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Family mediating practices and ideologies: Spanish and Portuguese parents of children under three and digital media in homes

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Contact with digital devices has become ubiquitous, and children are going online at younger ages and accessing a wide range of digital devices even from the first

months in life (Holloway, Green & Livingstone, 2013; Marsh et al., 2015). The technical possibilities of current digital devices (e.g. smartphones, tablets) allow young children to interact with them around any space of their houses or even in other spaces such as cars or restaurants. Discussions about the use of digital media by very young children is caught between discourses that emphasise their potential for current or future development and learning (Marsh et al., 2017; Livingstone, Mascheroni, Dreier, Chaudron & Lagae, 2015; Sefton-Green, Marsh, Erstad, & Flewitt, 2016), and the risks at various social and psychological levels (Livingstone, 2009). In the context of the home, families are working through this reality across cultural, social and economic backgrounds, adjusting family practices and environments to hyper-connected society. Parents are mediating their young children's engagement with digital technologies often with uncertainty, because these have little precedent in their own experiences and, importantly, because they lack clear guidelines (Chaudron, Di Gioia & Gemo, 2018; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2018). Very young children have been identified as a priority group to be studied further (Gillen et al., 2018; Holloway et al., 2013) as there are currently very few studies with children under the age of three (Mascheroni, Ponte & Jorge, 2018; Ólafsson, Livingstone & Haddon, 2013; Poveda & Matsumoto, 2018).

This chapter thus seeks to advance our understanding of how parents mediate the inclusion of their very young children into this digital society. We examine parental mediating practices and ideologies around digital devices as well as the media ecology of home (cf. Hepp, 2014) with regards to the digital activities of children aged under three, drawing on the cases of five children from Spain and Portugal from the *A Day in the Digital Lives of 0-3 Year-Olds* project developed under COST Digi-LitEY Action (Gillen et al., 2019). Data collection was carried out during 2017 and the research protocol consisted of a six-hour observation/ video-recording of the focal child's activity at home, as well as a preliminary and a follow-up semi-structured interview with the parents on attitudes towards technology in regard to their overall child-rearing perspectives, and on basic information regarding the family (see the full methodology in Gillen et al., 2019).

We explore differences in how access to digital devices is granted to children and how digital technologies are taken up by young children. There are significant convergences in the digital technologies available in the homes of the families analysed here, yet also visible differences in how children and adults engage with these technologies. From our perspective, this process can be understood in terms of parental mediation practices and we propose an analysis drawing from a specific understanding of parental mediation that will be used to examine the case families.

Parental mediation and children as participants in family practice

Work on parental mediation rests on different conceptualizations of mediation with specific methodological and analytical implications. A first approach focuses on *parental mediation styles*. This perspective tends to conceptualise mediation style as a stable, internal trait of the parent (similar to parenting style, Darling & Steinberg, 1993), which can be associated to individual characteristics such as other psychological components or socio-demographic variables such as socioeconomic status, gender, cultural origin, geographical location, educational level, etc. of the parents. This approach has also been associated with parents' own digital practices; which, in turn, are also conceptualised as relatively stable and measurable (e.g. Nikken & Jansz, 2014; Valcke, Bonte, De Wever, & Rots, 2010).

A second perspective focuses on *mediation strategies*. Within this approach, the focus is on how digital technologies are incorporated into broader family routines and the arrangement of the daily lives of children at home. This shift moves attention to child characteristics and mediating variables, such as children's age (e.g. Galera, Matsumoto & Poveda, 2016; Livingstone, 2007; Zaman, Nouwen, Vanathoven, de Ferrerre & Looy, 2016) or family structures (Nikken, 2018).

Finally, more recently, mediation has been understood as an *emergent process*. This approach aims for a much more interactional perspective, as a social and material ensemble involving participants (parents and children), digital/media devices and other artifacts (Jewitt, 2013). In particular, for young children, aged below 3, focus has been placed on the interactional ecologies (Erickson, 1996) that are created in homes through the organisation of domestic space, the availability of different digital devices and the organisation of activity, and how these aspects are shaped by parental beliefs.

