

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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REMOTE CONTROL

Transcript

“WE ARE CREATURES DEFINED BY WHAT WE DO WITH OUR HANDS.”

-- Frank Wildon, Stanford School of Medicine

CHAPTER ONE: THE BIG PICTURE

“AMERICAN CHILDREN, I’M AFRAID, ARE ADDICTED TO TELEVISION”

-- First Lady Laura Bush

MATTHEW: I miss watching TV when I go to bed.

TEXT ON SCREEN: ON MARCH 9TH, 2005, THE KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION, A NON-PARTISAN HEALTH RESEARCH ORGANIZATION, HELD A PRESS EVENT IN WASHINGTON D.C. TO RELEASE A REPORT OF THEIR YEAR LONG STUDY OF CHILDREN’S MEDIA HABITS.

VICKY RIDEOUT: Turning to the study that we’re releasing here today, I think the first thing that leaps out is simply the huge amount of time that children and teens are spending with media and its messages; an average of six and a half hours a day, seven days a week. That’s the equivalent of a full time job plus a few hours for overtime. And it’s more time than they spend in any other activity besides sleeping including going to school.

TEXT ON SCREEN: THE STUDY ALSO FOUND THE AVERAGE AMERICAN CHILD...

- SPENDS OVER 40 HOURS A WEEK WITH MEDIA
- SITS IN FRONT OF A SCREEN FOR OVER 4 ½ HOURS A DAY
- HAS A TELEVISION SET IN THEIR BEDROOM
- EATS THE MAJORITY OF THEIR MEALS IN FRONT OF A SCREEN
- AND HAS NO RULES REGARDING THEIR MEDIA CONSUMPTION

MARIE WINN: Most people are concerned about what kids watch, whether the programs are too violent, whether they are too sexually explicit, whether the advertisements are going to make kids greedy and want junk food and so on.

TODD GITLIN: The omnipresence of media, the saturation quality of media, is something that is in a way so obvious, but in a way so unmanageable. That people would rather talk in,

usually in a critical fashion about what it is they think they understand, namely it's sexy, it's violent, it's liberal, it's conservative. Probably the most appropriate response to recognizing this phenomenon is just to stop for a minute and just try to absorb the enormity of the fact that the major collective activity of our civilization after work is being in the presence of media.

SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: With some additional research, the case will be conclusive that we are causing long-term public health damage to many, many children and therefore to society. And lots of times the response comes back to me, "well, ya know, my kid does all of that and my kid's fine." Well obviously, certain children are more vulnerable than other children.

CHAPTER TWO: AMERICAN IDLE

"THE ONLY THING WHICH CONSOLES US FROM OUR MISERIES IS DIVERSION,
AND YET THIS IS THE GREATEST OF OUR MISERIES."

-- Pascal

MATTHEW: This is cornet violence.

MATTHEW: Obviously I eat, then I brush, watch some TV, play a lot of games, and mostly eat in the afternoon, and watch more TV, play more games, watch TV, play more games, and then brush again, have dinner, and then go to bed.

AVERIE: If I were on a desert island, and I could only bring three things with me, I would bring my Xbox, my family, and my kitchen.

BETTY: They really really do have a whole lot of games, and it's in every room. But I see it this way. As long as they've done what they have to do first, which is school work and cleaning up their room, remind you today they didn't do it, and doing their school work which comes first then, and you've taken your shower, and you've done your thing, then playing the game is not a big issue. I mean, I get upset sometimes when they're like over three hours, it's like "alright enough!" ya know? And then they'll stop if it gets to a certain point where it's just like "Oh my god, you haven't had enough?" and then it's like turn it off and put something else. And it's not, don't put on the junky cartoons, put something you can actually sit down and watch and get something out of. So it, at this point, yeah, I do think they get a lot.

