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Pandemic Screen Time: An Analysis of Parenting Practices Connected with Children's Use of Media in South Korea and the United States during the COVID-19 Pandemic*

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a study investigating the experiences of family media practices during the pandemic. The article is based on questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 39 parents in South Korea and the United States who have children aged between 4 and 11. The article employs a framework developed by Livingstone and Blum-Ross to consider different "genres for 'digital parenting'" (2020: 11). The article argues that although children's screen time increased dramatically, parents continued to mediate it and make deliberate decisions about children's media use. In particular, the analysis reveals parents' decisions about different purposes for children's media use, embracing many purposes they had previously resisted. These findings indicate that parents are making more nuanced decisions than previously employed when they followed indiscriminate screen time rules.

Key words: COVID-19, digital parenting, parental mediation, screen time, children's media practices

Ⅰ. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic spurred a dramatic increase in children's consumption of screen media across the globe as education, entertainment and socializing moved primarily to online environments in family homes (Götz & Lemish, 2022). In 2021, entering a second year under pandemic conditions, parents voiced concerns about increases in

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children's screen time as they struggled to reinstate family media practices that aligned with their pre-pandemic values and routines (Kelly, 2021; Kim, 2021). The situation was fueled by research with dramatic statistics about children's seemingly unfettered access to screens, and researchers who were talking about 'withdrawal' symptoms, likening children's screen media use to drug addiction (Ahn, 2021; Richtel, 2021).

While existing research contains broad statistics about children's media use, studies are still emerging about family media practices and parental mediation strategies during the pandemic. Even pre-pandemic, parents were being advised to move away from one-size-fits-all screen time rules and consider different types and purposes of media, individual children's abilities and interests, and the context of viewing screen media (e.g., see Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2020). This article investigates what happened to screen time rules during the pandemic by analyzing family media practices as described by parents. More specifically, the article investigates how parents might have accepted and mediated their children's use of media at home, following or doubting existing discourses on children's screen time during COVID-19, when online work and life seemed to become the new norm. The article focuses on two different country contexts - South Korea and the United States. Although the experience of the pandemic varied (see Appendix), we found that parental mediation strategies in the two countries were very similar.

II. Literature Review

1. COVID-19 and Children's Media Use

During the pandemic, children's use of digital media and technology increased in both countries. In South Korea, parents reported their children's digital media use increased as schools implemented remote learning due to the pandemic (Bae et al. 2020; Jeong et al. 2021). In the United States, a Pew Internet and American Life survey of parents with children under age 12 found that children's use of tablet PCs increased from 68% to 81%, and smartphone use increased from 63% to 71% from March 2020 and April 2021 (McClain, 2022). Furthermore, Kim et al. (2020) report that 50% of Korean children ages three to four are exposed to smartphone use under the age of two.

As children's media and technology use increases, parental concerns and new perceptions are emerging. Parents acknowledge the importance of learning to use technology in the early years, but parents also express concerns about negative impacts of media and technology on children (Danet, 2020). Some parents believe that children's media use hinders or replaces opportunities for developing social relationships and engagement in physical activities and play (Kim, Lee et al., 2020) as well as negatively impacting children's attention span and creativity (Graham & Sahlberg, 2021; Danet, 2020). However, the positive affordances that media and technology offer are also acknowledged among parents during the pandemic. Parents found that media and technology made it possible for children to continue getting an

education, were effective for academic content learning, and allowed new ways of connecting with families and friends (Graham & Sahlberg, 2021).

Previous studies have reported digital divides in relation to children's access to digital technologies and the Internet as well as differences in the quality of that access (Aissaoui, 2021). During the pandemic, digital divides deepened (Correia, 2020), particularly in relation to differences in socio-economic status and geography. Bae et al. (2020) identify that 91.4% of Korean children from high socioeconomic status families have adequate devices for virtual classes, and 71.5% have their own devices; on the other hand, 53.1% of Korean children from low socioeconomic status families have own devices, and 23.2% do not have necessary devices for attending virtual classes. Bae et al. (2020) also have found differences in children's digital literacy skills and the support availability, depending on the economic level of the household. In addition, children in rural areas in the US are more likely to experience little to no Internet connection (Kormos & Wisdom, 2021; Powers et al., 2020). For instance, the Arizona Rural School District reveals that 81% of survey respondents reported facing difficulties accessing the Internet at home (Arizona Department of Education, 2021). Digital divides have led to inequitable educational opportunities and outcomes.

