Parent-Pressure

A History of Parents as Co-consumers of Children's Media

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Abstract

In this article, I examine change and continuity in conceptions of parental agency in public debates about children's media consumption in Scandinavia, 1945-1975. During this period, public debates about the various kinds of media products children consumed were dominated by different groups of professionals: first, by teachers and librarians in the mid-fifties and, then, by intellectuals and performing artists in the late sixties. With a radically changed professional hegemony and a shifting media landscape, the role of media in children's lives was described very differently during the period. However, a strong continuity in the debates was the negative influence parents were seen as having on children's media consumption due to their lack of insight and interest in the topic. Drawing upon recent works on children's media, consumption and enculturation, I analyse why the negative description of parents as co-consumers prevailed despite radical changes in views on children's media consumption. In particular, I examine the shared inter-Scandinavian socio-cultural contexts that structured the changing professional and political groups' pressure on parents to perform according to their norms and values.

Keywords: children's media, enculturation, parenthood, Scandinavia, media history, public debates

Introduction

The question of parental co-consumption of children's media appears to be ever present in today's public debates. Should parents allow their toddlers to use iPads? What kinds of content are they letting their children encounter online? Are television programmes and games developed by public service broadcasters better than videos from YouTube and advergames? Questions like these surface weekly, if not daily, in print, on television and online; they are addressed in all kinds of parental literature; and being raised by NGOs, politicians, private companies and parents themselves (Clark 2012; Johansen 2014; Sjöberg 2013). The answers are many and often depend on the type of professional who gives them (e.g., media researchers, psychologists or educators); the type of media in question (books, tablets or television); the message (entertaining or educative); and the media in which the story itself appears (tabloids, news broadcasts or parental magazines).

The present article takes a step back from today's debates, offering a historical perspective on concerns about parental co-consumption of children's media. It introduces

new questions about children's enculturation via media and its entanglement with parental agency using a multi-layered comparison of two different periods' key debates: one about high versus low culture reading material in the nineteen fifties and its successor about politicization of children's media in the late sixties and early seventies. In doing so, the article answers a call for historicizing questions about public debates about children and media (Buckingham & Jensen 2012) and creates a context in which the dynamics and high levels of anxiety in present-day discussions can be understood (Clark 2012).

The context for understanding today's questions about parental agency in children's media consumption is created by unravelling the main levels and themes that have defined different interests in this area. Though the current digital media environment is in many ways different from what children encountered in the nineteen fifties, sixties and seventies, the intriguing dynamic that can be found in these periods' public debates can inform new research on the positioning of parental co-consumption in present-day discussions. Particularly striking in this regard is a seemingly similar view of childhood as a place where the wrongdoings of society can be set strait through professionally guided enculturation without raising any political or socio-cultural issues. In the present article, I show how this was the case in the fifties, sixties and early seventies and hope the article provokes researchers to ask whether current-day debates on children's media consumption are also dominated by "naturalized" professionalized ideals, which, potentially, exercise a highly normative pressure on parents to "doing the right thing" when they act as co-consumers.

My investigation starts from an analysis of debates about the role of media in children's lives within a specific setting, namely the Scandinavian welfare societies.¹ What has been of particular interest to me is the continuity of a negative conceptualization of parental co-consumption during the period 1945-1975, which prevailed despite radical changes in the ways in which media's role in children's lives was viewed and discussed. How could aesthetic and professional hierarchies change by 180 degrees while the view on parental co-consumption as problematic remained exactly the same? By holding up a vast body of sources from the printed public sphere against knowledge of the shared socio-cultural environment in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, in particular the rise and consolidation of the welfare state, I aim to understand the discrepancy of great change and strong continuity inherent in this question.

The article's theoretical framework combines theories from childhood, media and consumption studies. It emphasizes dimensions of enculturation and dependence upon parents in children's media consumption and how these have been understood and discussed in the Scandinavian public. The methodological framework is built around a diachronic comparison of views on parents as co-consumers in public debates about children's media consumption in two periods: the mid-fifties and the late sixties/early seventies. At the same time, the analysis moves across national borders by focusing on inter-Scandinavian commonalities in the conceptualization of parent's role in the child-media relationship. This broad scope enables me to focus on wide sociocultural trends in Scandinavian views on childhood and media consumption as the cause of change and continuity rather than particular national issues.

