Media, Home, and Family
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work serves as a model for the kind of learning that can happen in such large, team-oriented efforts.

—Stewart M. Hoover

As the four research associates brought on to conduct interviews for the research project that formed the basis of this book, we are grateful for the opportunity to be a part of such an engaging research team. Under the direction of Stewart Hoover, each of us was expected to read, analyze, and discuss each interview as quickly as possible after it was conducted and transcribed, and we were to read widely in related fields in order to contribute to the overall thinking about the project. Stewart insisted from the beginning that we contribute intellectually to the project, and he guided and encouraged us, often making subtle suggestions that greatly improved the work as a whole. Our weekly meetings, which went on for four years, were in actuality high-level research seminars, certainly the pinnacle of our graduate education experience, and perhaps the closest anyone can come to an ideal learning environment. We all are grateful to Stewart for his patience, understanding, and encouragement as, together, we wrote this book.

—Lynn Schofield Clark, Diane F. Alters, Joseph G. Champ, and Lee Hood
I

The Study: Symbolism, Media, and the Lifecourse
Nick and Roberta Kandinsky and their sons, Lance and Eric, are gathered around their kitchen table to talk with one of this book’s authors. Late in the interview, this good-natured exchange takes place during a discussion about renting videotapes of movies:

Nick [age 52]: We usually try to get light comedies. When Roberta’s out, we get an action movie. You know, I’ve seen some before. And you know, the kids with their video games, they’ve seen the violence, and I’m usually there with them. And if it gets too embarrassing, I’ll fast-forward it.

Interviewer: What gets embarrassing?
Lance [age 15]: You’ve never fast-forwarded!
Nick: You know, it’s really funny. The violence, I’ve never fast-forwarded. But sex, I do, and I don’t know why I do. It’s as harmless as the—[he is interrupted by the boys, who are making incredulous faces at this. The interviewer laughs.]

Roberta [age 49]: [to the interviewer] I know he doesn’t fast-forward.
Lance: I’ve never been around you once when you’ve fast-forwarded!
Nick: I remember when Eric was there, once I fast-forwarded.

Eric [age 11]: When was this?

Nick [casually]: Oh it was one of the movies, I forget which.

We heard some version of this conversation in many interviews in our study of families and media in daily life. In this exchange, the father declared that his family did not watch sex scenes in movies because he fast-forwarded through them. Nick Kandinsky thus aligned himself with certain generally accepted notions of media in the United States: that the media are full of violence and sex, and that responsible parents would not let their children watch such things. In identifying himself with these well-known concerns about the media, Nick put himself in the role of father-who-controls-the-media. Earlier in the Kandinsky interview, however, Nick and the other family members had identified Nick as someone who enjoyed television and movies rather indiscriminately. His wife Roberta was recognized as the family member who hated television and many movies and who was actually far more particular about the media her children consumed than Nick was. Because Roberta was absent from the story about renting videos, Nick had offered himself as the watchdog of his children’s media use, a role he did not ordinarily take. His family would not let him get away with this, however, and their disbelieving laughter undermined the well-intentioned claim he was eventually forced to abandon.

Similar exchanges occurred when other families gathered to talk about their family’s media practices in the study that forms the basis for this book. Parents sometimes presented themselves as more in control of media use in the home than they actually were; when they talked about this in family groups, inconsistencies became clear, sometimes in humorous ways. We begin the book with this example not so much to question whether the Kandinsky family or any other family we interviewed was consistent in their beliefs and behaviors regarding the media, but to explore and analyze what this exchange can tell us about what they attempted to present about themselves as a family, and how their media practices related to this presentation. Why was it important for Nick to present himself to a researcher as a parent who was more vigilant about mediated violence and sex than he actually was? What do such claims tell us about how parents view their job as parents in relation to media? How do such claims relate to family media practices, particularly in the increasingly common scenario of the two-household, divorced or blended homes in which children are raised? Moreover, how do children interpret such claims in relation to what they understand about their
families, their parents, and their household media practices? It is important to note that many children recognize their parents’ intentions even if their practices were inconsistent with the parents’ accounts of the media. This book explores how parents and children in different families deal with the gap between their practices and their accounts of the media.

