Media
In 1774, the great German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (pronounced gur'-tuh) published *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, about a young man who kills himself in despair over his unrequited love for a married woman. The novel immediately became immensely popular all over Europe, inspiring poems, plays, operas, songs, even jewelry and an “Eau de Werther” scent for ladies. At the same time, the novel inspired immense controversy. It was banned in some parts of Germany for fear that impressionable young readers might interpret it as recommending suicide, and in Denmark a proposed translation was prohibited for the same reason. Although claims that Werther caused an epidemic of suicide in Europe are now regarded as unfounded (Hulse, 1989), in one verified case a young woman who had been deserted by her lover drowned herself in the river behind Goethe’s house in Weimar, Germany, a copy of *Werther* in her pocket. Goethe was sufficiently disturbed by the controversy over the book to add an epigraph to the 1775 edition of the novel urging his readers not to follow Werther’s example.

In Goethe’s time as well as our own, the question of media effects has been a source of public debate and concern, often with a particular focus on the lives of adolescents. One more recent example took place in the autumn of 1993, concerning a movie called *The Program* released by the Walt Disney Company. The movie, about the players and coach of a college football program, quickly became controversial because of a scene in which one of the players demonstrates his manly toughness by lying down in the middle of a busy highway at night as cars and trucks whoosh by him. Some adolescents who had seen the movie proceeded to try the stunt for themselves. An 18-year-old Pennsylvania boy was killed and two other boys were critically injured, one of them paralyzed. In response to the resulting outcry, Disney hastily recalled the film and deleted the scene in question, while strenuously denying responsibility for the boys’ reckless acts.

This is about as definite an example of media effects as it is possible to find. There can be little doubt that the boys were imitating the behavior they had witnessed in the movie. They had seen the movie just days before, and friends who accompanied them the night of the accidents testified later that they were imitating the stunt they had seen in the film.

At the same time, this example illustrates why drawing a simple cause-and-effect relationship between the media consumed by adolescents and their subsequent behavior is problematic. Literally hundreds of thousands of people (mostly adolescents) saw the movie with the controversial scene. It was playing in 1,220 theaters at the time, and even estimating modestly at 100 persons per theater would put the total number of viewers over 100,000. Yet the total number of reported incidents that resulted from adolescents imitating the scene was three. Even if it were generously estimated that 100 times as many adolescents imitated the scene as were injured in the process, the total proportion of adolescents who were affected by the scene to the point of imitating it would amount to one fourth of 1% of the people who watched it. Evidently, then, the adolescents who imitated the scene had traits or circumstances that led them to imitate it, even though the vast majority of the people who watched it did not.

This incident illustrates both the potentially profound effects of the media on adolescents and the complexity involved in tracing those effects. Debates over media effects are often polarized, with those at one extreme glibly blaming media for every social ill and those at the other extreme dismissing (just as glibly) all claims of media effects as unverifiable. I believe both extremes are mistaken, and in this chapter I will present you with a more complex (and, I hope, more true-to-life) approach to understanding young people’s uses of media.

**THINKING CRITICALLY •••**

If one or two people out of a million who watch a particular movie or listen to a particular song are negatively affected by it, is that reason enough to ban or withdraw the movie or song? Or should people—even adolescents—be responsible for how they respond to media?
Media and Young People’s Development

No account of young people’s development would be complete without a description of the media they use. Recorded music, television, movies, magazines, and the Internet are part of the daily environment for nearly all young people currently growing up in industrialized countries (and increasingly, as we will see, in developing countries as well). The typical American adolescent listens to music for about 2 hours a day and watches television for another 2 hours (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). Forty percent of American secondary schools now begin their day with news and advertisements transmitted by Channel One, an in-school TV news program for teens (Palmer, 2006). Adolescents in Europe and Japan also watch TV for an average of about two hours a day (Flammer, Alsaker, & Noack, 1999; Stevenson & Zusho, 2002). Adolescents in the United States watch more movies than any other segment of the population; over 50% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 go to at least one movie per month (Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002). Seventy percent of adolescent girls report reading regular magazine reading (Walsh-Childers, Gotthoffer, & Lepre, 2002). About 90% of American adolescents have access to computers both at home and at school, and they use them for school work as well as for Internet access and e-mail (Roberts et al., 2005).

