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Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)

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Brief bio:

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Abstract:

The quintessential image of the television audience is of the family viewing at home –sitting together comfortably in front of the lively set. Accompanying this happy image is its negative – a child viewing alone while real life goes on elsewhere. This chapter reviews evidence over five decades regarding the changing place of television in children's lives. It argues that, notwithstanding post-war trends that have significantly changed adolescence, the family home and wider consumer society, there was time for the 1950s *family* experiment to spawn the 1960s and 1970s *family television* experiment, thereby shaping normative expectations – academic, policy and popular - regarding television audiences for years to come. At the turn of the twenty-first century, we must recognise that it was the underlying long-term trend of individualisation, and its associated trends of consumerism, globalisation and the democratisation that, historically and now, more profoundly frame the place of television in the family.

Television and the family: What do we want to know?

The quintessential image of the television audience is of the family viewing at home – children and parents sitting together comfortably in front of the lively set. Accompanying this happy image is its negative – a child viewing alone, square-eyed and trance-like, while real life goes on elsewhere. The former image was quickly popularised by broadcasting industries in many Western countries after the Second World War. It represents the hope of shared pleasure that motivated the public to purchase and install this new technology as quickly as they could afford to do so (Butsch, 2000; Spigel, 1992). The latter image, reproduced by newspapers, parenting magazines and public policy pronouncements, represents the fear that motivated funding for empirical research by social science designed to investigate television's potentially harmful effects (Rowland, 1983; Wartella & Reeves, 1985). So, who was right? Can we, after half a century or so of television in our homes and, furthermore, half a century or so of research, identify what difference television made to 'the family'?

The moral panics associated with the arrival of each new medium, which demand that research addresses the same questions over and again - about the displacement of reading, exercise and conversation, about social isolation and addiction, about violent and consumerist content (Barker & Petley, 2001) - have a long history. Bettelheim (1999) traces them back via Goethe's 'The Sorrows of Young Werther', blamed for a wave of suicides in 18th century Germany, to Plato's ideal state that banned imaginative literature for corrupting the young. But what this makes plain is that society's perennial anxieties about children, childhood and the family, are catalysed by 'the new', the popular hope being that by fixing the technology, society could fix the problems of childhood. However, a critical rejection of both moral panics and technological determinism does not permit us to conclude that television played no role in the unfolding history of the family in the twentieth century. Indeed, I am partly provoked to write this chapter by the notable absence of answers to the 'so what?' question from the many scholars who, over the decades, have zealously charted the facts and figures on the prominence of television within the family.[1] Surely, television must have made some difference. Equally, surely family life would have been different without television or had television been itself different.

To avert the charge of technological determinism hovering in the minds of this volume's readers (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999), I stress that the starting point must be the recognition that 'television', both the domestic set and its broadcast forms and contents, was developed, designed, financed, regulated and marketed by the very society which then worried about the consequences. Crucially, society has itself undergone profound changes over the past half century, so that television is just one of many factors that have influenced family life in the second half of the twentieth century. These changes include the urbanisation and education of the population, the growing emancipation of women, the growth of affluent individualism and the rise of consumer society together with an increasingly dispossessed poor, the gradual inclusion of the diversity of the population in terms of ethnicity and sexuality, the decline in public participation and political commitment and, specifically relevant here, the post-traditional family and the 'discovery' of adolescence. Together, these factors have refashioned the family during the twentieth century in the direction of individualisation and democratization, ever further away from the Victorian family (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Coontz, 1997; Gadlin, 1978); they have therefore also shaped the context within which television was appropriated, acquiring a meaningful place within 'the family'.[2]

Parallel changes in media and in childhood must be considered in tandem if we are to avoid either technological or cultural determinism. However, this short article can only sketch the outline of an analysis of television's place in the lives of parents and children and, in so doing, it

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[1] I will not, here, review research on television's effects on individual attitudes and behaviours, except to note the growing body of findings that, broadly, support the conclusion that television has cultivated certain assumptions, beliefs and mores in the population as a whole, reinforcing a normative status quo of consumerism and do-it-yourself lifestyle identity, along with a mainstreaming of public opinion, and a fear of crime, strangers and the unfamiliar (Millwood Hargrave & Livingstone, 2006).

