

[Sonia Livingstone](#)

In defence of privacy : mediating the public/private boundary at home

Book section

Original citation:

Originally published in Livingstone, Sonia (2005) *In defence of privacy : mediating the public/private boundary at home*. In: Livingstone, Sonia, (ed.) *Audiences and publics : when cultural engagement matters for the public sphere*. Changing media - changing Europe series (2). Intellect Books, Bristol, UK, pp. 163-185. ISBN 1841501298

© 2005 [Intellect Books](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/#####/>

Available in LSE Research Online: February 2013

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's submitted version of the book section. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Chapter 7: In defence of privacy: mediating the public/private boundary at home¹

On the potentially dramatic consequences of new media

Claims about the transformative power of the new media encompass many dimensions of social life. One of the most widespread is that long-established and traditionally-significant boundaries between distinct spheres are being blurred or transcended (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002). These include the boundary between work and leisure (via home working, teleworking, flexi-working etc), between entertainment and education (as in the neologisms of edutainment and infotainment), between local and global (here we have glocalisation, the global village, etc), between producer and consumer (as products are co-constructed or socially shaped by consumers), between adult and child (as in the disappearance, or the death, of childhood), and between citizen and consumer (increasingly conflated as the citizen-consumer).

These are familiar boundaries that we have lived within and committed ourselves to, they institutionalise dominant values and they are regulated and reinforced at all levels from domestic practices to international law. Yet, they now seem to be, in these late - or even post-modern times, up for renegotiation. The increasing mediation of everyday life represents one among many social trends driving forward this discursive and material process of renegotiation.

The blurring of boundaries matters because what is at stake is a series of claims about power. Traditional distinctions, critical scholars argue, serve the interests of the cultural and political elite. Transforming or undermining these distinctions may, as those in cultural studies have advanced, open up new possibilities for the marginalised, the subaltern, the oppressed to regain some control over their lives. Alternatively, as many political economists would have it, such transformations are effectively exploited by powerful commercial interests, ruthlessly undermining any surviving spaces for the exercise of freedom by either the traditional elite or the masses. Whichever, if either, of these is the case, it is clear that any social change brings with it huge public uncertainty.

In relation to new media forms and contents this uncertainty provokes widespread anxiety, anxiety which precisely centres on this supposed undermining of familiar boundaries and hence of traditional hierarchies. Newspaper headlines regale us with claims that children are gaining access to what only adults are supposed to know, that commercial institutions are gaining control over education, culture and

knowledge, that governments are extending their surveillance into our most private thoughts and practices, that global players are squeezing out local cultures and individual creativity, and so forth. On the other hand, although attracting less attention, the optimists also predict some grand futuristic consequences of the introduction of new media. The socially excluded may find new routes to participation. Knowledge is being democratised. Consumers get to create rather than passively receive content selected for them. Restrictive or discriminatory frameworks - of gender, race or disability - can be superseded. Local cultures can contribute to a global cosmopolitanism.

The boundary most pertinent to the present volume is that between public and private. Popular and academic discourse contains numerous claims regarding the role of the changing media environment in the privatisation of public space or, conversely, in the extension of the public realm into the domestic. This chapter examines the changing public/private boundary for children, young people and their families as new forms of media - most recently, the Internet - enter and become established within the home. The starting point is the intersection of three inflammatory terms in popular discourse - children, media, change - all of which reflect the perception that the conditions of childhood are changing and, moreover, that the media are changing the conditions of childhood. The endpoint of the argument will be to suggest that the exploration of one dimension of hypothesised change - the public/private boundary - has social, political and cultural implications beyond the particularity of children's media use.

What's new? On mediated childhood

Sifting through popularly expressed hopes and anxieties to understand what is going on, what is really new, perhaps; we find two underlying claims. First, as already noted, there is the widespread claim that public and private spheres are becoming problematically blurred as a consequence of the impact of new media (cf. Habermas, 1969/89; Meyrowitz, 1985; Thompson, 1995). Second, a broadly celebratory discourse of active, media-savvy, sophisticated young people, supposedly pioneers in the new media-saturated late-modern or post-modern culture, exercising their cultural, civic and consumer rights to participate in society through globalised, mediatised youth culture (as discussed by Drotner, 2000; Seiter, 1999; Turkle, 1995).

Problematically, however, to endorse the first claim is to undermine the second. In other words, if young people are the agents of change, their activities serving to facilitate and mediate the transformative consequences of new media, then there is little to celebrate in young people's innovative activities if the consequence is the blurring of spheres best kept separate. On the other hand, if we deny that young people are the 'media-savvy' leaders of social change, we risk reinforcing exactly that long-established conception of young people that the celebratory approach was designed to counter, namely, the image of children as vulnerable, embarked on a

process of development whose chances of success depend on protective sequestration during childhood and adolescence from the meanings and practices of adult society (Livingstone, 1998).

For example, in relation to the uses of the Internet, it is increasingly recognised that young people are often more expert than adults; indeed one wonders if they have ever before received such adult admiration for their skills and expertise (Livingstone and Bober, 2003). If the social consequences of new media are broadly welcomed for their creative or democratising potential, then the pioneering activities of children might be especially valued. But, if the new media environment is judged problematic, suddenly their expertise wins them an unexpected responsibility. They are then blamed for naively bringing pornography into the home, giving out parents' personal details to unknown others, giving up on the old-fashioned virtues of books or long-established standards of written language and communicative etiquette.

The strong feelings that these polarised positions arouse hint at a long history of cultural anxieties surrounding childhood in which society avows a positive view of children, yet systematically devalues, intrudes upon or excludes their needs and experiences (Qvortrup, 1995): they are disenfranchised within the public sphere, yet castigated for being apathetic or antisocial; they are subject to increasing surveillance, yet seen as deceitful or subversive; they lack the financial resources to be consumers, yet are criticised for their superficial consumerist values; and so forth.