Add videos, books, and newspapers, and the total amounts to a large proportion of the daily experience of adolescents. All together, American adolescents typically spend about $6\frac{1}{2}$ hours per day using media. About one fourth of their media use involves multiple media—listening to music while doing e-mail, for example, or reading a magazine while watching TV. A substantial amount of adolescents’ media use takes place alone—in their own bedroom over half have a DVD player, two thirds have their own TV, and nearly all have a radio and a CD player. There are few statistics on media use among emerging adults, but there is no reason to expect media use to decline between adolescence and emerging adulthood. In fact, emerging adults might be hypothesized to use media even more than adolescents do because they spend more of their life alone (Arnett, 2004a; Brown, 2006).

Another reason for looking at media in relation to young people’s development is that a great deal of concern exists about the potential effects of media on this age group. These effects are generally viewed as negative (Brown & Wither- spoon, 2002; Villani, 2001). Television is blamed for inspiring young people to drink alcohol, have unsafe sex, behave aggressively, and hold stereotyped beliefs about gender roles. Music is blamed for motivating young people to commit violent acts toward others or themselves. Movies and computer games, too, are blamed for violence. Magazines are held responsible for promoting an emaciated female form as the ideal so relentlessly that many girls become emaciated themselves in their attempts to emulate it. The Internet is accused of promoting social isolation and making adolescents vulnerable to adult sexual predators. Given all this controversy over young people and media, it is important for us to consider what the research evidence tells us about the merit of the accusations. And it is important to consider the possibility of positive media effects, as well.

In this chapter, then, we will look first at theories of media influence and then at some of the uses of media that are typical among young people and how those uses reflect certain developmental needs. This will include a discussion of how socialization through the media is related to socialization from other sources, such as parents, peers, and school. In the second half of the chapter we will examine the research concerning various controversial media, from violent television and computer games to sex in music to cigarette advertising to the Internet. Last we will consider two types of new media, the Internet and mobile phones, and the roles they play in the globalization of adolescence.

Theories of Media Influence

Two theories have been especially prominent in guiding scholars’ understanding of how media influence young people. Cultivation Theory argues that watching television gradually shapes or “cultivates” a person’s worldview, so that over time it comes to resemble the worldview most frequently depicted on TV (Appel, 2008; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1994; Tan, Tan, & Gibson, 2003). For example, adolescent
One aspect of Cultivation Theory is known as Mean World Syndrome (Gerbner et al., 1994). In Mean World Syndrome, the more people watch TV, the more they are likely to believe that the world is a dangerous place, that crime rates are high and rising, and that they themselves are at risk for being a victim of a crime (Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003). According to Cultivation Theory, they believe this because television often depicts crime and violence on dramas and news shows, which leads viewers to cultivate a view of the world as mean, violent, and dangerous.

The second prominent theory of media influence is Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1994; Tan et al., 2003). According to this theory, people will be more likely to imitate behaviors they see frequently performed by models who are rewarded or at least not punished. In a famous experiment known as the “Bobo doll” study, children watched an adult kicking and punching a clownlike doll (“Bobo”). Later, the children imitated the adult’s behavior almost exactly.

Over the past 40 years, hundreds of media studies have been conducted using Social Learning Theory as the guiding framework (Wade & Tavris, 2003). For example, studies have found that heavier exposure to sexual content on TV is related to earlier initiation of sexual intercourse, and this has been interpreted as indicating that the adolescents modeled their sexual behavior after the TV characters (Brown et al., 2002). Many of the studies using Social Learning Theory have concerned the relationship between television and aggression, as we will see in more detail later in this chapter.

Both Cultivation Theory and Social Learning Theory are presented mainly in terms of media effects, with the media consumer depicted as relatively passive and easily manipulated. In research using these theories, correlations between media use and attitudes or behavior are routinely interpreted as causation, because it is assumed that media have effects and the consumer is a relatively passive recipient of those effects. However, an alternative approach has developed that recognizes that the role media play in the lives of adolescents and others is usually more complex than a simple cause-and-effect relationship. This approach is known as the uses and gratifications approach, and the emphasis is on viewing people as active media consumers (Paik et al., 2001; Pierce, 2006; Rubin, 1993; von Salisch, Oppl, & Kristen, 2006). This approach will serve as the framework for this chapter.

The uses and gratifications approach is based on two key principles. The first is that people differ in numerous ways that lead them to make different choices about which media to consume. For example, not all adolescents like violent TV shows; the uses and gratifications approach assumes that adolescents who like such shows differ from adolescents who do not, prior to any effect that watching violent shows may have (Haridakis & Rubin, 2003). The second principle is that people consuming the same media product will respond to it in a variety of ways, depending on their individual characteristics. For example, some adolescent girls may read teen magazines and respond by feeling extremely insecure about the way they look compared with the models in the magazine, whereas other girls may read the same magazines and be relatively unaffected (Brown et al., 2002).