[2] I take it as read that, as Hill and Tisdall (1997: 66) observe, 'the idea of family is to some degree a fluid one, with a mix of concepts at its core – direct biological relatedness, parental caring role, long-term cohabitation, permanent belonging'. Indeed, given limitations of space, I will not here stress the complex, multidimensional and historically-contingent nature of each 'family', 'childhood', 'youth', 'television' – but I hope the reader will not take this to mean that I intend them in any simple fashion.

must rely on an even sketchier account of the major societal shifts during the past half century that contextualise the 'arrival' of television. Specifically, I shall argue, first, that the coincidence of mass television in the 1950s and what Stephanie Coontz (1997) has called 'the 1950s family experiment' meant that, although for a time the arrival of television signalled a temporary but culturally significant grouping of the family around the living room set (and the nation around the prime-time terrestrial schedules), historical evidence reveals that this only briefly bucks the longer term trend towards the multiplication and diversification of media that has facilitated what Patrice Flichy (2002) calls 'living together separately' or, more abstractly, the processes of individualisation, consumerism, and globalisation that characterise Western societies in late modernity.

'Family television': An accident of history

Research conducted from the 1950s onwards, when television reached the mass market in many Western countries, showed a collective 'coming together' of the family around the set, with domestic living space being rearranged to create the 'family room' (i.e. television room; Spigel, 1992) and the domestic timetable being adjusted to fit the television schedules (Scannell, 1988).[3] Compared with those without television, Hilde Himmelweit and her colleagues found in 1955-6 that children in television households were slightly more likely to stay indoors and to share both time and interests with their parents. Television rapidly became children's main leisure activity, to some extent displacing reading and 'doing nothing' and providing functionally equivalent leisure with little detrimental effect on school work. Viewing figures quickly reached just under two hours per day (the greatest amount of time spent on any leisure activity; Himmelweit, Oppenheim & Vince, 1958).[4] From the early years of television, viewers spent less time alone and more time indoors with the family (though not necessarily talking to each other!), with television tending to displace going to the cinema and socializing with others (Andreasen, 1994; Katz & Gurevitch, 1976; Robinson & Godbey, 1997).

Although in the 1950s, family life and gender roles became unusually predictable and settled, this was, as historical trends in social statistics show, 'a very short interlude that people mistakenly identify as "traditional"' (Coontz, 1997: 54). I suggest that a similar misconception, occasioning a similar nostalgia, has become associated with 'the 1950s family experiment', namely that of 'family television'. For several decades, television has been seen as – and for many people has been - what the family watched together, after father came home from work and when mother had finished tidying the house for the day. Television represented a key means by which father, by choosing to watch 'his' programmes, asserted his economic power, while mother, who regulated the children's viewing while father was at work, showed her moral proficiency in managing her family. Yet as Morley's (1986) account of 'family television' illustrated, fundamental tensions between genders and generations were often exacerbated rather than alleviated by these normative expectations regarding the family.

In short, 'family television' was more a popular ideal than an actuality. Himmelweit et al (1958) showed that even in the 1950s, children stayed up 'too late' watching television, watching 'inappropriate' programmes and conflicting with their parents. Oswell (2002) adds that though television was promoted as a joint activity for parents and children (consider the title of the popular British pre-school programme, *Watch With Mother*), it was widely understood as providing a babysitter that allowed mother to do something else. In short, the signs of individualisation as the dominant trend were already present. Interestingly, notwithstanding the decades of research on whether the television was or was not beneficial for the family, it was

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[3] Indeed, the marketing and design of television still seeks to shape family space and time to its expectations – unusually for media both before and since. The home computer notoriously does not fit well into the home, print media never sought to, and the radio quickly adjusted to fit people's schedules rather than the other way around.

[4] This figure has risen today to nearly two and a half hours in the UK (Livingstone, 2002) and to three hours per day in the USA (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). I thank Friedrich Krotz for drawing to my attention to a German project published by Gerhard Maletke (1959) as *Fernsehen im Leben der Jugend* (Hamburg: Hand-Bredow Institut). As in the UK and USA (Schramm, Lyle, & Parker, 1961), this showed that family viewing quickly reached 15-20 hours per week, a level from which subsequent research in Western countries shows little increase (see also Broddason, 2006; Johnsson-Smaragdi, 1992).

apparent from the outset that physically co-location does not guarantee emotional cohesiveness. In a statement that one could still write today, Himmelweit et al (1958: 25) wrote:

> 'Television does keep members of the family at home more. But it is doubtful whether it binds the family together more than in this physical sense, except while the children are young. As they grow older, their viewing becomes more silent and personal. Also, as children grow into adolescence, the increased time spent with the family may set up strains, since it runs counter to their need to make contacts outside.'

