CHILDREN, MEDIA, AND PANDEMIC PARENTING

FAMILY LIFE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Edited by
Rebekah Willett and Xinyu Zhao

"The Covid pandemic of the early 2020s posed unprecedented challenges for family life, not least in relation to the role of screen media. *Children*, *Media, and Pandemic Parenting* presents in-depth collaborative research, conducted across some very diverse international settings, looking at how parents and children learned to cope with the dilemmas and anxieties that arose. In the process, it points to the need to move beyond received wisdom – for example about screen time – and to rethink our understanding of the complexities of contemporary parenting much more broadly. In a world where childhood is now 'digital by default', this is precisely the kind of research we need."

David Buckingham, *Emeritus Professor*,
Loughborough University, UK

"Centering on the voices, perspectives, and ideological commitments of parents in seven countries, '*Children, Media, and Pandemic Parenting: Family Life in Uncertain Times*' offers culturally and politically nuanced insights into media practices, discourses and norms in diverse homes that make up children's living, playing, and learning at the height of the pandemic. This book is a must to all those who want to understand home media ecologies through the lenses of parenting, as well as children's agency and rights, honoring differences, and counter-stories of what it means to be a parent and a child in an ever-evolving mediatized and turbulent world."

Kristiina Kumpulainen, *Professor,*
University of British Columbia, Canada

"At a time when parents are challenged by the omnipresence of media in their children's lives, the analysis of the experiences of families in seven different countries during the pandemic is highly insightful and provocative. The interdisciplinary and multi-cultural perspective offered in this unique collection inspires us to ask new questions, consider what seems to be shared across the globe and what is culturally specific, and how our approaches to the media-technologies in our lives are shaped by our contexts and circumstances. Parents, educators, scholars of media, professionals, and policymakers will find within these pages new understandings of what parenting and schooling with media are or could be."

Dafna Lemish, *Professor*, *Journalism and Media Studies*,
Rutgers University, *USA*

"Before the pandemic, society worried that all children wanted was more screen time. But as the pandemic interrupted children's access to the 'real world', it became clear that the opposite was the case. This closely evidenced book demonstrates parents' myriad and nuanced responses to this crisis moment for families and provides hope for new ways ahead."

Sonia Livingstone, *Professor*, *London School of Economics,*
UK, author of Parenting for a Digital Future

"This is an exciting and highly informative book that offers a range of fascinating insights into families' experiences with digital media during the pandemic. The authors provide a wealth of information about digital parenting in an international context, and challenge existing and limiting assumptions about issues such as digital surveillance, screen time and screen-mediated schooling. This is an impressive volume that engages with innovate analytical frameworks and fascinating datasets in an insightful and nuanced manner, bringing important new theoretical and methodological insights that can inform researchers, parents and policymakers alike."

Jackie Marsh, *Emeritus Professor*, *University of Sheffield*, *UK*

"This is an important and insightful book which explores pedagogical, social, and cultural practices with digital media in families around the world during the pandemic. Willett and Zhao have assembled an international set of contributions which carefully resist the prevalent and overly simplistic discourses that emerged during the global pandemic on 'screen time' and 'learning loss'. Instead, the contributors provide methodologically innovative and nuanced accounts of family life and 'the digital' in pandemic times in a range of locations worldwide. In his foreword, Sefton-Green is right to point out how the book demonstrates the value of international comparative work in the field. In their conclusion, Willett and Zhao call for future research which builds on these multi-layered findings which is based on observation rather than surveillance, is respectful of children's rights, and is designed with curiosity and attention to the detail of families' lived experience. This book deserves the widest possible readership, not only drawn from researchers and policymakers but also from families negotiating the complexities of 'the digital'. They will all benefit greatly from this book's informed and considered response to uncertain times which has important implications for our understanding of digital life well beyond the pandemic and into whatever the future holds."

John Potter, *Professor*, *UCL Knowledge Lab*, *Institute of Education, University College London, UK*

Children, Media, and Pandemic Parenting

This book examines changes in families' rules and routines connected with media during the pandemic and shifts in parents' understanding of children's media use.

Drawing on interviews with 130 parents at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the book explores specific cultural contexts across seven countries: Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, South Korea, United Kingdom, and United States. Readers will gain an understanding of family media practices during the pandemic and how they were influenced by contextual factors such as the pandemic restrictions, family relationships and situations, socioeconomic statuses, cultural norms and values, and sociotechnical visions, among others. Further, encounter with theoretical framings will provide innovative ways to understand what it means for children, parents, and families to live in the digital age.

This timely volume will offer key insights to researchers and graduate students studying in a variety of disciplines, including media and cultural studies, communication arts, education, childhood studies, and family studies.

Rebekah Willett is Professor in the Information School at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA. She conducts research on children's media cultures, focusing on issues of play, literacy, identity, and learning. Her publications include work on makerspaces, playground games, amateur camcorder cultures, online gaming, and family media practices.

Xinyu Zhao is Research Fellow (Digital Childhoods) at the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, Deakin University, Australia. His work focuses on everyday digital cultures and practices in migration contexts. He is currently researching the political economy of digital childhoods and cultural diversity in contemporary digital parenting.

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Contributors

Rebecca Coles has been a researcher in the UK since completing her PhD under the supervision of Pat Thomson in 2014. She likes to work with archives, participant observation and in-depth and longitudinal interviewing and is interested in how people's love of art, media and literature sits within their wider lives, structured by inequality and social change.

Natalie Coulter is Associate Professor in Communication and Media Studies and Director of the Institute for Research on Digital Literacies (IRDL) at York University, Canada. Her work focuses on consumer, media culture, and digital media. She is currently working on a project titled *Kids and Digital Capitalism*. She has published on topics such as tween girls, Canadian children's media, scholarly research harassment, KidTech, and children's digital cultures.

Diana Carolina García Gómez is an assistant professor in the Childhood Studies Department at Bridgewater State University, USA. Her multidisciplinary work centres children and youth political participation as a node for studying processes of collective memory and peacebuilding. Diana focuses on young people's self-constructions and political identities approaching the Colombian post-accord context from the fields of childhood studies, memory studies, media studies, and political philosophy. She combines Latin-American scholarship, decolonial and postcolonial theories, and ethnographic methods.

Sarah Healy is co-lead of SWISP Lab and a Melbourne Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. Best known for her contributions to the fields of critical affect studies, digital methods and the posthumanities, Sarah is currently 'Hacking the Anthropocene' with young people around the globe.

Hyeon-Seon Jeong is Professor of Media Literacy at Gyeongin National University of Education's Department of Korean Education and Digital Media Education M.Ed. program in South Korea. Her research focuses on

children's digital literacy practices, media education, critical literacy pedagogy, teacher education, and digital parenting.

Amie Kim is an independent researcher and serves as a digital media literacy consultant for various institutions in South Korea. Her research interests include young people's media culture, digital citizenship, and children's digital rights. Her recent studies include young people's perceptions of online risks and child-led research on children's digital rights.

Maureen Mauk, based in the US, is Visiting Research Fellow at York University's Institute for Research on Digital Literacies and is a Senior Standards & Practices Analyst at Sony Crunchyroll. Her research focuses on the intertwined relationship between parents, policy, and industry as it relates to television history and the current platformised media landscape.

Lindsay C. Sheppard is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at York University, Canada. She is curious about girlhood, age, digital feminism, collective identity, and conceptualising agency. Using a feminist posthuman framework, Lindsay's dissertation is exploring girls' and young women's feminism on Instagram.

Rebekah Willett is Professor in the Information School at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA. She conducts research on children's media cultures, focusing on issues of play, literacy, identity, and learning. Her publications include work on makerspaces, playground games, amateur camcorder cultures, online gaming, and family media practices.

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Foreword

Learning from the pandemic

Julian Sefton-Green

Toward the end of her extraordinary and prescient history of the Spanish flu (1918–21), Laura Spinney reflects on some of the long-term effects of that pandemic (Spinney, 2017). In the final section, she speculates that the pandemic influenced (amongst others) the development of public health systems and the institutionalisation of modern medicine. She shows its impacts on beliefs in anti-science, modernism, the catastrophic ruptures in so many indigenous communities, racialised segregation, and the seeds of the Second World War II: virtually every aspect of the rest of the 20th century seems to have been touched and possibly even determined by that pandemic. Spinney explains how the pandemic even had an effect on the average height of post-pandemic children; it took nearly 50 years to return to the same growth pattern.

On one level, it is clearly too early to reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic, even if at the time, many scholars from many disciplines described the brutal first years of the pandemic as a kind of natural experiment. This book offers a very particular, and at times, brilliantly counter-intuitive analysis of its effects in one area: parents' understandings of children's use of digital technology in the home, especially as it was used for schooling during those lockdown years in 2020 and 2021. Even though this area of impact may not sound as important as some of the domains outlined by Spinney above, it actually dominated many people's direct experience of the pandemic. Indeed, accounts of its impact have made family technology use resonate in importance alongside other stories that define our collective memory of the pandemic, including breakdowns in public health provision, the achievements of medical research, or even a shortage of toilet paper.

As the pandemic progressed, the focus expanded from the immediate concern with the unknown effects of the virus itself and scientific ways to combat it, toward a concern with its broader social impact. On the one hand, there was increasing concern with economic effects and their consequences, and on the other, a concern with the well-being of populations caught in these straitened circumstances. In general, children had not spent as much time in the home and under the direct supervision of their parents and carers

since the introduction of mass education in the 19th century. When Laura Spinney (2017) wrote of the world after the Spanish flu that 'families were forced to recompose themselves' (p. 228), she did not have in mind the stories recounted in this volume. We can read here of families moving screens around the different spaces in the home, of children and parents renegotiating their everyday roles, and of both children and parents being required to adopt different roles – as teachers, students – rather than just behaving as family members. Throughout this volume, we read about the different ways that schooling was reimagined and reorganised to take place online and under the immediate proxy supervision of adults in the family.

There are other books to be written about the ways that the pandemic sedimented the platformisation of education (Williamson & Hogan, 2020). However, in many countries around the world, as this book shows, most schools attempted to offer a form of – for lack of better words – online learning. These attempts took an incredible variety of forms: from online classes to personalised catch-ups with teachers, to tyranny by worksheets, and the use of so-called personalised learning platforms offering activities, tests, as well as other forms of feedback. It is almost impossible to comprehensively describe the broad range of children's and families' different living and learning contexts during the pandemic. These ranged from children in remote areas having to rely on one or two mobile phones in the community to access their schools' educational resources, to all the children in a household having their own designated devices, hooked to high-speed broadband. Some parents purchased access to online services or paywalled learning platforms, and others were on hand both to supervise compliance and/or acting as a teacher to support and direct their children's learning. In many countries around the world, this whole process only served to highlight how much modern contemporary schooling echoed its earlier 19th-century function: to release women into the workplace and to offer examinations to manage children's next stages into work or access to further or higher education. The absence of public examinations for older children, which would then allow them to progress to the next stages in their lives, only served to show the persistent importance of the credentialing function of school.

In this book, the authors write of childhood now being 'digital by default', because the pandemic underscored the depth and breadth of digital technology in everyday life. In some ways, the issues around schooling only served as a counterfactual to this insight, given the unequal, contingent, emergent, and still evolving nature of the digitalisation of school. Paradoxically, and for all the investment in digital infrastructures in schools, they may be one of the last institutions unable to act as a very satisfactory default. Interpersonal, relational, and of course teaching skills may not be so easily translatable into a wholly digital experience. What this book shows is that the idea of using digital technology in a discretionary fashion, as something families might have a choice over, has long gone. When this book talks about childhood being digital by default, it means that so many activities, interactions, relationships,

and experiences in the home – even of being a child itself – are now in some shape or form, digital.

Yet, what the book explores is not so much the nature of those experiences from the child's point of view, or even the political economy which dictates what devices, technologies, modes of access, and content are experienced by whom; but how the nature of digital childhood is mediated by parents as they bring up their children. The principles of choice, as opposed to the imposition of a default, go to the heart of some of the peculiar anxieties of parenting in what has been called the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992). Structural transformations in late modernity, and the breaking of traditional bonds and authorities – of now not bringing up your children under the watchful gaze of prior generations, and with a reduced sense of security in terms of the life children might lead with regards to their employment, their identities, their 'place' in society – have led to an increase in anxiety and uncertainty. The pandemic not only changed parents' understandings of contemporary parenting responsibilities, but it also magnified and intensified any existing concerns parents might have had, including about digital technologies in their children's lives, even prior to the pandemic's traumatic impacts.

The key issue prior to the pandemic in relation to the digitalisation of childhood and for those principles of parenting, which suggested parents could exert choice and make decisions, revolves around certain visions of 'media effects'. That is to say, the ways in which people believe that consumption of the media or exposure to it exerts an influence. This influence has been characterised in a multitude of ways: from affecting the plasticity of neural pathways to other theories of influence on child development, to affecting emotional and psychological well-being, influencing ideas about gender, sexuality, and ideology. In effect, what it is to be a person and a member of any one particular society can be ascribed to some extent to the effect of media infiltrating the family home (Buckingham, 2000). If the digital is *not* a default, then parents and their modes of parenting stand between the child and all these theories about all these influences.

However, the pandemic ensured that such elements of choice as might be assumed to exist, and such elements of control or mediation that parents might be presumed to exert, were completely non-existent. The idea of a default removes the concept of choice, and it removes the illusion that parents and their preferred mode of parenting can stand between these assumed effects and their children. It is this aspect of the crisis that this book explores in such detail, rigour, and analytical imagination. The book is significant both for what it finds out about how parents understood their children's use of technology in the home during the pandemic, as well as its contribution to long-standing debates about parents' understanding of children's use of technology in the home more generally. In respect of this second dimension of how the crises catalysed by the pandemic transformed deeply held views and assumptions, we can perhaps see a version of Naomi Klein's (2008) 'shock doctrine' at work as the pandemic exacerbated and brought to the

surface fundamental inequalities, while simultaneously creating possibilities for change and resistance (see Klein, 2020). From this perspective, the pandemic acted as a heuristic – helping us face up to the ways our societies are organised, which are not made explicit in public discourse. At the same time, such reframings offer opportunities to reimagine our behaviours and our understandings of the world. As acknowledged by many contributors to this volume, 'the pandemic, through its many challenges, also acted as a catalyst for rethinking and reimagining digital interactions' (see Chapter 5).

Here, I think the project described in this book makes three significant and original contributions to the discussion about how people understand the effects of the media. The first of these relates to the global comparative structure of the research project, and the way that its international scope addresses the pervasive idea that childhood is a universal global phenomenon. The histories of childhood (Ariès, 1962) and especially children and the media (Cook, 2017; Sammond, 2005) have always been troubled by claims that childhood is a natural, common, and shared experience, lived by all children equally around the world. Historical scholarship has tried to excavate how childhoods are significantly contextual – relating to the norms and assumptions of the culture where they are experienced – and how different kinds of social norms have shaped our changing understandings of what child development entails. In this book, the common experience of lockdown and the denial of schooling – itself one of the few key global institutional cultural norms (Alexander, 2001; Lechner & Boli, 2005) – offers insight into this ongoing challenge in the social sciences. In this context, this book contributes to an understanding of how the homogenous nature of digital platforms – and its acceleration under the pandemic – might mean that experiences offered to children are indeed common, shared, and equivalent. This book offers an empirical investigation of this implication, by exploring whether this means that all experiences are the same – especially through the filter of different parents from different social classes, with different aspirations for their children and their children's futures – interpreting and giving meaning to these experiences with varied emphasis and weighting.

The range of the countries studied in this project also hints at the second significant contribution this book makes, which is methodological. The attention to parental mediation and the discourses surrounding how families interpret and make sense of their children's use of media in the domestic context clearly challenges oversimplified and potentially invalid concepts like 'screen time', often referenced in in discussions about regulating children's media consumption by limiting the number of minutes or hours spent consuming media on screen technologies. The book constantly interrogates this common sense understanding of digital media use and the way that such a weak concept is taken to stand for so many different kinds of experiences. A key finding from the book is that under the stress of schooling at home, this key concept (Livingstone, 2021) became redundant in so many families'

vocabularies. The comparative nature of the project helped the authors of this book address this challenge from an original perspective, but there are more than simple international comparisons. The book learned from the pandemic that understanding the full impact of phenomena within the social world necessitates an approach that integrates multiple perspectives. As such, it is interested in a series of key analytic frameworks exploring the interrelationships between the dimensions of media use and parenting practices: encompassing studies of content, interpretative frameworks, contexts, practices, and social interactions. The book offers insight into future research paradigms as to how we should go about trying to understand the role of digital media in everyday life, beyond a simple summary of the extraordinary nature of daily life during the terrible years of the 2020 and 2021 lockdowns.

Finally, the book makes an original contribution to the study of media use in the family through its willingness to entertain counter-intuitive and contrary positions, especially in relation to common sense expectations and cultural norms. A key finding from the book is that being forced to watch and interact with children's everyday media use acted in some ways to educate parents about what is going on for their children. Clearly acting like teachers changed the parameters of what was discussed in the family home, and both children and parents had to learn what the other found meaningful, engaging, purposive, and in its broadest sense, educational. The second half of this book in particular explores what parents learned from being in such close proximity to their children's media use. Although this could not be a recommended or mandated principle of parenting, and it took the trauma of the pandemic to bring this about, the book's willingness to engage with the unexpected, the counter-intuitive, and the downright contrary clearly helped its authors observe and learn about digital parenting (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). From this perspective, the pandemic clearly offered a kind of natural laboratory, but perhaps, it needed the international team assembled here to be able to use a natural divergence of perspectives to see what was actually going on.

And indeed, the effort required in this kind of international project at scale cannot be underestimated. I do however think this book underwrites the value of research projects like this, because it seems to me that without the international comparative lens, questions of method, or universality, and of the counter-intuitive imagination might not have arisen. I have an email from Rebekah Willett in the early months of 2021, writing that she was aiming to keep the study simple, so that she and Maureen Mauk could get an article drafted in a few months, but then she wrote 'but I am open to more exciting ideas'. I do not know whether she ever regretted this open invitation, but I think what the authors have collected here is not just a record of a horrible time in so many people's lives but a genuinely original set of studies exploring the significance, meaning, and use of digital media in family life. I hope these conceptual and theoretical insights will be a lasting legacy of the

pandemic – and that a book like this can change the horizon of our everyday and common-sense understandings.

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1 Introduction

Families, screen media, and daily life during the pandemic

Rebekah Willett

'Generation C', people who were children during the COVID-19 pandemic, is under close scrutiny, with news articles, medical journals, and educators reporting signs that pandemic conditions might have had detrimental effects on children's learning, social skills, attention spans, and mental and physical wellbeing. In the hype that surrounds these concerns, it does not take long for discussions to turn to children's use of media during the pandemic as one of the root causes of Generation C's ills, drawing on an age-old discourse about negative effects of media. For example, Professor of Psychology at Stanford, Keith Humphreys, is quoted in *The New York Times* as stating, 'There will be a period of epic withdrawal' that will require young people to 'sustain attention in normal interactions without getting a reward hit every few seconds' (Richtel, 2021). Drawing on emotive language used to describe drug addiction, Humphreys is likening children's media consumption during the pandemic to a prolonged period of drug or alcohol abuse. Discourses from news articles such as this added to the stress of the pandemic for many families with children. Even before the pandemic, parents felt guilty or anxious about the amount of time their children were consuming screen media, often feeling they failed to keep to the pervasive guideline of limiting children to two hours of 'screen time' per day (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2018; Willett & Wheeler, 2021). During the pandemic, parents had little choice but to throw out previous rules about how many minutes or hours per day children could spend on screen media, as children had to be online for school, online spaces provided a valuable means of socialising with friends and family, and families increasingly relied on digital spaces for entertainment, with extra-curricular activities cancelled and family spaces closed. We know that families' use of media increased dramatically during the pandemic, and there continues to be a feeling that there's no turning back the clock – returning to pre-pandemic levels of family media use is out of the question. So how do we understand Generation C's experience of media during the pandemic? What has changed, and what concerns remain? Are parents and caregivers rethinking the role of media in family life?

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Based on interviews with parents and caregivers about use of media in their homes, this book documents and analyses families' experiences as digital media became increasingly embedded in the fabric of everyday family life during the pandemic. We heard about various family practices connected with media prior to the pandemic: screen time (the number of minutes or hours spent consuming media on screen technologies) was limited, content was restricted by setting up Netflix channels for children, weekly family movie nights involved finding something for the whole family to watch together, computers were set up in family spaces rather than in private bedrooms. We heard many parents talk in nostalgic ways of 'the before times' (pre-pandemic), when children were occupied with school, extracurricular activities, and playing with friends; in the before times, there was little time for children to 'be on screens'. Parents yearned for the 'old days' when children did not want to go to their screens as soon as they woke up in the morning, and when it was easier to set boundaries on children's media use. As one mother in the United States described, 'Before the pandemic, it was a strict no. Like there was no wavering… it was black or white. And now obviously there's grey areas'. This book analyses shifts away from the 'black and white' rules: a sense of parental control, a view of children's engagements with media as easy to define, and the use of simplistic binary terms associated with 'screen time'. The pandemic forced many of these views and practices to become more nuanced in order to acknowledge the 'grey areas'. New routines and practices connected with media, often created out of necessity, indicated changes in parents' understanding of children's engagements with digital media. These changes responded to the realities of the pandemic, and as we analyse in this book, they reflected broader societal discourses about these topics, as well as specific micro-cultures in each household.

This book captures parents' feelings and experiences in times of lockdowns and school closures with a specific focus on children's digital lives. In June 2020, some of the authors in this book were scheduled to present at a conference about children and media. The conference was cancelled, and not only did we miss the chance to learn about and discuss current research, we also had to consider the relevance of our previous research on children and media during the dramatic shifts that were taking place as a result of the pandemic. It seemed urgent to document families' experiences, to capture some of the affective moments of the pandemic connected with screen media, and to find out whether parents had new understandings of children's engagements with media that responded to previous feelings of guilt and anxiety. The researchers in the United States started the project in Autumn 2020 and quickly realised that families' experiences of media varied in different geographical areas of the United States, with some children back at school in person and others still largely confined to home. Sharing initial excitement of documenting family life during this unprecedented time led to interest by other researchers, networking through research centres, and the resulting group of authors collaborating on this book. The research took place in seven countries, each

of which had different approaches to the pandemic, media, education, and family life. The number of days spent in lockdown, experiences of remote schooling, access to vaccines, and even the dates governments labelled as 'the pandemic' varied enormously across the seven countries. For the purpose of this book, we are focusing on families' experiences of the pandemic from approximately January 2020 through to July 2022, with data collected at different points depending on the country context. We have attempted to capture these varying contexts in Appendix 1, which provides summary timelines in each of the seven countries; and Appendix 2, which provides an overview of the research project in each country. Drawing on interviews with 130 parents, this book examines how family media practices changed during the pandemic, and ways parents' understanding of children's engagements with media have permanently altered. The book analyses experiences of diverse families in relation to specific cultural contexts during the pandemic, examining key themes related to media use: family media practices, schooling, creativity, and regulation.

This chapter provides an overview and context for the project by first summarising existing research on aspects of the pandemic experienced by children and families that are particularly relevant to the analyses in this book: screen media and childcare. The second part of this chapter describes the theoretical lenses that are threaded through the subsequent chapters to address major concepts such as media practices, parenting, childhoods, temporalities, and imaginaries. The third part of this chapter describes the research project upon which the book is based, including the methodological approach used across the seven countries. This part of the chapter highlights innovative methods, such as a visualisation exercise, and considers the layers and messiness of interviews that bear witness to the experience of the pandemic. The chapter concludes with an overview of the remaining chapters in the book.

Media and family life during the pandemic: recent scholarship

Recent edited volumes about children and families in the pandemic provide in-depth comparative studies that attest to the importance of analysing various cultural contexts in relation to pandemic-related experiences. The edited volume, *Children and Media Worldwide in a Time of a Pandemic* (Götz & Lemish, 2022) includes data from 4,200 children aged nine to 13, collected through an international survey administered in 42 countries. This volume reveals diverse ways in which children experienced media during the pandemic, including varying purposes for engaging with media and different literacies children developed as they used media in their daily lives. In a comparative study of interview data from parents in ten countries, *Family Life in the Time of COVID* (Twamley et al., 2023) investigates ways families understood government responses during the pandemic, and how family circumstances and cultures shaped their experiences. This volume reveals

the effects of government policies and diverse sociocultural practices on the experiences of the global pandemic. Both volumes provide important comparative analyses that add to our understanding of ways in which diverse families experienced media during the pandemic and the role of socio-political and economic contexts in understanding these experiences. We see this volume, *Children, Media, and Pandemic Parenting: Family Life in Uncertain Times,* as providing an account of parents' experiences in different cultural contexts, with a specific focus on family media use; and our contribution is less about findings resulting from comparative analyses and more about the development of analytical frameworks to explain our findings. We hope these frameworks will be useful in future research and policy making as family life becomes increasingly digital by default, and as we continue to experience uncertainty both locally and globally in relation to any number of factors.

Research emerging post-pandemic points to the significance of changes in family life that occurred as a result of pandemic-related conditions. While it is challenging to summarise research on the myriad of ways families experienced screen media in the pandemic, there are some overarching themes that we identify and present in this section. We acknowledge the limitations of these brief research summaries, particularly in relation to different global contexts. Our summaries focus primarily on countries represented in this book and are largely viewed through the lens of Global North countries. The aim is to provide some contextual information for our study about family media use during the pandemic.

Media during the pandemic

While studies indicated children's media use was on the rise before 2020, during the pandemic, children's media use increased dramatically as their lives became even more digital (e.g., McArthur et al., 2021; McClain, 2022; Qustodio, 2021; RevealingReality, 2020). With schools closing for 1.5 billion students globally, many children experienced remote education at some point in the pandemic, relying on educational screen media (television, apps) or online virtual schooling for their education, private lessons, and extracurriculars (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020). In addition to consuming more media for educational purposes, with after-school activities, summer camps, and play dates no longer an option, media were often used to occupy children while parents were working and doing household chores. Further, there were fewer options for family entertainment or outings such as going to libraries, sporting events, or museums – in many parts of the world, even playgrounds were closed early in the pandemic. With the launch of Disney+ streaming service starting in November 2019 and extending globally over the following two years, family movie viewing became a viable alternative to going out. Finally, social events and friend and family get-togethers were all done via screens. Unsurprisingly, children's ownership of personal media devices increased

during the pandemic in many countries, as families struggled to provide suitable education, social opportunities, and entertainment for their individual children.

For many stakeholders, including researchers, paediatricians, and parents, this increase in children's screen time is a concern which echoes long-standing discussions about a range of potential negative effects of children's media consumption. Some effects relate to specific areas of media content (e.g., sex, violence, or advertising); while other effects relate to media use in general (e.g., effects on brain development, or physical effects). Some concerns relate to the notion that media use displaces other, potentially more valuable, activities such as physical exercise, school work, or family interaction. Others reflect much broader social concerns, or concerns about values – for example in relation to consumerism or stereotyping. Children's use of the internet for purposes such as social networking and gaming, as well as consuming videos on YouTube and TikTok carries a further set of concerns, particularly exposure to potential content, contact, conduct, and contract risks (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021). In addition to these concerns, there has been an increase in research about the connection between mental health and screen media use, for example, studies that examine the effects of social media on anxiety and depression in teens. In the pandemic, as children and teens were increasingly isolated at home for long periods of time with more access to technology, these concerns increased (Hmidan et al., 2022; McClain, 2022). A cross-European survey found that responding children aged ten to 18 felt they spent too much time online during the pandemic, and half indicated that they went without eating or sleeping due to their online activities, with a quarter of respondents saying that this behaviour increased during lockdowns (Lobe et al., 2021).

These different types of concerns continued throughout the pandemic, with the mere increase in screen time often being equated to an increase in all of these effects. However, a description of the number of hours of screen time does not indicate what media practices look like in terms of context, content, or the individual child. There are different purposes for media use that shape how media are experienced and how they might affect individual children. From the scant research available that examines these types of questions, we know that during the pandemic, screen media were used for a variety of purposes, many of which are not subject to the concerns about media effects. Researchers are also pointing to the positive effects of screen media use during the pandemic. Most obviously, schools that were shut down for months, and even up to a year, relied on remote learning platforms and digital resources of various types to continue pupils' education. Outside of the role of screen media in learning, studies indicated that media were used by children and teens to alleviate stress created by pandemic conditions (Jiao et al., 2020), and families that experienced financial difficulties or other kinds of stress during the pandemic used media as a way of coping with stress or as a source of distraction from stressful situations

(McArthur et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022). Also highly relevant to pandemic conditions was the role of various platforms for providing opportunities for social connection. Research indicated the importance of video conferencing and other types of communication technologies for family members to keep in touch during the pandemic, particularly when families were unable to meet due to restrictions on travel and/or risk of contact with vulnerable (elderly or immunocompromised) family members (Eales et al., 2021). The pandemic also highlighted social aspects of digital games, long recognised as an important component of children's media culture, as well as spaces for social interaction. Researchers found that digital games were helping children stay connected with peers as well as other family members, which supported their wellbeing (Cowan et al., 2021; Rideout & Robb, 2021). Furthermore, research documented playful and creative engagements with digital media, including family YouTube sing-alongs, video making projects, creating digital art, and many hobbies (Cowan et al., 2021; Rideout & Robb, 2021). In spite of these findings, a majority of research investigating parents' and caregivers' attitudes towards their children's screen media use during the pandemic indicated concern and frustration. These studies reported parents' and caregivers' perception that children's screen time was far too high, resulting in various negative effects, including displacement of other activities such as physical activity, being creative, and spending time with friends and family (Graham & Sahlberg, 2021).

Managing childcare during the pandemic

An important context of family media use during the pandemic was the increase in childcare required when schools and after-school facilities shuttered their buildings. Sevilla and Smith (2020) estimated that families were providing 40 to 50 hours in childcare per week during lockdowns in the United Kingdom (compared with 20 hours before the pandemic). As these findings indicate, pandemic-related restrictions and lockdowns led to drastic changes in households, and for many, the rules for managing screen time needed to be rewritten. Not only did children's day-to-day schooling, socialising, and entertainment move online, parents and carers were facing uncertain economic times, often in the midst of isolation, stress, and trauma. The pandemic had deep and long-lasting effects on mothers, particularly mothers who were managing paid work, childcare, remote schooling, and the running of the household. Single mothers who had no other adult to share childcare or economic responsibilities were particularly burdened. Across the interviews with parents that we discuss in this book, we heard about mothers who quit work or reduced their employment hours in order to provide childcare and supervise remote schooling; we found that mothers voiced concerns about screen time more often than fathers; and we heard about mothers' additional labour of organising schedules and activities to keep children occupied without school and extracurricular activities. Applying the

concept of the 'circle of care', which accounts for the interrelated aspects of paid care work, unpaid care work, and paid work, Smith (2022) illustrated ways that the pandemic conditions in Canada created feelings of guilt and distress in mothers who attempted to work from home while managing their other responsibilities. As discussed throughout the chapters in this volume, interview data document the affective aspects of this circle of care, which was felt more deeply during the pandemic.

While research indicated that during lockdowns in different-sex parent households there was more sharing of responsibilities amongst parents; across the globe, women still bore the brunt of the increase in responsibilities for childcare, schooling, and general household tasks and were more at risk than men of psychological hardships (Azcona et al., 2020; Biroli et al., 2021; Goldin, 2022; International Labor Organization, 2020; Sevilla & Smith, 2020; Thomas et al., 2022; Twamley et al., 2023). A report from the United Nations (UN) highlighted the disproportionate burdens health emergencies place on women, and the effects of these additional burdens on UN Sustainable Development Goals, including gender equality (Azcona et al., 2020). Further, a report by the Center for Global Development estimated the number of hours of unpaid work provided by women compared with men during the pandemic and revealed stark disparities, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Kenny & Yang, 2021). Importantly, The Center for Global Development report highlighted the failure by many countries to include measures of unpaid work when assessing economic development; and authors of the report speculate that increases in unpaid care work during the pandemic was felt more by certain demographics, for example by women who previously relied on schools and childcare centres, paid childcare, or after-school care, to enable them to do paid employment (O'Donnell et al., 2021).

These findings align with research in the United Kingdom, where a parliamentary report pointed to an increase in the gender gap related to time spent providing childcare during the pandemic (Women and Equalities Committee, 2021). At the same time, women were major contributors to the UK workforce, and keeping the economy on track relied on women's labour. As Ashman et al. (2022) described in their article about the 'mobilization' of employed mothers by the UK government during the pandemic, 'Mothers were expected by the government to manage two conflicting priorities: halting Covid-19 through schooling children at home and somehow also satisfying their line managers by continuing to perform to a high standard' (p. 1127). Similarly, in Canada, the Finance Minister said, 'COVID has brutally exposed something women have long known: Without childcare, parents – usually mothers – can't work' (Freeland, 2021). Women with school-aged children experienced far greater reductions in employment compared with men (Couch et al., 2022), and there are concerns about long-lasting effects on women's careers due to women reducing their work hours or having to quit their jobs in order to cope with increases in household

demands during the pandemic (Couch et al., 2022; O'Donnell et al., 2021; Sevilla & Smith, 2020). Findings from global research indicated general trends in gender inequalities in relation to paid and unpaid work during the pandemic, with disproportionate effects on women's employment, working hours, and wages, with variations depending on specific contexts and government responses (see International Labor Organization, 2020; Mooi-Reci & Risman, 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2021). In Australia for example, the government financially supported workers whose jobs were temporarily suspended, alleviating some of the stress experienced by families. In Canada, the government opened schools and increased childcare options in Fall 2020, impacting women's paid and unpaid employment possibilities.

Importantly, in the United States, research indicated that gaps in employment during the pandemic were markedly different for women of colour and those who had lower levels of education who worked in areas such as childcare, health care, restaurants, and beauty services which were shuttered during lockdowns and sometimes did not reopen (Goldin, 2022). For women of colour, this exacerbated persistent wage gaps that have created a situation whereby women of colour are less likely to have savings and be able to withstand economic crises (Bleiweis et al., 2021). Thus, family economic security was particularly precarious in communities of colour, where women disproportionately work in part-time, less secure jobs that cannot be done from home. Women, and particularly women of colour, were more likely than men to lose their jobs due to layoffs necessitated by economic conditions in the pandemic. In addition, because women of colour were more likely to be in jobs that could not be done remotely, they experienced higher rates of exposure to the Coronavirus. These disparities are not unique to the United States. Research highlighted that socio-economic inequalities, particularly in countries with underfunded healthcare systems, resulted in disproportionate effects of COVID-19 and pandemic conditions on lower income families, and people from racially minoritised groups (Blundell et al., 2021; OECD, 2022).

Feminist economists use the term 'third shift' to refer to the care mostly provided by women that involves unpaid and undervalued labour in households, and Power (2020) asked if we now need to add a 'fourth shift' (remote schooling while working) to this framework. During the pandemic, remote schooling consisted of synchronous and asynchronous digital activities, both requiring active parental involvement. Various forms of 'hybrid schooling' also emerged as the pandemic wore on, with a combination of remote and in-person instruction, with children attending for part of the week or certain ages of children attending in-person. Across the interviews we analyse in this book, parents inevitably raised their concern and frustration that remote schooling meant far more screen time than previously allowed in their households. Coupled with the stress of having to alter screen time rules to take account of remote schooling, parents were expected to support their children's schooling in new ways. Parents and carers were responsible for

providing adequate internet access and devices, as well as being mediators and facilitators of children's remote schooling, and not all parents were equipped, available, or inclined to take up these new roles. Given that families had different access to the internet and digital devices, as well as varying levels of digital competency, the expected affordances of remote schooling did not benefit all students. For example, in families with children who had special educational needs, and in families whose first language was not the language of instruction, parents faced further challenges in trying to support their children's learning through remote schooling (Crescenza et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2021). Further, several studies found that parents resisted remote schooling, feeling sceptical about its educational effectiveness compared to traditional ways of learning (Dong et al., 2020; Weaver & Swank, 2021; Zhang, 2021). With school closures, many children missed opportunities for in-person peer interactions, leading to concerns about children's social-emotional development at critical developmental milestones. As the pandemic wore on, parents we interviewed for this book were intensely aware of these concerns as well as reports about 'learning loss' that appeared in the mainstream press (see Moscoviz & Evans, 2022). These findings and reports placed even more pressure on parents to provide children with opportunities for social, emotional, and educational growth as part of their management of childcare during the pandemic.

Theoretical lenses

The parents we interviewed for this project were experiencing the context described above, with many variations due to a range of factors including government approaches during the pandemic, family employment and socio-economic situations, health concerns, ages of children in the home, and so on (see Appendix 1 for summary overviews of pandemic timelines and Appendix 3 for details about each participating parent). The five analysis chapters which follow in this volume take account of these different contexts as we strive to understand and conceptualise families' experiences of media during the pandemic. This section turns to the theoretical lenses which we developed as we read and reread the interviews and had conversations as a research team about how we might understand parents' experiences.

The *first lens* considers family media practices, parenting, and childhoods. In this book, we are interested in unpacking the multi-dimensional relationships between media, parenting, and family life. We see 'digital parenting' as more than parents' practices of regulation and mediation of media and technologies in the home. By digital parenting, we are considering a range of media uses, routines, and rituals, as well as parents' understanding, discursive construction, and affective relationships to domestic media practices. Arguing for a need to focus on practice rather than media texts or industry, Couldry (2004) writes, 'we need the perspective of practice to help us address how media are embedded in the interlocking fabric of social and cultural life' (p. 129),

and he summarises practice-based research questions as follows: 'what range of practices are oriented to media and what is the role of media-oriented practices in ordering other practices?' (p. 130). We use the term 'family media practices' to include various uses of screen media (e.g., for socialising, entertainment, education), as well as considering screen media as an integral part of family life, with media devices determining how spaces are considered (e.g., large screens central to shared family spaces), how time is structured (e.g., family movie nights), and ways childhood is experienced (e.g., use of parental controls to limit content). To investigate parenting during the pandemic, we seek to understand ways that media were embedded in day-to-day life when lockdowns and other restrictions were in place, times when media were seen as new or exceptional to daily routines, and ways media structured the domestic sphere during lockdowns. Further, we recognise ways that family media practices are formed within and through various relations and contexts, including local and global politics, macro- and micro-cultures, other people, material objects, time, and space (Burkitt, 2016). We seek to see how the relations within specific domestic contexts shape the experience of digital parenting during the pandemic.

We recognise that 'parenting', a term only widely used in the past two decades, is positioned and constructed by dominant discourses that change over time and are experienced differently across geographical spaces (Cook, 2020; Faircloth & Lee, 2010; Lee, 2014). Daniel Cook argues that in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a scientific approach to child-rearing dominated magazines, books, manuals, and programs for mothers in the United States, putting pressure on mothers to be informed with scientific research and medical advice about children's moral development, health, welfare, and education (2020). Importantly, there has been a recent shift towards skills and knowledge of 'parenting' rather than knowledge of child development, described by Lee as, 'An increasing propensity to focus on the "ought" of what the parents should do, rather than the "is", of the child' (2014, p. 67). This increases the feeling that there are right and wrong ways to do parenting. Indeed, various initiatives aimed at improving the welfare of children frame parenting as a set of skills, subject to surveillance by the state. In relation to screen media, discussions of parenting include various discursive constructs related to benefits and risks of technologies, children's developmental needs, childhood innocence, risk management, parental authority, and so on (Clark, 2013; Livingstone, 2009; Vickery, 2017). Importantly, 'good parenting' is clearly defined in relation to assumed effects of media on children, resulting in recommendations for parents to evaluate screen media and tightly regulate their children's media consumption. In their analysis of interviews with parents, Blum-Ross and Livingstone write, 'time and again we heard parents of young children struggle to balance the convenience of screen time with their worries about being a "good" parent' (2018, p. 183).

Researchers have identified numerous forms and styles of parental mediation in relation to screen technology: posing restrictions, discussing content,

co-using media, monitoring by staying nearby or checking browser history, and using technical restrictions (see Clark, 2011; Livingstone et al., 2017; Nikken & Schols, 2015). These types of parental mediation involve parents in evaluating children's media, with preference given to 'high quality' media, discussing media and co-participating in media consumption in particular ways, and establishing and enforcing strict rules about media use, including 'screen-free' times and spaces. These expectations connected with parental mediation draw on neoliberal discourses of 'individualisation' and 'responsibilisation' which position decisions and actions, for example, as the sole responsibility of individuals (i.e., parents) (see Garrett et al., 2016; Rose 1999). Further, parental mediation theories assume that media can be isolated and then monitored, whereas we know family life is richly intertwined with various media forms and, particularly in the pandemic, media were everywhere in domestic routines and spaces. By approaching parenting from a media practice perspective, our analyses reveal a more holistic analysis of parental mediation and practices, recognising ways parents' guidance and decision-making connected with media are embedded in daily life. In Chapter 2, Sheppard, Zhao and Coulter take a relational approach to the data, identifying assemblages in the domestic setting that need to be accounted for when analysing family mediation practices, for example, ways that parents' attitudes towards technology, perception of risk and ideas about childhood, and views of children as more or less able to self-regulate, inform parents' practices.

Alongside these approaches to parenting and family media practices, several of the authors in this volume have a background in childhood studies which guides the questions we ask and our understanding of families. Rather than focusing on children's development or seeing families as individual units that are unified in their thinking, we recognise children as autonomous individuals within families, and we are interested in children's cultures within domestic settings. We recognise children as key negotiators within the media practices of households. Further, we are attuned to ways that 'childhood' is discursively constructed and ways that broad discourses about childhood, for example, childhood innocence, shape parents' understandings of their role as parents. We recognise that childhood is experienced differently across time and geographical spaces, and that aspects such as gender, social class, and ethnicity create differentiated childhoods.

The *second lens* considers temporalities. Time and space were defining components of lockdowns with some governments limiting the number of minutes people were allowed outside their homes and wide-spread implementation of social distancing policies (see Appendix 1). Families experienced dramatic changes to their daily and weekly schedules, markers of time passing such as birthday parties and graduation ceremonies were missed or convened in online spaces, and spaces in homes were reconfigured to allow family members to work, attend school, play, socialise, and stay entertained. We draw loosely on social analyses of time (e.g., Adam, 1995) to understand

these changes and tensions connected with temporalities. Rather than seeing time as linear, as measured by clocks and calendars, the analysis considers different experiences of time during the pandemic.

We heard parents talk about time as feeling precious – a sense that this time together as a family should be cherished and enjoyed before life returned to its usual pace. We heard about time during lockdowns as feeling monotonous – each day was in some ways the same, and families were running out of ways to pass time. Even weekends lost their meaningful routines and markers of the week. However, particularly when children were in remote learning and parents were working, we heard about time as fleeting and feeling hectic. Further, we consider ways that parents' construction of their past and their families' imagined future inform their understanding and actions in the present. By viewing time as socially constructed, our analyses allow us to consider how 'pandemic time' was experienced in different ways. Parents attempted to set schedules in order to regulate time and structure lockdown days, remote schooling put pressures on families to follow a tight schedule and configure time and space connected with media devices, and children's time on screens increased to fill the time previously occupied by extracurricular activities and family outings. Figure 1.1 is a photo shared by a Colombian mother, which shows her six-year-old daughter pointing to a schedule the mother created to break up the day into activities from 8am to 8pm. Table 1.1 shows the remote schooling schedule that a US mother was expected to facilitate for her seven-year-old son, by ensuring he was ready and in the correct online space at 8am and then monitoring changes of activities every 20-minutes or so. For parents with children engaged in remote schooling, time regulated their lives. Yet simultaneously, time passed, children grew older, and family engagements with media shifted to allow for children's development and the slow passing of time; and in some ways, time was paused as certain activities and relationships went on hiatus, with potential to be continued at an indeterminate date. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the pervasive screen time discourse continued to dominate parents' minds, with parents creating new coping strategies by relabelling what counted as screen time, anxiously attempting to create balance between online and offline activities, or simply giving up on limiting screen time in hopes of regaining control over their children's screen time post-pandemic.

Our *third lens* considers parental imaginaries and ways that parents experience and position themselves in relation to their role in their children's future with media and technologies. As we listened to parents discuss decisions they made about what media were in their homes, how much access children had to media, how to regulate and mediate children's engagement with media, we heard about parents' imagined futures for their children and for the role of technology in society. Parents frequently indicated that they supported their children's digital skill development because they imagined these skills to be essential in their children's future lives, in their education, as well as their future careers. As Livingstone and Blum-Ross describe, 'Each act of

Figure 1.1 Homemade pandemic daily schedule for a six-year-old in Colombia. Photo by the six-year-old's mother. Included with permission.

parenting has a double meaning – as an intervention in the present and an effort to bring about a particular future, even if this future cannot be fully named and the path to achieving it is uncertain' (2020, p. 6). These imaginaries draw on and reflect parents' understanding of media, as well as their children's future: parents' fears about the increase of screen time during the pandemic balanced with their imaginaries of a technology-driven future. We found imaginaries that were hopeful, such as when parents anticipated their children's skills in navigating online spaces required by school, and searching for information for school and for hobbies, would be lifelong skills useful in future digital worlds. We also heard about imaginaries that were anxiety-producing, such as feelings that children would be unable to control their desire for screen time, leading to worries about children's future social skills, mental and physical health, and creativity.