These approaches to mediation build on different metaphors (and ontologies) around digital media and devices, as well as childhood. From a *mediation style* perspective, digital technologies and media is something to be "contained", because without supervision from adults, digital devices and screens would overflow and consume most of contemporary children's time and activity. From a *mediation strategy* perspective, digital devices are "administered": parents and adults provide or subtract devices to arrange daily life and regulate children's behaviour (i.e. punish/reinforce). Lastly, from an *emergent process* perspective, devices become "objects" within interactional systems alongside parents and children.

In this chapter, we aim to *move towards* a framework closer to the third perspective, as it will allow comparison across cases and examination of how families create distinct arrangements around digital media and digital technologies. We do this through an analytical procedure in which each family/case is examined through the following steps: (a) describe the digital media environment/ecology in each home (Hepp, 2014; Plowman, 2015); (b) examine how digital media practices unfold, and how they are arranged and mediated by parents during young children's on-going activities, focusing on when/how/with whom the case study children use or have access to digital technologies; (c) explore the parental media ideologies and beliefs around digital technologies behind the practices (Gershon, 2010); and (d) analyse how home arrangements, digital media practices and media ideologies intersect within each family and across families.

The five case study families in Spain and Portugal

Both Spain and Portugal are quickly developing into an advanced digital societies. In 2018, Spain ranked 10th among the 29 European countries, while on the whole Portugal was ranked 17th (European Commission, 2018). Yet, Portugal has more than 90% coverage of ultrafast broadband at homes, which makes it third among the EU countries.

Two families (Gloria and Roser¹) from Spain and three families from Portugal (Tomás, Matias and Vicente) participated in our study. The focal children were two girls and three boys, aged between 19 and 34 months at the moment of data collection. Participating families were considered middle-class; two families (Gloria and Matias) are mixed nationality and use more than one language in their homes, and one lives in a bilingual region (Roser in Catalonia). All children lived in two-parent heterosexual homes, except Vicente whose parents are separated and lives with his mother. The families resided in the metropolitan areas of Madrid, Barcelona and Lisbon.

Young children's media ecologies, practices and processes

Children in this sample possess a similar range of digital technological/media devices (Table 1). All the families have at least a standard TV set, a smartphone, and a laptop or PC; and most of the families also have a DVD player, electronic toys, and tablets. The number of devices possessed by families is also similar. The Device

¹ We will use pseudonyms for the focal child in each family. See Gillen et al. (2019) for a full description of each case.

/ Person Ratio (DPR) ranges from 1.75 to 3.25; for those devices that specifically share mobile and tactile features (underlined), the ratio ranges from 0.66 to 1.5.

Table 1: (Mobile) Digital technologies possession by the case families

	Gloria (SP)	Roser (SP)	Tomás (PT)	Matias (PT)	Vicente (PT)
Devices available in the home	1 Standard TV (not connected to a cable) , <u>1 Smartphone</u> , 1 Laptop computer, 1 Desktop computer, <u>1 E-Reader</u> , 1 Digital video player/recorder, Electronic toy(s)	1 Standard TV, <u>2 smartphones</u> , <u>1 tablet</u> , 1 Laptop computer, 1 DVD recorder, Electronic toy(s).	2 Standard TV, 1 Smart TV, <u>3 smartphones</u> , <u>1 iPad</u> , 1 PC, 1 laptop, <u>1 tablet computer for children</u> , electronic toy(s).	1 Smart TV, <u>2 Tablets</u> , <u>2 smartphones</u> , 1 PC, 1 Digital Video Recorder, 1 Digital Radio, 1 PlayStation, <u>1 portable media player</u> , <u>1 tablet computer for children</u> , Electronic Toy(s)	1 Standard TV set, <u>1 Tablet</u> , <u>1 Smartphone</u> , 1 PlayStation, 1 PC, 1 Digital Video Recorder, 1 Digital Radio, Electronic toy (s).
Total	7	7	11	12	8
DPR*	2.33	1.75	2.2	3	2.66
MDPR**	0.66	0.75	1.2	1.5	0.66

*Device/Person Ratio (DPR); **Mobile Device/Person Ratio: (MDPR)

A case by case analysis - which we compare at the end of this section - shows how different mediation practices and processes emerge across families within these relatively similar living conditions.