The media are similarly associated with a history of public anxiety and ambivalence, often centring on their privatising effects on society. In tracing the long history of 'new' communication technologies, Flichy (1995; see also Butsch, 2000) argues that the social uses of the theatre, then the cinema, then radio, each underwent a transformation from a public occasion for 'collective listening to the juxtaposition of a series of individual listening experiences' in private (Flichy, 1995, p. 153). Today we are witnessing a similar transformation for television, the telephone and the computer - from collective to personal, from fixed to mobile, from focal to casual attention. For both media historians and for historians of childhood the boundary between public and private is particularly significant, serving to contextualise contemporary concerns about social change (Cunningham, 1995; Gadlin, 1978). I shall, therefore, make a short historical detour before addressing the question of whether and how children's engagement with new media contributes towards the renegotiation of the public/private boundary.

Public and private dimensions of childhood

The historical changes to childhood over the past century or more rest significantly on a series of other shifts - including changes in the structures of employment, the

education system, gender relations and the family, together with the rise of consumer culture, of a psychological or therapeutic culture and, of course, of youth culture (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). Overall, these changes position young people today in some ways as immature and in need of protection from potential harms, including from the media, but in other ways as in the vanguard, active pioneers in staking out new territories in youth culture. The outcome is a period of 'extended youth' in which young people are betwixt and between; caught in a series of cultural shifts, whose effects are at times contradictory rather than complementary.

Western industrial societies are delaying some of the traditional markers of adulthood, extending the years of education and pushing back the start of employment, of financial independence and hence of leaving the parental home. At the same time, at least by comparison with recent decades, it seems that society is bringing forward the age of sexual knowledge and experience, of lifestyle and identity choices, and of consumer spending power through the lucrative youth and, most recently, children's, market (Buckingham and Bragg, 2004; Kinder, 1999; Kline, 1993). To adult eyes, then, children are staying younger longer but getting older earlier. In some ways, they leave the privacy of the home and enter the public domain 'too early'; in other ways they delay entering the public domain 'too long', while bringing novel or disturbing elements of that public world into the privacy of the family. Hence, in the face of a changing media environment, we find longer roots for the 'vanguard' or 'pioneer' or 'youth as expert' themes characteristic of public discourse concerning the Internet, and for the moral concerns over impressionable children and anti-social youth, vulnerable to television influence, addicted to computer games and manipulated by advertisers.

The rapid pace of change in the media environment further exacerbates public anxieties - anxieties that, as noted earlier, not only mediate but also shape people's everyday responses to media. Gadlin (1978) argues that, to a degree that is historically distinctive, parents can no longer rely on their own childhood experiences to guide them in managing the spatial and temporal structures of their children's moral, domestic and family life - and this is particularly evident in relation to new media (from programming the video recorder, using SMS on the mobile phone, or searching or chatting on the Internet). Extending Gadlin's account of changing generational relations, Giddens (1993) proposes that we are witnessing 'a democratisation of the private sphere' (p.184), a historical transformation of intimacy in which children, along with other participants in a relationship, have gained the right to 'determine and regulate the conditions of their association' (p.185). Meanwhile parents have gained the duty to protect them from coercion, ensure their involvement in key decisions, be accountable to them and others, and to respect and expect respect. This conception of the 'pure relationship' contrasts strongly with the Victorian conception of the family based on hierarchy, authority and clearly demarcated roles.

The message from historians, then, is that contemporary families must negotiate a rapidly changing society without the traditional resources of hierarchical relations between the generations - with neither guidance based on strong parallels between the parents' childhood and that of their children, nor the moral right of parents to impose rules and sanctions without democratic consultation. Like their parents, so too are children posed with a series of challenges. Buchner et al (1995) argue that childhood increasingly includes the responsibility of constructing a 'leisure career' or 'biographical project', a responsibility that requires young people to anticipate future uncertainties and deal with risk and status insecurity in the context of a loss of traditional forms of family and community support.

Within this context of broader change - which includes the identification in the mid-twentieth century of adolescence (and youth) as a distinctive and problematic phase (Coleman, 1993) - that changes in the media environment should be located. In seeking to construct a biographical project, and in resolving the series of developmental tasks along the way - entering work, sexual maturity, political enfranchisement, financial independence, etc - communication plays a key role at all stages for young people, explaining why the various forms of media represent such significant resources or, at times, impediments. On a simple level, the media are available to fill the ever-growing leisure of extended youth. However, the media are far from neutral observers on the sidelines of change. Importantly, the media have remade themselves in recent decades - through youth television, pop music, globalised children's culture, the expanding magazine market, video games, etc - precisely so as to serve the needs, or to exploit, depending on one's political stance, the undoubtedly demanding task of 'growing up'. Identity development is thoroughly mediated, framed by the worlds of music, fashion, sport and lifestyle, and it is also increasingly problematic - witness the growth of stress, anorexia and depression among young people.

The media foster youth culture through both their contents and forms. Through their contents, they directly address the concerns, interests and experiences of young people. Through their forms, they provide the personalised, mobile, stylised, casualised media goods that today mark out the spaces and timetable of young people's lives. In so doing, and because of the multi-determined ways in which young people use them, the media contribute to a repositioning of young people in relation to the public and private spheres - casting them both as consumers and as citizens, in the present and for the future. One might argue that, to the extent that young people play a pioneering role in relation to the media, this is because society offers them few alternatives, positioning them so that the media offer a rare space for experimentation and expertise, providing a route - and hence also a focus of generational tensions - for the playing out of the consequences of wider social changes.

The combination of young people, positioned betwixt and between public and private spheres, and the media, with their unique power to penetrate private spaces

and to construct publics (see Chapter 1, this volume), results in some ambiguous, exciting yet explosive renegotiations of what is public and what is private. Young people use the media precisely to push at, explore and transgress established norms of public and private. They relish the potential of the media to offer the flexible tools and the free spaces within which to construct their individuality and relationships. And they are at times naively blind to the power of the media to position them subtly but firmly, according to consumerist pleasures, external cultural prescriptions and powerful interests.

