Chapter 4

The Media-rich home: Balancing public and private lives

Public and private leisure spaces

Thus far we have discussed the domestic diffusion and appropriation of new media in the context of competing leisure alternatives. We now focus on how 'the home' is itself a changing place as a context for family life and media use. 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). However, it was not always thus. Segalen (1996) argues that the model of the single family home emerged first in the middle-classes, especially in the early twentieth century, with a strict separation of public and private spheres: 'home sweet home… is the household interior, an over-decorated and embellished space held in the highest value' (Segalen, 1996; 400). 'Home making' was of course the woman's realm and the focus of much of her energy as well as of much of the advice directed at her. As a refuge from the world, and a centre of proper values, home represents the source of love, morality, freedom and happiness for all those who have also to go out into the world (see also Putnam, 1990).

In the second half of the twentieth century, with the growing significance of domestic mass media, two distinct trends regarding the home can be identified, both concerning the privatisation of leisure and, more recently, of learning also. These trends help us understand the considerable differences between childhood in the 1950s, when television arrived, and childhood at the turn of the twenty first century, when the computer had made similar inroads into the home. The first may be characterised as the changing significance of 'the front door', i.e. the boundary between the home and outside. The second trend pursues this spatial focus by considering the growing significance of 'the bedroom door', i.e. the boundary between the living room and the bedroom. If the first raises questions of the relation between the public community and the privacy of the family, the second raises concerns the balance being struck between communal family life and the private life of the child.

To take the first trend first, it appears that a continued shift from children's leisure time spent outside (in the streets, woods or countryside) to that spent primarily at home is contributing to changing cultural conceptions of childhood over the past half century. Certainly, when we interviewed parents about their own childhoods, the dominant image was neither that of a media rich nor a media poor home, but rather that of a carefree childhood spent out of doors. Idealised though this doubtless is, it is important to recognise that, as Hill and Tisdall (1997: 93) observe, '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'. The point too easily overlooked is that these factors are just as significant in affecting how children negotiate their relationships and use of space inside the home also. From a historical perspective, Cunningham (1995: 179) sees the two as more interconnected, noting that, especially for working class families, there has been a 'shift from a life focused on the street to one focused on the home... [Moreover] 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'.

From a media-centred perspective, the second trend rests significantly on the continual multiplication of media goods at home, for this can be seen to be fostering a shift in media use from that best characterised by the notion of 'family television' to one of individualised media lifestyles and, particularly for children and young people, of 'bedroom culture'. Notably, in the middle of the twentieth century, when television was first introduced it was placed proudly in the living room, with household members having to negotiate with each other how to use it. A key feature of today's domestic environment is the multiplication of goods, many of them increasingly owned by individuals rather than 'the household'. This multiplication of media in the home has little to do with technological innovation. Yet for the household the sheer multiplication of media is proving significant in social terms. The structuring of leisure spaces has altered, and domestic media are coming to play an ever more central role in these changes.

Focusing in on the home, then, we may observe that while in some ways the personal computer today is entering the home in a similar fashion to the television before it, there is a major difference. For the decision is no longer whether to have a video recorder, or a hi-fi system, but rather how many to have and where to locate them in the home. The single computer household, one may speculate, is similarly historically temporary. Having more than one computer at home, which may now seem as extravagant or unnecessary as the multiple television sets that appeared several decades ago, is already becoming commonplace among wealthier households. 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), 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). As a result, children increasingly have their own television, video, computer, radio, and so forth, as we have seen.

In short, for many young people, a media-rich home is taken for granted. Certainly most children today grow up in homes, which can be termed 'media-rich' by the standards of their

parents' childhood. This has reached the point where children even lose track of their possessions. Thus 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, although they were clear that every room in the house contained a set:

Interviewer: Right, so how many televisions have you got in this house?
Sam: Millions!
Interviewer: Millions? (Laughs) Is that one over there, hiding in that cupboard?
Sam: Yes. One, two, three (pause). We have got about eleven or twelve.
Matthew: It's about nine isn't it?...Well, most of them are quite old ones but we have got a new one in there and that is a new one as well.
(Middle-class boys aged 10, 13 and 14)

The two themes addressed in this chapter are linked, for both deal with the boundary between public and private. Specifically, as interviews with parents make clear, the creation of a media-rich home tends to be justified by parents in relation to the first theme, the decline of street or public culture, as they stress the supposed benefits that a media-rich home brings to the children in terms of both safety (as outside space is increasingly seen as dangerous) and education (as media use at home is increasingly construed as influential in supporting the role of the school), as well as simply being valued for enhancing leisure. However, given that much leisure time is spent at home, while tastes and interests differ across family members (see next chapter), there are also many practical advantages to the multiplication of media goods, and both children and adults often wish to use media uninterrupted by family members, as we shall see.

While the present attempt to contextualise children and young people's media use within the spatial arrangements of their daily lives is thus consonant with the ways in which social historical accounts agree that the twentieth century has seen a radical shift in children's space, the strength of the YPNM project lies in tracking the practices of everyday life which together constitute the basis for these larger trends. These micro-level practical and discursive factors may appear trivial. Yet the present exploration of this shift towards home-based leisure in general, and media use in particular, is also, necessarily, an exploration of how young people's leisure activities serve to connect, or separate, spaces inside and outside the home. For example, the traditional alignment of inside and outside with feminine and masculine is altered when boys stay home to play computer games. So too is the familiar association of home with entertainment and school or work with learning altered when mothers take up teleworking and children study using the Internet at home.

The decline of street culture

There's nothing to do really... 'cos they've just gone and closed down the <club>.
Can't go down there no more.
<The club> was a disco.
For our age.
But there's nothing here now.
(15 year old girls living in rural area)

We saw in chapter 3 evidence of a reduction in the unstructured or informal time available to children, suggesting that it is media, which now occupy this time. While in that chapter the purpose was to contextualise media use by considering the other, potentially rival, activities in which children and young people engage, it is also important to recognise that these activities vary in terms of the spaces they occupy.

The spaces for young people's leisure activities have changed in meaning over the past half century. James et al (1998) draw on Beck's (1992) theory of the risk society in noting that parents increasingly identify the world outside the home as a source of risk from which their children must be shielded; by implication, the home is construed as a haven of safety. In a parallel vein, Hill and Tisdall (1997: 194) comment that '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'. As one working class mother commented, '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'.

Thus, while parents recall with nostalgia their own childhood freedoms to play, or hang out, out of doors, they are in strong agreement that conditions have changed for their children, so that the large amounts of unstructured time available to them which, in the eyes of children and parents alike, were best spent out of doors, are no longer available for their children. Hence, the mother quoted above went on to tell us that her nine year old daughter is 'not much outside during the week, because with the garage being outdoors and it doesn't shut until 6 and there's traffic that's constantly coming and going… I'm not paranoid. I'm just extra protective when they're outside and most of the time I'm in here and I'm thinking, "All right, what's happening to them?"'.

Significantly, when we asked these parents how this compares with the amount of time they spent out of doors when they were her age, their answers echoed those of many parents in drawing a strong contrast:

> Mother: I was never in!
> Father: Neither was I!
> Mother: From 5 o'clock until 8.30 I was off.
> Father: Yes and me. As soon as I woke up in the morning I was off.

These kinds of fears are not restricted to families living in urban areas. Parents and children in the most sheltered rural environments were affected by such concerns and reports of harms to children on television and in the newspapers often figured in parents' accounts. Indeed, the YPNM survey shows 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 were brought up (see table1). Describing the change the other way around, nearly one third of parents think the local streets are 'not very safe' for their child, while fewer than 5% thought this had been the case when they were a child. And when asked to 'think about their child and what is affecting his or her life nowadays', parents of children in every age group identify the availability of illegal drugs and the child being victim of crime among their top three concerns.

TABLE 1

How safe parent thinks the local streets are, by age of child

	For parent at child's age (N=969)				For child nowadays (N=971)			
	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very safe	51	56	59	59	5	10	13	15
Quite safe	42	38	37	38	53	62	59	59
Not very safe	5	4	3	2	31	21	26	20
Not at all safe	2	2	1	1	11	7	3	6

Source: YPNM Report (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

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), suggesting the importance of cultural discourses surrounding childhood over and above the occurrence of actual physical threats.

Unsurprisingly, one third of parents (31%) say that their child spends 'very little' or 'none' of their time outside the home or garden without adults around, while only 12% say this was the case for themselves at their child's age (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Parent's views about amount of time spent outdoors unsupervised (by self at child's age N=942 and by child now N=965) by age of child

	For parent at child's age				For child nowadays			
	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All/most	27	34	37	34	8	12	11	27
More than half	37	32	25	29	17	20	23	21
About half	22	22	26	27	32	35	39	29
Very little	12	11	11	9	32	29	25	23
None of it	3	1	1	1	11	4	2	1

According to their parents, girls, younger children and middle-class children spend comparatively less time playing or 'messing about outside'. The YPNM diary, completed by children, confirms this picture, showing that, when asked about *'messing about or playing outside'*, on weekdays only the 9-10 year olds mess about outside before school, and they are also the most likely to play outside after school, although they come inside by 8 p.m. The 12-13 year olds go out a little less, but come in at the same time. The 15-16 year olds mess about outside even less but may stay out till 10 p.m. While boys are more likely than girls to mess about outside after school, it is the working-class children who are slightly more likely to stay out later in the evening. On Saturdays, the main time to spend time out of doors is across the middle of the day; otherwise the demographic patterns are similar as for weekdays.

In sum, it seems that considerable changes have taken place in recent decades in public perceptions of the dangers of the streets for children. Hill and Tisdall (1997: 12) worry that 'children are marginalised in adult thinking and actions, resulting in major restrictions on children's access to attention, places and resources. This marginalisation is often justified by children's need for protection, but can also be paternalistic in its effects'. Ennew (1994) goes further, arguing that much of British children's lives is ruled by "the idea of danger", which she sees as having taken a new twist at the beginning of the 1990s.