Media Consumption and Enculturation: Looking for the Significance of Parental Agency

Recent literature on children's consumption often considers the multiple social and cultural significances related to this activity (Buckingham 2011; Clark 2014; Cook 2008; Cross 2004). Drawing on the work of David Buckingham, consumption is understood here as something that has a symbolic, communicative function and "define[s] and construct[s] our identity. As such it depends upon people learning to interpret cultural symbols, acquiring particular cultural values and following (or at least understanding) cultural norms" (Buckingham 2011: 37). This definition of consumption covers all kinds of relationships that children (and adults) have with commodities, including media products. In these relationships, both children and adults are understood to play an active role in shaping the meaning of the relation. The roles of adults are the focus of the present paper for two reasons: first, because it is conceptualizations of parental agency in relation to children's media consumption that are investigated and, second, because adult professionals and political groups have dominated these conceptualizations in public debates.

The definition of consumption above emphasizes the role commodities play in the construction of cultural values and norms. When children and adults interact with commodities, they are understood to express and negotiate their identity in relation to the society they are part of. In a recent criticism of the term "consumer socialization", Daniel Thomas Cook proposes that we call this active process "commercial enculturation" (Cook 2010). This is a concept that confronts a narrow view of what constitutes consumption. The concept "assumes that consumption and meaning, and thus culture, cannot be separated from each other. [...] Children [...] are...] entering into social relationships with and through goods and their associations" (Cook 2010: 70). Taking inspiration from Stanley Fish (1980), we can understand consumer culture as something that takes place within specific "interpretive communities" bound by space and time. This again leads to the question of how meaning-making, understood as enculturation, is related to children's media consumption at a specific point in time. Furthermore, by appropriating this perspective, the conceptual constructions created in the debates about children and media come into focus as spaces where parents' agency as co-consumers is defined and contested in light of its contribution to (their children's) enculturation.

The above characterization of (media) consumption emphasizes that, when we consume, we participate in the maintenance or undermining of a system of cultural and social values. This means that when parents are involved in children's consumption directly or indirectly as co-consumers, they participate in what we might call the cultural politics of consumption, if we take politics to signify a shared set of assumptions or lived identities. When parents take part in children's consumption, they are, thus, wittingly or unwittingly engaged in consumption politics, creating identities for themselves and their children through their involvement with goods, as also described by Roger Silverstone and his colleagues with the concept "the moral economy of the household" (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992). It is the ways in which these identities have shaped or been shaped in public debates that are of central interest in the present article. As we shall see, the process of how specific conceptualizations of the child consumer are constructed is particularly pertinent in this process, as it indirectly and often unwittingly produces a

certain image of idealized adult behaviour against which the actions of adults, including parents, can be viewed (Cook 2011).

**Across Media, Across Nations:
A Scandinavian Comparison of Parent Pressure²**

In order to investigate change and continuity in the conceptualization of the parental role in children’s media consumption, I compare how this issue has been shaped in the public debate by focusing at two points in time between 1945 and 1975: the mid-fifties and the late sixties. These two periods were established as units for comparison using two different entry points: first, through an examination of previous literature on histories of children’s media in Scandinavia in the latter part of the nineteenth century (e.g., Bakøy 1999; Birkeland et al 2005; Christensen 2003; Christensen 2006; Felitzen 1999; Helander 1998; Kåreland 2009; Rydin 2000). Second, digital and printed indexes from Denmark, Sweden and Norway, which list the titles of all major native language newspaper and periodical articles from 1945-1975, were systematically reviewed using a set of keywords related to children and media to determine which periods to look at in detail. On the basis of this review, two periods were established as centres for the analysis, as articles were particularly numerous during these periods and, judging from the titles, where charged with normative content: 1953-1957 and 1968-1972. For these two periods, all indexed articles related to children’s media consumption in a leisure-time setting were collected, using the registers and indexes’ lists of themes by date and titles, or electronic meta-data. These added up to 1942 articles (see Fig. 1). Later, because inter-textual references to other works by a specific author, conference or government reports or radio broadcasts appeared in the articles, this material too was included into the data pool. In this way, many sources from both before and after the selected key periods, often of a different nature (books, reports, broadcasts) than what had first been in focus (articles), came to inform the analysis. This has enriched the explanations of continuity and break by allowing a ‘thickening’ of the analytical description both chronologically and with extra layers of biographical data on key debaters (professional background; key arguments in scholarly/political work), hubs of professional dissemination (union meetings; professional journals and conferences) and political influence (government reports and white books).

