing film (<u>but mostly going on their own</u>)
- Having rare copies of films. Piracy is acceptable in this instance if legitimate copies are hard to access, but not otherwise (for most avids)
- Spending time online in their film quest (digging wide and deep through film related sites)
- Reading about film (books, magazines, web sites etc.)
- Following a particular director and, to a lesser extent, certain actors

- Taking an interest in those parts of the world their favoured films are from (more than in genre - unlike other regular filmgoers. *"Directors and geography are a genre")*.

To best illustrate how avids relate to films and articulate their enthusiasms, Tables 3.1 and 3.2 present a selection of notable transcript quotes. They demonstrate the range of ways avids approach and conceive of films. Critical appraisal is central to this, but so too is the desire to seek out challenging films; an appreciation that films offer a valuable window on the world; and the desire to repeatedly return to favourite films.

Table 3.1: Examples of 'avid talk' about film generally

Theme	Quote
Critical appraisal	"As I learned to enjoy films I took a more critical and objective view" "When I hear cool lines in a film I always write them down and then think about what made them work"
Challenging tastes	"I have learned to challenge myself and go beyond personal taste"
Film as part of the fabric of everyday life	"We all [in the focus group] possibly watch at least three to four films a week. I often have them running in the background besides the ones I sit down to focus on"
Access and favoured venues	"When I go home to the suburbs it's devastating. There are no independent cinemas" "I would never go to the Odeon. It is empty when it is full" "I would rather support independent films and cinemas. The giants only fill you up with popcorn"
Fanaticism	"At the moment I am unlikely to watch anything other than Japanese films"

Table 3.2: Examples of 'avid talk' about specific films

Title	Quote
Cock & Bull Story	"Finally a British Film that is good. It has a good ensemble cast. It is based on the Tristram Shandy book".
Moolaade	"An extraordinary insight into African villages, their rituals and female circumcision".
Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring	"I saw Lord of the Rings three times in one day. I have seen many other films twice in one day"
A Matter of Life and Death	"It's a film I always return to again and again. It has everything"

Having gained an idea of what an avid looks like the strategically important question remains: what triggers this obsession with film?

It is common for avids to cite a particular film as the formative influence on their

development. Often the film in question is said to have 'really moved them', caused them great excitement ('it blew me away') or provided a powerful point of identification ('that is me'). It may be a particular moment or image in a film that has a profound impact: *"The flying sequence in* A Matter of Life and Death *has stayed with me. I dream about it".* However, the films cited on these occasions are often only milestones in a journey that began some time before. In other words, avids' interest in film builds up over time, fed by myriad wellsprings until a particular film prompts what can be quite a stark Damascene conversion.

Other influences, which may play a role in first introducing avids to the 'milestone movie', include attending further or higher education and clubs and societies that promote access to a wide range of cinema, or growing up in (or moving to) a city where viewing opportunities are greater than in rural and suburban communities.

We can build up a chronology of engagement with film from the biographical details yielded by the fieldwork, highlighting the role of these factors at particular life stages (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Key influences on avids

| Early years (ages 4-11)	Teens (ages 12-18)	Adulthood (age 19+)
Significant others ▪ Mostly father/male caregiver but also siblings. ▪ Wanting to bond, or finding refuge from difficult home life. Films on television ▪ Ubiquitous TV provides greatest range of viewing opportunities and allows experimentation and sampling. The big screen experience ▪ Cinema spectacle is a special and memorable experience for young audiences. First cinema visit is a vivid memory.	Films on television ▪ Still watching B&W films. ▪ Channel 4 seasons; BBC2 Alex Cox etc. ▪ Niche can = me/my world. School ▪ Film societies. ▪ Inspirational teacher. ▪ 'English' and film related school trips to London. ▪ GCSE and 'A' level course books made into films. Peer group (friends and siblings) ▪ Keeping up with the crowd. ▪ Impressing people. Parents/grandparents ▪ Less of an influence now but could be watching their videos without permission (feels risky). Videos/DVDs ▪ Collecting. ▪ Repeat viewing. The cinema ▪ Can be a lifeline, opening up range of films. Special offers and discount cards ▪ Incentives for time rich and money poor young people. Adolescent rebellion ▪ Films provide an alternative world.	College/University ▪ Film societies. ▪ Film studies/ English courses. ▪ Meeting like-minded people. Urban life Choice of films available: 'it's easy to watch film'. BFI and key venues. Q&As with directors. Film festivals. The Cinema ▪ Patronising independent cinemas. Internet communities* ▪ Posting to bulletin boards, discussion groups etc. ▪ Surfing for film related information. ▪ Sourcing film merchandise and tracking down rare films. Self preservation ▪ Friendship networks and socialising are organised around film. Career in film ▪ Avids may be drawn into film as a career and this in turn feeds their passion.