A consequence of the growing fears regarding children's safety is a growth in adult management of children's leisure space and time. For example, for Himmelweit et al (1958) the necessity of time spent travelling each day to school was regarded as one of the significant unsupervised periods in children's lives. Today, as most parents accompany their children to school, certainly up to the age of 10 or so, this time has been lost, particularly in Great Britain. 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%. This change they ascribed mainly to increased car ownership and worry about safety on the roads, although one quarter of parents was also worried about abduction. Comparing the UK and Germany, Hillman et al (1990) also note that over three quarters of German primary school children come home from school on their own, compared with only a third of English juniors. When they compared children in the two countries for permission to cross roads, to come home from school alone, to go other places than school alone, to use buses to go out after dark and to use their bicycles on the roads, German children were far less restricted than their English counterparts.

This retreat from street or public culture contributes to an increasingly clear demarcation between adult space and children's space. Where the street or public square was common land, in which young and old could intermingle, the spaces today reserved for children, both indoors or outdoors, are distinct and marked off from those for adults.[1] Indeed, in earlier generations children played outside both because outside spaces were seen as safe, for everybody, and because they were unwelcome at home, the home being a place for housework, to be kept tidy, with bedrooms certainly not to be played in during the day. Yet today, separate leisure spaces for adults and children, each equipped with media, are increasingly common.

Here two middle class mothers, both with ten-year-old boys, stress the importance of such a separation within the home:

> Interviewer: Would you say there are more advantages than disadvantages, for him to have a television in his bedroom?
> Mother: Yes, I think there's er, it's an advantage to me, um, basically 'cause it gives me a bit of free time... Er, you can, I can sit quietly down here - it's a small house.

---

[1]This separation can be traced back to the sixteenth century and the origins of childhood itself: 'The discovery of childhood created childhood and adult society where only society had existed before. The creation of childhood simultaneously separated children from adult society, limited their freedom among adults, and imposed severe disciplinary controls on children and youth by home, school, and church' (Luke, 1989: 23). See Hoggart (1957) for a lively and insightful account of the texture of home and street life for families in the post-war period.

The second mother agrees: 'I feel that as an adult I need adult time, and there's certain things on the television that are no-go to children. You don't really know what's going to come on.'

James, Jenks and Prout (1998) draw on Mary Douglas' notion of dirt as 'matter out of place' to suggest that increasingly 'children either occupy designated spaces, that is they are placed, as in nurseries or schools, or they are conspicuous by the inappropriate or precocious invasion of adult territory...[Childhood] is that status of personhood which is by definition often in the wrong place' (p.37). As any child knows, the informal codes of conduct regarding queuing in shops, crossing busy streets or even being visible in public places all assume adult status, and 'unaccompanied' children are routinely excluded. How society regards this division between adult and child spaces is contested: Postman's (1992) concern with the supposed role of media in undermining childhood innocence rests precisely on the way that television transgresses what he sees as a valuable division, thereby making 'adult' knowledge routinely available to children. These debates are as rife among parents as among academics and commentators, and whether one considers it best for children to know about the adult world or to be protected from it frames parental strategies of media access and use.

That occupying 'the wrong place' has a strong moral dimension is most apparent in the ways in which parents may talk about 'other people's children' who are not 'appropriately' contained. Here, the middle-class mother of a 12 year old boy puts this moral anxiety into words:

> To be honest I'm too strict, but I would rather be strict now and have him grow into a decent adolescent teenager than one that was running round the streets creating havoc. There's a few at his school that are very, their freedom is never questioned, they're out in the morning and they go back at 9.30, 10 0' clock at night, and they have terrible, terrible reputations, and I don't want that for Alex. I want him to have a reputation of being a nice child, and a nice human being, but I don't want him to have a reputation of being a thug and an out-and-out bully.

The perception of public space as relatively unsafe, under-provisioned and even immoral appears to be a particularly British view. 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, hidden from adult view, often with old buildings that you could deface without anyone caring. In the cities it was downtown areas where kids could hang out. Many of these places are now gone, and only some kids feel comfortable in the malls that have replaced them'.

This characterisation of the change switches our focus in relation to public space from a parental to children's perspective, and the result is to make the picture appear rather different. While their parents are more likely to focus on the dangers of going out, our interviews showed that children instead stress the absence, as they perceive it, of activities and facilities in their neighbourhood, as illustrated by the discussion quoted at the start of this section.

Certainly, a substantial majority (66%) of children and young people aged 9-17 think there is not enough for them to do in the area where they live, as the YPNM survey showed. The number dissatisfied with provision of outdoor leisure facilities rises sharply after the age of 11, when attendance at the many organised leisure activities outside the home (such as swimming or dancing lessons, scouting organisations, etc.) tends to fall off (see chapter 3). Indeed, three-quarters aged 12-14 and as many as four in every five of those aged 15-17 are discontented with leisure alternatives outside the home (table 3). In a parallel survey, Matthews (1998) confirms that only 33% of children and young people say they find plenty of things to do locally, while 65% claim to be bored in their spare time. In addition 82% claim they prefer being out and about to being inside, but the streets are perceived by half as fearful places.

TABLE 3
Child's view of whether there is enough for someone their age to do in area where live (N=984)

	AGE				GENDER		SOCIAL GRADE			
	ALL	9-11	12-14	15-17	BOY	GIRL	AB	C1	C2	DE
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	33	54	27	19	37	29	37	36	35	27
No	66	45	73	80	62	71	63	63	64	72

Note: percentages may not total to 100% as c.1% answered 'unsure'.

The message from children and their parents to policy makers is clear - improve the provision of safe leisure alternatives for young people, particularly teenagers, outside the home. For where, they ask, are the affordable and accessible meeting places – the cafés, parks, swimming pools, cinemas, skating rinks, youth clubs that they so wish for? Cynics may reply that the young are always dissatisfied, but it is noteworthy that this level of dissatisfaction as expressed by young people in the UK is around double that of young people in other European countries. For example, in the UK 81% aged 15-16 are dissatisfied with the facilities available in the area where they live, compared with only 61% in Sweden, 49% in the Netherlands, 43% in France, 34% in Germany and 21% in Switzerland (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001).

Not only do young people bemoan the absence of places to go, but crucially, places of importance to children often exist on a micro-level which rarely show up on an adult street map - the back alley, the local waste ground, a small stream – and they are connected by informal or hidden routes. Hill and Tisdall (1997: 108) stress children's preference for 'real' over 'artificial' environments, for 'they like to create their own play environment, whether imaginatively or through using and moving materials provided by nature or left by adults'. Through such imaginative play, children come to feel ownership over their environments (Corsaro, 1997); although as Hill and Tisdall (1997: 109) go on to note, 'children are not

considered prominently, let alone consulted, in most decisions about the design and use of space'. It will be suggested below that children's most private space, their bedroom, represents a rare exception here, although the most that can be achieved is, in Coontz's terms, a psychic rather than a notable physical distance from adults. Having conducted three ethnographic studies in different types of urban or city environment, Lieberg (1995: 20) concludes that young people use public space 'because they often have nowhere else to go when they want to be among friends' and because 'an orientation toward friendship concentrates on "doing nothing" activities in mixed-gender groups (peer-groups) in public spaces' (p.22). This is seen positively, for 'one of the most important aspects of teenagers' use of public spaces is the possibility of controlling and shaping their own existence without adult control' (Lieberg, 1995:33).

In short, children and young people live much more local lives than do adults, and this goes easily unnoticed by adult observers – researchers, policy makers and parents alike. Hence the importance of taking a child-centred rather than an adult centred approach to children's leisure. An area which appears to an adult to be run-down or loud with traffic noise may provide a friendly street with neighbouring children to play with, while an idyllic rural village is likely to lack an adequate bus service to the cinema or swimming pool in the next town. Listening to the rules that children told us about – concerning space, time and money - which circumscribe their access to outside spaces makes this local and contingent character of their access very apparent. Rules include particular spatial restrictions (e.g. only visit this street, only cross certain roads, only cycle a certain distance), temporal restrictions (e.g. be back by 7 p.m., only go out after homework is completed, only go somewhere at the weekend), financial restrictions (relating to entrance fees, transport costs, etc), and social restrictions (e.g. only visit certain known children, you can't go to certain public places, etc).

Consider, for example, this interview with the middle-class parents of three boys aged 10, 13 and 14 who live in a large and comfortable house – the same family with the many televisions quoted earlier - in an unspoilt rural area two miles from a tiny village. When asked 'what the boys do around here', their mother painted a picture of diverse activities, albeit requiring considerable parental support:

> Well, we have done the usual things, like they have been in air cadets and they have been to scouts... I think we are quite fortunate here that we have a cinema up in <neighbouring town> … we belong to a country club … where we play golf and do clay pigeon shooting in the back meadow. Well, they have all got bikes so they meet their friends and perhaps go and get something to eat at <local village>… I think it is still quite unspoilt. We have a boating lake nearby so the facilities around here are quite good. But in the winter we have to take them to the cinema because there are no buses. We give them the mobile phone and then when the film is finished we come and fetch them home.

The three boys, on the other hand, feel isolated, notwithstanding the beauty of their rural surroundings, and the youngest and hence most restricted child was particularly critical: 'I'm not allowed on the road on my bike so I am usually stuck at home watching TV or something or reading a book...When we want to get out we try and get out but sometimes we have done everything and that's all that there is to do and it is just so boring. There is really nothing to do around here.'

The situation of this family contrasts with that of an Asian family living in a working-class area where unemployment, racial tension and crime-rates are high. The family live in a shabby small semi-detached flat above the corner shop where both father and mother work for long hours. On interviewing this second family, we found rather pessimistic parents but much more satisfied children. Thus, when we asked whether there was much for the children (a boy of seven and a girl of five) to do in the neighbourhood, the mother answered:

> Unfortunately there's not, no. There's a leisure centre, there's a YMCA as well. They feel kind of outcast though because there's not many Asian children around here. So really what I have to do is to do things with them in the household and in the back yard, or take them down to the Metro Centre because they've got a good leisure centre there as well, so that's quite good for them… There's a new water park, but, er, I'm very reluctant to take them there... It's mainly with older children on their bikes and they are, er, hanging around and you don't get many other children there. And really the parks are not up to standard because there's loads of rubbish... It's quite frightening as well sometimes when I take them to the park. I've had one bad experience taking the children there.