Recently, Jane Brown and her colleagues presented a model of how the uses and gratifications theory works in the lives of adolescents (Brown, 2006; Brown et al., 2002; Steele, 2006). Their model, called the Media Practice Model, is illustrated in Figure 12.1. As the figure shows, the model proposes that adolescents’ media use is active in a number of ways. Adolescents do not all have the same media preferences. Rather, each adolescent’s identity motivates the selection of media products. Paying attention to certain media products leads to interaction with those products, meaning that the products are evaluated and interpreted. Then adolescents engage in application of the media content they have chosen. They may incorporate this content into their identities—for example, girls who respond to thin models by seeking to be thin themselves—or they may resist the content—for example, girls who respond to thin models by rejecting them as a false ideal. Their developing identity then motivates new media selections, and so on.

**uses and gratifications approach** Approach to understanding media that emphasizes that people differ in numerous ways that lead them to make different choices about which media to consume and that even people consuming the same media product will respond to it in a variety of ways, depending on their individual characteristics.

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*Source: Brown et al. (2002), p. 9.*
Rather than viewing young people as the passive, easily manipulated targets of media influences, the uses and gratifications approach asks, “What sort of uses or purposes motivate young people to watch a television show, or go to a movie, or listen to a CD, or read a magazine, or use the Internet? And what sort of gratifications or satisfactions do they receive from the media they choose?” Similarly, the Media Practice Model asks how adolescents select, interact with, and apply media products in the course of developing an identity. We will keep these questions at the forefront as we discuss media in this chapter. Let’s start out by taking a look at five of the principal uses that young people make of media.

## Five Uses

Five uses of media by adolescents can be specified (Arnett, 1995b): entertainment, identity formation, high sensation, coping, and youth culture identification. All of the uses described except entertainment are developmental in the sense that they are more likely to be uses of media for adolescents and emerging adults than for children or adults (Arnett, 1995b).

### Entertainment

Adolescents and emerging adults, like children and adults, often make use of media simply for entertainment, as an enjoyable part of their leisure lives (Brake, 1985; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004). Music often accompanies young people’s leisure, from driving around in a car to hanging out with friends to secluding themselves in the privacy of their bedrooms for contemplation (Larson, 1995). The most common motivation stated by adolescents for listening to music is “to have fun” (Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2000). Television is used by many adolescents as a way of diverting themselves from personal concerns with entertainment that is passive, distracting, and undemanding (Larson, 1995; Roberts & Foehr, 2004). Entertainment is clearly one of the uses young people seek in movies and magazines as well. Young people generally use media for the entertainment purposes of fun, amusement, and recreation.

### Identity Formation

“[I’d like to be like] Cher, Madonna, and Tina Turner all rolled together, because they all have attitude and they know what they want.”

—Stephanie, age 13 (in Currie, 1999, p. 262)

“I like it in YM and Seventeen magazines how they have like your horoscope and what you’re like—your color and if you’re an ‘earth person’ or a ‘water person,’ something like that. They tell you what you are.”

—Lauren, age 14 (in Currie, 1999, p. 154)

As we have seen in previous chapters, one of the most important challenges of adolescence and emerging adulthood is identity formation—the development of a conception of one’s values, abilities, and hopes for the future. In cultures where media are available, media can provide materials that young people use toward the construction of an identity (Boehke, Muench, & Hoffman, 2002). Part of identity formation is thinking about the kind of person you would like to become, and in media adolescents find ideal selves to emulate and feared selves to avoid. The use of media for this purpose is reflected in the pictures and posters adolescents put up in their rooms, which are often of media stars from entertainment and sports (see the Research Focus box).

Media can also provide adolescents with information that would otherwise be unavailable to them, and some of this information may be used to help construct an identity. For example, adolescents may learn about different possible occupations by watching television or reading magazines (Clifford, Gunter, & McAleer, 1995). In my research on adolescent heavy metal fans (discussed in more detail later in the chapter), over one third of them, inspired by their heavy metal heroes, stated their intention to go into music as a career, preferably as heavy metal heroes themselves (Arnett, 1996).