* The age of the research participants (18-44) means the Internet has had a fairly recent impact on their developing avid identity. With the growth of Internet access in the home, and its enthusiastic take-up by children and teens, it is likely this will have a much more significant role at an earlier stage for younger generations organised into 'communities of interest' around sites like YouTube and MySpace and as download services enter the market.

3.1.2 Three types of avids
The portrait of avids depicted in the previous section holds generally true but at a deeper level the research reveals distinct variations in this broad audience group. While all film avids are knowledgeable and obsessive about film there is evidence of more

than one type of avid, and this has implications for how to address and market to them. The three types of avid identified here are 'summit avids', 'specialist avids' and 'scattergun avids':

Figure 1: Three types of avids
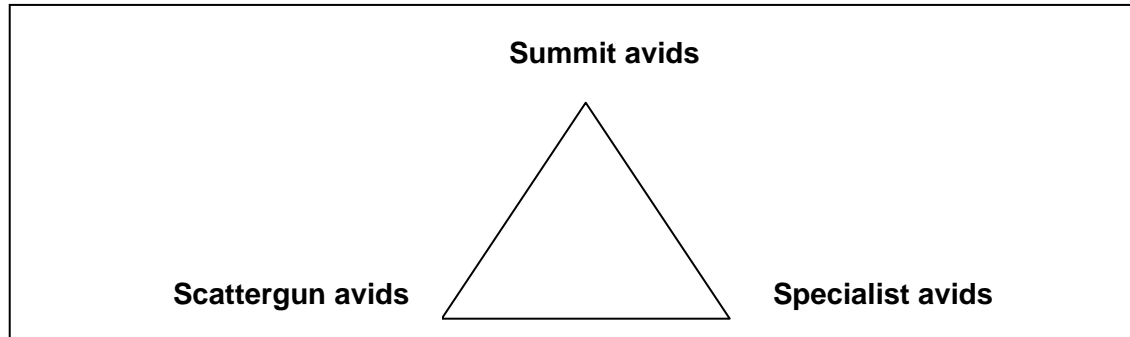
Summit avids- overview
Summit avids are the most widely knowledgeable. They often work in the film industry, or are film academics/educators or journalists. They may have started out as specialist avids (see below) but have learned to be less puritanical about what they see than in their more obsessive and zealous younger days. They are often interested in the business of film and may regard Hollywood as an interesting cultural phenomenon worthy of study.

Developing summit avids
Summits are firmly in the driving seat of their engagement with film, making them far less receptive to targeted marketing campaigns. But what about tomorrow's summits? The fieldwork found that some scattergun and specialist avids wanted a career in the film industry but were put off film courses because of concerns about whether they would lead to employment. Any initiative aimed at removing barriers to entry to the film business is likely to benefit the development of summit avids.

Case history 1 Summit avid Male, film lecturer	- Saw *Jungle Book* at cinema - wow! Hated sport so watched movies in holidays. - Worked unpaid at video shop and given posters. Challenged himself by going 'beyond personal taste'. 'I had some friends but guess I was on my own'. 'Teacher showed us stuff for older kids and we had a great film library at school'. Loved music but teacher helped film win out. - Loved classic Hollywood cinema- then went onto world cinema. Moved to Edinburgh because of the cinemas. 'Film Guild enabled me to watch films thought I did not like e.g. westerns. Now it is about seeing next great film'. 'Don't have TV or read newspapers. So film is my reference with the world'.