2. Parental Mediation

Across the academic literature, researchers have identified various parental mediation strategies connected with children's media use: posing restrictions, discussing content, co-using media, monitoring by staying nearby, checking browser history or logs, and using technical restrictions (Clark, 2011; Livingstone et al., 2016; Nikken & Schols, 2015). In developing parental mediation strategies, researchers argue for a holistic approach that considers the individual child, context and content (the 3 Cs) when evaluating media use (Guernsey, 2007; Lemish, 2015). Valkenburg et al. (1999) provide a useful classification of parental mediation: *active* mediation, which involves dialogue between children and parents about media; *restrictive* mediation, in which parents set rules and regulations around children's media consumption; and *co-viewing* involving passive co-presence of parents when children are engaging with media. Restrictive mediation often involves measuring children's media use in terms of time (e.g., 2 hours of media use per day), but also includes technological regulation such as blocks on devices, access to designated channels for children, and filters on content. Parents' involvement is often expected or required in these mediation strategies, including evaluating the content and quality of media, co-participating in media use, setting the rules for media use, and ensuring there are also 'screen-free' times and spaces.

In the United States and many other countries including South Korea, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has served as an authorized expert resource in providing guidelines and recommendations for the media use of children and families. In 1999, the '2 x 2' rule was introduced by the AAP, which recommended that children under age

2 should have no screen time, and children aged 2 to 5 should have limits of 1-2 hours of screen time per day. In 2016, the AAP revised their recommendations based on evidence-based studies. The revised guidelines suggest: avoid digital media for toddlers younger than 18 months, co-view with children 18 to 24 months, and limit screen use for children ages two to five to one hour a day of 'high-quality programming,' ideally with a co-viewing adult engaging in conversation about the programs. For children over age six, parents are told to place limits on screen time and have media-free times and spaces, hold conversations about online citizenship and safety, and ensure screens do not interfere with healthy lifestyle habits (AAP, 2016: 3).

In South Korea, by law, the Ministry of Science and ICT establishes the Smartphone and Internet Proper Use Promotion Plan every year. Based on the government-led 'Internet Overdependence Survey' (2004~2015) and 'Smartphone Dependency Survey' (2016-2020) the Korean government has implemented policies to prevent and treat 'addiction' and 'overdependence' on digital media use. Furthermore, most recently, the Korean Ministry of Science and ICT and the National Information Society Agency provides guides for use by infants and toddlers (0-5 years old), parents of infants and toddlers, children (6-12 years old), adolescents (13-18 years old), parents of children and adolescents, and adults and the elderly (19 years old or older). It is advised that children under 2 years old should not be exposed to smartphone's 'stimuli'. For children over the age of two, it is advised for parents to specify the amount of time a child is allowed to spend on the smartphone; to clearly define the purpose of the use of smartphones; to prioritize important work to be done; to inform the child that parents may restrict their use if the promise is not kept; to help children to set their own rules; and to be the model for children (Korea Ministry of Science and ICT, National Information Society Agency & Smart Rest Cultural Movement Headquarters, 2017).

Ⅲ. Methodology

1. General Methods

Data come from parallel studies in South Korea and the United States. Both studies involved researchers in each location (three in South Korea and two in the United States) collecting data from parents with children ages 4 to 11. The studies followed the same protocol, with minor variations. The research received Institutional Review Board approval from the researchers' home institutions. 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). 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 of schooling during the pandemic. Interview questions focused on experiences of the pandemic, particularly in connection with

children's use of media in the home. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and then read and reread by two researchers in each country. Initial analysis of interview data was led by the United States research team who developed first cycle descriptive and conceptual codes in relation to the United States data (Saldaña, 2016). These codes were applied to the South Korean data, and codes were discussed and adjusted before being applied to both data sets in Dedoose. Further information about each study is provided below. This article does not intend to hypothesize or compare participant responses based on particular demographic or geographic factors; rather, the sample provides the opportunity for analysis to consider how family contexts create different approaches to parental mediation during the pandemic.

