

[Sonia Livingstone](#)

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**From family television to bedroom culture:
Young people's media at home**

Sonia Livingstone

Department of Media and Communications
London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street, London, WC2A 2AE, UK
Tel. +44 (0)20 7955 7710
Fax +44 (0)20 7955 7248
Email s.livingstone@lse.ac.uk

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Definitions

'Bedroom culture' – especially for young people, a set of conventional meanings and practices closely associated with identity, privacy and the self has become linked to the domestic space of the child's bedroom in late modern society.

'Risk society' – in late modern societies, knowledge of and calculations regarding risk and uncertainty have become central to most or all social, economic and technological arrangements.

Introduction

In this chapter, I identify and analyse the role played by the media in underpinning the recent historical shift from a model of family life centred on the collective space of the living room to one dispersed throughout the home and, especially, located in the bedroom. It is argued that the domestic media introduced into Western homes over the past half century or more are first conceived as communal but then, as they become cheaper and more portable, they are reconceived as personal media, particularly by children and young people. In sociological terms, this reflects an underlying process of individualisation, by which it is meant that traditional social distinctions (particularly social class) are declining in importance as determinants of people's (especially young people's) life course, resulting in a fragmentation of (or perhaps liberation from) traditional norms and values. This process is linked in turn to the emergence of the risk society, a term by which Beck (1992) points to the recent (Post World War II) development of modern society as it faces vast yet uncertain and unmanageable risks of its own making; for childhood has become one key site of just such risks and anxieties. In the present chapter, it is argued that as 'outside' spaces are seen as ever more risky for children, 'home' takes over as the focus of their safety, identity and leisure. Within this, the bedroom, and hence bedroom culture, is becoming a central location – both physically and symbolically – of media use and the mediation of everyday life.

Public and private leisure spaces

At the turn of the twenty-first century, 'the home is now commonly accepted as providing personal fulfilment and satisfaction as well as the means of recuperating from the pressures of the working day' (Allan, 1985: 57). It was not always thus. The model of the single family

home emerged strongly in the middle-classes in the early twentieth century, with a strict separation of public and private spheres, and with the private constructed as a refuge, a place for nurturing positive values and for the socialization of children: 'home sweet home... is the household interior, an over-decorated and embellished space held in the highest value' (Segalen, 1996: 400).

With the growing significance of domestic mass media in the second half of the twentieth century, two distinct trends regarding the home can be identified. These help us understand the difference between childhood in the 1950s when television arrived, and childhood at the turn of the twenty first century now that computers and the internet have made similar inroads into the home. The first trend concerns the shifting boundary between the home and outside, altering the balance between life in the community and family privacy, as symbolised by the changing significance of 'the front door'. Extending this spatial framework, the second trend concerns the shifting balance between communal family life and the private life of the child, as symbolised by the growing significance of 'the bedroom door'.

To take the first trend first, children's lives are defined by the ways in which:

'adults seek to impose or negotiate rules and limits, adjusted over time, aimed at reconciling children's freedom and security... The nature of the local environment and the availability of formal recreational services, ranging from parks to clubs, crucially affect how children negotiate their relationships and use of space outside the home' (Hill & Tisdall, 1997: 93).

There has been a gradual shift from children's leisure time spent outside (in the streets, woods or countryside) to that spent primarily at home, both reflecting and shaping cultural conceptions of childhood over the past half century. Interviews with parents about their own childhoods reveal a dominant image of a carefree childhood spent out of doors (Livingstone, 2002). Idealised and nostalgic though this may be, historians of childhood confirm a 'shift from a life focused on the street to one focused on the home'. Further, 'this was accompanied by a change in the social organisation of the home. Parents, and in particular fathers, became less remote and authoritarian, less the centre of attention when they were present' (Cunningham, 1995: 179).

The second trend has been fuelled by the continual multiplication of media goods at home, fostering a shift in media use from that of 'family television' (Morley, 1986) to that of individualised media lifestyles (Flichy, 2006) and, for children and young people, of 'bedroom culture' (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001). First the television, then the hi-fi, video recorder, computer, and now the internet, entered the home for communal use in the living room and were then gradually relocated to kitchens, bedrooms, even hallways. So, new media today enter the home in a similar fashion to the television before it, the decision is no longer whether to have any of these goods but rather how many to have and where to locate them in the home. This multiplication of domestic media goods is facilitated by the reduction in price for media goods, by the growth of mobile media (e.g. mobile phone, walkman, ipod), by the continual process of innovation in the design and marketing of existing technologies, and by the diversification of media forms (which encourages the multiplication of goods through upgrading and recycling existing technologies through the household).

