

Dafna Lemish



Children and Media

A Global Perspective



WILEY Blackwell

Children and Media

Children and Media

A Global Perspective

Dafna Lemish

WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2015
© 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd., The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

The right of Dafna Lemish to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services and neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for.

9781118787069 Hardback

9781118786772 Paperback

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: © kali9 /iStock

Set in 10.5/13pt Minion by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

*To Lia Margaret Lemish,
her future siblings and cousins,
and their parents -
who give meaning to it all*

Brief Table of Contents

Preface	xi
Companion Website	xv
Introduction	1
1 Media and Children at Home	13
2 Media and Individual Development	38
3 Media, Learning, and Literacy	72
4 Media and Health-related Behaviors	98
5 Media and Perceptions of Self and Society	135
6 Media, Sociality, and Participation	176
7 Media Literacy Education	195
8 Policy and Advocacy	208
Conclusions: Growing Up with Media	233
References	243
Index	268

Contents

Preface	xi
Companion Website	xv
Introduction	1
<i>Why Media (Now, More than Ever)?</i>	1
<i>Why Children (Only)?</i>	3
<i>Why Global? (But Is It?)</i>	4
<i>About this Book</i>	8
1 Media and Children at Home	13
<i>The Role of Context</i>	14
<i>Media Diffusion in the Family</i>	17
<i>The Role of Media in the Fabric of Family Life</i>	18
The social uses of television	20
<i>Parenting Styles and Mediation</i>	22
Media-related conversations	25
Television as a talking book	28
Conversations with siblings and peers	30
Mediating fear reactions	31
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	33
2 Media and Individual Development	38
<i>Developmental Theories</i>	41
<i>Attention to and Comprehension of Screen Content</i>	45
Development of attention to audio-visual content	46
Relationship between attention to television and comprehension	47
<i>Development of Viewing Preferences</i>	49
<i>Development of Fantasy–Reality Distinction</i>	51
The development of genre distinction	52
The importance of distinguishing between screen fantasy and reality	54
The development of understanding of television characters	55
The development of moral judgment	56

	<i>Identification with Media Characters</i>	58
	<i>Children's Fear Reactions</i>	60
	<i>Television, Imagination, and Creativity</i>	62
	<i>A Conceptual and Methodological Reflection</i>	64
3	Media, Learning, and Literacy	72
	<i>Media and School – Two Educational Systems</i>	72
	<i>Viewing Television and School Performance</i>	77
	<i>The Audio-Visual Language and Cognitive Skills</i>	79
	The development of special viewing skills	81
	<i>Learning from Educational Television</i>	83
	<i>New Media Learning and Literacy</i>	87
	Gaming and learning	89
	<i>Television and Language Acquisition</i>	89
	Acquisition of native language	90
	Acquisition of second language	92
	<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	93
4	Media and Health-related Behaviors	98
	<i>Media and Violent Behaviors</i>	100
	Learning violent behaviors	102
	Cumulative effects of media violence	103
	Intervening variables	106
	<i>Media, Sex, and Sexuality</i>	109
	Gender and social expectations	111
	Pornography and teenage sexuality	113
	<i>Media and Advertising</i>	115
	Advertising for children	117
	Social and emotional wellbeing, and advertising	118
	Is advertising working?	119
	<i>Media, Alcohol, and Smoking</i>	120
	<i>Media, Obesity, and Eating Disorders</i>	121
	Body image and eating disorders	123
	<i>Media and Pro-social Behavior</i>	125
	<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	128
5	Media and Perceptions of Self and Society	135
	<i>Media and Gender</i>	137
	Construction of gender roles	139
	Construction of gender identity	141
	Gay identities	145
	<i>The Social Construction of Reality</i>	146
	Violence and the <i>mean world</i> hypothesis	147
	Materialism	148
	Perceptions of “us” in comparison to “others”	149
	Cultural integration of immigrant children	152
	<i>The Construction of Political Reality</i>	154
	The construction of conflicts	156

Peacebuilding interventions	158
Edutainment genres	160
<i>Americanization and Globalization</i>	161
What is “America”?	164
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	167
6 Media, Sociality, and Participation	176
<i>Social Networking</i>	178
Comparing offline and online relationships	179
Marginalized identities	181
<i>Risk and Harm</i>	182
Cyberbullying	183
<i>Organized Production and Participation</i>	185
Civic engagement and activism	186
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	189
7 Media Literacy Education	195
<i>The Central Debates in Media Literacy Education</i>	198
<i>Media Literacy Education Around the World</i>	199
<i>Practical Aspects of Media Literacy Education</i>	202
The curriculum	202
Teaching	203
Assessment	203
<i>Evaluating Media Literacy Education</i>	204
8 Policy and Advocacy	208
<i>Criteria for Quality Media</i>	209
<i>Broadcasting Policy for Children</i>	211
Content-related policy issues	212
Violence and sexually explicit content policy	214
Television advertising policy	215
Convention on television broadcasting for children and youth	217
<i>Internet-related Policy Issues</i>	217
<i>Interventions on Behalf of Children</i>	223
<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	228
Conclusions: Growing Up with Media	233
<i>The Changing Nature of Childhood</i>	234
<i>Research Involvement in the Debate</i>	237
<i>Neither Good nor Bad</i>	238
References	243
Index	268