2. South Korea Research Context

A total of 18 parents were interviewed from October 2021 to January 2022 (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. In total, 16 interviewees lived in a two-parent household, and two were single parents. In one case, a solo parent held hourly-paid lectures; in another, a parent was a full-time mother of a child with special education needs. All sixteen two-parent families had both parents working full-time or hourly. Five interviewees were full-time parents, and one interviewee was on childcare leave, while one interviewee's partner was on childcare leave. A parent shared childcare with her partner while working flexibly at home, while four parents relied on their children's grandparents. In general, all the parents had some kind of higher education and the homes had good or excellent Internet access and were media-rich. Until July 2021, most schools remained hybrid. One interviewee chose an alternative school where the child had less than one month of online education. Seventeen respondents reported that their children received online education from their school or a private provider.

3. United States Research Context

Data collection in the United States ran from May 2021 to January 2022 and included 21 parents (18 mothers and three fathers). Interviewees were recruited via snowball networking and physical flyers posted in local public spaces including libraries, park shelters and grocery stores. The resulting recruitment garnered a geographically and ethnically diverse group of participants. 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, 14 households had both parents working full- or part-time. A majority (86%) of the parents (including the interviewee and the children's other parent) had some level of higher education, and the homes were generally media rich with good or excellent Internet access. School experiences varied, with five participants electing to homeschool at least one of their

children before and during the pandemic. All participants 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. Childcare was almost non-existent when schools were closed.

4. Analytical Framework

The analysis below draws on Livingstone and Blum-Ross's three "genres for 'digital parenting'" (2020:11):

- *embrace,* in which parents seek out digital technologies either for themselves or for their children to ease family life or to gain valued professional skills or, for some, "future ready" identities and lifestyles.
- *balance,* in which parents try to hedge their bets by encouraging some digital practices and not others, often ad hoc, weighing opportunities and risks salient in the present or future;
- *resist,* in which parents articulate their efforts as attempting, at least some of the time, to stem the seemingly unstoppable incursion of digital technology into family life.

Importantly, Livingstone and Blum-Ross show how parents constantly move between these genres in their daily lives. In analyzing the "constellations of practices, values and imaginaries" that constitute the three genres, Livingstone and Blum-Ross indicate the dynamic nature of 'digital parenting', including tensions, inconsistencies, negotiations, and fluidity that constitute parents' practices in relation to screen media (2020: 13). Livingstone and Blum-Ross's framework was developed through extensive research before the pandemic. The analysis in this article investigates the relevance of the framework when considering family practices during a time of unprecedented increase in family media use. The article addresses two interconnected research questions: In what ways were parents mediating children's screen media practices during the pandemic? Does Livingstone and Blum-Ross's digital parenting framework (embrace, balance and resist) apply to pandemic parenting practices?

Ⅳ. Analysis

1. South Korean Case Studies

A. Cat Caregiver[1]: *"We needed to come up with an agreement on how we would define screen time."*

Cat Caregiver is a university professor whose family moved back to Seoul, Korea from her sabbatical in the United States in 2020 when Covid-19 started to spread. Her 13-year-old son started using a laptop before this, as his school in the United States provided students with laptops for educational purposes. Her 10-year-old daughter only started using digital media on a personal device in 2020. Cat Caregiver emphasized that for all family members to maintain their

1) Each interviewee chose their own pseudonym as they would use their own online nicknames.

daily routine, it was necessary for her to purchase additional digital devices. Her home was equipped with a sound-proof room with a desktop computer, which she and her children used for online classes or meetings via Zoom. Besides the family desktop, each family member had his/her own tablet and laptop. She tries to find a **balance** between the media she approves or disapproves of for her child by discerning the main purpose of media use. She encouraged her children to use laptops and the desktop at home for learning/studying, and she approved of her children using the smart pad for leisure (e.g., watching YouTube, Netflix and Webtoons). However, in contrast with her positive attitudes toward children having easy access to personal computers, laptops and tablets, she was not keen on her children owning smartphones. She recalled having to exchange the smartphone she bought her daughter with a flip phone without Internet access, due to concerns about potential negative impacts of a smartphone.