Gloria

Gloria engages very little with digital technologies throughout her day. Her play activities and the objects she uses are primarily non-digital. She only has access to two digital devices, which she can only use with parental assistance: the laptop computer - to watch media/videos from YouTube and the TV/DVD player - to watch cartoons and materials (from home and from the local library). Neither the family nor Gloria watch broadcast TV programmes as the TV Set is not even connected to a cable or antenna.

Her main type of digital media consumption happens during daily routines. For instance, during breakfast she sits on a high-chair while she watches videos on the laptop. She occasionally watches a video, alongside her mother or father, mostly upon her request. Yet, Gloria frequently observes her parents using digital technologies. The laptop computer emerges as a central device in the family home. It is located in the living room table; it is always on (even when other activities are taking place) and parents use it often (to use the internet, make arrangements and run errands, etc.), but it is strictly for parental 'work'. It is also present - as is her mother's smartphone - even when the mother engages in a book-reading activity with Gloria (these moments are captured in Figure 1).



Figure 1: Father preparing a video on the laptop while Gloria has a snack; watching a DVD with her mother; parents engaged in the laptop while Gloria plays; Gloria and her mother reading a picture book - the laptop is always on, on the table.

Roser

As for Roser, digital devices and media are centrally present in her daily routines (see Figure 2). She has all her meals at home watching cartoons on a tablet device. She watches it alone, or with her father, who helps her eat. Roser also has occasional access to a smartphone. She participates in calls (talking with her mother on the phone) or watches videos of her friends sent by their parents. She also likes to see photos of herself and take selfies.

Roser's daily life is also surrounded by her parents' use of digital devices. The household has the TV on most of the time. This is not meant for her to watch directly, but is rather part of the media "background" of the home: while she plays with other toys, parents do house chores or watch a series while feeding Roser. Roser also observes frequent use of the smartphone by her father and predicts some of its uses. At the same time, she is encouraged to and does play with other non-digital toys. For example, during the recorded day her father took her to a park in front of their flat and they also spent the afternoon playing with traditional toys.



Figure 2: Roser having breakfast while watching a cartoon; Getting ready for lunch watching a cartoon; Talking to her mother on the phone; Taking a selfie on sofa with her father and brother; TV on the background when Roser has yogurt for her afternoon snack; Handing over the smartphone to father when it made a sound.

Matias

Matias 'home has the largest number of digital devices among the five cases but he himself does not use or have access to most of these. Throughout the day he interacted and played with his sister mostly on non-digital artefacts and toys. The only digital technological device they have regular access to is the television - a Smart TV - in the living room. Matias watched broadcast child TV channels, at the request of his older sister. Other devices such as tablets are used very occasionally when the children are travelling (both parents are from outside Portugal and the family travels to their parents 'home countries).

TV/media consumption time emerges when the children want to rest from other forms of play or, as described by the parents when they need to be entertained while the parents or the mother have to complete other chores or activities, which is described by the mother as a "babysitter" role. Daily routines and meals for the children do not involve the use of digital or any other media devices. Matias is also a witness to the intense use of digital technologies by his parents. In particular, he views his mother who is a photographer working from home on her laptop computer placed in the main living room. This work takes place while Matias is also in the living room engaging in other forms of play so that he can be monitored by his mother (Figure 3 illustrates these moments).



Figure 3: Siblings watching television while the mother prepares lunch in the kitchen; the two siblings having lunch in the kitchen without digital devices; the mother working on her laptop in the living room while attending to Matias.

Tomás

The main devices Tomás has access to are television and smartphones. The digital activities are integrated as part of their play activities, usually on or around the sofa in the living room. Tomás likes to watch movies on the television, either on his own or with his family. However, he needs to negotiate the use the television with his older brother as they want to watch different content. The television set in the living room is usually on throughout the day even when children engage in other activities such as reading a book with other family members. The boys do not usually use the TV in their bedroom.

Tomás also engages with his mother's smartphone. He uses game apps installed on the phone and asks for his mother's help when pop-ups and ads emerge. As reported by the family, they had bought a tablet for the children in order to keep the "adult iPad safer". However, rather than using this child-oriented tablet, the boys prefer to use the parents' smartphones.