An important aspect of identity formation, and one for which adolescents may especially make use of media, is gender role identity (Hust, 2006; Steele & Brown, 1995). Adolescents take ideals of what it means to be a man or a woman partly from the media. Adolescents use the information provided in media to learn sexual and romantic scripts (Brown et al., 2002)—for example, how to approach a potential romantic partner for the first time, what to do on a date, and even how to kiss. One study of adolescents’ messages in Internet chat rooms found that the exchange of identity information allowed participants to “pair off” with partners of their choice, despite the disembodied nature of chat participants (Subramaniam, Greenfield, & Tynes, 2004). The authors concluded that the virtual world of teen chat may offer a safer environment for exploring emerging sexuality than the real world. For both girls and boys, gender, sexuality, and relationships are central to the kind of identity exploration and identity formation for which adolescents use media (Ward, 1995).

Magazines are a medium where gender roles are an especially common theme, particularly in magazines for adolescent girls. As noted in Chapter 5, the most popular magazines for teenage girls devote most of their space to advertisements and articles that focus on physical appearance, heterosexual relationships, and sexuality (Currie, 1999; Kim, 2006; Walsh-Childers, Gotthoffer, & Lepre, 2002). In contrast, the magazines most popular among adolescent boys are devoted to sports, computer games, humor, and cars—with little or no mention of how to improve physical appearance or how to form relationships with girls or any topic related to sexuality (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1999; Taylor, 2006).

This gender difference in magazines changes in emerging adulthood. Magazines for young women, like the magazines for adolescent girls, continue to emphasize physical appearance, sexuality, and heterosexual relationships, but magazines for young men such as Maxim and GQ also contain...
substantial content on these topics, unlike the magazines popular among adolescent boys.

**THINKING CRITICALLY •••**

Why is it that physical appearance and relationships are virtually the only topics in magazines read by adolescent girls, but these topics scarcely exist in magazines read by adolescent boys?

**High Sensation**

**Sensation seeking** is a personality characteristic defined by the extent to which a person enjoys *novelty* and *intensity* of sensation. Adolescents and emerging adults tend to be higher in sensation seeking than adults (Arnett, 1994b; Zuckerman, 2007), and certain media provide the intense and novel sensations that appeal to many young people. Overall, sensation seeking is related to higher media consumption in adolescence, especially TV, music, and computer games (Lachlan, 2006; Roberts et al., 2005; Zuckerman, 2006).

Many media products appeal to adults as well as young people, but some appeal almost exclusively to young people, at least partly because of the high-sensation quality of the stimulation. The audience for “action” films is composed mostly of males in adolescence and emerging adulthood, because this is the segment of the population that is highest in sensation seeking and consequently most likely to be drawn to films that portray scenes involving explosions, car chases (and car crashes), gunfire, and suspense (Hoffner & Levine, 2005; Slater, 2003). Adolescent boys also dominate the audiences for the high-sensation musical forms of rap, heavy metal, and hard rock (Arnett, 1996; Rawlings, Barrantes, & Furnham, 2000).

Music is a media form that may especially lend itself to high-sensation intensity. Most popular music is created by people who are adolescents and emerging adults or just beyond (with geriatric exceptions such as the Rolling Stones), and the sensory stimulation of most popular music is much higher than for television (think of the volume level of the last rock concert you attended). Adolescents’ emotional arousal when listening to music tends to be high, at least partly because of the high sensory and emotional intensity of music (Larson, 1995).

**Coping**

Young people use media to relieve and dispel negative emotions. Several studies indicate that “Listen to music” and “Watch TV” are the coping strategies adolescents most commonly use when they are angry, anxious, or unhappy (Kurdek, 1987; Oliver, 2006). Music may be particularly important in this respect (Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007). Larson (1995) reports that adolescents often listen to music in the privacy of their bedrooms while pondering the themes of the songs in relation to their own lives, as part of the process of emotional self-regulation. In early adolescence, when the number of problems at home, at school, and with friends increases, time spent listening to music also increases (Roberts et al., 2005).

Certain types of music, such as hip-hop or heavy metal, may appeal especially to young people who use music for coping. Adolescent fans of heavy metal report that they listen to heavy metal especially when they are angry, and that the music typically has the effect of purging their anger and calming them down (Arnett, 1991, 1996; Scheel & Westefeld, 1999; we will discuss this in more detail later in the chapter).

Young people also sometimes use television for coping purposes. Larson (1995) reports that adolescents use television as a way of turning off the stressful emotions that have accumulated during the day. Similarly, Kurdek (1987) found that adolescents use watching TV as a deliberate coping strategy when experiencing negative emotions. Adolescents also may choose media materials for specific coping purposes. A study of Israeli adolescents, in the aftermath of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, indicated that the media were an important source of information during the war and that adolescents used the information obtained through the media to help them cope with the stress of the war (Zeidner, 1993).