For many young people now, a personalised media environment is taken for granted, in striking contrast with their parents' upbringing. In interviews with children, some have lost track of their possessions. One six year old boy told us, 'I've got two computers in the house, I've got Sega, and a Nintendo. No, I've got three, Sega, Supernintendo and the normal Nintendo'. In another family, the children disagreed on the number of television sets they possessed – was it 9 or 11, they wondered? - although they were clear that every room, especially the bedrooms, contained a set (Livingstone, 2002).

These two domestic boundaries, marked by the two doors, raise questions about the role of the media in the changing relations between parents and children, and between public and private (Livingstone, 2005). The two are also linked. The creation of a media-rich home tends to be justified by parents in relation to the decline of safe public spaces. Outside spaces are

increasingly seen as dangerous, the range and quality of public services has declined, and media use at home is increasingly construed as educational as well as entertaining (Buckingham, 2001). More practically, since much leisure time is spent at home, and since family members' tastes are increasingly segmented, there are also concrete advantages to the multiplication of media goods at home.

In what follows, I shall elaborate the argument just sketched above, drawing on findings from the Young People, New Media project (YPNM). This project interviewed and surveyed children and young people (aged 6-17) and their parents across the UK in spring 1997, asking them about the media in their home, their leisure time use, including time spent on each medium, media-related attitudes and tastes, social contexts of media use, parental guidance, family communication, and so on (Livingstone, 2002; Livingstone & Bovill, 2001). In a follow up study, UK Children Go Online (UKCGO) interviewed and surveyed children and young people (aged 9-19) and their parents across the UK in spring 2004 (Livingstone & Bober, 2005).

The decline of street culture

I think it's got a lot to do with society. In our day it used to be 'Watch for the bad man', but now it's 'Watch for the bad man, and the bad woman and the bad policeman and the little boys and girls'. You cannot trust anybody. It's a horrible thing to say, but you cannot.

(working class mother of a 9 year old daughter)

James et al (1998) draw on Beck's (1992) theory of the risk society to examine how the spaces for young people's leisure activities have changed in meaning over the past half century. Ennew (1994) argues that British children's lives are ruled by 'the idea of danger', which she sees as having taken a new twist at the beginning of the 1990s. One consequence of the growing fears regarding children's safety is a growth in adult management of children's leisure space and time. For example, Hillman et al (1990) found that while in 1971 80% of seven and eight year-old children walked to school on their own, by 1990 this figure had dropped to 9%.

Parents recall with nostalgia their own childhood freedoms to play out of doors, convinced that they cannot allow this for their children, and so the home is construed as the haven of safety. Fears of the outdoors are expressed by parents in urban and rural areas, and reports of harm to children on television and in the newspapers often figure in parents' accounts. The YPNM survey showed that only 11% of parents with children aged 6-17 say the streets where they live are 'very safe' for their child, compared with 56% thinking this about the neighbourhood where they themselves were brought up.

The perception of public space as relatively unsafe appears to be a particularly British view.¹ Britain is often popularly described as a 'child-unfriendly culture', where many social codes exist to manage the separation of spaces for children and adults, and many others exist to regulate children's participation within those adult-designated, or adult-defined 'family' spaces. However, observing parallel trends in America, Coontz (1997: 17) comments that:

'People talk about how kids today are unsupervised, and they often are; but in one sense teens are under more surveillance than in the past. Almost anyone above the age of 40 can remember places where young people could establish real physical, as opposed to psychic, distance from adults. In the suburbs it was undeveloped or abandoned lots and overgrowth woods ... In the cities it was downtown areas where kids could hang out. Many of these places are now gone.

Societal desire to keep children safe is paralleled by the desire to keep society safe from 'youth'. As Hill and Tisdall (1997: 194) comment, 'our fears about children's crime in public places exemplify society's requirements for an 'indoors child', which will not only keep children but also the public safe'.