Case history 2 Summit avid Male, film journalist	- At 7 years predicts music chart positions. 'I could tell you everything about a band, their records, everything'. 'Obsessed' by music & 'NME world', an alternative world. - Discovers film at university: recognises music is just one aspect of culture. Drawn to Gay iconic films & actors "I found people who shared my interest'. 'Film is more adaptable to growing older than music'. - Film becomes the 'passion' - being part of something bigger - the world & 'culture' 'The London Film Festival was my first exposure to film makers and how much fun film could be'. - Reviews films everyday, lives film. At ease with self and a great social life around film. Fascinated by Hollywood as a business. Doing blogs – enjoys like minded net community. - Loves 70s USA, Howard Hawks, Brand, Hal Hartley. USA independents: Coen brothers, Tod Haines, Jones/Russell, writers - Charlie Kaufman. *Downfall* & *The Dinner Party* – seen as part of a cultural conversation. Delights in anticipating what people will be watching tomorrow.

Specialist avids- overview
Specialist avids are more careful about what they see and can be dismissive of films they believe are not worthy of their attention. They tend to be the most obsessive type of avid and have a pronounced collector mentality. They can be very cynical about Hollywood and what they regard as the poor state of the British film industry. Specialists can be very inner-directed types and adopt film more as a substitution for an active social life.

Developing specialist avids
Specialists are driven to discover for themselves. They tend to start out as loners. Arguably they do not need help developing their appreciation of film but steps can be taken to make it easier for them during their formative stages:

- Junior BFI to nurture their tastes at an early age;
- Discounts on film-related material for younger audiences e.g. DVDs of film director Q & A's, books and key specialised films;
- Establish discounted film clubs for young people.

Case history 3 **Specialist avid** **Female**	▪ As a child watched TV with dad. Loved John Mills. Introduced to British comedies (e.g. Ealing). Started collecting old videos even though could not play them. ▪ Collecting more film memorabilia. Aged 16 'thought I was cleverer than teachers'. Really became aware of directors through *The Young Poisoner's Handbook* 'which I became obsessed with'. ▪ At 18 had a Buster Keaton fascination and then Hitchcock. Made trips to London and started making animated films. ▪ Met director of *The Young Poisoner's Handbook*. Loves meeting directors and talking to them. 'I always have a parallel film in my head'. ▪ Enjoys tracking down rare films on the net. ▪ Loves *I'm Alright Jack*, *Steamboat Bill Jnr*, *On The Town*, *Vertigo*. 'They seem perfect, beautiful and spoke to me'.

Case history 4 **Specialist avid** **Male**	▪ As a child loved watching B&W films on TV. 'We watched a lot of TV'. ▪ Aged 8 saw *Goodfellas* and understood importance of directors. Hated school except for English teacher. ▪ Moved to Ireland and discovered world cinema through Three Colours trilogy -watched them in one night. <u>Sight and Sound</u> and <u>Empire</u> 'kept me in touch'. Bought book by Pauline Kael. ▪ Saw *The General* and became 'obsessed with silent film'. ▪ Moves to London and exposed to wider range of film. Starts reading more film books and scripts. Sees films from Africa and Iran - 'anywhere that is not obvious' ▪ Loves *Goodfellas*, *Black Narcissus*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, *The Passion of Joan of Ark*, *Irreversible*, Michael Powell, Kieslowski, Scorsese, Fritz Lang, David Lynch, Von Trier, Cronenberg, Haneke, Sembene and Howard Hawks.

Scattergun avids
Film is just one of the cultural interests of scattergun avids, albeit an important one. Consequently their knowledge of film may not be as deep as summits and specialists. Many profess to be writers (or would-be writers) and enjoy the performing and visual arts. They can often be found at galleries and they especially enjoy attending festivals for the cultural experience. They tend to be very sociable and regard film as part of the cultural mix, to be sampled eclectically.

