



## Strategies of parental regulation in the media-rich home

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### Abstract

This paper investigates practices of domestic regulation of media within the family, focusing on parental attempts to manage children's access to and use of new media. Theoretically, the paper seeks to integrate the specific literature on domestic rules and regulation of media use with the broader literature on the rules and roles in social situations, arguing that parental strategies in relation to domestic media reveal both the enactment of and the negotiations over the typically informal and implicit rules and roles in family life. These issues are explored using data from two surveys: (1) the 'Young People, New Media' project surveyed 1300 children and their parents, examining the social, relational and contextual factors that shape the ways in which families develop rules for managing the introduction of the personal computer and the multiplication of television sets, among other new media changes, in the home; (2) the 'UK Children Go Online' project surveyed 1500 children and their parents, updating the picture by examining the introduction of the Internet into the family home. On the basis of these data, it is argued that despite the 'newness' of media as they successively arrive in the home, there are considerable consistencies over time in the responses of families, it being the slow-to-change relations between parents and children that shape patterns of domestic regulation and use.

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## 1. New media in the family home

A family eats supper in front of the television, laughing at shared jokes, arguing over who holds the remote control, comfortable on the sofa together. A teenage girl argues with her parents over which video she and her friends are allowed to watch at a forthcoming sleepover party, resulting in her slamming her bedroom door and turning on some loud music. A mother and father cannot decide where to put the new computer in their already-crowded home – does it go best in the living room or their son's bedroom, and what difference will this make to family life? As each new medium successively arrives in the home (radio, television, games machines, personal computer, Internet and mobile phone), it attracts widespread public attention, sometimes excited, sometimes anxious. This is expressed in the national media, in political and community fora and, the focus of this article, in the attitudes and practices in the home among family members.

If the personal computer and its associated innovations (multimedia, digitisation, interactivity, the Internet) is the radically new mass market screen medium of the late 20th/early 21st century, 40 years ago it was television which drew all the attention. In those early days of the mass child television audience, 'Television and the Child' (Himmelweit, Oppenheim, & Vince, 1958), and 'Television in the Lives of our Children' (Schramm, Lyle, & Parker, 1961) established our academic understanding of the place of the then new medium in the lives of children. When these seminal research studies were conducted, some 40% of the population had a television at home. The 'Young People, New Media' project (Livingstone & Bovill, 1999), originally conceived as a 40 year update on those studies, was initiated at a time when a similar proportion of UK households had acquired a personal computer and, subsequently, the 'UK Children Go Online' project (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) was initiated at a time when a similar proportion had acquired the Internet at home.

Diffusion and adoption of each of these media has been rapid. For television, in 1955 40% of UK homes had a set, rising to 80% by 1964, and by 1988 saturation was achieved with 98% having a set, the new trend by then being multiple sets, especially among households with children (Mackay, 1995), and multichannel sets (cable, satellite and most recently, digital television). For the home computer, some 34% gained domestic access by 1998, rising rapidly to 54% by 2002 (ONS, 2004). Just a few years on, the Internet is making an even more rapid entry into the household, not even being measured by the UK Government's General Household Survey before 2000, by which time it had quickly reached 33% of homes, and rising to 48% by the second half of 2003 (ONS, 2003).

Three questions arise in seeking to understand the domestic appropriation and consequences of new media. First, how do the practices and values of family life influence the use and consequences of media within the home (Bird & Jorgenson, 2003; Facer, Sutherland, Furlong, & Furlong, 2001; Mesch, 2003)? Research addressing this question tends to follow a diffusion of innovation model (Rogers, 1995) and/or an appropriation or domestication model (Miller, 1987; Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992). Combining these approaches, Livingstone (2002) argued that new forms of technology, including new information and communication media, spread through society and find a meaningful place within the home and family life as a function of both demographic factors (age, socioeconomic status, gender, etc.) and such other factors as family composition and dynamics, cultural expectations, lifestyle, and attitudes to new technologies.

Second, and conversely, how does the arrival of new media goods at home influence the practices and values of family life? Research addressing this question tends to follow a soft-determinist or media effects approach, asking about the range of ways, direct or indirect, in which the media affect social life (Calvert, 1999; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003; Singer & Singer, 2001). This second question is more frequently asked, sometimes with great anxiety, by policy makers and the public (Kunkel & Wilcox, 2001), for the new media are widely regarded not only as fitting into family life but also as impacting upon it, thereby fundamentally affecting childhood, learning and social relations.

Note, however, that as with many other social scientific fields, the direction of causality cannot be easily determined, and empirical work tends simply to demonstrate an association between domestic situations and media use. In these circumstances, the more cautious and contextually sensitive perspective, namely that pre-existing differences among households account for differences in media access and use, is to be preferred over the technological impact models of public and policy discourses. Nonetheless, it is also arguable that both approaches are too polarised, and that seeking the links between shaping and impact approaches could contribute to our understanding of the relation between media and family life.

Third, we can question how much change occurs at all, for even though technologies are constantly changing, in many respects children's lives are much as they were 10 or even 40 years ago. Much of the portrayal of children's lives in 'Television and the Child' is recognisable 40 years on. Even when significant changes are discernable, they may be only indirectly connected with new media, for many wider social changes have coincided with technological change, shaping the processes of diffusion and appropriation of new media. For example, the growing privatisation of leisure means that the outside world is seen by many parents as increasingly dangerous for children, resulting in a transformation of the private home to permit a media-saturated, individualised leisure culture. Children no longer walk to school or play in the streets as freely as they used to (Hill & Tisdall, 1997). Yet at the same time, as the media become increasingly commercial, globalised, and interactive, children are becoming global citizens, increasingly in touch with other places and people in the world (Wasko, Phillips, & Meehan, 2001). In the family too, larger changes are occurring. Comparing children's lives with those of their parents, the divorce rate has escalated, more women engage in paid work and the structure of families has diversified. In the UK, more children are better off but more too are poor. More young people go into further or higher education but entry into the workplace is delayed and less secure. The result is an extended adolescence (Hill & Tisdall, 1997; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998), with families adapted by facilitating more individualised pleasures as well as using the media to generate occasions for togetherness (Livingstone, 2002).