The satisfaction of the children brings home the local nature of children's lives. Here, being able to play in their own street with friends makes all the difference: as Hassan himself tells us, 'I play out… I ride my bike. Sometimes I go round the block with my friends... I go up this road and if I am allowed I cross the road all the way up there. But the Nursery is at the top, so I stop and come back. I am allowed to do that if I ask my Dad or my Mam.' The situations of these two families confirm the argument made in the previous chapter. For, as the middle class family illustrated, television and reading enter the conversation when describing restrictions on their activities – having to stay at home means spending time with the media. Further, as both families illustrate, what is particularly valued about going out is spending time with friends which, while not in itself new, confounds many public anxieties about the hypnotic attractions of the media. Moreover, what is often valued about the media is the ways in which they aid children in overcoming the obstacles placed between themselves and their friends (hence the rapidly growing interest in mobile phones and email).

Writing in the mid seventies, Corrigan (1976) contrasted the potential unpredictability of street corner culture with the alternatives of Mum and Dad in the 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, as we see below.

The retreat to the home

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. On occasion, this reveals some cause for concern, as when a 13 year-old boy, living in an area with a high level of unemployment and violence, tells 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 media culture is an implicit and subtle one. Clearly, it reflects not only a shift in perceptions of public space but also in perceptions of the home. For while today it is going out which is heavily hedged about with rules and expectations, once the home was similarly restricted, with activities judged appropriate for particular people or particular rooms also heavily rule-bound, and in this regard children's desires or interests had little expression.

Interestingly, in telling their often-nostalgic story of decline, today's parents are more likely to recall the freedoms of outside than the restrictions of inside.[2] Here a middle-class mother living in a rural location talks about her 10 year-old son:

> 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.

> Interviewer: So what would you do before 9 o'clock on a school day?
> Leo: Play on my computer and watch TV.
> Interviewer: And what sort of things do you watch in the evening then?
> Leo: On a school day I would watch *The Bill* and a few - other stuff. And then at the weekends I would watch anything and everything until 10 o'clock.
> Interviewer: What sort of things would you do in the mornings on a Saturday?
> Leo: Just get up and watch TV until about 12 o'clock. Get dressed and have dinner and watch TV again.
> Interviewer: Have you got a TV in your room?
> Leo: Yeah. I spend most of my time in there.
> Interviewer: Why is that?
> Leo: I prefer it. I like being on my own sometimes. Watch what I want to watch instead of watching what my sister wants to watch or what my mum wants to watch.
> Interviewer: And in your bedroom do you ever have your friends round?
> Leo: Yeah. They used to come and we'd play on the computer.

This last observation is confirmed by the YPNM survey, showing that a favourite leisure activity outside the home is in fact visiting friends in their homes, and these visits frequently encompass the use of media. Indeed, many young people are motivated to visit friends in order to use media that they do not have access to at home: two thirds of boys aged 9 or more visit a friend's house to play computer or video games and half of 15-16 year-olds visit a

---

[2] This may be partly a matter of generation. Today's parents grew up in the sixties and seventies, a time of increasing liberalisation, rather than the more formal and restrictive forties and fifties during which a very different conception of 'home' was institutionalised.

friend to watch a video. Around a quarter sometimes go to use a computer (not for games) or watch satellite or cable television. Such social uses of media challenge suggestions that the effect of the media is to isolate children from social interaction. On the other hand, if friends are not forthcoming, the media play a much more important role, and one about which parents have considerable misgivings, while when friends are available, the media play a lesser role. Consider the case of this middle-class six year-old girl who used to live in a rather isolated cottage. As her mother told us:

> She did watch a lot of TV then. She would watch everything that was for children... I had a young and very demanding asthmatic baby so there wasn't the time for her. She would watch other children playing on *Sesame Street* and just almost interact with the children on the television because there was no one up there. You see I didn't have the energy to get out all the time, or to have people around all the time... It was useful... She just used to have a wee chair in that corner and sit there glued.

Since then, however, the family has moved to a housing estate in a small village where the children play regularly in the street outside. The children's social life, and therefore the place of the media in it, has been transformed, as this interview with Belinda shows:

Interviewer: Imagine you've just got back from school. What would you do?
Belinda: I like playing out the front or something.
Interviewer: Who would you play with?
Belinda: I like playing with Alice who's 9 and Carrie who's 8 who's Alice's sister, or Megan or my friend next door, Lucy.
Interviewer: What would you do?
Belinda: We would play on our bikes or something. Or I would play with Lucy next door on our bikes. We like playing 'follow my leader' on our bikes. (Laughs)
Interviewer: And what's best - being outside or in the house?
Belinda: Outside.

This interview was typical of many, demonstrating that "outdoors" above all was a social space where the children and young people we talked to could be together with friends. It represented excitement, freedom from adult supervision and freedom to explore. However, one should caution lest discussions of the adult supervision of childhood slip into a celebration of childhood freedoms and innocence (or of young people's supposed resistance to the dominant culture; Widdicombe and Woofit, 1995). For example, the image that could be seen to result from the data presented in chapter 3, of a heavily supervised and morally anxious middle class and a free, informal social life for the working class on the streets, tends to criticise the former and romanticise the latter. This leads in turn to a neglect of the problems which working class culture may reproduce for those young people (Willis 1977) as well as a neglect of the complaint clearly emerging from all young people, namely that there is insufficient public provision of leisure facilities, particularly for those who fall into the no-man's land between the definitions of 'child' and 'adult'. Moreover, if we replace the focus on supervision with a focus on resources, the picture instead becomes one of a well resourced middle class - in terms of activities both outside and inside the home and a less privileged working class who are comparatively deprived in both these respects. In short, we should neither over-glamorise leisure in public spaces nor underestimate the value of the new, high

tech bedroom culture. At home, the middle classes have more rooms, more media, as well as having more organised activities and more money to go out (although they are also subject to greater monitoring and restrictions; Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

It has been seen that, given limitations in their financial resources and the age-appropriate facilities provided for them, as well as the constraints of dominant discourses around childhood, the long-term historical shift towards the privatisation of leisure (Williams, 1974) means that the home (rather than, say, commercial facilities available within the locale) as a locus for leisure becomes ever more central to young people. And while at home, for a variety of reasons television in particular but also the media in general are frequently acknowledged as the easy way of keeping the family entertained, notwithstanding the doubts parents have regarding the media as 'time-wasting'. In short, the boundary marked by the front door is sufficiently problematic for families that, motivated also by other factors operating within the home, there is now another boundary, this time marked by the bedroom door. On the other hand, the broad link being proposed here, between anxieties about safety outside the home and provision of media inside it does not apply straightforwardly at the level of individuals. In the YPNM project we compared those parents who were relatively more or relatively less fearful of their children's safety in terms of the levels of media provision in the home, looking both at household and bedroom media, and found no direct association between concern with safety in public and provision of media in the private realm. Rather, as already noted in chapter 2, provision of media in the home or in the child's bedroom depends primarily on the factors of the age and gender of the child, and on the economic and cultural capital of the parents.

Home and family are not necessarily one and the same. Ironically perhaps, the privatisation of once-public leisure activities, and the allowing of children to spend their leisure time within the home rather than sending them out during the day, 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. Thus not only are their media preferences decreasingly shared with their parents but there are ever more media contents and sources tailored to their age group. In short, while the privatisation of leisure increasingly keeps the family together at home, the sociocultural process of individualisation increasingly pushes them apart, resulting in a diversification of leisure lifestyles within which the diversification of media plays a key role. But this apparent conflict between family togetherness and separation also is reaching a spatial resolution within the home, and one, which is transforming the spatial arrangements of the home further. Specifically, the multiplication of media goods in the home supports, facilitates even, a diversification of tastes and habits at home which frees young people from following the lifestyle decisions of their parents, but this requires the development of a media-rich or high-tech 'bedroom culture' in order to allow for the expression of individualised lifestyles on the part of young people (and their parents).

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, disencourages family life because it separates people. Errm, maybe not so much Charlie, but I do think that in general in encourages children to stay in their room. And it breaks off the contact.
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 in public spaces, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed both a decline in access for children, and an increasing demarcation between adult and child spaces, the private, domestic realm has been undergoing parallel changes. This period opened with the arrival of the television set into the family home, transforming the spatial and temporal rhythms of family life, and closed at the point at which it has become expected, and in many cases achieved, that each room, or each household member, would have his or her own space in which to view television with, perhaps, music, a VCR and, increasingly, a personal computer and mobile phone as well. To give an example, one that contrasts with the parents quoted above, when we asked the family with the many television sets whether this was because of the multiplicity of channels, the mother laughed and said, 'It's the multiplicity of children!'. As she went on to explain, 'everybody is very individual, and it also allows everybody to relax in their own way and in their own time.'

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, there was a new problem, namely where to put the set. As one new television viewer recalls, 'I remember, you had to go into the front room to watch it, and in those days, the front room was really only used for 'best ' - for special occasions. The television changed that' (quoted in O'Sullivan, 1991: 167). 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, 1995; Scannell, 1988). In interviews, we found very few children for whom this formal notion of the privacy of the home was relevant. Ten-year old Kevin told us that, 'well my Mum doesn't like people actually coming in … umm, because they'd probably break something, 'cos we've got a lot of china … and my Mum's teapots… and she doesn't want them broken'.

In the main, however, only relatively wealthy homes now keep a room for 'best', and many family homes have 'knocked through' from the best room into the dining room to make a large multifunctional space – the family room' available to all. In this new multifunctional living space, the media play a central role. Walk into the modern living room and one is likely to find a décor inspired by the middle class aspirations of the sitcom family or a prime-time home decorating programme, an arrangement of sofas and comfy chairs encircling the television set, an array of hi-fi equipment, video recorder, television-linked computer games machines and, covering most visible surfaces, a comfortable clutter consisting of television listings magazines, remote controls, newspapers, notes with URL's scrawled on them, compact discs, headphones, print out from websites, toys themed from the latest Disney hit, and so forth. All such space is marked by informality, typically noted by the family as you enter through the routine request to the visitor - 'please don't mind the mess'.