The scene with the Kandinskys is an example of an important way families in our study dealt with media in their daily lives: They did so as part of their work as a family, constructing and negotiating what we have come to call “accounts of the media” by which they located their families in U.S. society and in modern life. Our use of the term “accounts of the media” references two different yet complementary meanings of the word “accounts.” First, the nature of interviews means that parents were called upon to offer stories, or accounts, of how their family operated in relation to media. They often also described having told similar stories to friends, relatives, co-workers, and parents of children’s friends. Second, the term “accounts” refers to a related phenomenon that structured how the parents told the stories about the media: Parents were self-consciously aware of the importance of parenting, a task for which they felt accountable. The accounts of the media that parents gave in our study were always inflected with their assumptions about proper and desirable parental behavior in relation to the media.

In these accounts of the media, interviewees also constructed a family identity through a process of negotiating with media and culture in modern life. While much has been written about the role of the media in the individual identity formation of children, this book is rooted in our sense that it is necessary to explore how families negotiated a sense of identity collectively and how the media, in turn, played a role in this process. As the exchange among the Kandinskys indicates, we found that families did this collective identity construction in practical ways, around accessible topics such as television and video watching. Negotiation of family identity around media engagement was a significant, ongoing project in these families, as parents reflected on their parenting, as children reflected on their experiences and their parents’ wishes, and as they all attempted to explain themselves with reference to certain widely held beliefs about media in the United States. Sometimes the accounts incorporated family members’ religious beliefs—an aspect of American life that is not often fully recognized in media studies research (Hoover and Venturelli 1996). In response to our questions about religion and belief, interviewees cited a variety of frameworks and sensibilities, some of which we discuss in case-study contexts in Chapters Five through Eight. Overall, the accounts created in the interview context brought symbolic resources of the media into a negotiation that located people on larger
maps of morality, religion, gender, social location, individual purpose, and other parameters of modern life.

Moreover, as researchers we also took part in the negotiation of family identity, in that we approached people and talked to them as members of families. We defined family broadly, including families that were blended, single-parent families, parents of the same gender, unmarried parents who were living together, unrelated people who considered themselves family, and others. This does not mean that we ignored individual identity, but that we focused on various individuals’ processes of constructing family identity together, in specific contexts, in their homes. The fact that we conducted almost all of the interviews in the homes of those interviewed was central to the study. We were mindful of David Morley’s interest in visiting domestic settings to see what people “are up to” and what they do and say about the media (Morley 1996, 319). By focusing on a social grouping in a particular location, the family in the home, we hope to provide some insights into the complexities of American culture in mediated modernity.

PUBLIC SCRIPTS
Almost all of the families we interviewed seemed to draw upon relatively consistent assumptions about media, embracing what Ellen Seiter (1999, 58) has called “lay theories of media effects.” Among these “lay theories” is the assumption that heavy use of mass media can cause young people to become violent, insensitive, unproductive, or something worse. The question of whether media can be said to have such effects is a controversial subject in academic circles, but not necessarily in family living rooms. Families’ responses to what they believed were effects of the media were quite complex, as we will discuss, but, to a family, everyone in our study believed that the media affected their children in some way.

Such concerns about media effects have long pervaded public-policy discussions about media use among families in the United States. A key example is from Alfred R. Schneider, the longtime head of ABC Television’s standards and practices division—its chief “censor”—who used family as his criterion for “the public interest,” the standard mandated by the U.S. Congress under which television and radio stations must operate in order to be licensed. The mandate “at the very least, requires the exercise of due care where children are concerned. This amorphous concept of ‘public interest’ retains some sense of respect for family and order in society and support for institutional values” (Schneider 2001, 132). From 1960 to 1990, Schneider applied his definition when he and
his department reviewed program content “for questions of taste, acceptability, language, violent portrayals, and sexual innuendos” (Schneider 133), objections that were frequently cited by our interview parents as well.

Policy debates at the Federal Communications Commission have similarly been concerned with the impact of television on children, and much regulatory debate about the Internet has to do with fears that children can access pornography. Nongovernmental organizations, such as those in the media literacy movement, urge parents to take control of media use in the home.³ On the Christian right, the American Family Association and other groups move concerns from living rooms to the streets and marketplaces, calling for boycotts of advertisers that sponsor shows with violence, sex, and profanity. In these and in other ways, the notions of family standards for television have been embraced if not enacted throughout U.S. society, providing an important context for the daily struggles over media that took place in the homes of the people we interviewed.