Compared with radio, which took children for granted within 'the family audience', its mode of address asserting a unifying voice to bring the family together around the hearth, television arrived when the trend towards individualisation was well underway (Oswell, 2002). Family members were dispersing around the home, developing diverse lifestyle tastes and identities, partly because of the coincidental arrival of central heating (though few public discourses attack central heating for breaking up the family!). Faced with the task of addressing an already heterogeneous audience, television drew more on the techniques of market research to distinguish the child audience from the adult audience than it attempted to draw the generations together. Thus television has progressively distinguished 'kid', 'teen' and, later, 'toddler' and 'tween' market segments through programming form, content and style (Kenway & Bullen, 2008), addressing each as distinctive from each other and from adults, encouraging certain activities, interests and even subversive joys (Seiter, 1993), while associating peer culture and youthful identity with the messages of marketing, merchandising and distinction (Kline, 1993).[5]

Locating television in the longer history of individualisation

Individualisation[6] refers to a social change with a much longer history than the half century addressed here: as early as the end of the seventeenth century, one could identify 'the privatisation of families from each other, and the individualisation of members within families' (Luke, 1989: 39). But for young people, the change has been more recent, for the notion of 'teenager' emerged only in the 1950s (Abrams, 1959; France, 2007), this in turn resulting from the conjunction of several key changes - from children having a productive role in the economy to that of children as consumers (Cunningham, 1995), the extension of formal education from mid to late teens and a commensurate rise in the average age of leaving home (France, 2007), and the advent of consumer culture that created youth culture to fill the new space between childhood and adulthood (Osgerby, 1998).[7] The consequence is not simply the replacement of the traditional norms and values by which parents socialised their children (Gadlin, 1978) in favour of the peer group, but rather the emergence of the new responsibility, namely 'the reflexive project of the self which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives' (Giddens, 1991: 5). Here the media play a key role, providing the resources for identity construction and display, and the occasions for negotiating and defining aspects of one's identity against the expressions of others.

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[5] Ironically, throughout the dominance of mass communication, popular fears regarding "kids' culture" stressed the homogenising effect of commercialisation; today, the more commercially-effective strategy capitalises upon the process of individualisation, providing – and profiting from – fast-changing, niche markets and diversified taste cultures. Yet television's power has its limits: children and, especially, teenagers remain a notoriously hard market for either advertisers or broadcasters to reach; children still generally prefer to play with friends or ride their bikes than watch television (Livingstone, 2002), and when they do watch, they reinterpret the meanings offered to them in ways that fit their own perceptions, such reinterpretation being sufficiently creative for the media industry itself to hire its 'cool hunters' and incorporate the inventions of youth culture in developing its own innovations (Jenkins, 2003).

[6] Individualisation refers to the thesis 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 (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

[7] It is noteworthy that, although Himmelweit et al did not find television to have any impact on children's aggression, they did find that those with television became more ambitious and middle class in their aspirations and values, and girls also became more conformist in their desire to adopt feminine roles.

Comparing the 1950s with the 1980s, Ziehe (1994: 2) argues that the new consumer opportunities of post war western societies were framed in terms of ambivalent desires for ever higher domestic and personal living standards, resulting in 'an increasing orientation towards questions of life style' that in turn became crystallised in the parallel discourses surrounding youth, thereby encoding cultural change in terms of generational conflict. Ziehe stresses the importance of music here, but for Osgerby, television was also crucial as it addresses young people as distinctive in identity, lifestyle and attitudes, encouraging their construction of a leisure career that, being itself subject to pervasive market forces and peer pressures, is perceived by parents as making them 'grow up faster and earlier' (while postponing adult responsibilities for longer). As Coontz (1997: 13) puts it, 'in some ways, childhood has actually been prolonged, if it is measured by dependence on parents and segregation from adult activities', and this dependence is in a state of tension with young people's growing autonomy in the realms of leisure, consumption, appearance, identity. It is this tension, surely, that is expressed in the conflicts of adolescence that are, in turn, so often expressed as conflicts over the use of media at home.