Developing scattergun avids
As scatterguns tend to be more social and actively involved in a range of culture spheres they are a target market chased by many media and retail companies. Promotion and marketing campaigns need to be mounted in the places they like to frequent: bookstores, art galleries, music festivals and bars. Efforts should be made to

re-connect them with their love of film when other influences are at the fore. This may require joint brand cultural activity e.g. Channel 4/New Cinema Fund film, music and arts festivals perhaps even Sky Movies.

Scatterguns may wish to develop their knowledge of film but other than seeing lots of them they may not know where to start. Therefore improved signposting of available resources (e.g. Screen Online), short courses and local film clubs and societies may be helpful.

Case history 5 Scattergun avid Female	- As a child watched a lot of B&W films on TV. Family read a lot. Granddad had a passion for Chaplin. - Growing up got into music and bands. Loved music and film stars. Only had a choice of one or two good movies at local cinema. - Studied sociology at university but wanted to do film (but was scared as didn't really have any knowledge). Went through a period watching French films. Loves them because 'they are quirky'. - Goes to arts, music and film festivals. Would like to improve knowledge of film but does not know where to start. Watches all new 'interesting' films and anything independent. Posts reviews on the Internet. - Loves *Adaptation*, *Broken Flowers*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Gregory's Girl*, *The Blair Witch Project*, *Kes*, *Jules et Jim*, Hal Hartley, Baz Luhrmann, David Lynch.

Case history 6 Scattergun avid Male	- Watched war films on TV with dad (and still loves them now). - Had a good teacher into film. Studied *Chimes at Midnight* 'Made the book come to life'. At school loved *Ferris Beuller's Day Off* and horror. - At university realised *My Own Private Idaho* was Shakespeare and this made him more interested in films. Joined film society and watched films regularly. - Job took over and did not see films for a few years with the same intensity. Eventually joined BFI and Tate Modern. Loves being in film and arts community. Starting to learn about art and film 'in a random way'. - Loves *Ghost Dog, Way of the Samurai*, *Infernal Affairs*, Takeshi, Fellini, Roeg, and Satyagit Ray.

3.2 The film journey

The previous section began to elaborate a developmental model underpinning avid formation. This section takes the concept further by describing the key steps on the journey to becoming passionate about film. This is referred to as 'the film journey' and

comprises the following stages: *film as entertainment, film as identity, film as culture* and *film as career*. It is a process of cumulative building. At each step there are key triggers that enable people to move up to the next level of engagement. These trigger points are strategically important as they offer opportunities for intervention, helping to support and create greater interest in specialised film and film going.
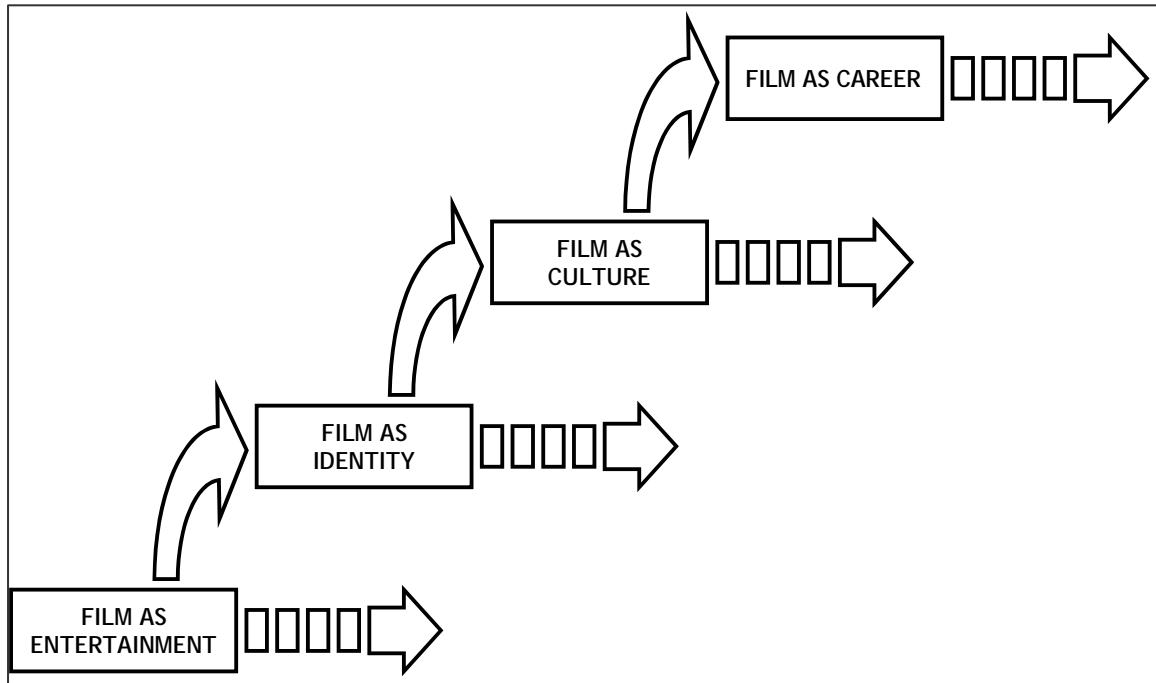
Figure 2: The film journey

