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Moira Bovill and Sonia M. Livingstone

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CHAPTER 8

BEDROOM CULTURE AND THE PRIVATIZATION OF MEDIA USE

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What is 'bedroom culture'?

In the second half of the twentieth century, growing affluence, changing patterns of family interaction, reduction in family size, the emergence of youth culture and the consumer power of the youth market have all combined to make children's bedrooms increasingly important as sites of leisure and learning. It is common nowadays for young people in Europe to have their own bedroom and for its furnishings to reflect their individual tastes and interests. Surveys in five countries in our project (CH, DE, FI, GB, IS) show that even amongst 6-7 year-olds just over half (56%) do not have to share a bedroom. As we would expect, the figures are higher for older children: two thirds (69%) of 9-10 year-olds have their own room, and over three-quarters of 12-13 year-olds (77%) and 15-16 year-olds (82%).[1]

European children's bedrooms are, furthermore, increasingly well-equipped with media (see Chapter 3). Alongside the more traditional books and radios, many young people now have a television set, video recorder, TV-linked games machine or PC in their room. To many children across Europe and North America (see Annenberg Public Policy Center, 1999), this media-rich bedroom culture represents a vital yet taken-for-granted aspect of their daily lives which significantly enriches the variety of leisure opportunities open to them. From a commercial viewpoint, these developments represent 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 leisure goods. And so for their parents, there may be implications in terms of family communication and media regulation. In this chapter, we ask how bedroom culture intersects with children and young people's media culture in general (Buckingham, 1993).

Accounts of children's use of their bedroom focus on the bedroom as a site for the consumption and display of consumer goods or as a private social space where young people can express and experiment with a sense of personal identity. Thus, in terms of the four key theoretical concepts outlined in Chapter 1, the emphasis has been on processes of *consumerism* and *individualization*. In the UK, the few early sociological accounts which draw attention to a 'culture of the bedroom' point to its connections with teenage consumer culture, particularly that of girls (see McRobbie and Garber, 1976; Frith, 1978), emphasizing how teenage girls' search for personal identity through self-presentation and the development of

'taste' has been led, exploited even, by powerful commercial interests in the fashion and music industries.

More recent research on bedroom culture has placed increasing emphasis on the role of the media. Bjurstr m and Forn≅s (1993) describe how mediated consumer images provide the raw materials with which young people creatively construct 'their' style. Similarly, studies of the domestic appropriation of media (Silverstone and Hirsh, 1992) show how media products, like other consumer goods, are used to express individual and collective styles which, in turn, function as identity markers. And while Steele and Brown (1995) note that 'for many teens, the bedroom is a safe, private space in which experimentation with possible selves can be conducted', what is notable about today's adolescents is that this safe, private space is increasingly also a media-rich space. Thus Bachmair (1991), when arguing that the bedroom is much more than a social context for media use, traces how the meanings inscribed in the arrangement of the bedroom also serve to frame and guide the interpretation of the texts transmitted by the media. The sign on the door ('Parents, keep out!'), the pop star posters on the wall, the collection of Disney mementos, and the program on the television screen combine as one fluid 'text', highly individual but drawing heavily on a shared, commercialized peer culture.

While the academic research literature remains sketchy, it suggests that across Europe the teenager's bedroom is where media and identity intersect: in this space media technology and content are appropriated by young people to sustain and express their sense of who they are. This new leisure site raises a variety of questions both for family life and children's media use. 'Bedroom culture' implies that children and young people spend significant proportions of their leisure time at home with the mass media, increasingly screen media, in their own private space rather than communal or family space. This provokes concerns about children leading increasingly isolated lives, and about parents' ability to regulate and monitor media use.[2] In raising some familiar but strongly felt fears about the *privatization* of children and young people's lives, as well as more optimistic visions of opportunities for privacy and individual self-fulfillment, the notion of bedroom culture is in many ways suggestive of the new opportunities and dangers which arise under conditions of late modernity (see Chapter 1). In order to begin to address these issues, we take as our starting point the following simple but intriguing questions:

- How much time do children and young people spend in their bedrooms?
- How does personal ownership of media relate to time spent in the bedroom?

- Is time spent in the bedroom contributing to a pattern of social isolation ?
- How does bedroom culture affect parents' media monitoring and regulation?
- In sum, what is the experience and significance of media use in the bedroom?

Our twelve-nation cross-cultural project gives us a unique perspective from which to address such questions. As in previous chapters, we are interested in identifying both similarities and differences in children and young people's leisure opportunities and experiences. On the one hand, bedroom culture appears very much a European and North American phenomenon, dependent on a high degree of modernization and wealth. This would lead us to expect cross-cultural similarities, given similar patterns of age and gender development. On the other hand, we may find differences between countries as a result of different cultural conditions or technological provision (see Chapter 1). For example, we may ask where media-rich bedroom culture is more developed. Is it in the United Kingdom, because of its relatively stronger screen-oriented culture?[3] Or in Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands, ranked among the top ten in preparedness for the networked society by the World Economic Forum (1996)? Spain, Italy and France, on the other hand, are cited as relatively low on all new technologies (see Chapter 1) and, in terms of cultural conditions, have more traditional family relations. The Netherlands and the Nordic countries also form a distinct grouping in terms of their more egalitarian gender politics and anti-authoritarian approach to child-rearing: these conditions too may have implications for bedroom culture.