During the pandemic, she and her spouse, who is a scientist, frequently worked from home, which gave them both a chance to see what their children do with the digital media and what they prefer. Her spouse has a more 'strict attitude towards children's screen time'. Cat Caregiver was often in a situation where she tried to persuade her spouse that time spent on digital media can be positive and can provide valuable opportunities for children to explore their creativity.

> With regard to the use of screen media…I have become much more sensitive to whether I use media to produce or consume. My husband had no idea about it at all, but while fighting with me, he seems to have come to realize that media use for production may be another thing. My husband and my daughter can be just a kind of media consumer. But it's not fun for my son and me to be just consumers–we live for media production…. I think there are very different conceptions of screen time. My perspectives on the difference between consumption and production-based media use have become much clearer now.

As seen in this excerpt, for Cat Caregiver the balancing act of digital parenting required not only negotiation with her children but also consistent negotiation with her spouse who has a different view on screen time. The pandemic conditions enabled both she and her husband to be more observant of how children use digital media and which types of activities they prefer. Cat Caregiver shows a clear understanding of her children's digital media use. Her decisions related to digital parenting are based on her close attention to her children's media practices on the digital device. In her view, creative activities done with digital media (e.g., making music, drawing pictures) count as positive uses of the tablet and 'productive screen time'. Whereas, time spent to "consume media" (e.g., watching Netflix, browsing YouTube, flicking through webtoons) is considered as screen time that needs to be somehow limited and controlled. It can be said that she **embraces** her children's creative uses of digital media. Interestingly, her view of "productive screen time" has changed during the pandemic. She realized that to produce, one needs to

consume (or browse/surf through) information and digital content which she used to consider as "wasteful" screen time.

Despite her positive attitude toward children's creative use of media, she still wants her children to get away from the screen and engage more in face-to-face conversations or reading books. For her, children need to balance time spent online and offline. She **resists** screen time taking up most of her children's daily routine. By monitoring and controlling the amount of time her children spend online, she tries to give them enough offline time where they can engage in face-to-face interactions, contemplations and offline play.

B. Shrimp Snack: *"I think there are other ways to enhance literacy skills beyond reading books."*

Shrimp Snack lives with her husband and two sons, aged five and six. She is a full-time caregiver. Her family lived in Seoul when the pandemic started. At the time of the interview, her family had moved to Gwangju, a metropolitan city in the southwest corner of South Korea. As Gwangju had a low rate of COVID-19 compared to Seoul, she and her family felt more at ease to engage in outdoor activities. Shrimp Snack's family has access to a desktop computer, two laptops and two smart pads. She does not allow her children to own smartphones yet. She **resists** her son being in the ubiquitous digital environment. For her, it is safer for her children to be under her protective eyes while using the digital media. If one of her sons wants to look up something on the Internet, he is allowed to use Shrimp Snack's smartphone. There is a smart TV in the living room. For her children, watching TV is only allowed for content in English via Netflix and YouTube. She has a positive attitude toward her child watching content in English, as she thinks it will help her child learn the language. She feels confident that she has control over digital content and devices that her children have access to at home. She explains that screen media at home are mainly for educational purposes such as language learning and information gathering. She shared her observation that her children enjoy the interactivity of smart TV 'enabled by new technology'. Her children appreciate that they can choose from various kinds of content, therefore they are more motivated to watch and learn from educational content.

Her willingness to **embrace** technologies also comes from her belief that children acquire skills from using digital media. As seen from the excerpt below, during the pandemic, she recognized that children unexpectedly gained literacy skills from digital media use:

> The day before yesterday, we were playing a video game and on that small screen, the message 'the server is unstable and the connection may be delayed for 47 seconds' popped up. I thought my kid would find it difficult to read and understand that message quickly from what I know about my child. Because when I see him read aloud, I can tell whether he understands what he is reading or not. I don't tell him but I can feel it because I've seen it often. He actually understood that short message [popped up on screen] quickly. I was very

> surprised because he was more than I thought. He was reading texts so well and quickly in [while he was playing] games. I think there are other ways to enhance literacy skills beyond reading books that moms would prefer.