These social changes affect the regulation and use of new media at home, for they affect the nature of family relations – who is at home to oversee children's leisure, how long children are financially and socially dependent on their parents, what alternative forms of leisure lie outside the home, whether the generations share lifestyle tastes and preferences, and so on (Livingstone, 2002). For example, in seeking to explain changes in patterns of television use by the family from 1950 to 1990, Andreasen (1994) suggests that the key shift from family co-viewing towards individual viewing was facilitated both by technological developments (the purchase of multiple sets, the individualising effects of multi-channel cable television and of the remote control) and by the emergence of more democratic families with non-traditional views about parent–child power relations. Flichy

(2002) agrees, seeing families as ‘living together separately’, although he envisages some limits to this multiplication and individualisation of media in the home. For researchers, the breadth of social changes that contextualise media use in the family poses an empirical challenge that demands either longitudinal panel studies or, at the least, repeated cross-sectional studies.

## 2. Regulating the media, regulating the family

To understand the regulation of domestic media we need to begin with an account of the domestic or family situation. Goodman (1983: p. 408), adopting a family systems perspective, notes that ‘a family is not just a collection of individuals; it is greater than, and different from the sum of its members. . . . A systems approach views the family in the context of its social milieu and in the context of its life cycle’. A family is indeed more than the sum of its members, an account of the social roles and relationships often proving more illuminating than an aggregate account of the activities of individual family members. In his approach to social relationship and social situations, Argyle (1988: p. 244) states that ‘relationships can be analysed in terms of their main components: activities, sources of satisfaction, rules, skills required, concepts and beliefs, and power’. This represents a more complex approach than is implied by the lay use of the term ‘household’ or ‘family’ commonplace in media consumption studies. So, how does the family manage the arrival of new technologies, mediating the processes of diffusion and appropriation? Such a question directs to us to attend to the dilemmas of parenting, the project of bringing up children in accordance with parental aspirations, values, interest, and skills. In meeting this challenge, ‘a great part of the energy used in everyday life is spent in an attempt to put ideology into practice’ (Varenne, 1996: p. 431). As Seiter (1999) observes of parents’ considerable anxieties in relation to their children’s television viewing, these reflect their daily struggles with normative expectations of ‘the good parent’ and ‘the good child’ (see also Oswell, 1999, on how such expectations are enacted in relation to Internet use).

One link between the cultural level of beliefs, values and anxieties and the domestic level of daily practices can be found in the symbolic, social and practical negotiation of parenting (and corresponding child-related) rules and roles. Argyle and Henderson (1985) stress that a rule is a culturally shared, prescriptive expectation regarding the correct way of acting, this in turn resting on a shared belief about the importance of such action. Relationships are, therefore, normative; they instantiate and reproduce cultural values. They are also constitutive of social situations. The rules and roles enacted in social situations serve to reproduce those situations, perpetuating particular, culturally shared beliefs and values, reducing ambiguity and uncertainty by permitting predictions regarding the behaviour of oneself and others, and so increasing the chance of avoiding certain problems and achieving one’s goals. Argyle likens relationships to games, thus:

‘In some ways relationships are like games. In order to understand or play a game, one needs to know the *goals* which are being pursued. . . and the *rules* which must be followed to do so. . . . Furthermore, the rules form a system, so that if one rule is changed it is often found that others need to be changed too. Rules define *roles* which players, or people in relationships, should perform. Games have special moves which are allowed, relationships have activities – both can be regarded as steps towards the goals. *Skills* are needed for both.’ (Argyle, 1992: p. 40).

In seeking to understand how, in a practical daily manner, parents and children manage the media in their homes, this paper takes the game analogy seriously, examining some of the skills, rules, roles and goals being applied in family situations. The focus is on television, the computer and the Internet, although these will be contextualised more broadly in relation to other media and non media activities in the home. By focusing on selected aspects of these mediated social situations in UK homes, the aim is to contribute towards an understanding of the ways in which media are regulated at home and, at the same time, an understanding of the ways in which parent–child relationships are themselves reproduced or renegotiated.

### 3. Methods and data collection

#### 3.1. *A programme of research*

As part of a longer programme of research on children and young people's uses of new media at the London School of Economics, two related projects have been designed and conducted, as outlined below. By bringing their findings together in this article, a longer perspective on children's and parents' perceptions and uses of different media over time becomes possible, thereby triangulating two data sources on the topic of domestic regulation of new media. Each of these projects combined a theoretical commitment to contextualisation with a multi-method design which triangulated qualitative and quantitative data sources. Each began with a variety of qualitative methods (mainly group and individual interviews), followed by a national survey, administered in homes using face-to-face, computer-assisted personal interviewing with children plus written self-completion questionnaires to their parents. The sampling procedure used was random location sampling, in which Government census enumeration districts (each of 150 households) are randomly selected across the country, with gender and age quotas sets for sampling within each district. On average, the interviews lasted forty minutes. Informed consent was obtained from both parents and children participating in the research. Social grade was measured using the standard UK market researchers' categories of A (professional/higher managerial), B (lower managerial), C1 (white collar), C2 (blue collar), D (semi-skilled) and E (unskilled).

#### 3.2. *The 'Young People, New Media' Project (YPM)*

Conducted between 1995 and 1999, this project surveyed 1303 children and young people aged 6–17 years old across the UK in spring 1997, together with 978 of their parents (Livingstone, 2002; Livingstone & Bovill, 1999). The survey asked a broad range of questions concerning all media in the home, leisure time use, including time spent on each medium, media-related attitudes and tastes, media uses and gratifications, social contexts of media use, parental guidance in media use, plus questions on family communication, child's personality and values. The achieved sample closely matched the social grade population profile for UK households with children, although in the parent survey, 79% of the questionnaires were completed by mothers and only 21% by fathers.

#### 3.3. *The 'UK Children Go Online' Project (UKCGO)*

Conducted between 2003 and 2005, this project surveyed 1511 children and young people aged 9–19 year olds across the UK in spring 2004, together with 906 parents of

the 9–17 year olds (Livingstone & Bober, 2003, 2004). The survey asked a variety of detailed questions focused on young people's Internet access and use in order to ask how the Internet may be transforming – or may itself be shaped by – family life, peer networks and learning, formal and informal. Questions focussed on two areas of risk and two areas of opportunity: access, inequalities and the digital divide; undesirable forms of content and contact; education, informal learning and literacy; communication, identity and participation. The achieved sample closely matched the social grade population profile for UK households with children, although as before, more mothers (72%) than fathers (26%) completed the survey. Reported percentages have been weighted in accordance with population statistics.