TEXT ON SCREEN: ACCORDING TO THE KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION, A TYPICAL CHILD'S HOME CONTAINS:

- 3 TV SETS, 3 CD PLAYERS
- 3 VCR OR DVD PLAYERS
- 2 VIDEO GAME SYSTEMS
- AND A HOME COMPUTER

MARIE WINN: Ya know one can sound like a kind of fanatic about this and make it seem like television is this evil medium and children shouldn't watch. Many kids can balance their lives perfectly well, they're just not that drawn into television. But there are a lot of kids who find television is, you might say, addictive in a kind of a vague, broad sense, not like a drug you take in, but as something they can't quite stop doing; and those are the kids who are in jeopardy.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have a favorite movie?

MATTHEW: Ah, yeah, it's the Incredibles. Yup, Incredibles.

INTERVIEWER: And how many times do you think you've watched The Incredibles?

MATTHEW: About 10, 20 times. 10, 15, 20 times. Something like that.

AVERIE: Daddy Day Care, Cheaper by the Dozen, a lot of family movies I've been seeing lately, Man of the House.

INTERVIEWER: And how often do you think you've seen them? Once or twice?

AVERIE: At least five times a week, like once a day they play.

MARIE WINN: So if you were going to watch a family today, you'd pretty much, to see what the family life is, you'd pretty much be watching people on the screen watching television. So you've got people today watching pre-television families as if this were some kind of ideal sort of thing. It is ironic and it's kind of sad and people who are happily watching these things don't quite realize that if they would just stop watching and turn off, they could have something approximating that kind of life themselves in their family.

BETTY: Matthew, can I sit there?

TEXT ON SCREEN: DINNER BEGINS AT 5:45PM
MOM ASKS IF SHE CAN SWITCH SEATS TO WATCH HER PROGRAM

MATTHEW: Okay.

BETTY: 'Cause I know you're not gonna watch the movie and I wanna.

MATTHEW: But when we're done can we watch some?

BETTY: This is what we do.

AVERIE: This is what you do.

AVERIE: We watch stuff together.

BETTY: Today I want to watch this. I can handle it for 20 minutes.

MATTHEW: Mom, this is our third day you've been outside.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 5:47PM

MATTHEW COMPLAINS ABOUT BEING OUTSIDE TOO MUCH

BETTY: So. You stay here and play all day.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 5:50PM

THE REMOTE CONTROL CHANGES HANDS FOR THE 2ND TIME.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 5:53PM

THE REMOTE CONTROL CHANGES HANDS FOR THE 3RD TIME.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 5:56PM

DINNER IS OVER IN ELEVEN MINUTES.

THE REMOTE CHANGES HANDS FOR THE 4TH TIME.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 60% OF AMERICAN FAMILIES WATCH TV WHILE EATING DINNER.

BETTY: If we lived in a different neighborhood, and I guess a different environment, it'll be a lot more different than them being home all the time and doing their homework and watching TV and playing their video games and watching videos. They'll be out more.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 72% OF PARENTS WISH THEIR CHILDREN PLAYED OUTSIDE MORE.

AVERIE: When I feel bad, I can't go outside. Well, if I have a choice, but I choose to spend my time indoors and I'd rather go outside and hang with my friends more.

INTERVIEWER: So why do you spend your time - you said you choose to spend your time inside - why do you make the choice then?

AVERIE: Mostly to watch my little brother, 'cause he can't go outside. So, ya know, I feel I have a responsibility so I stay inside.

AVERIE: Well, what I like about playing sports is I get to have fun, ya know, do something with my time rather than just watch TV or play video games. What I don't like about it is when you let your team down, you let your coach down, and it just doesn't feel good when you miss a play. And video games is just something to relax to, something you can do when you're bored. The thing I don't like about it is getting frustrated. I don't like when it's really hard for me. I get mad at just anything.

INTERVIEWER: And what do you like about playing real sports?

MATTHEW: Because they're kind of fun, and you get a lot of exercise.

INTERVIEWER: And do you like playing sports more than you like playing video games?

MATTHEW: Of course not!

RICHARD LOUV: But increasingly kids seem to prefer the virtual reality. There was a story recently in the New York Times about the fact that kids tend to want to play video basketball games rather than going out and having real basketball games. So it's clearly a distraction. But I really don't trash technology in the book. I don't think that's the point. It's not that video games are evil. It's a sense of balance in our lives and that's been lost.