Grounding theory in evidence

The analysis thus far has sought to understand how young people's media use in the twenty-first century is framed by broader changes in the relation between public and private spheres. But it has not yet moved beyond a polarised language of public and private, freedom and constraint, opportunity and danger. In the remainder of this chapter, I develop an analytic framework to distinguish three conceptions of the public/private boundary. These are illustrated with examples drawn from my recent exploration of children and young people's changing use of media in the context of home, school and youth culture. In 'Children and Their Changing Environment' (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001a), a project conducted across twelve European countries, a series of quantitative and qualitative comparisons sought to contextualise new media use in relation to older media, non-mediated leisure and the home. In 'Families and the Internet' (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001b), a series of ethnographic-style interviews and observations in thirty homes with children explored children's engagement with the Internet in its everyday context. And in my current research, 'UK Children Go Online' (Livingstone and Bober, 2003), these qualitative observations are examined systematically through a national survey of Internet use by children and young people.

In what follows, I stress that the analytic framework is not only derived from core theoretical distinctions and debates in social and political theory, but it also accords with the sense of everyday excitement, uncertainty and anxiety that, over and over again, emerges from interviews and observations with parents, teachers, children and young people as they attempt to make sense of new media in their daily lives.

Unpacking the relation between public and private

So, what does the notion of the blurring of public and private spheres mean? In what respects is it occurring? Why does it matter? Underlying the often implicit, at times obfuscating, uses of the distinction between private and public, lie three key oppositions or sets of questions. These concern profit, participation and governance (see Table 1).

In keeping with the spirit of this volume, I have characterised these oppositions

Table 1: *Opposing public and private*

	In which ‘public’ means...	In which ‘private’ means...
Profit: Questions of interest – who benefits?	Disinterested, as ‘in the public interest’, ‘for the public good’, ‘public sector’. Includes ‘public service broadcasting’ and ‘public property’.	Commercial or commodified, acting in self-interest or for ‘private gain’, as in ‘the private sector’, ‘private enterprise’, ‘private property’.
Participation: Questions of social relations, common culture and in/exclusion	Connected or engaged in a shared culture. As in ‘public opinion’, ‘public participation’, ‘public space’.	Withdrawal or isolation, as in ‘a private retreat’. Includes the possibility of idiosyncrasy or individualisation, as in ‘private opinion’ or ‘personal choice’.
Governance: Questions of visibility, rights, responsibilities and protection	Accountability and visibility, ‘making something public’ or ‘in the public eye’, ‘front stage’.	Privacy, secrecy, beyond surveillance, ‘backstage’, ‘in private’. Includes ‘the right to privacy’ and the notion of ‘invasions of privacy’.

in Table 1 using phrases from ordinary language in order to acknowledge that they are firmly embedded - together with the theoretical and public discussions that employ them - in the particularities of the English language. Indeed distinctions, commonly confused in English, when loosely referred to as ‘public’ or ‘private’, may not be confused at all in other languages. Matters are further complicated by the widespread use of ‘public’ to refer to ‘outside’ and ‘private’ to refer to ‘inside’. This conflates questions of governance with questions of participation: is the point about an activity being conducted ‘outside’ (or ‘in public’) that it is visible and so open to scrutiny, and/or that others can join in and share in the outcome?

The nature of media institutions particularly confuses. The press, for example, makes issues public in order to further private interests; public service broadcasters fulfil their remit by catering to minority tastes. Hanging out in the mall allows young people to congregate in public, but such provision is commercial. Joining a chat room allows a child to participate in public discussion from the privacy of their bedroom. Street corner culture seeks to subvert its public location by defying public norms. When claiming that the media alter the relation between

public and private, we should be clear whether we mean by this to address questions of profit, of participation or of governance.

Beyond aiming for greater clarity, we should note the normative valorisation of all three oppositions. Generally, when we talk of the blurring of the public-private boundary, it seems that the primary concern is with the privatisation of the public domain, conceived negatively, while a reverse 'publicisation' of the private domain is relatively neglected. As argued in Chapter 1 of this volume, the fear is that citizens are undermined, downgraded to consumers through privatisation. Publics are undermined, downgraded to audiences. Common culture is undermined, downgraded to the pleasures of self-interested or alienated individuals. Moreover, this normative valorisation is strongly grounded in the effort to critique and rebuff the many and evident threats from the commercial or private sector to the public sphere, to democratic debate, to public service broadcasting, to common values. Most prominently theorised by Habermas in his theory of the public sphere (1969/89) and subsequently applied to the analysis of the mass media (Dahlgren and Sparks, 1991), 'the public' is now routinely construed positively while 'the private' represents threats, danger and loss.

While granting the importance of the defence of the public sphere, there must be space within the debate for a defence of privacy. Conceptually, the notion of the private has a series of positive meanings easily lost within the public sphere debate. The free market defence of the profit-motive is well known and, whatever one's politics, few in western society seek to overthrow capitalism. Rather than stressing the problem of withdrawal or isolation from community and political participation, the activities these terms characterise can be re-described as independence or even resistance. Although government accountability is socially valued, so too is the right of individuals to privacy and civil liberties, thereby curtailing excessive state surveillance.

Not only can these negative conceptions of the private be re-described more positively, but so too can the positive conceptions of the public be critiqued, especially as these are instantiated in particular cultural or social institutions. The public does not always act in a disinterested or public-spirited manner, for example, but instead can be motivated, prejudiced, righteous or irrational. Nor is participating in a common culture always admirable - the community can be coercive, homogenising, intolerant. Lastly, accountability pursued unwisely can undermine the very ideals it is meant to protect - witness the impact of 'audit culture' on public institutions (Power, 1999).