3.2.1 Film as entertainment (Four to eleven years)
At four to five years old the cinema can be a thrilling and scary place. Every research participant remembered her or his first outing to the cinema (quite often it ended in tears!).

For older children, watching films is an important part of personal and emotional development. However, whilst they enjoy film at this age there is little interest beyond the moment of watching itself. So, the relationship is reasonably passive. Pre-teen children are unlikely to research a film's background or follow related themes such as the director's other work.

At this age, mainstream films (e.g. *Star Wars*, *Grease*) tend to be central in promoting interest in cinema.

Parents, older siblings and film viewing at home (on television and video) provide exposure to film and no doubt DVD will now also play its part for the current generation.

3.2.2 Film as identity (Twelve to sixteen/seventeen years)
At this stage film becomes more wrapped up with people's identity and personality, helping to define 'who I am'. It fulfils a number of important basic needs – the need for escape, belonging, bonding, independence, rebellion and (particularly for males) the collector mentality. This is the age when people start to actively look beyond mainstream film choices.

The key trigger at this stage is the trusted opinion former: family members, friends, film clubs, inspirational teachers and cultural icons (who can be outside of the film world but who may be associated with it). Ownership becomes important, not just possessing films on video/DVD but the feeling that one has a personal investment in favourite films.

Possible interventions:
- *Promotion of niche/alternative films on television;*
- *Foreground themes of sex, violence and horror as a way into subtitled films;*
- *Offer cinema admission concessions for younger audiences and support the development of school film clubs.*

3.2.3 Film as culture (Aged sixteen years and above)
At this stage people start to look beneath the surface of film and subject it to critical analysis. They begin to look for films that offer an alternative to the mainstream and to move out of their comfort zone. Many now act as though they were already in the film business, discussing how they would have written the script, cast and shot the film.

It is often a key 'milestone movie' (discussed in the previous section) that prompts a move into this stage. This period in people's lives often corresponds with academic development (in the sixth form and further/higher education), which can assist them in learning to adopt a more critical perspective and to develop their cultural palate. The Internet is increasingly important in allowing people to research beyond the film and explore avenues of interest.

Possible interventions:
- *Promote the Internet as a research tool;*
- *Support film societies, particularly in formal education contexts (schools, FE and HE institutions);*
- *Provide forums to meet actors, writers and directors;*
- *Provide and promote access to specialised films (e.g. through the Digital Screen Network).*

3.2.4 Film as career
This is the level where people move into the film industry (including working in film education and journalism). It tends to be 'a dream come true' and something people have strived and worked hard for.

Although many in the research loved the idea of getting into the film business, there

was a lot of ignorance about how to go about it. Also, people thought that even if they did try, they would probably not succeed because there are not many opportunities. Generally, when people thought about the film business they tended not to think about support roles and administrative jobs.