MATTHEW: I'm still practicing my hoops, still trying to get one. In school, I got like two or three shots in it, was pretty hard to get one in, but when you get a lot of practice you finally get it.

INTERVIEWER: What's easier, is it easier to get a hoop in the basket in real life or get a hoop in the basket in the video game?

MATTHEW: It's much easier to get one in the video game, 'cause you have to practice and practice to get a hoop in the real world.

MARIE WINN: Of course, one of the consequences that we're seeing now is that kids are not as active when they are watching television as they might be if they were doing anything else. And so we've got an obesity, a very serious medical problem, that our society suddenly facing and understanding, and television is involved in this.

THERE IS A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN HOURS
SPENT WATCHING TV AND CHILDHOOD OBESITY
-- U.S. Centers for Disease Control

INTERVIEWER: Why did you quit baseball?

MATTHEW: Cause it was getting harder and harder for me, and the outfield was too hard, cause they kept hitting it out in the outfield and I couldn't throw it.

OVER 80% OF NINE YEAR OLDS PLAY ORGANIZED SPORTS.
BY THE TIME THEY TURN THIRTEEN ONLY 20% DO.
-- U.S. Centers for Disease Control

BETTY: I don't know. I think most kids nowadays, this is what they do; they watch TV or stay home. I don't know what an average kid does. To me, they're average. To me, this is what an

average kid does. Matthew, don't touch that. I think they watch too much sometimes, ya know?

MATTHEW: That's what kids always do.

TEXT ON SCREEN: REGARDLESS OF THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES, MATTHEW AND AVERIE ARE AVERAGE AMERICAN CHILDREN, BASED ON THEIR MEDIA HABITS.

MATTHEW: A lot of kids get to play, and some kids don't, and they like playing video games.

INTERVIEWER: And why do you think they don't play?

MATTHEW: Probably because they do something bad or something like that, or they get punished.

AVERIE: I have a lot of friends, many aren't really interested as I am in video games, many just watch TV, music videos. Or they're more outside than I am, so they don't really have the time or money to do what I do.

BETTY: This is where we're at. This is the kind of environment we're in now where technology is kind of ruining and overtaking everything. But as long as they're not hurting anybody.

INTERVIEWER: If you had one hour, one extra hour every day to do something, what would you do?

MATTHEW: Obviously play games and watch TV, duh! And eat a lot of junk food.

TODD GITLIN: Our children's children's children will have a very disrupted and disruptive world to cope with, a world that is in many ways more dangerous than the one we live in now. And all these will require the closest attention, the most supreme devotion of intellectual and moral resources if society is to be viable, and what we're giving them instead as a legacy is a distraction machine, which will be more enjoyable every passing minute. We are therefore not serving them with the capacity to manage a deeply unmanageable environment, and we are therefore doing them a disservice. Along their way, they'll have a rollicking good time.

OVER 6 MILLION CHILDREN ARE MEDICATED FOR ATTENTION
DEFICIT DISORDERS, AN INCREASE OF 600% SINCE 1981.

-- National Institute of Health

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL PAST TIME

“IT’S HARD NOT TO LISTEN TO TV: IT’S SPENT SO
MUCH MORE TIME RAISING US THAN YOU HAVE.”
- Bart Simpson

MAN: Can you tell us that the mere fact that kids are immersed in this much media is matter of concern? That’s what I want to know.

DONALD ROBERTS: Yes, I think it’s a matter of concern.

MAN: Okay.

MARIE WINN: I think television is a very, very basic issue in American life. We see it in David Putnam’s book, *Bowling Alone*, and the affect it has on community life. I believe it has had a tremendous effect on child-rearing strategies that parents use, just the availability of television. These are all things that are apart from the content of the programs, all things that have to do with the availability, with the displacement of other activities by television. I think it is a big issue, and scratch any of your other issues and television is gonna be there.