In addition to the conceptual revalorisation of privacy, in empirical terms it is evident from research with children that they are enthusiastic about 'the private' in all three senses. Young people like commerce - they enjoy advertising, they love merchandising, they want to see the latest blockbuster, to hear the new top-selling compact disc, to follow fashion trends. Furthermore, they want to be individual -

notwithstanding their adherence to peer group norms - , to construct a distinctive identity, to have their personal opinions taken seriously. And in seeking opportunities to engage in a privatised or individualised culture, or to lick their wounds when upset or constrained, they place a high value on their privacy. So, they keep a private diary, they hang out in their bedrooms, they seek numerous ways to evade the scrutiny of critical parents; likening the parental monitoring of their Internet use to being stalked or having their pockets searched (Livingstone and Bober, 2003); in short, they cry out - 'leave me alone'. While not intending here to offer a blanket endorsement of young people's enthusiasms, my point is to challenge any simple or straightforward mapping of public and private onto good and bad.

Theorising the intersection of public and private

Returning to Habermas, it is significant that his primary concern was less with the privatisation of the public sphere than with the inter-penetration of spheres that 'should', in normative terms, remain distinct. In other words, his theory encompasses, in principle if not in emphasis, threats to the pure or ideal space of the private lifeworld of the family as well as the undermining of the public sphere by private or commercial interests. Importantly for the critical theory of Habermas, society is analytically divided not only into public and private spheres but also into the system world and the lifeworld.² In some respects akin to familiar sociological distinctions such as structure and agency, or institutions and habitus, or even macro and micro, the distinction between system and lifeworld illuminates the analysis of the public and private by subdividing each so as to produce four sectors or spheres of society. Crucially, it is the mutual intersection or inter-penetration of these spheres that is the focus of Habermas' critique. Moreover, it is the stress on process of intersecting or interpenetrating that can illuminate the social changes discussed in this chapter. In Table 2, I follow Fraser's account of Habermas (Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1981/7).

The advantage of categorising sectors of society in this manner is two fold. First, one can analyse how a focal concept - media, audience, child - is materially positioned, and discursively mobilised, by each of these sectors. In Table 3, the model has been applied both to the media in general and, in italics, to the audience (including young Internet users) in particular. After all, in a media-saturated society, there is no aspect of society that is not both shaped by, and an influence on, the media.

The second advantage is that, instead of conceiving of a single intersection between public and private domains, this is replaced by a series of intersections - or inter-penetrations, or tensions - between each pair of quadrants. Of the several intersections possible, I will now consider in detail the three that concern the personal or intimate sphere - in ordinary language, the locus of privacy and its relations to the 'outside' world - in order to analyse young people's activities in relation to new media and social change (Table 4). I shall suggest in what follows

Table 2: *The spheres of society*

	Public	Private
System	The state	The economy
Lifeworld	The public sphere	The personal or intimate sphere

that each of these three intersections centrally mobilises one of the key tensions underlying the public/private boundary.³

Intersection of the personal sphere and the economy

Questions of interest or profit lie at the heart of the intersection of the personal sphere and the economy. Note, however, that in Habermasian terms this intersection is within the realm of the private, albeit between the system and the lifeworld. In other words, that which is described in the terms of common discourse as privatisation - meaning the private sector's commercialisation of or intrusion into children's leisure, identity and lifestyles - is not strictly speaking a blurring of public and private at all.

The crucial concern, then, is not that of the exploitation of the public by the private sector, but that of powerful business exploiting ordinary people. Many questions arise. Whose interests are served if children spend more time watching television, if they acquire more personalised media goods, if they engage with online contents and services? Are the interests of commercial providers necessarily in conflict with those of children and families? Can one preserve a public sector space within an otherwise commercial environment, and which alternative interests might this serve? Two complementary shifts support the increasing interpenetration (for this process is more unidirectional than mutual) of the personal sphere by commercial interests: the rise of individualisation and of commercialisation.

First, the social trend of increasing individualisation (popularly, if misleadingly, described in terms of privatisation or fragmentation of common - or public - interests; Livingstone, 2002), supports a diversification in taste, in leisure interests, in lifestyle preferences. These lifestyle tastes and preferences are, moreover, ever less determined by socio-economic factors or cross-generational inheritance. And they are greatly enjoyed, and enthusiastically entered into, by young people, keen to explore new and different identities, to play with alternative

Table 3: The spheres of society, as applied to the media

	Public Audience as citizen	Private Audience as consumer
System Audience as object	<u>The state:</u> Legal and regulatory frameworks for the media industry, including protection for ‘fourth estate’ <i>Audience as object of media education and, through their vulnerabilities, of content guidelines and controls</i>	<u>The economy:</u> Media industry, media markets, commercial logic of media, advertising and links to consumer markets <i>Audience as commodity or market, characterised through ratings, market share and unmet needs</i>
Lifeworld Audience as agent	<u>The public sphere:</u> Media as forum for democratic debate, mediated community participation and public culture <i>Audiences as active and engaged, informed, participatory and/or resistant</i>	<u>The personal or intimate sphere:</u> Media providing the images, pleasures, habits and goods for identity, relationships and lifestyle <i>Audiences as selective, interpretative, pleasure-seeking, creative in doing identity work</i>

possibilities, to differentiate themselves from previous generations and from each other - creative but also fickle in this playful exploration. Children are enthusiastic adopters of consumer products associated with their favourite television programmes, sports teams, pop music groups - they want the wallpaper, the duvet cover, the collectable toys, the branded tee-shirt, the cuddly toys. On the Internet, their top search teams, their favourite websites, their preferred games, all pursue these themes.

That which, from a critical perspective, represents the driving force of private interests towards the multiplication of markets, the diversification of taste categories, the emphasis on markers of distinction and difference, represents for children and young people themselves the opportunity to experiment with and construct distinguishing and satisfying identities, the material focus for communication and, hence, relationships, and the resources for marking off boundaries from parents, family, ‘others’. Moreover, insofar as young people do the unexpected in initiating new trends, which are only subsequently capitalised upon by the corporate sector - examples include ‘grunge’ fashion, rap music, text

Table 4: Intersections between personal and other social spheres

	Public	Private
System	The state	The economy
Lifeworld	The public sphere	The personal or intimate sphere

messaging - their creativity in influencing both youth culture (within the lifeworld) and the economy (the system world) is significant.