Table 1.

Period/Country	1953-1957 newspaper art	1953-1957 periodical art.	1968-1972 newspaper art.	1968-1972 periodical art.
Denmark	211	89	208	154
Sweden	288	75	159	98
Norway	66	78	324	192

Through their interconnectedness, the sources present a discursive map that covers the cultural space in which struggles over children’s leisure-time media consumption have taken place. These turned out to be arenas in which no institution *per se* has held power but, rather, a free-for-all, no man’s land between different groups of welfare-state

professionals, media producers, parents, politicians and cultural critics. Analysing this map with the help of key arguments in secondary literature (including, but not limited to, *ibid.*), we see how hegemony has shifted in this arena in an intricate interplay with broader sociocultural and political changes in the welfare states.

The theoretical point of departure has formed analytical fix-points for the analysis in the form of questions related to the communicative process that has taken place in the public during the two periods. In order to analyse the construction of parental identity in co-consumption of children's media, I have therefore used the following questions to categorize the vast body of sources:

- 1) What were the roles that the media should (and should not) play in children's lives;
- 2) Who were the professionals/political groupings that defined the answer to these questions (and what does this tell us about the motivation for their positions in the debates);
- 3) How were parents addressed directly or positioned indirectly as either co-consumers or adults in general (and thus assumed to have different behaviour patterns than children, as outlined in Cook 2011).

All of these questions were related to a general analysis of themes that derived from a triangulation of the sources, the existing historiography and theoretical fix-points related to "media enculturation", "parental co-consumption" and "children-as-consumers".

The vastness of the sources and their various origins meant that I could trace particular arguments or even a specific debater through various kinds of mediated public arenas, from academic journals and specialized professional magazines to newspapers and popular magazines. Given the overall scope of the analysis, it has been the similarities across these different spheres that, primarily, have held my interest, as I take these to reflect the broader socio-cultural foundation of the professional or political groups that were involved in the debates. This is also why I have chosen to refer to a number of specific sources, which express an idea or a viewpoint particularly well, and to combine these with related observations/analytical entry points from secondary literature. I have hereby allowed specific debaters and texts to become representatives of professional or political groupings. The sources referenced below must thus be understood as representatives of groupings made from the categories that were established from my initial analysis of the material based on different positions in the public debates.

1950s: Irresponsible and Incompetent Parents

In the late forties and early fifties, Norway, Sweden and Denmark all had governmental or other semi-official bodies that conducted large surveys on the reading practices of children and young people (Bejerod 1954; Fransson 1954; Slettvoold 1953; *Unge pædagoger* 1952). They all found great gaps in what educators would like children to read and what children preferred. The data included information about all kinds of reading material from books to magazines, newspapers and comics. The concern appears to be as great when it was Enid Blyton types of books as when it was comics in newspapers or magazines that children read: all materials, books or comics, that were not carefully adapted to the minds of children were considered to be dangerous to children's well-

being – no matter their format. Certain formats were seen as more closely connected to quality literature than others: the unique book that was not part of a series, written by a well-known author and published by an equally well-known publisher (*ibid.*; Jensen 2012). But there was nothing that was safe for the untrained eye, as the Norwegian authors' union warned: Norway's best publishing house had been infested by the Nazis during the war, resulting in the poor and dubious quality of their children's books (Hagemann 1954). Therefore, to understand which books were best for children, one could not just buy a book judging from the publisher, price or general format. No, teachers and librarians continually warned; to know whether something was appropriate, one had to have knowledge of both developmental psychology and aesthetics (see, e.g., Buttenschön 1953; Larson 1954; Nørvig 1952; Tenfjord 1953).

The importance of children's media consumption meant that children and their parents would need careful guidance in their choice of media products. Unsupervised consumption of inappropriate material was assumed to have damaging consequences for children's mental health, as we see in the debates on comics during the period (Larson 1954; Winter 1995). The connection between the focus of dominant professions on prevention of mental harm and a strong emphasis on the need for knowledge about children's psychological development in order to select the right reading material framed the role of parents in children's media consumption: their lack of professional insight made them useless, even harmful, to the social engineers' panoptical procedures.