In some ways, the imagined future with media and technology became a reality during the pandemic, when after-school sports were replaced with virtual games, personal interactions were all done through screens, and family

Table 1.1 Weekly remote schooling schedule for seven-year-old in the United States

Monday	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*
8-8:20 Morning Meeting	8-8:20 Morning Meeting	View Message from Teacher	8-8:20 Morning Meeting	8-8:20 Morning Meeting
8:20-8:35 Reading Mini Lesson	8:20-8:50 Independent Reading or Meet with teacher	8:20-9:05 Independent Reading And/Or SeeSaw Reading Activity	8:20-8:35 Reading Mini Lesson	8:20-8:50 Independent Reading or Meet with teacher
8:35-9:05 Independent Reading or Meet with teacher	8:50-9:20 BREAK		8:35-9:05 Independent Reading or Meet with teacher	8:50-9:20 BREAK
9:05-9:20 BREAK		BREAK	9:05-9:20 BREAK	
9:20-9:40 Phonics Lesson	9:20-9:40 Phonics Seesaw	9:20-9:40 Phonics Seesaw	9:20-9:40 Phonics Lesson	9:20-9:40 Phonics Lesson
9:40-9:55 Writing Lesson	9:40-9:55 BREAK		9:40-9:55 Writing Lesson	9:40-9:55 BREAK
9:55-10:25 Ind. writing (not online) and possible conf. with teacher	9:55-10:25 Ind. writing (not online) and possible conf. w/ teacher or sm. group	9:55-10:25 Ind. writing or Seesaw activity	9:55-10:25 Ind. writing (not online) and possible conf. with teacher	9:55-10:25 Ind. writing (not online) and possible conf. with teacher
10:25-10:55 ENCORE	10:25-10:55 ENCORE		10:25-10:55 ENCORE	10:25-10:55 ENCORE
10:55-11:20 LUNCH	10:55-11:20 LUNCH		10:55-11:20 LUNCH	10:55-11:20 LUNCH
11:20-11:40 Number Corner	11:20-11:40 Number Corner	11:20-1w1:40 Number Corner (Seesaw)	11:20-11:40 Number Corner	11:20-11:40 Number Corner

11:40-12:10 Ind. practice or work with teacher	**11:40-12:10** Math Lesson	**11:40-12:10** Math Activity (Seesaw)	**11:40-12:10** Ind. practice or work with teacher	**11:40-12:25** Math Lesson
12:10-12:25 BREAK	12:10-12:25 BREAK		12:10-12:25 BREAK	12:25-12:30 BREAK
12:30-1:00 Ind. Social Studies or Science	**12:30-1:00** Social Studies or Science Lesson		**12:30-1:00** Ind. Social Studies or Science	**12:30-1:00** Social Studies or Science Lesson
1:00-1:30 Encore Small Group/Office Hours	**1:00-1:30** Encore Small Group/Office Hours		**1:00-1:30** Encore Small Group/Office Hours	**1:00-1:30** Encore Small Group/Office Hours

Orange: zoom live instruction	**Purple: recorded lesson, link in Seesaw**	**Blue: Activity is linked in seesaw**	**Green: Student Break Time**	**White: Flexible timing**

members were 'glued' to individual devices. When projecting to the future, the parents we interviewed often reflected on their own childhoods and worried that their children were too dependent on technologies, and that the current situation was radically different from their experiences of growing up. While these sentiments existed before the pandemic, families' experiences with media during lockdown heightened these feelings, and in particular a feeling of loss of control, or a struggle to maintain any sense of control over their children's media use, and a feeling of uncertainty about when pandemic conditions would end and whether they would be able to go back to rules and routines established pre-pandemic. We asked families what they imagined post-pandemic media use would look like, and as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, parents imagined a future with media technology embedded in daily life; however, they hoped their children would use media deliberately, and as one tool amongst many for communication, entertainment, learning, and ways to pass time.

Alongside these parental imaginaries are those imaginaries enacted by the state and technology corporations that were articulated and reinforced through dominant discourse about children and media and the role of parents in mediating and regulating their children's media use. State imaginaries posit children as future citizens who need to be technologically competent, media savvy, and socially and emotionally healthy. Various stakeholders voiced imaginaries about detrimental effects of pandemic-related conditions on children: learning loss, poor social skills, media addiction, and so on. These imaginaries had implications for parents struggling to make decisions about family media practices in the home, as domestic life became increasingly embedded with digital technologies. State imaginaries are the backdrop to the analyses throughout the book and are directly addressed in Chapter 6. In numerous chapters we detail ways that imaginaries about 'good' parenting practices from stakeholders (government officials, professionals including paediatricians and educators, and non-governmental organisations providing advice about screen media practices) shaped parents' understanding of children's media use and family media practices. Together, these imaginaries about children's futures from parents and the state help us understand the emotional struggles, including hopes and fears parents faced as they made decisions about their family media practices during the pandemic.

General research methods

The research project upon which this book is based includes seven countries: Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Chapters 2 through 6 analyse data from parallel studies across these seven countries. The studies involved researchers in each location conducting interviews with parents and caregivers who had children aged four to 11. [Throughout this volume, we use 'parents' as shorthand to refer to both parents and caregivers.] Together, we interviewed

130 parents (113 mothers and 17 fathers) following the same protocol, with minor adaptations for local contexts. Each study received ethics approval from the relevant institutional review board. Researchers drew on available financial resources, including small local grants where available to support project expenses. The studies employed an initial online questionnaire completed by each participant, followed by 40 to 50-minute semi-structured interviews via video conference software (e.g., Zoom, WhatsApp). The questionnaire asked background information on each participant and their family, including questions about family make-up (number and ages of children, marital status), demographics (ethnicities, parents' education, employment), availability of home media, and mode and type of schooling provided during the pandemic. Interview questions focused on experiences of the pandemic, particularly in connection with children's use of media in the home. As semi-structured interviews, we had a list of questions that addressed specific topics, and we encouraged participants to elaborate on ideas that seemed important or distinct to their family context. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and then read and reread by the interviewers as we moved into the initial preliminary analysis phase. Detailed information about each study (researchers, recruitment methods, overviews of participants) is provided in Appendices 2 and 3.

Initial analysis of interview data was led by the United States research team who developed first cycle descriptive codes that identified patterns (similarities, differences, frequencies, comparisons) in the US data (Saldaña, 2016). Second cycle coding involved grouping the descriptive codes into categories by identifying themes that ran across the different codes. This process resulted in a codebook that was shared with all researchers for discussion, trial coding, and adjustment. During these discussions, additional descriptive codes were added that were relevant to particular country contexts. After this third cycle of coding, the revised codebook was applied to data from all countries in Dedoose (see Appendix 4 'Codebook'). At this stage in the preliminary analysis, the codes and categories were fairly broad: the primary aim of this coding process was to get the large volume of data into manageable chunks for further analysis. The thematic categories that emerged from this process led to the choices of the chapter themes (changes in media use, education, creativity, regulation), with the more descriptive codes providing points of comparison when authors started discussing their chapter analyses. For each chapter, the authors focused on one category or code and provided examples of data for each code, noting absences in their data set, ideas for new codes, and writing observational memos. This provided the starting point for conversations about elements within each code that came to light when compiling data from the different countries.

At this point, researchers entered into dialogue about theoretical lenses that would help to highlight and explain some of the elements that were similar or contrasting across the different data sets represented in each chapter. The process of analysis was proceeded by jointly defining specific theories, developing

specific theoretical frameworks to explain the data, and writing analytic memos to start applying the frameworks with the data. This often involved multiple rounds of analysis, with researchers moving back and forth between data and theoretical frameworks in order to adjust the frameworks to align with the data. These conversations and formation of frameworks were a form of 'slow scholarship' (Hartman & Darab, 2012), with the evolution of frameworks taking many months to solidify as researchers read theories new to them, discussed ways the theories helped to explain the data, incorporated theories into the analytical framework, and then reapplied the framework to the data sets. Notably, the theoretical frameworks were a result of dialogue between researchers coming from different related fields and areas of interest as well as different cultural contexts. The resulting frameworks incorporate lenses from childhood studies, family studies, education, cultural and media studies, and affect studies.

Conducting interviews during the pandemic was made easier in some ways, due to parents' familiarity with video conference software, which for many was the way families kept in touch with other family members, as well as being their default meeting mode for work. Even if interviews happened outside of lockdowns, we still conducted interviews via video conferencing software or phone due to the ease of scheduling interviews. Research indicates that video conference interviews also allow easier participation and provide a more relaxed setting, as interviewees do not need to leave their home or have researchers enter their home (Sipes et al., 2019; Weller, 2017). To address potential barriers to access and ethical considerations connected with having visual access to the inside of people's homes, we offered telephone interviews, and the option to turn cameras off; however, most participants chose to participate through video with their cameras on. While this allowed us access to some non-verbal cues, the distance created by technology might also have prevented us from interpreting subtle body language including signs of distress (Sipes et al., 2019). However, the pandemic as experienced by parents with children aged four to 11 was fraught with higher demands than usual as parents tried to educate, entertain, and maintain their children's health, as well as their social and emotional wellbeing, in the midst of multiple potential crises. A vast majority of the parents we interviewed continued paid employment through the pandemic while continuing childcare duties, which increased exponentially when children were doing remote schooling (see Appendices 1 and 3). Our interviews, therefore, were often interrupted by these parenting responsibilities (cf., Faircloth et al., 2022). As parents told us about the challenges of their daily lives, we saw and heard evidence of children asking for assistance with tasks, requesting parents' attention, and being fed up with lockdown. Our transcripts contain moments of interruption and reassurance ('five more minutes and then I'll be with you') that illustrate the very ideas parents were trying to communicate to us. In some ways, these moments were important points of reflection for us as interviewers, highlighting the privilege that many of us had as researchers

who were able to take time to conduct interviews, and reinforcing the power imbalance with interviewers asking questions, directing the conversation, and ultimately interpreting the participants' words.

Unsurprisingly, the interviews were filled with affective moments, and the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed us to follow up on responses that indicated a deeper story to tell. At the end of each interview, we conducted a photo elicitation exercise, which involved researchers sharing their screen to show an online image site such as Unsplash or Pixabay. We informed participants that we were going to search for an image that they felt encapsulated their feelings about their families' experiences with screen media during the pandemic. We started with search terms 'children' and 'media' and entered more search terms suggested by interviewees, looking through the image selections and adding other search terms as the algorithm responded to the different searches. The chapters which follow contain some of these images and selected search terms as well as parents' explanations of the meanings they associate with the image. This final visualisation exercise highlights some of the messiness of our interviews – we were asking parents to summarise experiences of an unprecedented global event in just 45 minutes; for some, the questions we asked elicited emotional responses; and for many of the participants, we were dropping in to gather data and then leaving families to their pandemic situations. For some parents, we had the feeling that they were seeking validation about their parenting practices. Although we shared some early results of our study with participants through blog posts and news articles as a way of acknowledging their contribution to our longer-term academic study and maintaining some transparency connected with our interpretation of the data, the analyses ultimately reflect researchers' viewpoints and interests. We feel that our grounded and collaborative approach to the analyses in each chapter, which led us to the theoretical lenses described above, help to mitigate some of these power imbalances. We recognise that we are telling and shaping personal stories, and we strive to honour the voices and experiences of parents in the chapters that follow.

Overviews of the chapters

This volume includes co-written chapters on different themes with two or three countries represented in each chapter. Themes for the chapters are based on joint coding of interview data, and potentially all countries could have been represented in each chapter. We chose to focus each chapter on countries that had different contexts and potentially contrasting parent perspectives on each topic – for example, government regulation is an important context in Chapter 6 that includes data from China, South Korea, and the United States, countries with interestingly varied approaches to government regulation of media. In selecting countries for joint analysis, we considered both similarities and differences in the context of each study, such as availability of affordable health care, authoritarian versus more democratic governmental

approaches, and individual versus collective cultures. As we shared initial findings from our data during our biweekly meetings, we also developed an understanding of differences in pandemic-specific contexts such as number of days of lockdown, provisions for key workers, access to vaccines, and acceptance or resistance to school closures and requirements, as well as how these contexts potentially shaped family media practices. We also considered our different areas of expertise and how different lenses would contribute to the analyses in each chapter. As the researchers for each chapter delved into their data and discussed potential themes, overlaps, and differences, the theoretical frameworks described above emerged as highly relevant and fruitful ways of understanding family media practices in different countries. We are particularly excited to bring these frameworks to this study of families and media as a way of understanding the relevance of the pandemic experience in scholarship moving forward.

Chapter 2 draws on interviews with parents in Nanjing, China, and mothers in Ontario, Canada, to analyse relational family media practices. In particular, this chapter explores the shifting temporal and spatial dimensions of families' media practices, bringing together analytical approaches from media studies and sociology. The focus on China and Canada in this chapter allowed the authors to contrast experiences in a country with state-regulated media and a more communal approach to family (China), with more individualistic approaches to both media and family (Canada). Using a relational lens, the authors complicate a focus on parents as the sole decision makers and actors that affect children's screen media use. Attending to the networks of relations that parents are embedded in, including individuals, material objects, discourses, time, space, and broader socio-political contexts, adds nuance to understanding family media practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. By foregrounding the various people, things, ideas, times, and spaces which affect children's screen media practices, this chapter aims to acknowledge the relational, contested, and complicated nature of screen media in children's and families' lives.

Chapter 3 examines shifts in parents' understanding of family media practices with a particular focus on their new insights on children's use of digital media that came as a result of pandemic family life. The chapter analyses findings from Australia, China, and the United States, specifically examining changes in parents' understanding of their children's media use. As indicated in the Appendices, parents we interviewed from these countries had very different experiences of the pandemic, with most of the Australian participants experiencing 263 days of stringent lockdown, parents in China experiencing temporary 'snap' lockdowns, and some US families experiencing remote or hybrid schooling for 15 months with very little familial or state government support for working parents. Further, government approaches to media regulation varied, with China implementing screen time and smart phone restrictions for different age groups, emphasising perceived addictive qualities of these media. With increases in children's use of media and the

new contexts introduced by the pandemic, parents reassessed previous rules and routines, observed more of what their children were doing with digital technologies, and subsequently reevaluated their understanding of the role of screen media in children's lives. This chapter identifies three main changes in parents' understanding of children's media use: greater distinctions between children's purposes for using media, increased understanding of media content, and exacerbated worries about screen media. The chapter explains these changes by applying the lens of time and temporality. The authors argue that it was the parents' understanding, experiences, and imaginaries of multiple forms of time during lockdowns that shaped parental attitudes towards screen media across the three countries.

Chapter 4 explores how parents engaged with remote, screen-mediated schooling during the pandemic, drawing on data from South Korea and the United Kingdom. These countries provide an interesting contrast, with South Korea having no lockdowns, and the United Kingdom implementing three separate lockdowns with regional variations (see Appendix 1). In terms of education and schooling, there are key contrasts in these countries, with the existence in South Korea of an intense private supplementary tutoring system (*Sa Gyo Yuk* in Korean). Further, although children in both countries were provided with remote schooling options, in the United Kingdom, participation was optional until September 2020, whereas in South Korea teachers were required to take attendance. Finally, the countries have contrasting policies concerning children's use of technologies, with the South Korean government implementing national-level policies to prevent internet and smartphone overdependence, and the United Kingdom government leaving the decisions about children's technology access to parents. These different areas of contrast are relevant when considering remote schooling during the pandemic. With homes doubling as schools, and greater demands on parental involvement in children's online schooling, parents experienced a transformation in their responsibilities, often having to assume new and unfamiliar roles in supporting their children's remote schooling. This chapter analyses the terrains of parental responsibilisation that were disrupted in the pandemic, conceptualised as imaginaries that are being managed by individual families and also the subject of acute societal concern and public debate. The chapter identifies three terrains of parental responsibilisation – school partnerships, screen media, and family schedules – which all changed dramatically during the pandemic and shaped families' experiences of remote schooling. Importantly, these three terrains help to explain different parent responses to remote schooling, with some parents able to resist and negotiate areas of responsibilisation, some feeling pressure and guilt, and others working diligently to align with dominant expectations within each terrain. By understanding these terrains of parental responsibilisation, it is possible to view parents' responses to remote schooling as a pandemic-related response and also as a reflection of ways parents are positioned through discursive structures being experienced every day, pandemic or not.

Chapter 5 maps parents' heightened emotions onto children's digital media practices in Australia, Colombia, and the United Kingdom. We were interested in seeing the different responses to children's digital practices in countries that had varying amounts of isolation and time at home (most of the Australian participants experienced 263 days of stringent lockdown, the United Kingdom participants had three separate lockdowns, and Colombian children were kept out of school for almost two academic years). Further, this chapter brings together researchers from different disciplines: affect studies, education, and childhood studies. Engaging with theories of social imaginaries and affective affinities, the chapter critically examines how adult perceptions of creativity are entangled with moral values, revealing deep-rooted power dynamics within family structures and societal expectations. In finding a tension between children's digital media practices, parental need for control, and social imaginaries of an 'adequate' childhood, the chapter reveals that parental recognition of creativity is often contingent on whether children's digital activities align with societal ideals of childhood, innocence, and productivity. This nuanced exploration offers insights into the complex interplay between digital creativity, childhood innocence, and societal norms, contributing significantly to contemporary discussions related to children, digital media, and creativity.

Chapter 6 analyses how parents in the United States, China, and South Korea understood and employed parental control apps and/or features during the pandemic to manage children's use of screen devices. This chapter brings together authors with backgrounds in sociology, media studies, and media education. The countries represented in this chapter include very different governmental approaches to regulating children's media: South Korea and China have national-level policies to prevent children's 'overdependence' on the internet and smartphones, whereas in the United States, this level of regulation is left to parents, with media companies offering various options of parental controls. A recent international proliferation in the offerings of app-based parental control tools and surveillance software was embraced during the pandemic. Many parents turned to these technological tools to better supervise their children's daily screen activities as they experienced a surge of increased screen time by their children paired with growing parental anxiety over such change. Despite this global trend, parental control landscapes varied across countries as did cultures of parenting. This chapter critically examines parents' interactions with parental control software in three countries with distinct political, economic, and sociocultural characteristics. This chapter proposes and demonstrates a central argument – methods and reasons parents in the United States, China, and South Korea used parental controls during the pandemic were shaped by the interactions between the various forms of contextualised 'sociotechnical imaginaries' of parental controls produced by different actors in the three countries. We specifically focus on three actors – the state, the market, and the family. These imaginaries, while not always in alignment with each other, collectively shaped parents'

lived experiences of parental controls in managing children's everyday digital practices during the pandemic.

We conclude, in Chapter 7, by revisiting the theoretical lenses from each chapter to consider ways these new frameworks might contribute to understanding children's and families' media practices. Throughout the book, we resist making homogenised and universalist arguments or creating reductionist summaries of data sets from each country, because we know that family experiences are complex and unique. Instead, we want to offer new ways to make sense of family media practices from different perspectives. As discussed in this concluding chapter, our book brings new theoretical framings to the fields of digital parenting, digital childhoods, and family media practices, to help elucidate the specificity of family contexts, and to construct and test the different explanatory frameworks. The chapter concludes with provocations in relation to emerging research agendas, as well as real-life actions to support families, parents, and children in the digital age.

Although the book focuses on life during the pandemic, family media practices have significantly altered for the foreseeable future, and our findings have relevance far beyond the pandemic. Media are an inextricable part of the landscape of modern childhood, particularly in the Global North. Most stakeholder recommendations about parenting in this digital era are based on the potential for media to promote various forms of learning and interaction, or the potential for media to expose children to risks and possible harm. On one hand, there is danger of over-celebrating the potential for children's interactions with media and promising parents and educators results that will never materialise. On the other hand, over-regulation can reduce children's access to the benefits of media engagement, create anxiety amongst various stakeholders, and shut down dialogue with children about media. In contrast, this book aims to address questions about family's everyday media-based consumption and production practices within social, cultural, and historical contexts, in order to put children's and parents' experiences at the centre of conversations about children's media culture as we move towards a post-pandemic future.

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2 Space, time, and families' relational media practices

China and Canada

Lindsay C. Sheppard, Xinyu Zhao, and Natalie Coulter

Introduction

When asked how she felt about the lockdowns, Zhiying, a mother of two boys, sighed and replied: 'Resignation. I really hoped that my kids could have a normal life outdoors and play normally, instead of attending online classes and writing assignments all the time in the home. They lost their *normal* daily routines'. Towards the end of the interview, Zhiying selected the image (see Figure 2.1) to represent her experiences and feelings during the lockdowns using the keywords 'children', 'digital technologies', 'resignation', and 'depression' in an image search engine to locate this representation of her family's pandemic-related media experiences (see details about research methods in Chapter 1).

Zhiying was one of the many anxious Chinese mothers from the city of Nanjing in China, who eagerly desired that 'things get back to normal' from the strict and uncertain governmental restrictions. Where and when Zhiying's children engaged with digital media during the pandemic upset the 'normally' perceived 'healthy' relationship between children's everyday life and media technologies. As illustrated in Chapter 1, children's and families' access to and use of media technologies increased dramatically during the pandemic, as their lives became overwhelmingly digitised. Before the restrictions on in-person education, social events, and after-school activities, most of children's available time for media engagement occurred during evenings and on weekends. During the height of the lockdowns, children were home almost 24 hours a day, using media technologies for virtually all aspects of life: their schooling, socialising, entertainment, and more (Coulter & Sheppard, 2023; Zhao & Healy, 2022). In this chapter, we compare the interviews from Nanjing, China, and Ontario, Canada to investigate these transformations of everyday life in more detail. Specifically, we bring together analytical approaches from media studies and sociology to consider the spatial and temporal dimensions of these domestic shifts, and we employ a relational approach to agency to decentre a focus on parents in children's screen media practices. The focus on China and Canada in this chapter allows us

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Figure 2.1 The image that Zhiying selected to represent her experiences and feelings during lockdowns in Nanjing, China. Photo by Annushka Ahuja on Pexels.com.

to compare and contrast experiences in a country with state-regulated media and a more communal approach to family (China) with more individualistic approaches to both media and family (Canada).

Literature review and theoretical framework

As discussed in the previous chapter, contemporary societal and media discourses have largely responsibilised parents to mitigate the risks of digital technologies for their children, and to maintain a balance in children's everyday lives (Livingstone & Bober, 2006). Underlying such 'responsibilisation' discourses (see also Chapter 4) is the assumption that parents make autonomous, 'correct' decisions for their children's digital practices and experiences. We follow recent academic endeavours (MacAllister, 2016; Mukherjee, 2021; Raithelhuber, 2016; Woodyer, 2008) to challenge this individualistic way of understanding digital family practices by drawing on a relational approach to agency (Burkitt, 2016). This approach rejects the idea that autonomous individuals make independent decisions about their social worlds. A relational approach to 'agency', instead, recognises that individuals are always embedded in a web of relations – with other people, social structures, cultures, politics, material things, places, and time – all of which influence

how individuals experience, understand, and feel their social worlds (Burkitt, 2016). Agency, in this respect, unfolds in relations and is not something that people 'have' or that can be 'given', and it is not contained in discrete, individual human bodies (Burkitt, 2016; Raithelhuber, 2016; Woodyer, 2008).

A relational approach to agency has been mobilised in research on parenting practices and policy. For example, Jupp and Gallagher (2013) argue that understanding the effects of governmental policy requires attention to how it plays out messily in relational parenting, within specific spatial and temporal contexts. MacAllister's (2016) research on parenting practices around children's health reveals that parents are not acting on their own. Instead, they are embedded in relations with their children, policies, research recommendations, doctors, parenting 'experts', materials (e.g., parenting books, scales), places, and their own histories, shaping their parenting practices and their perceptions of 'good' parenting. Echoing arguments made by MacAllister (2016), Mukherjee (2021) explores relations of parent-child, parent-grandparent, and child-grandparent, which influence parenting practices around children's screen time. Mukherjee (2021) details how parents are not detached individuals making decisions around their children's screen time, but that various discourses – around childhood, leisure, screen time, and 'ideal' parenting – guide their parenting practices. Furthermore, parents are entwined in relations with their own parents, who have different caregiving practices around their grandchildren's screen time. Importantly, Mukherjee (2021) finds that children often 'wayfind' around parental controls and screen time limits. Thus, foreclosing an analysis of agency to parents themselves dismisses the interconnectedness of parents to their children and other caregivers and the impact of discourses of childhood, parenting, and screen time, which all shape how parenting practices unfold. A relational lens recognises parenting as a relational practice that unfolds differently in specific contexts as parents take up, resist, and rework dominant discourses of parenting and childhood (e.g., Geinger et al., 2014; Willett, 2021).

We turn to a relational approach to agency to complicate a discussion of 'choice' in digital parenting and family media practices and to decentre parents and children as autonomous, detached individuals. Our interviews with parents in both Nanjing and Ontario revealed that families' screen media practices are shaped by various interconnected bodies, ideas, spaces, and times, and are not neatly contained in their homes. Parenting and families' screen media practices are always connected to broader networks that include other people (e.g., their children, parenting 'experts', other parents), their familial contexts (e.g., work schedules, virtual schooling), pandemic contexts, public health mandates and restrictions, their own childhoods, and their broader thoughts about technology. We argue that this attention to relational agency adds nuance to discussions of children's screen media use by decentring parents and children as the key (or only) actors that shape decisions and practices of children's screen media use.

In what follows, we focus on the spatial and temporal dimensions of families' shifting media practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. We highlight how these spatial and temporal dimensions of families' shifting screen media practices were connected to relations that include people, familial contexts, pandemic contexts, discourses of childhood and parenting, and material objects (e.g., specific technology).

Space

Parents in both Nanjing and Ontario spoke extensively about the spatial dimensions of their families' changing screen media use during COVID-19, including finding and making space for virtual school and work from home, the ways that technology marked boundaries within their home, the space between parents and children during technology use, and distinctions between various digital spaces. While parents also spoke about creating boundaries in digital space, here we limit our discussion of space to a focus on the physical space of family homes as one part of the relations that shape children's and families' screen media practices. We organise our discussion of space in two subthemes: crafting spatial boundaries, and co-presence or togetherness during screen media use.

Crafting spatial boundaries

Our interviews revealed that technology, including screen media, reconfigured the space of the home and, in return, the space of the home shaped families' screen media practices. Parents reflected on the challenges of managing the space of their family homes during periods of lockdown when children were learning from home and some parents were also working from home, as well as having enough devices for everyone to use.

Helen (Ontario), a mother of two, spoke about the changing locations within their home where her son and daughter did virtual schooling. Helen explained how during the pandemic, her children started off doing their schoolwork together in the kitchen, but then that became too challenging, as her children distracted each other and could not focus. She felt she had to set them up in their own rooms on their own individual Chromebooks, which caused a new set of worries. Helen was particularly worried about her daughter's eventual learning from her bedroom, which she described as 'like [being] in a cave all day'. Her daughter thought the shift to her bedroom was fine, telling Helen 'my teacher said I can lie in my bed and listen or whatever'. Helen seemed less worried about lack of supervision, and more worried about how learning from bed made her daughter 'sort of dormant and just lying there all day'. The material contexts of Helen's family home, including buying new technology and desks and the configuration and size of their home that allowed her children to have their own private bedrooms to complete virtual schooling, shaped their screen media practices and

experiences with pandemic schooling. Helen's family's screen media practices were shaped by a broader network of things including the physical space of the home, as well as interpersonal relations, including between siblings and parent-child. Such a networked, relational approach helps us to decentre Helen as the key actor in the decisions around her children's virtual learning set-up, and instead understand how various spatial, material, and interpersonal relations of the home shape how Helen and her children experience virtual learning. This helps complicate a more individualised, unidirectional, and human-centric focus on parents as mediators of children's technology use (e.g., Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Symons et al., 2017; Warren, 2001), and better situate families' screen media practices as shaped by multiple relations.

Iris (Ontario), a mother of two daughters aged eight and five, also spoke about the challenges of the configuration of the family home for her eldest child's virtual schooling. Iris talked about the struggle of wanting to supervise and support her older daughter's virtual learning while also having to take care of her toddler. Iris explained: 'it was hard and in a house you know, when [you're] in the kitchen, I want to be, you know, close to my daughter'. Echoing Helen, Iris was also attentive to the sibling dynamics, worrying about her toddler causing distraction during school. Eventually, Iris noted, 'we all adjusted'.

In another example, Devi (Ontario), who worked from home during the pandemic, explained that her daughter, aged eight, completed virtual learning in her bedroom to help minimise distractions and noise for both of them. This had challenges when her daughter needed help and would interrupt Devi during work meetings. Helen's, Iris' and Devi's reflections on the struggles of virtual learning reveal the ways in which children's experiences with virtual learning during the pandemic were shaped by familial contexts, such as the presence of younger siblings, parents' working situations, and the physical space of the family home. Parents struggled between needing their children to be using screen technologies away from other family members to avoid distractions, and also needing to be close to their children for supervision and support.

Moving technology to children's bedrooms provided both some relief to the tensions of the pandemic, but also new sources of problems. Some of the mothers we spoke to in Ontario were worried about their children's technology use in rooms separate from their supervision. For example, Miriam said 'he'll take the iPad into his room like when he's on Facebook and close the door. So that worries me… like what else he'll click on'. Devi shared similar concerns but explained that sometimes she cut off the Wi-Fi in her daughter's bedroom by switching off the internet pods that boost the signal if she thought her daughter had been online for too long or if she was worried about the content with which her daughter might be engaging. Here, Devi actually used technology to reconfigure the domestic space.

The blurred boundaries between school and home during Ontario's extended lockdowns and school shutdowns had material implications for

families. Nearly all the mothers interviewed in Ontario shared that they needed to upgrade their Wi-Fi connection to support the demands of multiple devices and family members during virtual learning and working from home. While many school boards in Ontario offered additional devices for families to loan during school closures for virtual learning, there was an assumption that families' home internet was high-speed. This was particularly problematic for families that had more precarious housing situations during the COVID-19 pandemic, including Lady, who shared that the internet connection was a 'severe issue' during a period where her family was living at a family shelter. Lady explained that 'it took like an hour just to load my Gmail on my computer. So that was really tough'. Lady added that this was not only emotionally challenging but had real material consequences, as she explained: 'I had to upgrade the amount of data I would get on my cell phone. And then I would have to do most things [for my daughter's virtual school] through my cell phone'. Lady's experience is a stark reminder that families' screen media practices, including their children's experiences with virtual learning, are highly classed.

Some mothers interviewed in Ontario referenced rules around screen media use during family meals. In these examples, relations between spaces and objects, such as kitchens, tables, restaurants, as well as mealtimes, shaped parents' perceptions of kids' technology use, and subsequently, their families' screen media practices. Lana, for example, was passionate about her generally anti-screen approach with their four-year-old child. When asked about some of her thoughts about kids and technology, Lana shared an example from her previous work experience in a restaurant, where she observed that kids would 'just like [become] monstrous' when screen media devices were taken away. She thought devices were 'kind of being used as a [pacifier]' but clarified: 'I mean, not to pass judgments, like sometimes that has to be a thing, but I just didn't want that to be a thing for us, as long as we could'. Similarly, Iris and Kate noted they preferred that their children engage in 'healthier' activities like reading or colouring during mealtimes. These examples reveal the impact that time (e.g., mealtime), space (e.g., restaurants, dining space), as well as discursive constructions of technology and 'good' parenting practices shape how parents reflect on and manage children's screen media practices.

In Nanjing, in contrast, parents generally found using screens while eating to be less problematic. Xiu, for example, suggested how it is quite common for Chinese parents to give their phone to children when they are eating out, and when children are being noisy in the public. Yichen, father of a six-year-old boy, would give his son an iPad when he was eating, because it made the mealtime much easier. These contrasting stories also point to the significance of cultural contexts in the relations that affect parenting practices, including perceptions of 'good' parenting with technology (e.g., Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Willett, 2021; Wise & da Silva, 2007). Unlike aforementioned stories from Lana, Iris, and Kate, Xiu and Yichen see children's technology use at mealtimes as good parenting that helps entertain children and allows

everyone, including other members of the public, to enjoy a meal without excessive noise.

The difference between family experiences of screen media in Ontario and Nanjing also lies in the ways spatial boundaries were enacted in the home. Parents in Nanjing experienced spatial relations differently from the Ontario parents, as most Chinese families live in apartments instead of houses, making physical co-presence and supervision easier and largely inevitable. Yang, mother of a ten-year-old, was not too concerned about what her daughter was doing with her phone or tablet in the home because 'they were in the same [home] space', making supervision easy. For other Chinese parents, the pandemic lockdowns did incite them to enact some spatial boundaries when it came to screen media, but it was mostly the parents who were affected by these constructed boundaries, rather than the children. Jiaying, for example, requested her husband to only use his mobile phone in the bedroom after work, to set a 'good' example for their children. Because of the lockdowns and the rapidly increasing time families spent at home, Chinese parents were motivated to be more self-disciplined with their own media practices, with the expectation that their behaviour did not further encourage screen media use among their children.

Co-presence: Togetherness (or not) in families' screen media practices

In our interviews, we learned that many families lauded co-presence during media use. A sense of togetherness was felt when family members watched videos together, built models and toys while watching video tutorials, and learned to code together. The co-presence of a parent often justified screen time practices that were different than when children were using it alone. For example, Julie (Ontario) told Lindsay how her husband and daughter watched Sesame Street videos on YouTube together, and Iris excitedly explained that while her family '[did not] have many screens', they did use a projector for family movie nights on Saturdays.

Co-presence during virtual schooling had unique benefits for many parents, who for the first time were able to see how their children engaged in a digital classroom. As Susan (Ontario) told Natalie: 'it was the first time that I've ever like actually been able to hear and know what my kids are learning in real time. Yeah, and how a teacher goes about facilitating those things'. This co-presence did pose challenges, however, as Susan explained:

> I realised… like you know what? Actually the teacher can see, she can see that [my son's] eyes are shifting all over like, and then it's actually her job to call [him] into attention, you know. And so, so then I think, setting some kind of clear sort of parameters for myself, to not overstep was important.

In this example, the co-presence of Susan and her child during the virtual schooling highlights a gendered responsibilisation that Susan embodied as

a mother, connected to 'good' mothering (Faircloth, 2015), to facilitate her child's focused learning.

Co-presence when parents were the online viewer raised a different set of challenges. Lana, a graduate student, shared her experiences with attending virtual synchronous graduate school classes without childcare. Lana lamented: 'Sometimes [no screen time] wasn't an option, like I took sign language [courses] so I had to [be on] camera, so he had to just be beside me watching whatever was happening'. Lana told Lindsay that the co-presence between her and her son during her virtual schooling was frustrating as it introduced him to screen media in a way that she and her partner had worked hard to avoid prior to the pandemic. Lana said: 'Of course it would be easier for me to just give him something to look at and let me do school… I've worked so hard and for it just all to be like, kind of thrown away, I was frustrated about that'.

In Nanjing, parents spoke similarly about the importance of co-presence for remote schooling, seeing it as the most effective way to monitor children's screen time. For example, Lianjuan, mother of a ten-year-old, explained that she always wanted to check how her child was doing when having an online class. Rather than being with him all the time, he was in a separate room and Lianjuan would constantly walk into the room to make sure her son was doing 'okay' with the classes. Similarly, Jiequ talked about how she stayed close to her son when he was using screens, so she could constantly remind him to stop:

> Like I said, I don't think he could control himself. Because I'm a full-time housewife, I would just rush him to stop [using the screens]. I would say something like, are you done? Have you finished? Can you turn it off? I feel I had to say these things many times a day.

Physical co-presence was sometimes hard to achieve, for example, when parents worked and could not monitor children's virtual learning as closely, or when children resisted co-presence or surveillance. Parents in Nanjing spoke about using technology to achieve a virtual form of co-presence. In one striking example, Zhenzhen wanted to be around while her 11-year-old daughter was having an online class. However, her daughter was strongly against this idea. 'She would lock her room to prevent us from watching', as Zhenzhen explained. In response, Zhenzhen and her husband installed a camera in her daughter's room, so they could monitor from afar. As she further clarified:

> Like my husband, when he's working in his office, he would use the camera to see how my daughter was doing in class. If he found that she was absent minded or disappeared or was eating while having an online class, he would use the camera to talk to her and ask her to come back to class or focus.

We were struck by this example of co-presence. Zhenzhen's story reminds us that children and youth can and do resist and/or intervene in parenting practices around technology (e.g., Adorjan et al., 2022; Mukherjee, 2021). Through a relational lens, we disentangle the various relations that shape Zhenzhen and her husband's decision to install a video camera in their daughter's room. The configuration of the family home, the locked bedroom door, and the relations between themselves, their daughter, and technology all shape where, how, and with whom the virtual schooling occurs. In this example, the parent-child relation was affected by space and technology, within the broader context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Zhenzhen's daughter's resistance to co-presence intervened in the parent-child relation, which then motivated a shift to virtual co-presence. Contexts beyond their family also shaped the desire for virtual co-presence, including intensive parenting practices (Faircloth, 2015), or transcendent parenting in a digital age where technology can narrow the physical distance between children and parents, for example, through location tracking, cameras, and monitoring social media (Lim, 2020). What is considered normal and unsurprising in one cultural context (China) may be considered significantly inappropriate in another (Canada).

As evident in Zhenzhen's story, the physical space of family homes shaped the possibilities for co-presence. For example, when Lindsay asked Jenny (Ontario) whether she used any parental controls on her children's screen media devices, Jenny said: 'The parental controls is that I'm standing there, because we have an open concept house. So I mean, the TV is located in a very open space'. Other parents, like Miriam (Ontario) and Julie (Ontario) were worried about their children's screen media practices because of a lack of co-presence. Miriam was concerned when her son took the iPad into his room and shut the door. Julie shared that all of her children got laptops during the pandemic, and as a result her husband 'invested in Net Nanny', a software that allows parents to monitor and set parental controls. These stories remind us that parents are not acting on their own; instead, their thoughts and practices around children's screen media use are always embedded in relations, including between siblings, children and parents, space, contexts of virtual learning and working from home, specific technological devices, as well as discourses of 'good parenting' that praise co-presence (e.g., Takeuchi & Stevens, 2011).

Time

In this section, we highlight time as another key component of the complex web of relations shaping families' screen media practices during the pandemic. We organise our discussion in three subthemes: repurposing screen time, managing family time, and imagining post-pandemic times.

Repurposing screen time

First, we noticed that parents repurposed their children's screen time. While children's increased screen time was concerning for many parents in the study, they managed to develop new ways of appropriating the increased screen time in a 'positive' manner. For example, Xiu (Nanjing) was worried about her children playing video games but admitted that their time on screens was her 'free time'. As a full-time carer, Xiu needed her own time to relax and rest during lockdowns, when her children were always at home. Xiu's comments were echoed by Susan from Ontario, who called her children's increased screen time a form of 'survival for everybody', which meant shifting screen time rules depending on 'internal resources' like family members' capacities to engage with each other, including for parenting, childcare, and play. Many parents in our study adjusted their pre-pandemic rules around children's screen use during the pandemic, when children had overwhelming amounts of free time, a point that is elaborated in Chapter 3. There needed to be a way to fill the temporal gaps which used to be occupied by various educational, extracurricular (e.g., sports, music lessons), and social activities outside of the home. These changing perceptions and rules of technology time foreground dynamic, open, ever-changing relations between parents, children, and technology. Langjia (Nanjing), mother of an 11-year-old, expressed strong feelings of resignation when asked whether she was still opposed to her son using screen devices during weekdays: 'What can I do? There was no other way to entertain. He's home all the time. We are not comfortable with going to public places where there are so many people'. For Langjia, children's screen use is an inevitable, although undesirable, way to keep her child occupied in lockdowns. Similarly, in Ontario, when asked if the pandemic has changed how she was thinking about parenting, Miriam said: 'I guess it's made us like, loosen up about screen time. Not to worry as much'. When Lindsay asked how 'loosening up' the rules and 'not worrying' had been going, Miriam clarified: 'For the most part okay, like we are, we do still set a lot of limits and I don't know if it's too many, yeah all. It's always a work in progress'. Langjia and Miriam remind us that shifting relations between children, parents, space, and the context of the pandemic, affect how parenting unfolds and is experienced.

Parents worried about the implications of their children's increased screen time during the pandemic, particularly in relation to its impact on children being inactive. Some mothers in Ontario tried to set limits around screen time by using technological parental controls, setting timers, or using temporal boundaries to designate screens at certain times of the day. Both Helen and Ruth, for example, stopped allowing video games and iPad use before school. But for Ruth, this boundary was hard to maintain, and she reflected that as the pandemic wore on, 'those boundaries [around iPad use] are shifting as

well'. Jenny did not allow her children to use screen media devices before school, but they were allowed to use voice-activated devices to request and listen to music.

Parents found ways to justify increased screen time as a means of socialisation or entertainment. In one poignant reflection, Devi argued: 'It's not just the kids [who depend on technology for entertainment], it's the parents, too, and I stand up to be blamed in this, like my lack of time, and my husband's still working [outside] the home'. Here, Devi seemed to highlight the relational agency between children and parents, wherein parents' technology use shapes children's technology use, and vice versa. But also, children's unsupervised technology use provided parents with breaks from supervision. Comments like Devi's remind us that parents' schedules, work, and childcare responsibilities shape children's screen media practices. Importantly, these stories add nuance to framings of screen time, recognising that parents do not see all screen time as 'bad', a position that is echoed by researchers (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2018; Daugherty et al., 2014), and that their perceptions of screen time are shaped by the particular screen media device and activity, including whether it is a more social or isolating experience (see also, Mukherjee, 2021). We can consider how the specificity of particular relations – including between screen media devices, time, weather, and children – adds nuance to parents' reflections on screen time.

When screen time was framed as family time, it was deemed as more acceptable and less worrisome than children's independent screen time, echoing findings reported by Mukherjee (2021). While reflecting on her families' routine to play video games together on Friday nights, Kate (Ontario) said: 'But at least if we're doing it together, it's like right. It counts as family time'. Qinfang (Nanjing) also shared how she watched short videos with her daughter on Kuaishou, a popular Chinese short video app, to learn how to do handicrafts together at home. Jujie (Nanjing) and Lana (Ontario) spoke about watching television with their children, and engaging them in conversations afterwards about the content, encouraging them to think and learn. In these examples, perceptions of screen time shift. In the co-presence of a parent, screen time becomes a perceived educational opportunity.

Managing family time

As discussed earlier, while family rules around children's screen use shifted significantly during the pandemic, parents still strived to maintain some forms of 'order' in the home. This is best reflected in their attempt to set up temporal boundaries between children's daily activities, particularly between screen use and non-screen activities. Parents in both countries carved out temporal blocks of their everyday routines to better manage children's media use in lockdown. Jiang, for example, would not allow his 11-year-old daughter to use his phone until she finished all her assignments of the day, a rule that was common among Chinese parents in the study, as a way to manage parental

anxiety associated with the increased screen time. When asked whether she was concerned about her children's screen time in the pandemic, Jujie said:

> Not really, because I still had a fixed plan for them, so they won't watch screens all the time. I'll let them watch for about half an hour, and then they need to rest. They could play with their toys, or play some chess, or play with Lego for a couple of hours, before they use screen devices for another half an hour.

This form of temporal management gave parents a sense of control and routine amongst uncertain times, where children's screen use also included activities that were previously offline.

The relational agency emergent between parents, children, timers, and specific technology, was further exemplified in parents' discussions of screen time limits. Parents reflected on the challenges of getting their children off screens when their allotted screen time had ended. Lana (Ontario) adopted a more collaborative approach to setting timers with her young child, deciding together how many short videos he could watch. While this sounds idealistic, Lana shared: 'It's not very enjoyable because I know the freakout is going to happen at the end [of the video]'. In another example, Ruth (Ontario) shared that the notifications on screen time limits that appear during video games have become 'irrelevant at this point' because she and her husband have started to become more lax as the pandemic and lockdowns dragged on. Jenny (Ontario) shared that she used timers, where 'each [child] get[s] like 10–12 minutes each of what they wanted to watch… and then after [their] 10 [minutes of TV that they chose], we still let them watch [the show their siblings' chose]'. She thought this approach worked well, but one of her older sons complained about having to watch 'baby shows' that his younger sibling chose for part of his allotted daily TV time. Interestingly, these examples reveal the particular force of screen media devices in the parent-child relation, shaping how children engage with technology and their parents, encouraging parenting practices that include timers, collaborative rule setting, and indeed, frustration. Echoing arguments made by others (e.g., Adorjan et al., 2022; Mukherjee, 2021), these stories remind us that young people are not passively obedient of parents' rules and expectations around screen time. Such analyses push past a focus on parents as the sole mediators of children's screen media practices (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Symons et al., 2017; Warren, 2001), attending to parent-child relations and the effects of specific technology, timers, and discourses of screen time which constrain and enable children's screen media practices.

Notably, in Ontario, mothers spoke about being overwhelmed navigating the pandemic lockdowns and extended school closures, as Ontario had some of the longest lockdowns in the world (Coulter & Sheppard, 2023). Mothers spoke about the impossibility of managing their own work-from-home realities while supporting and supervising their children with their virtual

learning, and providing childcare, especially for toddlers (see also, Ashman et al., 2022; Michelson et al., 2021; Obeng et al., 2022; Smith, 2022). Of the 15 mothers interviewed in Ontario, three shared that they either stopped working, switched to part-time hours, or took a leave from work for childcare or to support their children's virtual learning. For example, Helen said: 'Luckily the agency I work with, is very flexible in terms of all this pandemic stuff and just, I would tell them week by week what days I could work'. This was a privilege in economically precarious and uncertain times, as noted by many of the mothers in Ontario. As Helen explained:

> I was able to stay home and not work from home so meaning like I can focus mainly on them. But like a lot of people are working full time on their computer from home. How do they teach their kids, take care of their kids, and still maintain a full-time job?

In another example, Rose retired early in order to better support her daughter who has a learning disability, visual processing difficulties, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which made virtual schooling challenging. Rose explained: 'That's why I stopped my career because she could not learn online…I had to be right beside her'. Helen's and Rose's stories provoke thinking about how social class and intersectional privilege shape how parents experience the relations they are embedded in, including juggling the demands of work, virtual learning, and childcare.

Kate spoke about the challenges of working from home during periods of the pandemic with two young children, one of whom was too young for kindergarten. Kate's partner also worked from home, and they had to coordinate their own meetings to ensure one parent could help with virtual schooling, and one could supervise their toddler. Kate explained: '[This balance is a] survival mode… a really tough situation where, yes, the TV is your parent now, because I have to get work done so that I can, you know, generate an income and feed [my kids]'. While her children enjoyed these times because of the increased screen time, navigating this balance, and allowing her children to engage with screens more to help this balance, was 'a struggle' for Kate. Kate admitted:

> There's feelings of guilt, and you know, I'm either letting them down by not being able to engage in, interact with them, or I'm letting my work down by, you know, whatever, ignoring tasks… yeah, it feels like an impossible balance really.