From such debates and actions, in concert with parental experience and belief frameworks, come what we term the “public scripts” about the media that each family in our study wrestled with. We argue that these public scripts are part of what James Carey (1989, 28–29) has described as a “publicly available stock” of phrases, ideas, words, and other symbols that construct a map of a society. In this book, we describe instances in which people constructed these maps by positioning themselves in terms of certain society-wide beliefs about the media.

There are many overlapping public scripts about the media, and most are negative in tone (Ang 1995; Seiter 1999). For instance, the people we interviewed readily talked about problems they associated with excessively violent and sexually explicit television programming, drawing upon public scripts deeply embedded in public-policy debates and some academic studies as well as in more informal venues. To a lesser extent, some commented on how the media reflect misunderstandings based on sexism, racism, or prejudices based in class status or sexual preference. Regardless of the particular position embraced, most parents seemed to believe implicitly that how they dealt with the media, and especially television, defined how well they were doing as parents and as a family.

To summarize, then, we note four public scripts in particular that emerged repeatedly in interviews, often all at once. They were: (1) There is too much violence in the media, and children must be protected from it. (2) There is too much sex in the media, and children must be protected from it. (3) Children are affected in some ways by media. (4) How we deal with media, especially television, helps define us as parents and as a
family; therefore, we parents must be especially diligent. All the families we interviewed acknowledged these public scripts.

We did not set out to uncover these public scripts of the media. Nevertheless, we gradually came to see that it was impossible to completely separate public scripts of the media from families’ statements about their own media practices, and ultimately their identity as a family. Creating accounts of the media offered an appealing narrative of how a family wished to be perceived in relation to media. Even more important, parents built upon widely accepted public scripts of the media and offered through these accounts an explanation and justification of themselves as “good” parents and, by extension, creators of healthy families.

Although sex and violence in the media tended to dominate discussions in our interviews, the depiction of bad behavior also worried many parents. A television show that came under repeated fire in this regard was The Simpsons, the animated situation comedy on Fox Television that depicts a nuclear but dysfunctional family. One father, Jim Mills, said he did not want his children to behave like the Simpson children, particularly in their name calling and use of bad language. “It’s not that The Simpsons teach those particular things, but there are things I don’t agree with that the kids might have a tendency to imitate,” Mills said. His role as a parent, he said, was to address such behavior when it occurred. Another parent, Gary Carter, similarly worried about the “disrespect and silliness, the constant need for being funny and loud” that erupted in his children (boys 11, 10, and 7, and a girl, 5) after watching cable television, an intruder that the family eventually rejected by canceling the cable subscription. This was “Bart-Simpsonitis” to Carter, a mode of behavior in which “everything had to be a one-liner crackoff, or disrespectful, ‘ha-ha’ kind of thing.” Sharon Hartman, another concerned parent, pointedly noted her feeling that The Simpsons was not suitable fare for her children, 14, 9, and 8. With prompting from her children, however, she cheerfully admitted that she and the rest of her family sometimes watched the show because they thought it was funny. In this, Hartman voiced her belief that television depicted behavior she disliked, and that her role as a parent was to make sure her children did not behave in the ways these television shows depict. She was also voicing a “should” in a common public script about The Simpsons, perhaps in part for the interviewer’s benefit: She felt that she should object to The Simpsons because it depicts rude behavior and is unsuitable for children. Jim Mills, Gary Carter, and Sharon Hartman all presented themselves as parents whose role was to intervene and to help ensure that their children were not negatively influenced by television. They had drawn upon their
own experiences to interpret a public script that television had effects on children, and in so doing they created their own accounts of the media.

REFLEXIVE PARENTING

To talk about parenting in the contemporary age is to describe a delicate balancing act. Parenting consists of lofty intentions regarding the ever-changing demands that emerge in relation to neighborhood, national, and even international events, along with the daily struggles over finances, custody, and more mundane matters. In a certain sense, such pressures on family life in the United States have always existed. What is different now, some scholars contend, is a greater self-consciousness about parenting. Since the 1960s, parents have become increasingly uneasy about raising children in light of increases in drug use, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and suicides among children and adolescents. Indeed, the structure of family life, particularly in the middle classes, has changed dramatically since World War II, as women have entered the workforce in ever-increasing numbers, as divorces rates have risen, and as new family forms have emerged. As the historians Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg note, “parents have become more self-conscious, anxious, and guilt-ridden about childrearing” (Mintz and Kellogg 1988, 220).