Towards the mid-fifties, work by UNESCO on children as a new mass media audience was central in turning general Scandinavian concerns about children's reading material into more specific concerns about superhero comics. With the Norwegian UNESCO committee functioning as a hub for the dissemination of concerns about comics to a Scandinavian public, the attention of librarians and teachers in Denmark, Sweden and Norway turned towards the potential threat the superheroes presented (*Arbejdsutvalget i Statens folkeopplysningsråd* 1954; *Statens folkeopplysningsråd* 1956; Winther 1955; Bejerot 1954). For the Europeans in UNESCO, the threat of superhero comics had primarily been framed as a question of the Americanization and homogenization of Western culture (Bauchard 1952/53). In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, this was picked up within the framework of scepticism against free market capitalism – a key issue in the new welfare states, where the aim was that living standards should not depend on pure market forces (Christiansen et al. 2006:12). In the discussions on comics this became a focus, because children were seen as particularly vulnerable to the capitalist recklessness embedded in comics production and distribution, as they were believed not to be able to withstand the low quality products and the power of advertisements (see, e.g., Brøndegaard 1955; Fransson 1953; Ipsen 1954; Johansen 1954; Nørvig 1953).

The mid-fifties discussions about comics also took on other dimensions besides the question of commercial dumping down of quality in children's reading material. In Scandinavia, the role of children as future citizens of the welfare state became a determining issue for the course of the debate and its framing of parents as co-consumers. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the interests of the state in all three countries widened to include social issues that had previously belonged to the private sphere; and, accordingly, their citizens were increasingly counted as active participants in the progress and workings of the state alongside various professional groups (de Coninck-Smith & Sandin 2004). Ning de Coninck-Smith and Bengt Sandin have described the

parallel expansion of the welfare states' areas of interest and growing democratization of society at large as closely linked to an increased focus on education and sociocultural equality (ibid.: 768). The focus on education and social equality through the establishment of comprehensive schooling meant that all children, no matter their cultural, social or economic background, were now part of the central resource on which the new society should be built. Superheroes, however, were seen as endangering this plan.

Alarmed by children's comics consumption, librarians and teachers took up arms against *Batman*, *Superman* and the *Phantom*. For the most part, their head-on plunge into the public sphere with fierce warnings against comics book can be understood in light of the responsibility these professionals had in their role as social entrepreneurs. The formal education as well as informal *bildung* that children were seen to be in need of to fulfil their role as good welfare state citizens had been put in the hands of teachers and librarians by the Scandinavia governments. These professionals had to ensure that children grew up supporting democracy, equality and shared views that would facilitate the continued growth of public welfare. To them the superheroes' violent and non-democratic ways of solving society's problems were seen as incompatible with these aims (Arbejdsutvalget i Statens Flokeopplysningsråd 1954; Bejerot 1954; Haxthausen 1955; Norland 1954; Slettvold 1953; Gustafsson 1954). An additional support – albeit on a more practical level – for the view that comics were inappropriate reading material was the suspicion that their visual representations of text in a short and snappy form would harm children's ability to read "proper" books, a skill that was believed to be pertinent to becoming a good citizen.

The importance of children's leisure time media consumption for enculturation purposes put great pressure on parents. When they allowed their children to consume the "wrong" kinds of media products, such as the superhero comics, it was these future citizens' mental health, and thus the very foundation of the welfare societies, that was at risk. That parents were exposing children to this risk and thereby failing in their role as co-consumers is quite clear from discussions about children's media consumption: they were described as lacking skills, for instance, in choosing books. In articles about children's literature, we are told how little parents actually knew about finding appropriate books for their children – they were incompetent in this matter and needed careful guidance by professionals (Bentzon 1953; Buttenschøn 1953; Nørvig 1953; Kragh-Müller 1953). But this incompetence was also described as paired with a certain degree of irresponsibility; parents were also portrayed as absent and uninterested. In articles about film-going, parents were described as sending their children off to the cinema, not caring what they watched or how it affected them (Siersted 1953; Granat 1953; Germeten 1953). In the period's most cited and elaborated book on children's comics consumption, we hear how terrible it was that parents themselves read comics and did not care about their children's comics consumption (Larson 1954).