**THINKING CRITICALLY •••**

Why do you think watching television and listening to music have calming effects on adolescents’ emotions? Do you think emerging adults would experience the same effects?

**Youth Culture Identification**

Media consumption can give adolescents a sense of being connected to a youth culture or subculture that is united by certain youth-specific values and interests. In cultures where
Jane Brown and her colleagues have used a number of creative methods to study adolescents’ uses of media (Brown et al., 2002). In one study (Brown, White, & Nikopolou, 1993), adolescent girls were asked to keep a daily journal about whatever they saw in the media about sex and relationships. In another study (Steele & Brown, 1995), high school seniors were asked to interview each other about how they used media in their bedrooms at home, including television, magazines, and stereos as well as room decorations that reflected media use (posters of rock musicians, sports stars, etc.). Another method they have used in their research is what they call “room touring,” where the researchers actually “tour” adolescents’ bedrooms and have the adolescents describe everything that holds special meaning or significance for them, usually including numerous media artifacts (posters, pictures from magazines, CDs and cassette tapes, etc.).

All of these research methods are qualitative. The focus is not on quantifying experience into patterns that can be reflected in numbers and analyzed in statistical tests, but on the experience of individuals and how they interpret and articulate their experiences.

Qualitative methods can result in rich data about the lives of individual adolescents, as in these two descriptions:

In [14-year-old] Rachel’s room the bed is covered with clothes, cassette tapes and magazines, a red phone, and the cassette player. The walls are plastered with posters of the Beatles, the B52s, and a leering rock musician with his hand stuck down in his pants. The posters cover over an Impressionist art print of a little girl with flowers. One wall is full of advertisements torn from magazines featuring muscular men and thin women modeling the latest fashions. . . .

Sixteen years old and a sophomore in high school, Jack safeguards an eclectic mix of childhood artifacts and teenage fantasies and aspirations in his bedroom. On one wall a wooden box displays a fleet of multi-hued model cars, painstakingly crafted during grade school. A shelf is piled high with the audiotaped “mixes” that now occupy his time. Perched on top is a teddy bear dressed in a white sailor suit. . . . On the wall next to his bed are more current concerns: a Ferrari Testarossa poster, and pictures of girls clipped from magazines. “If they look good,” Jack explains, “I just put them up on the wall.” (Steele & Brown, 1995, pp. 551–552)

In addition to individual examples, qualitative research such as the research conducted by Brown and her colleagues allows scholars to describe general patterns of development. However, for qualitative researchers, these general patterns are usually ascertained through the researcher’s insights and judgment rather than on the basis of statistical analyses. For example, in the study in which adolescent girls kept journals of their responses to sexual media content, the researchers concluded that the girls’ responses fell into three general patterns (Brown et al., 1993). Those they termed “Disinterested” tended to ignore sexual content in media, and preferred not to talk or think about it even when prodded to do so. Their rooms tended to be filled with stuffed animals and dolls rather than media items. In contrast, a second group labeled “Intrigued” had rooms filled with magazines, musical recordings, and television, and their walls were filled with images of popular media stars, including media items with sexual content. A third group, “Resisters,” also had rooms with evidence of high media use, but they tended to select images from less mainstream media—political leaders and female sports stars rather than popular music performers. They were termed “Resisters” because they were often critical of sexual media content, particularly the media depiction of women as sexual objects. In the journal of Audrey, age 14, was this critique of cosmetic ads:

I think that they use these beautiful people to sell their products because they want fat old ladies sitting at home with curlers in their hair watching the soaps to think that if they buy Loreal’s [sic] 10 day formula they’ll end up looking that beautiful. I think that’s really stupid because for one, I know perfectly well I don’t look like Cybil Shepard [sic] and Loreal’s [sic] 10 day formula’s not going to change that. (Steele & Brown, 1995, p. 564)

In this and many other examples, Brown and her colleagues show that adolescents are not just passive targets of media but active consumers who use media for a variety of purposes. At the same time, the qualitative focus on the experience of individuals also allows for revealing examples suggesting media effects. Audrey, seemingly so adept at deflecting the lure of media images, reported in her journal a couple of days after the entry above that she had spent the afternoon buying “basically cosmetics!”
people change residence frequently (such as the United States), the media provide common ground for all adolescents. No matter where they move within the United States, adolescents will find peers in their new area who have watched the same television programs and movies, listened to the same music, and are familiar with the same advertising slogans and symbols. Music, especially, is a medium for expressing adolescent-specific values (Gregson, 2006; Roe, 1985). Worldwide, media are a driving force behind the globalization of youth culture, as we will see in more detail later in the chapter.