Nevertheless, Tomás spends more time throughout the day engaging with other forms of non-digital play and literacy activities. He loves to play with his own dolls, 'reading' books and riding on bicycles. Also, there is a strong connection between his digital and non-digital activities: for example, his passion for animals is demonstrated in his digital activities above with animal-feeding game and love for Lion

King, as well as playing with a farm box made of wood and stuffed animals (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Tomás watching a movie with his family; Tomás 'reading' a book with his father while the television is on for his sibling; Tomás' mother helping him with the smartphone when an ad pops up; Tomás playing with his farm toys.

Vicente

Vicente has access mainly to a tablet and a television and they are used for a "babysitting" role throughout the day. After waking up, Vicente and his brother watch TV together in the living room. While he watches TV, he may be engaged in other activities simultaneously, as drawing on the floor, or when he gets tired of playing with his brother. He also watches TV again in the evening (after he has taken a nap and has been to a park). The mother puts a show for him on TV normally, as he cannot operate the remote control or the TV box on his own.

Vicente also engages with tablet devices in the afternoon, to watch the same cartoons and music videos he watches on broadcast television. However, this use needs to be negotiated with his brother, as his sibling also likes to use the family tablet device but to watch different programs/videos. Therefore, Vicente will use the table when he sees it as "free" or will ask his mother to negotiate use with his sibling. His engagement with the tablet also includes dinner time in the kitchen, watching English music videos, as well as after dinner in the living room, while the mother cleans up the kitchen.

Vicente can operate the list of suggestions on the tablet and can choose his next videos within the streaming application. Yet, he needs help to solve other problems and asks his mother for assistance. His older sibling also plays a supportive role with digital technologies despite the fact that this role is less acknowledged by Vicente or his older sibling.



Figure 5: Vicente watching and touching TV after waking up; Watching TV while drawing on the floor; Vicente playing with a tablet while brother watches TV; Engaging with the tablet while having dinner.

A summary of mediation practices and processes across cases

Table 2 summarises the mediation practices in the five case families. By looking at mediation practices as processes, we can see that access given by parents does not necessarily lead to its uptake by the children, such as the case of Tomás with a tablet especially bought for him, or the case of Roser with broadcast television. We can also see that, in some cases (Roser and Vicente), digital activities are clearly integrated into routines (i.e. meals or snack), while in others (especially Matias) they are only part of play activities. Even in families that promote little child digital engagement (Gloria and Matias), the children are surrounded by and observe frequent and intense digital engagement by parents. Siblings, in particular, older siblings, also play distinct but important roles in the mediation practices of the family (Matias, Vicente and Tomás).

Table 2: Summary comparisons of mediation processes

	Gloria (S)	Roser (S)	Matias (P)	Tomás (P)	Vicente (P)
General description	Limited access to digital technologies but part of family routines. Surrounded by parents' use of technology.	Integrated into meal routines. Surrounded by parents' use of technology.	Limited access to digital technologies. Surrounded by parents' use of technology.	Integrated use of TV and mobile phone in play activities. Connection between digital and non-digital activities.	"Babysitter" role. Long, free access, helped by Mother.
Main devices used	Laptop	Tablet	TV	TV (smart TV) Smartphone	TV (standard) Tablet
When	Breakfast / Snack / Play	Meals	Play	Play	Meals / Play

How	Father or child choose a program (i.e. YouTube videos).	Father chooses YouTube videos.	When requested by his sister, the mother selects program for both siblings.	He requests videos to play, navigates YouTube with supervision of mother. Negotiation with other family members.	He selects and navigates YouTube videos on his own, with help of mother. Negotiations with brother regarding which device to use.
With whom	Alone or with family.	With father or alone.	With sister.	Alone or with brother and father.	Alone or with brother.