In the debates about children's leisure-time media consumption, "parents" were generally used as a neutral term, not divided into gender or class; only a few times were working-class parents mentioned as being particularly neglectful, but this was the exception (Bentzon 1953). This un-nuanced negative description of parents' general incompetence and neglect underscores the point that it was the general climate of professionalization that had a great stake in creating the period's strong and negative discourse around parental lack of competence regarding their children's media consumption.

Solutions to the problem of children's poor choices in reading material and films often took the form of creating a space in which consumption could be regulated by professionals who understood children's needs for media products that were mentally safe and good for their enculturation. Film clubs and children's libraries were suggested as spatial solutions for creating a "safe" environment in which children could come and read, watch and listen to media productions selected to fit their age and stage. Once again, we see how developmental psychology in its basic and popular form created a foundation for the period's common understanding of children as mentally vulnerable and subject to great danger if exposed to something unfit for their particular mental stage. Media consumption generated by the combination of market and peer pressure; children's own preferences; and parental ignorance were all threats that children had to learn how to avoid, and their parents were side-tracked in this process. In conclusion, parents failed to provide the support their children needed, because they had neither the pedagogical insight nor the interest in providing their children with what teachers and librarians thought was appropriate media for children as future citizens of the Scandinavian welfare states.

1960s and 1970s: Conservative and Corrupted Parents

In the late sixties, the Scandinavian countries experienced a challenge to established norms, which played a prominent role in the debates about children and media. The significance of the 1968 youth rebellion and its counter-culture has often been linked to the change in pedagogical and educational values at this point in time (Andersen 2007; Nørgaard 2008; Korsvold 2008; Rydin 2000; Kåreland 2009). Criticism of existing cultural and social values, in particular the way in which they were transmitted to younger generations inside and outside the educational system, was a common starting point in the many different forms that "1968" took – from the hard-core political variants of neo-Marxism to the counter-culture lifestyle of the hippies (Jensen 2013). However, Norwegian historian Tora Korsvold has shown how the criticism of the welfare state from the New Left to some degree converged with changes in welfare state institutions and ensured a shift from a primarily psychological definition of children's needs to an increased emphasis on sociology (Korsvold 2008). The shift in dominance of professional knowledge inside the welfare state and the criticism of the educational system from outside are of particular interest here: together, they seem to pose a two-front attack on the fifties' dominant discourse on education and developmental psychology, which had defined the negative role of parents as co-consumers in debates on children's media consumption.

Fuelled by a desire to revolutionize the Scandinavian societies, a new generation of intellectuals and producers of children's media entered the debate about children's media consumption by the late sixties. Their interest in changing the existing society radically caused them to focus on the role of children's media as a conveyer of established values and norms. In 1968, Gunilla Ambjörnsson, a young, Swedish children's book author, critic and television producer, wrote a book called *Trash Culture for Children*, which collected, connected and amplified the critical viewpoints of her fellow left-wing intellectuals and media producers on the production, distribution and content of children's media (Schultz 1972; Sundström & Allroth 1970; Ørjasæter 1972). In Ambjörnsson's view, there was no such thing as neutral or apolitical content; all children's media had political

significance. To her, that which was said to be “neutral” was, indeed, political because it did not reveal the ways in which it supported already existing political, economic and sociocultural structures. Thus, she took one of the most widespread opinions of the 1968 youth revolt (Olsen & Andersen 2004) and brought it into the field of children’s media. Building on this foundation, Ambjörnsson and her like-minded contemporaries argued that children would benefit from an explicit politicization of their media products. They proposed to bring to an end what, in their view, was a long-standing tradition of giving children media products that were either “commercial trash” or so-called “high-quality” – the latter of which was perceived to be moralistic and escapist (Ambjörnsson 1968).

A central point in the argument for revisiting the standards of children’s media was that children deserved to be treated as competent and knowing individuals. The new generation of debaters argued that the well-meant, protective and moralistic tendencies they believed were apparent in many of the books, films and television programmes that were generally considered to be of high quality and appropriate for children made these media products boring. They proposed that children were suspicious of happy-endings, because they were well aware that the real world was not like this (Ambjörnsson 1968; Hemme 1968; Sjöstrand 1970). Thus, the argument ran, these seemingly appropriate media, for instance books that were promoted in the fifties as children’s classics, were dull, unattractive alternatives to the media products of “commercial trash culture” (Ambjörnsson 1968: preface). Commercial trash (pocket books, comics, magazines, slapstick movies and westerns), therefore, was what many Swedish children preferred, because they found these products “more realistic despite the fantasy they represent[ed]” (ibid.: 24). Accordingly, this lack of respect for children’s interests and needs, apparent in the so-called high-culture products, was what drew children into the arms of the “trash”. The emphasis on and criticism of children’s low status in traditional hierarchies of power, became particularly important to the discussion of children’s media consumption in the sixties and subsequently to the role of parents as co-consumers, because the focus on children as individuals marginalized parents as an entry point to children’s leisure-time media consumption even further than in the fifties.