RICHARD LOUV: I think the main problem with television and other electronic media is that they steal time from other activities. When kids are in nature, time isn’t stolen. It’s amplified. There’s a greater use of all the senses at the same time, that amplifies time, that makes us feel more alive in the time that we have. And when you take nature away from kids and replace it with a secondary experience, in a sense they’re losing big chunks of time from their lives.

TODD GITLIN: There’s a parable about a fellow who drives up to a customs station in a truck, and the customs official comes out and questions him about whether he has anything that he shouldn’t be carrying across the border. And the man says “no” and the official waves him through. And the next day, the same truck driver shows up, and this time the customs asks him to get out of the car and pats him down and can’t find anything. So he waves him through and the next day the guy is back again. This goes on for years. The guy is always appearing, he’s always being searched, the truck is being searched and no contraband is being found. So flash forward now years later the customs officer is about to retire and the truck driver drives up and the officer says to him, “ Look, I really have to know what you’ve been smuggling. Don’t deny that you’ve been smuggling something. I know you’ve been smuggling something. I’m retiring. I can do no harm to you. You’ve got to tell me, though, just for my own satisfaction, what it is you’ve been smuggling all these years. And the guy says, “trucks.” The media have been smuggling the habit of living with media.

SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I had a veteran teacher say to me one time, I said “what’s the difference between teaching today and teaching 35 years ago when you started?” And she said, “Well today even the youngest children come into the classroom, and they have a mental remote controller in their heads, and if I don’t capture their attention within the first five seconds, they change the channel. And it’s very difficult to get them to focus on a single

task that is frustrating or difficult for them to master, because there is always the out that they have learned to expect in their daily interaction with media.”

THE TOP TWO ADJECTIVES THAT CHILDREN USE TO DESCRIBE SCHOOL WERE “BORING” AND “TIRED”.

-- Education Week Magazine

HOURS OF TV WATCHING PER WEEK SHOWN TO NEGATIVELY IMPACT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: 10+

-- U.S. Dept. of Education

MARIE WINN: I think that one of the most important things for people to consider about television is not so much what it makes the child do, whether it makes the child more violent or whether it makes the child greedy and want to buy things, but the very simple idea that the hours that you spend watching television displace other life activities. You’ve only got a certain amount of hours in a day, and so now it becomes very important to consider what would they be doing otherwise.

CHAPTER FOUR: TURNING BACK THE CLOCK

“I REALLY DIDN’T LIKE TV TURNOFF WEEK, EXCEPT I DID NOTICE THAT MY GRADES WENT UP AND I WAS IN A GOOD MOOD ALL WEEK.”

-- Drew, 2ND Grader from Donora, PA

MARIE WINN: From infancy on, kids play, and play has a kind of a meaning to most people of something sort of inconsequential, but in fact play is the work of little kids.

TEXT ON SCREEN: TIME SPENT BY CHILDREN ON FREE UNSTRUCTURED PLAY HAS DECLINED BY 25% BETWEEN 1981 AND 1997.

INTERVIEWER: What’s the best thing about playing outside?

SARAH: Tarzan and hoola-hooping, chalk, playing with Buddy, rolling around in the grass, sledding when there’s snow outside. That’s it.

JACOB: I like to go outside and play sports usually or play with Buddy.

INTERVIEWER: What sports do you like to play?

JACOB: I like basketball, football, baseball, tennis, and

INTERVIEWER: And you play them all?

JACOB: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to play more video games?

JACOB: No, I like playing outside better.

INTERVIEWER: Do you like watching television?

SARAH: It's ok.

INTERVIEWER: Do you play video games?

SARAH: No.

INTERVIEWER: No? Have you ever played video games?

SARAH: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, what did you think of it?

SARAH: I dunno, weird.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

SARAH: Because you look at a screen. You just do stuff. I dunno, it's just weird.

DEBBIE: I had a neighbor tell me that Jacob would have no friends that would wanna come over if I didn't have video games.

JERRY: Which is ridiculous.