Additional activities	Surrounded by and observes parents' use of laptop and mobile. Co-watch DVD video requested by her on TV.	Surrounded by and observes parents' use of mobile and TV (which is on all the time), but not interested in using for herself.	Surrounded by many digital devices at home that he does not have access to. Observes mother working on computer all 'day.' Father lets children use his mobile occasionally.	TV (children's channel) is on all the time even when he engages with other activities. No interest in tablet bought for them.	
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Digital media ideologies

The interviews with parents allow us to tap into different dimensions of engagement with digital technologies: (a) rhetoric behind the mediation processes discussed above; (b) the perceived 'effects' of digital technologies on children; (c) attributed learning value; (d) the role of technologies in future uses and learning; and (e) 'media literacy' concerns and aims. Parental beliefs across these themes are threaded into distinct family digital media ideologies (Gershon, 2010), briefly described here for each case.

Gloria's parents actively promote alternatives to digital practices. They see digital technologies as a necessary and valuable learning tool in the future but, as they also believe it is easy to learn how to use digital technologies, they consider that delaying

her contact is not problematic as Gloria will quickly learn how to use them. Their main media literacy concern is helping Gloria have a critical perspective on technologies and technology use.

Roser's parents also want to promote alternatives to digital activity in their child but, at the same time, accept that technology is a part of their family life - although here parental stances vary and Roser's mother sees digital technologies as a much more "dehumanising" force. They also consider that learning how to use digital technologies is not difficult and can be delayed but situate digital skills alongside other basic skills (such as reading and writing). When turning to media literacy concerns their focus is on learning how to handle privacy and security issues in digital technology.

Tomás' parents have moved a step forward in accepting digital technologies as one more aspect of daily life and turn their concerns and strategies to their child's current engagement with digital technologies. They see digital media as something that may "consume" children's attention and time, so they actively monitor use. They also see some present learning potential for digital technologies (e.g. English as L2) and do not express future media literacy concerns beyond that later learning of digital technologies will be easy and "natural".

Matias' parents are also primarily oriented to their child's present engagement with digital technologies but, in contrast, have a much more negative view of digital technologies. They see digital media as something that can be "all-consuming" of the child's interests and attention and as having "zero" learning value. Consequently, they restrict as much as possible Matias' current access to digital technologies and believe that delaying this contact will not have consequences as it will be easy to catch up.

Finally, Vicente's mother articulates her discourses on digital technologies around practical concerns. As discussed above, digital devices are used as a "babysitter" resource and, in this respect, her only current concern is that Vicente becomes "dependent" on technologies to organise his leisure and activity. Given this use of digital technologies in the organization of daily life, little is expressed regarding the educational value or learning demands of digital technologies. Turning to the future, her main worry regarding digital media is how Vicente will learn how to handle "peer pressure" with and through digital technologies.

In short, the analysis of the different dimensions reveals diversity in media ideologies across families. For instance, although Gloria's and Roser's overall family approaches or rhetoric are similar, in the sense that they promote alternatives to digital technologies, their views regarding the effects of technology on children or their primary media literacy concerns are slightly different. Also, across the cases the learning value attributed to technology ranges from explicitly mentioning a "zero-value" to recognising its relevance to different present and future skills.

Conclusions

We bring together analyses on media ecologies, practices and ideologies as a first attempt at understanding parental mediation as emergent processes. While there is not a substantial difference in the presence of digital devices available across the cases (between 6 and 12 devices), there is considerable variation in how access is granted to young children, how use is structured by the parents, and how those devices are (or not) taken up by children. More digital technology available in the home does not necessarily lead to more use, as either access is restricted by parents (Matias) or devices simply are not taken up by the child (Tomás). On the contrary, even though not many devices were available, the use of the available devices may be intense depending on parental ideologies, circumstances, and perhaps the child's characteristics. Similar patterns of technology use by young children may also, actually, connect to different parental media/digital ideologies, family biographies and parental experiences with digital technologies (Gloria, Roser).

Understanding these practices as part of mediation as an *emergent process* allows us to acknowledge children as actors in the social and material interactions with their parents and digital technologies - and therefore also a part of children's (digital) rights to access, understand and participate in digital media (Livingstone, 2016; Staksrud & Milojevic, 2017). This chapter made evident the complexities in which these processes occur among children of young age, and their cultural situatedness, highlighting the multilayered relationship of children with digital technologies, and as increasingly integrated into everyday life, interacting with physical spaces, objects and experiences. It is thus crucial to interrogate how children's rights are promoted in ways that foster their general healthy development and well-being.

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