#### 4. Providing media at home

'Defining the social situation' of media use at home is achieved by families in at least two ways: materially, through decisions about the purchase and location of media goods; and symbolically, through the establishment of rules and practices regarding the use of these goods. Are these decisions simply a matter of finances, or of fashion, or do more social psychological factors to do with family rules and roles matter? Given the decisions that are made, what implications might these have in turn for the conduct of family life?

Unlike in the early days of television, when the computer is first acquired at home it has no obvious location. Hence it is to be found in living rooms, dining rooms, studies, bedrooms and even hallways; moreover, it tends to be moved around the home as families try a variety of strategies for domesticating this machine originally developed for the workplace. A similar flexibility now exists as televisions multiply – again, families face decisions about which rooms, and which people, should or should not have a television.

The YPNM project asked first about media in the home (see Table 1). Among the different forms of media, it seems that television, including cable/satellite channels, is the most equitable, access being unaffected by household or child demographic variables. Access to other media in the household varies: most are more available in middle class households, with the notable exception of the TV-linked games machine. The child's age matters, with a shift from books to hi-fi and personal stereos as children grow into

Table 1  
Percentage of children with media in the home, by demographics ( $N = 1287$ )

	All	Gender		Age				Soc. grade	
		Boy	Girl	6–8	9–11	12–14	15–17	ABC1	C2DE
Television	100								
Hi-fi	96			93	93	98	98		
Video recorder	96							98	94
Telephone	93							98	89
Books (not school)	87			92	88	87	83	94	82
Personal stereo	83			66	80	90	92	86	80
TV-games machine	67	78	56	65	70	72	61	61	72
Computer	53	50	56					68	40
Gameboy	42			35	45	48	38	47	39
Cable/satellite	42								

Note: YPNM children's survey (1997). Subgroup comparisons reported in this table are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .

their teens, although the games machine (TV-linked and handheld) peak in early teens. Gender also matters for both computer and TV-linked games machine.

The UKCGO project adds complementary findings for digital television, the mobile phone and the Internet, as well as updating adoption figures for the computer and TV-linked games machine (see Table 2). While the specific technologies that count as ‘new’ have changed in just seven years, the socioeconomic differences are sustained. Computers are now to be found in most homes with children, but still more middle class households. The same holds for access to the Internet, though interestingly not the mobile phone, both these being new media barely to be found in UK homes just a few years ago. TV-linked games machines too have become more commonplace, though access is no longer stratified (presumably having reached saturation), and digital television has spread rapidly, this latter showing more modest differences by class. Importantly, gender no longer appears to differentiate among owners of the computer, though gender differences remain for the TV-linked games machine (more boys) and now exist for the mobile phone (more girls). Lastly, age matters still, though age patterns tend to be distinctive to each medium: access to the computer, the Internet and, as before, the TV-linked games machine peak in early teens, while mobile phone ownership increases with age.

Children do not, however, simply have access to one or more media; rather they now live in multi-media environments with a structured range of media available. Drawing on the YPNM data for its range of media ownership measured, and using Ward’s method of clustering, a more complex picture emerges, comprising three main types of home as follows:

*‘Media-rich’ homes.* Nearly half of the sample (45%) was classified as ‘media-rich’, for these have a greater than average likelihood of owning books, personal computer, Internet access, telephone, VCR, teletext, cable or satellite television, TV-linked games machine, hi-fi system, camcorder, mobile phone, Gameboy and personal stereo. Since they contain a wider range of old and new media than the ‘average’ household, children in these homes have a greater variety of media choices.

*‘Traditional’ homes.* In approximately one quarter of the sample (26%), ownership of media is average for all media except for the ‘newest’, of which they have comparatively few (namely the computer, Internet, TV-linked games machines, personal stereo, camcorder, mobile phone and Gameboy). These households combine television, music and books, a familiar media mix long available to children.

*‘Media-poor’ homes.* In over one quarter of the sample (29%), each medium was less likely to be present than in the average home. Such a comparative lack of media is not

Table 2  
Percentage of children with media in the home, by demographics ( $N = 1511$ )

	All	Gender		Age				Soc. grade	
		Boy	Girl	9–11	12–15	16–17	18–19	ABC1	C2DE
Computer	87			85	89	90	82	95	78
Digital television	62							65	58
TV-linked games machine	82	91	73	85	88	77	70		
Mobile phone	81	77	84	53	88	93	94		
Internet access	74			70	74	83	69	87	60

Note: UKCGO children’s survey (2004). Internet access includes access via computer, digital television or games console. Subgroup comparisons reported in this table are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .



confined to new media, for these homes are notably less likely to contain books, radios and a telephone as well as newer or more expensive media such as a computer, games machine, hi-fi, etc. Only for television and the VCR does their media ownership approach the average.

This suggests that in general, a computer is bought by those who have already acquired many other media goods, it thereby adding to an already-rich media environment for which a range of attitudes, values and practices will have been already developed. As Bolter and Grusin (1999) argue, not only do new media add to the array of already-present media in the home, but also a process of ‘remediation’ occurs in which the meanings and practices associated with already-familiar media are altered by the arrival of the new medium. For ‘media-rich’ households especially, then, research should continue to examine the uses of television and other ‘older’ media as well as those of newer media, for these are repeatedly repositioned within the shifting spatial and temporal arrangements of family life.

What leads some parents to construct a ‘media-rich’ home? Although the youngest group (6–8 years) is most likely to live in a ‘traditional’ home (63%) while older teens (15–17 years) are most likely to live in a ‘media-rich’ home (57%), the key factor affecting the domestic media environment is the socio-economic status of the household rather than demographics of an individual child (for there are often other children who also influence the domestic media environment).