We regard this parental sense of accountability as an important theme today, and we understand this as part of a process of “reflexive parenting.” This concept is our extension of Anthony Giddens’s notion that in modernity a person is reflexive about how he or she relates to the social world, in that an individual continuously incorporates experiences, including mediated ones, into daily life (Giddens 1991, 1–9, 181–208). The parental reflexivity discussed in this book often emerged in discussions of family as well as of media, particularly when family members gathered as a group to talk with an interviewer. This reflexivity meant that parents in the study were especially mindful of the presumed influences that came between them and their children, particularly those influences over which they felt they had little control. In this context, peers, schools, and especially the media become lightning rods for parental anxieties.

Most of the parents we interviewed were self-conscious about parenthood; they thought and worried about what their children watched on television or saw in the movies. Unlike their own parents, some said, they felt responsible for their children’s media engagement and tried to limit what their children watched and how much time they spent watching. In the Garcia family, for example, the parents tried to limit their children’s watching to an hour and a half a day. In many families, this attempt to
control television was directly related to the act of reading. In the Ahmed family, for example, for every hour of reading, the children were allowed an hour of computer games or television. Most parents also said they tried to police content, to try to make sure that their children did not watch bad behavior or hear bad language, such as many parents found in The Simpsons. Some also worried about television shows that were scary, such as Goosebumps, or movies that were violent, such as Terminator. Some families said they held family conferences to talk about television, and some only wished they talked more about television and other media. Several parents recalled—sometimes fondly—watching far more television as children than they allowed their own children to watch. Their own parents, they concluded, were not so worried about television because it had been an uncomplicated part of life, something a child did after school, before dinner, and then perhaps into the evening. Repeatedly, then, we saw a process of definition unfolding as people discussed family, media, and parenting and cited public scripts about them. This process of definition, an aspect of reflexive parenting, is an important part of the overall project of meaning making in the home.

The rise in self-conscious, reflexive parenting is related to an emergent awareness of “expert” advice. In the decades immediately following World War II, one such expert, Dr. Benjamin Spock, stood out, as his Baby and Child Care became the “bible” for a whole generation of U.S. parents. Today, a wide variety of experts inundate parents with often-conflicting theories about child development and parenting, in a dizzying variety of ways. Parents can read parenting magazines, visit parenting Web sites, attend workshops and classes, and go to children’s resource centers, in addition to the more traditional information sharing that happens at playgrounds, in religious settings, and at neighborhood barbeques and birthday parties. In these ways, parents try to figure out ways to guard against what they believe are negative outside influences that can derail their own intentions.

Examples of reflexive parenting emerged frequently in families’ accounts of the media. We noted that all the interview parents in some way seemed to think it was important to stipulate an ability to be independent from media, yet media were so embedded in their lives that most of them shared stories of being uncomfortably exposed to something they disliked. In interviews, these stories of discomfort often emerged early in the discussion, then were later negotiated away as they described actual practice. Mark and Kristen Franz, for example, said they had not been comfortable with what they had heard about the sexual content of the movie Titanic and had not wanted their 11-year-old daughter to see it. Eventually, however, they decided that because the movie was
so popular their daughter would not feel normal if she did not see it. Kirsten Franz said they finally recognized the “social appropriateness” of their daughter viewing *Titanic*, and Kirsten took her to see it.

With the concept of reflexive parenting in mind, we ask the following questions in this book: Why do parents make the decisions they do about regulating children’s media use, and how do such decisions relate to other aspects of contemporary life? How do parents talk about such matters among their family members and to an interviewer? Moreover, how do their children understand such parental decisions? Finally, how can we think about parenting and media in terms of their social, historical, and cultural contexts?

**THE STUDY: COLLABORATION AND DEFINITION**

The research reported in this book was conducted following models of ethnographic audience research articulated in the work of Ang (1995), Bird (1992b), Stacey (1990), and Morley and Silverstone (1991). Over a five-year period, the coauthors individually conducted in-depth interviews with 269 individuals in 62 families. Most family members were interviewed in their homes more than once: An initial interview involved the entire family, and a second visit consisted of separate and confidential interviews with each member of the family.