Time spent by European children and young people in their bedroom

How do young people in Europe divide their free time at home between their own private space and communal family space?[4] In our survey, we asked about *the proportion* of waking time at home that they spend in their own room. The results confirm that European children and young people spend sizable proportions of leisure time at home in their own room (and perhaps surprisingly, sharing a bedroom makes little difference at any age to the proportion of time spent in it).

By the time they are 15-16 the majority of young people in Europe say they spend at least half of their waking time at home in their bedrooms (see Table 9.1). Young people vary in their use of the bedroom of course, and we thus find demographic patterns which hold true across most countries. Teenagers are more likely than younger children to spend time in their own room, and girls tend to spend a greater proportion of their time there than boys. The socio-economic

status of the family, although affecting media provision in the home (see Chapter 3), makes no consistent overall difference to time spent in the bedroom.

(Insert Table 8.1 about here)

However, there are also considerable differences across countries. Most striking is the comparatively small percentage of Dutch children of either gender, or any age, who spend half or more of their waking time in their own room, while the percentages in Germany and Flanders are among the highest. How can we account for such variation?

One explanation for both the observed gender differences and cross-national variations in time spent in the bedroom focuses on the attractions of the media available in the bedroom. Hence, we might have expected to find increased use of the bedroom as a leisure space, together with a lessening of gender differences, in countries where bedroom culture is more screen-centered, more high-tech, and hence more boy-friendly. For although bedroom culture was identified as predominantly feminine by McRobbie and Garber, these authors were writing in the 1970s when British bedrooms at least contained music and magazines, traditionally 'girls' media, but few or no screen media. However our findings do not offer much support for the idea that new media encourage young people to retreat to their rooms. For example, British children generally spend only average amounts of time in their own rooms, despite the fact that they are particularly likely to own screen media (Chapter 3). Conversely, as noted above, German boys as well as girls spend a comparatively large proportion of leisure time in the bedroom, although they own comparatively few screen media. Furthermore, in Israel and the Nordic countries older children are no more likely than younger ones to spend time in their own room, despite having more of the newest technologies (PCs with CD-Rom drive, Internet connections) as well as television sets and video recorders in their bedrooms. More generally, Table 9.1 does not show any greater gender differences in activities in those countries where there are relatively fewer media in the bedrooms. Clearly, then, there are no easy conclusions to be drawn which relate the degree of national diffusion of media to the growth of bedroom culture.

However, previous research also offers another explanation for the difference in boys' and girls' attachment to bedroom culture, and this explanation also might apply differently in different cultures. Frith (1978) locates bedroom culture within gendered power relations in the home. Thus he points out that girls are relatively more restricted to the home because parents exercise more control over them than boys and because they are assigned tasks in the home where boys generally are

not. McRobbie and Garber (1976), on the other hand, following sociological accounts of American teenage culture, offer an explanation in terms of friendship styles. Teenage girls, they suggest, tend to have one best friend or a small group of close friends who can be easily accommodated in the bedroom. Boys' peer groups, by contrast, are typically larger and their culture encourages an escape from the home and family into the street or café. Does this hold true for European children today? And if there are cross-national differences in the friendship styles of boys and girls, can this help to explain why girls spend more time in their bedrooms?

Several decades on, our European research largely confirms that boys are more likely than girls to spend their free time with a group of friends, while girls are more likely than boys to spend it with family members or one best friend (see Table 9.2).

(Insert Table 8.2 about here)

Once again, while there are noteworthy differences between countries in friendship patterns, these bear no consistent relation to differences in proportion of time spent in the bedroom. In the two Nordic countries, however, we do find the expected pattern: Swedish and Finnish teenagers are overwhelmingly most likely to spend their free time with a group of friends and, as expected, they also spend a smaller proportion of their free time in their own room. German and Dutch boys are more likely than those in other countries to spend time mostly with one best friend, yet in Germany the highest percentage, and in the Netherlands the lowest, spend half or more of their waking time at home in the bedroom.[5] Similarly, in Spain and Flanders, boys as well as girls are particularly likely to spend time with the family. Yet in Flanders above average numbers of boys spend half or more of their leisure time at home in the bedroom, while in Spain relatively few do so before the age of 15.

More media in the bedroom, more time spent there?

The above discussion attempts to relate patterns of time spent in the bedroom to national variations in domestic media provision. Here we examine the possibility of a direct link on an individual basis between personal media and time spent away from the family. In short, how then does having more or fewer media in the bedroom relate to time spent there? Having an often costly medium in one's own room suggests some interest in it, and so one might expect young people to spend longer with it.

(Insert Table 8.3 about here)

In general there is an association between the *number of media*, particularly screen media, that teenagers have in their bedrooms and the proportion of time they spend there: for 12-13 and, especially, 15-16 year olds, having more media is correlated with spending more time in the bedroom.[6]

Can we break this down, to see whether children and young people who have books, television, a TV-linked games machine, radio or hi-fi or a PC in their own room spend more time using these media than those who only have access to family-owned media?

Generally speaking, in each country those who own media personally report spending longer using them (see Table 8.4).

(Insert Table 8.4 about here)[7]

Although some differences are comparatively small, the overall picture is unequivocal.[8] Amongst 9-10 year-olds, having screen-media (television, games machine, or PC) in the bedroom is associated with the greatest increase in time spent. Amongst older children, being able to play music in their own room makes the most difference, although having a television set remains important, particularly amongst those aged 12-13.