The retreat to the home

There's nothing to do really... 'cos they've just gone and closed down the <club>.
But there's nothing here now.
(15 year old girls living in rural area)

Writing in the mid seventies, Corrigan (1976) contrasted the potential unpredictability of street corner culture with the alternatives of Mum and Dad in the rather formal front room or the known environment of the youth club. If those were the alternatives to the street corner of the 1970s they had changed by the 1990s. For many young people we interviewed, the youth club has closed down and the front room has been replaced by a multimedia home and, particularly, a multimedia bedroom. In the YPNM survey, 66% of children and young people aged 9-17 said that there was not enough for them to do in the area where they live. Crucially, then, the decline of street culture and the rise of the media-rich home are related.

Both parents and children explicitly link restrictions on the child's access to the world outside to increased media use within the home. In an extreme illustration of this, a 13 year-old boy, living in an area with a high level of unemployment and violence, told us that 'Mum gets us a video or a computer game if we have to stay in because of the fighting'. More often, though, the link between street culture and domestic culture is implicit, reflecting not only a shift in perceptions of public space but also in perceptions of the home. Where once the home was highly rule-bound, with codes for eating at table, activities in the bedroom, behaviour in the living room, and so forth, today it is going out which is heavily hedged about with rules and expectations. Here a middle-class mother living in a rural location talks about her 10 year-old son²:

Interviewer: You see television as playing a different role in Leo's life than it did in yours?
Mother: Oh yes, definitely. I can remember playing outside in the street for hours on end and having a lot more freedom to play out. They haven't got that as children now ... he's in more than we ever were as children.

Her son confirms the importance of media in his life, telling us that he spends a lot of time with the television, hi-fi and a games machine in his bedroom, and that while would like to go out more often, the garden is too small and he is not allowed to play football there.

Thus, children face not only practical and material but also discursive constraints on their lived activities, all contributing towards a historical shift towards the privatisation of leisure (Williams, 1974). At home, it is screen media that emerge as the easy way of keeping the family entertained, notwithstanding the doubts parents have regarding the media as 'time-wasting'.

One consequence was to force the realisation that home and family are not necessarily one and the same. Ironically perhaps, the privatisation of leisure throws family members together precisely at a time when the cultural shift towards individualisation means that children and young people are ever more encouraged to pursue their own individual tastes and interests (Buchner, 1990). Their media preferences decreasingly shared with their parents, for 'the modern family ideology [promotes] families in which the goal of individual self-realisation overshadows community solidarity and stability' (Gadlin, 1978: 236). And there are ever more media contents and sources tailored – indeed, targeted - to their age group. This growing individualisation fuelled our second trend, as we explore below.

From family television to bedroom culture

Interviewer: Do you think that there are any advantages or disadvantages to Charlie having TV in his bedroom?
Mother: Advantages are that we can watch programmes in here when Charlie wants to watch something else and --

Father: Disadvantages are that it, err, discourages family life because it separates people [...]
Interviewer: So is spending time together as a family important to you?
Father : Yes, of course, the family is the most important thing.
(Working-class family with 12 year-old boy)

If public spaces in the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a decline in access for children, the private, domestic realm has also undergone changes. The arrival of the television set into the family home transformed the spatial and temporal rhythms of family life (Scannell, 1988). Historical studies of the arrival of television suggest that far from fitting into the home, television transformed the structure of the home by prompting a considerable re-arrangement of domestic space (Spigel, 1992). As each room had pre-defined activities associated with it, television posed a new problem, namely where to put it. In most UK homes, the decision was made to put this proud new object in the once adult-only front room or parlour of the post-war British home, transforming this room in the process into the 'living' room, this itself being part of a wider trend towards the creation of the open plan living space (Oswell, 1999).

Today, only relatively wealthy homes keep a room for 'best', most family homes having 'knocked through' from the best room into the dining room to make a large multifunctional space – the family room – in which the media play a central role. 'Family television' encapsulates a site of both conviviality and power plays, in which the family share interests, pleasures and conflicts. As recently as the mid-1980s, Morley (1986) described the family gathering in the main living room to co-view the family television set, this providing an occasion for the operation of traditional generation and gender inequalities - Ang terms them 'living room wars' (1996) – in which Dad monopolises the remote control, sport wins out over soaps, women's viewing is halted when the husband wants to see 'his programme', and children's preferences come last.

As the media at home have multiplied, no longer a scarce resource for the family, the social practices which surround and accompany viewing have altered. A common solution is to transform bedrooms into private living rooms, leaving the family living room for those times when the family chooses to come together, enforced conviviality being a thing of the past for all but the poor. Thus today, most homes have been reorganised, the dominant principle no longer being that of 'front' and 'back' (Goffman, 1959) but rather than of communal space and personal spaces. How far along this path to go represents a central dilemma for families as they decide whether and when to acquire and locate televisions, computers etc, thereby shaping the particular balance between a communal or individualised model of family life.