However, the second shift surely is more influential. The lively and creative interests of young people are increasingly the target of a huge, commercialised, globalised leisure industry, devoted in its sophisticated targeting of youth as the new consumer opportunity; canny in its cross-promotion of non-media consumer goods within the media domain; ever more global in its reach; keen to evade or counter hitherto-dominant ethical norms that had regarded childhood as off-limits ('private'); and articulate in its reflexive adoption of child-centred discourses of children's rights, empowerment and identity as part of their branding and merchandising efforts (Kinder, 1999). So, the interests and anxieties of young people all become grist to the mill of mass consumerism. Individualisation is itself promoted by sophisticated marketing that simultaneously addresses ever more particular or esoteric niches while spreading ever more widely, ever more global in its reach. The outcome by no means necessarily serves the interests of young people.

A current example is the struggle to privatise online contents and services. Increasingly, online contents are branded and/or sponsored, organised according to normative preferred readings. Increasingly they contain difficult-to-avoid advertising. Behind the scenes, they collect personal data on the user's every click, search and download (Montgomery, 2001; Turow, 2001). The concept of the walled garden is symptomatic. Whether or not there are doors in the walls, commercial websites are typically designed to contain the user, to keep them on the site, enticing them with commercially themed contents, working rhetorically to make it unattractive or difficult to leave. The site for one football team contains no links to its rivals. The site for one television channel does not refer to any other. Each site offers a 'whole community', 'all' one could ever want to know, all the services one might want 'in one place'. These walled gardens implicitly, and firmly, counter the

optimists' rhetoric of the Internet as a democratic and open space of links and connections, freedom and choice, not to mention anarchy and counter-culture (Burbules, 1998; Livingstone, 2002). Indeed, a casual comparison of public and private sector websites will generally substantiate this argument.

Moreover, although these contents and services are often enjoyed and desired by children, this does not necessarily justify the imposition of commercial interests on resources that could, to a far greater degree than occurs at present, serve children's interest. This argument can, in any case, be set aside for the time being because, thus far, children lack the critical literacy - awareness of online privacy rights, ability to detect sponsorship, recognition of commercial strategies and goals, etc - to judge fairly what these contents and services represent. Only once critical literacy is significantly greater can one consider the responsibility of users, especially children, in making their choices to engage with certain media or contents over others (Livingstone, 2004).

Most commentators, while recognising the role played by young media users - what Beck (1992) calls individualisation - would agree that the key driver of social change here is commercialisation, the activities of the economy or corporate sector being vastly more powerful than are the activities of users. As a result, many argue from a critical standpoint, that ever-younger children are drawn into a commercialised repackaging of peer, or youth, culture. Fandom becomes an increasingly dominant mode of engaging with popular (and even high) culture. Both peer culture and fandom become indistinguishable from consumer culture writ large - transacted and disseminated on a global stage. And the power of the private sector to impose its highly organised will on the private individual is such that few find it possible or desirable to stand outside consumer culture, though of course some, including some children, embrace alternative or anti-consumerist life choices. However, a critique and alternative may be developed as part of the larger public/private negotiation, in terms of the protection of public values, most significantly that of citizenship (for consumers are also citizens, for citizens require unbiased information and education), and in terms of rights (consumer rights, children's rights, civil liberties).

Intersection of the personal sphere and the public sphere

The intersection of the personal sphere and the public sphere (see Table 2) blurs the public-private boundary within the domain of the lifeworld. Here, the central issue is that of social relations and common culture, in other words, participation. Since the lifeworld sustains society and carries the ideals of the culture, these questions are fraught, centring on how individual participation can contribute to the critical deliberations and community concerns of the public sphere. These anxieties regarding the vitality of the public sphere give rise to problems of regulation: since the public sphere cannot be created through coercion, what is to

be done when individuals' desires draw them away from the community, being motivated by self interest rather than disinterestedness?

This concern over the blurring of spheres is somewhat misnamed, therefore, for popular and academic concern centres less on any growing intersection than on the growing separation between personal and public spheres. Early findings that children who spent a long time on the Internet became addicted, depressed, loners, exemplified such anxieties. But subsequent research tells the opposite story, for it now appears that - while the early studies, by necessity, examined early adopters who lacked friends online - today's youth have a critical mass of friends online (Subrahmanyam et al, 2001). The consequence is that online communication does not displace but rather supplements or even stimulates face-to-face communication, strengthening social networks (Livingstone and Bober, 2003), although whether this contains the seeds of future participation or of new social movements remains to be seen.

Clearly, young people have proved themselves the pioneers in both online and mobile phone communication, generating the customs and practices by which a peer group regulates its considerable volume of communication across diverse channels (see Drotner, this volume). As the empirical evidence repeatedly confirms, the driver of change in this public/private blurring is the activities of young people themselves, although the wider social conditions of childhood, including the many structures that serve to marginalise or exclude children, should not be forgotten.

However, such sociality has limits. Young people also express a strong desire to be alone, particularly when they find circumstances constraining. Here too the media are orchestrated to achieve this privacy. For instance, the media-rich bedroom, with its 'parents - keep out!' notice on the door (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001)⁴; the personalised media - walkman, discman, radio - that block out family intervention or interruption; the absorbed playing of computer games, writing online diaries (or 'blogging'), which are password protected, or the use of hidden files and other privacy tactics. Such activities are often interpreted by parents and other adults as hostile in intent: certainly they are symbolic means of inserting distance into relationships for, as noted earlier, the communal or domestic space, as with any public space, has a normative, coercive aspect which may override or marginalise particular individual interests. Recall Morley's (1986) image of the family living room in which the power inequalities of both gender and generation coincided to allow the father to dominate the media choices of other family members.