Once again, cultural factors seem to matter, as different media are salient in different countries. For example, in Germany and the UK, having a television in the bedroom is likely to be associated with the most sizable difference in time spent. In Germany, where ownership of a set is comparatively rare and school starts early, this is particularly the case for weekend viewing, while in the UK, where ownership is high and bedtimes later, average weekday viewing is most affected. In Finland and Sweden, countries which lead in diffusion of IT, personal ownership of a PC is associated with particularly large increases in the amount of time spent with PCs (see Table 8.4). Again, too, gender makes a difference. Time spent by boys and girls in their own rooms is associated with different media, although television is a major attraction for both (see also Chapters 3, 4, and 12). For example, amongst 9-10 year old boys having a TV-linked games machine is most closely associated with time spent in the bedroom, while for older boys the link with having their own PC with a CD-Rom drive is dominant. For girls, on the other hand, having their own television set is most closely associated with time spent in the bedroom at all ages, and having a radio at age 12-13 and a telephone at the age of 15-16 are the next most important factors. For both television and the PC we can examine these trends in detail.

Of those with their own television set, around one in five in all four age groups say they usually watch television in their own rooms in the morning and, amongst secondary school age children, around half usually watch there in the evening (see Table 8.3).

Among children (6-7 and 9-10) fewer then one in five watch television in their bedroom in the morning and a third do so when they get home from school. Over a quarter of 6-7 year-olds watch there in the early evening, as do nearly two in five 9-10 year-olds. Similarly only one in eight 6-7 year-olds and nearly a quarter of 9-10 year-olds watch in television in their own rooms after 9.00pm in the evening.

However, there is considerable variation across countries, consistent with the picture in Table 8.1. Dutch children who have their own sets generally show least interest in watching them, while Israeli children are particularly likely to make use of them after they come home from school and late into the evening: three-quarters of Israeli secondary school children with their own set say they usually watch it after 9.00pm in the evening.

Interestingly, having one's own PC, compared with having access to one elsewhere in the home, is generally associated with more 'serious' computing activities and does not seem to encourage greater games use. In Israel, for example, 9-10 year-olds with their own PC, compared with those with access to a PC elsewhere at home, spend half or more of their time with the PC doing homework (43%, compared with 17%). In Spain 15-16 year-olds with their own PC are more likely (48% compared with 32% of those without their own PC) to use it for looking up information on CD-Roms. In Sweden such children are more likely to use their PC for looking up information on CD-Roms (42% compared with 24%), programming (28% compared with 9%) and email (26% compared with 14%).

(Insert Table 8.5 about here)

We would conclude that across Europe, having a media-rich bedroom is associated with greater use of the bedroom. Whether a media-rich bedroom actually encourages children and young people to spend more time there, or whether those inclined to spend time alone also tend to acquire more media goods, is a question we cannot resolve without a longitudinal study. However, we can also see that, for boys and girls at different ages, different media attract. For boys, computer-related technologies are more important, while as girls grow older

their interest in communication, music and narrative helps to explain why ownership of the telephone, radio and television emerge as predictors of time spent in their bedroom.

Are media contributing to a pattern of social isolation for children?

Young people who say they spend most of their free time alone spend a greater proportion of their time in their bedrooms, while those who spend more time with their family spend less time in their bedroom. There is 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. While this might seem to support the notion that the media-rich bedroom encourages social isolation, as is commonly feared by parents and by the media themselves, there are difficulties in drawing causal conclusions from these correlations. Clearly there are many factors operating within families which lead some children to prefer spending time with others while others choose more solitary occupations, and spending time in either living room or bedroom represents the most obvious way to manage such preferences. While in our project we sought to investigate some of these factors, we have found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that they are not readily amenable to investigation through a survey. However, our more qualitative work would certainly lead us to question the negative connotations of leisure time spent 'alone', as often implied by the moral panics which surround the changing media environment (Buckingham, 1993).

Here then, we explore the social contexts of media use while remaining neutral about the value of being either alone or with others (see also Chapter 7). Putting to one side the intractable question of causality, we focus here on the social context in which children and young people watch their favorite television program or play computer games, as for both of these activities there is often an element of choice, and our qualitative work suggests such choices are particularly exercised for favorite programs and game playing.

The survey findings show that, overall, those with a television set in their bedroom are more likely to watch their favorite program alone; this is particularly the case for teenagers (see Table 8.6). By contrast, although it is generally much more common to play computer games alone than it is to watch a favorite television program alone (see Chapter 7), having one's own games machine or PC makes comparatively little difference to the social contexts of use. In fact, for the two older age groups, in some countries the tendency is for children to be *less* likely to play alone if they have their own PC or games machine.