Closely associated with the family room is 'family television' (Morley, 1986; see also Moores, 1988), a site of both conviviality and power plays, in which the family share interests, pleasures and conflicts. As recently as the mid-1980s, Morley described an image in which the family gathers 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. Dad monopolises the remote control, sport wins out over soaps in the struggle to determine programme choices, women's viewing is halted when the husband wants to see 'his programme', and children have to fit in with others. Some of this is still visible, as when a working class 15 year old boy explains, 'most of the time Dad watches what he wants 'cos he pays for the telly'. Yet he goes on to add, 'sometimes if there is something on Sky that we want to watch… he [Dad] sits in one of our rooms to watch it and we watch it downstairs.' In other words, partly in response to the domestic conflicts charted by Morley, just a decade later we find a very different pattern emerging.

As the media at home have multiplied, no longer representing a scarce resource for the family, the kinds of social practices which surround and accompany viewing have altered. An increasingly common solution is to transform bedrooms into private living rooms, transforming the meaning of both solitary and shared viewing, and leaving the family living room for those specific 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) (nor that of day-time and night-time, nor of adult and child) but rather than of family/communal space and individual/personal spaces. How far along this path to go represents a central dilemma for the family at the turn of the century, and insofar as parents and children construct 'family life' through their daily activities, their decisions to acquire multiple televisions, or where to locate the personal computer, push them towards either a more communal or individualised model (see chapter 5). The 'living room wars' (Ang, 1996) were most obvious to those researchers of the one-set home, sensitising them to power inequalities based on gender and generation. Against that context, it might have seemed that multiple sets would resolve family conflicts by providing each family member with control over their own viewing. Yet as we come near to reaching that state, many British families now see themselves facing a new problem of dispersed living. As each person goes off in his or her own direction, this generates some nostalgia for the so-called togetherness once experienced in front of the set.

The long term trend clearly involves moving new screen-based media - the television in the 1960s, the VCR in the 1980s, the computer in the late 1990s - away from the main family space of the living room where they generally start their domestic career, towards more individualised spaces, particularly the bedroom/play room. This spread is both spatial and temporal, for while the media are spreading throughout the home, they are also spreading throughout the day. As noted in the previous chapter, television schedules have changed to fit this more casual use, from mainly prime time availability to an increasingly 24 hour service, and doubtless the ever more informal mode of address on television (Corner, 1995) also supports this altered style of use. The computer - like most other media, but significantly unlike television - is unable to impose its timetable on its users (though the Internet is making some moves in this direction), but still one might expect a gradual shift from use in valued time, reflecting a positive choice to engage with favoured contents, to more casual time-

filling uses associated more with boredom than with choice (- one might even see the increasingly entertaining screen-saver as a new version of the notion of television-as-wallpaper). Thus while the computer as a technology appears to assume a focused user, the screen does not require this, as the history of television shows.

Finding a home for media

Given the current stage in the diffusion of television and of the computer (Chapter 2), and having seen the expressed desires on children's part for yet more privacy in relation to their media use, let us consider further two of the choices currently facing households with children. The first is where to locate the computer; the second is whether to put a television in a child's bedroom. In just over half of all homes with children, these decisions have recently been made. Location is related to use, for children with their own computer spend some twenty minutes per day longer than those with access to one elsewhere in the household, resulting in almost twice as much use altogether, although the balance of time between playing games and using the computer for 'serious' uses differs little (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

Whether or not to acquire a personal computer is, as we saw in chapter 2, a matter of household income even more than it is one of parental education. For many families, however, the question is no longer whether but when: as one mother told us, 'all I know is that I can see computers being as much part of the home as the TV and video'. Once acquired, the decision of where to put it reveals some complex processes of appropriation by which parents and children negotiate their domestic environment. These decisions may follow the public/commercial discourse that accompanies purchase of these goods, but families also alter or resist these meanings, situating the goods so as to facilitate other kinds of practices. If the newly acquired computer is put in Dad's study, the child's bedroom, an older brother's bedroom, under the stairs or the family living room, very different meanings are activated, relating the key dimensions of meaning - leisure/work, shared/individual, parent/child, masculine/feminine - in different alignments.

It has proved less obvious where the personal computer should be located than the initial location of the television, and the result has as yet made less impact on main living spaces, though the growing presence of computers in bedrooms or what were once spare rooms, is altering the meaning and uses of these more peripheral spaces. Different households make different decisions. These decisions have dual implications, for both the meaning of the computer and computer use in the household and for the meaning of the space in which the computer is placed. One pattern in evidence is that families try the living room option first – following the location which succeeded for the television – but then subsequently move it into either the room of whoever turns out to use the computer in practice, this often deviating from anticipated use, or into a previously undefined space (box room, hallway, etc), often then relabelled as 'the computer room'. Occasionally, the reverse process occurs, especially when parents decide that a computer, originally bought for one child, should be more closely monitored and so a more public setting is chosen.

Looking at those homes where the decision has been made to buy a personal computer, we see that class and gender differences determine its location (see Table 4). Middle-class parents, and parents of girls, appear to prioritise sharing the computer within a communal

space over personal ownership by the child. Working-class parents, and parents of boys who invest in a computer appear twice as likely to place it in the child's bedroom, or to have a second machine in the child's bedroom. As a result, there are no social grade differences in the numbers of children having a computer in their own room, although, as we saw in chapter 2, middle-class households are almost twice as likely to have a computer somewhere in the home. For gender, on the other hand, we see the reverse: while boys and girls have more or less equally likely to have a computer somewhere in the home, boys are twice as likely to have one in their bedroom. In other words, boys are twice as likely either to have the family's only computer located in their room, or to have an additional computer of their own. Interestingly, middle-class families are less likely than working-class families to invest in a second computer for their daughters, but in other respects the gender bias is just as marked in working-class families where 33% of boys have the only computer in the home in their rooms compared with only 13% of girls.

Table 4
Location of computer in the home, by gender and social grade (base: all households with computer, N=556)

	Gender			Social Grade		Gender by Social Grade			
						Boy		Girl	
	ALL	Boy	Girl	ABC1	C2DE	ABC1	C2DE	ABC1	C2DE
Child's room and elsewhere	12	16	8	9	16	15	17	4	15
Child's room only	16	22	9	11	23	15	33	7	13
Elsewhere only	73	62	83	80	62	69	50	90	72

Source: YPNM Report (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

In accounting for the decision to put the computer in a family space or in a child's room, there are some cultural factors at work. Dutch and British children, for example, are equally likely to have a personal computer in their bedroom, but in the Netherlands they are twice as likely to have a computer in the home (van der Voort, et al, 1998). In other words, Dutch families are more likely overall to favour a communal interpretation of the computer while British parents are more likely to see the computer as facilitating a child's homework (or, as freeing the family from the sound of games playing). On the other hand, Danish children are not only more likely than British children to have a computer in the home but also proportionately more likely to have one in their bedroom for their personal use (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001), suggesting Denmark to be further 'advanced' on the path towards multiple, and thereby individual, computer ownership.

While the decision over where to locate the computer is described by parents and children as distinctive to the computer, it is noteworthy that similar patterns of provision for the bedroom occur for television. In other words, as we saw in chapter 2, middle-class parents, and parents of girls, appear to prioritise co-viewing or sharing the television in a communal space over personal ownership by the child, while working-class parents, and parents of boys, are more likely to provide a television in the child's bedroom. Yet the justifications surrounding these decisions are rather different. In the case of the computer, parents talk of supporting the child's education, or of the need for several family members to share the computer or, less often, of the need to monitor publicly how the child uses the computer. In the case of

television, parents talk of allowing different family members to pursue individual content preferences, and of providing privacy for both children and adults in the household. In both cases, they are subject to pressure from their children: when asked in the YPNM survey what they most want for their next birthday, 16% of children without their own television made this their top choice, and 14% of those who already had a computer elsewhere in the house nonetheless chose to have their own in addition. However, television far more than the computer is also popularly associated with dividing the family, and so parents' doubts about their children having their own set are associated with parental anxieties regarding their success in creating a cohesive family.

Media as solitary or social

In the YPNM survey we asked young people to estimate what proportion of the waking time they spent at home was spent in their bedroom. While few – especially among the younger children - claim to spend most or all of this time in their bedroom, by the time they are 15-16 the majority of young people say they spend at least half of their waking time at home in their bedrooms. This is especially the case for girls, although socio-economic status makes little difference, and it holds across diverse European countries (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001).

Ambivalence regarding the potentially isolating impact of the media is very salient for some parents, as one working class mother of a fifteen year old girl describes:

> Joanne has her television on when she is sort of sitting in there [in her bedroom].
> Which I didn't approve of... I feel that she is not in here with us that much then. I like
> us all to be together. I like that. But she has got to have her space. And she obviously
> likes watching some programmes that we don't, the younger programmes.

Not all families are so concerned, for 'dividing the family' can be fairly redescribed as 'providing for individual interests'. For example, when we asked one middle class mother of an 11 year old girl what her daughter's favourite television programme was, she replied with apparent equanimity: 'I don't know if she has got a favourite programme. I am afraid that we are a family where we all go in our own rooms. We don't sit around together... The children go up in their bedrooms and have their telly on and I am in here.'

In general, while 63% of 6-17 year-olds have a TV set in their bedroom the YPNM survey showed that only 19% of parents think it 'mainly a good thing' for a young person of their child's age to have a television set in their own room, while 31% think it 'mainly a bad thing'. These views are strongly related to social class, with middle-class parents twice as likely to disapprove of their child having a television in their bedroom than are working-class parents. Nonetheless, one in five parents (drawn equally from working-class and middle-class backgrounds) who think it mainly a bad thing nevertheless allow their child to have a set in their bedroom.