The new standpoints, which were brought up in discussions on children’s media, won a great deal of ground in the growing area of children’s culture, which attracted academic, public and political interest. An official advisory assembly in the Nordic Countries [Nordisk Kulturkommisjon] discussed the questions Ambjörnsson’s book had raised (Nordisk Kulturkommisjon 1969). The success of its ideas can partly be explained by the ways in which the new generation of debaters – despite their original, radical political agenda – managed to include and reach out to a fair share of the debaters who had dominated the fifties on several fronts. The points on which these otherwise very different groups came together are important, because their unity partly explains why parents were continually framed as inadequate co-consumers even though the standards for appropriate children’s media had changed by 180 degrees.

One of the points on which the old and new generation agreed was the distributive solutions they proposed to improve children’s access to appropriate media products. To debaters of both generations, the state, not the home, played the central role as the distributor of appropriate children’s media to all children. In 1969, the Nordic Commission for Culture held a symposium where debaters from both generations met (Skard 1970). They disagreed on many issues, but a speech held by one of the fifties’ central debaters,

Norwegian Åsa Gruda Skard, shows how they agreed on parents' inability to be good co-consumers of children's media. In her speech, Skard emphasized that, even though she saw the family as the ideal caretaker, the state had to actively balance out what she called "the unfortunate" conditions that industrialization and urbanization had created for families in modern society (Skard in Nordisk Kulturkommisjon 1969). She claimed that appropriate children's media did not reach children because parents were ignorant about the importance of the issue. Her solution was that the state had to be more actively involved in the distribution of appropriate media products using instruments such as legislation and education, making the state a strong, governing support to the family (ibid.:40). These solutions were considered an extension of the power of the state, which would help parents and, in the end, children to make appropriate choices. Likewise, Ambjörnsson also called for state solutions to the distribution of appropriate children's media to all children and raised the possibility of having a non-commercial, national publishing house. The state, thus, became a central solution in the various conceptualizations of appropriate children's media that both women represented. Nevertheless, Ambjörnsson saw the values of the current state as conservative and wished to replace it with another, more socialist state (Ambjörnsson 1968).

Ambjörnsson represented the view that children's media should help children see the problems of society and address potential problems within their own family (ibid.). In the view Ambjörnsson represented, children's media were supposed to give children the ability to face their own *and* society's problems – independent of what political views or social values their parents might hold. Within the left-wing discourse to which Ambjörnsson adhered, parents were depicted as the conservative forces in children's lives: they were an obstacle to children's empowerment and emancipation (and, ultimately, to the achievement of a socialist society). This – freedom from the restricted enculturation promoted by the home and the school – was what the new kind of socialist children's media was supposed to help to overcome (FBT 1968:3). According to Ambjörnsson, owing to parents' potentially conservative influence, they should play only a marginal role in children's media consumption. Thus children represented a progressive resource in the present society, but also, as in the fifties, a bright future population that should take society in the right direction – and children's media consumption should support this. However, it was no longer as educated welfare state citizens, but as emancipated people in a new and different society, free from old traditions and values, that children should develop. In this process, children's media became a means for separating children from their potentially conservative parents.

Discussion: Parent Pressure, Parent Failure

In the landscape of public opinion on children's media consumption, the dubious role of parents as co-consumers was often tucked inside another point, mentioned in passing as just another thing to worry about. Only in rare cases were parents directly addressed; their lack of interest and knowledge was described and lamented, but they were not confronted as active recipients of this message in public writings that discussed the issue. Direct address to parents only appeared in texts that were meant to guide their co-consumption in a restrictive manner, such as book reviews. During the entire period 1945-75, parents were, on the whole, not trusted to have the skill, insight or right at-

titude to be able to participate in children's media consumption unless they received direct instructions, and they were not invited to take part in discussions about their role and failures. Thus, even if the role of media in children's lives was a highly political, opinion-based matter, in the sense that it was determined by whatever ends the dominant debaters wanted children's enculturation to be aimed at – shifting from the fifties' good welfare state citizens in the making to the seventies' critical and politically active children – parents were nevertheless side-tracked as incompetent. In the fifties, it was their lack of professional skills that framed this picture, in the seventies it was their lack of (the right) political insight.