(Insert Table 8.6 about here)

However, the most striking finding is the difference between countries in the numbers of children and young people watching television or playing computer games alone, regardless of media in the bedroom. In Spain, having their own television makes little difference to children's behavior and fewer than one in five at any age watch alone. In Germany, on the other hand, two in every five of those who have their own set watch their favorite program alone at the age of 9 or 10 and this figure rises to almost half at the age when television viewing is most popular, between 12 to 13. Since rather more German than Spanish children have their own televisions (see Table 3.1) it may be that media ownership *per se* leads to a more established culture of solitary viewing. However, fewer Spanish than German children play computer games alone, even though many more Spanish children compared with German children have their own TV-linked games machines and just as many have their own PCs (see Table 3.2 and Table 3.3). This would suggest that wider cultural factors lead family life in Spain to remain largely communal, while in Germany the individualization processes associated with late modernity are further advanced and 'living together separately' (Flichy, 1995) is becoming a more common occurrence (see Chapter 1). Similarly, at 12-13 almost two thirds of Italian and Dutch children who have their own TV-linked games machine (60% and 64% respectively) usually play alone. In Sweden fewer than one in five play alone. Yet far more Swedish children have their own TV-linked games machine (see Table 3.2). Since computer games are most often played with siblings or friends (see Chapter 7) we may speculate that the low incidence of playing (and indeed watching) alone in Sweden can be related to larger family size (see Table 1.2) and the high proportion of children spending most of their time in friendship groups (see Table 9.2). Conversely the fact that so many Italian children play alone may be partially explicable in terms of the low birthrates in that country. Such findings suggest that, although having media in the bedroom is likely to encourage young people to spend time alone with media, demographic factors and social practices rooted in the culture of the country are at least as important.

However, having media in the bedroom may affect the social context of media use in other ways. Particularly, given that the living room generally remains a communal space for the family, a media-rich bedroom opens up a new space in which to share media not with family but with friends. Thus we may ask whether having screen media in one's own bedroom influences children's choice of viewing companion or game-playing partner. In some of the countries surveyed (FI, BE-vlg, DE, IL, SE, GB), those children who said they usually watched television or played computer games with someone else were

asked with whom they usually used these media. The findings suggest, that at least for teenagers, media in the bedroom may be encouraging social contacts outside the family circle, rather than encouraging them to spend more time alone. Overall, 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 PC.[9] There is no comparable effect for younger children, however, who presumably have less control over invitations to friends and are more likely to share a bedroom with younger siblings.

Does time spent in the bedroom reduce parental involvement in media regulation?

Qualitative interviews in different countries identified similar parental concerns about children's media use. Television is seen as taking up valuable time which could be spent more profitably on other activities (see Chapter 7). There are also concerns about the violent and possibly addictive nature of computer games, as well as worries about the Internet and the child's access to pornography and other unsuitable materials. The growth in media-rich bedrooms fuels these fears by making domestic regulation of media more difficult in practical terms.

In the United Kingdom twice as many parents (35% compared with 17%) think it a bad thing for a child to have a television set in their bedroom as consider it a good thing (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999). Views are even more negative in Germany (Krotz et al, 1999). In general, the younger the child and the higher the social grade of the family the more negative are parents' reactions. However, personal ownership by children of media may also be seen in terms of the positive aims parents have for their children, namely encouraging their autonomy as well as offering benefits for parents themselves in terms of privacy and choice: thus even disapproving parents consent.[10]

Our qualitative work suggests that in practice few families apply rules about media strictly, especially for teenagers (see Chapter 7). The reasons are numerous. Television in particular is so well integrated into family life that it appears less a matter of rules and more one of family habits. Busy parents often lack the energy to insist on rules. As the Israeli qualitative work shows, parents are physically and emotionally exhausted and often go to bed before their children. Among those aged 12 years or older, children often report viewing television late into the night without parents' awareness or supervision. (Lemish, pers. comm., 1999). Also typical are the findings from the United Kingdom that while expressing reservations about the effects of

media on children in general, parents are often less concerned *for their own child*, whom they trust to have enough common sense not to be unduly influenced. In general, our impression is that family rules about media use are fairly relaxed, and are typically less salient to children than they are to their parents. For example, one middle-class British father claimed confidently: 'We censor television. We draw the line usually at the 9 o'clock watershed', while in another room talking to another interviewer, his sons (aged 13 and 10) painted a very different picture regarding the use of their own television set:

Int: Do they have lots of rules that you go along with or do they not have rules?
M: No, not really rules.
Int: Rules about what time you have got to go to bed?
S: Yes, well.
M: They tell us to go up at about 9.30 or 10 or something, and then we just watch TV until they come up and tell us to switch it off.
S: They shout at you and tell you to turn it off.
Int: When do they tell you to do that?
M: At about 11, 11.30.

This excerpt illustrates what has been termed restrictive mediation of television by parents (Bybee et al, 1982; van der Voort et al. 1992), in contrast to more positive mediation, most notably conversational guidance during or after viewing. To explore children's perceptions of these strategies more systematically, in our survey we asked them whether their parents tell them when they could or could not use certain media (restrictive mediation) or chatted with them about these media (conversational guidance). In general, we find that most mediation strategies are practiced more by mothers than fathers (see Chapter 7). For television, parents are more likely to use restrictive strategies to control when younger children may watch, but in most countries they are just as likely to talk to older children as younger ones about their viewing. Both restrictions and positive mediation are considerably less common for the PC than for television in all countries. But does having media in the bedroom make a difference? Are parents less likely to regulate television viewing and/or use of the PC if the child has a television set or a PC of their own?

We find that in the case of younger children parental mediation is largely unaffected by the location of the media. In most countries, parents of younger children are just as likely to control access to television and the PC and to talk about them, if their children have these media in their own rooms, as opposed to having access only elsewhere in the home. It appears that at this age children are

still keen to spend time with their families and bedroom culture is less established. As we have seen (see Table 8.6), only in the United Kingdom do we find a slightly larger proportion of younger children watching alone if they have their own set.