What do these newly privatised, media-rich spaces mean to children? By the end of the 1990s, many young people had media-rich bedrooms, reflecting not only an intrinsic fascination with the media but also the unsatisfactory nature of the available alternatives. Other social changes, including central heating, smaller family size, and continual upgrading of domestic technological goods all had their part to play (Allan, 1985), but the result is a new kind of place for children's leisure which we are just beginning to explore and which is filled with ever more media goods for ever younger children.

The YPNM survey showed that in British children's bedrooms music media are the most popular: 68% of 6-17 year olds have a personal stereo, 61% have hi-fi and 59% a radio. Screen entertainment media follow close behind: 63% have their own television and 21% have a video recorder, while 34% have a TV-linked games machine and 27% have a Gameboy. Just a few years on, the 'UK Children Go Online' project, in updating this work, found that 19% have internet access in their bedroom (Livingstone and Bober, 2005). As is common, the internet is no more equally distributed across the population than other media: while one in five have the internet in their bedroom, this is the case for 22% of boys versus 15% of girls, 21% middle class versus 16% working class children, and 10% of 9-11 year olds versus 26% of 16-17 year olds. Moreover, this emergence of the media-rich bedroom as a child-centred and private space has its own developmental trajectory. Not only are media-rich bedrooms more common among teenagers, but interviews with children and young people reveal how the meaning of the bedroom alters with time.

Convenience

Children younger than about nine years old are relatively uninterested in bedroom culture, although a well equipped, 'media-rich' bedroom is occasionally provided as a way of ensuring the parents' privacy. Indeed, younger children prefer the family spaces, especially when parents are present, by contrast with teenagers who also like to use the space and facilities of the living room but mainly when their family is absent. Six year old Belinda told us that she doesn't normally play in her bedroom, but prefers to bring her toys downstairs to play where others are. Hence, these children are less likely to have media in their bedrooms, and family life is heavily focussed on the multi-functional, child-centred, media-rich living or 'family' room.

Yet even by this age, children's bedrooms will often contain media-related collections, not just of china animals and foreign coins but also Disney memorabilia, Pokemon cards or the paraphernalia of a Manchester United football fan. Ten year old Rachel and her friends all collect, but 'they collect different things', suggesting the link between collections and personal identity (Rochberg-Halton, 1984). Part of the convenience of the bedroom, then, is its role in the safe storage of valued objects. As these collections are generally recognised as transient, 'a stage' children go through, children's bedrooms house not only the current enthusiasm but also previous enthusiasms, making for series of partial collections which tell the story of a child's development.

One may see in these collections a legitimised form of consumerism. Generally encouraged or even initiated by parents, the practices associated with adding to and displaying the collection is construed by parents as specialist, serious, knowledgeable. We see this positive assessment of 'the collection' in the narrative spun for John, aged 7, by his mother, a lower middle class single parent. She first introduced the 'collection' to explain her son's video viewing, linking his interest in animals with her views of videos as educational and, perhaps, portentous of his future.

We have got a lot of the Walt Disney videos because we collect those because I think they are a collectable item and John is very much into marine life and the Free Willy video, anything to do with animals... In actual fact, the teacher in school said to him something about the whale that was in Free Willy and said to me 'if your son doesn't become a marine biologist then I will eat my hat'.

Already, through these collections, through their emerging fandoms, and through the associated theming of wallpaper, bed linen, decoration, etc, children's identities are being constructed and, simultaneously, commodified. In early to middle childhood, the objects collected vary widely, but often take the form of media-related merchandising (Kinder, 1999). By the teenage years, objects being actively collected are more directly media goods – discs, music files, videos, computer games, magazines, and so forth. This transition is noted by Kathy's (15) parents:

Mother: Oh well, she used to collect all those little whimsies that we once got from a car boot sale (laughter)... little animals that she collected.
Father: She doesn't collect anything now though, apart from music, not seriously anyway.

As with John, above, Kathy's collection of some 200 tapes is judged 'serious'. Possession, and safe storage is no longer key to the enjoyment of these goods, for media require time spent with them. Associated with the transition to media goods is a transition in the use of the bedroom – no longer primarily for convenience but now also for escape (into individualised media use) and for identity (requiring an investment in media use to promote self-development and self-expression).