Adolescents’ identification may be not to youth culture as a whole but to a youth subculture. For example, youth subcultures in recent decades have been defined by punk, heavy metal, and hip-hop. Adolescents who participate in these subcultures often feel alienated from the mainstream of their societies (Arnett, 1996, 2007b).

Media and Adolescent Socialization

We have seen that media use is a big part of the lives of most adolescents in the West. This prominence is even more striking when we think about it in historical perspective. At the beginning of the 20th century, adolescents’ exposure to media would have been limited to print media such as books, magazines, and newspapers. Television, radio, CD players, DVDs, computer games, and the Internet did not even exist. In less than a century, all these media have become a central part of the cultural environment of industrialized societies.

What does this transformation in the cultural environment imply for young people’s development? Essentially it amounts to the creation of a new source of socialization (Arnett, 1995b; 2006c). Of course, the media have become part of the social environment of people of all ages, but the potential role of media in the socialization of young people is perhaps especially strong. Adolescence and emerging adulthood are times when important aspects of socialization are taking place, especially with regard to identity-related issues such as beginning occupational preparation, learning gender roles, and developing a set of values and beliefs. It is also a time when the presence and influence of the family have diminished relative to childhood, as we discussed in Chapter 7. At the same time that parents’ influence on socialization recedes during adolescence, the role of the media in socialization grows. In one national American survey of 10- to 15-year-olds, 49% said they “learn a lot from” television and movies, a higher percentage than learned a lot from their mothers (38%) or their fathers (31%; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1999).

As a socialization influence, the media tend toward broad socialization in societies that have freedom of speech and where the media are relatively uncontrolled and uncensored by government agencies. In such societies, there is tremendous diversity in the media offerings available, providing adolescents a diverse array of potential models and influences. This is likely to promote a broad range of individual differences in values, beliefs, interests, and personality characteristics because adolescents can choose from diverse media offerings the ones that resonate most strongly with their own particular inclinations.

Most Western societies value free speech highly, so a diverse range of media content is allowed. However, the United States takes this principle further than European countries do. For example, Germany has a legal prohibition against music lyrics that express hatred or advocate violence toward minorities. In Norway, one person in the government reviews all movies before they are allowed to be shown in theaters and prohibits the showing of movies judged to be too violent. Neither of these prohibitions would be likely to survive a legal challenge in the United States because of the protection of free speech in the First Amendment of the Constitution.

Nevertheless, the principle of free speech does not mean that all media must be accessible to all persons regardless of age. Age restrictions on access to media are allowable under the First Amendment, and the United States has rating systems for movies, music, television, and computer games that are designed to indicate to children, adolescents, and their parents which media may be unsuitable for persons under a certain age (Funk et al., 1999; Lambe, 2006). However, the enforcement of these guidelines and restrictions requires substantial parental involvement (for the most part they are guidelines, not legal requirements). Because parents are often either unaware of the media their adolescents are using or hesitant to place restrictions, most American adolescents easily gain access to whatever media they like (Funk et al., 1999; Roberts et al., 2005).

Media and Other Sources of Socialization

An important difference exists between media and other socialization agents in the adolescent’s environment, such as family members, teachers, community members, law
enforcement agents, and religious authorities. Typically, these other socializers have an interest in encouraging the adolescent to accept the attitudes, beliefs, and values of adults in order to preserve social order and pass the culture on from one generation to the next. In contrast, media are typically presented by people whose primary concern is the economic success of the media enterprise. As a result, the content of media consumed by adolescents is driven not by a desire to promote successful socialization but by the uses adolescents themselves can make of media. Because the media are largely market-driven, media providers are likely to provide adolescents with whatever it is they believe adolescents want—within the limits imposed on media providers by other adult socializers such as parents and legal authorities.

This means that adolescents have greater control over their socialization from the media than they do over socialization from family or school. This has two important consequences (Arnett, 2006c). First, it results in a great deal of diversity in the media available to adolescents, from classical music to heavy metal, from public television to MTV, from Seventeen to Mad magazine, as media providers try to cover every potential niche of the market for media products. Adolescents can choose from among this diversity whatever media materials best suit their personalities and preferences, and on any given occasion adolescents can choose the media materials that best suit the circumstances and their emotional state.