Preface

Can one book fully and completely cover such a wide and complex terrain as the intersection of children and media, and do so from a global perspective? Obviously it cannot.

What it does seek to do is to provide you with one scholar's account of the landscape, a map, if you will, of the typography of the field of children and media, highlighting favorite places, mountain peaks, and hidden valleys from the point of view of an individual who has been engaged in this global trek over an extended period of time. Thus, by definition, this book is by no means inclusive, and should not be depended upon, solely, for your specific research project or thesis. But if you are looking for a mapping of the field, then I hope you will find this to be the right book for you. If so, it can serve as a takeoff point for your own journey.

Accordingly, this book organizes and analyzes the accumulated literature developed over the past 50 years by scholars studying relationships of children and media, with a view to assisting students, media producers, policymakers, educators, and parents in understanding key issues in relations of media, society, and culture that have been and should be studied, discussed, and confronted in terms of research, public policy, education, and production.

The general structure and content of the book follows an earlier version entitled *Children and television: A global perspective* (2007), which was based, originally, with permission, on a textbook I wrote for the Open University in Israel (*Growing-up with television: The little screen in the lives of children and youth*, 2002, in Hebrew) and updated in 2013 (*Growing up with television and the internet*). I continue to be indebted to the Open University of Israel for their generous permission to expand on that excellent experience. However, this book moves beyond the emphasis on television, including my own earlier work, to present a broader, integrative analysis of what we know about research conducted all over the world on the inter-relationships between all forms of media and children as a global phenomenon.

Expanding the discussion means a lot more than just “adding” all media to the previous analysis of children and television. Indeed, many of our assumptions and concerns about television use have been turned on their head with the introduction of digital media. Take, for example, the preoccupation of much of the public discourse with the passive and isolating nature of television viewing. Over the last decade, the rapid growth of social media has led us to discuss how children’s active participation in media production and online social networking are changing the nature of sociability. Thus, integrating new scholarship generated over the last decade in the vast area of children and media challenges us to reconsider many previous understandings of the roles of television.

I have been studying children and media for 30 years in the USA, Europe, and Israel, as well as its complementary implications for the development of media literacy. I have read, taught, conducted research, written about it, and presented my work in numerous scholarly as well as professional settings. I take pride in being in a unique position to bridge two complementary research traditions to children and media, stated very roughly as: The American tradition of developmental psychology with a general emphasis on the individual child, effects studies, and quantitative methodologies; and the European tradition of sociology of childhood and cultural studies with its general emphasis on sociological and cultural issues, and the application of qualitative methodologies. My education and experience in both traditions allows me the privileged position of sharing with you my integration of these traditions into a more holistic view of the field, which is neither limited to nor biased by either tradition.

I bring with me to this work, as to anything else in my professional and personal life, a feminist worldview and set of values. What I mean by this is a special concern for and interest in issues of equality and diversity, a critical view on the constructed nature of all social life, and an ethics of care. Within the framework of my own research, the feminist worldview has stimulated a rethinking of traditional binary oppositions related to children and media: The distinction between childhood and adulthood; the separation of children’s public and private lives; rational and emotional reactions to media; formal schooling and leisure activities; cultural constructions and developmental theories; consumption and production of media content. I have also taken very seriously an understanding of the power hierarchies that characterize relations between adult researchers and children investigated, and my own privileged position as a middle-class, educated, white female academic.

A major characteristic of all feminist work is the commitment not only to contribute to research and social theory, but also the commitment to being a catalyst for deep social change. Indeed, the feminist perspective often criticizes contemporary social science for differentiating rather than integrating knowledge and action and highlights instead the emancipatory potential of their co-joint workings. I am, therefore, deeply involved with making academic knowledge accessible to the public through efforts at teacher training, development of media literacy curricula,

appearances in the media, advising grassroots organizations, and participating in exchanges with producers. What I have gained from these efforts occupies an important place in the following pages as well.