Escape

She's got all these comics on the bed, and she likes to read them, and she's got a computer next to her TV so if she gets bored she can just move around quick, and

she's got like a computer booklet on computers and TV, and she's got a telephone with a hi-fi midi system sort of thing.

(9 year-old girl living in a middle-class family and talking of her ideal bedroom)

From middle childhood, children - particularly girls - become more interested in their bedroom, and start to want their own television/computer/hi-fi. This is largely for pragmatic reasons, particularly being able to choose and watch their own programmes uninterrupted. Over and over again, children described how irritating it is to be interrupted – when watching television for example – by siblings or parents, suggesting strongly that for them, being alone means welcome respite from family life, especially for the 72% who do not share a bedroom with a sibling (Livingstone & Bovill, 1999). Here a ten-year-old girl explains: 'I like being on my own... [I can] watch what I want to watch instead of watching what my sister wants to watch or what my mum wants to watch.'

Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

The image of freedom, or perhaps also of isolation, is well captured in Figures 1 and 2, drawn by children when asked to depict themselves watching television. In that task (see Livingstone, 2002), about half of those asked drew themselves in their bedrooms and half drew themselves in a family space. Perhaps this trend towards bedroom culture is particularly 'British'? European comparisons show that British children and young people generally own more screen media especially than do their counterparts in other countries (with the exception of America; Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999), though they do not necessarily spend more time in their rooms. The advantages of convenience do not appear to encourage isolation from the family but rather, they provide some control over *when* to be sociable or alone (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001). Wanting to escape, then, marks a transition from *having* personal 'stuff' and so needing somewhere safe to put it to *being* a distinct individual and so needing somewhere private to express this.

Identity

In adolescence, this concern with the self is of pre-eminent importance. The significance of the bedroom is now primarily centred on identity, as young people take a growing interest in how their bedrooms are furnished, arranged and equipped. By the early teens, these psychological reasons are easily as important as the practical ones as children and young people seek to identify, protect and embellish their own spaces distinct from adult scrutiny and intervention. The bedroom provides a flexible social space in which young people can experience their growing independence from family life, becoming either a haven of privacy or a social area in which to entertain friends, often listening to music, reading magazines, playing a new computer game or watching a video together. Listen to the satisfaction with which fifteen-year-old Joanne, from a working class family, describes her room:

I'm usually in my bedroom... I think that I like to be by myself really. I don't know. I suppose it's just because at the moment I have got all my furniture arranged like in a sitting room area, a study room area and my bedroom and it is just, like, really cool and I just like to go there because I know that that is my room... I mean I have decorated it how I want it and it's just like a room I don't think I will ever move out.

Personal ownership of media dramatically increases in the early teenage years, part and parcel of the development of identity. From the perspective of the social psychology of adolescence, 'valued material possessions, it is argued, act as signs of the self that are essential in their own right for its continued cultivation, and hence the world of meaning that we create for ourselves, and that creates our selves, extends literally into the objective surroundings' (Rochberg-Halton, 1984: 335). Lincoln (2004) suggests these material possessions are organised in terms of zones, with a fluid set of physical arrangements structuring the social activities that take place in the bedroom in order to enact the 'uniqueness' of its owner.

Notably, images of self-sufficiency and control figure strongly in young people's talk of their bedroom. In this context of self-sufficiency and control, unwarranted interventions by others can be experienced as a significant violation of privacy:

Last year I went to Austria and erm, I came back and I nearly had a heart attack because my mum had completely cleaned my room.... She had completely blitzed my room and I was so angry about it... It is my own private space and I really don't like her touching it.... She just goes on and on about me cleaning it and I mean, I try to tell her that it is my personal space and let me have it how I want.

(Middle class girl aged 15)

Emler and Reicher (1994) explore how the management of spatial boundaries, and the constraints on this, frames the everyday management of identities. Behind this lies the social psychological argument that identities must be enacted, and these enactments must be situated in locations with particular spatial and temporal structures. Madigan and Munro (1999: 70) identify the particular difficulties posed by the structure of the home for women in resolving the tension between 'the socially sanctioned goal of family togetherness, sharing, equality and the goal of individual achievement, self-identity'. While they suggest that for women this is more often achieved through the management of time than space, for children the bedroom is provided as a spatial solution.