Second, to some extent this socialization goes over the heads of the other socializing adults in the adolescent’s environment (Strasburger, 2006; Taillon, 2004). Parents may try to impose restrictions on the music, television shows, movies, and electronic games their adolescents consume, but these restrictions are unlikely to be successful if an adolescent is determined to avoid them. The limited time parents and adolescents spend in each other’s company makes it difficult for parents to enforce such restrictions (Larson & Richards, 1994). In any case, few parents even attempt to impose restrictions. For example, in one national American study, fewer than 20% of adolescents reported that their parents had rules about the amount of time they spent watching television or about the content of the TV programs they watched (Roberts et al., 2005). The percentages concerning computer and Internet use were similarly low.

As a source of adolescent socialization, media bear the greatest similarity to peers. With media as with peers, adolescents have substantial control over their own socialization, as they make choices with only limited influence from their parents and other adult socializers. With media as with peers, adolescents sometimes make choices that adults find troublesome. Indeed, media scholars have proposed that the media function as a super peer for adolescents, meaning that adolescents often look to media for information (especially concerning sexuality) that their parents may be unwilling to provide, in the same way they might look to a friend (Brown, Halpern, & L’Engles, 2005; Strasburger, 2006).

Examples of how adolescents may use media in ways disturbing to their parents and other adults in their immediate social environment can be seen in relation to each of the five uses of media described earlier. They may find entertainment in media that many adults consider disturbingly violent. In assembling materials toward identity formation they may develop admiration for media stars who seem to reject the values of the adult world, stars who may in fact reject the very idea of “growing up” to a responsible adulthood (Steele & Brown, 1995). Adolescents also may be attracted to high-sensation media that adults find disagreeable for precisely the reason it is so appealing to adolescents—the extraordinary high-sensation intensity of it (Arnett, 1996; Lachlan, 2006). Adolescents may seclude themselves in their rooms and use media in coping with their problems in a way that seems to shut out their parents (Larson, 1995). Finally, adolescents may become involved in a media-based youth subculture that actively and explicitly rejects the future that adult society holds out to them. In all of these ways, socialization from the media may be subversive to the socialization promoted by other adult socializers.

However, this portrayal of adolescents’ media use as oppositional should be modified in several respects. First, it bears repeating that media are diverse, and not all of the media used by adolescents are contrary to the aims and principles of adult society. Much of it is, in fact, quite conservative. Many media providers, especially in television, shrink from controversy and tend to avoid topics that could subject them to public attack (and advertisers’ boycotts). In most cases, adolescents perceive television programs as reinforcing conventional values such as “honesty is the best policy,” “good wins over evil,” and “hard work yields rewards” (Brown et al., 2002). Second, adolescents do not come to media as blank slates, but as members of a family, community, and culture that have socialized them from birth and from whom they have learned ideals and principles that are likely to influence their media choices and how they interpret the media they consume.

Third, the range of media available to adolescents, though vast, is not unlimited. Parents can place restrictions on how adolescents may use media at least when the parents are present; schools often restrict adolescents’ media use during and between classes; and many countries have guidelines for the content of television programs (at least on the major networks) and for the magazines and movies that may be sold to adolescents under age 18 (Roberts et al., 2005).

The portrait of media socialization presented here applies to the contemporary West, and media socialization may be quite different in traditional cultures. Legal and parental
controls over adolescents’ access to media are tighter in traditional cultures with narrow socialization, so that adolescents are unlikely to be able to use media as freely. However, today even in many traditional cultures the introduction of Western media is opening up new possibilities to adolescents, loosening the extent of parental control and increasing the extent to which adolescents choose the materials of their own socialization. Later in this chapter, we will look at examples of Western media influencing adolescents in traditional cultures.

THINKING CRITICALLY •••

Suppose you had an adolescent who liked to listen to a kind of music you believed was potentially harmful because of the level of violence in it. How would you handle it—would you forbid it, ignore it, discuss it—and why?

Controversial Media

Because adolescents spend a lot of time daily consuming media, and because media play an important role in adolescent socialization, parents and other adults express concern when they perceive the media as containing material that may have damaging effects on adolescents. In this section, we consider criticisms of controversial media and examine the available research evidence in relation to those criticisms. The areas of controversy discussed here are television and aggressiveness; computer games and aggressiveness; television and movies and adolescent sex; hip-hop and heavy metal music; and cigarette advertising.

Television and Aggressiveness

A great deal of research attention has focused on the extent to which media promote and provoke violence in young people. Most of this research has concerned television, and the majority of it has involved preadolescent children (Anderson et al., 2003; Cantor, 1998, 2000; Finney, 2006). However, this an issue of particular importance with regard to adolescents and emerging adults because the overwhelming majority of violent crimes all over the world are committed by young males aged 15 to 25 (Eisner, 2002).