The task undertaken here is enormous and very ambitious. I approached this challenge with deep gratitude to many, many people who have contributed to my professional development and life throughout the years. While there are too many to even attempt to name individually, I am indebted to them all. A few who stand out as important “mile-stones” on my intellectual way have my deepest gratitude. Therefore, I want to offer special thanks to David Buckingham, Linda Renée Bloch, Akiba Cohen, Máire Davies-Messenger, Kirsten Drotner, Nelly Elias, Shalom Fisch, Maya Götz, Amy Jordan, Barbara Kolucki, Sonia Livingstone, Rivka Ribak, Michael Rich, Chava Tidhar, Barbara Wilson, and Patti Valkenburg - from whom I learned much about children and media as well as about the intricacies of cross-cultural research; to Aletha Huston, Mabel Rice, and the late John Wright who assisted me in understanding the child developmental traditions; and to Ellen Wartella, with whom I first started on this trek in my first course in the field, over three decades ago, and who has continued to fuel my interests since.

To my colleagues and friends from the Feminist Scholarship Division of the International Communication Association (ICA), and especially Carolyn Byrely, Cynthia Carter, Marian Meyers, Lana Rakow, Karen Ross, and Angharad Valdivia, I give thanks for constantly reminding me of the meaning and responsibility of being a citizen of the globe, and the value of our daily work in attempting to make a difference within it.

I owe a great deal to Elizabeth Swayze, Senior Editor of Wiley Blackwell, who believed in this project and in me from our first exchange; to Julia Kirk, Senior Project Editor, Fiona Screen, copy editor, as well as to the production staff at Wiley Blackwell for their professional, efficient, and friendly collaboration. I am also deeply grateful to Jim Bigogno, our Dean's Office administrator in the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, Southern Illinois University, for his administrative assistance and dedicated, personal, year-round support; and to Jennifer Sigler, a talented doctoral student and graduate research assistant, for her valuable assistance. Finally, I am in debt to my colleagues Sun Sun Lim, Cristina Ponte, and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and contributions to the book proposal and the final draft.

I hope all of these colleagues and friends will find something of themselves resonating in the following pages.

To my children - Leeshai, Noam, and Erga - who were fortunate to enjoy consuming media in several places around the globe, and who never fail to challenge, inspire, delight, and surprise me. I thank them for stimulating my research following their own development from infancy to adulthood.

And finally, I am grateful to Peter Lemish, my lifetime partner and the most critical, yet loving, reviewer and editor, for keeping me intellectually and personally on the tips of my toes.

Above all else, this book is for the betterment of children's lives around the globe.

References

- Lemish, D. (2002). *Growing up with television: The little screen in the lives of children and youth*. Tel-Aviv: The Open University (in Hebrew).
- Lemish, D. (2007). *Children and television: A global perspective*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Lemish, D. (Ed.). (2013). *Growing-up with television and the internet: The screens in the lives of children and youth: A reader*. Tel-Aviv: The Open University of Israel (in Hebrew and English).

Companion Website

Please visit the companion website at www.wiley.com/go/lemish/childrenandmedia to view additional content for this title.

Freely Available:

Meet the author introductory video

Key terms

Questions for discussion and evaluation

Web links

Available to Instructors Only:

Assignments for each chapter

Sample syllabi for undergraduate, graduate, and professionally oriented courses

Introduction

Why study the role of media in children's lives? Why a specific concern with the audience of children? And why are children and media a global issue? Let us start our joint journey into the exciting field of the study of children and media by engaging the three central challenges embedded in this book's title.

Why Media (Now, More than Ever)?

The study of children and media relations is an enormously important topic for a variety of compelling reasons. First, children of both genders and all ages, races, religions, classes, and geographical regions of the world use media on a regular basis, enjoy them tremendously, and learn more about the world from them than from any other socializing agent. A phenomenon so pervasive and central in children's lives is bound to be of great interest to anybody involved in and/or concerned about their world – students, parents, teachers, scholars, politicians, professionals, policymakers, and concerned citizens; in short, all of us.

Indeed, there is very little else that can so confidently claimed to be an experience shared by most children in the world today. At the beginning of the third millennium, children are being raised in a variety of social arrangements: by dual parents, single parents, divorced parents, same-sex parents, communal parents, no parents. Furthermore, regarding the existential nature of their lives, we can say that not all children are literate or, for that matter, go to school. They speak hundreds of different languages, eat different foods, play different games, wear different clothes. They face very different challenges in their daily lives, and have different dreams and aspirations for their future. Yet almost all of them spend time with media on a regular basis.