The fierce importance with which the arguments for one or another kind of media product were stated further restricted the scope for parental agency. Throughout the period, children's media consumption was treated as something that had a great impact on their enculturation. Should children consume "inappropriate" material, they would not be able to carry on society in the ways that the dominant debaters wanted, neither in the fifties nor the sixties or seventies. The high risk involved was therefore another reason why parents should either be firmly guided or kept out of children's involvement with media altogether.

This positioning of parents, and their subsequent failures in carrying out the right consumption politics, can partly be explained in relation to the development of the (Scandinavian) welfare state. The increasing professionalization of all public realms related to children, and the ever-increasing interest in social issues that previously resided in the private sphere, were important to the view of parental co-consumption. In the fifties, the perfect parent was someone who acted like a professional librarian or teacher when it came to choices of leisure-time media – which regular parents failed to do. And though the debates in the late sixties were dominated by other types of professional and political interest, which rebelled against traditional educational/rearing discourses and practices, the intellectuals and producers of children's media did not argue against making the child a subject of society, quite the contrary: as parents were seen to be too embedded in traditional practices to reach, children should be "saved" by someone else, namely, the producers of (the right kind of) children's media. The entire periods' recurrent solution of spatial separation of children from the household and its dodgy moral economy and placement of them into libraries, theatres and film-clubs underpins this conclusion; it reflects a material demarcation of the role that parents could (not) play when it came to children's media consumption.

Throughout the period, the description of children as innocent in any consumer relationship also had consequences for the implied notion of adults, including parents. Whatever role the media were preferably believed to play in children's lives (educational, liberating or creatively stimulating) and however children were seen as not consuming what was for their own good, they were believed to be innocent in this respect. Children were persistently, from the forties to the seventies, described as lacking knowledge about the "appropriate" alternatives, as being seduced by enticing commercials or tricked by flashy, but hollow, stories. The indirect implication here was that, had they known better, they would have chosen what a given period's dominating debaters thought was appropriate. This belief in children's desire to live up to the standards of whoever was in power in the debates reflected badly on parents; they were the adults who should know better, but did not.

In this last line of interpretation, we see what Daniel Thomas Cook has called “a ghostly presence” of adulthood (Cook 2011). Cook made this comment based on implicit notions of adulthood inherent in the scholarly field of Childhood Studies and their negative consequences for our view of adult capacity for constantly enlightened, rational agency. However, we could also argue that the public debates on children’s media consumption have been “haunted” by a notion of adults and, ultimately, parents as those who were supposed to know better. The consequence of describing children such that their choices were seen as unwitting of the identities their media consumption created for them – rather than as choices based on a different moral economy – therefore made parents weak in their role as (responsible) co-consumers unable to perform as their children would, given the chance.

The dynamics of parent pressure in public debates described above raises several interesting questions for today’s research on children’s media consumption. First, it would be interesting to ask which professional norms dominate the field today and how they pressure parents. Second, a quick “googling” shows that today, at least in Denmark, parents themselves are “talking back” in letters to the editor, on social network sites and blogs. But which socio-cultural segments do these parents represent and are their voices being heard? And, third, has the increased acknowledgment of children’s agency meant a lowering of pressure on parents as co-consumers? If we look at today’s public debates, we see how “childhood” is still singled out as the place where social illnesses such as poverty, obesity and literacy should be battled. The fourth question is, then, how does children’s enculturation via media consumption factor in here, and what pressure does it place on parents?

Notes

1. Here, Scandinavia is taken to cover Denmark, Sweden and Norway as opposed to the Nordic Countries, which also include Iceland and Finland.
2. The methodology described in this chapter was not only used for the present article, but for collection of all sources for my PhD dissertation (Defining the (In)appropriate: Scandinavian Debates about the Role of Media in Children’s Lives, 1950-1985. Department of History and Civilisation, European University Institute, Florence, Italy).

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