It is worth reflecting on the reasons for this. Partly, they concern the domestic regulation of access to media contents; and partly they reflect a public anxiety about 'being alone'. The present account, namely that children and young people primarily wish to be with friends, with media taking second place in their preferences, is one which parents and researchers alike are happy to hear. And in many respects, this account of young people's sociability is a

fair one. For example, the description of the period after school offered to us by this ten year old girl is typical of many:

> Rachel: Well, normally I just choose to sit and watch TV.
> Interviewer: Right, when you're on your own?
> Rachel: Yes, and when a friend's there, we just play upstairs, then sometimes go out and have a walk round the village.

But both this account and its opposite, namely that children and young people are becoming isolated and addicted through excessive media use, tend implicitly to accept the assumption that being alone is problematic. Yet such an assumption does not accord well with an attempt to take young people's perspective seriously. For example, Ferrari et al (1985) conceptualise research on the implications of home computing for children and families, in terms of the opposition that the computer may encourage isolation of users, or may encourage co-operative group use. In this framework, computer experiences with other family members are construed as positive, while individual experience is seen as negative. By contrast, Hill and Tisdall (1997) review research which shows how much children value the right to be alone in general - to be quiet, independent and free from intervention (while, conversely, Emler and Reicher, 1995, observe a relation between sociality and delinquency). If we take this 'right' seriously, it is clear that the bedroom answers admirably, for central to young people's pleasure in their bedroom is that it represents a place of privacy. The association of being alone with being in one's bedroom is culturally variable – in Finland, children are more likely to find they have the living room to themselves (Suoninen et al, 1998) as the school day finishes relatively early and the proportion of working mothers is higher than in the UK[3], a situation which in the UK and US contexts is defined as the social problem of 'latch key children'. Notably, children describe finding they can have the living room to themselves with great pleasure.

Popular concerns about the media frame the adult judgement of the value of being alone, neglecting considerations of privacy, for now that bedrooms contain screen entertainment media, what was once seen as broadly positive – the child alone, lost in a book, losing track of the hours in a fantasy world – is seen as worrying.[4] As a culture, we do not think that the child alone, lost in a computer game, losing track of the hours in a fantasy world, is making a valuable use of their time. The growing endorsement of the 'time is money' metaphor makes us place a higher value on a mixed 'diet' of preferably sociable leisure activities than on any consideration of privacy, especially if it involves a lengthy escape into a fantasy world. Perhaps the main factor, though, is that in our culture being alone is a state of adulthood, meaning independence, making one's own decisions, learning from own mistakes, structuring one's own time, falling back on one's own resources, etc. A child alone in her bedroom may be seen, in some sense, not only as rejecting 'the family' but also as escaping the status of being a child, as exercising a certain independence.[5]

---

[3] For a comparison of the conditions of childhood across Europe, see Livingstone et al (2001).

[4] It is difficult to determine whether attitudes to children's solitary activities were once more positive, or whether society has always regarded the desire to be alone with suspicion. Certainly, it is screen media that today serve as the focus for such concerns.

[5] Increasingly, a large proportion of children and young people use personalised media such as the walkman, allowing them to create a private and individualised environment for themselves even when in public places.

Whether we construe a child making use of media in the bedroom as positive or negative, there is little doubt that the more media are located in the bedroom, the more time children spend with those media – even once age, socio-economic status and gender are taken into account - and so the more time they spend in their bedroom (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999). From the perspective of the media and communication industries, detaching media goods from fixed domestic locations by making them either affordable in multiple versions or by making them mobile, is a successful strategy for increasing the use made of them.

Amongst 9-10 year-olds, having screen media (television, games machine, or personal computer) in the bedroom is associated with the greatest increase in time spent. Across all age groups, children and young people with their own television report spending 37 minutes more per day viewing than children who only have access elsewhere in the home, while for the computer the equivalent figure is 21 minutes and for the TV-linked games machine, 19 minutes. Amongst older children, being able to play music in their own room makes the most difference – a matter of nearly half an hour per day, although having a television set remains important, particularly amongst those aged 12-13.

Across European countries surveyed, similar patterns hold (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001), suggesting that having a media-rich bedroom is associated with greater use of the bedroom. While it is a tempting to conclude further that, as bedrooms become ever more media-rich, children are spending increasing amounts of time in their bedrooms, there is little past data on bedroom use to permit this, and the reverse interpretation – namely that those who spend more time with the media are most likely to acquire media in their bedroom - is also plausible.

In the YPNM survey, and again this holds true across the European countries surveyed (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001), there is also a negative correlation between spending time in the bedroom and spending free time with family and a positive association with mostly spending free time alone. Again, it is difficult to determine whether this should be interpreted in terms of the isolating effect of personal media or the desire of some more than others for privacy. While having one's own television means that children are more likely to watch their favourite programmes alone, we also found that 12-13 and 15-16 year-olds are more likely to watch television and play computer games with friends if they have their own television or TV-linked games machine or personal computer. This suggests that what is key is the flexibility to balance time spent with family, friends and alone.

There are some cultural differences in sociability. Comparisons across Europe reveal that in Spain both boys and girls are particularly likely to spend time with the family and to spend comparatively less time in the bedroom (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001) while Swedish and Finnish teenagers are overwhelmingly more likely to spend their free time with a group of friends, also spending a smaller proportion of their free time in their own room. This suggests that wider cultural factors lead family life in Spain to remain largely communal while in the Nordic countries, youth culture is more peer-oriented.

Not only do parents undoubtedly value having some space and time to themselves, this being a significant factor in their arrangement of their home and daily timetable, but children clearly desire such time alone. This preference represents one means by which children contribute to the structuring of domestic arrangements, for they are not only consumers but

also, through their activities and desires, architects of the new style home with its multiple screens in multiple living spaces. These activities and desires were readily identified in the YPNM survey when we asked 10-16 year olds about the social contexts in which they watch television and play computer games.

Table 5 shows that watching television remains primarily a social activity – for three-quarters of these young people watch along with others more than half the time.[6] This is especially for the younger children, with siblings and mothers being the most common viewing companions. By contrast, computer games are a much more solitary activity, for nearly two thirds generally play alone, while friends and siblings tend to be played with most frequently.

---

[6]From the broadcasters YoungView panel, children aged 10-16.

Table 5: Percentage of 10-16 year olds who watch/play more than half the time …

	TELEVISION				COMPUTER GAMES			
	ALL (507)	10-11 (176)	12-14 (261)	15-16 (70)	ALL (403)	10-11 (136)	12-14 (210)	15-16 (57)
Alone	25	17	28	30	63	64	62	70
With friends	7	7	7	1	17	22	15	11
With siblings	53	59	52	39	24	25	26	18
With mother	46	50	45	40	3	3	5	-
With father	35	35	37	27	7	8	8	-
With other	13	16	13	3	6	11	4	5

Source: Livingstone (1999c)
Note: multiple response options allowed.

Notwithstanding the apparent social nature of television viewing, and as an exercise in trying not to impose assumptions onto our respondents, we also asked children in the survey to draw themselves watching television. Perhaps surprisingly, about half of them chose to draw themselves watching television alone, often in their bedrooms, suggesting a marked shift from the image of television as the family hearth, replacing the dinner table perhaps, but at least a social focus in the centre of family life. Having also asked them how they most enjoyed watching television and playing computer games,[7] it became apparent that these drawing were more likely to reflect preferred than actual viewing habits (table 6). For the differences between tables 5 and 6 reveal some interesting discrepancies between actual and preferred viewing.

Table 6: How 10-16 year olds most enjoy watching television *(N=507)* and playing computer games *(N=403)*

	TELEVISION						COMPUTER GAMES					
	ALL %	Boys %	Girls %	10-11 %	12-14 %	15-16 %	ALL %	Boys %	Girls %	10-11 %	12-14 %	15-16 %
Alone	40	42	46	31	45	44	44	48	32	43	42	51
With friends	19	36	18	16	19	12	28	19	20	25	31	19
With siblings	15	11	19	19	12	13	15	9	20	16	13	20
With mother	11	1	2	16	9	6	1	9	12	3	1	0
With father	3	2	5	5	4	0	4	4	2	5	4	0
With other	5	2	6	5	5	1	4	2	7	5	3	4
N/a	7	7	3	8	8	3	5	7	7	3	6	7

---

[7]From the broadcasters YoungView panel, children aged 10-16.

Source: YPNM survey (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999)

Clearly, children would like to be able to watch television alone far more than they actually can at present. Indeed, viewing alone is the most popular option. This would seem to be strongly motivated by the desire to escape from co-viewing with siblings and with parents. The YPNM survey also showed that more boys than girls watch their favourite programme alone. While this may reflect a greater desire on the part of boys to be on their own it may also reflect an association between the genre of their favourite programme and the context of viewing. Soap operas, more often the favourite of girls, appear to invite more sociable viewing while sports, more favoured by boys, are more often watched alone. Indeed, four-fifths of both boys and girls who identify a soap opera as their favourite programme generally watch it in company while one third of boys and girls who choose sports for their favourite watch this alone.

In all age groups, but particularly amongst boys and teenagers, more would also like to watch with friends.[8] This preference for being more often with friends than is currently managed is repeated when we compare experiences and preferences for playing computer games. However in contrast to their experience with television, more children are already playing computer games on their own than would opt to do so given the choice: almost two thirds mostly play computer games alone, but fewer say they most enjoy playing this way. The converging evidence, therefore, is that television - traditionally conceived as a social medium – remains a family activity but a sizeable proportion of children and young people would rather view individually. This suggests a growing pressure from children and young people for having a television in their bedroom if they do not already have one. However, the emerging picture is less one of children's preference for isolation than one of a preference for escaping the family and for spending time with friends. This latter is itself heavily media-related, for while the preference for peer relations serves to put media 'in their place', it is also obvious that one can no longer imagine youth culture without music, computer games, soap opera, or chat rooms, and that multiple-screen homes are becoming increasingly commonplace.