Table 3 shows that most middle class parents provide a ‘media-rich’ home for their children, though some favour a ‘traditional’ home, while working class parents divide between ‘media-rich’ and ‘media-poor’, with ‘traditional’ homes as the least favoured. The figures for parents divided by their terminal age of education show a similar pattern, with less educated parents favouring ‘media-rich’ homes. For income, the pattern alters, with poorer parents being least likely to provide ‘media-rich’ homes. In other words, while income is straightforwardly associated with media provision (the richer the parent(s), the more ‘media-rich’ the home), there is a tendency for education to work in a different fashion: less educated parents favour media-rich homes, while some more educated parents favour ‘traditional’ homes. Since education and income are both correlated with social grade, this helps to explain the lack of a straightforward relation between social grade and media at home. Nonetheless, these findings are consistent with analyses of the digital divide in relation to the Internet particularly (Warschauer, 2003) insofar as persistent differences in provision of Internet access by social class suggest not only differences in financial, spatial, expertise resources (Selwyn, 2003) but also that for middle class children more

Table 3  
Type of media environment in the home, by parental demographics

Col. %	Social grade		Terminal age of education		Household income p.a.	
	ABC1	C2DE	Higher (>17 years)	Lower (<17 years)	Higher (>£14,500)	Lower (<£14,500)
Media-rich	58	35	57	39	57	31
Traditional	24	27	24	26	23	33
Media-poor	17	38	18	35	19	37
<i>N</i>	531	684	492	373	501	346

Note: YPNM children’s and parents’ survey (1997). Subgroup comparisons are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .



than working class children, the Internet is being incorporated into an already media-rich home and, hence, a complex communication environment.

The complicating role of education suggests that values and aspirations matter here, not merely the financial resources of the household (Turow & Nir, 2000). How then do such social psychological factors make a difference? Table 4 shows that parental attitudes to media are associated with provision within their home, though it cannot be determined here whether these attitudes influence, or are influenced by, the type of media provision. Specifically, in both 'media-rich' and 'media-poor' homes, parents are more comfortable themselves using a computer and think it more important for children to use computers than 'traditional' parents; 'media-poor' parents are particularly keen for their child to know about computers. 'Media-rich' parents, who are both most experienced and most likely to have a computer are the least negative about them, while 'traditional' and 'media-poor' parents are more likely to think that computers stop people thinking for themselves.

Similarly, in relation to attitudes to television, 'media-rich' and 'media-poor' parents share some characteristics which distinguish them from 'traditional' parents: they are more likely to think their child media-literate and old enough to decide themselves what to watch. 'Traditional' parents are distinctive for thinking (or fearing) that their children should be told what to watch and for thinking (or fearing) that their child wants to buy what they see on television. 'Media-poor' parents, by contrast, are most likely to favour putting a set in their child's bedroom.

Taken together, the above findings suggest that the construction of a 'traditional' household reflects less the financial resources of the parents and more their attitudes towards the media. In other words, for those with sufficient financial resources, the construction of a 'media-rich' or a 'traditional' home is a matter of choice. Parents in 'traditional' homes generally feel that television provides children with good programmes, provided viewing is appropriately controlled, but they are least likely to describe themselves as comfortable using computers. In consequence, although the comparative youth of these children is also a factor, these households are the least likely to provide 'media-rich' bedrooms for their children, even though 51% of them come from the higher income group. In 'media-poor' homes, by contrast, financial restrictions dictate provision. That maintaining

Table 4  
Media-related attitudes by media environment in the home (%) ( $N = 978$ )

	Media-rich	Traditional	Media-poor
<i>Parental attitudes to computers</i>			
Comfortable using computers	26	16	23
Think computers stop people thinking for themselves	18	25	30
Think more important for young people than parents	45	35	42
Keen for child to know about computers	27	23	34
<i>Parental attitudes to television</i>			
Think child can distinguish TV/real people	43	27	47
Think child too old to tell what they can watch	20	7	22
Think child often wants to buy things seen on TV	13	24	20
Think TV in child's bedroom mainly a bad thing	36	36	17
Satisfied with what is available for child to view	62	75	70

Note: YPNM parents' survey (1997). All comparisons of attitudes by type of home are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .

a ‘media-poor’ home is rarely a matter of preference is supported by the finding that while these parents tend to be unable to provide access to a computer for their children, they are particularly keen for their children to know about computers.

If we turn to children’s accounts of media-related behaviours in their household (see Table 5), we find a clear link between attitudes and behaviours. Most notably, ‘media-poor’ households are the most television-oriented, children following their parents’ example in watching comparatively more television. In ‘media-rich’ households, children apportion their leisure time differently, shifting time spent from television to the computer; although we did not ask parents about the time they spend on the computer, since their television viewing is the lowest, it is possible that they too have time-shifted to the computer, their children thus following their example. ‘Traditional’ households are again somewhat anomalous, for the parents watch a substantial amount of television, but their children watch the least, indeed they make least use of media overall. The explanation probably lies in a combination of factors: these children tend to be younger than in the other households; and their parents tend to be most critical of or concerned about their child’s viewing habits.

One of the key decisions that faces parents is whether to provide a television, and more recently a personal computer and Internet access, for their children’s personal use in their bedroom. While the majority of children have a television in their bedroom (63%), the YPNM survey showed that this is more common in lower (71%) than higher (54%) social grade households (see Table 6). Faced with the subsequent decision about locating the computer, social grade works similarly. Hence, the YPNM survey found that although a considerably higher percentage of higher (68%) than lower (40%) social grade households contain a computer, the percentages of children who have a computer in their bedroom are similar (12% ABC1, 13% C2DE). This is because in lower social grade households, a child is more likely to be given the computer for their personal, rather than communal, use – again, the location reflects underlying decisions about values. Similarly, children in ‘media-poor’ households are more likely to have a computer in the bedroom (12%) than children in ‘traditional’ homes (9%), for in the latter, parents’ attitudes to computers are more negative. Indeed, ‘media-poor’ children are almost as likely to have one as children in ‘media-rich’ households (15%).