In short, media are one of the most shared and homogenizing mechanisms engaged in by children throughout the world, such that today we can barely think of childhood void of media. Whether they have a television or computer in their bedroom, share the family set in the living room, play computer games on their tablet while riding in the car to school, text on their mobile phone in the playground, or use media in the classroom or the community center, for most children today media are part of their taken-for-granted everyday experience. They may be watching television while playing on the rug, texting while eating their dinner, emailing while doing homework, or listening to music while surfing the internet – but still, they are using media. Children around the world are constantly “on” some form of a media experience.

What other cultural phenomena have such a magnitude of penetration, or have even achieved global status? No wonder our vocabulary has been recently expanded with the introduction of the term *mediatization* to refer to the changing nature of our world where media and the institutions that run them are understood to infiltrate all aspects and levels of our personal and social lives.

While relations between children and media are a universal, global phenomena attracting the attention of hundreds of scholars, worldwide, the burgeoning research literature continues to change as we engage a number of significant challenges. For example, as has already become clear from this brief introduction, an individual medium cannot be studied in isolation. It is common nowadays to substitute the discussion of television, for example, with *screen* culture, in order to recognize the trend for convergence of various media that employ screens: television, including cable and satellite connections, video recorder and games, computer games, the internet, movie theaters, hand-held electronic games, tablets and mobile-phone screens. They all share the predominance of the audio-visual system of signification, using similar codes and conventions to convey a rich abundance of contents. Indeed, our discussion of ‘television’ is deeply integrated with all the above forms.

One result of media convergence is the emergence of new fields of research. Thus, computers in general and the internet in particular, as well as more recently mobile technologies, have become the leading research topics of scholars investigating children and media over the past few years, following quick infiltration and diffusion of such technologies in the lives of children around the world.

At the same time, research into the role of television in children’s lives remains quite central in scholarly studies, for a number of key reasons:

First, television remains a dominant medium for young children even in those cultures where computers have reached a high diffusion rate, whether viewed off the air, through cable, satellite, internet downloads, or privately owned discs and DVDs. Mobile media and the internet in particular, while diffused rapidly, are still the privilege of the minority of well-to-do, middle- and upper-class children in both high-resource as well as low-resource societies.

Second, while scholarly study of computer access has been extended beyond the limited focus on ownership of the hardware itself (i.e., who has a computer at home or has access to one in a public place) to questions related to cognitive and

motivational access (i.e., who has the knowledge as well as the linguistic and computer skills necessary to access the computer? Who perceives the computer as relevant to their own personal goals and future prospects and thus has the motivation to pursue computer use?).

Third, studying television from a global perspective also provides us with a solid base from which to extend and illuminate the growing fields of digital media studies.

Finally, by way of another example of changes in our research field related to children's use of emergent technologies, we realize that much of our thinking about media consumption has been challenged by the more active role that children are taking today in their leisure culture. As a result, we now understand there is a blurring of the boundaries between consumption and production.

Many of the same questions to be discussed in the following text were investigated over the last century in reference to the place of television in children's lives, and they remain relevant, applicable, and indeed necessary in advancing this field of research. By extension, they can be applied to and compared with evolving research on the convergence of screen media and on mediatization of childhood. Such research is leading to the emergence of new theoretical foundations as new studies lead us into new territories. This constructive tension between continuity and disruption is one reason why the field of children and media is such a vibrant and exciting field of scholarly endeavor.

Why Children (Only)?

Although common discourse suggests that children are living today in a world devoid of what formerly distinguished childhood (i.e., constant blurring of former dichotomies between adulthood and childhood, learning and play, as well as public and private spheres), this book insists on continuing to treat children (somewhat artificially set at the up to age 18 marker) as occupying a very unique time in the human cycle that deserves our special attention as well as the best of our resources and human investment.

Furthermore, scholars of media and children are enriching our understanding of the need for more nuanced approaches to the concept of *childhood*; such as its socially constructed nature, as well as to the various diverse dimensions that it encompasses. Thus, studies of differences of gender, ethnicity, culture, and class are gaining more and more prominence in addition to those related to children's age. All of these add new dimensions for investigation and understanding of the already complex nature of the relationships between children and media.

Similarly, as we map the field today and summarize what we understand about children and media, we find that the theoretical approaches developed to understand the nature and meaning of childhood have deeply affected the kinds of research questions asked and methods employed by scholars in their attempt to answer them.

To a large degree, studies of children and media that dominated the field until the end of the twentieth century were *about* children. For example, children were tested

for their understanding of the content of television programs; they participated in experiments that measured the effects of video games on them; surveys were conducted about the amount and kind of exposure they had to digital technologies.