Possible interventions:
- *Better communicate the range of career opportunities in film;*
- *Cross promote film through other academic subjects;*
- *Provide more opportunities for enthusiasts to meet industry insiders (e.g. Q&As, workshops etc.).*

3.3 The value of film
The second stage of research was primarily concerned with exploring the unique value and significance of film. Because avids often reflect deeply on their film going experiences they make excellent research subjects for such an investigation and can provide valuable insights into the value of film for <u>all</u> audiences.

3.3.1 The unique selling point of film
As a medium film is felt to have many attributes that help explain its attraction. The following emerged from the fieldwork discussions, and taken together they constitute the unique selling point for film (individually these elements may apply to other cultural forms, but film is unique in bringing them all together):

- **The cinema experience is immersive**
  The darkened environment of the cinema demands focussed attention. Although one watches in silence and in a darkened space there can be a sense of community and not being alone.
- **Film can be informative and reveal essential truths about the human condition**
  "Shooting Dogs brought home the reality of the genocide to me far more than any news report".
- **Film has immediacy**
  "A film is so rich in colour, sound and texture that you can be transported into its world in an instant".
- **Film is accessible**
  Most towns and cities have at least one or more cinemas, making film going more accessible than other cultural activities. Film language is also more accessible than traditional (print) literacy.
- **Film is a widely shared cultural experience**
  "When you leave the cinema you can't help but listen to everyone expressing an opinion about what they have seen".
  "It's one of the few things that pretty well everyone can talk about - even more than sport".
  "You can be part of a community even if you're alone".
- **Film as a doorway**
  Film is unique in its overt interplay with other cultural spheres, bringing together and touching upon literature, language, travel and geography,

heritage and history, politics, music, and the performing and visual arts. *"French films really helped me to embrace and understand the language". "It's harder to understand the cultural context of a sentence in a foreign book…with a film it's all there".*

3.3.2 Value
Closely allied to these attributes is the value that film brings to people's lives. The fieldwork suggests this value has a personal and social/community dimension:

On a personal level film enables people to escape their worldly cares, it gives inspiration, helps people through their rites of passage, supports identity building, provides knowledge and promotes understanding in an accessible way, and (not least) gives considerable enjoyment.

On a social/community level film can be the common thread that binds us into wider networks (*"we all watch films and it gives us something to discuss"*). Film is also felt to encourage tolerance and promote understanding of other peoples, cultures and ways of life.

And as previously described, film is also regarded as a doorway to other cultural spheres:

- Many research participants admitted that watching a film of a book, rather than reading the book itself, helped them pass their English literature exam. Watching a film is a lot quicker and less arduous than reading a book. Nevertheless, film could also encourage many to go on to read the book after having seen the film.
- Although travel is not always possible, film is an easy way to see other places and cultures. Many of the people interviewed were so moved by a film they travelled to the locations and then read books connected with the subject matter.
- Film and music are seen to have an important relationship and there is a strong interest in soundtracks. People can be introduced to types of music and artists they would not normally come across.
- Whilst day-to-day party politics is felt to be unattractive by many, film was judged to raise political issues in a compelling and thought-provoking way (*"I would never have thought about life in Brazil, but* City of God *raised all sorts of issues that left me thinking about them for days and then discussing them with friends"*).
- There is also seen to be a natural fit between film and visual art at the level of aesthetics, creativity and artistic intent.

Above all, film is considered to have a unique cultural value because it is a remarkably accessible, inclusive and universal medium, with its appeal spanning generations and crossing national and linguistic boundaries (to a certain extent this also applies to television, but that tends to be perceived as a more mundane and parochial cultural form). And because of the powerful effect of stories told in light and sound (which

connect with us via our dominant senses of sight and hearing), film is able to confront people with the real world whilst also speaking to their imaginations.