This impossible balance of work, virtual schooling, and childcare has had notable affective implications on parents, which were experienced differently by Canadian and Chinese parents. In Nanjing, parents overall expressed strong feelings of anxiety and worry about their children's increased screen-related activities, particularly negative impacts on children's vision, academic

outcomes, and the possibility of addiction. Chinese parents were anxious about the long-term effects of their children's changed media practices during the pandemic. In Ontario, mothers worried about whether they were doing the 'right things' around their children's screen media use, and they felt guilty, thinking they were either letting their workplaces, or their children down. As Ruth said:

> like it kills me with how, pre-pandemic and it was, like it kills me with how much, like screen time that they have managed to, like, over the last two years, it is purely as a result of the pandemic because we're both working from home. We have no childcare.

For Ruth's family, the temporal gap between school finishing and the end of the workday was filled by screen time. Kate (Ontario) eventually realised that she is 'not alone in that [guilt]', and that she 'had to just learn to let go of some of that guilt, in those feelings, like I'm not the only one in the situation'. Taken together, these affective experiences point to the intensity of shifting responsibilities around work, childcare, and virtual schooling that parents experienced. These stories also remind us that parents are embedded in multiple relations, as parents, as workers, and as people, that involve specific responsibilities, time, and energy – all of which shape their parenting practices, including how they think about and affect their children's screen media use.

In one striking example, Lady (Ontario) spoke about the effects of her families' precarious housing situation and her mental health on her pandemic parenting, reminding us that intersectional social forces, including social class and health, significantly affect parenting. When discussing daily routines and rules around screen media use, Lady said: 'Because our [housing] situation is constantly changing the rules around us [are] constantly changing'. Lady added when she was 'having a bad health day' she might need to sleep or rest more, so her daughter had more screen time because she 'need[ed] something to keep her busy'. Lady clarified that during these challenging times she told her daughter to 'go watch…a couple episodes of Bill Nye [science-focused kids' TV program], or, you know, go play on your school tablet, your leap frog', to 'try to keep up with at least having an educational element, despite the fact that I'm not doing well'. Lady's comments speak to the hyper-responsibility and vigilance in discourses of 'good mothering' (Faircloth, 2015), and a hierarchy of screen media use that positions educational screen time as 'better' (Ponti, 2023).

Imagining post-pandemic times

Lastly, a significant 'legacy' of the pandemic for families in our study was parents' enhanced sense of uncertainty associated with their children's future technology use. Many of them became increasingly unsure of what to do

with their children's altered practices with digital media and devices when 'things get back to normal'. On the one hand, they acknowledged the digital world their children live in and the importance of digital literacy. On the other hand, they were not confident in accepting their children's changed media practices without worries. Consequently, parents were placed in a conflicting position to make the 'right' decisions around technology for their children (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Parents' reflections on post-pandemic times illustrate that how parents think about their children's screen media practices are not decisions they make independently; rather, they are shaped by discourses of gender, age, parenting and childhood, shifting social landscapes, as well as expectations and worries about their children's future educational trajectories. Some of them were not prepared to make significant changes to their children's media routines, as these routines have become the new norms, sometimes creating new definitions of the 'right' decisions. As Lianjuan (Nanjing) explained:

> I don't think there will be major changes. I think now people seem to have accepted this new routine. If you force them to change [back to the pre-pandemic routines], it seems to be quite difficult for children. We should just let him continue this way.

Jenny (Ontario) shared that she thought it was okay that her children watched television and played video games and thought that her children seem to be happy with the amount that they gave them, 'not too much, not too little'. When asked if she would make any changes to rules and routines moving forward, Jenny said: 'I can't think of any changes we would make'.

Some parents were more hesitant about moving beyond the pandemic without re-evaluating the rules and routines around their families' screen media use. Susan (Ontario) told Natalie that the pandemic had been a 'stretching experience' for her, and that while she understood 'that there are real benefits to being tech savvy' she thought that with technology 'the world becomes so complicated…and distracting for kids…as well as for adults'. Susan continued: 'I don't think there's going back, but I think I'd like to just be thoughtful about what they have access to'. Devi (Ontario) thought she would only allow her daughter to use a laptop for homework, and sparingly for chatting with friends. Kate (Ontario) shared that she was trying to slowly shift her children's routines around screen media use, for example, trying to turn off screens earlier in the evening to help with a more consistent dinner and bedtime routine, or removing screen time when there was misbehaviour.

Reflecting our previous discussion about screen media use filling children's free time, some mothers in Ontario spoke optimistically about their children's screen time decreasing once extracurricular activities like sports and music lessons returned. For example, Kira spoke about her children's after-school

programming re-opening, meaning 'they are out of the house more'. Similarly, Mandy's children were 'resuming some activities' which she was hoping would include 'more interaction with people and reduce[d] screen time'. Helen also thought that 'getting back into the routine' of hockey, gymnastics and baseball, would impose new 'time constraints… set[ting] the bar of what time they have available to screens'.

Others hoped for more 'beneficial' use of media for their children. Yichen (Nanjing) expected his child to use apps for the purpose of 'playful learning', instead of purely entertainment, once the pandemic was over. Zhiying (Nanjing) would want digital devices to be like tools for her two children: 'It's like when you need to complete a mission, like looking for information or working on a coding project, then you need them to complete it. However, I still hope my children won't need them for classes or entertainment'. In Ontario, Iris and Julie talked about coding programs and online chess programs, respectively, as more 'engaging' and thus, more favourable screen media practices for their children. Iris saw coding as an opportunity to foster her daughter's creativity and innovation, explaining that she and her husband wanted their daughter to 'have [the] vision… to create things'. Interestingly, in Ontario, mothers were hesitant about the future of their children's education amidst the increasing role of screen media and technology in curriculum and teaching. These parents did not expect to turn the clock back to the pre-pandemic times in terms of their children's media use in the home. However, they wanted some forms of balance, so their children only use media for some certain purposes, rather than others.

Some parents in our study referred to futures beyond the immediate pandemic context when they talked about their children's media use. When asked when she would relax rules around her son, Liuliu (Nanjing) replied: 'I think it will be when he finishes high school. We want him to go to a good high school… and then go to a university'. Similarly, Tangli's (Nanjing) criterion for rule relaxation is also associated with her son's educational trajectory, relaxing rules 'when he grows older'. This could be complicated, as Tangli explained:

> There will be more problems for sure, because he will have English classes in the future. Children may need to use some particular apps for practising English reading. …Also, you won't be able to constantly supervise their use anymore. They may resist or play [their phones] secretly. You won't know.

In Ontario, Julie thought that her children's future screen media use was 'largely going to be determined by, like, society, and the educational community', noting that she 'can't see tech[nology] ever going away'. Similarly, Lady (Ontario) explained: 'Depending on how the school's functioning, I may just

have to grit my teeth and bear that [my daughter is] going to come home with a tablet for school'. Lady was worried about the unknown long-term effects of everyday technology use.

Parents also expected changes in the future not immediately after the pandemic but more related to children's age and their biological, social, and psychological development, a theme that is explored further in Chapter 3. Jiequ (Nanjing) explained that her expectations of a post-pandemic time had nothing to do with the pandemic itself. Instead, she hoped that her son 'could better control himself when he grows older… so I don't need to constantly remind him'. Jiequ's concerns were echoed by Ruth (Ontario), who was trying to educate her children about the potential for technology addiction and encourage them to see technology as 'something that, like, supplements our life, it not is your life'. Ruth hoped that this teaching would help her children 'make good decisions about their own technology use because [she's] not going to be able to police their [technology] time forever'. Ruth worried that negotiating screen media use would continue to become more challenging as her children, especially her son, become more interested in video games as they get older. She thought that any limits she put in place would likely be resisted by her son. Jenny (Ontario) echoed these concerns, hoping that her sons would be introduced to video games when they were a bit older, when they had more 'self-control' so that when she said 'okay it's time to turn [the video game] off' her sons would 'turn it off without making a big fuss'. Similarly, Iris (Ontario) explained that she 'slowly want[ed] to introduce them to the meaningful technologies out there', while also not wanting her children to be naïve, or left out among peers. Susan (Ontario) shared that rules and routines around her families' screen media use were 'going to be something that's continually like evolving as our kids grow'; she spoke about the future involving 'kind of making like informed decisions or like assessments, or like just assessing like what are they ready for'.

Overall, parents' reflections on post-pandemic times illustrate how parenting and children's screen media practices shifted and changed over time, as the relations that parents and children were embedded in change. Parents' reflections on these shifting media practices point to the potency of discourses of 'good' parenting that focus on promoting screen media practices that foster positive developmental, educational, and career trajectories (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2018; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020), reflecting advice in guidelines for children's technology use (e.g., Ponti, 2023). Instead of positioning parents as individualised adults who independently make decisions about their children's screen media use, a relational approach allows us to recognise that parents' considerations about their children's screen media use, including how they imagine it in the future, are always shaped by multiple relations – between themselves and their children, education systems, discourses of parenting and childhood, and specific technologies.

Conclusion

Throughout the pandemic, parents in both Nanjing, China, and Ontario, Canada felt pressured to 'get it right'. The 'it' being to make the 'right' parenting decisions around children's media technology use, both the spatial contexts of technology use within the home and the temporal contexts (when and for how long) of technology use within the family. As this chapter reveals, the struggle to parent 'right' was messy, complicated, and sometimes contradictory. As evident in participants' narratives, being a 'good' parent is a relational and dynamic practice, that is shaped by multiple factors, including broader networks of other people (e.g., their children, parenting 'experts', other parents), familial contexts (e.g., work schedules, virtual schooling), pandemic contexts, public health mandates and restrictions, and their broader thoughts about children, childhood, and technology.

Using a relational approach, we challenge the construction of family media practices as individually located. Our approach illuminates how parents' decisions on and thoughts about screen media practices are not individual, rather they are shaped by broader relational contexts. The parents we interviewed in Nanjing and Ontario foreground how parenting with technology is not static, and that rules and practices of children's screen media are continuously changing as the relations they are embedded in change. Decentring adults and children as the sole actors, and foregrounding the various people, things, ideas, times, and spaces which affect children's and families' screen media practices, acknowledges the relational, contested, and complicated nature of screen media in children's and families' lives. In the next chapter, the authors focus on changes of parents' *perceptions and understandings* of their children's engagements with screen and digital media. To do this, Chapter 3 extends the analysis of time from this chapter and employs a temporal lens that accounts for different dimensions of experiences of time during the pandemic. This next chapter examines how changes in parents' perceptions and understandings are informed by the various temporal experiences during the pandemic.

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3 Temporalities and changing understandings of children's use of media

Australia, China, and the United States

Sarah Healy, Rebekah Willett, and Xinyu Zhao

Introduction

> Angela (Australia): I was dragged kicking and screaming into letting my kid have unfettered access to an iPad between nine and three … And I very quickly got off my high horse and he did a lot on screen very quickly.
>
> Lanjuan (China): I used to think that all digital devices are bad, because I thought when he used these devices, it was all about playing, like games or cartoons. Now I think it's more than play or entertainment. It could also be a form of learning. … It should be an integration of entertainment and learning.
>
> Rosa (US): The element of allowing probably a little more technology than we used to in the past is a possibility for us, as we've known that it's not all evil. We've learned that through this pandemic that we could potentially be more flexible of how much screen time they get.

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, family media practices looked very different during the pandemic, with dramatic increases in children's access to screen media and subsequent screen time as well as changes in the spatial and temporal aspects of children's everyday use of media technologies in the home. Overall, parents found it difficult to keep consistent with their pre-pandemic rules around screen use in the home. The narratives from Angela, Lanjuan, and Rosa above illustrate a common theme that ran across the seven studies: with increases in children's use of media and the new contexts introduced by the pandemic, parents reassessed previous rules and routines, observed more of what their children were doing with digital technologies, and subsequently reevaluated their understanding of the role of screen media in children's lives. Before the pandemic, Angela, Lanjuan, and Rosa categorised screen media (which they referenced as 'digital devices' and 'technology'), as universally 'evil', acceptable only in very limited and controlled amounts. However, their understanding of screen media shifted

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during lockdowns, when their daily family media routines were significantly disrupted. In this chapter, we examine these shifts in parents' understanding of family media practices, with a particular focus on their new insights on children's use of digital media that came as a result of pandemic family life. Parents we interviewed from Australia, China, and the United States had very different experiences of the pandemic, with most of the Australian participants experiencing 263 days of stringent lockdown, parents in China experiencing temporary 'snap' lockdowns, and US participants experiencing remote or hybrid schooling for 15 months with very little familial or state government support for working parents. Further, government approaches to media regulation varied, with China implementing screen time and smart phone restrictions for different age groups, emphasising perceived addictive qualities of these media. In drawing on data from these three countries, we illustrate how nation-specific pandemic contexts and experiences affected the ways in which parents understood children's screen media use in the home.

Many parents in our study referenced strict pre-pandemic screen time limits that applied to any exposure their children had to screens. However, during the pandemic, parents said they began to make more nuanced distinctions in connection with screen use. Parents indicated that their previous measures of screen time were too simplistic, treating all media the same and all types of media consumption and production as equal. Practically, a blanket approach towards defining screen time and managing screen use became unfeasible when children had no choice but to use screen media for longer periods of time, and for a greater variety of purposes, during lockdowns. As discussed in Chapter 2, to manage children's use of screen media in the home became a task of 'impossible balance'. One of the silver linings of the pandemic, however, is that parents might have had more time to reevaluate the roles of screen media for children. Spending extended periods of time together with their children in the same domestic space allowed parents to closely observe what their children were actually doing with digital media.

Most parents in the three studies indicated that their children's screen time increased during the pandemic – with some indicating large increases, particularly if children were doing all remote schooling and parents needed to continue working (see Chapter 4 for an analysis of remote schooling experiences). Some parents defined these increases as almost entirely negative and expressed their sense of guilt and frustration in the situation. These parents indicated that the increase in screen time was due to the lack of other things to do, with so many activities cancelled and family-friendly places shut down; even playgrounds were closed early in the pandemic. Further, parents said they relied on screens to occupy children more often than before the pandemic, as they struggled to work from home, attend to individual family member's needs, cope with pandemic-related trauma, as well as do necessary household chores. On the other hand, some parents stressed the positive aspects of screens during the pandemic, particularly related to social and emotional

lives. These parents indicated that screens offered solutions to some of the challenges of lockdowns and provided ways of enriching their lives during the pandemic. In particular, parents commented on the importance of screens for providing social time with friends and family, supporting children's relaxation and wellness, and for a variety of kinds of learning. During the photo elicitation exercise that occurred at the end of each interview in which we asked parents to select an image that represented their family's experience of media in the pandemic, parents frequently chose images with multiple family members on individual screens, with one father in the United States suggesting the terms 'children, media, drastic change' to describe his family's overall experiences (see Chapter 1 for methodology details). Parents who were more positive about their children's screen time during the pandemic also indicated that their understanding of children's media practices changed. These shifts reified the significance of time and linked concepts of temporality and change in the data, prompting us to attend to the implications of time in and across the interview transcripts. In the previous chapter, the authors focus on spatial and temporal dimensions of the changes in family media practices to analyse webs of relations that are embedded in these practices. This chapter, instead, focuses on different temporal lenses to explain the emergence of new parental understandings of children's engagements with media. We argue that it was the parents' understanding, experiences, and imaginaries of multiple forms of time during lockdowns that shaped parental attitudes towards screen media across the three countries. In the following section, we clarify what a temporal perspective means and how it works for our analysis.

Theoretical frame: Time and temporal imaginaries

Sociologists addressing conceptions of time discern *clock and calendar time* from other less visible temporal experiences (Adam, 1990). Clock and calendar time is perhaps the most familiar temporal lens for children and parents. From the moment they are born, children's ages are measured in terms of days, weeks, and months. Having school-aged children regulates family life through clock and calendar time (the school day, annual breaks, and so on). Adam (1990) argues that clock time is uniform, relentless, and mechanistic, and in its dominance, it makes other temporal experiences invisible. As Rosen (2017) argues, 'time can be experienced differently depending on our subjective and contextual experience, as well as social positions' (p. 375). A more conceptual and internal understanding of time is sometimes expressed as a contrast to clock and calendar time. French philosopher Henri Bergson describes time as abstract and subjective compared with the more concrete and objective nature of clock and calendar time (Bergson, 1913/2001). However, Bergson and others do not describe these two conceptions of time in polarised ways, contrasting 'objective time' with 'subjective time', for example. Rather, abstract and concrete time are seen to be experienced simultaneously (Simpson et al., 2020). In our discussion below, we reference

temporal multiplicities as those experiences of time that are sometimes contradictory – the feeling of time passing both slowly and quickly, for example. In the pandemic, these concurrent objective and subjective experiences of time were particularly pronounced during narratives of lockdowns.

The temporal lens frequently connected with discussions concerning children is that of *developmental time*. Researchers in childhood studies have long argued that the discursive positioning of children as 'becomings' highlights the ways that this temporal lens regulates children by assigning normative frameworks to their development (James & Prout, 1997). Further, viewing children as 'becomings' implies that the present is all about children's future – what children do now has a direct effect on what they will become. Ideals of childhood are also inscribed in temporal ways – children are sometimes described as 'growing up too fast', for example. In contrast with positioning children as 'becomings', discourses framing children as 'beings' attempt to shift the focus to the conditions of 'being' a child, while recognising that being a child in the present does have a past and a future. However, as Emma Uprichard (2008) argues, 'whilst the discourse of the "being" child accentuates the present, and that of the "becoming" child stresses the future, both the present and the future interact together in the course of everyday life' (p. 308). Importantly, as Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) articulate, discourses connected with children, media, and time are often about the future – concerns about children acquiring digital skills in order to be successful in the future, or children spending too much time with technology and not developing sufficient 'soft skills'. These constructions about children's digital futures drive the present – parents and caregivers make decisions about children's access to technologies based on their imaginaries for the future (see also Chapter 2). *Developmental time* captures hopes and fears about children's future, and shapes the experiences of children in the present.

By applying a temporal lens in our analysis, we acknowledge the social aspects of time, positioning time and the related concepts of temporality and change as relational (as opposed to absolute). The relational nature of time is illustrated by the way in which the pandemic was experienced in contradictory ways – families commented on having both 'too much time' on their hands and also feeling the pressure of the clock ticking, both in a biological sense and in relation to daily routines and obligations. Space, or the time-space dynamic, also plays a role in how time unfolds. For example, as described in Chapter 1, the lockdowns were experienced very differently across and within countries, with some families experiencing short sharp lockdowns (e.g., China) while others, such as those living in Melbourne, being restricted to their homes for 263 days with a limit of one hour of exercise outside the home each day, were having a different temporal experience again. Time is at once compelling and challenging. It is an everyday experience that is the stuff of small talk, yet remains a multifarious concept defying simple definitions and representations. Having said this, it is still helpful to chart out the four dimensions of time that are central to this chapter, noting

that these dimensions often work in tandem with each other and are by no means mutually exclusive:

1. The first dimension, *clock and calendar time*, is perhaps the most common conception of time. Sometimes referred to as chronos, it refers to standardised systems consisting of quantifiable units of measurement like hours, days, and years that operate to synchronise activities and structure routines (Adam, 1990).
2. The second dimension, *lived time*, refers to the subjective experiences of time, which are fluid and vary based on individual feelings, actions, and contexts (Bergson, 1913/2001). These qualitative experiences coexist with measurable time, offering a deeper, often contrasting understanding of temporality.
3. The third dimension, *developmental time*, is sometimes referred to as 'ages and stages', because it stems from cognitive psychology's understanding that as children get older, they progress through sequential developmental stages (cf. James & Prout, 1997).
4. The fourth dimension, *temporal imaginaries*, is future-oriented. It is concerned with societal norms related to ensuring that children's interactions with technology in the present day will equip them for the future.

In the analysis sections below, we return to these four dimensions of our time and temporality lens to show how a more complex understanding of time is central to complicating understandings of children's screen media use. We identify three areas of change in relation to parents' understanding of children's use of media: 1) new distinctions around purposes for using media; 2) increased understanding of media content; and 3) exacerbated worries about screen use. Parental concerns around the time children spend on screens are mostly future-oriented. They are worried that too much screen use may jeopardise children's social skills or their physical wellbeing when they grow up. This forward-looking aspect was, however, either unsettled because of the overwhelming present – the thick now – that parents had to cope with, or it was reinforced because of the uncertainty associated with the negative effects of screen media on children's development.

New distinctions around purposes for children's use of media

Before the pandemic, parents in our study generally counted all screens and uses of screens as 'screen time'. However, during the pandemic, parents were more aware of the many different purposes for children's media use: for family togetherness, social time with friends and relatives, relaxation and wellness, and many forms of learning. With these new distinctions, time took on more qualitative characteristics and was no longer used as widely as a quantitative tool to measure the so-called 'screen time'. Rather than

having one-size-fits-all rules (e.g., all use of any type of screen counts towards the two-hour per day screen time limit), parents made distinctions between different purposes of children's engagements with screens.

Parents indicated that children pursued interests, developed creative pursuits, and learned new skills, often assisted by technology. For example, parents in Australia and the United States mentioned their children watched YouTube tutorials on cooking, painting, crafts, and science experiments. Children pursued subjects that were interesting and relevant to them, looking online for 'just in time' advice and resources, which often resulted in projects to share with their families, such as meals or short videos. Children were able to experience learning that was interest-driven (led by children rather than schools), production-centred (resulting in tangible products), and involved shared purposes (often completed with siblings or other family members): evidence of connected learning principles in practice (Ito et al., 2013). Importantly, some parents said that this helped them shift their ideas about children's use of YouTube, which previously had been tightly regulated or banned in Australian and American households. Certainly, the shift did not occur in every household, with one Australian parent likening YouTube to 'crack cocaine', due to the perceived addictive quality of the platform, with algorithms that keep feeding the viewing habits of individuals. However, other parents saw the benefits of using YouTube for specific purposes, such as tutorials to support their children's interests, or watching specific programs as part of a daily routine. One Australian parent, for example, said that watching train videos on YouTube enabled her autistic child to calm himself when he reached his threshold for sensory stimulation (in the parent's words). For some parents, this created a more balanced view of media technologies, as this Chinese mother of a seven-year-old explained:

> Now I think screen devices are good and bad. They helped my son expand his knowledge base. He could use all those apps to find out about things he did not understand. That's the advantage; but when he plays games [on these devices] from time to time, that's not so good.

Similarly, Leah, Australian teacher and parent of three primary-school-aged children, reflected:

> [My kids] loved, you know, things that they've learned in technology. And so, I guess for me, it's maybe avoiding some of that social media, and some of the games if I can steer clear of that kind of stuff, and have it be more about your creativity and imagination.

This shift to a more balanced view of children's interactions with media is not easy to make, given the dominance of discourses, from a variety of stakeholders, about parents' responsibilities to minimise risks and ensure children's safety online (see Willett & Wheeler, 2021).

In addition to seeing more educational aspects of screen media, parents also recognised the role of technology in assisting children with wellbeing. The isolation created by lockdowns was mitigated somewhat through families' social uses of media technologies. Video conferencing with friends and family was mentioned frequently, primarily for keeping in touch. We heard of many new uses of video conferencing platforms to do show-and-tell type activities, to play existing games such as Bingo, or to create games such as hide-and-seek (with children hiding in their home with a device with the camera on, and the other player guessing where they were hiding). In the United States, one mother described her son 'hanging out' with friends on Facebook messenger, but not saying much of anything – rather, they sent emojis and played with images of themselves: 'It gave them an opportunity to see one another and just, I don't know, do really silly crazy things'. Likewise, an Australian mother reported that her son's friends spent a lot of time putting 'crazy' warp filters on images and sending 'heaps' of them back and forth in Snapchat. In addition, parents commented on their new understanding of online games as social spaces, rather than as entertainment/gaming activities as previously understood. Aligning with these findings, Ito et al. (2009) analyse games as spaces where children are 'hanging out' for social purposes, and Grimes (2021) indicates that parents commonly underestimate and misunderstand children's online gaming practices. The pandemic conditions may have allowed parents to see how often children were gaming, as well as different dimensions of online gaming.

Exercise and yoga videos were mentioned by parents in all three countries. In addition to using technology to support children's physical wellbeing, parents also commented on their new understanding of media to support mental wellbeing. We heard frequent descriptions of screen time during the pandemic as providing children with 'downtime' or time for 'separation' from other family members during lockdown. This was echoed by parents in Ontario and Nanjing, as discussed in Chapter 2. One US parent indicated that she finally understood her daughter's viewing of 'let's play' videos as pleasurable downtime, after her daughter provided a provocative point of reflection:

> The thing that they like watching on YouTube, which I think is silly, is other people playing Minecraft… .My daughter is like, 'Well Mom, you watch all the HGTV, you watch other people buying houses.' I'm like, 'All right. Touché. Touché, you got me.'

Again, as with online gaming during the pandemic, parents were able to observe different uses for media in their families' daily lives and make distinctions based on purposes for media consumption.

One of the drivers for the shifts in parental understanding of screen media was the reconfiguration of family members' temporal experiences in the pandemic, or their everyday subjective 'lived time', in Bergson's terms (1913/

2001). While lockdown restrictions are technically spatial, inadvertently, they have had notable temporal consequences on parents and children. For example, because of the stay-at-home orders, these families' daily temporal rhythms were disrupted. There was suddenly 'too much time', to begin with. Due to restrictions, children were no longer able to go to schools or socialise in the same way as they did, leaving them with lots of 'time on their hands'. Parents told us that children were bored, because of the amount of time they had to spend at home, particularly when parents were working and unable to engage in family activities. As illustrated in Chapter 2, to fill the multiple temporal gaps which emerged during the pandemic, many parents had no choice but to turn to screens to occupy children's free time. This development allowed children to engage with screen media for a broader set of purposes compared to the pre-pandemic time. Simultaneously, it created a situation whereby many parents started making nuanced distinctions between the ways in which their children used screen media.

Importantly, the increase of time on an experiential level must be understood relationally. This speaks to the second aspect of families' temporal experiences in the home; time became much slower for some parents. This allowed them time to observe their children's use of screen media, leading to more nuanced understandings of purposes for engaging with media technologies and greater distinctions in relation to media content, as described above. Further, parents indicated that the feeling of pandemic time as moving more slowly, allowed children to immerse themselves in hobbies and to pursue new interests, often aided by media technologies. This 'slow' time, then, gave parents new insights into the benefits of media technologies, greater understanding of their children's abilities for navigating and regulating their media use, and again, greater distinctions around purposes for, and content of, screen media.

Finally, and contradictorily, parents reported feelings of not having enough time, but also of time passing quickly. Juggling work and care responsibilities at the same time became an impossible task for many parents. To some extent, parents *had to* develop new understandings of screen media in order to manage their children's screen use in a more feasible manner. While parents felt that there had been more, and even too much time, for the children, they constantly felt that they were running out of time. This was particularly the case for American and Australian parents in our study, due to the extended periods of lockdown imposed in the two countries. Consequently, the intensity of the present experienced by the parents, outweighed their concerns for children's futures, in relation to the increased screen activities, as the Australian mother, Leah, explained:

> From a family perspective with three kids, and if they each have three touch points in the day, that's nine, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom of trying to balance technology, who needs what device, when, who needs what room to do this and, and so my husband and I would sometimes start our workday by 3:30pm.

While the multiplicities of temporal experiences could be explained from an individualistic, psychological perspective (e.g., Grondin et al., 2020), we contend that it is the various contextual factors in and outside of the home that conditioned how the parents experienced time during lockdowns. As analysed in Chapter 2, parents are always placed in a web of relations with other people, objects, and environments. Working arrangements, for example, play an important role in shaping how these parents feel about the passing of time during lockdowns. These conditions, together with the pandemic contexts, reconfigured families' time experiences, which drove how parents understood the roles of screen media in children's everyday lives.

Parents in Australia also talked about how they co-opted children's TV programming to signal the time of day and regulate household activities. In these households, watching TV was more likely to be considered as important downtime rather than screen time which required heavy regulation. TV eased transition from one part of the day to the next, or it created a focal point for a shared experience. One family described how a particular TV show in the early evening would indicate the workday was over and dinner preparation had begun. Rather than using a clock, children in that house watched the same show at the same time every day, to ease transition into 'family time' or into the bedtime routine. As Australian parent Leah, mother of three, reported, 'We probably have signposted a bit of our day and helped with transitions by using television'. This was despite the fact that Leah ordinarily preferred her children to partake in a variety of structured (e.g., sport) and unstructured outdoor activities (e.g., gardening) saying, 'I, to be honest, I hate TV. I hate technology. I am an outdoors person'. Transitions and routines were an important consideration for Leah, who worried more about the effects of reduced outdoor time than increased TV time.

In this respect, the meanings and consequences of 'clock time', as perceived in pre-pandemic time, were largely not applicable in lockdowns. Clock time here refers to time in its linear measurable format. It is different from lived time, in that the meaning of clock time lies purely in the quantity of time. For example, before the pandemic, any time children spent on screens for more than two hours would be considered excessive for most parents. Time, in this respect, was used as a measurement for regulation. However, the adoption of clock time in relation to children's screen use became simply impossible in lockdowns, when screens were required for so many activities. As a result, parents reconsidered the meanings of clock time to move away from an exclusive focus on the quantity of time children spent on screens, to the quality and content of screen activities, as well as to become markers of everyday life routines in lockdowns. Here, the quantity of time children spend on screens is further categorised into smaller branches whereby the content of the screen time is taken into consideration in defining screen time.

Increased understandings of media content

With the new understandings of different *purposes* for screen media, parents also described distinctions they were making in relation to how children were engaging with media and the different *content* they were consuming. Parents discussed media content and platforms that required or encouraged more 'active' engagement, in contrast with what they described as passive viewing (see also, Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). For example, one parent in the United States said, 'Disney Plus is a consumption, versus keeping in contact with others' and another US parent contrasted interactive Zoom sessions with media that involved 'just watching'. As we discuss in Chapter 5, active engagement and interactivity was accompanied by greater affinity with digitally mediated creativity. Many of the Australian parents commented on the increased prevalence of creative uses of digital technologies, with children variously accessing the creative offerings of cultural institutions, attending visual and performing arts classes, learning new cooking skills, purchasing materials for creative projects, and creating a range of digital artefacts including short films, animations, digital imagery, YouTube content, games, PowerPoint presentations, and more. The perceived increase in digitally mediated creativity prompted Leah, to predict that the extended lockdowns in Melbourne were

> going to create such a different roadmap for so many people because it just required such innovation and creativity and the kids were allowed to just go and do stuff. A lot of them have done some pretty cool things.

These distinctions helped parents consider what to place time limits on. Whereas 'active' use of screens (for social, educational, creative, or wellbeing purposes) were not necessarily counted towards daily screen time allowances, activities considered more passive, such as watching cartoons, were viewed as part of screen time that parents thought should be limited. In making these distinctions, parents had to articulate different purposes, as one US mother described: 'The primary purpose of [Zoom piano lessons] is piano, not to be on the computer'. These distinctions required parents to articulate and even label different screen times during the day, with some time labelled 'fun', 'leisure', or 'choice' screen time. These latter types of screen time were less regulated in terms of *content* but more often limited in amount of *time*.

New understandings of children's media use helped parents make decisions about particular content. With the increase in screen time for all purposes, parents indicated that they thought more carefully about the quality of media, particularly media being consumed by children outside their 'downtime', contrasting arts and science programs with, for example, repeated viewings of *My Little Pony*. Parents also made more subtle distinctions concerning sex and violence in media, rather than having a blanket ban on any media deemed as containing 'sex' or 'violence' (cf., Jeffery, 2020). For example,

one parent in the United States discussed the gratuitous nature of violence in *Die Hard* in contrast with the more acceptable type of action in *Star Wars* movies. Finally, parents expressed new understandings of social media and social interactions in online spaces. Whereas parents said they previously banned media such as TikTok or Minecraft, due to concerns about content and contact, parents said they were able to find ways to limit or regulate their children's engagements in these spaces. In Chapter 6, we analyse parents' experiences with parental controls including rating systems, software tools, and spaces such as YouTube Kids.

One further shift that came with increased time to observe their children's interactions, was parents' development of new understandings of their children's behaviour in relation to screen media. In the Chinese data, Lunqing, mother of a ten-year-old, listed a range of benefits she now sees, given the time she had to observe her son's media use:

> I now think that they (screen devices) are good and bad. They are good when they provide more channels for children to learn beyond the books. For example, when he had questions which I couldn't answer, I'd just tell him to Baidu (Chinese equivalent to Google) … This is a way to gain knowledge indirectly. … Plus, his communication skills have improved as well. I saw him chatting with his classmates during online class breaks. And he types faster now as well.

Parents shared a wide range of insights they gained, some of which were reassuring, and others that were worrisome. Some parents indicated that their children were able to recognise rules they (the parents) had set, based on content concerns, and children monitored themselves (and often their siblings). This contradicts common assertions that children are unable to control their own media use, particularly when media are seen as 'addictive' (Poulain et al., 2023). As shown in Chapter 2, when we decentre parents as the sole actors or decision makers, we are able to see that children can and do interact with rules governing family media practices. Parents also expressed surprise at some of the creative workarounds children had figured out, such as viewing TikTok videos on Pinterest (in a household where children's access to TikTok was not allowed) or accessing YouTube via Siri (in a household which had deleted the YouTube app off all devices). While it is commonly known that children sometimes hack or bypass parental controls on electronic devices, these more subtle types of workarounds are less often recognised in research (cf., Mukherjee, 2021). In Chapter 5, we discuss this in terms of phantasmagorical or transgressive play. Not only are these types of play less often recognised in research, they have historically been less recognised in pre-internet childhoods (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

The extended lockdowns in Melbourne, Australia, led to families engaging in school and work from home conditions for large chunks of 2020 and

2021. This led to shifts in how digital technologies could support social skills, and subsequently, to changes in parents' understanding of media content. Leah started the pandemic very anti-technology and here described her change in thinking:

> I've really tried to focus on a lot of the positives, because I think I've had a really negative mindset when it comes to tech. My son, actually, just during the school holidays, did a social skills programme that incorporated Minecraft, which they had done some Minecraft at a friend's house once. And he loved it. And I've just said, 'No, we're not going to put it on our devices.' But this school holiday programme, I've never seen him more engaged, like he would come home and talk about what he did, which is his ability to recall typically is pretty poor. And so for him to be so engaged in something, I just saw, Oh, my gosh, the benefit of that, to then, you know, increase and improve those social skills.

Similarly, Bee, another Australian parent who was not a huge fan of 'excessive' screen media before the pandemic, noted her son would play games,

> on the PC and the PS4 and even on his iPad, logging in on this thing called Discord. And they can just talk to each other all the time. So they're playing games together all the time. They're just chatting about whatever. And that was really great because they were so isolated with the lockdowns and didn't really see their friends otherwise.

Leah's and Bee's observations of the social aspects of their sons' screen time helped shift their ideas about the content of their children's online gaming platforms, seeing the everyday 'chatter about whatever' as an important form of participation for their boys.

However, this nuanced approach towards clock time in relation to screen media was found to be overall more prominent in the American and Australian data than in the Chinese data. This was partly due to the differentiated governmental responses to curbing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As indicated in Chapter 1, in Nanjing, where the Chinese data were collected, snap lockdowns were introduced at the beginning of the pandemic. Families in Nanjing did not experience extended periods of lockdowns, as the Australian and American parents in our study did. As a result, Chinese parents still aspired to keep children's total amount of time spent on screens low, if possible, no matter what the purpose of screen use was. Parents contended that since the time spent on screens for learning and online schooling had increased, the time spent on play and entertainment should have been more strictly managed so that their physical health was not compromised (see more discussion in Chapter 6).

Exacerbated worries about screen media

While the pandemic and its associated restrictions allowed many parents to rethink – and sometimes embrace – the roles of screen media in the home, other parents became even more convinced of the accuracy of the claims made in prominent public discourse regarding the detrimental effects of screens on their children. The longer time spent together in the same domestic space forced the parents to witness, in situ, their children's extended use of screen media. The increased or – in the eyes of many parents – excessive time their children spent on screens exacerbated their long-standing worries and concerns over screen media. Therefore, in this last findings section, we discuss how some parents in this study, particularly those in China, became more anxious about their children's daily screen media activities during lockdowns.

The intensification of parental anxiety over the negative effects of screen media on children is well captured in Jiang's responses. Jiang is a father of an 11-year-old. When asked how his understanding of screen media has changed, he reflected on his observation that so many children his daughter's age were playing *Honor of Kings*, a popular mobile online game among Chinese children and young people. Jiang became very concerned about this new development, because of the potential harms digital games like this may cause his child:

> First of all, I think my child is still too young to self-regulate. It's impossible to expect her to control herself [when playing games]. Also, using screens for extended periods of time can have significant harm on vision. Because of these two reasons, I still tried my best to limit the time and frequency of her screen use.

Jiang's response highlights the two main concerns Chinese parents have with screen media: 'addiction' (the term parents used to signal concerns about a perceived lack of self-control) and vision impairment. Chinese parents were overwhelmingly influenced by the discourses around the addictive power of screens, and the potential for vision impairment as a result of excessive exposure to screens. Such fears follow a 'media effects' approach towards understanding media, as if there are inherent qualities of the media forms (see Valkenburg et al., 2016). For example, Liu, father of a ten-year-old, had similar fears as Jiang. Although Liu realised the educational potential of his son's use of tablets, he did not think that it could outweigh the risks: 'If he uses it too much, he may still get addicted', he clarified. In contrast, only four of the 21 parents in the United States referenced 'addiction' when discussing concerns about children and screen media. In doing so, they draw on scientific discourse, as Natalie, mother of three sons, described: 'So, that kind of dopamine kick, you can see it in kids, like the drug…it's that addiction piece

of it that, I think, is developmentally inappropriate for kids in elementary school'.

In Australia, parents tended to differentiate their references to addiction further, acknowledging that different platforms had different capacities to induce addictive behaviour. YouTube, TikTok, and particular online games such as Fortnite were considered the most addictive, either because of algorithms designed to captivate, or simply because that was what *all* their friends were doing. Interestingly, every household had their own idea of what was addictive, and explanations of why this was the case were not consistent across the dataset. The Australian parents tended to be circumspect about what they described as the addictive nature of certain activities, choosing to implement strategies as and when required in response to situations as they arose, rather than resorting to outright bans. Bee, who was happy for her son to spend stretches of time on Discord talking about 'whatever' with friends, restricted the Wi-Fi connection to the PlayStation until after 2:30 pm, and created spatial boundaries for game play in the home, as a way of ensuring co-presence, similar to parents' strategies discussed in Chapter 2. Bee's strategies were designed to provide her son with continued opportunities to play, while ensuring 'crazy stuff' would not happen:

> …even games like Fortnite that he would get quite addicted to, I had other parents telling me their kids were getting very aggressive around it. So they just had to get rid of it completely. All the stories about kids, even friends of my son's just getting up in the middle of the night and playing with friends when the parents are asleep, you know, just crazy stuff. Yeah. And that's why I insist on it being in this room [the living room], you know. So I would hear that, if that happened.

To some parents, the addictive character of screen media was amplified and more clearly felt in light of their children's extended use of media in everyday pandemic life. As Ye, mother of an 11-year-old, learned from the pandemic, 'The more you use (screen devices), the more you are used to the company of smartphones or tablets, and the more you want to keep using digital devices'. This was similar to the habit-forming concerns expressed by some parents in the United States. Alicia, mother of four, shared her relief when her children returned to school, partly because they were no longer in the habit of using screens by default: 'As soon as a screen is exposed to them, they're thinking about screens, but if there aren't screens to begin with…[they're] doing more creative things…or go[ing] straight outside'. Underlying Alicia's comments are notions that media consumption displaces more 'worthy' activities, in this case, ones that are more active. This is also a theme in the Chinese data. To Zhiying, for example, who is a mother of two boys, the 'passive' nature of using screen media during lockdowns was particularly concerning. As she explained, before the pandemic, it was mostly she who deliberately and

carefully selected digital products for her children. During lockdowns, the children *had* to use platforms mandated by schools. Such passivity of screen media use bothered Zhiying and exacerbated her concerns.

In our interviews, we have observed how parental imaginaries of time in relation to their children's biological development played an important role in intensifying parents' anxieties and worries about children's increased use of screen media in the pandemic. While the increase in children's everyday use of screen media urged some parents to reevaluate the role of these media, other parents became even more anxious and worried about screen media and spoke about their potentially negative effects on children. Paradoxically, this was partly because of the increased time parents spent with their children together, during which they observed the increased screen activities in which their children were engaged. Partly, it was also because of the view that it was still too early for children, particularly the very young ones, to use screen media in an extended manner. As many parents explained, the appropriate time for children to use screen media more freely was always 'in the future when they grow up'. These personal imaginaries of the relationship between screen activities and children's biological development speak closely to the long-standing societal discourses that position children as vulnerable 'becomings', as discussed earlier in this chapter. The sudden increase of screen time and activities for children during the pandemic diverged from parents' ideas of the 'normal' amount of time that children *should* spend engaging with screens at their biological stage. Parents who remained strict with their children's use of media strongly believed that with their children's current physical and cognitive conditions, they should not engage with media technologies in an active manner.

It is worth noting, however, that parents' perceptions of biological time and its role in informing parental decisions around screen media are highly differentiated across countries. In general, we have observed that more parents in China have reported increased levels of worry and anxiety around the future effects of children's increased screen use than parents in the United States and Australia. As mentioned above, in the analysis of new distinctions around purposes for children's use of media, some parents' imaginaries for their children's future included the positive effect of children's technological skills development. They contended that children's media practices and activities during the pandemic may provide opportunities for them to develop digital literacies necessary for their future as grown-ups. For these parents, using a developmental time lens actually helped them observe and understand their children's engagements as beneficial in particular ways. In addition, some parents' concerns about their children's long-term wellbeing and social skills were assuaged by observing the social aspects of screen media and the development of positive identities through connected learning types of opportunities.

Conclusion

The above findings indicate the relevance of a new time regime imposed by the pandemic conditions for understanding parental attitudes towards screen media. Our analysis of changes in parents' understandings of screen time and children's interactions with digital media indicates some hopeful shifts as well as some steadfast concerns. By using a temporal lens, we see different parent positions at different times during the pandemic. When parents discussed clock time, which is used for regulatory purposes, parents used pre-pandemic discourse around limits on screen time. However, there was an important difference: in the pandemic, parents no longer counted screen time as all the minutes in day a child spent on a screen. Rather, the kind of 'screen time' that was regulated and counted by minutes was described as children's free choice of their use of screens. In a sense, parents had given up using clock time to understand how to parent with screen media, and they had to reevaluate their understanding of children's interactions with digital media.

The temporal multiplicities experienced particularly by families in extended lockdown situations led to new understandings as well as recurring anxieties. For some families, experiencing 'slow' time helped children use screen media in new ways, and parents were able to observe and gain new insights about the role of digital technologies in their children's lives. Using a developmental lens, parents were enthusiastic about the digital skills children were acquiring. However, for some, this extended time also led to concerns. Drawing on long-standing discourses around media effects, parents worried about children's lack of ability to regulate their behaviour, commenting on the 'addictive' nature of screen media. These concerns were embedded in developmental time frames – parents worried about what would happen in the future if children did not learn to self-regulate.

Throughout this chapter, we indicate that parents' experiences of time and their understandings of children's media use were shaped in part by discursive constructions of parenting, childhood, and media. In this chapter and in Chapter 2, we reference discursive constructions of 'good' parenting practices that position parents as responsible for limiting children's 'screen time', regulating media content, and simultaneously facilitating their learning on and about new technologies. The next chapter delves into parental responsibilisation, looking specifically at remote schooling. As is apparent from the analysis in the current chapter, the time children spent online for school and the regimented daily schedule of remote schooling were significant components of families' experiences of daily pandemic life. Chapter 4 analyses parents' responses to remote schooling, employing a theoretical lens that takes into account different aspects of parental responsibilisation connected with their children's learning.

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4 Schooling with and through technologies during the pandemic

South Korea and the UK

Rebecca Coles, Hyeon-Seon Jeong, and Rebekah Willett

Introduction

Several months into the pandemic, UNESCO (2020) estimated that over 1.5 billion children and young people were experiencing school closures and relying on educational technologies for remote schooling, which consisted of synchronous (e.g., Zoom) and asynchronous (e.g., Seesaw) digital activities, both requiring varying degrees of active parental involvement. For synchronous activities, parents had to help their children navigate various apps and accounts, get to remote classes on time, provide adequate devices and space for remote schooling, and potentially assist their children with their school's expected Zoom behaviours. For asynchronous activities, parents, especially those with younger children, had to assist with accessing, completing, and uploading their children's assignments to an assigned website in ways that schools or teachers had asked. Thus, families were not only responsible for providing adequate internet access and devices but also for being mediators and facilitators of children's remote schooling (León-Nabal et al., 2021). Yet, not all parents were equipped and available for these new roles (de Muynck, 2022). According to a report from the American Psychological Association (APA) in 2020, the majority of parents surveyed (74%) reported experiencing significant stress due to the disruption and adjustment of their daily routines. Similarly, other studies indicated that families experienced elevated levels of stress, anxiety, depression (Fontanesi et al., 2020; Hiraoka & Tomoda, 2020; Maggio et al., 2021; Sonnenschein et al., 2021), financial hardships (Agaton & Cueto, 2021); and they faced difficulties balancing their job responsibilities with family obligations, while also managing the demands of children's online schooling (Abuhammad, 2020; Dong et al., 2020; Stites et al., 2021).