Although the research is rooted in assumptions of interview-based audience research, the distinguishing feature of this work is its collaborative design, analysis, and writing, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three. The collaborative process through which we studied these families played an important role in the definition of the project. The five authors met weekly for nearly three years. Our three- to four-hour sessions were lively struggles, sometimes contentious but more often energetic and enthusiastic, as we tried to make sense of what people told us. We discussed interview contexts—the setting, how people seemed to react to us, how we felt about the people we interviewed, what they did, and what they seemed to convey nonverbally—as well as the transcripts that we prepared from our long and open-ended interviews in people’s homes. Our meetings became an important part of what we learned in this project, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Our collaborative approach helped us make sense of our in-depth, qualitative, semistructured interviews. We recognized that the resulting accounts were a kind of talk, which we view as examples of how people engage with social and cultural resources and processes in the making of meaning. One might ask, “What is the point of this talk?” The talk ranged across the contexts, conditions, and contradictions inherent
in family, work, gender, relationships, beliefs, and values in modern life. Media present—and present themselves as the embodiment of—a range of resources and solutions to these life projects. We cannot know everything about people’s responses, but we can try to understand how people deal with this range of resources and solutions by crafting meaningful accounts of themselves and their families.

**THIS BOOK**

This book is divided into two main parts. The first part, “The Study: Symbolism, Media, and the Lifecourse,” describes and explains the project, our experiential and theoretical roots, and the methods that we developed. Chapter Two explains our research methods and how they evolved from a postpositivist perspective to a constructivist one. This journey was aided by our informants, who helped us understand the importance of the contradictions and constructions in their discussions of media. The process of building theory to guide us and with which we struggled throughout the project is described in Chapter Three.

Following the chapter on theory, Chapter Four explores the topic of the family. The location of our research in the home helped bring about the description of our project as being in part about family. Parents in particular worried about the media’s penetration of the home, the role of media in children’s lives, and the embedding of media in daily life, and we realized they were drawing on certain public scripts that emphasized these worries. The concept of reflexive parenting came from our discussions about these worries, and the term is further explored in this chapter, which also places these notions in the context of historical notions of family in the United States and its images in mediated popular culture.

The second part of the book, “The Families: Case Studies,” is its narrative heart. We introduce Part II with a discussion of the systematic way we found people talking about the media. They did so through what we call “modes of engagement” with media, descriptive categories that we developed to think about the interviews. We argue that one of these categories, “accounts of the media,” is new to media-audience research and deserves further development. We first identified this category as we encountered what seemed to be contradictions between what people said they did and what they seemed to have done with media. We realized that more than contradiction was at issue, and that people self-consciously positioned themselves in relation to media when they talked with us. “Accounts of the media” are found in each family’s discussions of how their family related to public scripts of the media. We argue that “accounts of the media” helped people make meaning, individually and as
families. Our interpretation of these accounts of the media led us to view this category as an important source of insight into the overall project of meaning making in the media age.

Chapters Five through Eight are case studies of eight families. These four chapters explore the ways vastly different families make meaning. These cases are information rich and are not necessarily representative of a larger population. In them, we address public discourses of media and media policy, and the public scripts we and our informants brought to bear in our contemplation of these discourses. Every family we interviewed shared at least some accounts of the media that reveal conflict and contradiction, an indication that media are not unproblematically naturalized in the home.

Major differences in the way families account for media can be traced to the frameworks that guide what they do and think. This process is apparent in Chapter Five, which discusses the Ahmeds and the Paytons, whose cultural positions are at some distance from the U.S. mainstream and each other: one is a Muslim family with concerns about maintaining their own cultural traditions, and one is an ecofeminist, atheist family with Protestant roots. Their particular accounts of media were consistent with particular frameworks that guided their day-to-day existence. At the same time, these accounts often indicated contradictions in practice. For example, the Ahmeds’ differences from the predominantly Protestant U.S. society guided them in their judgment of topics like sex and violence on television. When the interviewer asked about their use of television, they related accounts that fit the way they wanted to live as Muslims outside mainstream U.S. culture, although even they described viewing practices that did not necessarily fit that framework. In contrast, the Paytons did not own a television, a decision consistent with their view that their family should live simply, outside the mainstream, with a commitment to ecological responsibility.