4 Conclusion

Considerable ground has been covered in this two-stage research project. The fieldwork has delved into the research participants' cultural lives and sought to distil some of the richness of their personal experience. The picture that emerges is a composite of these particulars, drawing together common elements and themes to arrive at a typical film avid profile:

> *Avids are obsessed with film; it is their passion. They are very frequent cinemagoers and regularly attend film festivals and seasons. They are drawn to independent cinemas and film is central to their social life. They have a collector mentality and spend a great deal of time reading up on film and hunting for hard to get titles. They follow particular directors and take an interest in those parts of the world featured in their favourite films.*

There are sub-divisions within this broad audience group. Three types of avid are discernible: *summits, specialists* and *scatterguns*. Summit avids are the most widely knowledgeable and tend to work in the film industry or film education/journalism. Specialist avids tend to be the most obsessive, often dismissive of films they do not deem worthy of consideration. Scattergun avids enjoy film as one (albeit important) component of their varied cultural diet.

This study also shows that the journey to becoming passionate about film can be broken into a number of stages, equivalent to different levels of engagement with film. This is referred to as 'the film journey' and comprises the following stages: *film as entertainment, film as identity, film as culture* and *film as career*. Progression through these levels is dependent on key triggers, which open the way for policy interventions by film agencies.

While the film journey provides a helpful metaphor for thinking about the development of people's passion for film (and their concomitant willingness to explore specialised film) it does not in itself explain what makes film so compelling. Drawing on avids' personal testimony, the research has identified some of the ways film adds value to people's lives, and the unique qualities that make film a rewarding and popular site of cultural engagement:

> *Film*
> *…can be informative and reveal essential truths about the human condition;*
> *…has immediacy and when viewed at the cinema provides an immersive experience;*
> *…is accessible;*
> *…is a widely shared cultural experience;*
> *…is a doorway to other cultural spheres.*

> *Film adds value on a personal level by*
> *…enabling people to escape their worldly cares;*
> *…providing inspiration;*
> *…helping people through their rites of passage;*
> *…supporting identity formation;*
> *…promoting knowledge and understanding of other cultures and ways of life;*
> *…giving considerable enjoyment.*
>
> *Film adds value on a social/community level by*
> *…binding people into wider social networks and communities of interest;*
> *…encouraging tolerance of other people, cultures and ways of life.*

A number of specific interventions were discussed in relation to stages in the film journey. In addition, several more general themes have emerged from the research and possible interventions and areas for further consideration are described in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1: Possible interventions

Theme	Intervention
The power of formative years	• Encourage parents and educators to foster an interest in film among young people. • Film offers fantastic benefits for young people. Are parents and others aware of this? Just as parents are encouraged to help children read and expand their minds what about the role of film? • Encourage young people into the cinema – for the experience just as much as the actual film. • As part of this, vibrant film societies at school and universities are essential. • By their very nature young people are cash poor. Deals of any kind on film entrance and related merchandise would help encourage them to consume.
Viewing opportunities	• For many, seeing films on TV first fostered a love of film. Seasons of black and white movies were often cited. • Are there enough important films being shown on free to air services and in a way that is accessible? • Late night can suggest 'illicit' and 'my world' for teens and young adults- are there enough adult oriented film seasons that would appeal to aspirant youngsters? • People living in the suburbs can crave cinemas that show 'intelligent film'. The digital screen network should address this, along with support for community based film society activity.

To return to where we started, this research was commissioned to inform and guide strategic interventions directed at increasing the audience for specialised film in the UK. It has succeeded in helping to clarify the distinction between avids and the other

archetypal audience groups identified by earlier research ('mainstream', 'mainstream plus' and 'aficionados'). In doing so it reveals how people come to join this influential group and the conditions needed to promote a passion for film more widely among audiences.

Appendix 1 – Audience types

Mainstream
- At their most extreme, they focus on either clearly romantic or action-based mainstream films.
- They are particularly drawn to films that are recognised as 'big films' or blockbusters.
- Very unlikely to seek out 'foreign' films.
- Film acts as an antidote to their everyday lives – escapism is a central driver of their reason to visit a cinema.
- Tend to be rejecters of specialised film.