Conclusions regarding the mediation of the boundary between the public and personal spheres must therefore be qualified in terms of particular social relations and common culture. Participation in what, we should ask? For young people use media both to sustain and participate in peer culture, and to move away from and distance themselves from intergenerational or family culture. Recalling our earlier

discussion of their uncomfortable positioning in an extended youth, betwixt and between independence and dependence, the public responsibilities of adults and the private protections of children, this is unsurprising. As Flichy (1995) argues, media allow family members to 'live together separately', so offering some resolution to the contradictions of modern family life. Taylor and Harper (2002) provide a telling illustration of young people using their mobile phones to text each other 'goodnight', supplementing, or perhaps replacing, the face-to-face 'goodnight' to their parents.

What are the implications of these observations? First, that participating in a common culture - sharing experiences, reaching decisions, negotiating values - depends ever less on the co-location of participants. Rather, the media serve to displace participation in time and space, permitting new forms of collectivity but perhaps also inhibiting old forms of deliberation, or introducing new grounds for exclusion. Second, parents are seeking the means, again using media, to counter the individualising effects of diverse and multiple media so as to sustain some degree of common culture within the home. Hence they may encourage eating together in front of the television, using sports or soaps to share some intimate time on the sofa, interacting together through a website, even instant messaging each other, or following up media themes to occasion family discussion, whether of an intimate or a political nature. Where once the structure of the home, and the media, demanded 'togetherness', today it must be more deliberately sought out.

Last, of course the challenge remains - how to encourage participation among young people not just in peer culture but also in the wider public sphere. Kimberlee (2002) suggests that, far from being apathetic or interested 'only' in alternative or identity politics, it is the extended youth, the altered trajectory in the transition from child to adult, which lies at the heart of the problem. As traditional structures of work, as well as traditional values and expectations, are lost, cues to participation and citizenship are no longer salient to young people. As Prout (2000: 304) points out, 'despite the recognition of children as persons in their own right, public policy and practice is marked by an intensification of control, regulation and surveillance around children', impeding rather than facilitating the ability of organisations to encourage children's participation. Hence, a number of commentators place the responsibility for the apparent distance between public and personal spheres less on the media (though there may be much that they could do to provide alternative cues to participation and citizenship), nor on children and young people, but rather on the structures of participation that seek to involve them.

Intersection of the personal sphere and the state

At the intersection of the personal sphere and the state, crossing both the public/private boundary and the state/lifeworld boundary, questions of governance come to the fore. These oscillate between interventionist and *laissez faire*

strategies, depending on the political climate. Also variable is whether the state seeks to regulate the relation between children and media by regulating the media or by regulating children, this latter by placing requirements on their parents or teachers.

In the UK, in response to the globalisation of media, among other factors, the current climate seeks to roll back interventionist regulation of the media, through state-imposed media content controls for example, replacing this with industry self-regulation, while shifting the responsibility for regulation from state to parents, teachers and children - itself a kind of privatisation of regulation. One key plank of the UK Office of Communication's regulatory framework is the promotion of media literacy - to ensure that users, especially but not only children, are equipped to make best use of the media and to avoid any associated dangers (Livingstone, 2004). Presumably, the successful promotion of media literacy will devolve responsibility to individuals, thereby legitimating 'lighter touch' regulation of the media industry.

However, the driver of social change here is public policy, itself driven in part by public opinion, so things move slowly, unlike processes driven by either or both of youth culture and commercial interests. Moreover, we are in a period of transition, with the media environment diversifying, globalising and commercialising ahead of both an updated regulatory framework and of public understanding of these changes. Consequently, we are witnessing a series of dilemmas where public and private values clash, and these in turn seem to exacerbate the oscillation between the inter-penetration of the personal sphere by the state and the withdrawal of the state from such intervention.

For example, the UK Government, in an attempt to encourage participation, recently promised every child an email address, but this promise was rapidly withdrawn when it was pointed out that listing children's emails on a school website might aid paedophiles more than politics. A similar dilemma arises when, on the one hand, the state aims to encourage children's online freedoms but, on the other hand, seeks to restrict them to certain approved activities other than those they might choose for themselves (often either private-intimate or private-commercial). Or when the education system hopes to facilitate the home-school link to encourage informal learning (a public good) without devoting teacher time to guiding parents in the use of the Internet (this being a domestic - that is, private - matter) and without acknowledging that the home-school policy further 'curricularises' leisure, turning parents into extensions of the (public) education system (Buckingham et al, 2001). Or when the state steps back from monitoring people's Internet use (an invasion of privacy) and instead encourages a market in online monitoring software with which parents can invade children's privacy themselves.⁵

The question of whose responsibility it is to regulate children's use of new media,

(the state or parents, industry or users), and uncertainty over parenting roles and children's independence in the context of the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1993), is resulting in a tactical dance between parents and children. Parents attempt to control children's use of the Internet, children attempt to evade control: both resort to the rhetoric of trust - parents, in order to justify not regulating their children, children, in order to justify evading regulation. Both employ a range of subtle and not-so-subtle tactics, resulting in struggles over the decision to locate the computer in a public or private space, or to impose more or less draconian prohibitions on the use of interactive services, for example (Livingstone, in press). A simple example is that of the Sim Series software which supposedly promotes public values - teaching children 'about pollution, city planning, and the creation of healthy environments' (Calvert, 1999, p. 186); yet as any parent of a pre-teen knows, such software is gleefully played 'against the grain' - destroying the city, encouraging urban destruction, experimenting with the means of killing the inhabitants - in other words, precisely subverting such public values. On a more serious note, children who lack privacy offline may choose, or may even need, to seek it online for, as Navidi argues (2003), the threats to children's safety (physical, sexual and moral) within the so-called privacy of the home are, statistically, far greater than those external threats so often publicised through the press, making the Internet a potentially liberating resource. The point here is that, as Perri 6 (1998) argues, privacy is not so much about keeping secrets as about having control over who knows what about you - in other words, about choosing who you tell as well as choosing who you do not tell.