However, for older children, location does matter, though this depends on the medium (see Table 8.7). Access to television, according to children over the age of 11, is more controlled if located in a communal rather than a private space. Teenagers who have their own set are significantly *less* likely to say that their parents tell them when they can or can't watch (in CH, DE, FI, SE, GB). Family chat about television is less affected, but where there is a difference (in DE, GB and IS), parents are more likely to talk if children do not have the opportunity to watch in their own room. The pattern is very different for the PC. Here among teenagers it is *more* common to be told when they can or can't use the PC (for games or other more serious purposes) if they do have their own computer (in ES, FI, IL and SE)[11]. Control over access is highest in Spain, where media regulation of all types by both fathers and mothers is particularly common (see Chapter 7). Similarly for positive mediation, parents are also more likely to talk about using the PC if their child has one in their own.

In summary, television, the family medium, almost universally found in the living room, is more regulated in that location. The PC, which as yet has a less well-established place in the home, and which, when not in the child's room, tends to be located in less private areas such as spare rooms, hallways or parents' bedrooms, attracts more parental control and comment when the child has their own. Possibly when children watch television in a communal room, parental mediation is more common because it is both to regulate the child's viewing, an also in order to preserve parents' access and privacy. Parents' regulation of the PC is much less likely to involve such dual motivation, as parental leisure is less likely to be disturbed by PC use because of its less central location in the home. As a result, mediation may be more closely linked to the child's own behavior, particularly as parents are often uncertain as yet regarding the kinds of activities and contents to which children may have access through the PC.

What is the experience and significance of media use in the bedroom?

In socio-historical terms, the media-rich bedroom is new in the lives of European children and their parents. In the 1950s, Himmelweit et al (1958) were preoccupied with the arrival of the single television set in the home, and in McRobbie and Garber's identification of bedroom culture in the 1970s, the television (far less the computer) played no role. Even in Morley's (1986)

study of family television, the analysis is centered on the struggles of multi-person households to share 'the television set'. However, 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.

Our research has established that a sizable proportion of children and young people's time at home is spent in the privacy of their own rooms and that, if these rooms are media-rich, young people spend even longer there. We have also seen from the parents' perspective, regulation of their children's media use is made more difficult by the development of a media-rich bedroom culture. We have also noted that different media encourage different social practices. Television is still in most countries a family medium (Chapter 7), and fewer than a quarter (23%) of young people usually watch their favorite program alone. However, the future trajectory for television would seem to be towards increasingly solitary use: children are more likely to watch alone if they have their own set and therefore the choice to do so (Table 8.6). On the other hand, although almost twice as many (43%) already play computer games alone, there is no indication that this will increase if more children acquire their own PCs or games machines: the tendency is, if anything, towards more social uses. In particular, it seems that computer game playing is an important peer activity which encourages contact with friends (see Chapters 7 and 9).

While these general trends hold cross-culturally, it also appears that, as far as bedroom culture is concerned, different national cultures are likely to encourage rather different outcomes. It seems that certain cultures may be more tolerant of, or more predisposing towards, leisure time spent alone, and that this may have consequences for the development of bedroom culture, regardless of media provision. For example, Swiss teenagers spend a more than average proportion of their time in their own rooms, while Finnish teenagers spend less than average (Table 8.1), even though Swiss children own fewer televisions or PCs (see Tables 3.1 and 3.3) and spend less time on these media (see Chapter 4) while for Finnish children the opposite is the case. This

cultural difference is confirmed by the finding that, among 15-16 year olds, only around 40% of Finns prefer to watch television or play computer games by themselves, compared with 60% of Swiss teenagers who prefer to watch television alone and 68% who prefer to play computer games alone.

Whether the development of bedroom culture is seen as a matter for interest or concern differs markedly across countries. Both tabloid and broad-sheet press reaction to the British report, *Young People, New Media* (a report which encompassed many aspects of children and young people's media uses) focused almost exclusively on bedroom culture as problematic[12]. In Israel, on the other hand, no comparable national concern has emerged even though by their own account Israeli children and young people spend a greater proportion of their leisure time in their own rooms than do British children, with a concomitant reduction in family viewing. Similarly, in the Nordic countries, although younger children in particular spend a considerable proportion of their free time at home in their bedrooms (Table 8.1), researchers encountered little concern about this amongst parents. This may be explained in terms of national anti-authoritarian patterns of child-rearing in Nordic countries, where independence and comparatively unrestricted access to leisure opportunities outside the home is regarded as important (Suoninen, pers. comm., 1999).[13]

In our research in the United Kingdom, we attributed the considerable amounts of time (five hours per day on average) spent by British children with the media to the combination of an increasingly personalized media environment in the home, a relative lack of things for children and young people to do in the area where they live, and parental fears for their safety outside the home (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999). British parents' fears may not be entirely unfounded. Home Office statistics (1994), reporting 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 the number of child abductions. Our survey showed that British children, compared with others in Europe, are the most likely to say that there is not enough for someone their age to do in the area where they live (Table 8.8)[14]. In short, we suggest that the meaning of bedroom culture in individual countries depends on the leisure context in which it develops: the boundary of the bedroom door is ultimately less important than the boundary of the front door.