The theoretical assumption of most of this research was to perceive adulthood as the end goal of children's development and the measuring stick of all their performances. Accordingly, children were perceived as deficient: they were unable to understand media content quite as well as adults; they were not yet immunized against its negative effects; and, unlike adults, they were naive and easily persuaded to buy products or to give personal information to strangers on the internet. Furthermore, according to this approach, children were also understood to be inexperienced "subjects" of research who had difficulty accounting for their personal experiences and understandings of the media in their lives. Such research, then, relied heavily on adults – caregivers, educators, parents, researchers – to report about children's inner worlds, their modes of making meaning, and their media-related pleasures.

Recently, the approach known as cultural studies, as well as sociological-oriented research, challenged the assumption that children should be viewed in relation to the process of "becoming" fully grown adults. In its place, they suggested that childhood be assumed to be a form of "being" in its own right. Accordingly, these scholars highlight the need to allow children, in each stage of their development, to be fully recognized as having a unique personal voice that deserves to be listened to and understood with empathy. Such research advances studies that are as much *with* children and *for* children as they are *on* children. This theoretical and ideological turn has led to application of a wide range of methodologies for studying children and media. For example, in addition to the use of surveys and experiments, researchers incorporate a more active role for the children, as participants with an independent voice, such as with in-depth interviewing, participant observation of their media behaviors and spontaneous play, as well as analysis of their artwork and written accounts.

Why Global? (But Is It?)

As we have seen in the preceding text, children and media constitutes a global phenomenon because media are ubiquitous throughout the world, and it is almost impossible to separate media from conceptions of contemporary childhood. In addition, a number of other compelling reasons can be added to the claim that media have global status: First, very similar debates over media's roles in the lives of children have emerged worldwide. On the one hand, the introduction of television and its diffusion, since the middle of the twentieth century, followed by computers, the internet, and mobile devices, have been adopted and integrated into life in all societies. This has happened in conflicted ways, just as was the case with other communication technologies that preceded them (e.g., books, newspapers, radio, films). This process is referred to by scholars as *technological determinism*, according to which technologies determine, to a large degree, the characteristics of a society.

Accordingly, many writers claim that high hopes and great expectations were expressed that each new medium would enrich children's lives, stimulate their imagination and creativity, widen their education and knowledge, encourage multicultural tolerance, narrow social gaps, and stimulate development and democratization processes. On the other hand, there is also great anxiety that extensive exposure to media can numb the senses, develop in viewers indifference to the pain of others, encourage destructive behaviors, lead to a deterioration of moral values, suppress local cultures, and contribute to social estrangement.

The ambivalent stance with regard to the role of the medium of television in children's lives – as a “messiah” on the one hand and “demon” on the other – has been discussed widely in public debates in every culture that has absorbed the medium. We witnessed the same debates in recent years with regard to the proliferation of the internet, computer games, as well as mobile technologies. The most pronounced concerns are expressed over the effects of media violence on children, as well as the potential harm of exposure to sexual portrayals, effects of advertising on socialization to consumer culture, and more general concerns for children's passivity and social disengagement. Framed by scholars as *moral panic*,¹ public pressure on governing institutions is exerted through discussion and debates in the media, public forums, parents and community newsletters and forums, as well as in expert testimonies offered in legislative hearings by public leaders and broadcasting policymakers.

Countries that can afford to do so allocate public funds to research institutions in search of more definite and conclusive answers to the enduring question: “What are media doing to our children?”

Second, children all over the world use various technologies as they complete their homework or chores to the sounds of popular music on their music devices. As they daydream they may fantasize on love and adventure over blockbuster movies broadcast on their local channels or downloaded onto their computers and mobile devices. They cheer for their favorite sports team across continents and seas; follow the news of armed conflicts worlds apart; admire many of the same celebrities, collect their memorabilia, hang their posters, wear their T-shirts, follow their private lives in magazines and on websites. They share their everyday life experiences via social networks with others worlds apart as well as those next door. They “like” a viral YouTube video and download a popular app on their mobile phone and tablet in the millions.

Indeed, I suspect that if you visit any country in the world today you will be able to strike up a conversation with local children by asking about their favorite programs, video games, movies, songs, commercials, or internet sites. You do not even have to know the language. Hand motioning to pictures and ads, clicking on links and touchscreens, or the mere mention of the names of global celebrities and popular programs and games will stimulate enough cooperation. At least some of the programs or contents are bound to be familiar to you from your own home media offerings or those encountered in the homes of friends, on public transportation, or while waiting in some line.