These questions and dilemmas of governance, protection and privacy have been analysed here from a broadly liberal perspective. That is, in terms of an oscillating closeness or distance between the state and the individual or the public and the private, and in terms of the dilemmas arising when rights conflict (the right of adults to access a non-censored Internet vs. the right of children to be protected from pornography, for example). But from a more critical perspective they can also be understood as the increasing incorporation of the private lifeworld by the state through the Foucauldian imperative to self-regulation. On this reading, policies such as the promotion of media literacy take on a more sinister aspect - demanding that individuals regulate themselves through becoming a good parent, a literate Internet user, a dutiful child, etc - in order to free commerce from content or trading restrictions or other obligations which may serve the public, rather than private, interests (Gordon, 1991). These injunctions towards self-governance represent a significant undermining of children's private lives (for children's and youth culture is, of its essence, playful, subversive, risky and hidden from adult eyes) and, potentially, an undermining of any benefits or freedoms to be gained from Internet access.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the experience of children and young people's uses of

new media to develop a wider argument about the renegotiation of the boundary between public and private. It proposed, first, that rather than simply claiming that public and private are becoming blurred, three distinct processes are occurring, these relating to three distinct, if interconnected, oppositions between public and private - one based on matters of interest and profit, one based on matters of participation and community, and one based on matters of governance and privacy. Second, and taking a lead from children's own positive evaluation of the private (rather than, or as well as, the public) poles of these oppositions, the chapter challenged adult-centred assumptions of the superiority of publicness. Children and, especially, teens co-opt the media in their own interests to create privacy for themselves, to explore their identity and self-development away from parents and other adults while, at the same time, forging a dynamic and sustaining peer network. In the third stage of the argument, Habermas' conception of society in terms of both a public/private dimension and a system/lifeworld dimension, was applied to media organisations and media users in order to contextualise the three oppositions - public interest/profit, participation/withdrawal and governance/privacy - identified at the outset.

The elaboration of this framework, exemplified through children's uses of new media, revealed the very different features, concerns and drivers of social change that characterise these three oppositions as they map onto the blurring or intersection of three domains: economy/personal sphere, public sphere/personal sphere and state/personal sphere. The claim that the traditional distinction between public and private is becoming blurred is thus unpacked into a series of distinct but intersecting questions of meaning, value, agency and responsibility. In short, 'public' and 'private' mean something different in different contexts, as part of distinct debates, and should not be confused or conflated.

Each of the arguments advanced here were stimulated by, and tested against, a child-centred research strategy (Corsaro, 1997), the point being to complement both an adult-centred and a media-centred approach. The advantage is that this allows the inclusion of voices too often marginalised in debates about children and media, bringing into focus a range of media uses not otherwise recognised (i.e. visible to adults, public) - the playful, secretive, evasive, tactical, subversive (i.e. the private). By contrast with a media-centred approach, a child-centred approach starts its story not from the perspective of changing media but from that of changing childhood, sidestepping the difficulties of technological determinism and of the media effects perspective. Grounding one's account first and foremost in children's lives rather than in technological innovation makes sense of empirical research with children and families, capturing the historically and culturally-contingent complexities with which new media are appropriated both into homes and more broadly into society. It is hoped that the present analysis provides a productive account of how the changing media environment alters the opportunities and dangers for social, economic and political engagement that face young people and their families.

Notes

1. Many thanks to the colleagues with whom these ideas have been discussed: Magdalena Bober, Moira Bovill, Nick Couldry, Daniel Dayan, Kirsten Drotner, Peter Lunt, Mirca Madianou, Dominique Mehl, Ulrike Meinhof, Dominique Pasquier, Roberta Pearson and Andrea Press. Earlier versions of this chapter were presented to the *European Communication Congress*, Munich, 2003, and to the *Information, Communication and Culture Conference*, Oxford 2003. A shortened version of this chapter has appeared in *Journal of Media Practice* 6:1.
2. Outhwaite (1996, p. 369) defines 'Lifeworld' in Habermas' usage as extending Husserl's usage so as to encompass 'relatively informal ways of life, contrasted with market and administrative systems, as well as to a cognitive "horizon of meaning"'.
3. This framework can encompass further sources of public/private intersection. For example, the question of broadcasting regulation versus liberalising the market lies at the intersection between state and economy. The economy and public sphere are linked in, for example, the question of commercial funding for public participation initiatives (as in the debate regarding the liberating or corrupting influence of the talk show). Lastly, the tension within the public domain between system and lifeworld is evident in attempts to use publicly-owned media services to enhance citizenship participation (as in e-democracy initiatives).
4. As I have argued elsewhere (Livingstone, 2002), staying at home is framed, to a significant degree, by the meaning of 'going out'. Especially for parents of younger children and of girls, going out is risky while staying home is safe. A privatised, media-rich bedroom culture is also supported by the apparently progressive exclusion of children and young people from public places in society (as funds for youth clubs are withdrawn, as hanging about on street corners is discouraged, public leisure facilities are beyond the financial resources of many).
5. The invasive rhetoric of the software market is clearly evident in product names - e.g. *Cybersnoop*, and in product claims - *Cybersitter*, says the promotional materials, 'works by secretly monitoring all computer activity' so as to 'see exactly what your children have been viewing online [and] monitor chat room sessions, instant messaging, email' (www.cybersitter.com). This is not to say that the external threats to children's privacy are not real: consider the dilemma over equipping the mobile phone with GIS capability - on the one hand, this frees the child by permitting parents to monitor children's location, but on the other, it places the child at risk, for ill-intentioned adults may also monitor children's movements.

References

- 6, Perri (1998). *The Future of Privacy. Volume 1: Private life and public policy*. London: Demos.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.