Not only 'children' and 'teenagers' but also 'the family' and 'television' have changed, co-evolving (Andreasen, 1994) through the post war decades. For many, family life in the 1950s was undoubtedly cohesive and stable, with sufficient affluence to fuel the consumer boom to which both the birth of youth culture (Osgerby, 1998) and the golden age of television (Spigel, 1992) were linked. While television diffused rapidly, rising in the US from 9% of households in 1950 to 87% by 1960, the significant change over the next thirty years was not so much the saturation of the market, though this occurred (with 98% of households having television by 1990), but rather the growth of multi-set households. Along with the linked technologies (satellite and cable channels, video cassette recorder, electronic games, etc), this transformed the home into a multi-media environment capable of supporting not only a shared interest in the nightly news, the national soap opera or the Saturday film, but also the diverse and niche interests of each individual separately.

In this manner, television followed the trend established for electronic media throughout the last century: the gramophone from the start of the twentieth century, the telephone from the 1920s, radio from the 1930s, television from the 1950s, the VCR from the 1970s, the computer from the 1980s, and now the internet. Each has begun its career in the main collective family space of the living room but, as prices fall and multiplication and mobility of goods becomes feasible, each has moved into more individualised, personalised and, for children, unsupervised, spaces, particularly the bedroom but also the study, play room and kitchen, thereby spreading both spatially and temporally – from defined and prioritised spaces and times to casual use throughout the home and throughout the day (Flichy, 2002; Livingstone, 2002).

Ratings show that television as a shared experience is in steady decline, for children and adults, with the increasing diversity of channels resulting in greater fragmentation of the audience and ever-less adherence to a scheduled timetable of viewing. Today, few programmes attain mass audiences on the scale of, say, UK soaps twenty years ago (with 15-20 million viewers in a nation of some 60 million). Even mass audiences may not share their experiences: in the late 80s, I observed a family of six, all fans of the Australian soap opera, *Neighbours*, who watched on different sets or at different times – a dispersed mass audience, eschewing co-location in the 'family room' (Livingstone, 1992).[8]

In 1955, watching alone was relatively rare: 24% of 10-11 year olds watched children's programmes alone, as did 23% of 13-14 year olds; for evening programmes, the proportions were 11% (10-11 yrs) and 9% (13-14 yrs). Viewing with parents, on the other hand, was very common, particularly for evening programmes: 81% (10-11 yrs) and 88% (13-14 yrs), though even at that time, children's programmes were more often shared with siblings than parents (Himmelweit et al, 1958). Four decades later, watching alone had not risen among 10-11 year olds, but for 13-14 year olds, viewing alone rose sharply to 32%. Meanwhile, viewing with

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[8] This is not to say that television is no longer important in the family, but rather to reveal the diverse and sometimes counter-normative ways in which it is embedded in the dispersed family, providing a common or private leisure activity, symbolic resources for family conversation and negotiation, and an occasion for the socialisation of children regarding the wider world (Goodman, 1983). For many families, 'family time' is also media time, especially television time, and television may be positioned as scapegoat, boundary marker, escape, time manager, stress reducer, bartering agent, babysitter, companion, and more.

parents fell, both for the 10-11 year olds and, more strikingly, for the 13-14 year olds (33% with father, 40% with mother) (Livingstone, Bovill, & Gaskell, 1999).[9] A longitudinal study conducted Iceland found that the percentage of 10-15 year olds who usually watched television alone rose from 2% in 1968 to 40% in 2003, while the proportion who watched with their parents fell commensurately (Broddason, 2006).

There has been, in short, a discernable shift away from shared towards privatised viewing over the past four decades and, arguably because adolescents only became 'teenagers' from the 1950s onwards, this shift is more evident for 13-14 year olds than for 10-11 year olds.[10] Though multiple sets and competing programme preferences facilitate this trend (having television in one's bedroom adds half an hour to daily UK viewing time, and one and a half hours in the US; Livingstone, 2002; Roberts et al, 2005), the primary driver is children themselves - the 'Young People, New Media' project found children wish to watch alone even more they actually do.[11]