With homes doubling as schools and greater demands on parental involvement in children's online schooling (León-Nabal et al., 2021), parents experienced a transformation in their responsibilities, often having to assume new and unfamiliar roles in supporting their children's online

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schooling (Carrión-Martínez et al., 2021; de Muynck, 2022). In particular, parents were expected to take on greater instructional responsibility and develop new skills and capabilities regarding online schooling, including both technological and content knowledge. These new responsibilities disrupted terrains of family life already being renegotiated by parents, such as: the relationship with schooling; the place of screen media in the home, as seen in Chapter 2; and the apportioning of parental time, including between work and home, and between care for different family members, as seen in Chapter 3. Importantly, as discussed below, these responsibilities are discursively constructed by neoliberal ideologies that create expectations for the role of the state and individuals, in this case parents. Thus, as described in the next section, these terrains of responsibilisation are highly charged for parents who are challenged with making decisions based on their own values and identities, but in the context of contradictory advice and uncertainty about the future shape of the world (Beck, 1992; Beck-Gernsheim, 1998). Rather than seeing parents' responses to these processes of responsibilisation as entirely pandemic-related, in this chapter, we argue that our data indicate reflections of deeper structures that position parents and shape their responses to remote schooling.

This chapter explores how parents engaged with remote, screen-mediated schooling during the pandemic, drawing on data from South Korea and the UK. These countries provide an interesting contrast, with South Korea having no lockdowns, and the UK implementing three separate lockdowns with regional variations (see Appendix 1). In terms of education and schooling, there are key contrasts in these countries, with the existence in South Korea of an intense private supplementary tutoring system (*Sa Gyo Yuk* in Korean). Further, although children in both countries were provided with remote schooling options, in the UK, participation was optional until September 2020, whereas in South Korea, teachers were required to take attendance. Finally, the countries have contrasting policies concerning children's use of technologies, with the South Korean government implementing national-level policies to prevent internet and smartphone overdependence, and the UK government leaving the decisions about children's technology access to parents. These different areas of contrast are relevant when considering remote schooling during the pandemic.

Conceptual framework: Terrains of parental responsibilisation

The theoretical lens we developed draws on critiques of neoliberalism and ways neoliberal discourse of individualisation and responsibilisation positions decisions and actions, for example, those connected with family media practices, as the sole responsibility of individuals. The family is positioned in neoliberalism as the site of the construction of normative behaviours and values, with individuals (parents and caregivers) responsible for looking after their family's needs, managing their place in society, and

accepting the responsibilities as constructed by the state (see Garrett et al., 2016). As Davies and Bansel argue,

> A particular feature of neoliberal subjects is that their desires, hopes, ideals and fears have been shaped in such a way that they desire to be morally worthy, responzibilised individuals, who, as successful entrepreneurs, can produce the best for themselves and their families.
>
> (2007, p. 251)

Importantly, neoliberal discourse is inherently political, enacted through government policies that drive societies away from social welfare models, and towards market-driven ones. Children's education is one such arena, with dominant discourse inciting parents and caregivers to provide what is 'best' for their children (and their children's future) at home, and to demand 'the best' schooling, extracurricular activities, and resources for their children's education. As we employed this lens to investigate parents' discussions about remote schooling, we identified various neoliberal discourses which positioned parents and caregivers and shaped their understanding and experience of remote schooling. We are calling these different areas constructed by discourses 'terrains of parental responsibilisation'.

A key terrain being negotiated by parents is their relationship to their children's school, including what is often referred to as *home school partnerships*. In this terrain, parents may be positioned as consumers, who supposedly know what they want from a school system, itself fraught with debates regarding curriculum, assessment, its use of technology, and school structures (Biesta, 2005, p. 59). Responsibilisation demands parents engage in their children's schooling, for example by arranging private tutoring, connecting home activities with school curriculum, or using technologies to follow and respond to daily communications (Cottle & Alexander, 2014, p. 655; Wright, 2012, p. 290). Yet, parent-school relations are often riven with mutually misunderstood expectations, power dynamics, practical pressures, and continuing disconnection (Lareau, 2011; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016). In addition, parents are urged to attend to their children's education beyond school, and to take on the role of 'pedagogues', responsible for ensuring that their children acquire the skills and dispositions they will need for future educational success. Through a multitude of advice channels, parents are urged to give time and consideration to how they should frame everyday events as occasions to 'teach' their children (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2001; Hoffman, 2010; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). Much of the discourse concerning home school partnerships emphasises 'barriers' to productive relationships, most often focused on barriers experienced in households. This assumes a desirable and normative path to parental engagement with schooling, whether in ordinary times, or during the exceptional period of remote schooling during the pandemic. Yet, this normative path does not exist. Parents experience school partnerships differently based on

a plethora of variables, including barriers of time and resources, as well as their own experiences of education, the presence of conscious or unconscious bias, their views regarding the right way to parent, and so on. During the pandemic, realities regarding the home school terrain highlighted the problematic assumptions connected with responsibilisation in this area.

A second key terrain of parental responsibilisation considers *screen media in the home*. Here, research has explored the pressure on parents to be informed about, and to evaluate, a multitude of expert advice regarding regulation and mediation of children's experiences with screen media (Willett, 2021). Based on qualitative research with parents in the period before the pandemic, Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020, p. 2) describe how parents are caught in 'swirling anxiety' between injunctions to protect their children from potentially damaging screen practices, and help their children keep up with digital opportunities related to education and future careers. They describe three 'genres for digital parenting' that parents employ as they negotiate their daily lives: embrace, in which parents seek out digital technologies to ease family life or to gain valued professional skills or 'future ready' identities and lifestyles; balance, in which parents weigh opportunities and risks and try to hedge their bets by encouraging some digital practices and not others; and resist, in which parents attempt to stem the incursion of digital technology into family life (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020, p. 11).

During the pandemic, the demand on parents to facilitate remote schooling often relied heavily on screen media, and so disrupted parents' management of screens in the home – already a highly charged issue for many families. In analysing parents' negotiation of their children's screen media use, Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) describe how parents, across social backgrounds, are caught between injunctions to protect their children from potentially damaging screen practices, while simultaneously being expected to help their children keep up with digital opportunities related to education and future careers. In relation to screen media, they argue, parents are given the role of decision maker on matters believed to affect their children's future in potentially profound but unknown ways. Individual families are given the opportunity to shape their life based on their own values and identities, but they must do so in the face of acute societal concern, public debate, and contradictory advice (Beck, 1992; Beck-Gernsheim, 1998; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Finally, we see *family schedules* as a third terrain of parental responsibilisation that intersects with home school partnerships (terrain one) and screen media in the home (terrain two). Temporal aspects of family life are discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to changes in understanding of screen media, and in this chapter, we extend the analysis to consider ways that expectations about schedules connected with schooling constitute another form of responsibilisation. Family schedules revolve around the school calendar and timetable, for daily, weekly, and annual routines. Weekdays structure family schedules with school start and finishing times, as well as expectations about

homework and involvement in after-school extracurricular activities. Further, in the process Lareau (2011) calls 'concerted cultivation', parents spend time educating their children in the home, 'exposing' them to educational activities and resources, providing 'enrichment' experiences, and helping them develop skills and attitudes that will benefit them (particularly in educational settings), not to mention scheduling time for children to be outside for fresh air and exercise. Screen media are part of this family scheduling terrain – children are sometimes provided with educational media for a certain number of minutes, and more broadly, parents are expected to manage children's screen time, with two hours per day the oft-cited limit. Screens are often part of family schedules and routines – family movie nights, after-school downtime, access to screens as rewards and punishments, and provision of additional screen time to occupy children when travelling, when the weather is poor, or when parents need to attend to domestic chores (Willett, 2021). Of course, the pandemic severely disrupted family schedules. Parents (many of whom were trying to work from home) were expected to keep the regimented timetables of school by logging children on and off at specific times throughout the day (see Chapter 1, Table 1.1) and completing and submitting homework online. During lockdowns, parents were advised to establish schedules for their children, and to include time for exercise, art, communication, and 'activities'. For example, The Child Mind Institute, a non-profit organisation with a team of psychologists, psychiatrists, neuropsychologists, social workers, and speech-language pathologists, suggested, 'It may help to print out a schedule and go over it as a family each morning. Setting a timer will help kids know when activities are about to begin or end' (Jacobson, 2020). For the parents we talked with, this kind of advice was unrealistic at best, often serving to increase anxiety parents felt about their family routines.

These three terrains of responsibilisation – school partnerships, screen media, and family schedules – changed dramatically during the pandemic and shaped families' experiences of remote schooling. These areas of responsibilisation are intertwined and relate to other areas of life besides schooling, such as children's health and wellbeing; and further, they include daily routines that are embedded in daily life, such as those suggested by schools and health care professionals (e.g., reading before bedtime). Importantly, these three terrains help to explain different parent responses to remote schooling, with some parents able to resist and negotiate areas of responsibilisation, some feeling pressure and guilt, and others working diligently to align with dominant expectations within each terrain.

Case study analyses

As background to the analysis, we provide some contextual information about remote schooling and screen media in our two countries (further details are in Appendix 1). South Korea had no official lockdown during the pandemic. However, remote schooling was introduced from the very

beginning of the pandemic, and tightly regulated by the South Korean Ministry of Education. A combination of in-person and screen-mediated learning was implemented in 2020 and 2021, depending on the infection status of individual schools and regions. Small-scale face-to-face instruction was allowed for emergency childcare, basic academic support, and special education schools/classes. The predominant form of screen-mediated remote learning was video lectures uploaded on the e-learning platform, particularly in the first year of the pandemic. Teachers were mandated to check students' attendance. South Korean society is characterised by an intensive private supplementary tutoring market (*hagwons*). In this context, parents have been 'responsibilised' for making 'autonomous' choices in selecting educational services in the competitive entrance examination system (Doherty & Dooley, 2018). During the pandemic, parents who were dissatisfied with remote learning and concerned about their children's learning deficits relied more on *hagwons*, with 75.5% of K–12 pupils receiving private tutoring in 2021 (Lee & Yoo, 2022).

South Korea has national-level policies to prevent internet and smartphone overdependence. As demonstrated in the analysis in this chapter, these state discourses are present in domestic settings and often internalised by parents. Our analysis shows that parents' perceptions are dominated by protectionist attitudes, with parents trying to delay the age at which children begin using screen media and setting limits on the amount of time they spend using it (see also Jeong et al., 2021). However, the introduction of remote learning made it difficult for parents to stick to their pre-planned parenting policies regarding digital device use.

Moving now to the UK context, the government ordered a lockdown in March 2020, part-way through the Spring school term, and in England and Scotland the order ended in May 2020. Remote learning was provided for children not in school, although attendance was not compulsory. In September 2020, after the summer break, all children returned to school in person. As part of an additional national lockdown, schools in Scotland and England closed in December 2020 and January 2021 (respectively), and schools staggered opening for different ages in February and March 2021. Preschools remained open during these additional lockdowns, and schools continued to provide in-person education for children considered vulnerable and children of essential workers.

During the UK lockdowns, reports indicated unequal educational experiences in terms of children's access to learning resources and support for learning (Andrew et al., 2020; Cullinane & Montacute, 2020). Comparing students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, students from lower-income families had lower quality technology and internet access and had to share study or work spaces more frequently compared with students from higher-income families. Further, more parents in families with higher incomes reported hiring private tutoring and feeling more confident in their ability to support their children's engagements with remote schooling. One

report indicated that 9% of low-income families hired private tutors, half that of well-off families; and further, well-off families hired private tutors for longer periods of time compared with lower-income families (Andrews et al., 2020). Finally, school provision of learning resources varied, with schools in higher-income areas providing more interactive resources such as videoconferencing and online help, compared with resources offered through lower-income schools. Schools in lower-income areas were more likely to provide worksheets or workbooks, due to concerns that families would not be able to access online resources, and secondary schools were more likely to set online work and provide technology for students than primary schools. In one study, only 2% of teachers from the lowest-income areas indicated that their students had adequate access to technology for remote learning (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020).

In contrast with South Korea, in terms of policies concerning children's 'overdependence' on technologies, the UK government leaves the decisions about children's technology access to parents. The UK government is careful to indicate that there is not enough evidence to create guidelines regarding children's screen time; rather, the government supports advice from chief medical officers. This advice includes leaving electronic devices out of bedrooms at night and talking with children about screen content and conduct. Regulation of screens is seen as the responsibility of parents and caregivers.

Parents engaged a diverse range of approaches to schooling during the pandemic as they navigated their own paths through these three terrains of parental responsibilisation. The following sections explore ways that terrains were experienced differently by different families, and how the pandemic created new barriers and pressures within the terrains, which sometimes clashed with parents' beliefs and abilities to maintain pre-pandemic family routines and practices. This analysis section draws on five interviews in South Korea and five interviews in the UK to explore how parents negotiated school partnerships, screen media, and family schedules. We found that parents placed different levels of importance on each terrain and, during the pandemic, they all worked to balance practical barriers with their beliefs and values as they navigated their own path through remote schooling.

School partnership and responsibilisation in South Korea

In their book, *The Class*, a pre-pandemic ethnographic research project exploring the relationship between home and school, Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) describe different stances parents take towards their children's learning. In one stance, parents 'respect the school's definition of learning' and try to mirror, at home, the kind of learning they understand to be taking place at school (p. 170). In another, parents follow an 'alternative vision of learning' and treat their home as a place for superior creative and flexible

learning opportunities (p. 180). While these two stances are present in the South Korean data, the former is more pronounced. The majority of South Korean parents who talked to us seemed to have taken on remote schooling responsibilities to some degree. However, many parents in our study held a highly critical view of the pedagogy of screen-mediated learning, which relied heavily on video lectures, especially in the first year of the pandemic. In practice, they respected the school's authority over learning, aligning with the instrumental role of education in determining a child's future in South Korea. As described by Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 'the value that families accord to school depends on how they calculate its relevance to their children's possible futures' (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016, p. 170). South Korean parents routinely invest in private education to supplement mainstream schooling, in order to better prepare their children for the nation's university entrance exam, the results of which can have a significant effect on a student's future career prospects. Private English language education is also widely used to better prepare children for future employment on the global job market, in the 'over-schooled' society of South Korea, where parents eagerly invest in their children's academic life, in comparison with other forms of cultural enrichment activities (Jeong, 2019).

Plum Mom is one of the parents who respected the school's pedagogy. (In the South Korean study, participants chose their pseudonyms.) It was a challenge, especially in the beginning, for children and parents to navigate the government-provided e-learning platform, even to find their online class on the menu to watch video lectures and submit assignments. Parents felt that they needed to 'sit next to their children to help', as Plum Mom said, even going so far as to get help from the teacher on the phone. Plum Mom felt relieved that her spouse worked from home and was able to help her daughter:

> For the assignments, you had to take pictures to upload, and it was a little bit difficult for my child, so she did it with her dad. I think my husband was there with my daughter a couple of times when I wasn't there, fortunately.

Plum Mom expressed frustration with remote schooling, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. Selecting this image as a representation of her experience, she said,

> I think the frustration was a little bit more for me, and I think it's a combination of a lot of things, like my kids' schoolwork, and then the COVID-19, and then my own feelings about not being able to take care of my children as well as I should have, and all of those things.

Despite their willingness to participate collaboratively in remote schooling, however, some parents experienced difficulties keeping pace with the continual introduction of new software by their children's teachers. The rapid

Figure 4.1 Plum Mom's choice of image which reflects the feeling of frustration she had with remote schooling. Photo by Elisa Ventur on Unsplash.com.

pace of technological change can put teachers under pressure to keep up with the new technology (Jeong & Kim, 2015, p. 89), which can add to the pressure on students and parents. This is illustrated by the experience of Meejung Mom, who expressed that she felt 'frustrated and incompetent as a parent' due to her perceived lack of digital skills. While initially, she managed to provide digital equipment and support her child's use of it, the constant influx of new software led to her and her child becoming 'lost again' in the process of learning these tools, reinforcing her feeling that she was digitally incompetent:

> Parents who use computers at work are good at it. Uploading homework is easy for such parents. However, I couldn't do it well. The same is true for my daughter. This kind of thing happens a lot these days. I'm not able to do it well since I have been a housewife for so long.

Despite her readiness to embrace digital technologies, Meejung Mom grappled with the ever-evolving digital learning environment, highlighting the existence of a digital divide among parents. This reinforces the notion that parental engagement in the context of remote schooling is shaped by an intricate interplay of individual capabilities, attitudes, and socio-cultural resources.

The responsibility of parents for their children's education was not limited to providing technical assistance and cooperation in remote instruction. Parents who believed that the sudden transition to digital technology was not effective for their children's education either taught their children themselves or enrolled them in private academies or tutoring programs. Cat Mom said that in the first year of the pandemic, her children's remote learning classes were primarily watching video lectures, like in most other schools:

> The remote class that my daughter took last year was just videos on an online learning platform and she had to watch them on her own. But she never really engaged with it. She was told that she had to do homework and she had to answer questions but that was it. It wasn't something that happened after a certain amount of time. It was like that from day one.

Cat Mom believed that the ineffective pedagogy caused 'a great deal of learning loss' and that she had to 'reteach the entire subject at home' on her own. As a professor in the field of education, she was aware that it would be unrealistic to anticipate high-quality learning materials under the given, urgent circumstances. As a result, she provided her children with additional support to ensure they learned effectively. She stated that supporting her children's remote learning was her 'top priority as a parent'. Except for English, she taught her children herself without relying on private tutoring academies. She allowed her daughter to 'just do Math and read a lot of books' and sent her to an English *hagwon*, a private tutoring academy, 'because there was no official exam in elementary school'. Although Cat Mom described herself as merely embracing her responsibilities as a parent, we can see the work of discourses of responsibilisation shaping her understanding of her role and what should be her 'top priority as a parent'.

However, some parents lacked the subject-matter expertise, pedagogical experience, and financial means to teach their own children or provide private online tutoring. Samuel might belong to one of the most vulnerable social groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. For 17 years, he had been a Korean immigrant in Ecuador, importing and selling Chinese goods without generating a significant profit, and he had recently returned with a Spanish-speaking wife and 12-year-old son. In January of 2020, he returned to South Korea after the pandemic rendered his trade and business with China impossible. Financially struggling, he and his Spanish-speaking wife, who spoke limited Korean, returned to South Korea. His 12-year-old son lacked the necessary Korean language skills to keep up with his class. Even though there were many well-designed materials organised by grade level, Samuel lacked the subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical expertise to use them. In consideration of his son's special education needs, the teacher offered his son in-person classes at the school. Similar to the case of Cat Mom, Samuel's story illustrates that the terrain of responsibilisation connected with school

partnerships was unevenly experienced due to differing socioeconomic and cultural resources amongst families.

Screen media and responsibilisation in South Korea

As remote learning increased screen time in the home, parents in South Korea 'embraced', 'resisted', or attempted to find a 'balance' (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020) in such changes, depending on the context and the purpose of their children's media use. In some respects, Plum Mom embraced her son's use of screen media, especially his smartphone, as she was now able to see the educational aspects of his media use. Her son enjoyed watching his favourite Japanese animations on Netflix, teaming up with friends to play Minecraft or Roblox on his smartphone with the speaker activated for chats, and gaining diverse knowledge by researching his favourite topics on YouTube. Although she had previously held negative views regarding the use of screen media, she realised that 'it was not a bad thing' after observing her son acquire so much knowledge from YouTube, and she was thrilled that he was able to supplement his school education by using the online learning platform:

> Smartphones are so fascinating, and I think even adults would have a hard time if they were told not to use them, but I hope that they can be appropriately controlled. After experiencing various things on a smartphone, I would like my child to use it less and spend more time studying.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, some parents indicated that the pandemic gave them more time to observe their children's digital activities and helped to shift their ideas about purposes for screen time, specific content, and children's creative uses of digital media. Plum Mom stated that she found her son 'adorable' and was 'proud' of the fact that he discovered information about his favourite scientific topics on YouTube and frequently discussed them with his parents. She added that it was wonderful to 'permit children to watch their favourite content on their smartphones and gain knowledge' in this manner. However, she wanted her son to 'balance' his screen media use in a manner that would allow him to self-regulate the purpose, duration, and priority of media use over schoolwork. Plum Mom registered her son for access to *elihigh*, a private online learning platform for elementary school students that includes video lectures on all subjects and telephone contact with the learning manager. She thought that, due to this online tutoring program, her son was not falling behind, thinking that otherwise 'the learning gap would have been enormous'. Although Plum Mom shifted her ideas about the content and purpose of her son's media use, she still framed it as largely educational and indicated her desire for 'appropriate' control, which underlines how responsibilisation discourse was informing her understanding.

Other parents voiced concern regarding their children's access to media, noting that prior to the pandemic, children used screen media in limited

ways during school hours, but that with remote learning, their children had constant access to screen media at home. Parents still wanted to limit their children's exposure to screen media but found it challenging to do so in practice. Meejung Mom stated that she had frequent arguments with her daughter concerning her use of digital media. Although Meejung Mom aimed to follow the advice of experts by actively controlling when and how her daughter used screen media, she found it difficult to do so because her daughter had begun using a tablet for remote learning and simultaneously had started using it for other purposes, such as social media. Due to her concerns about online safety and cyberbullying, Meejung Mom opposed her child's use of social media. She felt that she had lost some of the control she had over her daughter's screen media use, because remote schooling had given her daughter more access to technology and indirectly more access to social media. These anxieties indicate the stress that parents felt when being positioned as responsible for mediating screen use as their children's access to screens increased during the pandemic; and possibly, parents also worried that they would have greater challenges in navigating this terrain of responsibilisation as their children grew older.

Cat Mom was also concerned about the increase in screen time for her children, but she took a more balanced and nuanced approach by differentiating between different purposes for screen media use and limiting her children's access to screen media. In Chapter 6, we describe how Cat Mom regulated her children's access to screens through screen time controls in their 'Apple ecosystem', which was added during the pandemic by replacing all of the family's devices – smartphones, tablets, and laptops – with 'Apples'. She indicated she was trying to balance media use with other activities, such as family conversations and reading books. She stated that her 12-year-old son constantly created and wrote on the computer and indicated that she did not count the time he spent on these more educational activities towards his allotted screen time limit. As with Meejung Mom, Cat Mom positioned herself as needing to be in control of her children's media practices, a position informed by discourses about 'good parenting' in relation to screen media.

While the majority of South Korean parents collaborated with screen-mediated remote schooling, some parents resisted by withdrawing their children from mainstream schools. Myne chose an alternative school, due to her concerns about her children's overdependence on digital technologies and her negative experience with screen-mediated private education. Myne resisted allowing her children to use digital technology, hardly allowing them to use their laptop computers and iPads at home. She limited her children's daily screen time to less than an hour. She had tried out *i-Scream Home-Learn,* another popular brand of online tutoring for elementary school students, for her children. She found that her son 'enjoyed it at first', but as she expected, 'he lost interest right away after a few days'. She also saw 'a lot of kids in regular schools, and most of their online classes are terrible'. Myne strongly

believed that 'children should meet their teachers and other children in person in school'. Myne's case illustrates the concerns that parents might have had regarding screen-mediated learning, in terms of children's escalating reliance on digital devices and technology in their everyday lives. Her decision to withdraw from online education was an attempt to strike a balance between her children's online and offline activities, as she navigated the terrain of responsibilisation connected with screen use.

Family schedules and responsibilisation in South Korea

In Griffith and Smith's book based on longitudinal interview research, *Mothering for Schooling* (2005), the task of negotiating the timetables of the workplace and the school is described as one of 'coordinating the uncoordinated' (p. 47). Parental responsibility for schooling also involves work to manage the often incompatible schedules of work, care, and school: coordinating drop-off and pick-up times with the requirements of their employment, the schedules of other family members, and all the other tasks necessary to run a household. In this chapter, we argue that accepting individual responsibility for these schedules and making arrangements to enable various forms of learning is part of the process of responsibilisation as parents.

Family schedules in South Korea varied according to parents' flexibility of work schedules, the availability of additional support for childcare, and the financial affordability of private academies or tutoring services. In South Korea, it is common for children to go after school to private academies or to receive tutoring, which is considered a part of a 'shadow education system'. *Hagwons* function not only as a supplement or substitute for schooling, concerned with minimising potential learning loss or advancing learning, but also as after-school care for young and elementary children until their parents return home from work. There is no formal legal regulation of the age at which children are allowed to be home alone without adult care in South Korea. Working parents tend to have support for childcare from grandparents or a hired childcarer for the gaps between after-school care services or *hagwons* and the time when parents arrive home. During the pandemic, parents felt pressure to send their children to *hagwons*, despite the social distancing policy, as they were concerned about learning loss and with the amount of time children were spending on their smartphones 'unless they were sent to another *hagwon*', as Meejung Mom said.

Those parents who were able to teach their children without relying too much on private academies or tutoring services were likely to have flexible work hours, have support for childcare from the other parent or grandparents of their children, and draw on their cultural capital in relation to the school curriculum. Cat Mom was able to work flexibly as a university professor, sharing childcare duties and her children's learning with her husband, who was a neuroscientist. Her husband took care of their daughter's learning in Maths, while she was involved in her reading. She only sent her daughter to

an English *hagwon* for academic purposes and another *hagwon* for piano lessons. At Cat Mom's home, family schedules on weekdays focused on their children's learning, while those on weekends were almost entirely focused on 'family fun activities' such as going to a library, museum, or shopping mall.

Interviews with working parents in particular revealed the challenges of grappling with their children's increased screen time, particularly when the children would be left alone without adults' care at home. Working full-time, Plum Mom was able to adjust her working hours so that she could supervise her 11-year-old son's remote schooling until 10am before going to work, returning home around 8pm. She said that her son would wake up close to 9am, just before the beginning of online classes which would end by approximately 10am. Plum Mom said that her son started using his smartphone as soon as he woke up and until the online classes began. He went back to using his phone after the online classes ended when she left for work, despite claims that he was doing his homework. She believed that the ubiquitous nature of home wi-fi made this routine easier. She arranged two different *hagwons* for her son: a 'study centre' and an English academy in person, between 2pm and 5:30pm, and a gym between 6:30pm and 8pm. Plum Mom scheduled these *hagwons* for learning, socialising with others, and to keep her son away from his constant use of his smartphone when alone at home. She banned her son's smartphone use after 8pm to manage his screen time, and she tried to counter increased screen use with outdoor activities, such as riding a bike and going to a local library as a family, as well as shared movie viewing on Netflix, which was considered a healthier, dialogic alternative. Plum Mom's account highlights the tension between parental responsibilities and digital parenting, especially in relation to working parents' childcare needs, which increased during the pandemic.

Myne sent her ten- and 14-year-old sons to an alternative school that provided in-person instruction, except for a month when the pandemic became severe. Her sons' classes were able to meet daily, due to the school's small size and low student population. She expressed satisfaction with the alternative school's face-to-face classes, which did not involve screen-mediated learning. This is Myne's description of her younger son's schedule:

> My son wakes up around 7 in the morning, goes to school, leaves school at around 5pm, goes to the climbing gym, gets a workout, and comes home between 7:30 and 8pm. After he arrives home, he washes up, has dinner, and goes to bed at 9pm.

Myne's family schedule appeared to be considerably simpler compared to those of other parents whose children were involved in screen-mediated remote learning or in online or in-person private education. In contrast with many other South Korean parents we interviewed, she described her feelings as a parent during the pandemic as 'calm' and 'peaceful', leaving her son's education to the school and taking care of his after-school rest and exercise.

School partnerships and responsibilisation in the UK

Like in South Korea, UK parents' 'guiding principles' (Clark, 2013; Willett, 2021) around their role and responsibility for their children's education played an important role in how they approached remote schooling. While some were committed to partnering with their school to deliver its teaching, others either preferred to implement their own pedagogy or did not feel pedagogy should have a place in parenting at all. Similar to the data from South Korea, many of the parents we spoke to were dedicated to following the timetable and work set by remote schooling. Julia described herself as a 'rule follower' and talked about her determination to complete all the tasks school assigned, even though this led to what she termed 'home-schooling hell'. She described sitting with her eight-year-old daughter for hours every day, trying to get through the work:

> Hours and hours we would sit there. I was trying to get her to do stuff and it'd be, 'I've dropped my pencil', 'I banged my head picking my pencil up', 'I've dropped my pencil again', 'I've got to sharpen my pencil'… It would go on for hours and hours, literally. She would drive me up the wall. Friends would say, 'Just don't finish it' and I'd be like, 'We've got to do it'. But I'd get to Friday and I'd still got Monday's stuff to do. It was very stressful.

While in Livingstone and Sefton-Green's (2016) study, 'accepting the school's definition of learning' was associated with parents with lesser knowledge and confidence in the field of education, in our research it describes the approach of university-educated Julia. She felt pressure to match what she imagined other 'very engaged' parents from her daughter's school were doing, and to make sure her daughter kept up academically. 'Everyone else would have been on it. That's the impression I got', she said. Because she felt that her daughter had been 'slightly behind' at school, she initially saw home-schooling as an opportunity to help her catch up, although she soon began to worry that she would fall even more behind. Yet, at no point did she 'give up'. As well as feeling responsible for her daughter's learning, in the context of the pandemic, she also felt a responsibility to her daughter's school. 'Because she's adopted' (i.e. considered vulnerable), she explained 'we could have had her in school. She had an automatic place. But I couldn't have done that'.

While Julia embraced the role of delivering remote schooling, others resisted it, refusing to take on a para-teacher role, or what they perceived to be that of a teacher-like authority figure, in relation to their children. This is in contrast with our findings from the South Korean parents, who might have been critical of the educational provisions, but still enforced a range of educational interventions. This difference in approach might have been a result of the less centralised education system in the UK, or the fact that attendance in remote schooling was optional from March to July 2020 in the UK. Anna,

who was working from home part-time as a designer, did initially try to 'be a teacher' to her seven-year-old son and 'do school at home':

> I would sit him down, get out a load of work sheets and make him' she said. But the context of the pandemic quickly caused her to re-think this approach, and she decided 'I'm not going to spend this time arguing, this is a time to connect and support each other.

Similar to the parents Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) describe as having 'alternative visions of learning', Anna embraced her own ideas about how learning best takes place. She introduced her son to a wide range of opportunities opened up by the pandemic. His school 'chucked a load of stuff at us', she said, 'Reading Eggs, Purple Mash, Twinkle' and she also collected material from museums, arts organisations, and publishers who had opened their collections or were generating learning materials, and from education-oriented YouTubers. Assisted by the broad range of screen-based apps, programs, and materials she collected, she developed an alternative curriculum and pedagogy to that of remote schooling. She came to believe:

> You don't have to be a teacher. It wasn't about me making him learn, it was about okay, how can we learn together? How can I set up an environment for him to be curious, to be self-led, to discover, to learn his own things?

Over time, she said, her son came to choose the programmes he wanted to work on: 'That self-learning thing and self-directed work, it started to happen'. Before the pandemic, Anna had explored the idea of home-educating her son, and her experience during it gave her the confidence not to send her son back to school. When in-person schooling resumed:

> Children were being told to wash their hands x number of times a day, being really regimented: 'You got to line up like this…' Like, no, we're not going back, because that is not an environment for learning.

Not all parents who resisted taking on a role mediating schooling did so in favour of an alternative pedagogy, however. In responding to the context of the pandemic, Tanya resisted being positioned as a para-teacher and also resisted the place of pedagogy within the family more generally. In relation to the work provided by the school, she came to feel like 'none of it mattered' and quite quickly reduced the tasks she facilitated to 'just a bit of Maths'. She did not enforce remote schooling for her 11- and 14-year-old children, as she had not enforced homework in the past, feeling that her relationship with her children should be distinct from school's:

> Basically I'm quite laissez faire with all of it. I'm like, 'It's your responsibility. It's your learning. And if you want to do your homework, do your homework. And if you don't, don't. I'm not going to force you'. Because, for me, the natural consequence is that school gets annoyed with you, not your parents. And it generally works quite well, because [my kids are] really responsible and really self-motivated.

Tanya is a psychotherapist and felt her responsibility, in the context of the pandemic, was to ensure her family's wellbeing and togetherness:

> Probably because of what I do, I was like, right, we're going to be mentally healthy. And we are all going to start the day with you know... Joe Wicks and then we can do a meditation session together. I basically drew up a timetable which didn't involve a lot of actual school. It was more like, we're gonna do exercise every day; we're gonna go for a walk in nature every day; going to meditate every day, do something creative every day.

Confident that her children were 'really bright' and capable of 'catching up quickly' she 'wasn't particularly concerned about them falling behind academically'. Faced with higher priorities, such as health and basic economic security, the pandemic might have allowed some parents to resist being positioned by dominant discourses about what it means to be a 'good parent' in relation to school partnerships. For parents such as Tanya, there is also an element of social and cultural capital at play. Her position as a psychotherapist afforded her confidence in her children's academic abilities and attitudes considered important for schooling (responsible, self-motivated). The process of responsibilisation is linked with context, in this case the pandemic, as well as socioeconomic status, creating hierarchies of who is targeted by and who can resist discourses of responsibilisation.

Screen media and responsibilisation in the UK

Parental principles in relation to school partnership interacted with principles concerning screen media, which also played a key role in how families approached remote schooling. Anna, as described above, 'embraced' the wide range of educationally-oriented screen media available to her son, although she was careful that her son had time away from a screen and was not 'constantly stimulated by external media'. As well as watching educational videos, she and her son also produced videos themselves and came to enjoy 'presenting and filming things', 'showing people what he's done or how to do things'. As discussed in Chapter 5 in this volume, spending time together during lockdowns gave parents new insights into their children's creative uses of digital media. This is reflected in Figure 4.2, which was chosen

Figure 4.2 Anna's choice of photo which reflects her embracing of media technology. Photo by fizkes on Shutterstock.com.

by Anna towards the end of the interview, as we looked at images that might represent her experience and feelings about media during the pandemic. Anna, a UX designer, reflected that since the pandemic:

> I have started a YouTube course: I don't feel valued at work; I don't feel recognised, and I need to show up. It's also about being a presenter and learning how to storytell. And I guess they're going to want to be YouTubers and I'd love it if [my children] could tell really good stories.

In a different way, screen media was also embraced by those with a strong commitment to remote schooling. In Julia's case, as the pandemic wore on, the school provided more screen-based resources and structure for remote schooling, and this helped Julia feel more supported and better able to facilitate her daughter's schooling. As recorded lessons were introduced, the screen presence of her daughter's teacher relieved the pressure on her to structure the school day, teach lessons, and maintain a positive attitude. 'It was still an effort to get her to actually do the work but, because it was a bit more like school, it was much better', she said, 'and because he's such a good teacher, he made it fun'.

Others' concerns about the effects of screen media on their children's development trumped their sense of responsibility for schooling. Echoing the

developmental temporality discussed in Chapter 3 in this volume, Rachel described how she worried about the effect increased screen media might have on her seven- and eight-year-old sons:

> Somehow, secretly, I think people develop ADHD from too much screen time. Maybe there's no link, I don't think it's been proven, but I just don't want them to not be able to focus or concentrate because they're used to flashing colours and constantly changing images and seeing life lived at a pace that it's not lived in real life.

Rachel, a university administrator, engaged selectively with remote schooling, not in order to deliver an alternative pedagogy or to avoid taking a teacherly role, but in order to resist her children's exposure to certain forms of screen media. She was eager that her sons kept up academically, but – finding it a hassle to login to the educational platform of her children's school and judging its content to be limited – Rachel approximated her own version of school learning materials and made up her own questions and activities:

> You had to go to a website and log on, and you've got different logins for the two children, and they're mostly just shoving up worksheets. We didn't have the right devices for them to fill the worksheets in on the computer, so you had to print out the sheets, get them to fill them in, take photos and then upload them. The amount of ink our rubbish printer would use up! So I just made up some questions… And they had to spend a bit of time reading a real book, a hardcopy, and then they had to write a couple of sentences… and then maybe do some songs…

Rachel balanced the value of different screen-based learning activities with her desire to avoid 'being on the computer that much' and continually evaluated the value of different screen-based learning activities. She did not see the benefit of her children reading on a screen, via the school's reading app, so she set them readings from 'real books' instead. She did, however, install the school's Maths programme, Sum Dog, which she described as 'sums put within a gaming environment', on her children's tablets, along with other games classified as 'educational'. This was only temporary, however, and she came to reconsider their benefit, deciding that they were not pitched at the correct level and 'weren't really that educational'.

Family schedules and responsibilisation in the UK

The family schedule was a key barrier to facilitating remote schooling for many UK parents, but how these barriers were experienced by parents depended on their values and imaginaries around the structuring of family life in the context of the pandemic. Julia, who felt a strong responsibility to deliver remote schooling, had one daughter and a partner, and found her freelance work was

mainly suspended as lockdown restrictions came into effect. The period of school closures was for her an opportunity to spend uninterrupted one-on-one time with her daughter, and her determination to facilitate her daughter's schooling was not in conflict with her other circumstances. For 'laissez faire' Tanya, meanwhile, who continued to work as an NHS therapist, the period was one during which she was 'not as aware of what the kids were doing'. Yet, in the context of the pandemic, she did not regret her inability to supervise their schooling or her loss of control over the screen time routines she had previously established. 'So then the devices went upstairs into the bedrooms and that was the first time we'd ever let them do that', she said, 'I didn't care as much. It was kind of like, "Well, as long as they're happy" '. Anna, who also continued her work as a designer, was also relatively unconcerned that her children went unsupervised while she worked. She discussed her belief in the importance of 'leaving' children to be 'bored' – to 'explore and potter around and do things and to have time to think and be creative'. The time mothers like Tanya and Anna dedicated to their paid employment was not perceived as a barrier to remote schooling but was tied to the guiding principles which led them to take the approach they did.

This was not the case for all parents, however. Phoebe, a single parent whose full-time work as a Marketing Director continued from home throughout the pandemic, felt she did not have time to support her son in the way she needed to, neither in relation to his screen use nor his schooling. She described how she might be leading a 'pitch' for work while her ten-year-old son needed her, and how he would have what she described as a 'silent tantrum', where he did not want to interrupt her online meeting, but would shout silently, out of sight of her screen, 'Mum, I'm bored, I'm sick of this. I want to talk to you'. She worried as he became a 'power-user' of Roblox and 'addicted' to YouTube.

> I was worried about how much he was doing it. And he came across a lot of influencers in lockdown, which had never penetrated his world before. There was a male makeup artist he was loving, then there's a news report about the fact that this male makeup artist, or whoever he was, was actually interested in young boys and I have to get embroiled in all of that kind of discussion. [...] There was some online bullying that went on with some of his friends and I had to put a stop to that because the language was extreme, and very upsetting for him and everybody else.

It was a very difficult time: 'The guilt was enormous', she said. When discussing search terms for images that represented this time, she suggested 'crying mother'. Phoebe wanted to make sure her children engaged with schoolwork, but she found it impossible:

> I did have rules about being at our desk at eight or nine, like we were at school, but that lasted for about a week. I'm used to going 'This is how it's

> going to be' and then we do it. But they were like 'No'. Resistance crept in. They hated it. They found it hard. Because my job is essentially a billable job, and I'm recording seven, eight, nine hours a day on my timesheet, it was a nightmare to force them to do anything.

Yet, Phoebe was determined that her son engage with remote schooling and not 'fall behind' and, while the UK does not have private learning institutions like South Korea's *hagwons*, her financial situation did allow her to eventually employ a private tutor to guide him through his work via Zoom. 'They would crack through all the schoolwork, no fighting'; she said 'I'm sure he did slip behind but it was enough for us to feel satisfied that he wasn't mind-numbingly bored and was still learning'. As it did for Julia, her commitment to schooling trumped her concerns about the additional screen time it involved; the arrangement did not decrease his time spent on screens, but nevertheless, she said it 'saved my life, really'.

Conclusions

When we first started analysing the data for this chapter, we categorised parents' discussions about screens and schooling and tried to identify factors that determined how parents responded to remote schooling during the pandemic. Initially, we identified a plethora of factors: differences in parents' attitudes to schooling and to screen media, and differences in parents' circumstances (the kind of remote schooling on offer, the composition of their household, their employment situation, their access to technologies, and so on). All of these factors more or less affected the positions parents adopted towards remote schooling. However, as we delved deeper into the analysis, we began to understand how these factors interacted within family life and were part of deeper frameworks informing parents' decisions and attitudes. Parental engagement with remote schooling was experienced through discursive structures operating in the home that had long histories and were firmly embedded. As constructed by these discourses, 'good parenting' involved providing learning opportunities in the home and supporting formal education, limiting and mediating screen use, and prioritising children's complex daily schedules connected with their learning above all else. These discursive structures informed the guiding principles parents articulated during interviews as driving their decision-making. This helped us understand parents' responses to remote schooling as not just pandemic-related but also as a reflection of ways parents are positioned through deeper structures of responsibilisation, pandemic or not.

In South Korea and the UK, long-standing discourses about home school partnerships position parents as responsible for supporting their children's learning in relationship to their school curriculum and as responsible for fulfilling a broader pedagogical role. This dominant discourse defines parental responsibilities in very rigid ways, and many parents felt anxious about their

children's learning during the pandemic. Yet, although some parents worked extremely hard to follow the prescribed remote schooling, others resisted it and drew on alternative discursive structures.

Importantly, our analytical framework helps to highlight these structures and to see how they operated differently in our two country contexts. The three terrains of parental responsibilisation we identified are the foundation for discursive practices specific to each context and were thus experienced differently in each family context during the pandemic. In both countries, the terrain of parental responsibilisation around digital technology includes the necessity of providing children with 'appropriate' screen media and concerns about the effects of too much screen time, both of which affected parents' responses to screen-based remote schooling. Most parents in South Korea who talked to us seemed to have taken on the responsibilities for supporting remote schooling to some degree, because they felt that there was no choice in the heavily centralised education system and the remote schooling policy. In contrast, in the UK, some parents resisted being positioned as para-teachers in the home, prioritising their families' wellbeing, health, and economic security. Perhaps this was because there was less support for working women in the UK and more flexibility in the remote schooling policies. Further, as we highlighted in the analysis, some parents felt more confident to express their parenting principles in defiance of dominant discourses around the necessity for children to be engaging in remote learning.

In relation to screen media, South Korean parents felt largely frustrated and unable to limit their children's screen time, given requirements for remote schooling. Responsibilities for limiting screen time might have been felt more deeply for these parents, given the national-level policies to prevent internet and smartphone overdependence. In contrast, in the UK, although many parents were also concerned about the increase in children's screen time that came with remote schooling and pandemic conditions, we heard many stories of parents and children taking control of educational media – using digital media for production-based learning projects, or rejecting screen-based learning activities recommended by schools in favour of off-screen experiences.

Finally, discourses surrounding the scheduling of children's time intersected with the terrains of parental responsibilisation connected with school and media. In both countries, dominant discourses about scheduling children's extracurricular time dictate active parental involvement to align with aspirations for their children's futures. During the pandemic, parents in both countries felt responsible for scheduling their children's learning and also scheduling opportunities that would mean time away from screens. In South Korea, parents maintained schedules by juggling their own work, securing childcare from other family members, and arranging private education or teaching their children by themselves, contingent upon their financial and cultural capabilities. In the UK, where lockdowns meant that a vast majority of parents and children were unable to go to work, school, or other

social spaces, parents' circumstances – including the time taken up by paid work, caregiving needs of other family members, the presence or absence of a second adult in the household, and the financial ability to hire additional childcare/educational support – dictated whether or not it was possible for them to support the schedule of remote schooling. Therefore, there was variation amongst the UK parents we interviewed, with some parents willing and able to support remote learning schedules due to their employment situation; others resisting these rigid schedules, following their own values in determining children's daily schedule (or lack thereof); and still others who were unable to support their children's remote school schedule and essentially rejected these discourses of responsibilisation.

In South Korea and the UK, as in Livingstone and Blum-Ross's (2020) study, at times, parents embraced screen media and the affordances offered for teaching and learning. Other times, parents resisted screen-based learning, feeling that remote schooling, alongside the many other purposes for screens necessitated by the pandemic, meant that their children were on screens for far too many hours each day. In many cases, discourses connected with responsible parenting intensified feelings of anxiety and loss of control, as parents were required to disregard previous family rules and routines connected with screen time. Given the pressures placed on the family schedule during this period, many parents felt unable to follow their guiding principles around remote schooling, often then experiencing intense feelings of guilt. However, these circumstances did not exist independently of parents' values and positioning in relation to this terrain or the other terrains of responsibilisation. And whether parents experienced their inability to schedule remote schooling as a source of worry and guilt depended on their guiding principles around screen media and schooling. In the next chapter, the authors delve into the societal and parental imaginaries of 'children's digital creativity' to analyse how these imaginaries intersect with societal norms and discourses of digital childhood. Through the conceptual lens of affective affinities, they reveal how the emotional intensity associated with family experiences and perceptions of children's creative practices has pushed parents to reconsider their pre-existing understanding of the term's meanings and implications.

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5 'Just doing stupid things'

Affective affinities for imagining children's digital creativity

Diana Carolina García Gómez, Sarah Healy, and Rebecca Coles

Introduction

Intensified emotions have long been associated with advances in media-related technologies, such as the zoetrope, television, and the internet, with such advances acting as a litmus test of a public's disposition at a given moment in time. Pandemic lockdowns were an intense period of heightened parental emotion – both negative (anxiety, disapproval) and positive (surprise, appreciation, pride) – creating a unique opportunity through which to examine the affective interplay between parental imaginaries of childhood, play, creativity, and the everyday realities of children's digital media practices as we move into a postdigital era.

Adopting a Spinozist understanding of the social imagination, we take imaginaries to have three distinct characteristics: they produce very real, material effects; they act as the connective tissue between an individual and a collective; and they have strong links with affect and emotion (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 12). The social imaginary plays a significant albeit often invisible role, because it is 'constitutive of, not merely reflective of, the forms of sociability in which we live' (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 143) *and* maintains 'a direct and strong contact with bodily reality' (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 12). For us, social imaginaries are fluid and multiplicitous, a thousand little imaginaries (if you will) stretching beyond the social to encompass material, technological, and nonhuman others. Thus, we think of imaginaries as networks of capillaries that give life to the social body, and we invite you to do the same.

We draw on Threadgold's (2020) concept of 'affective affinities' to explore how the emotions that arose during the pandemic intersected with parental imaginaries of childhood, digital media, and creativity and influenced parental responses to the circumstances at hand. We attend to ways individuals formed affinities with particular imaginaries, which then shaped their responses to social, material, and technological encounters. Knowledge of the multiple imaginaries that shaped how parents thought about childhood, creativity, and technology enabled us to discern how parents formed

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particular affinities which predisposed them to react in particular ways to situations involving their children. This knowledge equipped us to approach such encounters with greater intentionality and critical awareness, while providing insights into the misleading elements of social imaginaries that contributed to baseless mass hysteria or unfounded moral panic related to children and digital media. Perhaps most significantly though, we find that thinking with the concept of 'affective affinities' to explore the intersection between imaginaries, emotions, creativity, and children's digital media practices makes it possible to articulate the way parents can – and do – reconfigure imaginaries in response to ever-changing circumstances, shaping everyday reality in the process.