DEBBIE: This was over two years ago or something. I think there was the worry that you don't have what the other kids expect, then your kid might not have friends, which I thought was absurd, and so far it's proven to be.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 64% OF PARENTS WISH THEIR CHILDREN SPENT LESS TIME WATCHING TV AND PLAYING VIDEO GAMES.

JACOB: Well, we play sports outside a lot, and that's pretty much all we do.

INTERVIEWER: And do they ever wish that you had a video game system here?

JACOB: Not really, they think that they have enough, and the fact that I have a bigger yard than most of them have, they like that and they play outside.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think you watch more TV than your friends or less?

SARAH: Less.

INTERVIEWER: Less? Do they talk about TV at all?

INTERVIEWER: No? What about video games? Do your friends play video games?

SARAH: But not many.

INTERVIEWER: No? Most of your friends don't?

SARAH: Most of my friends don't, but a lot of boys talk about them in class.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about that?

SARAH: Not good.

JERRY: There was one friend of Jacob's who, his parents took the video games away for a certain period of time, for two days or whatever. And they heard a noise in the middle of the night, and it was at midnight of the day that he was allowed to start playing, the kid had set his alarm and woke up and played from like 12:00 to 2:00 in the morning.

DEBBIE: You had the story a little off, but that's okay.

JERRY: It was something like that, wasn't it?

DEBBIE: Yeah.

JERRY: The kid was up in the middle of the night!

DEBBIE: He wasn't allowed for the rest of the day. So he saw him waking up, and he got up and he went down at midnight. They heard him coming up at 1:30 in the morning.

JERRY: He was up playing because it was after midnight.

DEBBIE: He was proving a point, ya know?

INTERVIEWER: And why do you think if they like playing sports more than video games? Why do you think they play video games?

JACOB: Because if they're like, if they get tired of sports, sometimes, and they can play video games, or if they just get tired, or if it's really dark outside, or a thunder storming.

DEBBIE: What's worked for me is to just have very strict clear guidelines that they know. For example, TV doesn't go on before 6:00, so that they don't ask. And occasionally they'll ask, I

say “what time is it, is it 6? No, you know the answer.” So that made it really easy. I think the biggest thing is that children are amazing at how resourceful they are, and I had a friend who eliminated TV altogether for a while, and she said it was amazing what her children started doing, what they came up with. And so I think that just to turn the stuff off and see what happens, ya know children whine and complain at first, but then they come up with alternatives. So I think that’s amazing. They’re better at it than adults are.

DEBBIE: What was the highlight of the weekend, guys? Sarah.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 6:15 PM. DINNER BEGINS.
EVERYONE DESCRIBES THE FAVORITE PART OF THE DAY.

DEBBIE: Wanna know what my highlight was?

SARAH: Isabella? Isabella again was so late.

DEBBIE: What?

SARAH: Isabella again was so late.

DEBBIE: Yeah, but you know what my highlight was? Reading your report card.

JERRY: Oh yeah, I gotta say, that’s my highlight too.

JACOB: Of the week?

SARAH: You guys are never gonna get this, not in a billion years.

JACOB: Will you tell us?

SARAH: I’m gonna do it. No.

DEBBIE: Go ahead and do it.

SARAH: Do you want me to do it? It’s super hard.

DEBBIE: Is it a thing?

TEXT ON SCREEN: 6:31 PM
THE FAMILY BEGINS A GAME OF TWENTY QUESTIONS.

JERRY: And how are we supposed to guess if it’s at your friend’s house?

JACOB: I don’t know, we know this.

DEBBIE: She said we know.

JACOB: I know what it is.

SARAH: Mommy, I know you're gonna know it. Jacob and Dad, I'm not sure.

DEBBIE: Well then, that's no good.

JERRY: That doesn't count.

SARAH: No, but it starts with a B.

JACOB: Did I give it to you?

JERRY: Yup.

SARAH: A note!

JERRY: It was the anniversary note that you and Sarah gave to mommy and me for our anniversary. It 's the mark of a dog that I don't know.

JACOB: Stitches? Stitches?

JERRY: The stitches of a dog that I don't know.