These preferences for 'socialising' the media work to overcome some features of the technologies themselves. Notably, the computer, which generally supports a single user - there is often only one keyboard, one joystick, one mouse – and which is indeed a medium children are very likely to use alone, is also a medium which many would prefer to use with friends. Moreover, Pasquier et al (1998) suggest that the computer (playing on it, talking about it, advising on use, comparing experiences) may provide a new opportunity for father-son discussions which previously were relatively absent within the typical family. Observations of children playing computer games suggest that children are finding ways of playing even one-person games with friends, issuing instructions to the one with the mouse, negotiating turn taking, and so forth, as well as talking about computers at school or visiting friends to see their computer. LaFrance (1996: 316) notes that the games themselves encourage group involvement, for the stress on passwords, cheats, and tips, represent a knowledge 'that one can find in certain books or magazines, which children seldom buy but

---

[8]Those with their own television set are almost twice as likely as those without to watch their favourite programme on their own, they are a little more likely to watch with friends, and they are particularly less likely to watch with opposite gender siblings (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

the content of which circulates, in informal networks of friends'.[9] Meanwhile, technological support for social gaming - in the sense of multiple simultaneous game players using multiple networked computers – is growing. So too are email and the Internet being used primarily, and against popular expectation, to sustain face-to-face relationships more than to create virtual ones.[10] In short, while often played alone, there is also evidence that, contrary to the popular fears that computer games have an isolating effect on children, they are instead finding a series of strategies for 'socialising' the computer.

In general, the possible harms, if any, of 'solitary' use of media remain unproven. Moreover, in principle, as social psychologists have long argued, even if one sits alone with one's thoughts in an empty room, one is irrevocably social; there is no individual (or private) thought or action which is not constituted in and through the other thoughts and actions of the social realm. But being apart from others, physically, is clearly seen by children and young people themselves positively. The importance of bedroom culture for children and young people is now considered in more depth below.

The culture of the bedroom
We have seen that equipping the bedroom with media represents for parents and children an ideal compromise in which children are both entertained and kept safe. For parents are more fearful of their children's safety outside the home than of any media-related dangers, as the YPNM survey shows. And as many young people do not think there is enough for them to do in their neighbourhood, they are only too happy to receive their own new or hand-me down televisions, VCRs, etc. Thus, by the end of the 1990s, many young people have media-rich bedrooms, not necessarily reflecting an intrinsic fascination for the media so much the unsatisfactory nature of the available alternatives. We have also seen that parallel data from other European countries suggest that British children experience a comparative lack of leisure facilities outside but this is compensated in part by a comparatively greater media provision inside the home (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001; d'Haenens, 2001). Of course, other social changes, including central heating, smaller family size, and continual upgrading of domestic technological goods all have their part to play (Allan, 1985), but the result is clearly a new kind of place for children's leisure which has been little explored to date, and one which is ever more filled with media goods for ever younger children – their bedroom.

The YPNM survey showed that in British children's bedrooms music media are the most popular: 68% 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. Two-thirds (64%) have books (not for school) and as many as 12% have their own computer, though only 4% have a CD-ROM and 1% a modem (see Chapter 2). However, one should not presume 'bedroom culture' to be homogenous across all children and young people. In the YPNM project we divided the bedrooms of children and young people aged 6-17 into four types according to the media they contained.

❑ Media-rich bedroom

---

[9]LaFrance describes this as an absorbed, emotional, uncritical sociability - 'experienced as the abandoning of the personality rather than as the enhancement of individuality' (1996: 315).
[10] Ref to BT project.

❑   Specialist bedroom (typically, books and music or books and computer)
❑   Screen-entertainment bedroom
❑   Media-poor bedroom

The *'media-rich' bedroom* describes around one quarter of children and young people's bedrooms. These contain a variety of old and new media, including greater than average ownership of screen entertainment, music, books and computers. It is more typical of boys, older and working-class children. This last may seem unexpected, as overall household provision is positively associated with household income; however, in provisioning children's bedrooms, as we saw earlier, different factors come into play, and many of the media-rich homes were found in relatively poor households. To be sure, media-rich bedrooms tend to be located in media-rich homes, where the contents of the child's bedroom tend to duplicate those elsewhere in the home; yet we encountered a proportion of relatively low income households (often single parent households) where the child's bedroom was equipped apparently at the expense of the home.

We saw in chapter 2 that certain media have become more specialised in their uses. Similarly, some bedrooms (about one in three) specialise in particular combinations of media, eschewing other, particularly screen-entertainment, media as a result. Hence, the combination of *books and music*, especially favoured by girls or, increasingly common among teenagers, bedrooms prioritising *books and the computer,* are more typical in middle-class homes with educated parents. A screen/print trade-off is clearly observable here, for these bedrooms are also distinguishable by being particularly low on screen entertainment media, especially television.

By contrast, the *'screen entertainment' bedroom,* more common among working-class boys, especially between ages 12-14, tends to prioritise the television, TV-linked games machine, and for some, a VCR, over books and music equipment. While screen-entertainment represents a media specialisation of some children and young people (and, indeed, of some parents), it is rarely characteristic of the home overall and so does not emerge as a household type (see chapter 2). This is because households rich in screen entertainment media also contain books and music and so are more generally media-rich. This type of bedroom – characteristic of one in five of the sample - is interesting in part because it is the focus of most popular concern; indeed, these bedrooms – along with the media-rich bedrooms – are characteristic of children who claim to spend a higher proportion of their waking time in their bedroom.

Lastly, around one quarter of bedrooms may be characterised as *'media-poor'*, being less likely to contain any of the media we asked about. Interestingly, these are not necessarily those of poorer or younger children, though these children do tend to be lower media users. Media-poor bedrooms are associated with a considerable variety of households. As pointed out earlier, there is no simple relation between household income and provisioning of the bedroom. Rather, two factors are relevant in accounting for the existence of media-poor bedrooms in average-to-high income households. First, this low level of provision may represent a disinclination to prioritise screen media within the family's lifestyle. Second, it may reflect a preference on the part of parents for shared rather than personalised media use within the family, so these homes may be well equipped other than in the child's bedroom. Perhaps because girls are less interested in acquiring screen media in particular, or because

girls are more often expected to share with the family, media-poor bedrooms are more common among girls.

The YPNM survey also shows that media in the bedroom are heavily used, and that generally speaking, those children with access to certain media in their own room spend more time with those media than do those who only have such access elsewhere in the home (this holds true even after controlling for the age, gender and social class of the child). It follows then that those with 'screen' or 'media-rich' bedrooms spend more time overall with media (especially with screen media) and those with 'book/music' or 'media-poor' bedrooms spend the least time with media overall (with the exception of reading) (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

The relationship between type of home environment and media provision in the children's bedrooms is far from predictable. However, the emerging pattern suggests that there are two categories of parents who provide a 'media- rich' home: those who equip their children's bedrooms as part of a general strategy of high levels of provision in the home, and those who equip the home well for common use but provide less for individual use in the bedroom. A converse pattern may be observed in 'media-poor' homes: while some of these families provide relatively little media for their children's bedrooms, a similar proportion provides high levels of media in the bedroom for individual use. Of major significance, then, is the balance struck – depending more on family ethos than finances – between individual and communal lifestyles within different households. The nature of 'bedroom culture' for particular children varies in consequence.

This balance and, hence, this emergence of what we might term the mediatised, or hi-tech, 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 confirms that the meaning of the bedroom as a leisure space alters with time. Three key rationales for the bedroom vary in importance for different age groups:

❑ For sleeping in and convenient storage of personal goods
❑ For escaping the family and for activities which require concentration
❑ For constructing and expressing one's individual identity and sociability

Convenience

In general, 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. Consequently, 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. When we asked Belinda (6) why she claims to spend little time in her bedroom, she answered:

> Belinda: Because I wouldn't usually play in here.
> Interviewer: Where would you normally play?
> Belinda: Errm, the living room, the back garden or in the front.
> Interviewer: So do you come up here and get your toys and take them downstairs?
> Belinda: Yes.

However, even by this age children's bedrooms will often contain (and protect) their collections – whether of china animals, Disney memorabilia, foreign coins, Pokemon cards or the paraphernalia of a Manchester United football fan. Ten year old Rachel tells us: 'I used to collect bees' while her little sister Hester adds, 'and I collect Owls, little china owls.' Significantly, when we asked Rachel, 'do your friends collect the same sorts of things as you do or different?' she explains, 'No, they collect different things', suggesting the link between collections and personal identity. Part of the convenience of the bedroom, then, is its role in the safe storage of valued objects. As her mother says of Shelly, 9:

> She used to collect the Farthing Wood Animal models. She used to make the models and then put them out of reach so that no one else could touch them.

As this quotation also suggests, these collections are generally recognised as transient. Parents and children describe the collection as something engaged in for a while and then – like the image of the self it represents – grown out of. As Hester's mother says, 'Hester used to collect little ornaments of owls. She hasn't collected any for a while now but she went through a stage of collecting them.' Consequently, children's bedrooms house evidence of not only the current enthusiasm but also that of previous enthusiasms, making for series of partial collections which, while appearing ad hoc to the outside observer, represent the story of a child's development:

> Leslie did collect, he's got loads of dinosaurs, little plastic ones and things, he did collect the football stickers, he likes the Power rangers things but he hasn't still got all of them. Lucy - she has got a lot of Barbies but she's gone off them at the moment, she just, no she doesn't really collect anything.

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 very differently from the irritating pressure for another computer game or the latest trainers, being seen instead as specialist, serious, engaged, 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 notion of the 'collection' to explain her son's video viewing through his interest in animals. In so doing, she establishes a series of associations between videos and education, knowledge, value and, ultimately, John's career potential:

Mother: 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… If there is a wild life programme on them, John will just sit there from start to finish. He is very into that… John likes any aspect of it, like any programme, like wildlife programmes, or Animal Hospital, he loves things like that. But the videos, I mean the collection is varied. They have the wildlife videos, the Disney videos, and films that have come out or that they have seen at the pictures and wanted to have as a keepsake type of thing. When we were younger, we had a lot of Thomas the Tank ones. The Sooty video collection was good with the alphabet and stuff like that, and Rod, Jane and Freddy, when they were

around. Those are videos that I have since passed on to friends with smaller children because I thought that they were quite educational at the time… But sort of with the animals he has always been - he is a very sensitive child and with animals it is something from a very very small age, I mean like sitting in the dog box with the dog and if you say 'no' to a chocolate biscuit then you can see John just feeding the dog and stuff like that. 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 with the exception of videos, are generally not media goods (though of course they are often promoted through the media). By the teenage years, objects being actively collected are nearly exclusively collections of music tapes and compact discs, videos, computer games, magazines, and so forth – all of them media goods. 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 for John, above, Kathy's possession of some 200 tapes is judged 'serious'. However, 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 (or individualised media use) and for identity (requiring an investment in media use to promote self-development and self-expression).