Looking ahead: The changing public agenda

I had first thought to argue that, for its first twenty years or so, television brought the family together but then, from the 1970s onwards, it began to pull them apart again. But, a better account is one that recognises the signs of individualisation from the very early years of television (and before) – in strategies of audience segmentation, a history of multiplication and personalisation of domestic media, in youthful desires to escape the parental gaze, and so on. Before these signs gathered strength, which took some decades, being dependent on longer term trends regarding adolescence, the family and consumer society, there was time for the 1950s *family* experiment to spawn the 1960s and 1970s *family television* experiment. This moment in time, it seems, shaped normative expectations – academic, policy and popular - regarding television audiences for years to come. But at the turn of the twenty-first century, we must recognise that it was the underlying long-term trend of individualisation, and its associated trends of consumerism, globalisation and the democratisation of the family, that more strongly shaped and, was itself facilitated, by television. Two consequences of individualisation are worth signalling by way of conclusion. These concern parental mediation and media literacy, concepts that are central to today's research and policy agendas, yet they barely figured fifty years ago. Parental mediation, I suggest, gains a new importance in what Giddens (1993: 184-5) calls 'the democratisation of the private sphere', while media literacy arises in the context of the individualisation of risk (Beck, 1986/2005), in this case, risk of media harm.

The social trends of the twentieth century combined to transform the 'Victorian' family, a model of domestic life that prioritised a culture of stability, hard work, security, duty and respect into the 'democratic family' that prizes role flexibility, gender and generational equality, and a culture of self-fulfilment and individual rights. As Giddens (1991: 7) put it, in the democratised private sphere, children have gained the right to 'determine and regulate the conditions of their association' within the family, while parents have gained the duty to protect them from coercion, ensure their involvement in key decisions, be accountable to them and others, and to respect and expect respect. For young people, this resulted in part from the economic and legal hiatus that opened up in the past fifty years between dependent child and independent adult, resulting in tensions between the discourse of needs and that of individual rights. The new child-centred model of the family offers some resolution insofar as it advocates that parents should provide for their children economically for an extended period of time while simultaneously recognising their independence in terms of sociality and culture, for now 'the goal of individual self-realisation

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[9] Himmelweit et al asked in 1955, 'with whom do you most often view?' The 'Young People, New Media' project asked almost the same question in the UK in 1997('with whom do you watch television for more than half the time?'), though not distinguishing children's from evening programmes.

[10] Note that today, research extends the age range of 'children and young people' up to 18, while Himmelweit et al only researched those from 10 to 14 years old – after all, in mid-50s Britain, pupils left school at 14 or 15 and entered the adult world, as apprentices if not as fully independent.

[11] This is not to call young people loners or social isolates, for one should note above discussion of the changing nature of childhood. Nor should we overstate the case: most 6-17 year olds, including older teens, said they eat a main meal (75%) and watch television (68%) with their parents on most days of the week, and most talk to them about something that matters at least once or twice a week (70%). For parents, television viewing remains the activity they most commonly share their children (Livingstone, 2002).

overshadows community solidarity and stability' (Gadlin, 1978: 236). However, this creates new difficulties in balancing the requirements of parents and children, difficulties to be resolved through negotiation rather than, as before, 'laying down the law', and which are often expressed through conflicts over space (the front door, the bedroom door), time (what to do, and watch, when) and media (personal vs. shared media, content preferences, etc; Andreasen, 1994; Livingstone, 2002).[12]

Given this context, it is intriguing to note that Himmelweit et al asked few questions about parental mediation or regulation of television, observing simply that one in five do control (ban, restrict, encourage) their child's viewing, and concluding that 'control, then, is rare, and where it exists, it is aimed at preventing the child from watching horror or frightening programmes' (p. 378-9). Possibly, Himmelweit et al said little about parental mediation in the 1950s because its importance was obvious, rather than because its role was then unanticipated. In early American research, the important of parental mediation received a little more consideration, especially as a problem among supposedly 'negligent' working class families, who tended to treat television as the electronic babysitter, permitting their children access to content appropriate only for adults (Butsch, 2000; Klapper, 1960).