In the interview data gathered in Australia, Colombia, and the UK, we noticed that parents responded positively when they understood their children to be using digital technology for what they deemed as educational and creative purposes, such as making stop-motion animation or for PowerPoint presentations. However, when parents did not perceive their child's activity to be educational or 'creative', but rather disruptive or threatening to parental authority or increasing the risk of potential harm, it was seen more negatively and perceived as addictive, hollow, or even foolish. Creativity has, in many instances, become a proxy for parental approval; yet, it is neither a neutral concept nor a self-evident good but inflected with the sociocultural politics of a given time and place (Banaji et al., 2010; Harris & Holman Jones, 2022; Ogata, 2013). Our data suggest that heightened emotions that accompanied the moralising of children's digital creativity was linked to parental needs for control and surveillance during a time of extreme uncertainty, which was somewhat paradoxically accompanied by greater latitude for engagement with screen media and the technologies that mediate those media. The intensified moralising that occurred raises questions about how understandings of creativity emerged in response to social and historical events, including the pandemic, and *how these understandings of creativity then shaped the digital lifeworlds of children today*. In this chapter, we explore how adult fabulations of 'the creative child' were propelled by hopes and anxieties attached to the use of digitally mediated technologies. To do so, we draw on the authors' backgrounds in different disciplines, including affect studies, education, and childhood studies. By bringing together these different lenses and country contexts, we are able to consider the different responses to children's digital practices in countries that had varying amounts of isolation and time at home (most of the Australian participants experienced 263 days of stringent lockdown, the UK participants had three separate lockdowns, and Colombian children were kept out of school for almost two academic years). We begin by discussing literature that reveals the epistemological underpinnings of parental imaginaries around childhood, parenthood, children's media practices, creativity, and play.

Perceptive and epistemological implications of parental imaginaries

Imaginaries can be powerful because they shape individual and collective thought *and* action. Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) emphasise the constitutive role of imaginaries of the 'innocent' or 'pure' child; the idealisation of childhood as a time of play, imagination, and creativity; and the 'good parent' as the guardian of innocent childhoods and, by extension, the future. Imaginaries of the 'good parent', tasked with the delicate balance of optimising opportunities and minimising risks in the digital age (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020, p. 22), are deeply intertwined with neoliberal values, economic rationalisation, and standardisation, as well as instrumental approaches to schooling and the influence of developmental psychology. In the following brief literature review, we tease out some of the discursive elements that shape parental imaginaries – which act as 'reservoir[s] of norms and discourses, metaphors and cultural meanings' (Jasanoff & Kim, 2009, p. 123) – and explore the interplay between historic discourses of play and contemporary narratives surrounding digital creativity. We explore how sanctioned forms of creativity and innovation are closely tied to the concept of 'progress', while digital creativities that deviate from these norms – often characterised as imaginary and phantasmagorical (Sutton-Smith, 1997) – either evade adult recognition or are summarily dismissed as transgressive or nonsensical.

Imaginaries of the creative child

Normative notions of childhood and children's development have been bolstered by Western societies through the promotion of discourses related to the child's essential innocence, imagination, and ingenuity (Dyer, 2017; Ogata, 2013). These characteristics became encapsulated by the idea that children are naturally creative beings. As Ogata explains, the inherent creativity granted to children stems from the modern conception of childhood, in which creativity 'has become an unquestioned "truth" about children and childhood' (Ogata, 2013, p. ix). Creativity became both a script and a practice, tied with notions of an idealised childhood that must be promoted and protected by the adults who oversee it.

However, as antiracist (Bernstein, 2011; Garlen, 2019), postcolonial (Balagopalan, 2021), and queer theorists (Dyer, 2017; Stockton, 2009) have shown, the modern idea of the innocent child cannot be divorced from the white, colonial, middle-class project of the 19th and 20th centuries. As Dyer (2017, p. 295) argues, once our societies became organised around ideas of childhood as precious and innocent, creativity was constrained to comply with these values, hurting children's curiosity and imagination. When we discuss childhood creativity, it is often without transgressing what adults want and expect of children. Childhood creativity, then, is not only tied to the project of preserving children's innocence: it concerns a need to protect

children from external risks and from their own agency and precociousness (Garlen, 2019).

In the period following the Second World War, children's creativity became tied to the promotion of individuality, innovation, and originality, as values that shaped the capitalistic and neoliberal ideology of the West. As Nguyen (2021) explains, 'as a figure who would secure the future of the nation, the modern creative child grew to be seen as increasingly precious, both socially and economically, across the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries' (p. 10). By depicting children as inherently creative, the so-called First World block gave children a prominent role in the Cold War imagination, as keepers of a democratic future based on originality, imagination, and independent thinking (Ogata, 2013). This was possible due to the central role that child psychology, developmental studies, child-rearing experts, and educational reforms came to play. Creativity was to be nurtured not so much by the State, as it might have been in the East, but by the nuclear family. This opened opportunities for a plethora of material innovations in the form of manuals, toys, literature, and media content that sought to encourage healthy creative avenues. Creativity became commodified in the name of preserving the innocence of childhood.

With the turn of the new millennium, children's creativity discovered a new canvas on which to flourish – the boundless world of digital technology. Contemporary discourse characterises children not only as creative, but also as inherently techno-savvy, as exemplified by the popularity of the flawed yet persistent idea that every child born around the turn of the current century can be described as a 'digital native' (Eynon, 2020); presenting new possibilities and threats to the innocent child. Digital childhood is thus constructed and maintained through the rhetoric of protection, justifying moral panics and policies that aim to 'save' children (Garlen, 2019) and simultaneously stimulate the imaginative child. The contradiction that children are agentic and creative but also must be protected, highlights the preoccupation around child-rearing within the West. Parents are now tasked with fostering their children's digital play and balancing autonomy and innovation with personal responsibility and risk management. This further complicates parental responsibilities in the digital world, creating a series of contradictions when society upholds the creative child, yet also expects parents to constrain, restrain, and surveil the extent of the creativity, if they are to be 'good' parents.

Imaginaries of the good parent

Imaginaries of good parenting place the responsibility for creating and curating the conditions that secure 'happy' childhoods, and preserving childhood innocence, on parents. Thus, 'parenting' has 'become a crucial means by which society explores dilemmas over how to live, what constitutes well-being, and what "good life" to hope for' (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020, p. 3). And protecting the creative child has the combined effect of surveilling

not only children's development but also parental practices (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Parenting has a double temporal intention: it is both an intervention in the present and an effort to bring about a particular future. Though child-rearing's purpose is to train children into assuming the conventions of adulthood, the cultivation of the creative child also values the child's unique point of view (Ogata, 2013, p. xi). The uncertainty brought by the pandemic meant many of the parents we interviewed discussed how the pandemic interrupted their effort to ensure a 'good, normal future' for their children since, for the first time, they had difficulty imagining a hopeful future. These anxieties affected parents' interactions and interpretations in relation to the digital world. As Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) put it, 'as parents strive to understand the profound changes they are living through, digital dilemmas act as a lightning rod for contemporary contestations over values, identity, and responsibility' (p. 2). Thus, parents must operate within the constraints imposed by 'good parenting', while at the same time this imaginary in turn informs their notions of childhood, creativity, and digital media appropriateness.

Parental imaginaries of childhood and digital media

Before the pandemic,

> a steady flow of mass media headlines exhort[ed] parents to learn digital skills or buy the latest gadget to keep up, yet also to closely monitor their children to avoid risks online and to limit time spent on 'mindless' activities like gaming and social media.
>
> (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020, p. 4)

However, the 'new normal' with its lockdowns and virtual schooling affected, in complicated ways, parents' views on adequate or permissible media usage. The key question was no longer if children had enough or too much media time (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020, p. 190). Rather, affective responses to the critical circumstances led parents to question not only their family's relationship with digital technologies, but also their views on their capabilities as parents entangled between narratives of nostalgic 'pre-internet childhoods' and hopes for employable futures in the digital age.

The preoccupation with the disappearance of 'pre-internet childhoods' was related to parental desires to protect children's innocence and family life by prolonging their unawareness of social realities and censoring certain topics (Garlen, 2019; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). However, the expansion of digital media has increased access to information, fuelling parental anxieties in terms of risk-aversion and media panics. Some of the parents we interviewed expressed how the circumstances forced them to have conversations with their children they (the parents) were not ready to have; their children were the ones asking for clarifications. These interactions that

contested parental imaginaries about adequacy can also be linked to the fear of a collapse of the child-adult binary 'brought on by the "corruption" of children with adult knowledge [that] continues to drive moral panic about the safety and well-being of children in contemporary society' (Garlen, 2019, p. 57). The fears and hopes attached to the imaginary of the digital creative child shaped the ways in which parents approach digital parenting.

Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) provide a useful lens to analyse digital parenting: to embrace, balance, and resist digital media usage within family life (also discussed in Chapter 4 of this volume). These genres refer to the practices, imaginaries, and values that families adopt interchangeably, when discussing how parents in the UK examined digital media usage within their households. Within these three genres, the – now widespread – myth that children are natural digital natives is being debunked. As Nguyen (2021) addresses, what is also at play is adults' conflicting fears and hopes about a 'digital generation' and a hopeful (capitalistic) future. When we apply Livingstone and Blum-Ross' framework to the context of the pandemic in the countries that we analysed, we notice that parental imaginaries regarding digital media were agitated in two ways. First, the sense of control parents felt they had the right to have was continuously questioned, and often compromised, since schools demanded constant connectivity. Second, the desire to embrace or balance digital media was constrained by the fear of compromising the hierarchical power relation between parents and children, when children started to demonstrate 'too much' savviness due to the rapid acquisition of digital skills.

Parental imaginaries of the rhetorics of play and digital creativity

Similar to Dyer's (2017) argument regarding the queer child, we argue that normative ideas around the creative child – set in opposition to children's actual digital creativities – unsettle normative descriptions and the temporal idea of developmental childhood discourses. One can venture to say that the pandemic, with the increase of parental obligations and children's screen time, and in some cases coping with 'cabin fever', brought parental anxieties to unforeseen levels that were reflective of a unique situation. However, if we look to past scholarship on children's play, specifically Sutton-Smith's (1997) analysis of play scholarship, in which he traces seven rhetorics of play across hundreds of play studies conducted during pre-internet childhoods, we begin to see that decades-old rhetorics – or discourses – continue to shape parental dispositions towards digital creativity today as much as they did over 30 years ago. Of the seven rhetorics that constitute Sutton-Smith's play theory, the most relevant to this chapter are the 'progress rhetoric', due to its popularity with developmentalists and its link to normative views of childhood; the 'imaginary rhetoric', due to its emphasis on the phantasmagorical, fantastical and theatrical; and the rhetoric of frivolity, due to its acknowledgement of the role of nonsense and insolence in children's play and creativity.

Sutton-Smith (1997) notes how a rhetoric of progress has dominated the way children's play has been thought about and controlled by adults for over 100 years, with ideologies of progress and developmentalism also shaping contemporary neoliberal notions of creativity and innovation. The rhetoric of 'progress' underpins permissible versions of play in the same way that it underpins permissible versions of creativity and innovation. This has made other significant kinds of play, such as the imaginary and phantasmagorical, much less visible. And yet, renderings of children's phantasmagorical and frivolous play – including mockery and mimicry, transgressive and theatrical, nonsense and insolence – continue to persist in children's play activities across physical and virtual realms. In this sense, not much has changed between pre- and post-internet childhoods (Marsh et al., 2016). As Sutton-Smith (1997) notes, 'We appear to be frightened by children's phantasmagoria, and most of our work on children's play simply avoids such play forms rather than treating them as central to what play is about' (p. 172).

This chapter critically examines the assumptions surrounding digital creativities, much like historical assumptions about play, and in the process reveals conflicting perspectives. Our analysis focuses on how the pandemic influenced parental roles as curators and guardians of childhood innocence in relation to digital media consumption within households. We employ an affect analysis to shed light on what constitutes creative, digital childhoods and explore the underlying purposes of these discourses within sociopolitical contexts in three distinct regions: Australia, Colombia, and the UK. This research is significant because it underscores the importance of recognising differences and inequalities rooted in intersectional identities and global settings that can be overlooked in discussions about creativity. Additionally, it challenges the notion of universal creativity as an innate trait only accessible to the privileged few (Ogata, 2013, p. 193). The intersection of the child, digital media, and creativity holds appeal due to our fascination with the promises of democratic and optimistic futures.

Our examination of how the concept of children's digital creativity varies across these three countries contributes to a broader global understanding of childhood discourses. By highlighting diverse, sometimes conflicting, and occasionally convergent international experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, we enrich the global discourse on childhood. During the lockdown periods, the Australian, Colombian, and UK parents in our study indicated that the usual mechanisms of surveillance, akin to the concept of the panopticon, were effectively suspended due to an absence of outside judgement. This created a unique temporal and spatial opportunity for experimenting with alternative approaches to parenting. Examining the outcomes of this period of reduced regulation reveals the considerable influence exerted by normative discourses and societal imaginaries concerning the 'creative child' and underscores the degree to which these constructs continue to shape our daily lives.

Conceptual approach

The power of the imaginary lies in its ability to shape perceptions, provoke emotional responses, amplify norms, and influence decisions; 'they project visions of what is good, desirable, and worth attaining' while warning 'against risks or hazards that might accompany innovation if it is pushed too hard or too fast' (Jasanoff & Kim, 2009, p. 123). As the digital realm evolves, so does the interplay between parental imaginaries and children's creative and playful endeavours. Connecting with Sutton-Smith's (1997, p. 128) theorisation of children's play, we think of imaginaries as fluid, material-discursive entities that are comprised of an arrangement of heterogeneous elements that are both 'heavy and light, ritualistic and playful, earnest and frivolous'.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, imaginaries are of interest to us because they wield substantial influence, shaping individual and collective thought and action. For us, the methodological question becomes one of how to map out parental imaginaries of children's digital creativities by taking up 'affect' as method (Hickey-Moody, 2013). We looked to Threadgold's (2020) concept of 'affective affinities' to make it possible to do this mapping and gain a sense of the extent that these imaginaries prime parents to embrace, resist, and/or balance digital media in family life (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Affective affinities are predicated on the idea that individuals who share an affinity with a specific imaginary (here, the 'good parent', childhood, creativity, and digital media) are inclined to align themselves with social, material, and technological practices congruent with some imaginaries, while resisting others. These affinities develop and solidify over time, moulding parents' imaginaries *and* responses to various situations – either by rejecting or avoiding certain experiences, striving to facilitate alternative outcomes, or embracing perceived opportunities. In other words, affective affinities shape individual and collective dispositions (e.g., dispositions of fearfulness, hopefulness, enthusiasm, moral panic, etc.), which then mediate both individual and collective 'capacities to affect and be affected' (Anderson, 2014, p. 109). Circling back to Spinoza, 'the interactions of imagination with the central emotions – desire, joy and sadness – yield systematic variations in intensity of attachment and aversion', and it is the 'intensity of attachment and aversion' that determines the degree of confluence (e.g., affinity) or dissonance (e.g., repulsion) that is sensed by an individual (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 26). At this point, it is important to note that affect and emotion are linked concepts, but certainly not the same thing. While emotions can be thought of as a body's response to being affected, affect is more of a trans-individual affair. Sometimes thought of as 'affective economies' (Ahmed, 2004; Clough, 2008), affect and hereby affective affinities 'do not originate in individual bodies but [are] provoked in individuals through larger circulations and strategies, thereby accruing its value and potency as a moral economy through its distributions' (Adams et al., 2009, p. 249).

Threadgold (2020) notes that affinities can trigger epiphanic moments that either enchant or disturb, while others may become routine and habitual. The potency of affective connections in these moments, gives rise to sensations that resonate with individuals and, in cases where sensations, feelings, and emotions lead to inclusion or exclusion, comfort or discomfort, they hold significant weight. Consequently, a parent's affective affinities serve as predictors of response patterns – not only shaping their dispositions towards particular ideas, practices, places, technologies, individuals, and situations, but also leading to 'fluctuations of imagination and hence, on Spinoza's definition, fluctuations in the affects of hope and fear, which are the core of political life' (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 26). Identifying parents' affinities with children's creative use of digital technologies illuminates the political currents that press upon family life and can anticipate potential points of in(ter)vention aimed at expanding the definition of children's digital creativities. The awareness of existing imaginaries in the present moment allows us to comprehend how parents are primed to respond to situations involving children and digital technologies. This insight facilitates a more intentional and critical approach to these responses, mitigating the risk of reality becoming distorted by undue fear, unwarranted mass hysteria, or moral panic, without empirical basis. It also allows for the creation of conditions conducive to alternative responses.

Conceptual apparatus

The conceptual apparatus that comprises our analytic is adapted from Threadgold's (2020) theory of affective affinity, which augments Bourdieusian concepts with affect theory, hence the Bordieuan tone to the terminology. We composed our analytic as a tripartite conceptual apparatus comprising of dissonance, confluence, and distinction; putting it into action in a similar way to another study exploring the boundary-related work that occurred while learning from home during the Hungarian lockdowns of 2020 (Neag & Healy, 2023). The analytic, outlined in Table 5.1 below, makes it possible to identify the affective flows in the data and tease out their implications.

Since, in this chapter, affect functions as both a heuristic and a multi-directional force, affective affinities not only become a lens through which to reveal parental imaginaries, but also a force or charge which configures and is configured by the imagination.

Data and methods

While we gathered interview data as described in the introduction of this book, we added extra steps into our process to bring our analysis into alignment with our conceptual approach and apparatus. Our empirical material is

Table 5.1 Analytic of affective affinities

Dissonance	*Confluence*	*Distinction*
Central to this idea is the affectively charged experience of symbolic violence, characterised by emotions such as anger, shame, guilt, and denigration. Symbolic violence makes an impression on an individual's disposition(s), functioning to shape affinities and circumscribe practices, expectations, and pursuits. Individuals under the weight of symbolic violence often grapple with feelings of displacement or the need to evade a perceived threat, much like living in a harsh, resource-deprived environment (Threadgold, 2020, pp. 24–25).	Central to this idea are experiences marked by ease, comfort, and serendipity. Here, an individual's 'sticky affinities' coincide with the social and material conditions of a specific setting. This phenomenon, termed 'social magic' by Threadgold (2020, pp. 24–25), emerges when one's affinities harmonise with the demands of the setting and situation at hand, fostering a sense of effortless adaptability and achievement.	Central to this idea are the affective relations concerning status, where sticky affinities correspond with tastes, morals, and values. Such affinities set individuals or groups apart, evoking feelings that range from superiority to aversion. Tied to acts like 'humble bragging', distinction serves as a mechanism to establish and maintain hierarchies (Threadgold, 2020, pp. 24–25).

presented as a curated selection of interview data from Australia, Colombia, and the UK, chosen specifically to emphasise emotive responses to children's creative or unanticipated interactions with digital media, as reported by their parents. The interview data in this chapter take the form of affectively attuned transcriptions (Willink, 2023). These transcriptions were made after an initial selection of empirical material had occurred. We revisited our audio-recordings, treating these interviews as live, sensory-affective events (Willink & Shukri, 2018), to capture tonal shifts (indicated in parentheses), heightened emphasis (indicated by underlining) and instances of intensified emotion (indicated by bolding the text). Once we had each re-transcribed the interviews, we set about identifying traces of affect (affective relations) in the data, by highlighting emotive comments/interactions. Specific focus was accorded to expressions of dissonance (like anger, shame, guilt, denigration, fear) and confluence (such as ease, comfort, serendipity). We also remained attuned to instances of moralising affect, manifesting in forms of distinction like judgement, taste, superiority, and disgust.

Findings and discussion

The lockdown era gave many children opportunities to explore, engage, and expand their creative abilities, and simultaneously activated parental imaginaries around what constitutes permissible and normative creative undertakings. We start our discussion with empirical material from three working mothers living in Melbourne, Australia, during the height of the pandemic.

Parental imaginaries and digital creativity

In what follows, Kate, Jade, and Bee each responded to the question 'Did you notice your children using technology in creative or unexpected ways?'. Their responses show what it looks like when parental imaginaries meet realities of digital creativity, highlighting the influential role of parental imaginaries. While the digital realm offers an expansive playground for creativity, parents' affinities with particular types of creative consumption and production prime them to variously curate, guide, endorse, balance, and dismiss creative practices in uneven ways. Arguably, parents' affinity or aversion to some digital creativities but not others is influenced by the broader social imaginaries of the 'good' parent, childhood, play and creativity, offering an explanation of how social imaginaries have material effects on children's digital experiences in the moment and also have implications for their digital future.

Kate's story (Australia): Curated creativity

Kate's approach to her six-year-old daughter's creativity is prefaced by preferences that are less about restricting screen media, and more about providing a curated path to the cultivation of distinction (here children's cultural consumption). She recounts:

> one other **cute** little thing that happened in lockdown for Scarlet, which has opened a bit of a new world for all of us **too**, which was a comedy duo who do children's comedy called The Listies … They were doing a Friday live stream through Facebook and doing a lot of kind of online activities for kids and comedy for kids. … So we discovered them from the Arts Centre. We did quite a few Arts Centre activities in the early lockdowns

There is a sense of ease and comfort with accessing the cultural offerings of the Arts Centre, conferring an affective affinity with them. The Melbourne Arts Centre, a site that Kate and her family seek out, and enjoy *doing* things at; 'we're big [on] attending, we like going to the **gallery**, and we like **doing** those sorts of things'. It is a seemingly 'natural' transition to participating in online arts and cultural activities, a trajectory that opens 'a bit of a new world' for the whole family, who appreciated the sense of community and togetherness afforded by the cultural offerings (e.g., The Listies) and school

holiday programs on offer. What Kate describes can be understood as a confluence of affective affinities with the type of children's culture and creativity that the Melbourne Arts Centre produces/legitimises for the public.

Jade's story (Australia): Balancing act between convention and innovation

During her interview, Jade expressed her enthusiasm for her ten-year-old son's growing expertise in PowerPoint, saying, 'he got very excited about doing PowerPoint presentations for a while there', before explaining that 'he wanted to do a PowerPoint presentation for his Cricket Club, and run them through all of the statistics of [the players]'. Jade continues:

> … he's a stats freak (brief pause). So he wanted to do a presentation and show, I'm like (voice goes up in pitch), 'Look, you know, I'm happy for you to put that together (her tone indicates hesitancy). But we might just keep that at home (pause then a considered response). I'm somehow not sure that your friends would probably **appreciate** what you're doing with that.'

Jade highlights the valuable learning, specifically information literacy, that arises from her son's creative use of PowerPoint, an application Jade is comfortable with. She displays a sense of pride in her son's passion for statistics, subtly boasting about his inclination as a 'stats freak'. However, Jade recognises the potential social stigma associated with a ten-year-old being deeply engrossed in statistics and PowerPoint. While she appreciates the fun and educational aspects of the activity, she is also wary of societal judgement, especially from her son's peers, and chooses to keep this activity within the confines of their home. This decision reflects the challenges parents encountered when balancing societal perceptions and their children's unconventional creative pursuits. While Jade admires her son's tech skills and academic inclinations, she's also wary of potential judgement from communities like their cricket club. This subtle tension between pride and caution, affective confluence and dissonance, points to a boundary under negotiation – requiring boundary work that involves a modicum of what Threadgold (2020) refers to as 'distinction'. A subtle act of distinction takes place; stats-freakishness and PowerPoint presentations are permissible in the home, but perhaps not in the sports community, where transgressing social boundaries is riskier.

Bee's story (Australia): The phantasmagorical digital realm

Bee provided a candid glimpse into her 11-year-old son's digital engagements. When asked about her child's surprising and/or creative use of digital technologies, she replied:

> Well, I'd say TikTok … he'd just do a daily little snippet on TikTok like 'day two isolation' and just some stupid thing about his day. And he used

> lots of like **warped filters** and just made stupid images of himself and just doing stupid things… So yeah, like the stupid big **mouths** and all that sort of stuff. He does all that stuff. He loves all that.

Bee's dismissal of her child's TikTok activities as 'stupid' gives insights into a complex parental imaginary. The term 'stupid' indicates an affective dissonance at hand that primes Bee to dismiss what Sutton-Smith might call phantasmagorical or transgressive; activities that do not align with perceived 'productive' or 'educational' endeavours corresponding with developmental 'progress'. Yet, this dismissal also underscores the broader issue of acknowledging digital play as legitimate creativity. The playful and experimental aspects of children's online activities, from making quirky avatars to applying 'stupid' filters, can easily be described as constituting a creative practice characterised by spontaneity, experimentation, and expression. Bee's narrative brings forth the distinction between 'permissible' and 'transgressive' creativity. While playful acts like warped filters might seem inadequate to a parent's imaginary, from a child's perspective, it is an exploration of digital creativity.

In the discussions with Jade and Kate, there is evident positivity (expressed as enthusiasm) associated with creative activities involving digital technologies, indicating an affective affinity. Even so, Jade hinted at the societal challenges of her son's less conventional passion for statistics. Meanwhile Bee's narrative is marked by a dismissal of certain digital activities that loosely align with children's phantasmagoria as 'stupid'. Hesitancy to acknowledge or legitimise certain forms of digital creativity resonates with Threadgold's notion of 'distinction'. Bee's story underscores the tension children face when their creative endeavours diverge from accepted norms. As children navigate their creative space, they often confront parental reservations, a manifestation of 'affective dissonance' and 'symbolic violence'. This dynamic suggests that the enablers and constraints on children's digital creativity stem from parental imaginaries that are deeply entangled in established sociocultural politics of families and communities. However, in the insulated time-space of pandemic restrictions, many parents began to re-conceptualise their approach to parenting, seemingly freed from the norms that usually bind their parental decisions, particularly around screen time. It is as if the family unit was collectively quarantined from societal 'panopticism', thereby nullifying the need for stringent control. This absence of external pressures reveals how deep-rooted societal narratives, specifically regarding creative childhood, steer our daily choices.

Suspension of the parental imaginary: (Lack of) control

We now leave the Australian context and turn to the UK. Like the Australian parents, the UK parents we spoke to had set well-defined boundaries regarding their children's screen media use prior to the pandemic. For many

of the UK parents, there was a marked transgression of these norms during lockdown, which opened a window into a different world of parenting – free from customary 'screen-time regulations', yet marked by dissonance that accompanied the (lack of) control. Unlike the Australian parents we spoke to, an emphasis on control – or the lack thereof – was pervasive in this selection of UK transcripts, often crowding out possible creative openings. There are few references to digital creativity and play, as this group of parents instead wrestle with their children's relationship with screen media and the intense experience of exception brought about by lockdown, particularly for mothers working from home while in-person schooling was closed. Emotions were heightened in response to the fraught experience of transgressing pre-pandemic ideas of acceptable screen media habits.

Koshka's Story (UK): Go for it, go crazy

Koshka, an employee at a digital tech firm, was once strict about her children's screen media habits. But during the early days of the pandemic, she noticed significant changes in her approach to parenting and in her children's behaviour. Reflecting on this initial period, she said her children (ages seven and nine) had 'watched unreal amounts of TV', and her attitude was that they could '**Go for it, go crazy**'. She painted a vivid image of her children's behaviour during this time, describing them watching TV 'like zombies' or 'couch potatoes'. Koshka described some observed positive outcomes of this drastic shift in daily routines, such as her children becoming more self-sufficient. They 'would get up whenever' and began preparing their own meals. She remarked: 'they kind of loved it, they just took it easy'. However, the boundless screen time did come to a halt, and a break from TV was implemented by Koshka. 'The zombie time came to an abrupt end', she recalled. She faced resistance from her children, who voiced complaints of being bored and feeling mistreated. Yet, her decision to enforce a break from screen time was more flexible than originally intended. 'If I was busy, they would sniff it out and they'd just get hours of TV', she laughingly admitted. Although her re-introduction of control sounded 'super militant', she said, in reality it was 'weak'.

Koshka candidly discussed the 'hypocrisy' of enjoying TV herself but disallowing it for her children and thought the experience had been one of learning to relinquish control and allow her children more freedom in their choices. Despite her personal reservations about certain TV shows she described as 'horrendous', Koshka said she allowed her children to watch them because 'it's important to let them make their own choices to some extent'. Caught in a tension between children's desires and expectations of parental control, Koshka resisted the urge to direct her children into making more tasteful (i.e. less 'horrendous') choices, resolving the dissonance by giving in to the circumstances, for a time.

Other UK parents also described intentionally relinquishing control of their children's use of screen media, without articulating if this led to

creative or unexpected digital practices. Pockets of opportunity for children to engage with digital media in unexpected or playful ways may well have been created by parents relinquishing control; however, the interview data did not shed light on this. Instead, data were streaked with fear of what digital media was potentially doing *to* children (e.g., turning them into couch potatoes or zombies) with less emphasis placed on hopes for what children could potentially be doing *with* digital media. A particular parental imaginary of screen media makes its presence felt; one that centres technological determinism (Edwards, 2023), which has a tendency to take 'screen time' as a unit of measurement, is justified by shifting responsibility to the child (e.g., responsibilisation) and is structured by binary thinking (e.g., all/nothing, good/bad, militant/weak, active/passive). Intense emotions bleed through in the interview transcripts, indicating the degree to which transgression of pre-pandemic imaginaries of digital childhoods could be a distressing and dissonant experience for parents who chose varied paths to achieve confluence.

Some UK parents were able to form an affective affinity with the 'new normal' brought on by the change in circumstances, because they felt the crisis justified a relaxation of norms around screen media use, and there was a sense of comfort that they were doing the right thing. In effect, these parents responded to the circumstances by suspending and detaching themselves from the social imaginaries that would ordinarily influence their decisions. As one UK parent put it, 'I didn't care as much. It was kind of like, as long as they're happy. I suppose the pandemic did make you go "Does it really matter?" '. Or, as another said: 'It was such a tough time [...] I didn't really feel guilty, even if he watched TV 10 hours a day. It was the right thing for him'. Others re-thought what might previously have been thought of as transgressive. As one dad said, describing a transfer of responsibility for screen use in his home, 'we probably relaxed the rules and hoped that they would self-manage their use a little bit'. What these accounts share is that they leave the pre-pandemic imaginary of screen media largely intact; in the end, the relinquishing of control becomes a justified and reversible adaptation.

Conflicted parental imaginaries: Coping-not-coping

In the UK, as our data suggest, parents – predominantly mothers – *chose* to relax control over their children's screen time and content consumption. However, the narrative was different for the Colombian parents we spoke to. The emotional burden from the prolonged isolation and additional responsibilities made many feel defeated. Rather than embracing their children's transgressive media habits as a creative outlet or an opportunity to let children make their own choices, Colombian parents felt cornered. This sense of powerlessness, which we term as a feeling of 'forced surrender', reflects a reluctant relinquishing of parental authority to their offspring and to the pervasive influence of digital technologies.

Paula and Pablo's story (Colombia)

Paula and Pablo, a couple from Bogotá with two sons ages eight and 11, Mateo and Alonso, recounted their experience during this period as one of 'total global schizophrenia'. The Colombian Ministry of Education's '*modelo de alternancia*', introduced in November 2020, further complicated matters. While it permitted a return to physical schooling, it did so under strict guidelines which, in some cases, restricted even basic acts like eating during school hours. While Paula and Pablo opted for their sons to return to school, the looming uncertainty of the 'new normal', combined with constant health screenings, put an added strain on the household.

Paula conveyed the pandemic-related challenges they faced, stating: 'if you had *the hint of snot*, you had to stay at home going to virtual school, and Alonso, there was *nothing he hated more than that*'. She further described the emotional toll, noting the difficulty of reintroducing their children to the school environment only to have them return to virtual learning. Paula recalled how Alonso, who was eleven years old during the pandemic, would express that 'the teacher did not pay attention to him' during these virtual lessons. Instead, 'Alonso connected to classes but was also watching football videos' on platforms like YouTube, often diverting his attention from his schoolwork. In this situation, Paula and Pablo were coping with dissonance in terms of the academic expectations that were not being met: on the one hand, Alonso's expectations as a student were ignored by the struggling teacher; and on the other, his parents' expectations of him as a 'good virtual student' felt challenged when he chose to 'skip' school to watch a football match.

To cope, Paula devised various strategies, reminiscing how she would 'go upstairs in the attic' to oversee Alonso's activities. On some days, overwhelmed, Paula said:

> I would lock myself in my room and say, **'I don't want to be anyone's police… let them do whatever the hell they want**.'

Yet, there were moments when she would reprimand both of her children, decisively stating, 'today you are not taking class, I caught you watching this video, **you are done**, no school today'. Paula would pick up the computer and hide it for the rest of the day.

The online interactions of Mateo (Alonso's younger brother) were not without their mischief either, with Paula explaining that at just eight years old, he had learned how to 'paint moustaches on the teacher on the iPad', to which Pablo added, 'He would take screenshots and paint on them'. In both cases, parental imaginaries about childhood, adequate media use, and what counts as creativity, conflated Paula's feelings of intense dissonance, eliciting reactions of forced surrender. Interestingly though, Mateo's transgression was readily read as phantasmagoric play, while Alonso's was never valued as creative. This is possibly related to the varying degrees of agency

displayed by the children while breaking the rules: in Alonso's situation, working around the rules served the purpose of passively watching a match; in Mateo's case, he actively – and thus creatively – went around the rules to display his humorous personality.

Navigating the pandemic imposed varied roles on parents, influencing their perspectives on the significance of education in the context of familial harmony and established roles. External pressures, from ever-changing government policies to heightened school surveillance, contributed to this dynamic. However, the internal strains arising from shifts in domestic dynamics, especially increased screen time, were equally formidable. Paula's experience mirrored a broader sentiment – the balance between parental duties and personal sanity often teetered precariously.

Helena's story (Colombia)

Helena, a single mother from Medellín who used to define herself as anti-technology, echoes these sentiments. For her, the pandemic and the unforeseen increase of media time was as much about revealing her human vulnerabilities to her daughters as it was about navigating the practical challenges and dissonant emotions. She explains, 'During the pandemic, they [her two daughters] saw me as much more… human. That mom did not have good days every day'. There were moments of anger, frustration, and desperation, with Helena confessing there were times she stated 'I'm angry, I can't take it anymore'. Yet, these very instances allowed her children to step up, with them offering her words of comfort, often mirroring her own advice back to her. They would say, 'mom, **breathe**, count to ten, think about the things you like'. The role reversal was both poignant and healing. Helena reflects on these moments, stating, 'So it was the girls trying to calm me', and highlighting how they would remind her, 'Mom, relax, calm down, everything is fine, it's okay if you feel like this, this too shall pass'. The experience was revealing, as Helena admits the pandemic was also about showing that 'mom also got angry, that mom sometimes got sad'. *Letting go* and *surrendering* to the pressures of the pandemic and the increase in media use are two of the multiple ways in which parents coped with the uncertainty. As Helena showed, she both let go of the need that parents feel to always be in control of their emotions and to model emotional intelligence to their children. She was acutely aware that she also had tantrums, behaving in a *child-like* manner, and surrendered the control of the situation to her daughters. For her, this showed a more *human* parent to her daughters, and at the same time, it helped her heal some aspects of her past, fostering more horizontal relations in the home and democratising the home environment, creating sticky affinities within her imaginaries of good parenting and creative digital media time.

The narratives of both Paula and Helena illuminate the multifaceted challenges parents grappled with during the pandemic, framed within the

networks of imaginaries considered in this chapter. The constant tension between maintaining a healthy and productive routine and yielding to unprecedented pressures defined their experiences. Helena's story underscores the complexity of the parent-child dynamic during these trying times. The shift from a traditionally vertical, authoritative structure to a more horizontal, democratic one was evident, allowing for a new opportunity to think differently about the creative child as someone in control of the parent-child dynamic. Her ability to show vulnerability, to 'let go' in front of her children, was not just a coping mechanism, but also an exercise in mutual understanding and growth. This adaptability in the face of adversity underscores the resilience of families and offers a profound commentary on the evolving dynamics of parent-child relationships in contemporary times.

Parental imaginaries under threat: Fear of the end of childhood

In the case of Daniela and Diego, access to digital media and acquiring digital skills and literacy was considered key for their child's culture and social belonging. Both Daniela and Diego were worried about the addictive and detrimental effects that digital technologies would have on their young son, Simon, leading to a premature ending of childhood. A discourse of technological determinism (Edwards, 2023) is again evident, this time amplifying what could be described as a disposition of fear, echoing other parents in the Colombian data who also see too much media as *enslaving* and acting as an alienating force. Acquiring digital skills, then, is seen as the way in which their son will be able to triumph not only in terms of the limitations that his public education presupposes, but also as a way to foster adequate digital creativities that will protect both his childhood and future.

Daniela and Diego's story (Colombia)

Daniela and Diego lived in Bogotá with their son, Simon, who was five years old at the beginning of the pandemic. Their differing perspectives on technology were striking. Diego embraced and valued technology, and his view on the lockdown and the increase of media use could be read as Threadgold's (2020) 'social magic', since he saw the lockdown as a time to foster and sharpen his son's technological skills. This was possible because Diego's affinities were in harmony with the new demands imposed by the setting, fostering a sense of effortless adaptability and even excitement. Prior to the pandemic lockdown, he was already working remotely and was completing an online doctorate in music production. He self-identified as 'pro-tech' and acknowledged digital media's economic and professional benefits. In contrast, Daniela perceived herself as an enemy of all things digital, struggling with her partner's and child's immersion in the digital world.

These perspectives deeply affected their child's educational journey during the pandemic. Due to limited internet access and scarce technology resources

at Simon's public school and the families enrolled in it, Simon's education during this period primarily relied on physical copies of assignments that were collected at the school's gates at the start of the week, and then submitted on Fridays. Unlike many of their more affluent friends, Daniela and Diego never partook in 'streamed school', referring to the children who had to sit in front of a screen for eight hours a day, 'pretending' to go to school. They were keenly aware that unlike some of their friends, whose children were attending private education, Simon's enrolment in a public school *prevented* him, or – according to Daniela – *saved* him from this form of virtual schooling. However, Daniela and Diego were also aware that within his school, Simon was considered more affluent, leading to an interesting dynamic, cemented on socioeconomic awareness.

Their approach to digital games is particularly noteworthy. During lockdown, Diego's affective affinity with digital creativity underpinned his encouragement of Simon to create his own video games. The game Minecraft played a significant role in their parent-child relation, with Diego appreciating its educational components. Yet, Daniela's primary concern was ensuring a balanced and non-addictive relationship with screens. Her worries were framed within a fear that too much digital media could pose an end to her son's happy childhood. Daniela's dissonance with the way media was used in her home expressed a fear widely held by Colombian parents, characterising excessive media consumption as potentially addictive or an 'enslaver', by pulling children away from real-world interactions. Daniela was particularly perturbed by the way children, including Simon, might alter their behaviour when addressing an online audience, imitating personas they had seen on shows or elsewhere. She emphasised her concern when sharing that one time she saw Simon playing, pretending to be a YouTuber, and:

> So I sort of watched him, and he looked cute, super sweet, but I worry (and as she pauses, Daniela brings her hands to her face and cradles her head) I do not want him to be like one of those YouTubers, **it's a fake world**. **Because I don't want him to suffer**. Not because 'oh, how embarrassing to be a YouTuber', but because I don't want him to confuse his emotions, what he's **really** thinking, feeling, and **what he wants to convey**, because of that desire to connect with that world through the screen.

Daniela's deep-seated fears about the performative nature of online interactions devalued their theatrical and transgressive qualities. As Sutton-Smith (1997) points out, this type of behaviour is disconcerting for adults. Daniela envisioned a future where her son could experience events, like concerts, without the filter of a screen, and where being present is only possible through unmediated interactions. Daniela and Diego also show that parental imaginaries are not necessarily aligned; rather, competing imaginaries coexist. On the one hand, Diego's imaginary was heavily shaped by his affective affinity with digital creativity, as a way to challenge classist

expectations of public education. On the other hand, Daniela's dissonance and aversion to technology reflect a different form of parental imaginary in which *real* childhood cannot occur within the digital world.

Reconfiguring parental imaginaries: Creative openings

This final story was chosen in part because of its ordinariness and in part because, in contrast with the experiences of UK parents discussed already, it describes an instance of parental imaginaries changing. It is an insight into the emotional labour of negotiating children's use of digital media and the boundary-work required of parents seeking to embrace an expanded view of children's permissible digital creativities. We heard varying iterations of this story by parents in Australia, Colombia, and the UK. It is this story that we return to, as we reconsider the question of how intense emotional experiences and the affective charge accompanying the heightened use of digital technologies during the pandemic, brought parental imaginaries of digital creativity to the surface. In this interview excerpt, Leah, a single parent of a nine-year-old son and a 12-year-old daughter, who worked from home during the UK school closures, re-lived her experience:

> Leah: Before the pandemic he was just more <u>engaged</u>. He was going to school every day and, when he came home, he would often go **out** on his scooter or his bike and see his **friends** and it was much later in the evening, just before bedtime, he **might** then watch a bit of TV or he **might** go on his Xbox to look at YouTube. But it wasn't (*exhales tensely*), I don't know, so <u>consuming</u>. [...] Then [during the pandemic] he was **unsupervised** for a lot more of the day that I would have **liked** and then he was on his **Xbox** a lot more than he would have normally been. I tried to limit it. It's just very difficult when I'm downstairs working and he's upstairs in his bedroom.
>
> Becky (interviewer): That must have been a <u>really really tough time</u>.
>
> Leah: Yeah, it was it. It's weird, isn't it? At the time it was horrendous. He got quite (*pauses*) <u>angry</u> as a result of it and the games that he was playing, racing games and Fortnite, unfortunately, didn't seem to help. [...] I, it, (*stutters*) I couldn't cope, to be honest, and he was getting really (*pauses*) **fractious**, he was getting really kind of **angry** and frustrated and I could see his mental health suffering and myself I just felt really quite low to be honest.

In this part of the interview, Leah described an intense experience of dissonance and crisis around her son's screen media use. But, as school and his football club resumed, the crisis lifted. Later in the interview, reflecting back on the legacy of that time, Leah reinterpreted her son's engagement with

YouTube and gaming as having a positive effect on his social connection and well-being in the context of the crisis at hand:

> When he was on his Xbox, even though he didn't see people physically on screen, he saw his friends **every day** because they chat through their headsets. Actually, from that point of view, I was happy for him, thinking 'Well you've got **permanent dialogue** with your friends'.

Leah also drew on creativity discourse to describe the educational benefits of his screen engagement in terms of self-motivated learning and social skills:

> As much as my son wouldn't voluntarily go and watch a YouTube video about algebra, bless him, (*with warmth*) he volunteered to hoover the house this weekend. The hoover [vacuum cleaner] was blocked, and he couldn't empty it, so he actually went onto YouTube and found a video of how to empty it. That's got to be a positive (*with enthusiasm*) the fact that he actually thought, 'Well, I know where I can go to get it, I'll try to have a look' [...] And his confidence is, uh (*sarcastically*) 'coming on', his teamwork actually (*now more genuinely*), because a lot of what he does, he's in a team, in like groups that are competing and I hear him quite a lot trying to navigate people in his team, saying 'Well, if you do **that**, then we'll come along to do **this**' and I can see him in a kind of leadership role, which is quite nice, actually.

Explicit markers of creativity may seem absent in Leah's story, but underlying discourses of creativity, play, and childhood are present (Banaji et al., 2010; Dyer, 2017; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Small 'c' creativities (Craft, 2003) imbue Leah's recount of digital practices during the pandemic, which in turn demonstrates how the interplay between discourse, affect, and emotion creates an environment wherein parents, perhaps unknowingly, gravitate towards certain forms of digital creativity – prompting them to recalibrate their thinking away from simplistic good/bad binaries or technological determinism. What becomes evident here is that 'creativity' can operate as a gateway for parental endorsement and a catalyst for change, becoming a politically charged element of children's digital life-worlds. While being cautious not to position creativity as inherently positive (Banaji et al., 2010; Ogata, 2013), our analysis suggests that it is a potential point of in(ter)vention for parents who are seeking to critically engage with the social, material, and technological conditions of family life. It is thus important to understand how parental imaginaries of childhood and digital creativity can change (e.g., be affected). Leah's story is an instance of one parent's shift from dissonance to confluence (and beyond) by gradually building an affinity with her son's digital media practices. While it is by no means generalisable, we think it provides useful pointers to orientate thinking concerned with expanding parental imaginaries of digital childhoods:

1. *Affective dissonance and parental imaginaries:* Leah's initial feelings of distress, amplified by her son's increased screen time and her own work constraints, underscore a significant emotional dissonance: 'It's not doing either of us any good'. This dissonance was arguably rooted in the parental imaginary of a 'traditional' childhood – one with limited screen interactions and more direct social engagements. The pandemic confronted and contradicted these embedded imaginaries, leading to heightened emotional responses.
2. *The affective charge of digitally mediated lives:* The idea of 'affective charge' can be perceived as the emotional weight and tension parents felt as they navigated the new realities of their children's digital engagements. For Leah, this was evident in her oscillation between concern for her son's well-being and the practical challenges of limiting his time on his Xbox. As digitally mediated activities became more central during the pandemic, the affective charge around it intensified, making it a central point of contention, reflection, and re-evaluation for parents.
3. *Digital creativity and evolving imaginaries:* As Leah's narrative progresses, there is a discernible shift in her disposition towards her son's uptake of digital media. While the initial distress was rooted in perceived overexposure to screens, reflection brought forth the nuances of her son's activities. The description of her son seeking a solution to the blocked vacuum cleaner on YouTube and his enhanced leadership capacity in online gaming contexts highlighted Leah's recognition of the potential for constructive digital creativity in everyday life, indicating movement (e.g., increase in capacity) resulting in a disposition affording 'postdigital convergence' of the social, digital, and material (Edwards, 2023). Even if these examples serve to reinforce normative discourses of childhood and neoliberal politics of creativity, they still mark a shift in Leah's imaginary of children's digital technology, because they suggest Leah is coming to understand digital play and creativity as being more about what the kids are *doing*, rather than what they are playing with. Leah's recalibrated affinity with aspects of her son's digital lifeworld moves into alignment with recent literature on digital play, as summarised in Plowman's (2020) report.
4. *From dissonance to confluence:* The pandemic, through its many challenges, also acted as a catalyst for rethinking and reimagining digital interactions. The affective charge and intense emotional experiences eventually led parents, like Leah, to begin to recognise the multifaceted nature of digital engagements. The crisis inadvertently forced a broader societal acknowledgement of the digital not just as a space of passive consumption and/or addiction, but also as a fertile ground for creativity and social connection that is inseparable from everyday life.