Chapter Six discusses two families closer to the heart of U.S. culture, the Hartmans and the Roelofs. They were lower-middle-class, white Protestant families with contrasting religious beliefs and practices, providing an excellent opportunity to further explore the contribution of religious frameworks to meaning making in relation to the media. The Hartmans used their evangelical framework—a collection of values, ideas, beliefs, and practices—to guide them in their daily lives, including their media use. They saw little or nothing in media that came close to their religious framework. The Roelofs, on the other hand, did not have a practical religious foundation—they did not attend church and were not affiliated with a church, although they considered themselves Christians. In contrast to the Hartmans, the Roelofs found religious
lessons in some television shows, and at the same time they wanted to
distance themselves from media. As a result, the Roelofs seemed less con­
sistent in describing media and what media meant in their daily family
life. In both families, the children seemed to understand their parents’
wishes about media engagement, although both sets of children some­
times challenged them. In this chapter, we discuss the differences in the
two families and note that it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to make
normative arguments about either family’s approach.

Chapter Seven is about two white, middle-class families: the Franzes,
a nuclear family, and the Price-Benoits, a family headed by two gay
men. Through the Franzes and the Price-Benoits, we explore notions
of “normal” and how the media might play a part in the definition of
family. Chapter Eight includes two multicultural families, the Vogels and
the Carsons, that are deeply and intensively engaged in media, although
in very different ways. The chapter considers the term “couch potato”
as a public script and what it might mean. Through the Vogels who are
relatively well off, and the Carsons who have a low income, we explore
media practices in families of heavy users of media in relation to culturally
informed assumptions.

LOCATING THE STUDY

Finally, a word about the location and context for the interviews, which
were conducted in several localities in the state of Colorado. To retain
anonymity of the informants, we have not offered many specific de­
tails about their particular locations. However, we would like to offer
some general information about Colorado and what was happening
economically and socially during the interviewing, from 1996 to 2000.
During that time, Colorado’s economy boomed. The unemployment rate
steadily dropped over the decade of the 1990s, and in January 1999 it was
2.9 percent, the lowest it had ever been, and lower than the comparable
national rate of 4 percent. Relatively high-paying jobs in telecommu­
nications and in high-technology companies fueled the boom, but it
did not last much past 2000. Two years later, by mid-2002, the boom
had bust. Colorado had a net job loss of 56,000 jobs, or 2.6 percent of
the workforce, a far bigger rate of loss than in the United States as a
whole, which suffered a 1.1 percent job loss in the recession following
the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. State tax revenues were down,
homebuilding dropped greatly, and income growth declined, much of
it due to the precipitous shrinking of the telecommunications industry,
which had been a strong presence in Colorado in the 1990s. Our inter­
viewing ended before September 11, 2001, and thus any concomitant
shifts in news coverage, in politics, and in public scripts in general are not reflected in this book.

Instead, interviewees talked to us during the boom years, when statisticians and journalists alike reported growth and optimism: the population grew, employment grew, and average annual wages outstripped the consumer price index in metropolitan areas like the Denver-Boulder-Greeley area, for example. Construction boomed—the number of construction jobs more than doubled from a low of about 60,000 in 1989 to a high of 146,810 in 1999. Over that decade, the state’s population grew by more than 1 million people, to 4.3 million as of April 2000, making it the third fastest-growing state in the nation, behind Nevada and Arizona (Westkott 2002.) That growth gave Colorado a seventh seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. In fact, four of Colorado’s counties were among the nation’s five fastest-growing counties, including Douglas County, the richest in the country with a median annual household income of $77,513. Some of our informants lived in Douglas County, where sprawling suburbs have been carved out of plains and pasture land south of Denver, bringing at the same time congestion and stress to the state’s infrastructure. Overall, the median household income in Colorado, adjusted for inflation, grew from $30,140 in 1990 to $45,738 in 2000 (Florio 2001). However, the average income in the top 20 percent of families grew faster (39 percent) than in the bottom 20 percent of families (17.7 percent), though the gap was greater in most other states, with Colorado ranking 41 in the rate at which that gap widened (Aguilar 2002). The growing income gap and the population increase, along with declines in tax revenue due to a tax-limitation measure at the beginning of the decade, put increasing pressure on the state’s schools. Some study parents worried about some aspect of that pressure, whether it was general discomfort with their children’s education or frustration at what they perceived to be the uncertain status of the schools due to those pressures. In a few cases, for these and other reasons, parents chose to home-school their children, hoping to control, as one father said, the kind of education his children received.