Turning to the newer decision facing parents, namely whether to locate Internet access in the child’s bedroom or elsewhere in the home, the UKCGO survey (see Table 6) found that although middle class households are more likely to have Internet access (86% ABC1,

Table 5  
Media-related behaviours by media environment in the home (%)

	Media-rich	Traditional	Media-poor
TV usually on when get home from school	31	36	42
Average minutes/day parent views TV	137	148	154
Average minutes/day that the child . . .			
Views television	143	128	163
Listens to music	76	42	71
Uses computer at home	22	5	10
Spends on media overall	319	249	319

Note: YPNM children’s survey (1997). All comparisons of behaviour by type of home are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 6

Location of television, computer and Internet at home by social grade (%)

	ALL	ABC1	C2DE
Location of television at home ( <i>YPNM children's survey, N = 1303</i> )			
Child's room	63	54	71
Elsewhere in house only	37	46	29
No access at home	0	0	0
Location of computer at home ( <i>YPNM children's survey, N = 1303</i> )			
Child's room	12	12	13
Elsewhere in house only	41	56	27
No access at home	47	32	60
Location of Internet at home ( <i>UKCGO children's survey, N = 1511</i> )			
Child's room	19	21	16
Elsewhere in house only	54	65	43
No access at home	27	14	41

59% C2DE), working class parents are disproportionately likely to locate Internet access in the child's bedroom, resulting in a modest gap only in bedroom access (21% ABC1, 16% C2DE). Thus, although the cultural perception of having a television, a computer or Internet access in a child's bedroom is different, the parental motives – leading higher grade families to favour communal media and lower social grade families to favour personalised media – appear to be similar.

Does having personal access to a medium affect the amount of time spent with it? Comparing time spent with media by children who have access in their bedrooms or only elsewhere in the house, it appears that those who own things personally systematically report using them more (see Table 7), ranging from one third as much again for television to over three times as much for music. Since demographic factors also influence media provision in the bedroom, a series of multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. Depending on the medium, it was found that having the medium for one's personal use in the bedroom explained an additional 1–4% of the variance in time spent with that medium, after controlling for child (age, gender) and household (income, parental education) variables.

Having found that access to a computer increases children's total 'screen time', apparently at the expense of other social activities and sports, Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Greenfield, and Gross (2000) identified a combination of negative and positive effects of computer access, going some way to justify parental anxieties in relation to the domestic

Table 7

Time spent on media per day, by access in bedroom (minutes)

	Have in bedroom and elsewhere at home	Have elsewhere at home only
Television	159	122
Video	45	28
TV-games machine	34	15
Computer	48	27
Radio or hi-fi	73	22
Books	17	10

Note: YPNM children's survey (1997). Row comparisons are all significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .

regulation of new media. Furthermore, the risks of online communication are becoming increasingly clear (Turow & Ribak, 2003; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003; Livingstone & Bober, *in press*). Hence neither a simple ban nor a straightforward license to use the computer or Internet, especially if privately located, is sufficient. Rather, the challenge for parents is to find ways of maximising benefits while minimising risks, and this for a medium in which they consider themselves often less expert than their children. This comparative lack of expertise or skill applies even more to the Internet than to previous media (Livingstone & Bober, 2003).

These patterns challenge simple economic accounts of children's domestic media environments, revealing instead the importance of family attitudes and values (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001). In provisioning children's bedrooms, household income makes less difference than in overall provisioning of the home; it is not simply the more affluent who have more. Indeed, to the extent that income is influential, it works in the opposite direction: for screen entertainment media, children in poorer homes are more likely to have both television and games computers. Parental education is also important: children of more educated parents are less likely to have their own television and video in their bedroom, but are more likely to have their own books (Livingstone & Bovill, 1999). These decisions have consequences for the amounts of time children spend with the media they own personally. They also have consequences, as explored below, for the ways in which parents can regulate or mediate their children's media use.

## **5. Regulating media at home**

As noted earlier, 'defining the social situation' in relation to media at home is achieved not only materially, through the purchase and location of media, but also symbolically, through rules and practices for media use. Surveys of parental regulation of children's media can give the impression of high levels of concern and so suggest considerable parental efforts towards media regulation. However, if media concerns are put in the context of a range of other parental anxieties, concerns about the media lag behind the availability of drugs, the child's job prospects, the child being a victim of crime and educational standards in schools (see Table 8). As the YPNM survey shows, for boys and girls equally, parents grow increasingly concerned about drugs and job prospects, and decreasingly concerned about educational standards in schools, as children become older.

Values are next most important to parents, though these are, presumably, linked to concerns about media. In relation to the media, television content gives rise to greater concern than either computer games or videos. For younger children, parents worry about television content (especially for daughters), road safety and about having enough time to spend with their child (and, for some, the availability of childcare). For older children, they worry about social facilities outside the home (and, to a minor degree, the content of videos). Interestingly, although social grade makes a difference in terms of media provision within the home, generally parental concerns for their children are not differentiated by social grade.

Nor are the media top of the list when it comes to causes of family friction (see Table 9). Asked to say which subjects regularly cause arguments with their children, parents name helping in the house almost twice as often as they name watching television, playing computer games or using the telephone. Both homework and going to bed are also more contentious than any media use. Watching television and using the telephone, however,

Table 8

Parents (%) choosing as one of three things giving most cause for concern for their own child by demographics ( $N = 978$ )

	All	Gender		Age				Social grade	
		Boy	Girl	6–8	9–11	12–14	15–17	ABC1	C2DE
Availability of illegal drugs	51			43	54	54	54		
Child's job prospects	47			35	36	52	66	43	50
Child being victim of crime	39								
Educational standards	38			46	39	37	30		
Child growing up with decent values	34								
Violence, sex, bad language on TV	24	19	29	26	29	21	19		
Safety on the roads	21			30	25	20	9		
Availability of social facilities	16			11	13	20	21	13	19
Having time to spend with child	13			17	15	15	6		
Addictive computer games	6								
Violence, sex, bad language on videos	6			3	4	8	7		
Availability of childcare facilities	5			8	7	4	1		

Note: YPNM parents' survey (1997). Subgroup comparisons reported in this table are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 9

Parents (%) saying what regularly causes arguments with children by demographics ( $N = 978$ )

	All	Gender		Age				Social grade			
		Boy	Girl	6–8	9–11	12–14	15–16	AB	C1	C2	DE
Housework	59			44	65	68	59				
Homework	49	57	40	39	49	59	47				
Bedtime	48			69	58	43	19				
Television	34			44	31	31	16				
Going out	32							27	25	30	43
Money	31							18	23	32	46
Phone	30	23	36	17	23	35	45	20	25	32	39
Comp. games	15	23	7	19	16	17	9	10	14	14	21
Videos	14	17	11	22	14	10	8	9	15	12	18
Music	8			5	7	7	15	7	7	6	12

Note: YPNM parents' survey (1997). Subgroup comparisons reported in this table are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .

are on a par with going out and money as a source of family disputes although only around half that number of families quarrel about watching videos, playing computer games and even fewer about listening to music.