To conclude, the emotional intensity and affective charge surrounding children's amplified digital engagements during the pandemic brought parental imaginaries to the fore. It pushed parents to grapple with their

pre-existing notions and, through reflection and experience, recalibrate their understanding of their children's digital creativity in everyday life. In many circumstances, this led parents to effectively suspend their imaginaries of childhood and digital media. However, in a few circumstances, parents reconfigured their pre-pandemic imaginaries, affording the children in their lives greater capacity to engage in digitally mediated life. That parents are taking on the emotional labour involved in charting new norms in such unsettled territory marks a significant movement towards embracing the postdigital present, with the postdigital encapsulating 'the notion of a digitalised society—a social situation, in which human practices are "imbricated" with technologies' (Edwards, 2023, p. 7). As he was wrapping up his conversation with Diana in Colombia, Diego reflected, 'technology isn't going anywhere, and not only that but it is everywhere, so my wish is that my son develops a healthy relationship'. The next chapter, Chapter 6, applies the notion of imaginary to explain the use of parental controls during the pandemic in three countries. It highlights how parental understanding and practices of using parental control software to manage children's screen time and digital activities is a result of ongoing interactions between dominant imaginaries of this technological innovation and their own imaginaries. By comparing the socio-technological contexts of the three countries, Chapter 6 identifies the different actors that shape the everyday use of parental controls for children.

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6 Imaginaries of parental controls

The state, market, and families

Xinyu Zhao, Maureen Mauk, and Amie Kim

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapters, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the norms, schedules, and household parameters related to family media practices across different national contexts. Most parents in our study were no longer able to cling to the pre-pandemic screen time rules and accepted, often with a shrug of resignation, the idea that they should simply do what was deemed necessary to manage the relationships between keeping children safe at home, but entertained, and continuing their education online. At the same time, parents still sought feasible ways to maintain a sense of control in this time of crisis and uncertainty. In this chapter, we draw on data from the United States, China, and South Korea to explore how parents approached their children's screen time and content moderation through 'parental controls'. By parental controls, we refer to 'software tools that allow [parents] to monitor and limit what [their] child sees and does online' (eSafety Commissioner, n.d.). These tools are usually installed in digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and smart TVs, as well as built into mobile apps, platforms, and software. In the pandemic context, parental controls were associated with significant parental motivations and beliefs surrounding the management of children's everyday screen time and activities during lockdowns, when screen use had noticeably increased in the home. The countries represented in this chapter include very different governmental approaches to regulating children's media: South Korea and China have national-level policies to prevent 'overdependence' on the internet and smartphones, whereas in the United States, this level of regulation is left to parents, with media companies offering various options for parental controls.

Increasingly, parents across the world have access to different types of parental controls. In China, for example, parental controls were first introduced and made mandatory as a built-in function for short-video platforms in 2019, as part and parcel of a pilot 'anti-addiction system' (Cyberspace Administration of China, 2019), colloquially known as the 'teenage mode' (or teenager mode). The name was soon adopted by other Chinese online platforms to refer to their parental control functions. Parents can voluntarily

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activate this system when logging in to platforms. Teenage mode's main feature limits screen time and filters online content for child users under age 18. Similarly, in 2015, South Korea required Smart Sheriff, a parental control app, to be installed on the smartphones of all children under the age 19. Smart Sheriff was created by a consortium of telecommunication companies collectively known as the Korean Mobile Internet Business Association (MOIBA) and funded and promoted by the government-led communication regulatory body. Hundreds of thousands of users downloaded Smart Sheriff; however, the app's service was terminated after the release of a report which claimed that the application contained weaknesses that compromised children's privacy (Anderson et al., 2015).

In countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, , instead of state mandates, parents usually choose from a plethora of commercial options and built-in affordances. Parental control apps advertise offerings including a variety of technical features for parents to monitor and manage children's everyday screen activities. According to Zhao and Wang's (2022), recent research, some apps allow parents to control children's access to particular online content or monitor their screen time, whereas others provide communication support for parents and children to have open conversations about screen use and to set up screen rules together. Despite the fact that the efficacy of these tools is unclear, the parental controls market continues to be forecast as an area of significant growth (Data Bridge Market Research, 2022).

In this chapter, we consider how parents understood and engaged with these types of parental controls in different pandemic and sociotechnical contexts via the analytical concept of 'imaginaries'. By imaginary, we broadly refer to the set of norms, values, and practices through which 'people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations' (Taylor, 2003, p. 23). We argue that how and why parents in the United States, China, and South Korea perceived and used parental controls during the pandemic was shaped by the interactions between the various forms of contextualised *sociotechnical imaginaries* of parental controls produced by different actors in the three countries. We specifically focus on three actors – the state, the market, and the family. These imaginaries, while not always in alignment with each other, collectively shaped parents' lived experiences of parental controls in managing children's everyday digital practices during the pandemic. In this chapter, we first outline the conceptual lens of imaginaries which informs our analysis, before mapping the parental controls landscapes across the three countries under investigation. We then present and analyse interview data by discussing parents' imaginaries of parental controls, and how they align with or work against sociotechnical imaginaries produced by the state and the market. We conclude this chapter by reflecting on parents' perceptions

and experiences of parental controls and how they interacted with the varying pandemic conditions.

The conceptual lens of imaginaries

An extensive body of scholarship is engaged with the concept of 'imaginary' and its many variations to understand people's social life and lived experiences, including those in relation to emerging technologies. In science and technology studies, the concept has been adopted and adapted to represent various sociotechnical discourses about social reality produced by different actors (e.g., Bucher, 2017; Guay & Birch, 2022; Jasanoff & Kim, 2009, 2015). It denotes the embedded nature of social life and technology (Dahlman et al., 2023, p. 110) and provides a useful lens to understand the many ways science and technology create a sense of ethics and connection, even 'morality' in our social lives (Jasanoff, 2015, p. 4). The analytical concept of 'imaginaries' thus allows for critical investigation into the relationships between technological visions and everyday lived experiences of technological innovations.

Social imaginaries of technology are pluralistic (Lupton, 2021; Mager & Katzenbach, 2021). They are produced by multiple actors, which may include the state (Jasanoff & Kim, 2009; Hoff, 2023), corporations (Haupt, 2021), and individuals (Bucher, 2017; Lupton, 2021; Sörum & Fuentes, 2023). These imaginaries work together, although often unequally, to co-produce the trajectories for future advances in science and technology and, to a large extent, shape how people experience these technologies in everyday life. However, not *all* visions are considered imaginaries. Overall, *sociotechnical imaginaries* are those 'collectively held, institutionally stabilised, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology' (Jasanoff, 2015, p. 4). While the 'collective' and 'institutionalised' nature of imaginaries indicates a quality of fixity, they are 'multi-faceted and dynamic' (Mager, 2017, p. 256) as the different actors work to gain power and authority towards their goals, thus morphing these individual visions into 'a collective imaginary' (Haupt, 2021, p. 239).

For digital technologies, imaginaries were found to play a crucial role in their creation and governance (Mager & Katzenbach, 2021). Government and business actors have produced dominant sociotechnical imaginaries in relation to digital technologies, creating and legitimising hegemonic narratives about digital services, products, and practices. Hoff (2023), for example, explored the tactics adopted by the Dutch government to articulate sociotechnical imaginaries of artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to healthcare services. More broadly, Bareis and Katzenbach (2022) analysed national AI policy documents in four countries to understand how the technology has

been imagined in governmental discourses. The comparison highlighted 'the vast cultural, political, and economic differences of the countries' (Bareis & Katzenbach, 2022, p. 871) in which sociotechnical imaginaries of AI were produced and institutionalised. Corporate sociotechnical imaginaries are used as strategic resources to meet the company's business objectives and to legitimise their business actions, as shown in Haupt's (2021) research on Facebook. These studies, among others, recognised how sociotechnical imaginaries of digital technologies are often shaped and substantiated by state and commercial actors.

Meanwhile, other research investigated whether and how technology users respond to the dominant visions of digital technologies and produce alternative or counter-imaginaries. Lupton (2021) analysed how Australian participants responded to publicly articulated imaginaries of personal datafication and dataveillance. Similarly, Sörum and Fuentes (2023) explored how consumers experienced and talked about commercial datafication practices in the Swedish context. Their research revealed the various ways in which Swedish adults responded to dominant sociotechnical imaginaries of datafication, and how their responses are highly contextualised and situational. Focusing on counter-imaginaries of datafication, Kazansky and Milan (2021) used three case studies to illustrate how civil society actors have attempted to subvert dominant visions of a datafied society, as constructed and substantiated by state and corporate interests. These studies highlight the agency of individuals and groups in interpreting and negotiating dominant sociotechnical imaginaries and the possibilities of enacting alternative imaginaries of technological developments in everyday contexts.

Building upon this scholarship, this chapter engages with the concept of imaginaries by paying special attention to how parents in the three countries understood and responded to the dominant imaginaries around parental control services, as well as the policy and social contexts in which these responses were embedded. As Lupton (2021) has argued, 'uncovering the contexts in which the imaginaries articulated by individuals are situated can be an insightful way of identifying the broader meanings, practices, norms and values that shape these imaginaries' (p. 7). Being mindful of contextual factors, we argue that the state and corporate actors in these countries have significantly shaped how parents imagined the affordances and implications of parental controls for their children. Parents navigated the sociotechnical imaginaries created by government and business, which the parents constantly adopted and negotiated. We highlight the sociopolitical, cultural, and technological environments of the three countries during and beyond the pandemic in order to provide an important background for consideration when exploring how and why parents engage with parental controls in certain ways. We show how parents' imaginaries are influenced by the broader sociotechnical imaginaries present in state and market practices, which then influence their use of parental control technologies.

Parental controls in public imaginaries

In this section, we consider how the state and the commercial actors in the United States, China, and South Korea have contributed to the production and legitimisation of institutionalised sociotechnical imaginaries of parental control software through national policies and technological initiatives. These imaginaries relate to the rhetoric and visions around *what it means to control children's use of screen media* and its implications on everyday family life in the home. Below, we compare and contrast the sociotechnical imaginaries of parental controls in the three countries.

In the United States, most screen media (e.g., television programs, YouTube content, videogames, podcasts) are commercially funded and largely governed at an arm's length via self-regulatory practices, partly due to considerations of the protection of American citizens' constitutional rights from censorship (Chris, 2019; Heins, 2007; Mauk, 2021; Perlman, 2016). Currently, very few industry standards govern parental controls, default settings upon the launch of new apps and programs, or cohesive ratings across platforms. In the media marketplace overall, the Federal Communications Commission and Federal Trade Commission set rules to regulate obscenity and create a *safe harbour* on airtime for adult content, but only over network television broadcast. Cable, satellite, streaming, and online content are largely left unregulated on a federal level. Basic online privacy protections on tracking and information sharing are set up to protect children under the age of 13, and new state laws, notably the California Age-Appropriate Design Code, which is modelled on the UK Children's Code, are being introduced to help strengthen rules governing the use of children's data and the verification of users' ages. However, parental controls as a feature and enhancement for screen content are not mandated and not directly regulated by the state. As Mauk (2023) has argued, parental controls have been carried over as a cultural artefact of US commercial broadcast regulation dating back to the 1990s, with mandatory V-chip ratings for broadcast TV and explicit lyric warnings on music. These remnants of linear television from past decades have become a common practice, and are said to *empower* parents to moderate content themselves through some commercial and internal labelling and affordance provisions by commercial businesses. Media business self-regulation is passed on to the parents on the front lines of screen media moderation in the home.

US parents are often positioned in the business rhetoric of free speech enterprise as 'empowered' to make their own decisions. Families are individualised in this capitalist model of neoliberalism. Because governance is not mandated by the state and does not lead to profits in business self-regulation, companies push the onus of screen time moderation and technology oversight onto parents. Instead of calling it a burden, however, it is highlighted as parental *empowerment*. The international nonprofit organisation Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI, 2022) found that US parents report the highest levels of hours spent monitoring their children's screen time (11.8 hours per week

in the United States, in contrast with UK parents at 7.6 hours per week, and French parents at 3.5 hours per week). It is the individualised ideology of being a good parent that furthers and embodies the rhetoric of responsibility and duty felt by parents to act as a gatekeeper, media censor, and digital protector. In this respect, the US imaginaries of parental controls, as produced by the state and corporations, mostly revolve around the empowerment of parents to better moderate their children's screen practices. These imaginaries emphasise the importance of 'age-appropriateness' for children's screen activities, indicating the expected roles of parental controls to filter out 'inappropriate' content for children. American parents, as the main target consumers for the parental control products, are imagined as the main beneficiaries of technological methods in parental moderation.

Overall, American parents relied on embedded parental controls to help navigate the onslaught of media their children used during the pandemic. Some of the most popular technological tools and platforms for entertainment, education, time-filling, and communication amongst US families included: Apple operating systems – running iPads, iPhones and MacBooks; Google laptops, which were often cited as issued by school systems and embedded with Gmail, Google Drive, Google Search, and YouTube; and digital streaming services such as Netflix, Disney+, Apple TV, Prime, HULU, PBS Kids, and Nickelodeon. Additionally, social media and gaming became increasingly popular during the pandemic, with TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube rising in popularity, alongside Fortnite, Minecraft, AmongUs, and Roblox for multi-player gaming connections. Each of these forms of digital technology features their own version of parental controls.

The use of embedded and external software to provide parental oversight over these various apps and platforms is positioned as *empowering* to parents, allowing them to set parental controls via the use of age and maturity ratings, and guardrails around access and screen time allowance; however, it creates a misleading paradox of control. Guins (2009, 2015), for example, dismantled 'control technologies' such as V-chips, pointing out how technology of self-reliance is a paradox, because the imagined control offered by such tools can be misleading. Guins (2009, p. 39) described this setup as a 'market incentive dressed up as empowerment', where parents have to fill the duty of care gap left by government regulation and business interests. US parents may imagine themselves as having choices, but in actuality they are maintaining and filling a gap in the sociotechnical rhetoric of self-regulatory, free-market industry design.

In contrast, China holds its media as state controlled. This affects everything from *who* is held responsible for children's media practices, to *how* screens are regulated at home. Safe moderation for children and teens' screen use in China is largely regulated and enforced through state-led initiatives aimed at preventing 'internet addiction' (Pissin, 2021). In October 2020, China's *Law on the Protection of Minors* was revised to add a new chapter called 'Internet Protection'. Under this chapter, special attention was given to

the 'problem' of children's addiction to the internet. Article 68, for example, requires that

> [t]he departments of press and publication, education, health, culture and tourism, and cyberspace affairs shall regularly carry out publicity and education on the prevention of minors' addiction to the internet, supervise the online products and service providers to fulfil their obligations of preventing minors' addiction to the internet, and guide families, schools, and social organisations to cooperate with each other and take scientific and reasonable measures to prevent and intervene the internet addiction of minors.

The problem of internet addiction is imagined to be best resolved through state-wide technological initiatives, which are mandated to be embedded in internet services. There are two most notable examples. The first is a real-name verification system required for all online game providers in China, used to set up time limits for all users under the age of 18. This system has been institutionalised via several policies over the past few years. In 2019, for example, China's National Press and Publication Administration issued a 'Notice on Preventing the Minors from Indulging in Online Games', which required online game providers in China to implement a real-name verification system in all their products, and to limit children's time on online games to a maximum of 1.5 hours on weekdays and three hours on weekends or public holidays (NPPA, 2019). This restriction was further tightened in 2021 to a maximum of three hours per week (Zhao & Sefton-Green, 2022). The second example is a parental control feature, the 'teenage mode', which was built into most Chinese video and live-streaming platforms in 2019 (Xinhua, 2019). While the teenage mode is compulsory, the specific design and operation of this feature is at the hands of the companies running the digital platforms. Moreover, it is the parents who decide whether to turn on the mode for their children or not. When the mode is turned on, parents can set up a password, so children are limited to being on the platform for a maximum of 40 minutes per day; and in addition, access to the platform is blocked between 10pm and 6am. When children want to extend their screen time, they need (their parents) to put in the password. At the same time, children are limited to a particular content pool, which is algorithmically considered 'age-appropriate' and 'educational'. The filtering feature allegedly takes responsibility (and agency) away from the parents in relation to sourcing and selecting online content for their children, which relies solely on the digital platforms to define and implement what is useful for the young users.

The mandatory nature of such technological initiatives indicates a state vision that views problems associated with children's internet use, such as addiction and harmful content, as best resolved via technological innovations like the teenage mode. While parents in China are able to make decisions about activating the mode, they have little power deciding what is given

to their children, or the time that their children are allowed to be on the platform. To some extent, the state has taken away their power, and the parents are only given the options to opt in or not. Therefore, in contrast to the US imaginaries, Chinese imaginaries of parental controls are heavily oriented to the protection of children, rather than empowerment of parents. In a way, the name of the 'teenage mode' justifies the efficacy of parental controls. The beneficiaries are the children and teenagers. At the same time, the sociotechnical imaginaries around screen media and the internet are largely around ideas of 'harm' and 'addiction'. These key constructs define what digital media mean for children, thus justifying state intervention and state-led parental control systems. By emphasising the severity of the internet problems for children, the Chinese national policies construct technological systems such as the teenage mode as 'an inevitable technological pathway' (Bareis & Katzenbach, 2022, p. 864), which points 'ahead to promising and attainable futures, or to futures to be shunned and avoided' (Jasanoff, 2015, p. 22). Such technological systems are imagined to be the key connector between the different stakeholders in children's everyday internet use and the major motivator for these stakeholders to take responsibility to protect children from all kinds of online harm.

South Korea sits somewhere in between the United States and China. In South Korea, the sociotechnical imaginaries related to screen media, especially digital media, are caught between the idea of 'digital competency', and 'harm' and 'risks'. For that reason, imaginaries of parental controls rest on the necessity for parents to provide their children with appropriate digital tools, as well as safe and healthy digital environments. At the same time, while the state does play a role in mandating and regulating the parental controls industry, parents are responsibilised to provide 'proper' guidance in relation to digital media, in contrast to China. In South Korea, mixed messages are sent to parents. On the one hand, they are advised to support their children's use of digital media, with 'digital literacy' being framed as crucial capital for the twenty-first century. In 2022, for example, the revised national curriculum was announced, which emphasised the importance of digital competency and integrated media literacy into various subjects. The definitions of the notions of 'literacy' and 'competency', however, are vague in these policy interventions; they seem to be synonymous with basic skills and knowledge to use digital technologies. This is further exemplified in how the Seoul Provincial Office of Education established a policy that equipped all students with a tablet PC, with the aim of bridging digital divides and supporting students' online education experience during the pandemic. Korean parents constantly hear cultural discourse which suggests that young people are in danger because of harmful online content and risky social circumstances. In 2020, the online sex crime scandal, known as the 'Nth room' case, stunned the public and increased parental anxiety, as it involved underaged females as victims. Parents also worry about their children's excessive use of digital media. National legislation mandates that primary schools participate in an

annual test for smartphone overdependence, which implies that children are at risk of being overdependent on smartphones.

Similar to China, the South Korean state takes part in protecting children from online harm and overdependence, by supporting the development and implementation of content filtering applications such as the SmartSheriff mentioned above. It mandated all mobile devices owned by minors have content filtering software installed. In 2014, Article 32–7 of the Telecommunications Business Act was adopted. According to this article, telecommunications companies should install tools filtering harmful content when selling cell phones to teens and should also inform teenagers and their legal representatives of this. The KCC (Korea Communications Commission) funded MOIBA to develop content filtering applications such as the Cyber Security Zone (the successor to the SmartSheriff). Telecommunication companies and mobile phone companies followed suit and developed their own parental control technologies and applications. Now, parents in South Korea can easily download parental control applications and content filtering software developed by both the government funded consortium and commercial companies.

However, the mandatory installation of parental controls on young people's mobile phones has not been met with universal acceptance and recognition. Most parental controls enable parents to filter content, to monitor and regulate what a child can do, and to see how many hours they use their mobile phone. For instance, by installing the Cyber Security Zone, parents can block children from accessing certain applications and filter content. It informs parents of the child's daily smartphone usage time, when they mainly use it, which applications they use and for how long. It enables parents to track the child's location and block their access to Wi-Fi. Using 'Smart Safe Dream', which is another parental control application provided by MOIBA, parents can monitor their child's online search history and messaging applications. In 2021, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea stated that the parental control tools could violate the basic human rights of young people, such as the right to privacy, and recommended the KCC inspect the status of related parental control tools and take necessary measures. In response to the recommendation, the KCC explained that it is not their role to intervene, as it is the parents' and children's decision to use (or not) the additional functions provided by the parental control applications. In this sense, despite active state interventions, Korean parents – much like US parents – were portrayed and imagined as the main actors responsible for engaging with parental controls to both protect their children from online harms and empower them to be prepared for a digital future.

Parental imaginaries of parental controls

As a distinctive, yet often-neglected, actor in producing imaginaries around technologies in the home, parents make decisions about how and when

parental controls are used for their children. Parents' expectations and lived experiences of parental controls during and beyond the pandemic are often shaped by their interactions with the dominant imaginaries in their countries. Individual technology users have agency in negotiating widely circulating sociotechnical imaginaries and constructing alternative or counter-imaginaries. In this section, we discuss how parents in our study have responded to the sociotechnical imaginaries of parental controls in the three countries, namely internalising and/or contesting these imaginaries. We first unpack how some parents have accepted the state and market imaginaries, by analysing their expectations of parental control software's efficacy in solving the many 'problems' of children's screen-based activities, including addiction, harmful content, negative impacts on health, and others. We then articulate how such visions of parental controls are also negotiated and resisted 'on the ground' in homes. Importantly, parents talked about the limitations of parental controls in achieving what was expected to be achieved, as well as the issue of accessibility for all parents to effectively engage with these technological tools.

Internalising dominant imaginaries

As discussed earlier, dominant sociotechnical imaginaries of parental controls in China are largely centred around the necessity to protect children from online harms. Parental control software is positioned as one of the most effective methods to implement parental and governmental regulation of children's screen-based activities. This sociotechnical imaginary was noticeably adopted by many Chinese parents in our study. For example, health was one of the top reasons cited by Chinese parents in support of their use of parental controls. In particular, the adverse impact of screens on children's vision was referenced as the biggest concern among the Chinese participants. All twenty parent interviewees expressed their worries over their children's 'excessive' screen time during the pandemic, and how it may harm their vision. Aside from manually setting up time limits, parental control settings were considered an effective way to implement regulation. Xu, mother of two, explained how the embedded teenage mode is helpful for her to better manage her five-year-old's screen time:

> I have a gaming app on my phone called *My Talking Tom*. If you put in my child's identity, … there will be a time limit. So if she goes over time, the app will quit itself. Even if you log in again, you will still not be able to play it. Sometimes, she will come to me for help. I'll just tell her that time is up so the app won't let you play. … There is nothing I can do (laugh).

In the eyes of parents, the teenage mode helped to authorise time limits and to make it difficult for children to negotiate.

Other motivations for Chinese parents to use parental controls included the potential psychological and behavioural impacts of screen use, and the concerns that it would jeopardise routines of children's physical activities. This is best epitomised in Chinese parents' constant reference to the phenomenon of 'addiction' in an online world, which indicates how the idea of addiction has entered the country's political and popular discourse to define the risks of children's use of the internet and screens. As Zhenzhen, a mother of an 11-year-old, clarified when asked why she considered her child might become addicted to online games:

> First of all, her teachers disapprove of it (too much screen time). Second, many parenting experts also disapprove of it, because it has adverse impacts on their physical and mental health. For example, if she uses digital devices for too long, she won't go doing exercises. I also saw that experts say if children spend too much time on these devices, their mindset becomes directed – that is, she does not produce much but only accepts what the phone tells her. There will be little interaction.

Zhenzhen's account suggests how the various sources of sociotechnical imaginaries of digital technologies for children collectively shaped parents' views and expectations of children's use of screen media. She was motivated to turn on the teenage mode for her child because of her fear of screen media's negative health impacts, as well as the expectations that parental controls can solve these problems.

Aside from health reasons, Chinese parents also spoke about the importance of parental controls for filtering out 'age-inappropriate' online content for their children. Sexualised content was cited as being inappropriate and was among the most troubling content for Chinese parents. They talked about the presence of 'soft pornographic' content on short-video platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou. Jiang, a father of an 11-year-old girl, was particularly worried that his daughter might encounter those dancing short videos where the performers 'dress explicitly'. Similarly, Lunqing, mother of a ten-year-old boy, found the teenage mode on Douyin helpful for filtering out content that was 'a little bit pornographic'. For others, content that was overtly 'negative' became a major concern. Jujie activated the teenage mode for most of the platforms that her children used during the pandemic, with the hope that media content which may have negative impacts on her children's values can be filtered out. Zhenzhen had a similar expectation of the mode, although she later realised that it was not perfect:

> There is something called "teenage what [mode]" which I could choose to turn on; but the problem is, even if the content is considered teenager appropriate, I feel there is still a lot of content that has "negative energy". It's not all about positive energy.

It is worth noting that the 'positive energy' referred to by Zhenzhen is not simply a jargon with individualistic meanings; instead, it is associated with a state-led campaign which has gained popularity among the public and was simultaneously highly politicised and depoliticised (Chen & Wang, 2019).

Evidently, these Chinese parents have largely accepted and internalised the public imaginaries of children's online practices and parental controls in China. The time limits and content moderation met parents' desire to control children's screen time and activities, particularly those in relation to entertainment, minimising the possibilities of vision damage, addiction, and exposure to harmful content, which are all elements of the dominant imaginaries of children's online experiences, constructed through policy documents and state-led technological projects. In a way, this suggests how the dominant imaginaries of technology can be so powerful that counter-imaginaries are difficult to construct (cf. Lehtiniemi, 2020).

In the United States' research data, parents' concerns about negative effects of screen media on children's vision and health were minimal. Our interviews showed that their motivations to use parental controls were largely rooted in shielding their children's eyes (and ears) from potentially problematic content in the media. Content concerns included exposure to mature topics, including adult or coarse language, sexual scenarios, and violence. Additionally, parents sought technological tools for parental control to help protect child viewers from the perceived predatory threats via adults preying on minors,and corporations taking advantage of children through data privacy issues and recommendation algorithms. 'Appropriate' and 'inappropriate' were commonly used descriptions by American parents to detail their instinctual barometer of the types of media content they aimed to include and exclude during screen time. 'Age-appropriate content' was said to be that which 'was appropriate based on our beliefs' (Alicia) in contrast to mentions of inappropriate and even 'terrifying content' on Google that parents feared their children were not emotionally prepared for. One mother likened a child's free-reign exposure to the internet to 'dumping your kids in Times Square, New York City without a parent'. Parents also mentioned concerns with 'gratuitous violence' – when violent acts are inserted and amplified into a program or game content for attention and not necessary for the storytelling or plot. US parents, in general, felt less concerned about fantasy violence, with many families mentioning that they subscribed to Disney+ during the pandemic particularly for *Star Wars* content.

While there were limitations and a host of issues, as we discuss in the final section of this chapter, controlling screen time often meant engaging with technological tools for parents to filter kids' media before it was consumed. While the V-chip age rating on televisions dates back to the late 1990s when it was mandated to be installed on all TV sets, parents mentioned employing the tool or versions similar to it that are used by streaming services such as Netflix to help avoid mature content from being viewed by children.

However, Racquel, an American mother, noted that the ratings are not always reliable or accurate: ‘even then PG isn’t always appropriate’. V-chips and maturity ratings work by physically blocking or preventing programs from being viewed, specifically programs that are rated by their broadcast or cable network for certain maturity levels. In the digital environment, these tools also translate to streaming platforms. These platforms have evolved to include proprietary parental controls which allow parents varying levels of functionality to block access, hinder the ability to purchase, or curb choices of what is available for children to use or view by means of kids’ profile settings, age-gates, ratings designations, or even (in the case of Netflix Kids) individually naming particular shows or films as prohibited from viewing.

Blocking technology appealed to parents as a tool for control. Parents described their habits in terms of building a technological and virtual fortress via *blocks* (though not the construction toy building kind). Blocking app store purchases and downloads allowed parents the ability to pre-approve what could be accessed, and to curate application access ahead of children’s perusal. Also, Netflix’ parental controls gave parents the tools to manually enter and block or deny access to see a film or show from the child’s profile. Despite frustrations with the YouTube app, some parents did note that they removed YouTube TV from their home television screen and kids’ iPads. Trust and reliance on specific companies and brands were a part of parents’ assurance in their ability to control kids’ media. By narrowing down the type of phone, computer, and even streaming platforms used by a family, some parents felt more in control. Jonathan, a technology-savvy father, noted:

> We’re in the sort of Mac family and Mac allows you to do ‘safe search’ on Google. But there’s something that – you can go into the actual settings of the iPad and restrict content. You can set like they can only watch TV-PG, they can only watch, you know, PG-13 and below movies, they can only do, you know, you can set it at 13+ apps or, you know, 14+ apps or 15+ apps and generally those work pretty good. I mean I – in the last couple of years, I haven’t really come across any problems with it.

American parents’ motivations to engage with parental control software and tools, as discussed above, reflect the normalisation of the public imaginaries of parental controls in the United States. Specifically, the dominant imaginaries around the adoption, use, and customisation of built-in parental controls across the many devices, apps, games, and platforms used by a family showcase the media and tech industry’s hegemonic legitimisation of norms and practices. Parents understood and responded to parental control services as a *parental caregiving duty*. It was their sociocultural role to build in and customise tools, block content, and oversee aspects of digital safety for their children. Importantly, parental controls were believed by many American parents as an effective way to accomplish such a duty as parents.

Finding the ideal balance between growth and protection was the centrepiece of many South Korean parents' imaginaries of parental controls. In other words, parents anticipated that parental control tools would aid them in their efforts to give their kids access to age- and safety-appropriate digital experiences and devices, which would secure their futures in a digital world. The majority of the South Korean parents who participated in the study believed that it was crucial for them to monitor how much time kids spend on digital gadgets. Some parents used the built-in program to manage screen time, while others deliberately selected and used parental control products available on the market. For instance, Nuri (a mother of two children, including a 12- and four-year-old) purposely switched her child's mobile phone from a 2G phone with no internet connection to a smartphone, as it was easier for her to control her child's smartphone by downloading a parental control application. By using parental control tools, parents wanted to prevent children from spending too much time online for health reasons. Vismila said it is important to be stern in deciding the time when the child should not be online. She wanted to create an environment for her children to get enough sleep. Cat Mom is a mother of two children, including a son aged 12 and a daughter aged ten. As she believed it is important for her children to participate in offline activities and interact face-to-face with others, she set up an Apple screen time control to limit her children's computer use before 11pm. For her, the parental control tool supported her parenting approach and values, which prioritised a balanced online and offline lifestyle for her children's well-being.

However, for some families the screen time limit was seen as negotiable. The parental control application that Tokki-Macaroon (mother of an 11-year-old) used is produced by a telecommunications company. It provides a function whereby a parent can allow more screen time as compensation for a good deed or as a present. Tokki-Macaroon explained that the application linked the child's mobile phone to his father's, giving him the authority to control the child's access to the internet. As she clarified:

> When the child set the screen time for three hours and he spent them all, he needed to call his father to ask for a time extension and his father could do it. It wasn't a paid app but a free app so that's how we've been doing it'.

As such, parental control tools on the market enable customisable control by allowing more screen time as compensation or rewards, because it is not practical for families to follow a 'one-size-fits-all' approach when setting up screen time. For instance, a parental control application called 'ZEM' which was mentioned by parents in the interviews allows setting screen time for weekdays differently from that for weekends. It also has a 'gift' icon, which parents can use to allow their children more screen time as a gift.

In addition to controlling screen time, similar to parents in China and the United States, South Korean parents in the interviews explained the

importance of limiting children's experiences online to age-appropriate ones. For instance, there were parents who used parental control tools to limit applications that children could download on their devices. Nuri (mother of a 12-year-old) claimed that

> the kids are at the age that I need to manage what content they are watching. So we downloaded an app for this purpose, and the kids' father continued to manage it… Because their father has managed their devices, children could not access apps for kids ages 12 or up.

Using the parental control tool, Nuri aimed to protect her child's online use by monitoring and controlling which applications she could download on her mobile phone.

Parents expressed their desire and the necessity to know what their children actually do online in detail. In that way, parents claimed that they could control screen time and protect children from getting involved in activities that were not appropriate for their age (e.g., harmful content, sexual risks, spending too much money on computer games). As it was up to parents to find the right balance for appropriate screen time or screen use, parents' confidence in their own digital literacies influenced what kinds of parental control tools they chose and how they used them. As mentioned in the quote above, Nuri left it to her husband, who had been working as a computer engineer, to manage their child's media use (e.g., setting up the parental control app to limit which apps their child could use or download). In this case, it was the father who had the authority to decide how the parental control applications would be used.

Parents from South Korea discussed their efforts to limit and manage their kids' access to digital media. Different parents used parental control applications and tools to different extents. However, it was common that parents tended to internalise the dominant sociotechnical imaginaries of parental controls and consider themselves to be ultimately responsible for safeguarding their children from risks related to digital media. They also felt obligated to prevent their kids from becoming overly reliant on screens and online activities in order to maintain their health. The development of parental control tools reflects parents' desires and demands to tightly regulate their children's screen time. However, some parents also made the point that they were open to negotiating regulations around screen time, because children may acquire digital competency by using digital media.

Contesting dominant imaginaries (during the pandemic)

While many parents in the United States, China, and South Korea were keen to engage with the parental control features and products, they also pointed out the tools' limitations. Those who chose not to use parental controls explained why they deliberately avoided them. In this section, we critically

examine parents' lived experiences of parental controls and focus on the issues of accessibility and efficacy. Parents' responses suggest how they attempted to negotiate and contest the dominant imaginaries around parental controls. Importantly, such discursive rejection was driven by the pandemic contexts which reconfigured these families' screen activities (see also Chapter 2). Faced with the lockdowns' spatial and temporal implications, parents often had to eliminate specific time limits and time blocks that they had used previously to control how much and when their children could access TV and online content via screens. Parental control mechanisms which technologically limited time usage on screens were often turned off or not used, due to the large amount of time children needed access to various screens – for education, occupation, and time-filling, as so many other activities were cancelled.

In China, parents complained about the complexity of understanding or engaging with the teenage mode or any other forms of parental controls. They either did not know how to turn it on in apps, or they did not fully grasp what needed to be done to activate state restrictions on children's screen time. Zihan, for example, found setting up the teenage mode too troublesome and unnecessary, so she did not bother to do this. Instead, she insisted that she and her husband could manually monitor and moderate their child's use of screen media. In contrast, Lunqing and her husband were very glad that China had introduced further restrictions on children's online game time. She believed that 'the state must vigorously develop this [policy and technology]'. However, when asked how she tried to engage with this intervention in daily life, Lunqing was not aware that it was based on the platform's recognition of child users for the restriction to be activated. Instead of helping her child to log in to the games using their own ID, she used her own ID as login details. Lunqing thought that this way, she could help 'filter out' harmful content, but in fact, it only allowed her child unlimited access to the game. The unfamiliarity with parental controls was shared by many other Chinese parents in the study, particularly those who had set up their own time limits for children's screen time as they lacked the time, skills, or motivation to investigate how the mechanisms worked. The lack of digital skills, therefore, barred some parents from meaningfully utilising parental controls to moderate their children's online activities.

Moreover, not all Chinese parents found parental controls effective. Tangli, mother of a seven-year-old, explained that she did not activate the teenage mode for the apps that her child used because 'it's too troublesome'. According to her, because the mode required the users to take a break every 40 minutes, she could not finish what she was doing before she had to attend to her child again. As the time limit is set by the platforms rather than the parents, it may not suit every parent's needs. For other parents like Langjia, the allotted time for her child to use Douyin or play online games under the teenage mode was never enough for her child. As a result, there were always negotiations between her and the child once the screen time was up. Usually,

Langjia would extend the time as long as her child was performing well with school homework. The rigid time limits built in the teenage mode became insufficient in addressing the contextualised needs of parents during the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, this one-size-fits-all approach was not appreciated by all the Chinese parents we interviewed. Zihan, for example, did not regard the teenage mode to be effective:

> I think people are different. …So for the little one, it might be useful. But for the six-grader, he has his own thoughts. Sometimes the games are… like the PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds game – it's collaborative. You can't just finish in an hour when you want it to finish, right? …My son often said, the game has started, we are a team. I can't be the one who drags down the team. So every time he plays that game, I'll let him finish before we eat and do the homework. … Kids now have their own plans. There's no one size that fits all.

While these narratives do not completely reject the need for parental controls as enacted in the Chinese public imaginaries, the vision that technological interventions such as the teenage mode can effectively prevent children from internet addiction and online harms were questioned and challenged in parents' accounts of their everyday experiences. While parents overall expressed worries and concerns about children's media use during the pandemic, they also developed more nuanced understandings of the purposes and content of children's media experiences (see Chapter 3). They questioned the effectiveness of parental controls by highlighting the importance of the context of children's digital experiences, which could not be properly addressed by the one-size-fits-all approach of the teenage mode.

Similarly, in the United States, we identified digital divides related to the understanding and implementation of parental controls. Parents described themselves as 'not savvy enough', sharing their concerns with family members and other parents. One mother, Joanne, noted how she relied on her ex-husband to set parental controls in relation to her daughter wanting to create her own YouTube channel. 'Are you really allowing that? I don't know how to manage it', Joanne said to her daughter's dad. 'So whether he has or he hasn't, I'm not always sure. But he knows how to do all of that, I know for sure. And I just haven't learned it all yet', she added. Deanna, another mother and teacher in New York City, inquired about the use of parental controls on games like Roblox and Fortnite at a Parent Teachers Association (PTA) meeting after noticing her students were spending a great deal of time playing and talking about these games daily. Deanna noted that other parents felt they had no idea how to begin using parental controls: 'They were like, "No. How do you do that?" So, I was telling them the steps to block things on the tablet, because they didn't know how to do it'. While parents shared their concerns at home and amongst other parent friends about their children's

games and devices, many also recognised a lack of tech 'savvy' to fully use the technological tools and affordances of parental controls.

In contrast to China and South Korea, research with US parents revealed an overall lack of multi-generational households. Sociocultural norms which individuate families into separate households without grandparents or other generations of elders and relatives created a situation whereby US parents were often isolated with minimal additional adult support in the home. The pandemic took away much of the routine schooling and childcare needed by parents. Therefore, screens were sometimes utilised as babysitters to fill the gap in care and allow parents a few extra hours to complete their own work days during the pandemic. The presence of children of varying ages within one household also created difficulties in navigating parental controls and household rules surrounding screen time. Siblings of different ages within a single household needed and wanted different types of content. Parents noted how their younger children had sometimes been exposed to content not intended for their age. Michelle, for example, described that a lot of the family rules for the seven- and 11-year-old 'went out the window this year' with the younger daughter having 'skipped Sesame Street. We were already on to Dora'. American parents also struggled with their children subverting systems of parental control and self-regulation. One mother, Joanne, relayed how her daughter looked so similar to her ('my mini-me') that she could use Apple's Face ID to unlock her phone. Once unlocked, the other sisters figured out how to reset her controls and passwords. Other means of circumvention of parent approval methods were also shared. Parents of divorced kids used workarounds between separate household rules and flexibility around screen time. Additionally, parents noted that children used a different home device such as a parent's Amazon Kindle to then pose as a parent and approve their requests for the installation of Meta's Messenger for Kids app.

Beyond children's nimble grasp with technology and their ability to circumvent some parental controls, one of the most prominent issues voiced by parents regarding technology and children was the algorithmic recommendation system on YouTube. While problematic for many families, YouTube was still used in most households in our study, as it was necessary even for school assignments. Parents shared their issues with YouTube's parental controls, algorithmic recommendations, and security settings. Setting limits became too restrictive, because online/virtual schooling often required access. Even parents who set YouTube blocks found those often had to be lifted to allow access to children's educational assignments. Parents wished there were ways to filter language on YouTube, so they could limit the type of content their children were seeing and hearing. With her children returning to in-person school, Delphia optimistically stated she hoped to try to block YouTube again for her daughter. Parents held hope for a temporary allowance of YouTube, with the idea that they would increase restrictions when routines shifted after the pandemic. While digital skills and accessibility were barriers to the use and employment of parental controls for content moderation, US parents

notably noticed issues with the efficacy and design affordances of parental controls, particularly with YouTube.

In South Korea, parents who contested the sociotechnical imaginaries of parental control technology described how they had discovered that relying solely on parental control tools did not ensure that children would have safe and healthy experiences related to digital media. Some parents in the interviews said they did not feel the necessity of using parental control tools, as they could stay close to the child to monitor what he/she watched or used on screen. For instance, Meejung Mom, mother of a ten-year-old daughter, said that as a stay-at-home mom, she could easily monitor her child's media use:

> I am always at home. So my kid uses it while I'm there. She doesn't have her own phone, but we have one Galaxy Tab and use it in my sight. So yeah, we haven't used parental control tools yet.

Similarly, Superman, a father of two sons who were seven- and eight-years-old, said he did not have a plan to use parental control tools to restrict his sons' media use yet, because he deleted all the software icons on the household computer desktop, except for language learning apps. Plus, his wife was on leave of absence for childcare, indicating that at least one parent would be available to manually monitor and manage children's digital activities.

At the same time, Korean parents also discussed how children often found ways to get around the parental control applications. As a result, Vismila changed how she used parental control tools. She still used Google Family Link, but she did not use it to actively block anything. Rather, she tried talking to her children about the information notified to her via Google Family Link, such as their history of online use. In other words, she preferred to use the information gathered by the parental control application as a starting point for conversations with her children about their digital experiences. Additionally, parents such as Cat Mom changed how they counted 'screen time'. There were screen uses that parents encouraged, such as using productivity apps on a tablet PC and producing YouTube content, which could be part of the child's portfolio in the future.

> We used to define all time on devices as screen time. During the pandemic, my husband and I needed to come up with an agreement on how we would define screen time. My husband is very sensitive to screen time, so we talked about whether we should include Zoom class in screen time. Our first kid composes songs with a computer. He composes, writes and produces something. In my opinion, it shouldn't be part of screen time… So, the standard of two hours, the standard of how many hours a day, an absolute number, the time spent on screen is not important, but what you do with it and what it means. That's the difference.

For Cat Mom, it was not a matter of limiting screen time or exposure online, but a matter of providing children with opportunities to get involved in 'productive/good' screen use. However, there were no fixed criteria to discern 'good' or 'productive' screen time from the time that parents felt should be limited. These distinctions are subject to negotiations between parents and children. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, during the pandemic, parents were often frustrated as they felt that they were solely responsible for guiding children's media use. At the same time, they had a chance to learn what children did online and what they wanted from their digital engagements. Parents learned what kinds of screen experiences children enjoyed and what risks they faced. Parental control tools monitor and report data back to parents about their children's use of, and time spent with, applications, as well as who they communicate with, and even which words are included in the conversations. Whether or not these tools helped parents understand children's concerns and needs for support related to digital media or supported parents to start intimate conversations with children about their digital lives depend on parents' own perceptions of and literacies related to digital technology.

Conclusion

Globally, the various parental controls that were used during the COVID-19 pandemic, although not necessarily new, emerged as an imperative element in family media practices. There was a shift in perceptions of parental controls during this time. Parental controls went from a product feature to an essential worker – a critical component and mediator for regulating children's screen time. In this chapter, we critically examined and compared how parental controls were imagined both politically and sociotechnically in the United States, China, and South Korea, and how parents in the three countries responded to such technological interventions during the pandemic. The distinctive sociotechnical histories and environments of the three countries contribute to the construction and legitimisation of the different discourses around the roles and expectations of parents and how they should use parental controls. Parents have been highly responsibilised for their children's online activities and digital experiences. Parental controls, as a recent technological innovation with claimed benefits for parents and children, have been discursively portrayed as the preferred method to fulfil parental obligations in uncertain times.

In our analysis, we also discuss the different ways in which American, Chinese, and South Korean parents understood and responded to such dominant imaginaries. While some parents were compliant with these imaginaries, others challenged them by reflecting on issues of accessibility and questioning the efficacy of parental controls. How parents engaged with parental controls was largely influenced by their perceived confidence and knowledge in making use of the technology, their impression of its efficacy,

and their understanding of what it means for children to live in a digital society. Notably, the various contexts associated with the pandemic significantly reconfigured how parents understood what parental controls could do and what they, as parents, should do with the technology. In their lived experiences of parental control software, they constantly recalibrated its meanings and affordances in relation to their pandemic needs and conditions, as parents. In the concluding chapter of this book, we focus on the importance of documenting and understanding families' lived experiences of media during the pandemic, and we highlight the strength of the theoretical lenses we have developed and employed. As analysed in the current chapter, viewing everyday phenomena (e.g., families' digital media use) through the lens of parental imaginaries helps elucidate the networks of relations that inform and shape family media practices connected with regulation and parental controls. Chapter 7 brings together the various lenses and provides provocations for future work in the field.