Today, parental mediation is conceptualised as combining three distinct strategies of restriction (on time, length or content of viewing), evaluation (guiding children on quality, interpretation, criticism), and co-use (discussion while viewing, sharing the viewing experience). But in the work of Himmelweit, Klapper, Schramm et al, parenting was understood in terms of the Victorian model, with only restrictive mediation being considered. For example, Schramm et al. (p.148) discuss parental authority by noting that 'late bedtimes tend to occur in homes where parental control is lax', and they stress the parental duty 'to shield a child from undue fright resulting from television'. But they say nothing that conceives of parents as equals who may share (or conflict over) the entertainment of viewing or as supporters who help their children 'get ahead' or 'keep up' in education or consumption. By contrast, in today's democratic family model, it is instead the latter strategies that are emphasised (Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999) – Nathanson (2004) asks parents to discuss screen violence with their children, for example, rather than banning their viewing. It is curiously, then, that states seek to roll back national regimes of broadcasting regulation, public policy is again determined that parents should bear the primary responsibility for managing and controlling their children's media exposure, even though this demands a restrictive approach that problematically casts parents back into precisely the gatekeeper and rule-enforcer role they have escaped from, albeit ambivalently, in recent decades (Livingstone & Bober, 2006).[13]

Notwithstanding these shifts, children's escape from the authoritarian parent has been curtailed, especially by comparison with the comparative freedoms of fifty years ago, though for different reasons. Childhood and youth have, over the period we are concerned with here, become key sites for the anxieties of the risk society - a term by which Beck (1986/2005), points to the reflexive recognition of post war recent society that it faces vast yet uncertain and unmanageable risks of its own making.[14] Not only are parents responsible for protecting

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[12] Much of this privatised use of media is focussed on the bedroom, once a rather chilly and uncomfortable, sometimes forbidden, place in which to escape the demands of family life, but now positively valued opportunities for socialising and identity work, saturated with media images, sounds, technological artefacts and other media products.

[13] It is noteworthy that Himmelweit et al, writing in the then-dominant public service context of the UK (Oswell, 2002), direct most of their recommendations to broadcasters (the new intermediaries – 'in loco parentis' in the process of socialization since, as (Katz, 2003), argues, television disintermediated parents), while Schramm et al, writing in the commercial context of American (and, now, international) broadcasting, divide theirs more evenly, as today, among broadcasters, parents, schools and government.

[14] Part of this story is that, as 'outside' spaces are construed as increasingly risky for children, 'home' took over as the locus of safety, identity and leisure. So, supporting Raymond Williams' (1974) identification of the privatisation of leisure, historian Hugh Cunningham (1995: 179) concludes that for children, the postwar period saw a 'shift from a life focused on the street to one focused on the home... [and] 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'. One stark illustration: Hillman et al (1990) found that while in 1971, 80% of UK seven and eight year-old children walked to school on their own, by 1990 this figure had dropped to 9%. Within the home, especially for children, the bedroom has become a central locus of media-rich leisure and, hence of the mediation of everyday life (refs). Thus,

their children from such risks, including the risk of media-related harms (Millwood Hargrave & Livingstone, 2006), but children too, in a context of the individualisation of risk, are responsible. In the media and communication landscape, these risks are signalled by digital convergence. As the EC's Information Society and Media Commissioner, Viviane Reding, said in December 2007:

> 'In a digital era, media literacy is crucial for achieving full and active citizenship…The ability to read and write – or traditional literacy – is no longer sufficient in this day and age... Everyone (old and young) needs to get to grips with the new digital world in which we live. For this, continuous information and education is more important than regulation.' (Europa, 2007)

Media literacy was not, it seems, a term in Himmelweit's vocabulary, though she was very interested in differential levels of intelligence as a mediator of television's influence. As Luke (1990: 282) observes, the prevailing Behaviourist tradition meant that 'the possibility that viewers bring anything other than demographic variables to the screen was conceptually excluded'. But following the cognitive reframing not only of psychology but also, therefore, of the psychology of the viewer, media literacy, we saw both a new focus on critical literacy as empowerment (Pecora, 2007) but also, more critically, that 'the discourse cleared a space for institutionalized practices of intervention'– notably, media education, parental mediation and devolved content regulation (Luke, 1990: 282). Today, media literacy continues to grow in importance on both academic and policy agendas, given current efforts to devolve media risks to an 'empowered' and media-savvy public (Livingstone, 2008). The family's role in mediating the television (and also an array of other media, including the internet) is, therefore, increasingly an educational one, an informal extension of the formal requirements for children's learning, protection and participation. But television's role in mediating the family means that the children are somewhere else, evading parental guidance and, precisely, 'doing their own thing' even when at home.

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while television in the 1950s drew people home voluntarily, by the 1990s children had become trapped at home, with television no longer their preferred activity (Himmelweit et al, 1958) except for 'a boring day' when they are not allowed out (Livingstone et al, 1999).

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