When playing a video game with her child, Shrimp Snack noticed that he fluently read and understood a lengthy error message which appeared on screen. She suggests that her child acquires a "new type of literacy" through engaging with media. She embraces digital media as she considers it helpful for her child's future by providing a natural and engaging learning environment. However, she realizes that soon she will not be able to control the types of digital media her children have access to. When playing with his peers at school, her child gains knowledge of online games or YouTube content she does not approve of at home. She admits that her attempt to guide her child to watch "quality content only" will not work in the near future, and she would have to take a more **balanced** stance. Nevertheless, she believes that children will always "gain skills or acquire knowledge" from digital content, even if the parents dislike it.

2. United States Case Studies

A. Andrea[2]: *"Just trying to be responsible."*

Andrea is a full-time caregiver with four children ages 13, 11, 8 and 4. Her husband is a full-time PhD student. Andrea described all family members as White. The family lives in a small condominium in an urban area. All the children switched from public schools to homeschooling during the pandemic, and in September 2020 the older two were enrolled in a private school. The four children share a Google Chromebook, Kindle Fire, Nintendo Switch, and there is one family television. The oldest child has an iPad supplied by the school and used only for school purposes. Andrea is aware of discourse about limiting screen time, which she says is "drilled into your head" as a parent. Andrea says she and her husband are "trying to be good parents, trying to stick to an hour or two [of screen time]… Just trying to be responsible, keep them active." The family has maintained a strict screen time limit of 1~1.25 hours per day for "recreational screen time," and before the pandemic the children were occupied with various afterschool sports and arts programs. Andrea lists various family activities pursued during the pandemic including hiking, biking and boardgames. During "recreational screen time," children are able to choose from carefully regulated options (e.g., designated Netflix channel, educational apps, "non-violent" games). Andrea positions herself as fairly **resistant** to including media in her children's routines. However, there are many grey areas in which Andrea is practicing more of a **balanced** approach to screen media, and during the pandemic, she **embraced** media use for particular purposes.

As a homeschooler, Andrea drew on media for different purposes: to occupy one child so she could work with another, to provide

2) Participants' names are pseudonyms chosen by the researchers.

resources (educational apps, instructional videos, strategy games, information), for creating digital outputs (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) and for outside instruction (e.g., piano lessons). Andrea recalls that she increased her younger children's screen media use when realizing that her older children's computer skills were behind their peers' when they enrolled in private school during the pandemic:

> Seeing the things that the older kids are now doing is forcing us to use screens more. But not necessarily for recreational purposes. It's more for educational. Or at least that's what I'm trying to tell myself.

This excerpt captures the balancing act that Andrea performs as she considers how best to prepare her children for a future with technology while aligning with her understanding about limits on screen time. She reminds herself that educational purposes are different than recreational purposes, but expresses doubt in her parenting practice.

Andrea specifically discusses evaluating sources of information as something she is having to teach her older children, because previously they did not have "unfettered access to the Internet." Further, in reference to social media and cell phone use, Andrea indicates that she and her husband want to prepare children for a future with technology: "we have to expose them to it, to teach them to use it responsibly." Andrea recognizes that her approach to media will need to change as her children get older, and having more of a balanced approach will help prepare children for a projected future: "the kids are going to get older and I have to relinquish control and trust them to make good decisions on their own."