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7 Conclusion

Contributions, provocations, and calls to action

Rebekah Willett, Xinyu Zhao, and Diana Carolina García Gómez

The international research project upon which this book is based began in 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic with a central question to investigate: Given that children's lives are even more digital by default with education, entertainment, and socialising moving online, how are parents shifting their ideas about children's media use? While this question remained a major area of interest for our research, the project evolved as the research team came together from varied national and cultural contexts, from a diversity of disciplines, and with different personal experiences during the pandemic. This led to a book that is about global family media practices during the pandemic but also about far more. As we collected and analysed our data, we met biweekly on Zoom to discuss emerging ideas. Online project meetings provided a generative space for the research team to share and conceptualise preliminary findings and to locate common themes across the data sets. While the project involved researching families in seven countries, the representation of research data and findings in the book does not always follow a comparative approach. In each chapter, we intentionally paired researchers who collected data from countries with potentially interesting contrasts in terms of cultural or political contexts. This allowed the research team to consider the contextualised nature of family media practices and experiences during the pandemic. We developed and employed a wide range of theoretical and analytical frameworks to understand and explain differences in families' experiences. On the one hand, we resist making homogenised and universalist arguments or creating reductionist summaries of data sets from each country, because we know that family experiences are complex and unique. On the other hand, we want to offer innovative ways to make sense of family media practices from different perspectives. This book thus brings theoretical framings from multiple disciplinary fields to help elucidate the specificity of family contexts and to construct and test the different explanatory frameworks. In this concluding chapter, we discuss the key empirical and theoretical contributions of the book. The chapter concludes with provocations in relation to emerging research agendas as well as real-life actions to support families, parents, and children in uncertain times of the digital age.

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Findings and contributions

Overall, this book explores various aspects of family media practices during the pandemic and how they are influenced by contextual factors such as the pandemic restrictions, family relationships and situations, socioeconomic statuses, cultural norms and values, and sociotechnical visions, among many others. While researching parents' and caregivers' experiences, this study analyses their accounts to understand the complicated roles of digital media in broader family dynamics and in relation to children and childhoods. To do this, this book develops theoretical frameworks to see beyond parental perspectives and to move across different sets of data in order to develop holistic understandings of family media practices. Chapters 2 and 3 collectively and connectively explore changing family media practices and perceptions of screen media. Employing a relational lens, which is foundational to the other chapters, Chapter 2 attends to the networks of relations in which parents are embedded, including individuals, material objects, discourses, time, space, and broader socio-political contexts. It argues that it is these relations, rather than parents themselves, that have reconfigured what families did with screen media, both spatially and temporally. The temporalities of the pandemic are further explored in Chapter 3. This chapter examines how families' varied perceptions and experiences of time during the pandemic shaped changes in their understandings of screen media. By constructing a multi-layered temporal framework, the authors of this chapter shift discussions beyond a focus on 'screen time' to explore different parental understandings of children's screen media use as informed by multiple experiences of time during the pandemic.

Chapter 4 focuses on the confluence of neoliberal discourses which dictated parental responsibilities surrounding remote schooling by employing a framework the authors call the 'terrains of parental responsibilisation'. This framework reveals the many ways in which families navigated areas which were already deeply shaped by neoliberal understandings and discursive structuring of what parenting should look like. It allows the authors to take account of contextual factors (government responses to the pandemic, different types of education systems, varying family structures) while recognising more global pressures that contributed to parents' attitudes towards remote schooling and decisions made about children's education. Chapter 5 turns to parental views of children's digital creativities and explores the extent that adult formulations of 'the creative child' are propelled by hopes, fears, and anxieties attached to wider notions of 'adequate' and 'inadequate' use of digitally mediated technologies. The chapter employs a conceptual approach of 'affective affinities' which encompasses three analytic apparatuses: dissonance, confluence, and distinction. The analysis illustrates that parents were more likely to recognise children's use of digital media as creative when it aligned with normative ideas of an 'adequate' childhood that correspond with progressive discourses (or rhetorics) of innocence, creativity, and innovation. As a concept that

is imbued with the morality of adults, 'digital creativity' exposes a range of affects and emotions that reveal much about the power dynamics of not only families but also the broader community. In Chapter 6, the authors discuss parents' experiences of parental controls during the pandemic, by focusing on how this technological innovation has been imagined and discursively constructed in three different national policy contexts, and how these dominant imaginaries were internalised and negotiated by the parents. The authors employ the concept of sociotechnical imaginaries to explain how and why parents used parental controls and to understand ways imaginaries were shaped by different actors. These imaginaries, while not always in alignment with each other, collectively shaped parents' lived experiences of parental controls in managing children's everyday digital practices during the pandemic. A lens that includes sociotechnical imaginaries helps identify dominant discourses and ways they are experienced and enacted in homes, including ways that parents can reshape those imaginaries.

Analyses in the book chapters were informed by several (inter-)disciplinary perspectives that address digital parenting, family media practices, and understanding of childhoods. Employing different theoretical and analytical frameworks to analyse and explain an international dataset highlights the necessity and challenge of interpreting the various aspects of family life in the digital age as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon. Predominantly, the phenomenon has been approached elsewhere through the conceptual lens of 'parental mediation', which considers the different factors that shape parental decisions and practices about managing children's use of screen media. While this remains important in this book, the chapters have looked beyond what parents have done in relation to their *children's media practices* to include investigations of what they have done *as parents*. That is, digital parenting involves more than parental regulation and mediation of children's screen activities; it also includes a wide array of parenting practices and cultures induced by digital technologies that constitute contemporary parenthood. Therefore, a key theoretical contribution of the book is to provide multiple lenses of understanding the digital everyday for children and families within and beyond the family contexts. Broadly, the theoretical frameworks developed in the book draw from a relational approach (see Chapter 2) to recognise the agency of various stakeholders in mediating family media practices, including state policies, educational and cultural institutions, social discourses, media companies, and technological initiatives. What underpins all the chapters in this book is the rejection of seeing parents and families as insulated from these 'external' forces; rather, we pay particular attention to subtle interactions among these multiple actors. Essentially, it is impossible to holistically capture the meanings and implications of family media practices without deliberately engaging with different conceptual approaches and perspectives.

The three theoretical lenses developed and operationalised across the chapters in this book provide innovative ways to understand what it means

for children, parents, and families to live in the digital age. The first lens employs *media practice* and *relational* approaches to challenge a single focus on parents as the only mediator of children's media experiences and to call attention to the diverse actors that influence contemporary digital childhoods. It emphasises the central role of media and media practices in articulating different aspects of everyday life. In a way, this lens resonates with the calls for 'non-media-centric' media studies (Krajina et al., 2014; Morley, 2009) to fully consider not only practices with media but also practices, contexts, and relationships *around* media. This lens opens up new research questions for digital parenting studies to explore; for example, what a 'digital ambience' means for constructing contemporary parenthood and expertise of parenting, and how emerging digital technologies have contributed to the rise of new forms of child-rearing. The second lens, *temporalities*, reveals the complex relationships between time and family media practices. It first questions the simplistic measure of 'screen time' which dominates public and media discourses about children's media experiences. It also highlights how families' temporal experiences define and are defined by their everyday media practices and routines. Acknowledging the future-oriented connotation of concepts like 'children' and 'childhood', this lens critiques the developmental approach towards studying children, by underscoring the constructed nature of societal and parental expectations of children's imagined future. This imagined future is heavily narrated around the necessity and risks of media technologies. The temporal lens allows for the investigation of family media and digital parenting practices as embedded in a new post-pandemic time regime, structured by various conditions, discourses, and norms of time. The third lens considers the role of the different levels of *'imaginaries'* in shaping family media practices. It deliberately expands the analytical focus beyond the domestic sphere to explore the role of a wide array of actors. Moreover, this lens asks questions about the power relations between these actors, and to what extent children, parents, and families can negotiate these imaginaries. This lens encourages questions about the power asymmetries and inequalities between the state, companies, institutions, and families in different national and cultural contexts and explores where and how the different types of imaginaries converge in everyday life.

In terms of empirical contributions, throughout the book we propose and support the argument that children's lives are increasingly digital by default, at least for the seven countries represented in this book. This means that children now have access to digital media in ways not previously experienced. As media entertainment companies expand their offerings to children across the globe, some commentators argue that this is leading to the erasure of diverse childhoods and to an essentialised 'digital child' devoid of ethnicity, sex, gender, age, able-bodiedness or socioeconomic status. If everyone is accessing the same cultural products, the argument goes, then childhoods will be increasingly homogenous. In this book we argue that there is no standard family media experience across the globe or

within countries (c.f., Modecki et al., 2022). Each family has its own context, values, and practices. However, theories we develop in each analysis chapter can be applied to global contexts. So, although this book is a global project about family media practices in the pandemic, we are not focusing on the effects of the pandemic or global aspects of families' experiences. Rather, we use the situation of the pandemic to show ways that contextual factors are key to understanding family media practices; and further, we demonstrate ways in which theories can help us take account of contexts while also creating meaningful analyses that apply to a broad range of contexts.

We highlight constructs that parents are positioned by and that parents are positioning themselves through; and, given little choice over work, school, and domestic routines during the pandemic, we locate moments when parents rejected particular constructs. The book includes illustrations of some parents reinterpreting 'good parenting' during the pandemic, particularly in relation to children's use of digital media and also in related areas such as remote schooling. Here, we saw powerful neoliberal discourses about parental responsibilisation being questioned during the drastic circumstances of the pandemic. Parents demonstrated their understanding that 'good parenting' can mean giving children more screen time so they can play with friends, have time away from the rest of the family, or give themselves a mental health break. 'Good parenting' can mean paying attention to family and children's needs, which may not always align with expectations from schools.

The book also helps consider what it meant to be a child during the pandemic. Children in the pandemic experienced different childhoods across the globe, depending on a range of factors, and childhoods looked different in the pandemic than in any other point in history. Of course, all parents expressed desire for their children to be successful in adulthood, however, they drew on different discourses in relation to their understanding of childhood and what this understanding meant for their children's future, confined by contextual boundaries. While some parents drew primarily on developmental discourse to understand the needs of their children in the pandemic and their concerns about their children's future, other parents were more concerned with children's social and emotional states of being. These positions reflect views long recognised by childhood studies scholars, of children as 'becoming' versus children as 'being' (Uprichard, 2008). We also found different approaches to children's rights, with some parents reflecting more deficit views and others attributing more agency to children. These different positions affected how parents understood their children's interactions with media and their role in mediating and regulating their children's media engagements. Importantly, these views of childhood affected parents' understanding and decisions about a variety of media practices in the pandemic, including media connected with schooling and learning, entertainment, and socialising.

Provocations and calls to actions

Drawing on our theoretical frameworks and empirical contributions, we conclude the book with three calls to action. The pandemic forced many parents with children to rethink various aspects of their life in the moment of the global crisis: the effect of telecommuting on family life, the role of cultural institutions (shuttered in the pandemic) in children's experiences of growing up, the importance of socialising with friends and family, and of course, family media practices. As we write the conclusion to this book in late 2023, in some ways it feels as if, as a society, we want to forget or ignore our experiences of the pandemic and the continued repercussions. Parents are desperate to move to a post-pandemic time when they can raise children the way they imagined before the pandemic. Yet, there is value in the process of rethinking and reflecting on our experiences of the pandemic. If we do not pause to reflect on the rethinking that occurred by necessity in the pandemic, then we lose a valuable opportunity to take onboard lessons that emerged from our experiences of extreme circumstances. We hope this book has captured some of these moments when families had to rethink their family life. To conclude, we share some reflections on what these moments might provide in terms of real actions we can take as researchers, parents, and stakeholders, to understand and support family's media lives.

First, let us help parents *observe* rather than *surveil* their children's digital activities. With lockdowns, many parents had little choice but to observe their children's digital media use, and this informed their rethinking of family media practices. Away from the home, many parents spend significant amounts of time sitting on bleachers watching their children play organised sports. But how often do parents allow themselves the time to observe children at home, watching their digital play? This is not meant to ask parents to fit another thing into their busy family schedules ('sit and observe your child online for 30 minutes per day'), rather this involves a shift in thinking about the role of parents in regulating children's media. At the moment, parents are told that they need to know what their children are doing online and to be in the same room as children to enable this type of observation to happen. However, these observations are framed as regulation and surveillance rather than learning about children's activities. Importantly, 'surveillance' frames children, parents, and screen media in particularly negative ways. Parents are positioned as the screen media police looking for illicit activity and harmful content; the internet is full of risk and potential harm; and children will do illicit and risky things if not carefully watched. Parents then feel guilty that they are not surveilling enough. These ideas are reinforced by dominant discourses about children and media, and they release corporations from taking responsibility. In the US, paediatricians routinely ask parents how much screen time their children have and where the screens are located in the home. What if we asked parents about their observations of their children: what are the different purposes for your children's digital media use?

What excites you about what your child is doing with digital media? When using digital media, when are your children the experts? This would give professionals ways of reshaping the discourse – highlighting beneficial aspects of children's media use and encouraging parents to be on the lookout for creative moments, as described in Chapter 5, as well as providing an opening to a conversation about concerns.

Second, we need to encourage stakeholders to *understand* and *value parents' and children's experiences*, rather than providing quick measures and solutions. Pandemic conditions gave parents permission to resist pervasive screen time recommendations (for example, two hours of screen time per day). For some parents, this meant prioritising their children's experiences and family circumstances over powerful neoliberal discourses of responsibilisation. When stakeholders start discussions with parents by providing screen time recommendations, this can shut down the conversation. As we found across the interviews for our book, parents are intensely aware of purported risks of children having too much screen time. However, quick measures do not take account of parents' varying situations, nor do they encourage parents to consider more nuanced views and experiences of digital media. Further, a focus on screen time means that we do not consider children's experiences of screen media. In some ways, it is unsurprising that parents were concerned about screen time, not only because of the pervasive and powerful discourses. Parents want what's best for their children, and we found parents feeling a need to justify children's activities during the day: playing with friends online is socialising, using an app is educational, designing PowerPoint presentations is creative and skilful. Importantly, many of these justifications reflect a view of children as 'becomings', focusing on children's development, their deficits, and of course, their futures (Uprichard, 2008). We can also encourage parents and stakeholders to view children as 'beings' who have agency and are constructing their childhood in the moment. This shifts the focus from children's development to children's experiences and voices. Rather than having to justify screen time from a developmental perspective, we can consider how children are experiencing different types of, and purposes for, digital media.

Finally, we need to consider how to support *children's rights* in these discussions. This point is related to the first two: observing children's digital activities might help us understand children's experiences and perspectives and place more value on children's voices. Moving away from an adultist viewpoint that focuses on children's deficits and their futures might help us focus more on children's present. Pandemic-related concerns about children centre almost entirely on long-term harms: learning loss, decline in mental health, stunted development of social skills. While we are not dismissing these very real issues, we want to think about what happens if we ask children about their concerns post-pandemic. We know, for example, that for some children remote learning was a relief from the constant adult surveillance and social drama of in-person school life; and post-pandemic, some

schools have shifted to provide more hybrid modes of learning, in order to honour these children's voices, feelings, and ideas (Ladson-Billings, 2021). One call to action resulting from the pandemic is for stakeholders to find more ways to elicit, listen to, and act on children's voices.

Another provocation related to children's rights is about children and space. In many of our interviews, parents shared a feeling of pre-pandemic nostalgia as they expressed concerns and frustration related to increases in children's media use and children's occupation of digital spaces. This digital presence was made possible by the impossibility for children to be in spaces like schools, parks, public libraries, children's museums, or other spaces for children. However, due to the 'stranger danger' myth, which posits that children are no longer safe in public spaces (Renfro, 2020) or in schools, very few spaces in 'the real world' are believed to be safe. This societal fear has been extrapolated to the digital space, which is increasingly perceived as detrimental, regardless of age. So, we ask, where can children be children? Historically, children were 'to be seen and not heard', and now they are to be hidden and not even seen; so we ask, where do children belong? Moreover, and equally important, to which childhoods do these questions apply? These questions are an invitation for future research that takes seriously children's rights in terms of their right to voice, agency, and existence in the 'real' and the 'digital' world. Rather than taking an adultist view of screen time, assuming we know the experiences of children, if we incorporate a children's rights perspective, we will be in a better position to understand different purposes for children's media use, address concerns that are more relevant to children's everyday digital media lives, and support more intentional decision-making about family media practices.

Near the end of each interview, we asked parents how they imagined their future family media practices: whether they would revert back to pre-pandemic rules and ways of measuring screen time, or would they be more flexible. This was a challenging question for many parents – their children were now up to two years older, so they were also trying to decide what was 'developmentally appropriate' for their children. Parents recognised that their children's worlds were even more digital by default than before the pandemic, both because they were two years older, and because the increasing digitisation of everyday life had also progressed. While some parents' responses seemed to reflect their exhaustion, trauma, and hankering to go back to 'the before times' when they felt more in control over their family schedules and their children's interactions with screens, they also acknowledged the reality in which things had changed and moved on. In some ways, parents did regain control as schools and workplaces reopened and extracurriculars and family outings resumed. But of course, in a sense, there is no going back. In worlds that are digital by default, screen media are not turned off and on for a specified number of minutes per day; multiple screens are turned on all the time and used for a variety of purposes, as tools and resources in homes. There are multiple experiences of 'screen time'; some are measurable (e.g.,

30 minute episodes of shows for entertainment), some are more subjective (e.g., conversations with friends and relatives in which time seems to fly by), and some are continuous (e.g., phones that are always on). It is hopeful that parents made these distinctions and reflected understandings of children's media experiences that challenge simple notions of measuring 'screen time' in minutes. Although digital parenting will never be easy, in a post-pandemic digital world, we hope that parents are able to continue to recognise complexities and subtleties of children's engagements with media, and that these recognitions will alleviate some of the anxieties associated with children engaging in 'too much screen time'. Further, with these shifts, we hope that other stakeholders, including researchers and policymakers, will be able to focus on issues such as privacy and children's rights in digital spaces. As we move away from discussions about how much screen time is 'appropriate' for children, we can start addressing these more urgent questions.

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Appendix 1
Summaries of COVID-19 timelines

Australia

In late January 2020, Queensland became the first Australian state or territory to declare COVID-19 a public health emergency following the first confirmed cases in the country. The federal government delayed a national declaration until 18 March 2020. The declaration was shortly followed by closure of all Australian borders to any non-residents and restrictions on large gatherings (Philips et al., 2022). As health policies typically fall under the responsibility of state and territory governments, other emergency responses such as school and work closures, stay-at-home requirements, and masking were ultimately decided on a more local level resulting in policies that were responsive to city, state, and territory outbreaks (Philips et al., 2022). While agreement in policies was seen at the beginning of the pandemic, states and territories rapidly diverged in their COVID-19 related policies as the pandemic continued to be experienced very differently in different parts of Australia (Philips et al., 2022). Throughout the first two years of the pandemic, 'snap lockdowns' were implemented across Australia to curb the spread of the virus, particularly during outbreaks in the main cities of New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland; while 'lockouts' which completely prohibited entry to certain communities and kept unvaccinated individuals quarantine at home occurred in the Northern Territory (Philips et al., 2022). Vaccination efforts began in February 2021 throughout Australia, being limited initially to those who were at high risk due to their employment (Philips et al., 2022). As of 6 July 2022 over 95% of eligible Australians had received at least two doses of a vaccine (Australian Government, 2022).

Among the Australian states and territories, Victoria was noted as having the most restrictive policies throughout the pandemic, notably having twice as many school closures than others (Philips et al., 2022). At the end of March 2020, the Victorian government implemented their most stringent policies, with individuals allowed to leave their homes only for food, medical care, COVID-19 testing, exercise, essential work and education; with social contact limited to only two individuals (Storen & Corrigan, 2020). Restrictions began to be lifted in May, with more localised lockdown restrictions

occurring later in June (Philips et al., 2022). A 'ring of steel' was placed around the perimeter of metropolitan Melbourne for four months, preventing residents from leaving the city and potentially spreading the virus to regional Victoria. The 'ring of steel' was lifted in November 2020. Despite a degree of measures continuing throughout the summer (e.g., November 2020 – March 2021), further outbreaks coupled with limited access to vaccinations led to a 'State of Disaster' being declared by the Victorian state government on 2 August 2021. Restrictions again tightened and a 5km travel limit, a curfew, and a limit of one hour of exercise outside was re-instigated (Philips et al., 2022). Additional easing and tightening of restrictions in Victoria continued in response to localised outbreaks throughout 2021. Once vaccination targets were met, almost all restrictions were loosened at the end of October 2021 (Philips et al., 2022), but not before Melbourne made news headlines for passing Buenos Aires' record as the most locked-down city in the world.

Despite some subsidisation and funding for children's remote learning resources including devices and home internet, the digital divide in Australia was exasperated by the pandemic (Heffernan et al., 2021), with some scholars projecting negative academic outcomes as a direct result of school closures, particularly for students who are disadvantaged. While a report from the Royal Children's Hospital in 2020 highlighted that many Australian families felt the initial stay-at-home orders brought them closer together, parental mental health was negatively affected by COVID-19 in almost half of the survey respondents (Royal Children's Hospital National Child Health Poll, 2020). Families with young children were often hard hit by job loss and/or financial hardship during the pandemic, especially those that were mothers and already experiencing some sort of disadvantage prior to COVID-19 (O'Connor et al., 2022). Victorian families, especially those living in the Melbourne metropolitan area who experienced extended school closures and/or limited access to childcare for preschool aged children were arguably some of the most impacted by the emergency pandemic response. Meanwhile, the Western Australian state government's tough border rules and quarantine requirements stopped local outbreaks and allowed day-to-day life to continue without the lockdowns and restrictions experienced by those located on the more heavily populated east coast of Australia.

Canada

Reflecting the decentralised federal government of Canada, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were varied across the 13 provinces and territories of the country (Cameron-Blake et al., 2021). While the federal government focused on broad economic, healthcare, vaccination, and international travel factors; provinces, territories, municipalities, and health units were responsible for making local policy choices regarding factors such as stay-at-home requirements, school closures, masking, and gathering restrictions

(Cameron-Blake et al., 2021). Notably, the federal government did not expand their control during the pandemic by declaring a national state of emergency as other countries did (Allin et al., 2022). Critics argued this prevented better and more consistent implementation of testing, tracing, and treating COVID-19 especially early on in the pandemic (Allin et al., 2022).

While the first case of COVID-19 in Canada was reported in late January 2020 (Cameron-Blake et al., 2021), screening for COVID-19 was not implemented until late February 2020 (Canadian Public Health Association, 2021). 18 March 2020 saw the closure of Canadian borders to international travel (Canadian Public Health Association, 2021), being among the first countries worldwide to close borders (Allin et al., 2022). Shortly afterwards, provinces began declaring public health emergencies and implementing restrictions (Cameron-Blake et al., 2021). During the first major wave, Ontario and Quebec – some of the most populated provinces – saw higher rates of COVID-19 compared to other regions (Cameron-Blake et al., 2021) and implemented some provincial-border closures throughout rises in cases. Long-term care facilities were especially hard hit across Canada, requiring the need for the Canadian Armed Forces to assist with staffing in both Ontario and Quebec during the spring of 2020 (Allin et al., 2022). On 14 March 2020 Ontario closed all public schools, with reopening not occurring until September of that year after large-scale provincial funding investments in additional PPE and cleaning measures (Cameron-Blake et al., 2021).

While cases declined over the summer and multiple provincial and regional restrictions were relaxed, mid-September saw a large-scale second wave of COVID-19 cases throughout the country, particularly in Ontario (Cameron-Blake et al., 2021). Increases in cases throughout the fall in Ontario triggered additional tightening of gathering restrictions in the province, with stay-at-home orders and school closures in December 2020 lasting until late January 2021 (Cameron-Blake et al., 2021). Vaccinations began in December 2020, with 80% of eligible people fully vaccinated by September 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022) despite various delays and problems in administration coordination among governmental agencies (Cameron-Blake et al., 2021). As of 17 June 2022, 85.646% of eligible Canadians had received at least one vaccination dose, and 49.027% had received a third vaccination dose (COVID19Tracker.ca, 2022).

While Canada was able to avoid the large-scale job resignations seen in the United States and recouped employment to pre-pandemic numbers by September 2021, over three million people lost employment during March and April 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2022). Mothers of young children, particularly those with less education, experienced greater decline in employment during the pandemic than fathers or those with no or older children in the early part of the pandemic, likely due to closures of childcare facilities and concerns of child safety (Qian & Fuller, 2020). To support citizens

experiencing financial hardships during COVID-19, the federal government introduced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) in late March 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2022), giving each qualifying individual up to $2,000 a month until September 2020 (Cameron-Blake et al., 2021). Additional temporary federal funding for families with children under six was made available in May 2021 through the Canada Child Benefit (Government of Canada, 2021).

A variety of other health and wellness factors were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. A report from March 2022 noted that mental health has declined since the start of the pandemic in 2020, with women suffering at slightly higher rates than men (Statistics Canada, 2022). Poorer mental health was noted among teens and young adults who lost access to many socialisation activities and life milestones (Canadian Public Health Association, 2021). Additionally, police-reported hate crimes that targeted Black, Asian, or Indigenous peoples increased by 37% in 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2022). Women and people of colour were the hardest hit demographic groups by both COVID-19 and related economic factors (Allin et al., 2022). Indeed, Peel, Ontario's most ethnically diverse region, had the greatest portion of the province's cases during the second wave of cases in fall 2020 necessitating the opening and operation of multiple federally-funded quarantine hotels (Allin et al., 2022).

China

Considered the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak, the first cases worldwide were reported in December 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan (Zhang et al., 2021). Although initial reports of COVID-19 in China were criticised internationally as being minimised and covered up by the Chinese government (Buckley, 2020), the outbreak in Wuhan sparked almost immediate closure of public transportation and movement to and from the city by the local government and inspired multiple other countries worldwide to start preparing for future spread (Qin & Wang, 2020). The first death from COVID-19 was confirmed by the Chinese government in mid-January 2020 (Qin & Hernandez, 2020). Referred to as a dynamic clearance approach, or commonly nicknamed as the 'zero COVID' approach, China's prevention and management of COVID-19 through social transmission was heralded as being very strict internationally (Zha et al., 2022). This approach aimed to completely prevent all community transmissions of COVID-19 and often resulted in extreme limits on even inter-provincial travel for many Chinese citizens (Zha et al., 2022). Throughout the pandemic, mask wearing in some fashion was maintained throughout China regardless of transmission rate in a specified province (Zha et al., 2022), although extremely strict regulations of mask wearing in public was limited to the beginning of the pandemic and specific locations experiencing outbreaks (Zhang et al., 2021). By the

beginning of January 2022, China reported having vaccinated at least 85% of people, with vaccinations occurring in waves for targeted higher-risk individuals and professions first (Zha et al., 2022).

Although China is known for its highly centralised and authoritative form of governance, throughout the pandemic, responses and restrictions tended to be made and implemented at a provincial level or, in some cases, even more locally (Zha et al., 2022). The national government did order short closures of industry, including childcare, in early 2020 and issued a comprehensive national guide for more regional protocols, but provinces were primarily responsible for deciding the degree of COVID-19 restrictions (Zhang et al., 2021) and for developing regularised strategies for epidemic prevention and control. Despite this freedom, many provinces followed each other's leads and a higher agreement among restrictions between provinces was found at the beginning of the pandemic, with divergence occurring towards the latter part of 2020 and throughout 2021 (Zhang et al., 2021). Outbreaks which occurred throughout 2021 typically resulted in tighter provincial restrictions (Zha et al., 2022), with some provinces preemptively introducing stricter restrictions in advance of Chinese New Year and other celebrations. This is believed to have lowered the number of cases in China during these typically high travel times (Zha et al., 2022).

To cope with economic impacts from closures and travel restrictions during the peak of the pandemic, China was able to offer high levels of economic support to its citizens during 2020 and the early part of 2021; but, reflecting the country's recovering economy and employment numbers, it did not extend many of these efforts past initial deadlines (Zhang et al., 2021). Throughout the pandemic, many Chinese schools shifted to online formats during peak outbreak periods, changing family routines, particularly for those that were subjected to isolation measures (Yue et al., 2020).

In Nanjing, capital city of Jiangsu Province, where the research participants in China were recruited, there had been three rounds of COVID-related restrictions before and during the data collection. The first one took place not long after the initial Wuhan outbreak when schools were closed and residential communities were under 'closed management' across the municipality. This included a number of control measures including that people within an enclosed residential community were required to wear face masks and take their temperature before being allowed to enter the community. In July 2021, positive COVID-19 cases were reported in Nanjing airport and soon spread to over ten Chinese provinces. Areas around the airport were under strict lockdown and control, whereas confined public venues including cinemas and pubs were closed in all areas of Nanjing. As the outbreak took place during China's summer school holiday, schools were not particularly impacted except for a few days' delay of the start of the fall semester. The latest outbreak and restriction happened towards the end of the data collection in March 2022, when schools in Nanjing were closed again and remote teaching was adopted for most schools.

Colombia

In November 2019, Colombia was facing high socio-political instability due to a series of national civilian protests. Known as *Paro Nacional*, people were daily taking the streets to initially oppose the tax reform presented by President Ivan Duque, but the protests rapidly morphed into a public display of discontent due to severe economic, educational, and social inequalities. The government's retrieval of the proposal, however, did not yield the expected results. The protests continued, and the friction between the mayors of the main cities, where most of the unrest took place, and the central government heightened. It was in the midst of this context when the pandemic 'arrived' in Colombia in March 2020. The first national COVID-19 case was diagnosed in Bogotá on March 6th, by a woman arriving from Milan, Italy. This prompted the mayor of Bogotá, Dr. Claudia Lopez, to impose a lockdown of the city, and promptly on March 23rd, a presidential decree for 'mandatory preventive isolation' and the 'total limitation of the movement of people and vehicles' at the national level was issued by President Duque (Liendo, 2020). Unlike other countries in the region like Brazil, Mexico or Nicaragua, where a negationist approach to the pandemic was adopted (Dyer and Torres, 2022), Colombia rapidly entered into a total lockdown from 23 March until the 31 July, 2020. Once the lockdown was over, the Colombian government relied on two strategies to confront the pandemic: national quarantines and social distancing. The national strategy for social distancing was *pico y cédula*[1] which allowed citizens to engage in formal and/or economic activities, when the last number of their citizenship ID was the opposite of the date (odd numbers could access banks, supermarkets, or public transportation when the date was an even number, and so forth). Once the four months of lockdown were over, the central government issued a series of decrees that 'brought increasing flexibility to these isolation measures in an attempt to gradually reopen economic activity by sector from the end of April onwards' (Liendo, 2020, p. 36). The two sectors that reopened on 27 April were construction and manufacturing. However, this flexibility was not enough to prevent severe economic losses and mitigate the public health crisis.

By June 2020, testing for the virus was not growing as fast as the spread of the virus, contact tracing went down, and the number of available ICU beds reached record occupancy levels. Given this context, local governments introduced stricter confinement measures, the implementation of which was difficult due to the scarcity of resources and the fatigue of people in different regions. According to Chaves Castro (2021), the pandemic resulted in an increase of unemployment, with the months of April and May of 2020 presenting rates of 19.8% and 21.4%, respectively. Additionally, the effects of COVID-19 on the labour market were more severe for women where the number of employed women fell by 22.1% in May, compared to the same month of the previous year, in contrast to a fall of 14.9% for men (ibid,

p. 155). The confinement, paired with the increase of unemployment faced by women, must also take into account the fact that after three weeks of quarantine, the Colombian Women's Observatory reported an increase of 142% in domestic violence service calls (Ortega Pacheco and Martínez Rudas, 2021).

Furthermore, *pico y cédula* did not apply to children and the elderly, the latter being categorised as high risk and the former as vectors of transmission. Therefore, these two sectors of the population were prevented from leaving the lockdown for the entirety of the time. During the lockdown and throughout 2020, schooling at all levels was to be virtual, and it was not until June 2020 when children (and the elderly) were allowed to go outside for one hour a day. By the end of the year, around November 2020, the Ministry of Education allowed all educational institutions to implement a gradual return to schools via the *alternating education model* (sistema de alternancia). Under this model, the classrooms were divided between children who attended class face-to-face, and others who remained virtually. In addition, schools were to follow strict biosafety protocols such as masking at all times, no food consumption, and social distancing. This model prevailed during 2021 and was lifted at the start of 2022 when the Ministry of Education allowed for the total opening of schools and universities. It is fair to say that children faced the harshest and more strict restrictions in the country. CEPAL determined that these strict restrictions impacted children's social and developmental wellbeing and their mental health, because during the periods of time children were away from their peers and one or both of their main carers, and also because of the increase of food insecurity due to the decrease of daily meals in many households (Marinho and Castillo, 2022). For children in rural areas, the precarious connective network and the broad digital divide meant that either some municipalities disregarded the Ministry of Education and continued with face-to-face schooling, or children dropped out of school altogether. According to UNICEF, the closing of schools paired with mandatory confinements exacerbated learning gaps and income losses, affecting millions of households and creating conditions for increased recruitment of children and adolescents by illegal armed groups and criminal organisations (Rodríguez Uribe et al., 2021). A crucial finding of this same study was that the pandemic and the restrictions on children affected the historical involvement of minors in illegal activities. While recruitment used to take place predominantly in rural areas, since the start of the pandemic there has been an increase of children's involvement in delinquent activities in urban areas, possibly due to the loss of income and the closure of schools (Rodríguez Uribe et al., 2021).

The latter exemplifies the dynamic of the spread of the virus in Colombia which mainly took place in the country's main cities, that of Barranquilla, Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín (also the cities included in the present study). In regard to Barranquilla, according to Velásquez and Molinares (2020), this city rapidly became, during the first quarter of the coronavirus pandemic, the city with the highest number of deaths in Colombia. The rapid

increase of the crisis led Barranquilla's mayor, Jaime Pumarejo, to coordinate local efforts in conjunction with Atlantico's Governor Elsa Noguera, President Ivan Duque, and all Barranquilleros. As it was presented on the website of the Barranquilla's Mayor's Office (Alcaldía de Barranquilla, 2020–2021), there were many decrees and resolutions that Pumarejo established to maintain good behaviour and control in the city from 13 March 2020 to 5 May 2021. Some of those safety measures were *pico y cédula,* the prohibition of all nightlife and the sale of alcoholic beverages and curfews. Once the national government allowed for the reopening of the construction and manufacturing sectors, the expansion of the capacity of the health services as well as the compliance of the biosecurity measures by citizenship proved to be insufficient, resulting in an increase of the fatalities due to the virus. These measures taken in Barranquilla were also established in the majority of the country including Bogotá during this sanitary emergency to help prevent the spread of the virus in the territory.

In the case of Bogotá, mayor Claudia Lopez decided to carry out a lockdown pilot called 'Simulacro Vital', during the second week of March 2020, once the first cases were detected and prior to the national lockdown. The anticipated lockdown was implemented in order to help slow down the spread of the COVID-19 in Bogotá and was more strict since the city was already facing a moderate risk level of contagion. This yellow alert involved three major strategies to slow down the spread of COVID-19 which were individual self-care, collective self-care, and medical care.

Cali, capital of the department Valle del Cauca, continued to suffer from the peaks registered in the country. *El País,* a Colombian news outlet, reported that cases of COVID-19 continued to multiply in Cali and in El Valle particularly. However, as the secretary of health from the department Valle del Cauca, María Cristina Lesmes said, it was nothing compared to what happened in the other four peaks recorded before, but Caleños needed to stay safe and keep following all the measures taken by the city. Among the measures taken by the government in this part of the country were the reduction of massive gatherings, the prohibition of gatherings that involve old people, and the *pico y cédula*. It should be noted that Cali was one of the two epicentres for the 'the Paro Nacional' protests alongside Bogotá which occurred in 2020. The massive gatherings, confrontations between protesters and state and paramilitary forces, roadblocks that created a food crisis and shortages in supermarkets, in addition to the warm weather, were all plausible causes for the spread of the virus.

Medellín, on the other hand, showed to be a great example during the pandemic, helping out other departments such as Chocó (one of the poorest Departments in Colombia) as it was stated by the Ministry of Health website (Ministry of Health, Colombia, 2020). In this city, the mayor's office headed by Daniel Quintero, created the *Medellín me cuida* initiative (Medellín takes care of me) in which, through an online portal, families were able to register information on comorbidities (pre-existing conditions), possible COVID-19

symptoms, and food assistance needs. The local government stated that once the pandemic had been neutralised, all data were to be deleted, but there were several complaints that the government had failed to do so (El Colombiano, 2022). Most of the reports used for this research classified Medellín as the city with the highest rates of compliance during the lockdown. Furthermore, the city recorded the lowest rates of urban violence in March 2020, right at the start of the pandemic according to the Press of Secretary of Security and Coexistence. One of the measures exclusively implemented by Medellín was the Accordeon Strategy *(Estrategia acordeón)* which consisted of four days of activity and three days of closure and sought to aid with the pressure on health services and improve the local economy.

In 2022, the use of masks was still mandatory for public transportation, hospitals, and nursing homes according to Decree 173. Furthermore, all schooling was to be face-to-face, regardless of geographical locations. Lastly, according to the National Health Institute (Instituto Nacional de Salud – INS,) by 7 July 2022, Colombia has had 6,198,848 confirmed cases, of which 6,008,044 recovered and 140,202 deceased, placing the country fifth worldwide regarding number of cases at that time.

South Korea

South Korea reported its first positive case of COVID-19 on 20 January, 2020. The Korean government effectively controlled the regional spread by conducting large-scale diagnostic testing, epidemiological investigations, and implementing personal hygiene policies, including the use of masks and social distancing. Information about the number of positive cases in various regions/neighbourhoods and locations visited by infected individuals was disseminated through emergency alert texts. These alerts aimed to prevent contact between infected and non-infected individuals and aid in the epidemiological investigation of the virus (National Research Council for Economics, Humanities, and Social Sciences & The Korea Transport Institute, 2020). The implementation of the 'test-track-treat strategy' in South Korea was a pivotal factor in the country’s ability to avoid imposing an official lockdown. However, the extensive deployment of large-scale testing and information and communication technology for patient tracking in South Korea presented significant controversies regarding human rights and privacy through surveillance technologies (Chung & Lee, 2021).

With rigorous control measures, South Korea avoided widespread COVID-19 transmission, resulting in significantly fewer deaths compared to other countries. However, South Korea was one of the last developed countries to commence a mass vaccination program, which began on 26 February, 2021. Vaccinations for adolescents and children, including those aged 5–11, became available gradually, with the latter group becoming eligible in March 2022 (Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, 2022). As of

June 2022, 86.2% of South Koreans were fully vaccinated, compared with 61% worldwide (The Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University, 2022).

In South Korea, the academic school year typically begins in early March. However, during the initial COVID-19 outbreak in February and March 2020, the Ministry of Education postponed the start of the first semester. On 31 March 2020, in-person classes were indefinitely delayed and schools were instructed to prepare for remote schooling. By mid-April 2020, all schools began the academic year virtually. Despite the postponement, applications for emergency childcare services commenced in early March 2020. During the school closures, limited in-person childcare and classes for essential academic support were permitted. Elementary school and kindergarten after-school care continued to operate to minimise parental burdens (Yu, Cho & Kim et al., 2021). Children in special education schools or classes also had access to in-person instruction (Uhm & Hong, 2020).

Following the stabilisation of COVID-19, the Ministry of Education implemented a phased reopening of schools. Elementary students in grades 1–2 resumed in-person classes from 27 May, grades 3–4 from 3 June, and grades 5–6 from 8 June. Students were required to conduct self-diagnosis at home, and the use of personal masks and the installation of transparent barriers were mandated. Schools with fewer than 300 students resumed daily in-person classes, while larger schools implemented a blend of in-person and remote learning based on social distancing levels, allowing either one-third or two-thirds of the student body to attend at a time. From 30 August to 20 September 2020, due to heightened social distancing protocols, all schools in the densely populated capital region, including Seoul, transitioned to fully remote schooling. In 2021, the government mandated that first and second graders attend school in-person every day, considering child development (Ministry of Education, 2021).

National Assembly audits revealed that private elementary schools in Seoul had more than twice the number of in-person school days per week compared to national and public elementary schools (1.9 days), according to the academic management plans of elementary schools. The government positively evaluated its continuation of education through remote schooling amidst the COVID-19 crisis. However, concerns about the quality of remote learning led to an increased reliance on private academies, tutoring, and online learning platforms, potentially exacerbating educational inequalities (Jeong, 2020). It was found that private education expenditures for *hagwons*, tutoring, private online learning platforms, and learning material-based homeschool programs increased across all school levels in 2021 compared to 2020: expenditure for elementary school programs rebounded from a decline in 2020 and increased more than in 2019, while expenditures for middle and high school programs continued to rise despite COVID-19 (Ministry of Education, 2022).

United Kingdom

The four nations of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) implemented similar policies with varied timelines throughout the pandemic. Further, timing of policies varied as local councils implemented lockdowns and specific school policies in response to concerns. Families for this project all lived in England or Scotland. As of July 2022, England had experienced three lockdowns. The first cases of COVID-19 were reported in the UK in late January 2020. By March, a lockdown was in place across the four nations of the UK, and in England and Scotland the order ended in May 2020. For the UK, lockdown orders allowed people to leave home only for the purposes of food or medicine, exercising (once per day), or assisting the elderly and vulnerable. Two further 'circuit-break' or 'fire-break' lockdowns were mandated in England as variants spread across the country in October and November 2020 and January 2021. Scotland implemented a similar brief lockdown in January 2021.

As part of the initial lockdown, all schools in the UK were closed in March 2020, remaining open for children considered vulnerable and children of essential workers. On 1 June many primary schools in England resumed for certain year groups (preschool, ages 4–6 and ages 10–11), with some variation by local councils; and from mid-June schools resumed for certain secondary school year groups (ages 14–15 and 16–17). Schools in Scotland remained closed until July 2020. Remote learning was provided for children not in school, although attendance was not compulsory until the 2020–2021 school year. In September 2020, after the summer break, all children returned to school in person. As part of the third national lockdown, schools in England and Scotland closed in January 2021 and December 2020 (respectively), and schools staggered opening for different ages in February and March 2021. Preschools remained open during the third lockdown, and schools continued to provide in-person education for children considered vulnerable and children of essential workers. Reports indicated that women were the primary caregivers and home educators during all three lockdowns – in the first lockdown period, women were doing two-thirds more of the childcare duties than men (Office for National Statistics, July 2020b), and by the third lockdown, the BBC reported results of a survey that found 71% of women 'felt they had assumed most of the responsibility for childcare or home schooling' during the lockdowns (Goswami, 2021). Further, according to government statistics, more women than men were furloughed, they spent less time working away from home, and they did more unpaid housework and childcare (Office for National Statistics, December 2020a).

In early December 2020, the UK started their vaccination program, the first European country to do so. From March 2021, restrictions across the UK started to ease, with some tightening when variants were surging. Vaccination for children aged 12–15 started in September 2021 and for children aged five to 11 in February 2022. All COVID-related restrictions were

removed in England and Scotland from February to April 2022, including requirements to socially distance, wear masks, show proof of vaccination or negative test results for certain indoor venues, and self-isolate if infected. In June 2022, 73% of the UK population was fully vaccinated (compared with 61% worldwide).

United States

The first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the US were announced in January 2020, and by mid-March there were lockdowns in some states, school closures across many areas, and White House guidelines that suggested limiting gatherings to no more than 10 people. Significantly, policies about quarantines, mask-mandates, and school closures were made at local levels – states, counties, cities, and school districts had different policies throughout the pandemic. Further, COVID-19 mitigation policies were heavily politicised, and states with Republican governors had the least stringent policies. Four out of the 50 US states never implemented a lockdown, three states had regional lockdowns, and in those states were lockdowns were implemented, regulations varied from stringent (e.g., in the early months of the pandemic, New York City (NYC) only allowed people to leave their home for grocery shopping, getting medicine or healthcare and solitary exercise) to less stringent (e.g., North Carolina closed bars and dine-in restaurants and banned all gatherings of 100 or more people).

By April 2020, the US was the global leader for reported deaths due to COVID-19. Racial disparities in rates of COVID-19 were evident; for example, reports showed that '68% of the COVID-19 related deaths in Chicago occur among the city's African American community' (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Further, some ten million people were unemployed by the beginning of March, with more than 5.4 million losing their health insurance (in a country with no national health insurance) (Taylor, March 17, 2021). For comparison, the previous worst week for unemployment filings was 695,000 in 1982 (Taylor, March 17, 2021). Women experienced higher unemployment rates than men, and in September 2020 four times as many women dropped out of the labour market compared with men, with Black women and Latinas especially affected (Ewing-Nelson, 2020). All states closed schools for some period of time, offering remote learning, and many schools remained closed until the summer break in June; and the usual summer schools, activities, and camps were cancelled or provided in adapted forms (outside or remotely).

In September 2020, as a new school year started, some schools and universities attempted to reopen by adapting in-person teaching and/or providing hybrid schooling. For example, NYC reopened all its public schools. By November, many schools, including NYC's, had to return to remote learning due to high numbers of COVID-19 cases. Reports highlighted the toll the pandemic was taking on children's mental health, with the CDC reporting a

31% rise in the number of emergency room visits for mental health reasons among children ages 12–17 from March to October compared with the same period the previous year (Taylor, March 17, 2021). For the remainder of the 2020–2021 school year, schools varied in their approach – some only offering remote learning, others offering adapted or hybrid programs. By the end of the academic year (June 2021), children had experienced one and one-third school years under pandemic conditions.

The vaccine rollout for health care providers and care home residents started in December 2020. However, the highest peak for COVID-19 cases and deaths occurred in January 2021, when records showed over 5,000 deaths per day. By mid-April 2021, all states reached a widespread level of vaccine eligibility that included residents aged 16 and above. In March, the CDC announced that fully vaccinated people could gather indoors without masks, and the previous six-foot social distancing guidelines were amended to three-feet for children in school. Waves of variants spread across the US throughout 2021, and CDC guidelines for mask-wearing reflected these waves. Significantly for families, in November 2021, children ages five to 11 years were eligible for a paediatric vaccine, and in June 2022 vaccinations for children under age five were approved. In June 2022, 67% of the US population was fully vaccinated (compared with 61% worldwide).

Note

1 The *cédula de ciudadania* is Colombia´s national ID card. This public document is granted to all Colombians at the age of 18.