Beyond cross-national differences, we may also identify cultural differences between parents and children, for there is certainly a difference between parents' and children's perspectives on bedroom culture. To parents, the media-rich bedroom represents both a refuge from the dangers of the streets and, on the other hand, a threat to family relationships and 'constructive' leisure activities. To

children it is more important for providing a unique space in which they can express their identity, experiment with their individuality, exercise personal control, and manage - through both connection and distance - their relations with family and friends.

The qualitative interviews confirm the growing importance of the bedroom for European children of all ages. Before the age of nine or ten most children are comparatively uninterested, although parents may try to encourage use of the bedroom as a play space in order to secure a modicum of privacy and quiet for themselves. On the other hand, escape from troublesome siblings can be an attraction for those who do not have to share a room. Here one exasperated British seven-year-old talks of trying to watch his favorite television program with his five-year-old brother:

J: 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.
Int.: Right, so does that annoy you a bit?
J: 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.

By the early teens, bedrooms are increasingly valued not just for practical reasons but also to support a developing sense of identity and lifestyle. 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. In tune with the account offered by McRobbie and Garber (1976), this 16 year-old, British girl describes below how her bedroom expresses not only her sense of style, but also her sense of who she is. And, as befits a teenager's bedroom in the 1990s, the media play a key role:

R: Well I've made it my own. It's got all my - I'm very into musicals, like West End things and er I've got all the posters and leaflets all over my wall. You can hardly see the wallpaper. And my CD player. I've always got music on. That's what I usually do - I just sit in there and listen to music. Or I sometimes watch telly if Mum's watching something I don't want to watch… whenever my friends come over we just usually go round and listen to music and talk and watch television.
Int: Why are you in there rather than in the living room watching television?
R: Well, usually because my Mum's down there. Don't want her listening to what I'm talking about… Um well I suppose, boys.

Int: So your bedroom's quite a private place in fact?
R: Yes. My personality's expressed.

To conclude, 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, privatized space, as opposed to communal family space. However, such a relatively privatized bedroom culture is also developing because of the perceived failures of a more public, outdoor leisure culture (in terms of access, cost, variety, etc). 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. While these general trends are apparent, we have also identified some cross-national variations in bedroom culture. It remains to be seen in how far national differences in culture, in family life and in young people's access to public spaces and facilities will affect the future balance of outdoor versus indoor, social versus solitary, or family- versus peer-oriented, leisure activities in young people's lives. What is clear is that the media - particularly screen media - are playing an increasingly significant role within the more indoor, more solitary, more peer-oriented space of the bedroom.

Table 8.1: Percentage claiming to spend half or more of waking time at home in own room, age by gender

	BE (vlg)	CH	DE	ES	FI	GB	IL	IT	NL	SE	AV
AGE 6-7											
Boys	50		59	40	49	31	47		10	53	42
Girls	58	N/A	62	29	56	37	53	N/A	15	62	47
All	53		61	35	52	34	50		13	57	44
AGE 9-10											
Boys	*55*		*49*	37	*39*	*31*	51		16	*47*	41
Girls	*65*	N/A	*67*	37	*54*	*47*	67	n/a	20	*57*	52
All	60		57	37	46	40	60		18	53	46
AGE 12-13											
Boys	78	**48**	59	48	39	*43*	*46*	**50**	**23**	49	48
Girls	74	**71**	67	52	60	*49*	*62*	**71**	**48**	56	61
All	75	60	63	49	50	46	54	61	36	53	55
AGE 15-16											
Boys	69	65	75	64	51	52	48	*55*	43	52	57
Girls	63	74	67	61	62	65	68	*68*	42	57	63
All	67	70	72	62	56	59	60	63	42	55	61

Note: bold $p<0.001$; underline $p<0.01$; italics $p<0.05$

Table 8.2: Who mostly spend free time with, by gender (All age 6-7, 9-10, 12-13 and 15-16)

	BE-(vlg)	CH	DE	DK	ES	FI	FR	GB	IL	NL	SE	AV
Boys												
On my own	8	10	*6*	13	*9*	11	16	**6**	12	*9*	11	9
Group of friends	35	44	*36*	42	*40*	57	36	**44**	43	*45*	64	44
One best friend	15	21	*29*	12	*12*	16	22	**22**	23	*27*	14	19
Family	42	25	*29*	31	*39*	17	25	**29**	21	*19*	12	26
Girls												
On my own	7	10	*5*	7	*5*	10	13	**3**	7	6	10	8
Group of friends	29	34	*27*	41	*39*	48	26	**33**	36	*39*	58	37
One best friend	21	25	*38*	15	*14*	21	30	**27**	28	*30*	16	24
Family	43	32	*30*	36	*42*	21	30	**37**	29	*25*	16	31

Note: bold $p<0.001$; underline $p<0.01$; italics $p<0.05$

TABLE 8.3: Percentage of those with TV in own room usually watching there at different times of day.

	BE-vlg	DE	ES	FI	GB	NL	IL	IT	SE	AV
AGE 12-13										
Before school	9	10	**21**	14	15	**21**	**22**	16	16	16
When get home	30	35	49	35	32	*12*	**67**	56	34	39
Early evening	55	46	39	52	39	*37*	**78**	58	55	51
After 9 pm	46	20	56	58	32	*20*	**76**	66	51	47
AGE 15-16										
Before school	*3*	11	9	15	13	14	**22**	9	14	14
When get home	22	30	44	33	36	*17*	52	**56**	30	36
Early evening	38	45	30	38	41	*27*	**57**	44	40	40
After 9 pm	51	49	63	63	52	*34*	**76**	72	65	58

Note: These data are for teenagers only as in most countries too few children have their own set.