While anxieties vary little by social grade, arguments are strongly stratified. Apart from the things which occasion conflict in most households, poorer families report far greater amounts of conflict between parents and child than do wealthier families. Some, but not all, of these conflicts may be attributed to the costs of children's leisure activities. This may explain why poorer children are more likely to have a television in their bedroom – in these households, many leisure activities are expensive and so may give rise to conflict. Whereas 43% of ABC1 parents in the YPNM survey said they considered having a television in the child's bedroom 'mainly a bad thing', and only 19% considered it 'mainly a good thing, in C2DE homes this trend is reversed, for 24% consider it a good thing and

20% a bad thing. The causes of arguments also change as children get older: watching television or videos and playing computer games cause arguments most often when the children are young, while arguments about use of the telephone and playing music increase as children grow older. Gender also matters: parents argue more with boys about homework and computer games, more with girls about the telephone.

As Van Rompaey, Roe, and Struys (2002) observe, conflicts over domestic media use are now being extended to Internet access and use at home, this becoming a major issue in family discussions and, significantly, a focus of family conflicts. In the UKCGO survey, 19% of parents though only 9% of children confirmed that they argued about the Internet (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). For television, and perhaps also for the Internet, these conflicts may be rooted in lay beliefs about media effects. This was explored in relation to the effects of television on children in the YPNM survey, with parents in lower social grade homes being more likely to consider that television has had harmful effects on their child (see Table 10). There is also a tendency to see daughters as more upset by television and boys as more likely to imitate violence, though this is balanced by beliefs in positive effects.

Other differences between families are rooted in differing perceptions and experience of computers. The YPNM survey (see Table 11) shows that parents, especially middle class parents, are broadly positive about computers, though they are more enthusiastic for their children than for themselves. These percentages indicate greater parental concern compared with their children: only 64% of the children surveyed think it is more important for children to understand computers than for their parents and only 55% think you get left behind if you do not know about computers. On the other hand, children are much more likely to consider computers exciting (81%). Notably, the parents of daughters are less likely than the parents of sons (37% strongly agree compared with 46%) to say that they think it more important for children to know about computers than for parents, suggesting that some gender differences in society stem from parental beliefs.

Table 10  
Parents' (%) beliefs that television has affected their child, by demographics ( $N = 950$ )

	All	Gender		Social grade	
		Boy	Girl	ABC1	C2DE
Positive effects: parent thinks their child...					
Can distinguish TV/real people	94				
Learns a lot from television	57	59	55		
Has been encouraged to read some good books	26	24	28		
Negative effects: parent thinks their child...					
Often wants to buy things has seen on TV	61			55	66
Would read more if watched less	49				
Is often upset by violence on the news	32	25	39	30	34
Is encouraged to be lazy by watching TV	32				
Is often upset by fictional violence on TV	22	16	28		
Has been made to grow up too quickly	16				
Is made to think violence part of daily life	15				
Has copied violent behaviour seen on TV	11	19	3	8	14

Note: YPNM parents' survey (1997). Subgroup comparisons reported in this table are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 11  
Parents' attitudes to computers, by social grade ( $N = 950$ ) (% agreement)

	ALL	ABC1	C2DE
More important for children than parents to know about computer	95	97	94
Keen for child to know about computers	79	76	83
People get left behind if don't know about computers	73		
School should teach child more about computers	53		
Computers are exciting	51		
Computers stop people thinking for themselves	23	16	29

Note: YPNM parents' survey (1997). Subgroup comparisons reported in this table are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .

Children are more confident than their parents in using a computer, this impacting on the parental skills in managing this new medium. Among children, 92% claim to feel very or fairly comfortable using a computer, compared with 69% of their parents. Among parents, but not among children, there are significant differences in confidence: 21% ABC1 parents versus 15% C2DE parents consider themselves very comfortable using a computer. Among children, the differences are due to gender and age, with boys and younger children claiming significantly greater levels of ease using a computer.

Table 12 extends this examination of attitudes among parents, focusing on a wide range of attitudes towards the Internet from the UKCGO survey. Parents appear particularly ambivalent about this latest medium, holding both positive attitudes (e.g. the Internet helps children with school work and to discover new things) and negative attitudes (e.g. the Internet risks children's personal information and exposes them to pornographic or violent images). As for computers in the YPNM survey, middle class parents are rather more positive, although the differences are modest and some ambivalence is apparent, suggesting that the legacy of socio-economic advantage is still visible despite the prevailing shared discourses that define the opportunities and the dangers posed for children by

Table 12  
Parents' attitudes to the Internet, by social grade ( $N = 906$ )

	ALL	ABC1	C2DE
I am concerned that children might see sexually explicit images on the Internet	4.6		
Having the Internet at home helps children with school work/college	4.5	4.6	4.4
It's a risk that children may give out personal or private information online	4.5	4.6	4.5
Online, children discover interesting, useful things they did not know before	4.3	4.3	4.3
I am concerned that children might see violent images on the Internet	4.1		
Spending too much time online interferes with schoolwork/worthwhile activities	3.9	3.8	3.9
Going online a lot leads children to become isolated from other people	3.6	3.7	3.6
Children who do not have/use the Internet are at a disadvantage	3.5	3.7	3.2
The Internet can help children learn about diversity and tolerance	3.4		
The Internet can help children participate in the community	3.1		
People worry too much that adults will take advantage of children on the Internet	3.1	2.8	3.4
It's safe for children to spend time on the Internet	3.0	3.1	2.9
Using the Internet undermines the values and beliefs that parents want their children to have	2.8		
I am optimistic that the Internet can help solve society's problems	2.4		

Note: UKCGO parents' survey (2004). Average scores, where 1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly. Subgroup comparisons reported in this table are significant at least at  $p < 0.05$ .



the Internet. Notably, parental ambivalence makes the domestic regulation of the medium difficult, for parents apparently wish both to facilitate and to restrict their children's use of the Internet.

How, then, do these variations in attitudes and values translate into the rules by which parents attempt to manage media use in the home? Insofar as 'rules can be regarded as solutions to common problems' (Argyle, 1988: p. 228), rules for regulating domestic media are, in this sense, typical of family rules. We have seen some of the beliefs parents hold regarding the problems that the media may pose. How far do parents attempt to establish rules to resolve these problems?