As part of a global audience, children employ technologies that enable them to access content which transcends local or even regional physical and cultural boundaries in their media experiences. This leads us to ask: Do children live today in a global village as envisioned by Marshall McLuhan? Can we argue that they are living in a shared global culture whose values are learned through the process of *McDonaldization*² (i.e., the diffusion of American culture and values around the world)? If so, do they perceive the social world in similar ways? Is their local identity being erased? Are they evolving the same vision of themselves as consumers, individuals, and citizens of the world?

We know that through global technologies children access a largely global fare consisting of cartoons, situation comedies, soap operas, action-adventure serials, as well as Disney-style and Hollywood movies mostly produced in Euro-American cultures in the West. In addition, they also watch programs that come from other parts of the world; such as Latin-American tele-novellas; Japanese and Korean animated series; or local co-productions of the American series *Sesame Street*. Thus, in shifting from a focus on global access to technologies to the contents distributed, we know that children around the world are entertained through technologies that bring them popular culture-style productions, originating primarily in the USA but also in other parts of the world. These productions are diffused through a process theorized as *The Megaphone Effect*.³ The USA, according to this thesis, collects and adopts cultural artifacts from around the world, adapts them to the American “palate,” and then USA-based media conglomerates serve as a megaphone, spreading them to other markets and turning them into a global phenomenon.

The adoption of a new medium in society, initially as technology, is accompanied by the introduction of an entire value system and political economy that can often be quite foreign to the receiving country. As a global phenomenon, media promote mainly what has been termed as *late modernity* values, typified primarily by commercialism, globalization, privatization, and individualization. At the same time, media have also been among the interventions employed in nation building, cultural preservation, and social revolutions.

Third, the field of “media and children” has become a global research interest of scholars, whose primary association is in psychology, media studies, sociology, health, and education. Their varied disciplinary homes make a great deal of difference to the nature of the research; for example, in the kind of theoretical underpinnings used, questions posed, research methods applied, and, therefore, the kinds of findings produced and their interpretations.

Further, in this respect, noting the changes in the influence of the academic disciplines engaged in studying the reciprocal relationships between children and media is crucial to understanding the richness emerging out of this body of research. Psychology, the most prominent of the disciplines applied to this area, continues to focus on the individual child, as well as a host of related issues such as: social learning from media, the effects of media on behavior, development of comprehension of media content, or the uses children make of media and the gratifications they acquire from their related behaviors.

As the body of literature started to accumulate, mainly from the Euro-North American academic institutions, it became clear that the “strong effect” conclusion referred to previously that assumes a unidirectional media effect on children is overly simplistic. Other research approaches demonstrated something that common sense and anecdotal data posited for a long time: children are not the passive, proverbial tabula rasa upon which media messages leave their marks. On the contrary, children are *active* consumers of media: They react to, think, feel, and create meanings. In doing so, they bring to media encounters a host of predispositions, abilities, desires, and experiences. They use media in diverse personal, social, and cultural circumstances that, too, influence and are part of their discourse and interactions with media.

With the exponential growth of digital technologies, the relationships of children and youth with media have taken an interesting interactive twist, with young audiences becoming what scholars came to refer to as *producers* (producers + users) or *prosumers* (producers + consumers) of media rather than being viewed solely as consumers. Thus, it became clear that asking “what do children do with media?” and “how do media and childhoods interact to define each other” are just as important questions as “how do media influence children?”

The impact of this process remains significant as it resulted in what scholars refer to as a paradigm shift. One example of the richness of this impact is that it raised the need for cross-cultural research. Clearly, comparative research of this global phenomenon can illuminate many of the questions at the heart of the field’s continually emerging research agenda: Does media violence affect children differently if they are living in a violent urban center in comparison to a tranquil isolated village? Are children more frightened by news coverage of war when they are growing up amidst armed conflict in comparison to children for whom war is a fictitious concept? Do children react differently to actors and actresses of European descent who appear in their favorite programs and movies if they are living in a dominantly Euro-North American society in comparison to African, Latino, or Asian ones? And what about consumerism? Would children raised in rich consumer cultures, amidst an abundance of products from which to choose, interpret advertising differently from those with no financial resources or with limited personal property? Pursuing such questions, as related to children and media, has become a global endeavor for researchers as no single body of knowledge based on contextualized studies in one culture, be it as rich and diverse as possible, can provide us with the in-depth, multifaceted picture necessary to understand such phenomena in their full global manifestation.

Finally, in terms of investment, children and media represents a global business of enormous proportions and value. For huge entertainment corporations, children are first and foremost current consumers, rather than future citizens. From such a point of view childhood is not a distinct period in the life cycle, one that should be attended to with compassion and responsibility. On the contrary, it is a distinct market opportunity. Televisions sets are hooked to cable and/ or satellite dishes, receiving programs fed by huge international commercial corporations over dozens of channels, and the battle over the quality of the local channel is a battle over the

quality of one drop in the ocean. Thus, any attempts to develop or lobby for change in the content of television programs for children, for developing policy guidelines for internet sites or the video games developed for them, for restricting advertising and marketing to children or for fostering media literacy skills in the educational systems, cannot be undertaken in isolation. Concern for the quality of the relationship between *children and media* is a global issue and only global cooperative efforts are likely to make a substantial, enduring difference.