Andrea also indicates instances during the pandemic when she embraces screen media in order to maintain family stability. Living in a relatively small space, Andrea says she sometimes uses individual screens intentionally to "separate" family members and "take a pause." She says, "screen time I don't think should be used for quiet time. Ideally, that should be reading, but sometimes we just needed to take a pause." Andrea references the conditions of the pandemic in which her children were not able to go to afterschool activities or to playgrounds as part of the reason more "pauses'' were needed in their family's domestic routines. Andrea also embraced screen media for communication with extended friends and family members via Zoom, which she did not count as part of the children's daily screen time allowance. Further, watching media together (one hour of "family show time") was a regular routine in the pandemic on weekends, particularly due to a lack of activities available for families. While this time was not included in the screen time allowance, the family viewing was tightly regulated in terms of content, with "gratuitous sex or violence" prohibited. Resisting some content, finding balance and embracing various media use as a family all played into the constant presence and negotiation of media use in Andrea's household.

B. Deanna: *"Everything is blocked."*

Deanna lives in a large urban city with her husband and two children, a daughter aged 6 and son aged 2. Deanna describes herself as White, her husband Black, and children as mixed-race. Both Deanna and her husband work full-time as teachers, and at the time of the interview (May 2021), both were teaching online from home with no options for childcare. Their 6-year-old attended public school, which had been entirely virtual since March 2020. The daughter and father were each provided with an iPad from their schools, and in addition, the household had a laptop, TV and PlayStation. At the time of the interview, the daughter was required to be online for school from 8.30 until 2.30 (with a 45 break for lunch), and she had homework to complete on the iPad after school. With virtual schooling, Deanna had little choice but to **embrace** media for her daughter. However, pre-pandemic Deanna's approach was more **resistant**, and even in the pandemic, Deanna kept tight control of content, resisting pressure she felt from her daughter's peers (or presumably, their parents). Post-pandemic, Deanna hopes for a more **balanced** approach which allows her daughter some exposure to different forms of media and technology in a controlled environment.

Before the pandemic, Deanna's daughter was diagnosed with optical issues, and her ophthalmologist recommended limiting screen time to 30 minutes per day. During the daytime, parents and daughter were at school, therefore, screen time was limited to short episodes on TV. Deanne describes new tensions connected with increased media use:

> prior to this pandemic, there was no fights about screen time, because there were no screens…She didn't know what she was missing. I don't know if this makes me a bad parent or not but she didn't know that there's some kids her age that have phones, or video games. She just wasn't aware of that.

Deanna's reflection on her daughter's pre-pandemic media practices indicates general resistance to screen media, particularly due to the "fights" that occur now that her daughter is "aware" of her peers' media consumption. Further, this excerpt highlights doubt Deanna feels in not exposing her daughter to media, asking if she might be a "bad parent" by keeping her child from engaging with her peers' media culture. Deanna has been forced to embrace her child's use of the iPad, not least for virtual schooling. She also relies on media to occupy the children when she and her husband are teaching. However, Deanna and her husband tightly regulate media content, as Deanna describes: "Her tablet is very blocked. Everything is blocked. She's constantly coming downstairs and saying she can't even get on stuff she needs for school." Deanna described her daughter's request to access YouTube, Roblox, Minecraft and Among Us, insisting that her friends are on these platforms. However, Deanna is concerned about contact with older children and adults in these spaces, particularly use of language and topics of conversation. Media that Deanna allows due to their controlled content are Nick Jr, Disney+ and co-viewing

of YouTube videos.

Deanna looked forward to returning her daughter's iPad to school in order to gain back some of the control she felt she had lost during the pandemic around screen media. Deanna maps out a future in which she will balance her daughter's media use in order to prepare her for using technologies:

> I don't think you can go from eight hours to 30 minutes…I was thinking I would teach her how to use my laptop…She's never used a laptop before…I was thinking that she could have some quiet time each day to play some games, or interact in that way, but I still don't want her on those apps that she wants to be on.

In describing this balance that Deanna hopes for in the future, she acknowledges that her daughter will benefit from learning how to use a laptop and "interact in [games]", however, Deanna wants these experiences to occur within prescribed limits of time, technologies and content.