Research on parental regulation or mediation of children and young people's media use (Bulck & Bergh, 2000; Bybee, Robinson, & Turow, 1982; Livingstone, 2002) finds that parents regulate media use in a number of ways. They may try to influence their child's reactions through discussion (often labelled 'evaluative guidance') or by simply sharing media time with the child (labelled 'unfocused guidance'). More straightforwardly they may seek to control access to media and hence time spent on that activity (labelled 'restrictive guidance'). To place the regulation of media use in context, we also asked about parents' strategies to manage the child's going out, for as we have seen, this is more likely to concern parents than media use.

Table 13 shows that mothers and fathers tell a similar story about their regulatory activities, although mothers are more likely to restrict their child's use of the telephone. Children, however, tend to view their mothers as generally more restrictive, perhaps because they are more often present in the home, and also because domestic regulation is commonly perceived as part of the maternal role. There are some social grade differences in domestic regulation: ABC1 parents are more likely than C2DE parents to have rules about whether the child can go out (81% versus 74%,  $p < 0.05$ ) or watch television and videos (83% versus 67%,  $p < 0.05$ ). In a related survey of a different sample of 830 parents (Livingstone & Bovill, 1999), parents in the lowest social grade were found to be least likely to restrict the amount of a child's viewing (AB, 67%: C1, 62%: C2, 66%: DE, 51%,  $p < 0.05$ ) or to talk about a programme while viewing with their child (AB, 88%: C1, 82%: C2, 84%: DE, 76%,  $p < 0.05$ ). Parents in the higher social grades were more likely to encourage the viewing of specific programmes (AB, 77%: C1, 76%: C2, 69%: DE, 65%,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 13

Rules specifying when children can or cannot do certain activities, as reported by parents and children

	Father says he...	Mother says she...	Child says father...	Child says mother...
... Tells child when they can/can't ...				
Go out	77	77	47	60
Make telephone calls	62	70	42	54
Watch TV/videos	73	74	35	41
Use/play on a computer	48	51	27	31
Listen to music	27	24	17	20
Read books	13	12	8	8
None of the above	5	5	23	13

Note: YPNM parents' and children's survey (1997). *N*'s vary by row (c. 970 for parents and c. 1096 for children as only those with access to the relevant medium are included).

Both surveys show that parental regulation and mediation of children's media use declines as children become older: after all, 'power relations between parents and their children keep changing as the children grow up' (Argyle, 1988: p. 236); as Table 9 showed, adolescents still conflict with their parents, but less over the media and more about money, responsibility and independence.

What is most striking, however, in Table 13 is the discrepancy between parents' and children's accounts of the overall level of restrictions: three quarters of parents but less than half of children say that there are rules for when children can watch television or make phone calls, and similarly half of parents but less than a third of children state that there are rules for when they can use the computer. Since some parents claim to regulate media use while their children appear unaware of this, it would seem either that parents overclaim, being less effective than they would hope, or that children underclaim, being less independent than they would hope. Baxter (1987) shows that mismanaging or miscommunicating within relationships is itself a source of conflict: here then is one of the sources of conflict occasioned by media that we have noted earlier. Bulck and Bergh (2000) found that both restrictive and evaluative guidance increase levels of parent–child conflict (and, indeed, conflict between parents and conflict between siblings), but that unfocused guidance reduces parent–child conflict. In the UKCGO survey, a similar level of discrepancy was found for some of the specific rules for domestic Internet use (Livingstone & Bober, 2004): for example, 77% of parents but only 54% of children say their child is/they are not allowed to buy anything online, and 62% of parents but only 40% of children say their child is/they are not allowed to chat online. And these discrepancies occur in relation to a range of specific uses of the Internet. However, in terms of general rules of use we found much less discrepancy: 42% of the children say that they have to follow rules about for how long and 35% about when they can go online, and parents are broadly in agreement, with 43% claiming to have set up rules for how much time their child can spend on the Internet.

Shifting from restrictive to more informal forms of parental mediation, we also asked parents which activities they "sometimes chatted about" with their child. In the YPNM survey, both fathers (71%) and mothers (77%) named watching television or videos most often as a subject of conversation. However, reading books and listening to music (activities which children are only rarely told when they can or cannot do) are also mentioned as subjects of conversation by the majority of parents (65% of mothers compared with 55% of fathers). Half of parents talk about music (54% of fathers and 53% of mothers) while more fathers than mothers talk about computers (53% compared with 45% of mothers). When asked, children report a similar pattern, claiming that significantly more mothers chat about reading and fathers about computers. In the UKCGO survey, 81% of parents but only 25% of children say that their parents ask what the child is doing online, and fewer than one third (as reported by 32% of parents and 31% of children) sit with the child while they go online (Livingstone & Bober, 2004, *in press*).

## **6. Consequences of domestic regulation of media use**

The two surveys reported here have provided complementary sources of data on the practices of domestic regulation of new media in the family. The 'Young People, New Media' project sketched a broad canvas, encompassing the range of old and new media in homes, and setting the use of these media in the context of a wide variety of contextual

factors, from children's friendship networks and relations with their parents to their bedtime, homework commitments, hobbies and interests. In short, it sought to locate new media in the context of older media, media in the context of leisure, and leisure in the context of family dynamics. The 'UK Children Go Online' project provided a more focussed examination of the very-recent arrival of the Internet in UK family homes, and so it updated the YPNM survey in certain but not all particulars. The focus in that project was on a detailed analysis of the risks and opportunities introduced by the Internet in order to understand the balance between them. As outlined in the theoretical introduction, the present paper has taken as its framework the successive arrival of particular media in the home – the television, the personal computer, the multiplication of television sets, the Internet. Each has occasioned considerable discussion and negotiation in both public and private fora. Drawing on the breadth of the YPNM survey, the paper has explored the domestic and family contexts of new media use, looking across the diverse media in the home to classify domestic media cultures (media rich, media poor, traditional) in order to identify the shaping factors at work in, as well as the consequences, of domestic regulatory practices. The narrower contribution of the UKCGO survey permitted an update in relation to the Internet, identifying some substantial continuities over time. These continuities are due less to the media themselves – for these indeed differ, and their differences matter – than to the slow-to-change continuities over recent decades in the roles, responses and conflicts between parents and children. By looking at family regulation of media over time, some of the underlying social psychological dimensions of the appropriation of new media can thus be revealed, belying the popular view that technological change makes for domestic revolution.