JERRY (cont'd): Want more chicken?

DEBBIE: You need to eat off your spoon, Jacob.

JACOB: Help.

DEBBIE: Oh no, that's gonna be Gabe again.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 6:49 PM
DESSERT IS INTERRUPTED FOR A PLAYDATE FOR THEIR DOG.

TEXT ON SCREEN: 6:53. DINNER IS OVER
IT HAS LASTER THIRTY-EIGHT MINUTES.

TEXT ON SCREEN: ONE HOUR EACH DAY OF QUALITY CONVERSATION BETWEEN PARENTS &
CHILDREN IMPROVES ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.

JERRY: When Deb and I first started getting together, we had some fights about the television stuff. I mean, I wanted it on during dinner and stuff like that.

DEBBIE: I forgot you used to do that.

JERRY: Yeah, that's the way I grew up.

DEBBIE: TV was always on, yeah.

JERRY: I just learned to, just different habits and found pretty quickly that it was just better to be able to just talk with Deb, and then when the kids came along it was a no brainer. When you look at it side by side, being able to sit down and have a normal dinner and conversation, as opposed to looking at somebody else's life on the television, it's just a no brainer.

INTERVIEWER: Do you like playing video games or playing outside?

JACOB: Playing outside way more, cause you're a lot more active.

INTERVIEWER: And playing video games or reading?

JACOB: Reading cause, I dunno, if you get into a good book, you cant really stop reading it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you like playing video games or doing schoolwork?

JACOB: Playing video games.

INTERVIEWER: Playing video games or hanging out with your friends?

JACOB: Hanging out with my friends.

INTERVIEWER: And playing video games or spending time with your family?

JACOB: I like spending time with my family more.

DEBBIE: My main objection to like the Gameboys is that it takes away kids ability to entertain themselves. Ya know, just staring into space, or daydreaming, or making up games in the car, those kinds of things. If you have a Gameboy or, now they have theses DVD's in the vans, or even a Walkman that's antisocial as opposed to listening to the radio. They don't ever have to interact with each other or with us, or entertain themselves, or just space out and do nothing, so I won't allow any of that in the car either. I think it's really healthy to have that down time, because life is so full of stimulus all the time.

RICHARD LOUV: Well, probably the ultimate example to me of the irony of our perception of the outside are all these ads that are showing up now selling backseat television screens in cars. In almost every one of those ads for those backseat entertainment centers, to keep kids distracted with cartoons, you'll see the SUV racing along a beautiful mountain stream or the grand Tetons in the background, and here the kid is watching a cartoon in the backseat. We

don't seem to value looking out the window anymore. And how can kids learn how their cities and how the country is put together, unless they look out the window?

DEBBIE: I mean, this is the time for kids to have that use of their imagination. It's the best time. And if we put them in front of electronic things, they don't develop those muscles. And I think it's really a missed opportunity. I think it's a gift also to give children the ability to entertain themselves, because they'll have that their whole lives. And our children growing up in this generation don't know how to do that, a lot of them, and I think it's sad. I wonder what's gonna happen with their children.

RICHARD LOUV: The most important thing, I think, that a child can get while still a child from life is a sense of wonder. In addition to a sense of being loved, I mean that comes first of course, but if you don't develop a sense of wonder as a child it's pretty tough to do that later. And it's pretty hard to develop a sense of wonder sitting in front of a video game playing Grand Theft Auto, for instance, as opposed to going out into the woods, in the fields and having nature experiences with your family, for instance, or on your own. The sense of wonder is always waiting in nature for children, and we should not be denying them that chance.

CHAPTER FIVE: TAKING BACK THE REMOTE

"YOU CANNOT KILL TIME WITHOUT INJURING ETERNITY."

-- Henry David Thoreau

MAN: Commissioner, one of the interesting things about this study is that a majority of parents seem to be saying, "we're ok, ya know, we'll put a TV in the kids bedroom, we'll put an internet access in the bedroom, we're not gonna tell kids how to use TV." Let me put this bluntly, if the parents don't give a damn, why should the rest of us?