V. Conclusion

The aim of this article is to investigate ways parents mediated children's screen time during the pandemic and how Livingstone and Blum-Ross's (2020) digital parenting framework applies to pandemic parenting practices. The analysis indicates that Livingstone and Blum-Ross's genres framework aligns very well with parents' discussions of their mediation practices during the pandemic. Parents talked about the pressure the pandemic created for them to completely change their family media practices and to accept many more hours of screen time, and they discussed how this conflicted with their understanding of 'good parenting' and ways they hoped to raise their children. We found that parents were embracing their children's media practices; however, there were many nuances involved in accepting or embracing media. In some instances, parents were *reluctantly* embracing media, for example for remote schooling, for family entertainment, or to occupy children while the parents worked, did self-care, or attended to household needs. In other instances, parents embraced media for their children because they reported seeing benefits, for example, in relation to providing socialization and literacy experiences.

While news reports and broad statistics indicate that parents were anxious about screen time and provided little resistance to children's expanded use of screen media during the height of the pandemic, our study offers a different perspective. Parents in our study were particularly clear in ways they controlled particular content, for example, by only allowing access to certain applications or Netflix accounts and by differentiating media for different children in the family. Parents' acceptance of media emerged as they learned more about their children's media practices due to the time spent together during the pandemic. Some parents who were able to observe their children reported developing a new understanding of their children's digital lives that would inform future mediation and family media practice.

In many parts of the United States where

schools did not reopen for in-person learning for up to a year, parents often worked from home and took care of their children, taking on the role of a teacher without any childcare assistance. The situation appeared to have forced some parents to alter their media mediation methods. However, there were no official lockdowns in South Korea, despite some regional differences. Despite various difficulties, local governments, education offices, and schools provided emergency childcare, and in-person classes were resumed under social distancing guidelines in August 2021. In addition, government policies on digital transformation heavily influenced education and society. The South Korean parents appeared to have attempted to learn about the relationship between media and their children, perhaps against their own beliefs regarding media's negative influences on children's development and learning. The silver lining of pandemic parenting might be that parents have a deeper understanding of their children's media practices, a hypothesis that is worth further investigation.

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Appendix

Summaries of the COVID-19 timeline in South Korea and the United States

South Korea

South Korea's first positive case of COVID-19 was reported on January 20, 2020. The government effectively controlled regional spread by conducting large-scale diagnostic tests and epidemiological investigations and implementing personal hygiene policies, including masks and social distancing. The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 mostly remained below the national average of 5,000 until around January 20, 2022, although there was a record-high peak with 621,317 new cases on May 16, 2022. COVID-19 vaccinations for adolescents and children gradually became available, including for children aged 5-11 in March 2022. As of June 2022, 86.2% of South Koreans were fully vaccinated (compared with 61% worldwide).

In March 2020, the beginning of the new academic year of all schools across the country was delayed for 6 to 8 weeks until mid-April 2020 when all schools started virtually. Remote and in-person classes began in all levels of schools in May 2020, reflecting the infection status of each region. Although there were total remote learning periods, small-scale face-to-face instruction was allowed for emergency childcare, basic academic support, and special education schools/classes. Among the 27 million jobs, 35% (9.45 million pieces) are highly vulnerable to unemployment in the short run, while 46% (12.42 million pieces) are highly vulnerable in the long run.

United States

The first confirmed cases of COVID-19 were announced in January 2020, and by mid-March there were lockdowns in some states. 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. Over 10 million people were unemployed by March 2020, with more than 5.4 million losing their health insurance (in a country with no national health insurance). All states closed schools for some period from March to June 2020, offering remote learning, and many schools remained closed until the summer break in June 2020. In the 2020-2021 school year (September 2020 to June 2021), schools varied in their approach - some only offering remote learning, others offering adapted or hybrid programs.

The vaccine rollout for health care providers and care home residents started in December 2020. However, the highest peak for COVID cases and deaths occurred in January 2021. By mid-April 2021, all states reached a widespread level of vaccine eligibility that included residents aged 16 and above. Waves of variants spread across the United States throughout 2021, and government guidelines for mask-wearing reflected these waves. Significantly for

families, in November 2021, children ages 5 to 11 years were eligible for a pediatric vaccine, and in June 2022 vaccinations for children under age 5 were approved. In June 2022, 67% of the United States population was fully vaccinated (compared with 61% worldwide).