Mainstream plus
- Because they are principally looking for 'good' films (without breaking them down into categories), and because their cinema attendance can be as infrequent as once a month, they will usually find a mainstream film that satisfies their demand for 'something good'.
- However, a less mainstream film that has earned itself the status of a 'must-see' can appeal to them over and above mainstream fare, and can become their first choice for a visit.
- They tend to stick to mainstream repertoire. However, they can be lured into seeing specialised films now and again. These films will typically be American/English, offbeat but upbeat, accessible and with a familiar cast (e.g. *About Schmidt*).

Aficionados
- Aficionados are more likely than Mainstream Plus audiences to think of 'specialised films' as a category in their own right.
- They like to portray themselves as more discerning than other film-goers, to the extent of describing themselves as 'anti-Hollywood'- even though they still predominantly see mainstream American films.
- Compared to Mainstream types, Aficionados are more likely to make an effort to seek out specialised films that have caught their attention.
- Aficionados will see all the same specialised films as Mainstream Plus audiences, as well as specialised films that are foreign, more thought-provoking and have unfamiliar casts. They are still likely to reject the more extreme examples of specialised material.
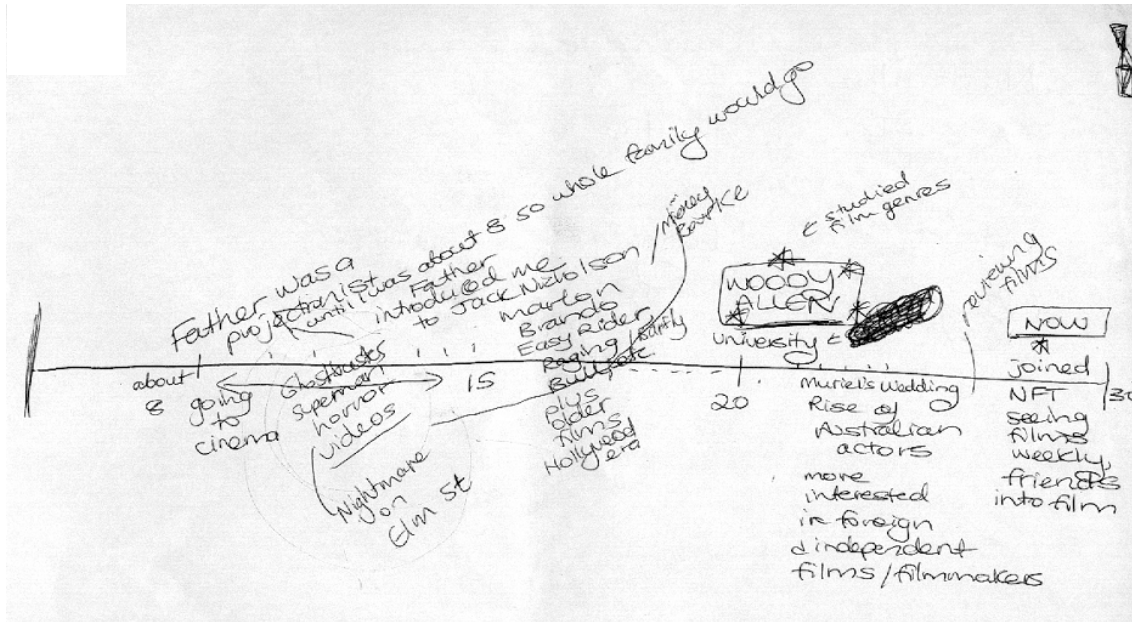
Film avids
- Film avids have their identity strongly bound up in film.
- They express a strong liking for films that do not fit neatly into any genre.
- Their love of cinema extends to the point where they are not merely interested in the film itself, but like to read and gain knowledge of the subject.
- The language used by film avids tends to be more sophisticated, analytical and thoughtful than that used by other types.
- They plan their viewing much further in advance than other filmgoers.

- They enjoy and indeed may even prefer going to the cinema on their own.
- They use a greater variety of sources to find out what's on and will make a trip specifically in order to go to the cinema.
- They often go more than once to see the same film.
- They will see mainstream films for different reasons than other audiences (e.g. to appreciate the special effects in *The Matrix*).

Appendix 2 – Example timelines

Timeline 1

Timeline 2

Acknowledgements