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Appendix 2
Overviews of research studies in each country

The international research project includes seven countries: Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, South Korea, United Kingdom, and United States. Together, we interviewed 130 parents and caregivers following the same protocol, with minor adaptations for local contexts. [Throughout this volume, we use 'parents' as shorthand to refer to both parents and caregivers.] Each study received ethics approval from the relevant Institutional Review Board or ethics committee. The context of each study varied due to factors such as government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Appendix 1). Appendix 2 describes the specifics of the study in the different country contexts, including recruitment methods, overviews of demographics of the participants, and notable contextual factors. Appendix 3 provides more detailed information about each of the participants.

Australia

The Australian interviews were conducted by Dr Sarah Healy, who at the time was Research Fellow in Digital Childhoods, Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, Deakin University. The project received ethics approval from Deakin University's Human Ethics Advisory Group in the Faculty of Arts and Education. Research participants were recruited via two main methods: digital flyers posted on social media and snowball sampling where participants were invited to share the digital flyer within their networks. Twenty parents participated, with the interviews and a shared digital image search occurring between November 2021 and February 2022. Among the 20 interviewees, 18 of them were mothers who had responsibility for school from home while engaging in either part-time or full-time employment. The two fathers involved also worked from home, with one having full responsibility for schooling three young children while performing a demanding job from home throughout the pandemic.

Fifteen of the 20 participants were living in Victoria during the 263 days of Melbourne lockdowns. The parent living in a regional Victorian town reported that they had similar lockdown experiences to those in Melbourne because of high caseloads in their local area. That 75% of participants

were based in or near Melbourne is significant because of the duration and extremity of the lockdowns; unless parents were classified as 'essential workers' there was no childcare available, even if provided by extended family and many professions, such as teaching, were not classified as essential despite the expectation that teachers would continue to work full-time, often with children of their own at home largely unsupervised. Five of the 20 participants lived in other parts of Australia, all in medium to large cities. We sought to recruit participants only from Victoria; however, our online recruiting process drew in participants from outside Victoria too. While these families had different experiences of lockdown and remote emergency schooling – all less intense than Victoria which bore the brunt of the pandemic response – their testimonies provided useful counterpoints to the Melbourne experience. Much of what families from outside Victoria reported match what Melbourne parents said about what they experienced in the early days of the lockdowns. However, the Melbourne parents as a group ended up in quite a different position to the parents located outside of Victoria. One thing visible in the data is that the multiple extended lockdowns Melbournians endured resulted in many of the initial problems associated with online schooling being resolved to the satisfaction of children and parents. Over time the concern shifted from lost learning to children's (and parent's) mental health. Three of the Melbourne families reported at least one child in the household with an autism and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) diagnosis requiring modifications to the way they approached school from home. The experiences of these families were noteworthy in what the parents were prepared to do to ensure the child's needs were being met despite conflicting priorities with work and government restrictions on leaving the home. These parents were especially able to articulate strategies for helping children moderate their use of digital technologies for learning, socialising and entertainment.

The Australian data is skewed towards a more advantaged socio-economic group of participants with all families having at least one and often two full-time incomes. While some families reported challenges associated with children sharing devices to do school from home – especially in the early stages of the Melbourne lockdown – this was mostly an issue with not having prepared for the unexpected situation and was gradually resolved as lockdowns dragged on. Home internet access was generally very good with only one family reporting more significant issues. However, they did not try to fix their internet because they liked the forced break from devices caused by weather related 'bad internet'. Despite the socio-economic bias in the Australian data, the findings drawn from it are relevant to the broader conversation because the tensions and challenges identified will likely be amplified and complexified in populations experiencing a confluence of factors contributing to greater socio-economic disadvantage.

Canada

The interviews in Ontario, Canada were facilitated by Lindsay C. Sheppard and Dr Natalie Coulter. Lindsay is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at York University, with a background in child and youth studies. Her work sits at the intersections of the sociology of youth, girlhood studies, social movements studies, and digital sociology. Dr Coulter is an associate professor in the Department of Communication and Media Studies, and the director of the Institute for Research on Digital Literacies. We received ethics clearance at York University and received funding from an internal York University LAPS grant.

We conducted 15 interviews using Zoom's video-call software between January and July 2022. Participants were recruited through neighbourhood-specific parenting Facebook pages. We sought permission from the page moderators prior to posting our digital recruitment poster. All interviewees lived in urban neighbourhoods in the Greater Toronto Area, located in Southern Ontario, Canada, which includes approximately six million people. All participants were mothers, despite our attempts to recruit parents and caregivers. Most participants lived with their male partners and two children. Participants self-identified around race and ethnicity. Seven participants identified as Asian, four self-identified as first-generation immigrants from South and East Asia, and one participant is a recent immigrant from China. Most participants had college, university, and/or postgraduate education. However, seven of the 15 participants were not currently working outside of their homes at the time of the interviews. Three of the participants interviewed had stopped working during the pandemic and lockdowns to support their families full-time at home with schooling and childcare. All participants had access to the internet, either Wi-Fi or cellular, however, almost all participants explained that they needed to upgrade their internet to meet the demands of virtual school and remote work. Once their internet was upgraded, they seemed to be able to manage virtual school and remote work. While we categorise most participants as middle-class in terms of education level, profession, and living situation, one participant and her family lived in a financially precarious situation which seemed to be exacerbated by the pandemic. This involved moving between neighbourhoods, cities, and between apartments and family shelters during the pandemic.

Ontario had some of the longest school closures in the world. While there were some slight differences between school districts in terms of the length of closures, overall, there were four mass school closures totalling over 22 weeks between March 2020 and June 2021. The first school closures were announced on 12 March 2020 and continued to the end of the school year on 30 June. In the following school year (2020–2021) students could choose to attend virtual school which was completely online, or attend school in-person. Most students continued in-person, but this was interrupted by various in-person school closures during the year starting in January 2021, and a shift

to in-person classes being online. Most of the parents interviewed chose to send their students to in-person school, but parents struggled with the school closures and having their children return to online school. Day cares were also closed fairly often, which meant even more pressure on parents who had younger children alongside their school aged children. Parents found the shifts from in-person to virtual schooling with little notice, exhausting, as they had to scramble to make sure they were able to support their child in the next phase of closures.

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China

Interviews in China were conducted by Dr Xinyu (Andy) Zhao, Research Fellow in Digital Childhoods of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, Deakin University. The project received ethics approval from Deakin University's Human Ethics Advisory Group in the Faculty of Arts and Education. Research participants were recruited in Nanjing, capital city of Jiangsu Province, via two main methods. First, digital flyers were posted in public-facing chat groups on WeChat, one of China's most popular social media platforms, by the researcher himself and through the researcher's professional networks in China. This was followed by the adoption of a snowball sampling technique where participants were requested to share the project information within their networks.

In total, 20 online interviews were conducted in Mandarin between January and April 2022 in the format of audio calls on WeChat. Among the 20 interviewees, 17 of them are mothers. All interviewees were married and living in two-parent households in urban Nanjing at the time of the interview. Most (19) interviewees are Han Chinese, the majority ethnic group in China. Fifteen interviewees were parents of single children, despite the fact that China abolished its decades long one-child policy. About half of the interviewees reported that both parents of the family have received higher education, whereas 14 indicated that at least one parent holds a university degree. Four mothers reported themselves as full-time carers, two of whom hold a bachelor's degree and one master's degree. All of the interviewees' school-aged children went to public schools. Unlike the education systems in

many other countries in this study, education in China is mostly funded and managed by local and central governments.

All families had either 'good' or 'very good' home internet access. The majority (18) of parents reported that their children had some level of remote learning at home during the pandemic, either in formal or non-formal settings. In Nanjing, online teaching and learning was arranged and managed by city-governed districts, subdivisions of a municipality. Each district may have had different or similar modes of online teaching (e.g. live-streaming or recorded classes) on different platforms. Outside of formal education, many of the interview participants had their children enrolled in out-of-school private tutoring classes. During the pandemic, particularly when there was tightened epidemic control restrictions in Nanjing, most of these shadow education services moved online as well. Most of the families in this study were media-rich during the pandemic, yet all of the interviewed parents were 'concerned', to varying extents, about their children's screen time and isolated lifestyle. Among the different screen activities, gaming was considered the most 'problematic' and 'addictive' and was strictly controlled or even forbidden in many families. And among the different media devices at home, smartphones were rarely easily accessible to children as they were believed to be particularly harmful for children's vision.

Colombia

Research in Colombia was conducted by Dr Diana Carolina García Gómez, postdoctoral teaching fellow for Childhood Studies in the School of Integrative Studies at George Mason University. All data was collected and analysed between May and August 2022. Most of the interviews were carried out via Zoom (except for one carried out in person) and included 15 participants (12 mothers and 3 fathers) located in the four major cities of Colombia: Barranquilla (1), Bogotá (9), Cali (1), and Medellín (4). The interviews lasted between 35 minutes to 2 hours. Interviewees were recruited using social media platforms, the researcher's networks, and snowball sampling. Although the interviewed families considered that their children attended schools located in the aforementioned cities, two of the interviewees resided in rural areas during the quarantine period. Two of the families decided to remove their children of any form of schooling while they familiarised with the 'new normal'; one of the families that moved to the rural area decided to keep their children in face-to-face schooling despite the national lockdown decrees; and the rest of the families chose to abide to the national norms.

The schooling situation of the children varied during the two years of quarantines in Colombia. Once the pandemic reached Colombia in March 2020, a national lockdown was decreed which lasted until 31 July 2020. During this period of time, schools were allowed to momentarily close so they could transition to virtual schooling. Most educational institutions

restarted and implemented virtual classes by April 2020. By November of the same year, the gradual return to schools via the *alternating education model* (sistema de alternancia) was implemented by the Colombian Ministry of Education. In this model, educational institutions at all levels combined strategies of virtual homeschooling with face-to-face meetings in educational establishments. Social distancing continued to be the main biosecurity guideline, and therefore it was up to the families and the students to decide if their child was returning to school. Prior diagnosis of compliance with biosafety conditions to preserve the well-being of the educational community continued, and the schools had to adjust the curriculum, adjust the school day, and determine the ages of students who could return, as well as the size of each classroom, meeting places, among other measures. Once the government drew all the guidelines for the alternating model, most of the parents interviewed chose to send their children back to school.

South Korea

Three researchers conducted the data collection in South Korea: Mi Yoon, an EdD candidate working in the areas of multiliteracies education; Amie Kim, a part-time faculty member working in the areas of cultural studies and media education; and Hyeon-Seon Jeong, a full-time faculty member working in the areas of multiliteracies, media education, and digital parenting. The study was conducted at the Gyeongin National University of Education, which served as the Institutional Review Board. The research was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea's 2021 Program of the National University for Innovation and Transformation (number: RA2021047). Hyeon-Seon Jeong and Amie Kim were responsible for the data analysis, and Ju Lim, a PhD candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Curriculum and Instruction, and Gwanghee Kim, an EdD candidate at Gyeongin National University of Education, provided assistance in Korean translation and comparative analysis.

Data collection ran from October 2021 to January 2022 and included 18 parents (16 mothers and two fathers). A snowball network and social media posts were used to recruit interviewees. These methods recruited participants from different demographics and income levels, including parents with special education children. The resulting recruitment garnered a geographically diverse group of participants ranging from Gwangju, Yeosu, Cheongju, Incheon, Gyeonggi-do, and Seoul; including families in rural, urban, and metropolitan settings; families with children of special education needs (including children identified as 'slow learners' or as diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder); and 'multicultural families' of two interviewees whose partners were born in other countries. In total, 18 interviewees lived in two-parent households, and two were solo parents. In one case, a solo parent was an hourly-paid instructor; in another, a parent was a homemaker of a child with special education needs. All 18 two-parent families had both parents

working full-time or hourly-paid. In general, all the parents had some kind of higher education and the homes had good or excellent internet access and were media-rich (although some parents intentionally refused to buy multiple devices so they could control their children's media usage). Twelve respondents reported that their children received online education from their school or a private provider. Three parents reported that their children attended school every day in 2021. There was an alternative school that had less than one month of online education during the entire pandemic period.

United Kingdom

Interviews in the UK were conducted by Dr Rebecca Coles, a freelance researcher also currently working for the Open University's Centre for Literacy and Social Justice. Her work was funded by Deakin University and received ethical approval together with the Australian based research.

UK research participants were recruited through emails and messages shared through Rebecca's professional networks and then through these participants' own networks. When it was found that this sample was skewed towards parents in professional employment, three participants were also recruited through paper posters placed around primary schools in Rebecca's locality. Nonetheless, the UK sample is skewed in favour of parents holding a university degree. It was suggested to participants that their interview be conducted via Zoom, but they were also given the option of a phone interview, which five preferred.

Twenty-one parents were interviewed between October and December 2021, and of these, 18 were mothers while three were fathers; 14 lived in England while seven lived in Scotland; 13 lived in an urban setting while eight lived in a rural one; 16 described their cultural heritage as white and/or British while five described having a Black cultural heritage or some heritage from Iraq, Pakistan, Croatia or Hungary; 16 had a degree while five did not; and none of the parents reported struggling financially to access a device or the internet. All participants had at least one primary aged child and the interviews focused on parental experiences related to these children. However, the age of the children of these parents ranged from one to 16. The mode age of these children was seven and the mean age nine. Three participants spoke about having a child who was neurodiverse.

Parents spoke of being forced to balance work and their children's needs in new ways. Work situations changed over the course of the pandemic, but during the height of the first UK lockdown, four participants were 'key workers' working shifts outside the home, 11 were working from home either full-time or part-time, four had their work suspended and were 'furloughed' by their employer or in receipt of grants through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and two were not working. Meanwhile, for a majority of participants, schooling was taking place remotely and only four parents sent a child into school during this period. No participants said they sent their

children to a fee-paying school, although one parent did begin to homeschool over the course of the UK lockdowns.

United States

Two researchers conducted the study in the United States: Maureen Mauk, PhD candidate with specialisation in media studies; and Dr Rebekah Willett, faculty member working at the intersection of media and cultural studies, childhood studies, and education. The study was conducted at University of Wisconsin-Madison, which served as the Institutional Review Board. Data collection ran from May 2021 to January 2022 and included 21 parents (18 mothers and three fathers). Interviewees were recruited via snowball networking and via flyers posted in local public spaces including libraries, park shelters and grocery stores. The resulting recruitment garnered a geographically diverse group of participants ranging from Alaska to New York including families in rural, suburban and urban settings and an ethnically diverse group of families (including parents identifying themselves as Black/African American, Hispanic American or Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, White/non-Hispanic and biracial). Eighteen of the interviewees were in two-parent households and three were solo parents. All of the solo parents worked full-time; and in the 18 two-parent families, in 13 of the households both parents worked full-time, one parent worked part-time, and four participants described themselves as homemakers at the time of the interview. A majority (86%) of the interview participants and their children's other parent had some level of higher education, and the homes were generally media-rich with seven participants reporting 'good' internet access and 14 'very good or excellent' internet access (although some parents deliberately resisted buying multiple devices in order to control their children's media usage).

School experiences varied in our study, with five participants electing to homeschool at least one of their children before and during the pandemic. All participants with children in public and private schools indicated that their children had virtual school starting in March 2020, however, some schools (particularly private schools) reopened in September 2020 with temporary closures and shifts to virtual schooling throughout the school year; while other schools remained virtual or went hybrid until June 2021. For families not sending their children to private schools, childcare was almost non-existent, with very little assistance from the government. Further, most interviewees indicated that their extended families were dispersed and not an option for childcare.

The context of life in the United States in 2020 and 2021 was extraordinary with the United States experiencing intersecting crises of COVID-19 and racial injustice in an environment fuelled by toxic misinformation and political divisiveness. After the murder of George Floyd, who died while being arrested by police, the country experienced widespread protests against police brutality and systemic racism, and many cities had curfews with the

National Guard being deployed to maintain peace. Then-President Trump's rhetoric, including referring to COVID-19 as 'Kung Flu' fuelled hate crimes and resentment. When he refused to accept that he had lost the election for presidency in 2020, he encouraged his supporters to take over the United States capitol resulting in a violent insurrection on 6 January 2021.

Appendix 3

Information about research participants and their families

In this appendix, we provide demographic details of the research participants and their families. The following tables include information about the participants' and (if applicable) their partners' employment and work-from-home status(es), type of schooling their children experienced during the pandemic, demographics notes (participants' self-identifications, in their own words), the number of children in the household, age of children at the time of the interview, and each child's gender as indicated by interview participants. Presentation of information in each table follows the cultural norms and conventions in each national/regional context of the seven studies.

Australia

Pseudonym and location (Only parents who are named in the book have a pseudonym assigned.)	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes (Those self-identifying as Australian could be described as Anglo-Australian.)*	*Children and ages*
Kate Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), paused return to work plans to supervise school from home.	Government school from home	Australian	Daughter: 7
K8 Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), paused return to study plans to supervise school from home.	Government and Non-government school from home	English/Italian	Son: 14 Daughter: 10
A1 Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), worked in an early childhood centre first lockdown then from home in second.	Government school from home	Anglo-Celtic	Sons: 11, 13
Angela Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home.	Government school	Australian	Son: 8
Leah Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home as did other parent.	Government school from home	Australian	Daughters: 6, 11 Son: 8
Bee Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home.	Government school from home	Australian	Daughter: 17 Son: 12
K2 Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), sometimes worked from home but mostly from business.	Government school from home	English-Italian	Son: 11
M1 Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home.	Government school from home	Asian-Mixed	Son: 14 Daughter: 11

K3 Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), essential worker, worked part-time at workplace with other parent supervising on those days.	Government school from home	Australian (Anglo-Saxon South African)	Son at childcare Daughter in first year of school (ages not disclosed).
V1 Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Father (two-parent family), worked from home. Other parent was an essential worker out of the house.	Government school from home	Australian (Vietnamese-English)	Sons: 9, 12 Daughter: 8
L1 Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home when possible.	Government and non-Government school from home	Australian	Daughters: 12, 14 Son: 8
Jade Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home.	Government school from home	Undisclosed	Sons: 6, 10
H1, J2 Melbourne Metro, Victoria	Mother and father participated, interviewed together after the Victorian lockdowns had ended.	Government school from home	English-New Zealand	Son in year four (age not disclosed)
B1 Regional Victorian town	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home (self-employed) with child with autism. Other parent essential worker. Interviewed after the Victorian lockdowns had ended.		Australian with British, Norwegian and Sri Lankan roots	Son: 9
K4 Sydney Metro, NSW	Mother (two-parent family), both worked from home.	Government school from home	Anglo	Sons: 2, 6
N1 Regional NSW city	Single mother (one parent family), worked from home.	Government school from home	Australian with English, Scottish and Irish heritage	Sons: 7, 9, 15
K5 Regional NSW city	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home.	Government school from home	Australian-American	Sons: 6, 13

(*Continued*)

Australia (Continued)

Pseudonym and location (Only parents who are named in the book have a pseudonym assigned.)	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes (Those self-identifying as Australian could be described as Anglo-Australian.)*	*Children and ages*
K6 Brisbane Metro, Queensland	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home while other parent worked outside of home as essential worker. Family living in Taiwan.	In-person attendance only	Chinese	Son: 5
K7 Adelaide Metro, South Australia	Mother (two-parent family), worked from home, interviewed early 2022 at the time when Adelaide was experiencing a wave of cases and restrictions.	A mixture of in-person and remote schooling as well as Government and non-government	Australian	Son: 11 Daughter: 9

Canada (all interviewees were located in Ontario)

Pseudonym	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Jenny	Two-parent household, both parents work outside home in healthcare.	French-immersion, virtual & in-person	Chinese-Canadian, PhD and post-grad education, urban/suburban	Sons: 5, 8 Daughter: 3
Helen	Two-parent household, Mom switched to part-time/flexible hours during pandemic as behaviour therapist; Dad is police officer.	Public school virtual & in-person	Christian, European, Scottish background, college & grad school education, suburban	Son: 10 Daughter: 8
Iris	Two-parent household, Mom not working since children; Dad works in IT mostly from home.	Public school virtual & in-person	First generation immigrants, Indian, grad school education, suburban	Daughters: 5, 8

Devi	Two-parent household, Mom works from home but was on maternity leave in 2020, Dad works outside home in health research.	Private school, French-Immersion, virtual	East Asian immigrant, Indian – Canadian, multigenerational household, Masters & PhD, urban/suburban	Daughter: 8 Son: 2
Lady	Two-parent household, no job mentioned, partner works from home in software development.	Public school then homeschooled	Caucasian, Scottish, German, Mom finished grade 11, partner has university education, urban	Daughter: 8
Lana	Two-parent household, Mom artist & grad student, Dad entrepreneur.	Day care when open	European background, urban/suburban	Son: 3
Kate	Two-parent household, both work from home in health research.	Day care when open & public school, virtual and in-person	Mom is Western European, dad is Filipino & Jewish, post-grad education	Sons: 4, 8
Miriam	Two-parent household, Mom stopped working during the pandemic; Dad works from home in finance.	Public school and early years programming, virtual	Caucasian & Jewish; BA education; urban/suburban	Son: 4 Jewish
Julie	Two-parent household, Mom is teacher (virtual and in-person); Dad is career coach from home.	Private school, virtual & in-person	Chinese-Canadian; grad school education; urban	Daughters: 8, 14 Son: 11
Susan	Two-parent household, Mom is office administrator, part-time, was supposed to start in March 2020 but started in Sept 2020 part-time; Dad works at home part-time.	Public school	Mom is Korean; Dad is Chinese; Dad is ordained minister; urban; Mom went to grad school	Sons: 5, 8
Ruth	Two-parent household, Mom and Dad work from home in HR and sales.	Public school, in-person & online	Caucasian, Jewish; university educated; suburban	Daughter: 8 Son: 11
Rose	Two-parent household, Mom quit work during pandemic to support daughter's virtual school and then homeschool; Dad works in sales from home.	French-Immersion public school, Homeschool, then private school	Mom is Jewish; Dad is Italian; urban; Dad has undergrad; Mom has grad school	Daughter: 9

(*Continued*)

Canada (**all interviewees were located in Ontario**) (**Continued**)

Pseudonym	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Mandy	Single parent household, husband works overseas as an engineer. Mom works from home as social worker.	Public school	Mom is Chinese new immigrant; Dad is Chinese; Both parents have grad school education; urban	Sons: 2, 8
Angie	Two-parent household. Mom works at home as speech pathologist, Dad works from home self-employed.	Public school	Mom is Chinese, was born in Canada; Dad is Chinese-American; Mom has post-grad education; urban	Daughters: 5, 7 Son: 2
Kira	Two-parent household.	Public school	White; urban	Daughters: 8, 11 Sons: 6, 13

China (**all interviewees were located in Nanjing, all two-parent households**)

Pseudonym	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Jiang	Father works in the procurement department in the food industry and mother is an accountant. Neither rarely worked from home during the pandemic.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers recorded online classes for students to watch at home.	Both parents are Han Chinese. Father holds a diploma and mother holds a bachelor's degree.	Daughter: 11
Lianjuan	Mother is a full-time carer and father is a programmer. Father worked from home all the time during lockdowns.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers assigned educational activities for students to complete at home.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding bachelor's degrees.	Sons: 3, 10

Zihan	Mother is a teacher and father is a freelancer. Mother sometimes worked from home during the pandemic but father never did.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers gave live-streamed online classes to the students.	Both parents are Han Chinese. Mother holds a diploma and father holds a high school degree.	Daughter: 3 Son: 12
Jiaying	Mother is a private company employee and father is an engineer. Mother sometimes worked from home during the pandemic and father never did.	Kindergarten; educators assigned educational activities for parents to complete with their children at home.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding Bachelor's degrees.	Sons: 6, 8
Xu	Parents run a hair salon together and did not work from home during the pandemic.	Kindergarten; educators prepared digital materials and sent links to parents in group chats for them to watch or listen with their children.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding high school degrees.	Daughter: 5
Ye	Mother is a private company employee and father works in a public institution. Mother rarely worked from home during the pandemic while the father never did.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers gave live-streamed classes to students.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding bachelor's degrees.	Daughter: 11
Yichen	Father is an engineer and mother is a nurse. Neither worked from home during the pandemic.	Kindergarten; educators met with children and parents together twice in one semester during lockdowns.	Both parents are Han Chinese. Father holds a bachelor's degree and mother holds a diploma.	Son: 6
Jujie	Mother is an insurance agent and father's occupation is unknown. Mother always worked from home during the pandemic, but father never did.	Public school; school teachers assigned educational activities in parent group chats for children to complete at home.	Both parents are Han Chinese. Mother holds a diploma, and father holds a master's degree.	Sons: 5, 8

(*Continued*)

China (all interviewees were located in Nanjing, all two-parent households) (Continued)

Pseudonym	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Liu	Parents run a liquor and tobacco shop together. Both worked from home during the pandemic.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers gave live-streamed classes on an online portal.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding bachelor's degrees.	Son: 10
Xing	Mother is an accountant and father's occupation is unknown. Both worked from home during the pandemic.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers sent materials to parent chat groups for their children to read.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding bachelor's degrees.	Son: 9
Yang	Both parents are private company employees. Neither of them worked from home during the pandemic.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers gave live-streamed online classes.	Both parents are Hui Chinese, holding high school degrees.	Daughter: 10
Qinfang	Mother is a salesperson and worked from home most of the time during the pandemic. Father is a private company employee and never worked from home.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers assigned educational activities for students to complete at home.	Both parents are Han Chinese. Mother holds a diploma and father holds a bachelor's degree.	Daughter: 8
Xiu	Mother is a full-time carer and father is a company manager. Father rarely worked from home during the pandemic.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers assigned educational activities for children to complete at home.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding diplomas.	Sons: 8, 10
Jiequ	Mother is a full-time carer and father is a company employee. Father rarely worked from home during the pandemic.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers recorded classes for students to watch at home.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding master's degrees.	Son: 8
Zhenzhen	Mother is an office clerk and father is an engineer. Mother sometimes worked from home during the pandemic and father did most of the time.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers recorded online classes for the students to watch.	Both parents are Han Chinese. Mother holds a bachelor's degree and father holds a master's degree.	Daughter: 11

Lunqing	Mother is a pharmaceutical sales representative and father works in a government institution. Mother sometimes worked from home during the pandemic but father never did.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers recorded classes or gave live-streamed classes to the students.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding bachelor's degrees.	Son: 10
Langjia	Mother is a private company employee and father is a business owner. Mother never worked from home during the pandemic and father rarely did.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers recorded online classes for students to watch at home.	Mother is Han Chinese, and father is Hui Chinese. Both hold bachelor's degrees.	Son: 11
Liuliu	Mother is a warehouse manager and father is an appliance repairer. Mother sometimes worked from home during the pandemic and father rarely did.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers assigned educational activities for students to complete at home.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding diplomas.	Son: 9
Tangli	Both parents are employees of unnamed private companies. Mother always worked from home during the pandemic and father did sometimes.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers first recorded online classes for students to watch at home, then changed to live-streamed classes.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding high school degrees.	Son: 7
Zhiying	Mother is a full-time carer and father is a human resources manager who rarely worked from home during the pandemic.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers gave assignments to students to complete in the daytime and upload them to parent chat groups afterwards. In the evenings, teachers gave live-streamed classes. There was also online teaching for private tutoring.	Both parents are Han Chinese, holding bachelor's degrees.	Sons: 4, 8

Colombia

Pseudonym and location	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Andrea Medellín, Antioquia	Two-parent household, Mother is full-time employee at a construction company. Worked from home during the pandemic, as well as her partner. Both hold professional degrees and work in the private sector.	Private schooling, calendario A during the pandemic (meaning the academic year matches the calendar year). As soon as the modelo de alternancia became available, parents decided to send daughter back to school.	Lives in urban area, middle class. White-mestizo.	Daughter: 8
Blanca Bogotá, D.C.	Two-parent household, partner worked from home prior to the pandemic. She is a university teacher.	Private, international school, calendario B (meaning the academic year began in August). During the pandemic son only had 2 hours of virtual schooling. The modelo de alternancia was every 2 weeks.	Lives in urban area, middle class. White-mestizo	Son: 7
Camila Bogotá, D.C.	Two-parent household, both parents are essential workers, she is a medic and he works in Tech in a hospital. Camila was on maternity leave for most of 2020. After maternity leave she went back to work in the hospital; dad continued working during the pandemic and living at home while the children and Camila went to live with her parents.	Private schooling, calendario A. As soon as the modelo de alternancia became available, parents decided to send son back to school.	Lives in urban area, middle class. White-mestizo	Son: 8 Daughter was born during the pandemic (February, 2020)

Daniela Bogotá, D.C. Diego Bogotá, D.C.	Two-parent household, Diego had been working from home for a couple of years prior to the pandemic, so he was used to being at home. He was also completing his doctoral degree virtually. Six months prior to the pandemic, Daniela quit her job so she was a stay-at-home parent.	Public school, Calendario A. During the pandemic the school community couldn’t rely on digital technology therefore there was no virtual schooling. The family decided to go into lockdown two months prior to the government mandate.	Live in urban area, Lower middle class. White-mestizo	Son: 7
Edna Medellín, Antioquia	Two-parent household, During the pandemic both parents worked remotely. They worked in the private sector.	Due to the relocation area, the youngest child attended the rural school since there was no compliance of the lockdown mandate. The oldest continued to attend his former school virtually. Oldest son attended private school while the youngest attended the local, public school.	Lives in urban area, but moved to a rural area during the pandemic. Middle class. White-mestizo	Sons: 6, 10
Fernanda Bogotá, D.C.	Two-parent household, Husband began working from home during the pandemic. Fernanda worked at a restaurant so she lost her job during lockdown.	During the pandemic the family had two learning experiences. At the start of 2020, the son was attending a public kindergarten. This school couldn’t rely on digital technology therefore there was no virtual schooling. Families were sent worksheets via email to be completed at the end of the week. At the end of the year the son switched to a private school to begin his primary education. This time around school was fully virtual.	Live in urban area, Lower middle class. White-mestizo	Son: 5

(*Continued*)

Colombia (Continued)

Pseudonym and location	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Gustavo Medellín, Antioquia	Two-parent household, Both parents work independently. Gustavo is a photographer and community manager, and his wife is a nutritionist who became a food influencer during the pandemic sharing recipes.	Prior to the pandemic, the son was attending a private school. However, the lack of resources to accommodate his special needs forced the family to change schools during the pandemic.	Lives in urban area, Working class. White-mestizo	Son: 9 Daughter: 4 Son has autism level 1.
Julián Bogotá, D.C.	Two-parent household, Julian is a veterinarian who owns a veterinary store. Therefore he continued to operate his business during the pandemic. His wife worked for the private sector from home.	Private schooling, calendario A. When the modelo de alternancia became available, parents decided not to send their daughter back to school but to continue with virtual schooling.	Lives in urban area, Middle class. White-mestizo	Daughter: 10 Son: 21
Helena Medellín, Antioquia	Single parent household; She is an entrepreneur who has an industrial design business for children's playgrounds from home. Though her former partner lives in the same city, she is the primary carer of the girls.	Private, international school, calendario B. At the start of the pandemic the youngest had only been at the school for 6 months, and she had only 2 hours of virtual schooling per day. The oldest had 4 hours of virtual schooling.	Lives in urban area, Middle class. White-mestizo	Daughters: 6, 9
Pablo Bogotá, D.C. Paula Bogotá, D.C.	Two-parent household, At the start of the pandemic, Paula lost her job, so she was grateful to be able to focus on their sons' schooling. Pablo continued to work from home during the pandemic. He works in the private sector in the field of strategic communication.	Private, international school, calendario B. As soon as the modelo de alternancia became available, parents decided to send sons back to school.	Live in urban area, Middle class. White-mestizo	Sons: 8, 11

Mariana Suesca, Cundinamarca	Single parent household, During the pandemic Mariana worked from home as an assistant in a strategic communications company.	During the pandemic, Mariana decided to pull her son out of school because she felt he did not cope well with the virtual school model. While she found a more suitable solution, she homeschooled him. Finally, she enrolled her son in a virtual school throughout the pandemic.	Lives in rural area, Working class. White-mestizo, Lives with both her parents.	Son: 6
Natalia Barranquilla, Atlántico	Two-parent household, Natalia is a stay-at-home parent. Her partner worked in the construction industry so he was categorised as an essential worker.	Public school Calendario A. Both sons attended virtual schooling until the end of the pandemic.	Lives in urban area, Working class. White-mestizo	Sons: 12, 14
Mónica Cali, Valle del Cauca	Two-parent household, Both parents worked remotely during the pandemic in the private sector.	Private, international school, calendario B for the son. Prior to the pandemic, the family decided to switch the daughter from school as she has special needs that were neglected at her former institution. They enrolled her in a virtual school based in the US.	Lives in urban area, Middle class. White-mestizo	Daughter: 14 Son: 7

South Korea

Pseudonym and location	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Plum Mom Gwangju	Mother and Father worked full-time with flextime as an office worker.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments; child attended 'study centre' and English hagwons and a gym in-person; registered private online learning platform.	Both parents are Korean.	Son: 11
Meejung Mom Seoul	Father worked as a full-time office worker; Mother was a full-time carer.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments or gave live-streamed classes to students; children attended English and music hagwons (small-scale) in-person.	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a low-income family.	Sons: 13, 17 Daughter: 10
Cat Mom Seoul	Mother is a professor specialising in educational technology, working flexibly from home during the pandemic. Father is a professor specialising in neuroscience, working flexibly at home.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments or gave live-streamed classes to students; children attended English hagwons (small-scale) in-person.	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Son: 12 Daughter: 10

Samuel Incheon	Father worked in hourly-paid building facilities management and Mother was a full-time carer.	Specialist public boarding school providing in-person, intensive Korean as a Second Language programs for new immigrants (6 months); regular public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments. The class teacher offered in-person classes at the school, considering special education needs.	Father is Korean, and Mother is Ecuadorian who speaks very little Korean. After his trade and business with China were ruined due to the pandemic, Father returned to South Korea with his Spanish-speaking wife. They were accompanied by their son, who had very limited Korean language skills, following 17 years abroad; Identified as a low-income family.	Son: 12
Myne Incheon	Father was a full-time office worker; Mother was out-of-work (formerly, a freelancer after-school program instructor).	Private, alternative school; mostly in-person classes; children went to a climbing gym in-person.	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Sons: 10, 14
Nuri Anyang, Gyeonggi-do	Father was a full-time computer engineer; Mother was hourly-paid school instructor teaching Russian in a specialist public school for new immigrants.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments; children attended private hagwons.	Mother is Russian, speaking excellent Korean; Father is Korean; Identified as a low-income family.	Son: 12 Daughter: 4

(*Continued*)

South Korea (Continued)

Pseudonym and location	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Vismila Cheongju, Chung-cheong bukdo	Mother worked as a freelancer after-school program instructor and graduate student specialising in social welfare.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; School teachers divided students into two groups, providing remote learning through pre-recorded videos and assignments, as well as in-person classes with lunch; children went to Taekwondo hagwon.	Korean; Single parent; Identified as a low-income family.	Sons: 11, 16 Daughter: 14
Tokki-Macaroon Incheon	Mother was on leave of absence (preschool teacher); Father worked full-time as an office worker.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments or gave live-streamed classes to students; child attended hagwons.	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Son: 11
Superman Seoul	Mother was on leave of absence (elementary school teacher); Father worked full-time as an university affiliated elementary school teacher.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments (first son); Year one child (second son) attended in-person classes every day; both children went to Taekwondo, English and Arts hagwons; English, Math and Chinese tutoring at home.	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Sons: 6, 8

Twin Mom Yangpyeong, Gyeonggi-do	Mother worked as a teacher of special education needs.	Public school; children attended in-person classes every day.	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Twin Sons: 6
Damdam Mom Seoul	Mother was out-of-work during the pandemic (formerly hourly-paid Special Education Assistant).	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments or gave live-streamed classes to students; child registered local education office of Disability Welfare Center-provided online classes and private online learning platform.	Single parent; Korean; identified as a low-income family.	Son: 9, special education needs (developmental delay)
Shallala Jeju	Mother worked as an elementary school teacher.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; Child attended in-person classes every day (Year one and two); school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments (Year three); child registered in-person English hagwon	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Son: 9
Katan Incheon	Mother worked as a freelance media education instructor; Father worked full-time office worker.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments; teachers began offering live streaming classes after Katan filed a complaint to the local education office; child attended English hagwon.	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Daughter: 11 Son: 9

(*Continued*)

South Korea (Continued)

Pseudonym and location	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Yuno Mom Yeosu, Jeollanam-do	Father worked as an engineer; Mother was a full-time carer.	Private school; periods of remote schooling; children attended in-person classes every day; teachers assigned tasks to be uploaded online and offered interactive live-streamed classes to both students and parents; child registered English learning online platform and interactive live online private course (reading, discussion, physical activities).	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Son: 8, special needs (autism) Daughter: 6
Shrimp Snack Gwangju	Mother was a full-time carer.	Kindergarten	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a high-income family.	Sons: 5, 6
Pretty Crystal Suwon, Gyeonggi-do	Mother worked as a full-time officer worker	Kindergarten	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Son: 5, special education needs (autism)
JiYeonWho Mom Seoul	Mother was a full-time carer; Father worked as a full-time office worker; Grandparents lived together and supported childcare.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers uploaded pre-recorded videos and assignments or gave live-streamed classes to students; children attended in-person English and Math hagwons and registered homeschool material-based private lessons.	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a high-income family.	Daughters: 10, 13

Pororo Seoul	Mother worked as a middle school English teacher; Father worked as a full-time office worker; Grandparents provided childcare.	Public school; periods of remote schooling; school teachers pre-recorded videos and assignments and gave live-streamed classes to students; teachers communicated with parents via membership-based online community; child registered private online learning platform for English and Math	Both parents are Korean; Identified as a middle-income family.	Daughter: 10, specialeducation needs (autism)

UK

Pseudonym	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Rachel	Two-parent household. She worked partly from home and he worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Urban; Professional occupation	Sons: 7, 9
Mumtaz	Two-parent household. She does not work and he continued to work out of the house.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Urban; BAME heritage	Son: 6 Daughter: 14
Emma	Two-parent household. They both worked mostly from home.	Youngest child still to start school during school closures.	Urban; Professional occupation	Daughters: 2, 5
Josephine	Two-parent household. They both continued to work out of the house.	Youngest child still to start school during school closures.	Urban; Professional occupation	Son: 1 Daughter: 5
Klara	Two-parent household. They both worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Urban; Professional occupation	Sons: 5, 7
Lucy	Two-parent household. They both worked partly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Rural; Intermediate occupation	Sons: 4, 7

(*Continued*)

UK (Continued)

Pseudonym	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Marianne	Two-parent household. They both worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Urban; Professional occupation; BAME heritage	Sons: 3, 7
Anna	Two-parent household. They both worked mostly from home.	State school then homeschooling. Periods of remote schooling.	Urban; Professional occupation; BAME heritage	Sons: 3, 7
Leah	Single parent household. She worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling but early return to in-person schooling.	Urban; Intermediate occupation; BAME heritage	Son: 9 Daughter: 12
Joan	Single parent household. She continued to work partly out of the house.	State school. As a key worker her children continued to attend partly in person.	Urban; Service occupation	Son: 8 Daughter: 16
Tanya	Two-parent household. She continued to work partly out of the house. He did not work.	State school. Periods of remote schooling but early return to in-person schooling.	Rural; Professional occupation	Daughter: 11 Non-binary: 14
Deliah	Two-parent household. She continued to work out of the house. He worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Rural; Intermediate occupation	Son: 5 Daughter: 7
Natalie	Two-parent household. They both worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Rural; Professional occupation	Daughters: 5, 7
Koshka	Two-parent household. They both worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Urban; Professional occupation; BAME heritage	Son: 7 Daughter: 9

Julia	Two-parent household. They both worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Rural; Professional occupation	Daughter: 8
Phoebe	Single parent household. She worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Urban; Professional occupation	Son: 10 Daughter: 14
Mary	Two-parent household. They both worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Rural; Craft occupation	Daughters: 6, 9
Nichole	Two-parent household. She worked partly from home and he worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Urban; Professional occupation	Son: 9
Tom	Two-parent household. He worked mostly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Rural; Professional occupation	Son: 7 Daughter: 9
Michael	Two-parent household. He worked partly from home and she worked always from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Rural; Manual occupation	Daughters: 3, 6
Sam	Two-parent household. He worked mostly from home and she worked partly from home.	State school. Periods of remote schooling.	Rural; Professional occupation	Daughter: 7 Son: 10

Occupational grouping in UK demographic notes draw on this schema: Arts Council England (no date) *Occupation Definitions*. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Socioeconomic_occupation_definitions_0.pdf

USA

Pseudonym	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Taryn	Two-parent household. Both parents working from home (although Taryn quit job during height of pandemic).	Public; mixed mode over the course of 1.5 school years including all virtual	Suburban, parents both White	Son: 8 Daughter: 5
Delphia	Solo parent household. Mother working two jobs from home.	Public; mixed mode over the course of 1.5 school years including all virtual	Suburban, mom is Latina	Daughters: 11, 18
Angel	Two-parent household. Mom working from home; Dad working sometimes at home.	Homeschool	Suburban White mother, Mixed Race children.	Daughters: 9, 11
Alicia	Two-parent household. Mom not employed, Dad works outside the home.	Public / private combination. Some of her children were in private school in-person. Daughter with special needs was in public school, fully virtual and eventually became in-person	Suburban married mother; mom is Asian-American, Father is White	Son: 11 Daughters: 3, 7, 9; 9-year-old has special needs
Deanna	Two-parent household. Both parents working from home (Kindergarten and high school teachers).	Public, all virtual	Urban, mom is White, father is Black	Daughter: 6 Son: 2
Rosa	Two-parent household. Both parents working from home	Public, all virtual	Suburban, both parents Latine	Daughter: 9 Son: 5
Natalie	Two-parent household. Mother works part-time from home managing homeschool curriculum program. Father is an engineer working remotely.	Homeschool	Rural, moved from a large city to the country; both parents White	Sons: 6, 9, 11

Katherine	Two-parent household. Dad worked from home full-time, mom worked partially away from home.	Public, mixed mode over course of 1.5 school years including all virtual, 5 year-old daughter in-person day care	Suburban, both parents White	Son: 8 Daughter: 5
Michelle	Two-parent household. Public School guidance counsellor and military officer	Public, mixed mode over the course of 1.5 school years including all virtual	Rural suburban, both parents White	Daughters: 7, 10, 11
Joanne	Solo parent household. Remote work in Pharmaceutical Research	Public school, mixed mode over the course of 1.5 school years including all virtual	Suburban, mom is White	Son: 18 Daughter: 10
Andrea	Two-parent household. Mom not employed, Dad in military IT	Homeschooled two kids, two kids full-time private in-person	Suburban, both parents White	Daughter: 13 Sons: 4, 8, 11
Camilla	Two-parent household. Both parents working from home	1 daughter homeschooled preschool; Two other daughters are full-time private school in-person	Suburban, both parents White	Daughters: 5, 8, 9
Amanda	Two-parent household. Mom not employed, dad working from home full-time	Public, mixed mode over the course of 1.5 school years including all virtual	Suburban, both parents White	Son: 4 Daughters: 5, 9
Irene	Solo parent household. Mom employed outside of home.	Public, mixed mode over the course of 1.5 school years (first virtual from home then went to day care to do virtual learning, then in person)	Latina, child mixed race (Black-Hispanic)	Daughter: 9
Isabella	Two-parent household. Both parents working outside the home	Public school, mixed including all virtual	Suburban, both parents Latine (recent immigrants)	Daughter: 6
Racquel	Two-parent household. Both parents work, husband an ad exec, mom a TV exec	Private, mixed over course of 1.5 school years, first all virtual then in person	Urban, Both parents Black	Daughters: 8, 10
Rana	Two-parent household. Dad primarily worked from home; mom not employed	Homeschooled	Urban, mother is Asian/ Pacific Islander, father is White	Sons: 9, 11

(*Continued*)

USA (Continued)

Pseudonym	*Pandemic household employment*	*Pandemic schooling*	*Demographic notes*	*Children and ages*
Kelly	Two-parent household. Mom not employed. Father works in Education	Public, all virtual	Suburban, mom is White, Dad is mixed race. Son is White/Black/Hispanic	Son: 9
Alex	Two-parent household. Dad is self-employed works full-time from home; wife works in medical care part-time for a school system.	First fully virtual for all children, then hybrid part-time in person for all school-aged children	Suburban, both parents White	Daughters: 10, 11 Sons: 5, 8
Jonathan	Two-parent household. Dad is a writer, Mom works as a production executive in entertainment industry.	Mix of private and public school (1 child private, one child public), mix of fully virtual online schooling then transition to hybrid.	Suburban, both parents White	Son: 12 Daughter: 10
Dennis	Solo parent household. Television producer and attorney.	Hybrid private school	Suburban, White	Sons: 4, 7

Appendix 4
Codebook for data analysis

1. Pre-pandemic media practices (and general thoughts about children and screens)
2. Media practices related to school during the pandemic (including time on screen)
3. Tangible/perceivable changes in family media practices (outside of school time online):
   a. Temporal (e.g., amount of time, time management)
   b. Geographic/space (e.g., changes in room use)
   c. Adding/removing technology (e.g., screens, software, apps, programs)
   d. Other ways media practices changed (not covered in a, b, or c) (e.g., for play, privacy, individualising according to age)
4. Thoughts connected with changes:
   a. Why media practices changed (e.g., work habits, boredom, changes in routines)
   b. Changes in understandings of media and family life (e.g., compromises, reprioritisation, rationalisation, distinctions, ambiguities, greater sense of ambivalence)
   c. New understanding of children's creative uses of media, creative workarounds
5. Post-pandemic aspirations
6. Changes in parents' roles/identity connected with media (e.g., as educators, technology experts)
7. Overt affective dimensions of family media practices specifically related to new practices in the pandemic (e.g., kids hating zoom, parents' emotional labour)
8. Technological tools for parental control and/or content moderation

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