TABLE 8.4: Difference (+ or -) in minutes use per day if have medium in bedroom.

	CH	DE	ES	FI	GB	IL	IT	NL	SE
AGED 9-10									
Television	**+26**	**+30**	- 7	+26	**+27**	+ 8		**+28**	+18
on weekdays	+27	+24	-15	+25	+36	+ 8		+31	+18
at weekends	+25	+45	+12	+30	+ 3	+ 7	**n/a**	+22	+18
Games machine	N/A	+12	**+60**	n/a	+ 1	+25		+12	**+30**
PC	+24	+ 6	+ 4	**+56**	+11	**+48**		+ 8	+17
Music	+13	+29	n/a	+39	+14	+ 4		n/a	n/a
Books	+11	+ 8	n/a	+23	+12	- 37		+ 2	+11
AGED 12-13									
Television	**+25**	+27	**+23**	+6	**+39**	+21	+10	**+22**	+29
on weekdays	+23	+30	+25	+ 7	+44	+23	+ 8	+29	+30
at weekends	+30	+21	+18	+ 5	+25	+17	+16	+ 3	+27
Games machine	n/a	**+33**	+17	n/a	+15	+13	+ 1	- 5	+10
PC	+18	+23	+ 1	+34	+5	+22	+40	+10	**+52**
Music	+20	+ 4	n/a	**+56**	**+42**	**+54**	**+47**	n/a	n/a
Books	+12	+12	n/a	+32	+7	+40	n/a	+17	+28
AGED 15-16									
Television	+53	**+44**	+15	+12	+39	+20	+26	+10	+14
on weekdays	+62	+49	+19	+13	+39	+21	+31	+ 7	+18
at weekends	+30	+33	+ 6	+11	+38	+19	+12	+18	+ 3
Games machine	n/a	+13	+ 9	n/a	+32	+35	+ 6	+12	+18
PC	+12	+30	**+24**	+37	+ 8	+23	+34	+12	**+34**
Music	**+95**	+27	n/a	**+86**	**+88**	**+59**	**+48**	n/a	n/a
Books	+32	+23	n/a	+33	+21	+22	n/a	**+42**	**+36**

Note: Figures in bold indicate the largest differences, by age band for each country.

TABLE 8.6: Percentage of children and young people watching favorite television program and playing computer games alone, by whether or not have medium in bedroom.

	BE (vlg)	DE	ES	FI	GB	IL	IT	NL	SE
AGE 6-7									
Watching fav. prog. alone if have . . .									
TV set in bedroom	29	25	18	27	25	42		n/a	26
No TV set in bedroom	13	34	20	20	18	34			28
							n/a		
Playing alone if have . . .									
PC or games mach. in bedroom	*29*	41	23	55	n/a	54		64	60
no PC or games machine in bedroom	*39*	31	16	39		42		62	47
AGE 9-10									
Watching fav. prog. alone if have . . .									
TV set in bedroom	18	40	17	28	*18*	31		n/a	15
No TV set in bedroom	8	24	15	14	*5*	22			9
							n/a		
Playing alone if have . . .									
PC or games mach. in bedroom	27	44	*37*	48	49	47		63	20
no PC or games machine in bedroom	41	38	*26*	45	45	38		59	23
AGE 12-13									
Watching fav. prog. alone if have . . .									
TV set in bedroom	**23**	48	18	*39*	*31*	29	n/a	n/a	<u>28</u>
No TV set in bedroom	**6**	35	14	*22*	*16*	21			<u>13</u>
Playing alone if have . . .									
PC or games mach. in bedroom	**18**	*39*	25	*45*	46	41	63	65	19
no PC or games machine in bedroom	**41**	*44*	21	*50*	41	33	61	63	26
AGE 15-16									
Watching fav. prog. alone if have . . .									
TV set in bedroom	**17**	*43*	17	42	*38*	*36*	n/a	n/a	25
No TV set in bedroom	**8**	*26*	13	28	*18*	*20*			20
Playing alone if have . . .									
PC or games mach. in bedroom	41	52	24	51	48	41	56	67	23
no PC or games machine in bedroom	37	46	33	48	40	36	61	71	32

Note: Bold $p<0.001$; underline $p<0.01$; italics $p<0.05$

Table 8.7: Percentage of parents who say when children can/can't watch, and who chat about, television/ videos or use the PC (for games or other uses), by whether or not child has medium in bedroom (Base all aged 12-13 and 15-16).