About this Book

The intellectual journey offered you, the reader, in this book begins at the place of the regular, lived experience of children's television viewing, namely, in their home settings.

Chapter 1, "Media and Children at Home," examines the changes in the role of media in the lives of families worldwide, and in particular the place media have come to occupy in children's leisure. This discussion addresses such issues as: How are media integrated in the everyday lives of children? What are the various roles that parents and siblings play in intervening in media consumption habits: for example, in controlling amount of time devoted to media as well as type of contents consumed; mediating the messages; incorporating media in family conversations?

Just as family types and the social contexts in which children are growing up are extremely diverse, so are their individual personalities, cognitive skills, and life experiences. Thus, in Chapter 2, "Media and Individual Development," we explore the importance of such individual differences for understanding children's media uses, through such questions as: What can we learn from the literature on various dimensions of children's development and their relevance to the consumption of media? For example, how are children's attention and comprehension of media developed? What roles do the *formal features* of audio-visual texts play in these processes? How do children learn to distinguish between the reality and fantasy dimensions of media content? How does the development of genre recognition, comprehension of narratives, characters, and moral issues progress? What are the forms of children's identification with media characters? What kind of emotional responses to media content do children display? Further, we will ponder the issue of how much of what we know from research can be generalized to children as a homogenous group, across cultures and age groups, versus how far their relationships with the media change as they grow and develop within particular contexts.

The potential of media for formal and informal learning has been recognized by institutions and educational systems around the world, particularly with regard to those less privileged. Televised "schooling" and educational media challenge many of our conventional assumptions regarding proper pedagogies. In this regard, Chapter 3, "Media Learning and Literacy," will include discussion of the relationship between media and various forms of learning. In doing so, we will engage such questions as: What are the inter-relationships between viewing television, school performance, and reading-writing literacy? Is television viewing related to language – as well

as second language – acquisition? Prominent cases such as the worldwide research conducted on *Sesame Street* are one of the foci of analyses shared. This chapter also includes discussion of the integration of new media – particularly the internet – in schooling and the role of digital culture, including gaming, in learning, cognitive skills, and literacy.

With the understandings gained in the first three chapters, we will be ready to tackle the much-debated issue of the behavioral effects of media on children in Chapter 4, “Media and Health-related Behavior.” Grounded in the branch of the research literature that regards children as a special audience, because of their vulnerability, particular attention will be devoted to research traditions and hypotheses seeking to explain short- and long-term effects of media violence. The effects of media advertising on consuming behaviors, as well as on family dynamics and emotional wellbeing, will be followed by a consideration of the research on the role of media in promotion of unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking and consumption of alcohol, as well as implications for obesity and eating disorders. In addition, the chapter will address the debate over the effects of media on sexual behavior of adolescents, and discuss pornography.

While Chapter 4 is primarily engaged in studies of the more negative effects of media on children, we will remind ourselves that the same mechanisms that explain negative effects can also be applied to promote positive pro-social behaviors. Finally, when reviewing the full range of educational initiatives, we will also be concerned with other important methodological questions, such as: How valid are the methodologies commonly employed in studying these effects? How relevant is this full range of questions to non-Anglo-European societies? What are the issues of study that we have neglected?

The study of the behavioral effects of media is only part of the story. Many questions posed in our field are concerned with influences of media on children’s identity formation, and their evolving worldviews, values, and stereotypes. Accordingly, Chapter 5, “Media and Perceptions of Self and Society,” focuses on the role of media in the cultivation of perceptions of self and others. We will ask ourselves how media contribute to the construction of gender identities, sexuality, and body image as well as socialization to sex-roles. Do media foster a perception of the world as a mean and dangerous place in which to live? And, what is the media’s role in teaching us about “others” (we all have different “others,” depending on who we are) – be they racial minorities in our society, persons with physical and/or mental disabilities, older people, etc. What is the place occupied by media for displaced and immigrant children in facilitating integration into their host countries? Do media play a role in helping children “know thy enemy” or in socializing them to the political world and becoming engaged citizens? Are media part of the formation of a global youth culture that transcends cultural and geographical borders?