Most simply, whether children can keep their friendships distinct in space and time from their family relationships is crucial to sustaining multiple, possibly distinct, identities. Hence, the widespread irritation occasioned by siblings intruding into spaces in which friendships are conducted, media are engaged with, or privacy enjoyed represents an irritation not simply due to the interruption of an activity or conversation but a clash of identities. The irritation is not alleviated by the younger sibling promising to be quiet, or not interfere, for it is a symbolic intrusion, a clash of one identity with another, a loss of freedom to reinvent oneself for oneself. Similarly, the persistent untidiness of many children's rooms, and the high degree of tidiness of others, may reflect more than a concern, or lack of concern, with order. For an untidy room is hard for an adult to walk around, and a very tidy room will show signs of intruders. The effect is to make the room both child-friendly and adult-unfriendly. By contrast with the traditional hierarchies of the living room, the bedroom is fundamentally a heterarchical space - perhaps the only place where children can dictate the rules of engagement to their parents.

Conclusion: bedroom culture

The bedroom becomes meaningful through the conjunction of all three rationales above. It provides a convenient location in which personal goods can be gathered and maintained. It provides a means of escape from the interruptions, interference and gaze of others. And it facilitates the routine (re)enactment of a desired identity. Steele and Brown (1994) describe teenage 'room culture' as the place where media and identities intersect through the bricolage of identity-work objects on display in young people's rooms. They see adolescents' rooms as 'mediating devices' by which they express who they are and who they want to be, a safe, private space in which experimentation with possible selves can be conducted (see also Frith, 1978). Thus the media-rich bedroom in the 'juxtaposed home allows teenagers to remove themselves from adult supervision while still living with their parents' (Flichy, 1995: 165).

Bachmair (1991) talks of the bedroom as a text within which the television programme is interwoven as one central element among others. This complex text of the bedroom provides a key site for the construction of identity and a position from within which to participate in a shared peer culture. This participation takes two forms, for the bedroom is both a location in which children and young people can entertain friends and also a place in which they can experience their connection to the peer group even when alone, particularly through the use of media valued by peers.

The media are used in various ways to manage these boundaries of space and identity, especially by young people who not only sustain multiple identities but whose identities are

often experimental, temporary, available for making over, and the symbolic resources of the media provide the content – images, representations, themes – as well as the material means of managing boundaries (the walkman, the loud music in the bedroom, the total absorption in a computer game) – the ‘deafness’ parents complain about is more due to identity considerations than to media addiction.

‘Bedroom culture’ in this sense is very much a Western phenomenon, being dependent on a high degree of modernisation, individualisation and wealth. As such, it represents a new opportunity for targeted advertising and marketing, as the media-rich child’s bedroom is both a site of reception for commercial messages and a location for the display and use of consumer goods. While the bedroom is a key site for the increasing commercialisation of childhood and youth, it also supports the development of identity in ways that may be, but are not necessarily, exploitative. For example, McRobbie and Garber (1976) and Frith (1978) emphasised how teenage girls’ search for identity through self-presentation and the development of ‘taste’ has been led by powerful commercial interests in the fashion and music industries, though others (Fornas and Bolin, 1995, Lincoln, 2004; Steele and Brown, 1994) see mediated consumer images as providing the raw materials with which young people creatively construct ‘their’ style.

Summary: living together separately

This chapter has traced the shift from public to private first in the decline of street culture’ and the retreat to the home and second, in the shift from ‘family television’ to ‘bedroom culture’. The argument may be summarised as follows.

- Today, much privatised media use is centred on the bedroom, once a rather chilly and uncomfortable, even forbidden place in which to escape the demands of family life, but now a positively valued opportunity for socialising and identity work, saturated with media images, sounds, technological artefacts and other media products.
- Although children and young people value spending time with media, often alone - despite adult worries about ‘isolation’ or ‘wasting time’, this need not mean that social contacts are being replaced with social isolation, for media offer new means for social interaction, albeit often peer- rather than family-focused (Livingstone, 2005).
- Still, it does appear that within the home, the multiplication of personally owned media facilitates children’s use of individual, privatised space, as opposed to communal family space. Rompaey (2001) calls this the increasing ‘compartmentalization of family life’ as a result of the individualising effect of ICT combined with teenagers’ desire for privacy within the family context. Similarly, Flichy calls it ‘living together separately’ in his characterization of the role of media in family life.

However, I have argued that privatised bedroom culture is also the result of the progressive exclusion of children and young people from public places, together with a growing priority on ‘the home’ as the centre of a screen-entertainment focused, privatised and individualised leisure culture.

