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Book Reviews

Donald F. Roberts and Ulla G. Foehr, *Kids and Media in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. \$75.00 hardcover, \$25.00 papercover.

In an earlier television era, a frequently-run public service announcement posed the following challenge to parents: "It's ten o'clock. Do you know where your children are?" Parents confronted with such a question today can no longer reassure themselves, as a previous generation did, that they need not worry as long as their children are in their rooms at home. As this and countless other media studies are demonstrating, the average American child's exposure to media messages has reached the point where it is virtually all-encompassing. In fact, media exposure now occupies more of our children's time than any other activity except sleeping and, as this study reports, media exposure is growing especially rapidly within the home but often without parental supervision or even awareness.

As the authors point out, being sent to one's room was, in the past, a form of parental discipline, involving isolation from the pleasures of social interaction and entertainment, including television. Nowadays, with over half the children in this study having their own television, radio, tape-player, and CD-player in their bedrooms, and with growing numbers adding computers and cell phones with Internet access to their personal media staples, bedrooms now contain a cornucopia of entertainment, information and social interaction media. Consistent findings from decades of media research have generated concern about the negative consequences, for some children, of uncontrolled exposure to the electronic media, including heightened aggression, obesity, illiteracy, innumeracy, or poor social skills. With increasing access by children to the Internet, exposure to pornography and potential sexual predators are additional concerns. Without causing undue alarm, the authors of this study present research findings that they hope will alert parents and policy-makers to the risks inherent in the media-saturated environment in which our children live.

The study reported in this book was carried out under the auspices of the Kaiser Family Foundation for the Study of Media Entertainment and Health. It was initiated in 1997 and the results were first disseminated in a detailed technical report in 1999. The present book is a more user-friendly version of that report, accessible to interested professionals and the serious reading public, including parents.

While the media literature is replete with findings on the impact of specific media, especially television, on children, the authors undertook what they claim is the most comprehensive and rigorous study ever attempted of American children's exposure to the total array of media available to them. It is hard to argue with the authors' claim to comprehensiveness. For example, if you want to find out the time budget devoted to reading by a specific age group, the differential exposure to television between suburban and rural children, or their access to and specific uses of home computers, you can find this information in the dozens of tables in this book. Among the variables studied are age, sex, race/ethnicity, residence location, family composition, parent education and socioeconomic status.

The study is well-designed and as well-executed as can reasonably be expected in such an ambitious project. As the authors readily concede, drawing firm conclusions on a large number of variables, based on a sample of 1,000 two-seven year olds and 2,000 eight-eighteen year olds needs to be done cautiously and they deserve credit for making clear where their data are weak. Unfortunately, the findings on children's use of home computers were outdated by the time the initial report was written in 1999 and certainly do not reflect current reality. The authors made a valiant effort to supplement their data with findings from later studies but, almost inevitably, given the dynamic nature of developments in personal computer technology and its especially-rapid adoption by young people, their efforts were less than fully successful. The emergence of the computer as a primary music resource for young people and, along with the cell phone, a major social interaction tool, is scarcely considered. However, there is much information that is useful, especially in highlighting areas for future research.

In summary, this book presents convincing evidence that the daily lives of our children and young people are even more media-saturated than we may have suspected. It is no longer much disputed among media scholars that the influence of the mass media is at least as powerful as the other principal socialization institutions—families, schools and churches. Not all media influences are pernicious, of course, but some clearly are and, given the all-pervading and rapidly-changing nature of our children's exposure, it behooves us to pay attention. This book helps focus that attention by providing a comprehensive picture of the media environment in which our children live and how they budget their time among the large and growing array of media options available to them.

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Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld (Eds.), *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants and Those Who Stayed at Home*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. \$42.00 hardcover, \$14.00 papercover.

Historically, immigration has been a one-way street. Emigrants and exiles rarely returned to their homelands—the former, often because the economic costs of the journey were prohibitive; the latter, because of political prohibitions. When returns were made, they often took the form of pilgrimages; like the Islamic injunction to visit Mecca once in a lifetime, most immigrants have felt a pull to see their birthplace once before they die. In other cases, such as persons displaced by World War II, refugees returned to discover that there was nothing to return to, and thus they were compelled to migrate yet again.

This situation, however, has changed dramatically in the past twenty years. Economic and political revolutions around the globe have given rise to entirely new categories of world citizens—transnationals, who regularly cross borders and cross lives between their old and new countries; and repatriates, who have permanently returned to their homelands. The scholarship of immigration and exile is only now beginning to catch up to this