Why does it matter how families frame their rules and prioritise their values in relation to children's media access and use? Several arguments may be advanced here. First, there is a growing body of evidence that parental regulation or mediation of their children's media use has consequences for media effects. Research has examined not only the factors which influence parental mediation of children's television viewing but also the effects of parental mediation on children's media use, consumer socialisation and media literacy (see Calvert, 1999; Singer & Singer, 2001). Parental mediation is, too, influenced by such factors as family interaction or communication styles; these, in turn, have been shown to influence the ability to understand television among young children. For example, in a field study of 627 children and 486 of their parents, Austin, Roberts, and Nass (1990) examined the effects of family communication environment and parental mediation of television content on third, sixth and ninth graders' perceptions of the realism of television content, its similarity to real life and their identification with television characters. Findings showed that effective interpersonal family communication helps children form the real world perceptions which they then compare with their perceptions of the television world so as to better assess realism.

As Singer and Singer (1983) noted some years ago, the structural format and content of commercial media pose a series of challenges for the developing child in terms of possible influences on cognitive skills, imagination, beliefs, motor controls, and aggression. In relation to television, parents are aware of these challenges and, in many cases, seek to mediate between children and television. Parents employ a range of mediational strategies, from the relatively open, non-directional strategy of parent-child co-viewing to more restrictive or controlling strategies. These strategies vary in their goals, with some designed to use television as a positive influence on their children while others are designed to protect

children from the possible harms of viewing television. In relation to computers and, especially, the Internet, parents are more hesitant, both because they often lack expertise and because of the widespread perception that children are already more expert than their parents (Livingstone & Bober, 2003). Young people are popularly constructed as effortlessly appropriating digital technology for use in their own lives, seemingly for no apparent reason and with easy mastery (Facer et al., 2001; Facer & Furlong, 2001). Subrahmanyam et al. (2000) raises the further issue, not of how family dynamics mediate computer use but instead of how computer use mediates family relationships. As Kraut et al. (1998) found, in the early days of Internet adoption, greater use of the Internet was associated with subsequent declines in family communication although subsequent findings have challenged this conclusion (Livingstone, 2003).

Taking a different approach to how computers may alter the family, Van-Rompaey and Roe (2001; *in press*) examine how the arrival of a new medium such as the personal computer prompts the re-arrangement of domestic space and time. The family timetable for meals, or television viewing, or homework may shift, as do physical arrangements of shared and private spaces, leisure and work spaces within the home (Livingstone, 2002). As argued also in Bovill and Livingstone (2001), the effects of these changes are not always in the direction of increased flexibility or blurring of traditional boundaries, as families may attempt to re-compartmentalise their various activities. The transformation of children's bedrooms into 'media-rich' spaces is one interesting outcome of these attempts, and one which, while it resolves some problems, nonetheless impedes parental strategies of monitoring and regulating their children's media use. As Van Rompaey and Roe (2001) put it, children's bedrooms are becoming multimedia islands by which children evade family life.

Most recently, the Internet is proving especially challenging and frustrating for both parents and children as they attempt to fit it into their lives and homes (Livingstone & Bober, 2003). These challenges are threefold: (1) practicalities, including affordability, knowing what to buy, installing and upgrading, etc; (2) questions of use, this involving social capital or social support; and (3) cultural and cognitive questions of media, or Internet, literacy – gaining the benefits and avoiding the risks, becoming a producer as well as a receiver of content, critical evaluation of information accessed, etc. While parents' strategies for managing their children's use of the Internet are emerging, so too are children's tactics for evading this management (Livingstone & Bober, *in press*). In the USA, Cole (2001) found that 55% of children aged 12–15 stated that they did not tell their parents everything they did on the Internet, yet adults kept an eye on children's Internet use (91%), limited online hours (62%), and used software to filter or block questionable websites (32%); moreover, two-thirds (67%) of children surveyed had to ask permission to access the Internet.

Qualitative research in the UK also suggests that parents and children often play a game of attempted control and attempted evasion (Livingstone & Bober, 2003), and this is confirmed by the UKCGO survey findings: while 46% of parents (though 35% of children) claim that there is filtering software on the computer used by their child, 69% of 9–17 year olds who use the Internet at least once a week have some concerns about their parents restricting or monitoring their Internet use, and two thirds of these young people have taken some action (e.g. deleting e-mails, hiding files) to maintain their online privacy from their parents or others (Livingstone & Bober, 2004, *in press*). Whether implicit or explicit, the game is played out repeatedly and seriously in many homes, perpetuated by the fact

that while parents gain power from ‘the ability to reward or to punish, . . . [and from] the possession of expertise and the possession of skills of social influence’ (Argyle, 1988: p. 235), not only do children have more expertise with new media but also their skills in social influence are a matter of evasive tactics or passive resistance, rather than strategic management of the situation.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the practices of domestic regulation have significant policy implications. In the changing communication environment, broadcasting for children and young people is under increasing commercial pressure, threatening the continuation of budgets, scheduling slots and creative programming for children and young people while global imports are ever-more competitively priced; one consequence is that programming designed for adults, or for other cultures, is increasingly accessible to children, requiring some mediation if not restriction. In parallel, there is considerable pressure from governments to widen access to and use of computers and the Internet not only in workplaces and schools but also in homes (e.g. Office of the e-Envoy, 2003) while at the same time freeing up market competitiveness, this too resulting in a wide range of online contents and services which are not always designed for or appropriate for children, again requiring some mediation if not restriction. In consequence, for a range of economic, political and technological reasons, national regulation of domestic media environments is ever more difficult to sustain, leading Governments increasingly to build parental regulation of their children’s media use into national and international policy (Bird & Jorgenson, 2003; Kunkel & Wilcox, 2001; Livingstone & Bober, *in press*; Oswell, 1999). Yet as we have seen, parents find this no easy task. Given the considerable scope for social psychological factors to determine who engages with which media at home and why, matters of meaning, preference, identity and pleasure will make a difference not only to the relations between children and parents but also to the communications policy in which family practices are increasingly embedded.

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