Escape

From middle childhood, children - particularly girls - become more interested in their bedroom, and start to want personal ownership of media. This is largely for pragmatic reasons, particularly being able to choose and watch their own programmes uninterrupted. Over and 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 being able to concentrate. 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.' The notion of the bedroom providing some 'peace and quiet' is much valued, and one can see why when we consider the experience of this exasperated seven-year-old who talks of trying to watch his favourite television program with his five-year-old brother:

John: I can't hardly see the TV, he goes zoom, zoom, zoom, he's whizzing around, I can't even hear what it's saying.

Interviewer: Right, so does that annoy you a bit?

John: Yes, and then when I get really angry I have to, what I have to do is climb down - this makes me really mad - switch it off.

This value of the bedroom does not cease, at least for the 72% who do not share a bedroom with a sibling. Here a 16-year-old girl, living in a working-class family, expresses a similar sentiment:

[My bedroom] has got all I need in it. But it is nice because I have got like a stereo and a TV, so if I need some peace and quiet, or I just want to be on my own, I can just go up there and do what I want.

However, even though our 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 et al, 1999), they do not claim to spend more than average amounts of time in their rooms. The advantages of convenience do not necessarily, it seems, encourage isolation from the family (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001). However, the desire for escape – whether for peace or for engaging in individual media tastes – is precisely about finding value in the distinction between self and family. Wanting to escape, then, we can see as marking the 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. Corsaro (1997) notes that first and foremost peer cultures are organised so that children protect their interaction space – this is as apt in accounting for children's investment in their bedrooms as it is for the outdoor places that Corsaro has in mind. Rochberg-Halton (1984: 347) suggests further that, 'transactions with cherished possessions are communicative dialogues with ourselves''. 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.

Similarly, when asked why she watches television in her own bedroom rather than in the living room, 16 year old Rose tells us:

Rose: Well, usually because my Mum's down there. Don't want her listening to what I'm talking about… Um well I suppose, boys.

Interviewer: So your bedroom's quite a private place, in fact?

Rose: Yes. My personality's expressed.

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; see also Furby, 1978; Kamptner, 1989). Rochberg-Halton's (1984) account of the symbolic value of goods for the self stresses that while everyone values their old photos, their favourite records, their childhood teddy bear, for children and teenagers these 'special' objects are highly likely to be located in their bedroom. Yet curiously, Rochberg-Halton sees this as evidence of young people's egocentricity - their desire to have everything, and every activity, in the one room - rather than recognising that the bedroom is the main if not only place where young people can exert control over the arrangement of objects in 'their' space.

Notably, images of self-sufficiency and control figure strongly in young people's talk of their bedroom. Here a nine-year-old middle-class girl describes her picture of her ideal bedroom:

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)

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)

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. Emler and Reicher (1995) 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 the relationships through which they are enacted are situated in locations with particular spatial and temporal structures. Most simply, whether

children can keep their friendships distinct in space and time from their family relationships is crucial to the sustaining of 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. At such an interruption one is drawn into being primarily a sibling, a family member, rather than a friend, peer group member, or whatever, and the identity thus foregrounded may, from the young person's point of view, pull them back to a familial identity possibly more typical of when one was younger, and one more defined by others, particularly parents, than by oneself. The irritation is thus 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.

Bedroom culture

The culture of the bedroom draws on all three rationales or meanings of the bedroom. It provides a convenient location in which one's personal goods can be gathered and maintained. It provides a means to escape from the interruptions, interference and desires of others. The combination of these two constitute the basis for the construction of an individual identity, facilitating both a positive statement of oneself through one's possessions and activities and a negative statement of what one is not, of being elsewhere and of doing other things than with one's family members.

Steele and Brown (1995) 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, seeing 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. Frith (1978:64) links the history of rock music to the then new culture of the bedroom, suggesting that it resulted from the emergence of music for young people tailored to youth while simultaneously defined against the tastes of their parents, thus effectively drawing on trends towards both the privatisation and the individualisation of media use. As Flichy commented later, the media-rich bedroom in the 'juxtaposed home' allows teenagers to remove themselves from adult supervision while still living with their parents' (1995:165).

Bachmair (in press) talks of the bedroom as a text within which the television programme is interwoven as one central element among others. From the sign on the door ('Parents, keep out!') to the popstar posters on the wall, the collection of Disney momentos, and the music on the radio or magazine programme on the television, together these constitute an interlinked and personalised text. As such, 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. The skilful opening and closing of windows, depending on who is in the computer room, the use of screensavers or other means of personalising the screen, temporarily or permanently, are similarly means of marking the computer in terms of identity.

'Bedroom culture' in this sense is very much a Western phenomenon, being dependent on a high degree of modernisation 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 thus 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. Thus while 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, Bjurström and Fornäs (1993) see mediated consumer images as providing the raw materials with which young people creatively construct 'their' style. Similarly, studies of the domestic appropriation of media (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992) focus on the use of media products, like other consumer goods, to express individual and collective styles.

The gendered bedroom

It is no accident that the quotations included thus far come from girls. McRobbie and Garber (1976) noted how girls' subcultures are too often rendered invisible by academic and popular discourses, especially those that focus on problematising boys' appropriation of public spaces. Looking back to the 1950s onwards, they stressed the importance of the culture of the bedroom for girls, which they related to the greater attachment of girls to their family and to either a best friend or a small group of close friends, a circle which can be accommodated adequately in the bedroom.[11] Spending time in one's bedroom is not purely a matter of choice or convenience, but also reflects girls' more restricted access to public and often male-dominated spaces and the domestic duties expected of them which tie them to the home (Frith, 1978).

When McRobbie and Garber (1993) describe girls' bedroom culture as protected spaces, free from parental surveillance, in which style, identity and belonging can be expressed, little

---

[11]Certainly, our recent YPNM survey confirms that girls spend more of their free time with one best friend or with their family while boys spend more free time with a group of friends.

attention is paid to the possibility of boys' bedroom culture – presumably, they are seen as primarily engaged instead in 'street corner culture' (Corrigan, 1976). But these images of bedroom and street culture stem from a time – 1950s to 70s - before bedrooms were media-rich. Today, with a growing concern about street culture and its associated dangers, together with the increasing provisioning of media in the bedroom, makes bedrooms also of importance to boys; they too need space for identity and relationship work, and the pervasiveness of media in these spaces is significant. One may even speculate that for boys, some aspects of street corner culture may be reproduced in the bedroom, transforming historically feminine culture of the bedroom in the direction of the traditionally male culture of the street. Cunningham (1995) described the street corner as about waiting for something to happen (or even about making that unpredictable something happen), in order to alleviate boredom. As young people are, in his terms, 'repatriated' to the home, a new kind of making things happen can be seen, now focussed on the screen: the logic of computer games especially is often about power and mastery, anticipation and eventfulness (LaFrance, 1996).

Gender differences are perhaps most salient when children outline their ideal bedroom. We asked children to draw us pictures of their ideal bedroom 'in the year 2000' (taken by our interviewees to refer to a rather distant future). While the importance of conspicuous media consumption was central to many pictures, girls tended to foreground the aesthetics of interior design while boys were more fascinated by technology and control. Here are two working class girls, aged 13 and 14:

> It would be a big spacious room with loads of space and pine furniture with big wardrobes and drawers … and there'd be a big TV with all the channels and everything and a big stereo with big massive speakers and there'd be a little room going off in my own bathroom with like marble floors and a jacuzzi and everything and in the room there'd be a big king-size bed and then there'd be another little room going off with my own little gym in it and a swimming pool.

> My bedroom's going to be black and gold and white. I'm going to have a cyber-wardrobe, when you walk through it it puts clothes on for you. It depends on what mood you're in. And then it's going to have a shoe wardrobe that changes your shoes for you. And then I'm going to have a sand bed with sand underneath it because I think that would be wicked…And then a TV like a cinema screen. And then a glass floor and a massive chest of drawers that looks more like a wardrobe but it's just got thousands of drawers, and then like a big window a massive window and my speaker boxes. I've not had time to draw my stereo in but it'll be on top of my chest of drawers.

These children greatly enjoyed this task, playing with the ideas of new media possibilities with great humour. As one 13 year old girl noted, 'I'm drawing me mum, she's stuck in a time warp in my wardrobe!'. And a ten year old boy calls out excitedly, 'Everybody! Look what you've forgotten! An interactive mum!' His friend replies in kind: 'I've got a Playstation 1 million. I've got a camcorder. I've got a fridge. I've got a slave. I've got me and my babe on my bed and I've got an emperor's bed what is king, king, king size!' While no future moment will make these fantasies come true, for children and young people, their bedroom is a key site in which their fantasies of who they are and who they might yet be are perhaps most readily expressed.

Living together separately

The growth of a market for personal ownership of television sets, videos and computers is multiply determined. Crucially, children and young people value using the media alone, despite adult worries about 'isolation'. Yet this privatisation does not necessarily mean that social contacts are being replaced with social isolation, for media can offer new means for social interaction, albeit often peer- rather than family-focused. Much of this privatised use of media is focussed on the bedroom, once rather chilly and uncomfortable, sometimes forbidden, places 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. As leisure becomes increasingly media-dominated, and as rooms (or people) rather than the home (or the household) increasingly 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 and temporal structures of domestic and family life. Rather they must figure out for their own household 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.