Bovill, M., and Livingstone, S. (2001). 'Bedroom Culture and the Privatization of Media Use'. In S. Livingstone, and Bovill, M. (Ed.), *Children and Their Changing Media Environment: A European Comparative Study* (179-200). Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Buchner, P., Bois-Reymond, M. d., & Kruger, H.-H. (1995). 'Growing Up in Three European Regions'. In L. Chisholm (Ed.), *Growing Up in Europe: Contemporary Horizons in Childhood and Youth Studies* (pp. 43-59). Berlin: de Gruyter.

Buckingham, D., Scanlon, M., and Sefton-Green, J. (2001). 'Selling the Digital Dream: Marketing Educational Technology to Teachers and Parents'. In A. Loveless, and Ellis, V. (Ed.), *Subject to Change: Literacy and Digital Technology* (pp. 20-40). London: Routledge.

Buckingham, D., and Bragg, S. (2004). *Young People, Sex and the Media: The facts of life?* Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Burbules, N. C. (1998). 'Rhetorics on the Web: Hyperreading and Critical Literacy.' In I. Snyder (Ed.), *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy Into the Electronic Era* (pp. 102-122). New York: Routledge.

Butsch, R. (2000). *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television 1750-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Calvert, S. (1999). *Children's Journeys Through the Information Age*. Boston: McGraw-Hill College.

Coleman, J. C. (1993). *Understanding Adolescence Today: A Review*. *Children and Society*, 7(2), 137-147.

Corsaro, W. A. (1997). *The Sociology of Childhood*. Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press.

Cunningham, H. (1995). *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*. London: Logman.

Dahlgren, P., & Sparks, C. (Eds.). (1991). *Communication and citizenship*. London: Routledge.

Drotner, K. (2000). 'Difference and Diversity: Trends in Young Danes Media Use.' *Media, Culture & Society*, 22(2), 149-166.

Flichy, P. (1995). *Dynamics of modern communication: the shaping and impact of new communication technologies*. London: Sage.

Fraser, N. (1990). 'Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy.' *Social Text*, 25/26, 56-80.

Gadlin, H. (1978). 'Child Discipline and the Pursuit of Self: An Historical Interpretation.' In H.

W. Reese & L. P. Lipsitt (Eds.), *Advances in Child Development and Behavior* (Vol. 12, pp. 231-261). New York: Academic Press.

Giddens, A. (1993). *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gordon, C. (1991). 'Governmental rationality: An introduction.' In G. Burchell, Gordon, C., and Miller, P. (Ed.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (pp. 1-51). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Habermas, J. (1969/89). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of Bourgeois society*. Cambridge: MI. Press.

Habermas, J. (1981/7). *The theory of communicative action, Vol 2. Lifeworld and system: a critique of functionalist reason*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hill, M., and Tisdall, K. (1997). *Children and Society*. London and New York: Longman.

Kimberlee, R. H. (2002). 'Why Don't British Young People Vote at General Elections?' *Journal of Youth Studies*, 5(1), 85-98.

Kinder, M. (Ed.). (1999). *Kids' Media Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kline, S. (1993). *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in the Age of TV Marketing*. London and New York: Verso.

Lievrouw, L., & Livingstone, S. (Eds.). (2002). *Handbook of new media: Social shaping and social consequences*. London: Sage.

Livingstone, S. (1998). 'Mediated childhoods: A comparative approach to young people's changing media environment in Europe'. *European Journal of Communication*, 13(4), 435-456.

Livingstone, S. (2002). *Young People and New Media*. London: Sage.

Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *Communication Review*, 7: 3-14.

Livingstone, S. (in press). 'Children's privacy online: Experimenting with boundaries within and beyond the family.' R. Kraut (Ed.), *Information technology at home*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Livingstone, S., and Bober, M. (2003). *UK children go online: Listening to young people's experiences*. London: LSE Report, launched 16 October 2003. Available at www.children-go-online.net.

Livingstone, S., and Bovill, M. (Ed.). (2001a). *Children and their changing media environment: A European comparative study*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Livingstone, S., and Bovill, M. (2001b). *Families and the Internet: An observational study of children and young people's Internet use*. Public report. London School of Economics and Political Science.

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/whosWho/soniaLivingstonePublications3.htm>

Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Montgomery, K. (2001). 'The New On-Line Children's Consumer Culture.' In D. Singer & J. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of Children and the Media* (pp. 635-650). London: Sage.

Morley, D. (1986). *Family television: cultural power and domestic leisure*. London: Comedia.

Navidi, U. (2003). *Presentation at the Experts' Meeting, Children, Mobile Phones and the Internet*, Mitsubishi Research Institute, Tokyo, 6-7 March 2003. See also <http://www.childline.org.uk/> (last checked 31/1/2003).

Outhwaite, W. (Ed.). (1996). *The Habermas Reader*. Oxford: Polity.

Power, M. (1999). *The Audit Society: Rituals of verification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Prout, A. (2000). *Children's participation: control and self-realisation in British late modernity*. *Children & Society*, 14(4), 304-315.

Qvortrup, J. (1995). 'Childhood and modern society: a paradoxical relationship'. In J. Brannen & M. O'Brien (Eds.), *Childhood and parenthood* (pp. 189-198). London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Seiter, E. (1999). *Television and New Media Audiences*. New York: Oxford university Press.

Subrahmanyam, K., Greenfield, P., Kraut, R., & Gross, E. (2001). The impact of computer use on children's and adolescents' development. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 22(1), 7-30.

Taylor, A. S., & Harper, R. (2002). 'Age-old Practices in the 'New World': A study of gift-giving between teenage mobile phone users'. Paper presented at the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems: Changing our world, changing ourselves table of contents, Minneapolis, MN, USA.

Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The media and modernity: a social theory of the media*. Cambridge: Polity.

Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Trow, J. (2001). 'Family boundaries, commercialism, and the Internet: a framework for research.' *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 22(1), 73-86.