Chapter 6, “Media, Sociability, and Participation,” is devoted to the relatively new, but what now appears to be the rapidly changing and highly attractive, research field of the social aspects of children’s current media use. We will discuss social networking and the relationship between children and youth’s offline and online

social relationships. While risk-taking is part of growing up, including in virtual worlds, there are now several more dangerous forms of risk-taking that involve media use, such as cyberbullying and sexting. And, as a contrast, we will relate our discussions to other studies that focused on various forms of creative participation online, including civic engagement and activism. Thus, Chapter 6 summarizes what we know to date about young people's online involvement.

Chapter 7 discusses the application of all of the above to the area of "Media Literacy Education." The rationale for incorporating such education now, more than ever, as well as the debates surrounding it, will be summarized, and will serve as the foundations for the presentation of various models of media education employed around the world as well as a discussion of several practical aspects related to the development of curricula, pedagogy, and assessment of effectiveness. The continuing inadequacies of research that evaluates the effectiveness of media literacy education, particularly long term, will be pointed out.

Chapter 8, "Media, Policy, and Advocacy," examines a host of interventions worldwide on behalf of children and the media in their lives. We will review the development of media policy and regulations around the world, particularly regarding historical concerns with issues related to television such as broadcasting hours, inappropriate content for children, advertising practices, exposure of children on the screen, and sponsorships of quality programming. We will then explore the vibrant discussion on attempts to regulate the internet, monitor children's usage, and look at the technological tools for access restriction. Various forms of public activism and advocacy efforts at improving children's media and fostering global cooperation will be reviewed. These efforts highlight the value of cooperation between the worlds of academia and activism, both with their unique accumulated bodies of knowledge and experience devoted to the betterment of the lives of children worldwide.

The book's concluding chapter – Growing Up with Media – pulls together the major themes woven throughout the book to provide an overview of the field. In the process of doing so, it also engages the study of children and media in the discussion of the changing nature of childhoods.

Admittedly, these chapters map the field of media and children according to just one of many potential approaches. For example, we could have decided to focus on several central substantive topics (e.g., violence, advertising, fiction, news) and discuss each one of them from various angles. Or, we could have followed age groups separately (e.g., babies, pre-school, elementary-school, middle-school children). Finally, we could have studied each medium independently. Thus, what is offered here is but one way to organize the vast amount of accumulated knowledge available.

Indeed, any approach adopted would have to recognize that the domains and issues are deeply interwoven and cannot be discussed independently of one another. After all, children are holistic human beings and need to be viewed as such. Thus, their cognitive development and learning do not develop or function independently of their social context or of their behaviors and worldviews. Therefore, the book artificially fragments the field to facilitate the acquaintance of readers with this exciting field of study.

You will note that discussion of different media dominates different chapters. For example, the extensive discussion of the integration of television in the family in Chapter 1, and discussion of the internet and sociability in Chapter 6. This imbalance is due not only to the unique opportunities that each medium prioritizes, but also to the availability of existing research. While we have some 60 years of accumulated research on television and children, research activity on the internet and mobile media only emerged over the last two decades. Thus, a new version of this book, issued in the not-too-distant future, might present us with a different format and findings.

Overall, I can say that I have tried to address the issues from as diverse a theoretical and methodological point of view possible, drawing upon studies conducted by scholars from all over the world. This is no small undertaking, as much of the work is not accessible to English speakers, myself included. This having been noted, I recognize that much important work published in professional and academic media in Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic, among other languages, is unavailable to those of us whose main research language is English. Overall, the field suffers from very little exchange between these isolated academic enclaves. One of my primary professional goals – as researcher as well as in my capacity as founding editor of the *Journal of Children and Media* – is to initiate such intellectual dialogue. I acknowledge, regretfully, that the “global perspective” is still a highly Anglo-perspective, as it relies almost in its entirety on research published in English.

Finally, in terms of reading experience, I have used the proverbial “wide-brush strokes” in writing this book, thus giving the “global perspective” an additional meaning, that of a general overview. As a result, specific details of research studies are not included in order to attain a more general, integrative view and to maintain the flow of the argument. Accordingly, bibliographic references are often cited together at the end of the discussion of each theme and appear as footnotes. Beyond their function to give appropriate credit to the authors upon whose work I draw and whose ideas and knowledge are discussed in the book, these citations primarily serve to point out directions for additional readings.

As you read this book you are invited to explore the field on various levels, choosing the ones that fulfill your needs the best. You may choose to read the text alone, in its narrative style. You may want to pause and expand your knowledge and understanding by referring to the more informative referenced readings suggested at the end of the book. In either case, I hope you will get as excited about this field as I am.

Notes

1. Drotner, 1992.
2. Ritzer, 2013.
3. Bloch & Lemish, 2003.