We have seen that media-rich bedroom culture can contribute to the shifting of the boundary between public and private spaces in several ways. Within the home the multiplication of personally owned media may facilitate children's use of individual, privatised space, as opposed to communal family space[12]. However, such a relatively privatised bedroom culture is also developing as a result of the apparently progressive exclusion of children and young people from public places in society together with a growing priority placed on 'the home' as the centre of a screen-entertainment focused, privatised and individualised leisure culture. At the same time, the nature of such private space within the home may be transformed as the media-rich bedroom increasingly becomes the focus of peer activity, and as the media themselves, through their contents, bring the outside world indoors. Staying at home is framed, to a significant degree, by the meaning of 'going out': for parents, going out is risky while staying home is safe, being with others is healthy while being alone means being isolated or antisocial, organised time is time well spent while free time is easily wasted, and so forth. Whether the metaphors come from the realms of health or finance, time with media is rarely neutral, and it is within this cultural context that both parents and children make their choices.

Notably, all this is merely the latest chapter in a long history of communication technologies, one that can be told as a story of the increasing privatisation of leisure. One can trace the transformation of the public show - first at the theatre and then in the twentieth century, in the cinema - from an occasion for 'collective listening to the juxtaposition of a series of individual listening experiences' (Flichy, 1995:153). A number of factors, including the

---

[12] Rompaey and Roe (in press) call 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.

architecture of the theatre, the social status of both audience and performers and, in relation to the cinema, the introduction of sound (Hansen, 1991), effected the broad shift from 'collective listening' - which was about 'noisy listening', joining in, shouting out, being seen - to a new form of spectatorship - as silent, dark, alone, non-participatory.

Historically, these transformations from public to private, and from collective to individual, were rarely anticipated. Boddy (1985) quotes a variety of commentators who failed to anticipate the casual uses of television. The following, taken from *Harper's* in 1940, is typical: 'Television, like the motion picture or the stage, and unlike the radio, requires complete and unfaltering attention. If the eye wanders for a moment from the television screen a programme's continuity is lost' (Boddy, 1985: 131). And although Flichy traces this history for the radio - from collective to individual, from centrally located to mobile and dispersed, from shared to fragmented experience, from restraint to free use, even he, writing in the late 1980s, finds it hard to anticipate a similar future for television, arguing first that television's mode of address is to the group not the individual and second that the evidence for multiple set ownership is far slower than that of radio. Yet as Williams (1974: 26) observed several decades ago, broadcasting 'served an at once mobile and home-centred way of living: a form of *mobile privatisation'*. We may reasonably continue Flichy's (1995:159-60) narrative, namely that, 'whereas in the 1940s the family had gathered together around the radio, in the 1960s each family member pursued his or her own activities while listening to a separate radio', by suggesting that from the 1990s onwards in Europe, and rather earlier in the USA, the same has occurred for television. Perhaps a similar story is already emerging for the computer.

The 'lonely crowd' of the theatre and cinema may be less visible in the home, the space where most twentieth century mass media have developed, yet the same fear of isolated media use on a mass scale has fuelled a series of moral panics which have followed in turn the introduction of television, video games, computers, the Internet, and so forth (Drotner, 1992; Buckingham, 1993).[13] Broadly speaking, today's domestic media are following a similar path to that of public leisure spaces. The now familiar case of the telephone also illustrates this trend, for this was originally thought of as a means of listening to theatre or concerts at home, thus failing to anticipate the more private, one-to-one use which became dominant. Flichy describes the social history of radio, from the collective listening in the family living room to 'living together separately', facilitated by the new portability and cheapness of the transistor radio, which allowed the multiplication of radios within the home as well as by the introduction of a new centre for family life - the television set.

In analysing the cultural significance of this shift, there is a tendency among commentators to conflate the process of privatisation, the primary focus of this chapter, and individualisation, an analytically separate but historically coincident process also relevant to, for example, the multiplication of domestic media. Privatisation typically refers to the move away from

---

[13]With the growth of specifically domestic media, as opposed to those in public places, concerns have been expressed not only over the privatization of what was once public but also over the intrusion into a traditionally private place of common, national or even global images. As Silverstone (1999) has noted, a new and highly significant 'door' within the home has been introduced, with the electronic screen providing or preventing access to the wider community. In general, this new 'door' is proving as controversial as we have seen the front door and bedroom door to be for children and their parents, albeit one that is increasingly being opened when, or even because, the physical doors are often closed.

publicly accessible spaces where people are conceptualised as citizens (e.g. Meyrowitz, 1985) and the simultaneous move towards domestic spaces, where people are conceptualised as consumers or audiences. This in itself is often unclear insofar as there is a tendency to confuse the common usage of the term 'private' which maps private and public spaces onto inside and outside the home and family (or even, which construes public as visible and private as solitary or unseen by others) with the analytically precise use of the terms seen in the work of Habermas (1969/89) and others (e.g. Poster, 1997: 208-9). Here the realm of the private refers to commercial interests, whether part of the system (specifically, the economy) or the lifeworld (the home), as distinct from the disinterested concerns of the democratically conceived and institutionalised 'public good', again whether part of the system (the state) or the lifeworld (the public sphere). This usage clarifies certain ambiguities regarding the key spaces of children's lives. The mall is located outside, and so, seemingly public but actually private (i.e. commercial or commodified or exploitative). The home is valued for its privacy (the 'sanctity' of the home) yet this is increasingly intruded upon by private (i.e. commercial) interests. The bedroom is the object of concern insofar not because it offers privacy but because it appears to isolate young people from participation in the public (i.e. disinterested) sphere.

In short, underlying the common and sometimes obfuscating uses of the private/public distinction, we can identify four key oppositions which frame debates over young people's media use. Thus debates may refer to notions of private in the sense of:

- commercial or commodified (versus disinterested or public) leisure;
- withdrawal or isolation from others (versus connection to/participation in public culture or the public sphere);
- privacy or the evasion of surveillance (versus being 'in the public eye');
- individual, as in 'acting as a private individual' (versus social or communal, with a focus on a shared and socially grounded or traditional set of knowledge, conventions or values).

The very confusion among these different uses of the private/public distinction in popular discussion tends to fuel the moral panics regarding 'home alone kids', net-addicts, the McDonaldisation of kids' culture, and so forth. Morley cautions against understanding privatisation as a withdrawal from social relations, for instance, when he notes that 'Television viewing may be a "privatised" form of activity, by comparison with cinema-going for example, but it is still largely conducted within, rather than outside of, social relations – in this case the social relations of the family or household' (1986: 14), and this holds true even when viewing is further privatised into the bedroom.

Notably, the places in which children and young people spend their leisure cut across these various notions of public and private culture – the home is apart from the public sphere yet grounded in tradition, the bedroom offers privacy yet is increasingly commercialised and media-rich, the shopping mall is both connected and commodified, the street corner is in the public eye yet may represent a defiance towards public culture, the youth club is part of the public domain yet supports an individualised youth culture. Once these four oppositions are separated, it becomes clear that different responses are appropriate. For instance, concerns over the commercialisation of kids' culture (e.g. Kinder, 1999), and over the loss of a public sphere which positively encompasses children, certainly mark a historical shift and are likely to be widely supported. But this should not be taken to threaten children's right to privacy or

freedom from surveillance. And nor should we assume that the loss of tradition is necessarily against young people's interests – indeed, the social movements stimulated by a growing politics of identity may be seen to work for their interests. However, our responses to particular leisure spaces will remain complex not least because, as the private realm of the economy increasingly penetrates the disinterested public sphere, and as the institutional realm of the state increasingly penetrates the lifeworld and the domestic sphere, the meanings of these places is, as Habermas has argued, historically contingent and changing.

One should note at this point that the last opposition above is more correctly theorised not in terms of public/private but in terms of individualisation, the broad Western trend in which everyday experience and practice is becoming detached from traditional sociostructural determinants (such as socio-economic status), resulting in a concomitant diversification of lifestyles freed from the social ties and traditions that have hitherto defined identity and taste (cf. chapter 3). In practice, however, when we examine the domestic media uses of children and young people, we find these processes working together (as encapsulated in the notion of 'living together separately', Flichy, 1995). The traditional conception of public life focuses on the community and on what is communal, so that civic life reflects choices and habits shared with others. In other words, there is a link between activities conducted in public, as part of the public interest, and the social structures and traditions that we inherit and which bind us together. Meanwhile, the driving force of private interests is towards the multiplication of markets, the diversification of taste categories, with the result that private life is increasingly centred on markers of distinction and difference. Popular anxieties over the solitary nature of new media use draw on both these conceptions, linking anxieties about the loss of citizenship participation with those concerning the loss of community tradition and values. Thus, privatisation supports individualisation and vice versa. Similarly, models of public or civic media have traditionally been tied to national regulatory frameworks, while only a global media market, commercially funded, is proving able to support the diversity of individualised lifestyle preferences.

Our common sense language, in which many social ideals (and anxieties) are framed, tends to presume a clear separation of lifeworld and system. Yet if one accepts Habermas' analysis of modernity in terms of the penetration of the lifeworld by the system world, with deleterious effects on both public sphere – increasingly managed in the interests of economy and the state, and on the home – increasingly commercialised and a site for commercial management and manipulation (Habermas, 1987), options often posed as either/or alternatives surely become both/and options instead. Society asks, is the policy of introducing Internet into schools about enhancing public knowledge communities or enhancing the competitiveness of a national workforce; is the family viewing of a Disney film an expression of private pleasure or of successful commercial exploitation of a once-non-commercial domain; and so forth. To answer, 'both/and', however, is not to offer a bland rejection of new media hype and hope but to invite a considered evaluation of the opportunities and dangers, which are opened up.

This chapter has traced the shift from public to private in relation to both the decline of street culture' and the retreat to the home, and in relation to the decline of 'family television' and the rise of 'bedroom culture'. Many of these issues raised in this chapter in turn raise more general questions regarding the meaning of childhood and family life. For although of course the present generation of parents were not, in the main, children during the 1950s, the culture of family values and childhood expectations dominant at that time, as well as the challenges

to this culture posed then and since, has framed the struggle over the meanings of childhood throughout the decades which followed (Coontz, 1997; Osgerby, 1998). The notion that the privatisation of leisure (and in part, of childhood) has gone hand in hand with the democratisation of the family is taken up in the next chapter.