MICHAEL COPPS: I think what we're really talking about here, and we really gotta keep our eye on the doughnut and not the hole, this has become such an all-pervasive media generation, and we're not doing our job on the parental level, on the broadcaster level, or the governmental level. One reason is that we have such a sorry state of media education in this country, and I hope we'll talk about that today, because to raise a generation of kids who are exposed to six and half hours of this a day and not tell them what to look for or what the media is doing for them, and not to educate the parents, I think is a tragedy.

FEWER THAN 5% OF U.S. SCHOOLS TEACH MEDIA EDUCATION.

-- U.S. Center for Media Literacy

COMMON: At a certain point, I feel like corporations have to put some morals into their business structure. We've been saying it earlier, and Senator Clinton said it too, it's like certain circumstances don't allow parents to be there. So when does the media, not only just through

corporations putting it out there, or the artists, the creators, but when do you all say “ya know what? We gonna take time to promote something that’s positive to our children?”

SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: So what can we do to protect children and help parents? I think the most important lesson of today’s report, as with so many of the earlier reports, is that parents need to understand what their children are exposed to, so that they can be aware of how to take corrective action.

VICKY RIDEOUT: For those parents who are concerned about how much time their kids are spending with media, this study indicates there are some very simple things they can do and that’s the good news.

VICKY RIDEOUT: So, for example, kids who live in houses where the TV is not left on most of the time spend an average of an hour less each day watching TV. Kids who don’t have a TV in their bedroom spend almost an hour and half less watching TV each day. And kids with TV rules that are usually enforced spend an average of about 40 minutes less each day watching TV than kids who don’t have TV rules.

RICHARD LOUV: There has happened this vast disconnect between children and actual physical involvement with nature, direct experience as opposed to secondary experience. And now much of childhood is comprised of secondary experience, sitting in front of a tube playing a video game, being on the Internet or watching television. That’s a remarkable change in human history.

VICKY RIDEOUT: And I think there isn’t a simple answer to it. I think the message from this study is simply for all of us to focus on the fact that media plays such a central role in young people’s lives. And so all of us need to be thinking about that, whether it’s policy-makers thinking, can I do a better job of labeling, encouraging media providers to label the content so parents can make choices that are appropriate to their families? Whether it’s the Kaiser family foundation recognizing that centrality of media to say, “we wanna work with artists like Common, or networks like Nickelodeon or others to reach youth.” It’s a powerful way to reach youth with positive messages. Or whether it’s parents saying, “maybe I wanna rethink whether I turn the TV off during dinner tonight and talk to my kids instead.” So I don’t think it’s a clear black and white good or bad, I think it’s - this study is like a census of kids in media in this country, and what it’s doing is focusing our attention on the raw numbers and then it’s up to all of us to interpret those and act on them.

TODD GITLIN: Well, I don’t know that I want to answer your question, because it’s too easy to say the obvious. Ya know, parents should be less indulgent of the bells and whistles, the quick and dirty rewards of media. Media programmers should be less obsessed with the bottom line of their corporations. We should have media literacy programs. I mean, those are all in a way no brainers. But they also miss the tremendous imperatives that there are in this civilization that keeps sending the parents to use the gadgets as baby-sitters and the executives to make careers by asking solely the question, what will make the maximum number of eyeballs pay attention to this show? And the kids will wanna know what’s wrong

with having fun, and those are all legitimate questions, but I don't know that we get very far with our moralistic pounding of the desk to the effect that everybody's got to take responsibility. I mean, sure, but there is something I believe perverse about the entirety of a civilization that rewards the quick and dirty, automatic, itchy trigger finger, remote control existence that has become the dominant sort of existence.

TEXT ON SCREEN: WHEN A CHILD BORN TODAY TURNS 30 YEARS OLD, HE OR SHE WILL HAVE SPENT ALMOST TEN YEARS OF THEIR LIFE IN FRONT OF A SCREEN.

TEXT ON SCREEN: A FULL DECADE SPENT WATCHING LIFE INSTEAD OF LIVING ONE.

[END]