A growth in wages, high-technology jobs, and population contributed to a steep climb in housing prices, boosting Colorado’s median home value in 2000 to $169,070, more than double the value of $82,400 at the beginning of the 1990s. The boom did not extend to everyone, as housing-price increases and soaring rents squeezed those earning lower wages, a problem alluded to by some informants. By mid-decade, African American and Hispanic workers were doing worse than average, with unemployment among African Americans at 14.8 percent and among Hispanics, at 5.8 percent, compared to total unemployment of
4.2 percent. By the end of the decade, wealth was distributed less evenly than at the beginning of the decade. While the Denver metropolitan area and other cities along the Front Range of the Rockies boomed, in outlying towns and rural areas significant poverty remained (Olinger 2002). In fact, some of the poorest families in our study lived in such small, rural areas.

The boom in Colorado brought a major shift in the composition of the population, as the state's Hispanic population nearly doubled, to 735,000 people, or more than 17 percent of the total. The Asian population increased to about 100,000, or a 67 percent increase. The number of non-Hispanic whites also grew, but their proportion of the population shrank, from 81 percent in 1999 to about 75 percent in 2000. The numbers of African Americans also increased, but their percentage of the population was 3.8 percent at the end of the decade, down slightly from 4 percent at the beginning (Denver Post 2001). The boom also brought a shift in political orientation; early in the decade, Republican and Democratic registration remained about even, making Colorado a key swing state in national elections. By 2002, however, Republicans outnumbered Democrats by about 176,000. This change was attributed by some political analysts to an influx of residents from other, conservative western states, including a significant number from very conservative areas of southern California (Seibert 2002).

One well-reported influx from southern California came about as a result of efforts by the city of Colorado Springs, the state's second-largest city, to lure religiously affiliated business to the area. That resulted most notably in the relocation of the media conglomerate Focus on the Family, which originated from a syndicated radio program of the same name. Even before the 1990s, Colorado Springs had been home to significant numbers of Protestant evangelical organizations, giving it a kinship to Wheaton, Illinois, and Orange County, California, both areas with a large evangelical presence. Colorado's mountains also host numerous Christian camps, conference headquarters, and retreat centers. Somewhat ironically, despite the presence of religiously affiliated groups in Colorado, the southwestern part of the United States has had a lower level of religious affiliation compared to other parts of the country (Finke and Stark 1992). Protestantism and Catholicism dominate the religious landscape in Colorado as they do elsewhere in the country. In Colorado's urban communities, as is true throughout the United States, the growth in immigration, particularly as fueled by the high-tech boom of the 1990s, meant a growth in attendance at area mosques and Buddhist temples. Although these communities are still small relative to the dominant religious traditions, they experienced growth even as
some of the more established urban religious communities continued a
decade-long period of declining membership. In addition, more people in
Colorado than elsewhere in the country claim interests in mysticism
and alternative spirituality, as evidenced in national surveys and in the
booming natural healing and health-foods industries located in the state
(Kosmin and Lachman 1993). While some people view these practices
as an alternative to more traditional religious affiliation, others take part
in these alternative religious practices as a supplement to their religious
traditions.

In summary, Colorado’s profile during the study was in some ways
unique, and some particulars are recounted in case studies in this book.
But in general ways the state was not extremely different from the United
States as a whole in the late 1990s. We saw the study’s location in Colorado
as an opportunity to explore the global in the local, as they are intertwined
in Colorado and in U.S. society as a whole.

All in all, this book stands in a tradition of work that attempts to in-
terpret the experiences of human beings as they inhabit the technologies,
artifacts, and practices of the media age. Media experience is a subtle,
interactive, and embedded aspect of modern life. It is not easily studied,
theorized, or interpreted. We share with many other scholars a desire to
go to the field and see what people actually do and say. This book is about
what we found when we did, and how we learned from and interpreted
the accounts people gave us.
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Chapter 1


Chapter 2


Chapter 3


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**Chapter 6**


**Chapter 7**


**Chapter 9**


Chapter 10