	BE (vlg)	CH	DE	ES	FI	GB	IL	SE
TELEVISION/VIDEOS								
Mother says when can/can't watch								
TV in bedroom	61	**12**	22	52	13	27	33	19
TV elsewhere only	59	**40**	33	52	28	44	25	29
Father says when can/can't watch								
TV in bedroom	44	**8**	15	44	*7*	25	27	18
TV elsewhere only	50	**34**	28	49	*15*	40	21	21
Mother chats about watching								
TV in bedroom	93	41	57	45	66	47	*27*	35
TV elsewhere only	89	44	72	38	60	58	*39*	37
Father chats about watching								
TV in bedroom	75	35	48	40	52	37	23	34
TV elsewhere only	73	41	55	40	49	46	27	29
PC (FOR GAMES OR OTHER USE)								
Mother says when can/can't use PC								
PC in bedroom	46	13	11	**49**	*16*	21	25	*15*
PC elsewhere only	35	20	13	**26**	*9*	25	12	*9*
Father says when can/can't use PC								
PC in bedroom	*34*	**7**	12	**46**	11	17	18	16
PC elsewhere only	*21*	**22**	14	**27**	6	23	15	9
Mother chats about using PC .								
PC in bedroom	*53*	30	36	*26*	**37**	*29*	26	*23*
PC elsewhere only	*40*	17	28	*18*	**17**	*16*	16	*16*
Father chats about using PC								
PC in bedroom	61	**44**	34	*33*	45	35	30	35
PC elsewhere only	43	**26**	26	*23*	27	36	20	24

Note: Bold $p<0.001$; underline $p<0.01$; italics $p<0.05$

TABLE 8.8: Percentage children and young people saying there is enough for someone their age to do in the area where they live, by age.

	BE (vlg)	CH	DE	DK	ES	FI	FR	GB	NL	IL	SE
Age 6-7	49	88	n/a	n/a	n/a	84	78	n/a	86	69	n/a
Age 9-10	50	67	60	69	75	76	75	57	74	85	73
Age 2-13	50	76	59	61	90	43	63	30	52	74	50
Age 15-16	44	63	54	66	91	34	47	17	47	47	30

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Footnotes

[1]Throughout this chapter, such figures represent the average across countries, weighting each country equally, and do not represent an average of individuals (see Chapter 2).

[2]For example, in a report from the American Academy of Paediatrics (*Paediatrics, 1999),* the committee chair, Miriam Baron, wrote: 'bedrooms should be a sanctuary, a place where kids can reflect on what happened that day, where they can sit down and read a book' (*The Times,* August 5th 1999).

[3]The UK emerges as screen-oriented from the present research, as shown through the comparatively small numbers of children with their own books and large numbers with their own screen media (Chapter 3) as well as through the greater time spent watching television (Chapter 4). By contrast, we may identify Switzerland and the Netherlands as more print-oriented cultures, where more children own books and fewer own televisions or VCRs.

[4]Note that time spent at home outside the bedroom is not necessarily time spent with parents: for example, as the majority of Finnish mothers as well as fathers work, Finnish children spend a fair amount of time in the home alone, and so need not restrict themselves to their own rooms to secure privacy. Note also that asking about *the proportion* of waking time at home spent in one's own room does not tell us about the *number* of hours spent in the bedroom. Children in different countries spend differing proportions of their overall leisure time indoors as opposed to outdoors: thus apparently similar replies of 'about half of the time' etc. may represent very different number of hours or minutes. For example children in Nordic countries have more freedom to go out (see Chapter 12) while a third of British parents tell us that their children spend 'very little' or 'none' of their free time outside the family home or garden. This is likely to mean that in absolute terms, British children spend more time in their own room than Finnish or Swedish children, despite indications to the contrary in Table 1. Moreover the issue is further complicated by differences in school hours. In the United Kingdom and France even the youngest children are in school until after 3.00pm, while children in most other countries have afternoons free.

[5]German and Dutch boys are more likely than those in other countries to spend time mostly with one best friend, yet in Germany the highest percentage, and in the Netherlands the lowest, spend half or more of their waking time at home in the bedroom. This may partly be due to a practical limitation. The Netherlands has the greatest population density of any country in the sample and so Dutch homes have small rooms, making them possibly less attractive as leisure locations (Eurostat Yearbook 1997). Similarly, in Spain and Flanders, boys as well as girls are particularly likely to spend time with the family. Yet in Flanders above

average numbers of boys spend half or more of their leisure time at home in the bedroom, while in Spain relatively few do so before the age of 15.

[6]This claim was tested using Spearman correlations between total number of media, total number of screen media, and proportion of time spent in the bedroom, and was significant ($p < 0.05$) in most cases. However, as our four-point measure of time spent in the bedroom is broad-brush, this association can only be seen as indicative.

[7]The time measure used here is not minutes per day averaged over a week but minutes per day where the medium is used.

[8]Spearman correlations between time spent in the bedroom and personal ownership of these media, although positive and significant, are very small in all cases. The highest are correlations of 0.13 between time spent in the bedroom and owning a games machine for 9-10 year-old boys ($p<0.001$) and owning a PC with a CD-Rom drive for 15-16 year-old boys ($p<0.001$).

[9]80% of 15-16 year-olds with their own PC or TV-linked games machine usually play games with a friend compared with only 62 % of those who share access to such media ($p<0.001$).

[10]In the UK 20% of parents who think it a bad thing nevertheless provide their child with their own set (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

[11]The only exception is Switzerland, where fathers are more likely to restrict use of the PC if their child uses a family PC.

[12]Typical headlines read 'The rise of bedroom culture spells trouble for our children' (*The Independent, 22/3/99*) and 'The youngsters with no life beyond the bedroom' (*The Daily Mail, 19/3/99*).

[13]As our survey confirms, in every age group Finnish and Swedish children spend more days a week with friends and going out to clubs. Finnish children also spend up to twice as much time as British children simply 'playing or messing about' outdoors.

[14]Matthews (1998) confirms that only 33% of British 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 outside to being indoors, but the streets are perceived by half as fearful places.