- Intriguingly, as leisure becomes increasingly media-dominated and as rooms (or people) rather than the household become the unit for acquisition of screen media, today’s parents cannot rely on their own childhood experiences to guide them in managing the spatial, temporal and moral structures of domestic and family life.
- Rather they must figure out for their own family how to accommodate, regulate and enjoy the plethora of media goods now widely available. This they generally do together with their children as part of a sometimes co-operative, sometimes conflictual negotiation, within a broader context which pits a discourse of new opportunities and consumer choice against one of parental duties to manage appropriately the social development of their children in the face of increasing potential harms.

Student exercise

Make a list of the media that your parents, and then your grandparents, had at home (if you can ask them, do so). Compare this with the media you yourself grew up with and then with that of children today. Think especially about which media, if any, were situated in the bedroom, and which in the living room. Think also about the other activities that took place in these two domestic spaces, and the rules that determined who could do what? Again, you may need to ask people of different generations, as the answers can be surprising.

Then identify the similarities and differences over time. What continuities and differences does this suggest for what children can do, and for what is meant by or expected of 'childhood' or 'the family'? For example, do different arrangements of media (spatial, temporal, symbolic) influence the things that people (parents and children, children with their friends) share in common? Does it make it easier to pursue individual tastes?

Further reading

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Figures

Source: Young People New Media project,

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Figure 1: A girl's drawing of 'myself watching television'

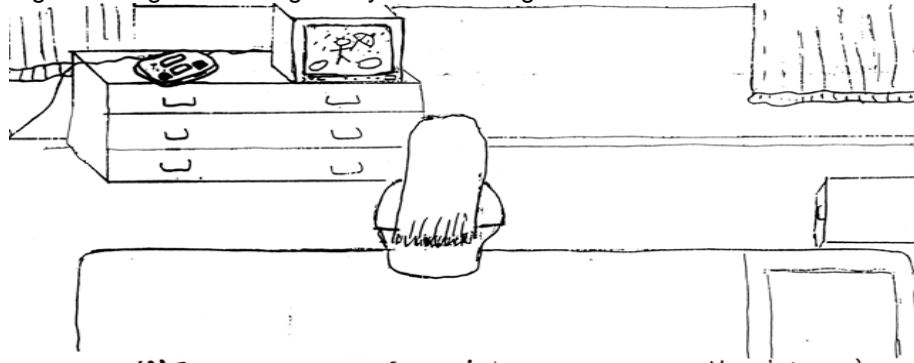
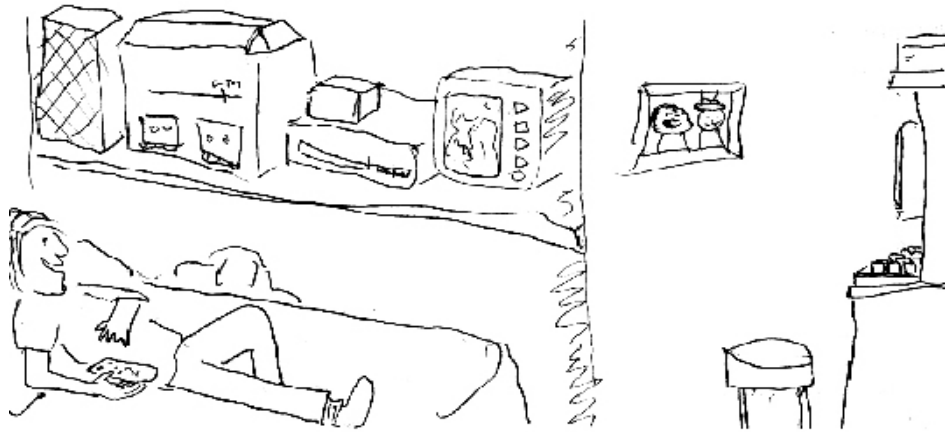


Figure 2: A teenage boy's drawing of 'myself watching television'



Endnotes

¹ British parents' fears are not without foundation. Home Office statistics (1994) on child victims of crime report twice as many cases of gross indecency with a child in 1992 compared with 1983 and a fourfold increase in child abductions. Nonetheless, surveys conducted on both European crime rates and fear of crime show that while in Britain crime rates against children are relatively high, fear of crime is disproportionately high among British parents (Livingstone et al, 1999).

² Throughout this chapter, names have been changed to protect participants' identity.