Unfortunately, most of the studies on adolescents and television violence are correlational studies, which ask adolescents about the television programs they watch and about their aggressive behavior. As we have often noted in this book, correlational studies do not show causality, and these studies merely indicate the unremarkable finding that aggressive adolescents prefer aggressive television programs (Selah-Shayovits, 2006). They cannot answer the crucial question “Does watching violence on TV cause adolescents to become more aggressive, or are adolescents who are more aggressive simply more likely to enjoy watching violence on TV?” In an effort to address this question, numerous field studies have been conducted on the effects of television on adolescent aggression. Typically, adolescents (usually boys) in a setting such as a residential school or summer camp are separated into two groups, and one group is shown TV or movies with violent themes whereas the other views TV or movies with nonviolent themes. Then the behavior of the boys in the two groups is recorded and compared. However, the findings of these studies are weak and inconsistent, and overall they do not support the claim that viewing violent media causes adolescents to be more aggressive (Freedman, 1988; Strasburger, 1995).

The study most often cited to support claims that violent television causes aggressiveness is a longitudinal study by Eron and Huesmann (Bushman & Huesmann, 2002; Coyne, 2006; Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1984). They
began their study when the participants were 8 years old and continued it until the participants reached age 30. Television-viewing patterns and aggressive behavior were assessed at ages 8, 19, and 30. A correlation was found between aggressiveness and watching violent TV at age 8, not surprisingly. But watching violent TV at age 8 also predicted aggressive behavior in boys at age 19, and by age 30 the men who had been aggressive at age 8 were more likely to be arrested, more likely to have traffic violations, and more likely to abuse their children. This relation was found even controlling for boys’ initial levels of aggressiveness at age 8. So, it was not simply that aggressive persons especially liked to watch violent television at all three ages, but that aggressive 8 year-olds who watched high levels of TV violence were more likely to be aggressive at later ages than similarly aggressive 8 year-olds who watched lower levels of TV violence. The relation between watching violent TV and later aggressive behavior was not found for girls.

A study using a natural experiment provides perhaps the most compelling support for the argument that watching violent television causes aggressive behavior, at least in children (MacBeth, 2006). In this study a Canadian community (called “Notel” by the researchers) was studied before and after the introduction of television into the community. Aggressive behavior among children in Notel was compared with the behavior of children in two comparable communities, one with only one television channel (“Unitel”) and one with multiple TV channels (“Multitel”). In each community several ratings of aggressiveness were obtained, including teachers’ ratings, self-reports, and observers’ ratings of children’s verbal and physical aggressiveness. At the beginning of the study, aggressive behavior was lower among children in Notel than among children in Unitel or Multitel, but aggressive behavior increased significantly among children in Notel after TV was introduced, so that Notel children were equal to their Unitel and Multitel peers 2 years after the introduction of TV. However, the study involved children in middle childhood rather than adolescents, and there is no information on how the adolescents of the community reacted.

Although the findings of this study are intriguing, overall the research provides only mixed support for the claim that watching violent television causes adolescents to behave aggressively. The evidence is more persuasive that violent television causes aggression in children (Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005; Cantor, 2000; Paradise, 2006). As the father of 9-year-old twins who have spent a substantial proportion of their childhood pretending to be characters from Scooby-Doo, I can attest to the power of television to inspire imitative behavior in children. However, adolescents are not children. Their cognitive abilities usually enable them to reflect on what they are watching and to recognize it as fantasy rather than as a model to be imitated. Even Rowell Huesmann, one of the most prominent proponents of the claim that televised violence causes aggression in children, states that “we do not need to be as concerned about adults’ or even teenagers’ exposure to media violence as much as we do with children’s exposure. Media violence may have short-term effects on adults, but the real long-term effects seem to occur only with children” (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003, p. 219).

This is not to dismiss the potential of televised violence for provoking violence in some adolescents under some circumstances, especially for adolescents who are already at risk for violence due to factors in their personalities and social environments (Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005; Huesmann et al., 2003; Kronenberger et al., 2005). It is probably true that, for some adolescents, watching television violence acts as a model for their own aggressiveness. However, if watching violent television were a substantial contributor to aggressive behavior among adolescents in general, the relationship would be stronger than it has been in the many field studies and longitudinal studies that have been conducted.

The evidence is stronger that television violence influences attitudes toward violence among adolescents, making them more accepting of violent behavior and less empathic toward the victims of violence (Paradise, 2006). Also, recently two scholars have begun to look at the relation between television watching and what they term “indirect aggression,” which is like the relational aggression we discussed in Chapter 8. In one of their studies (Coyne & Archer, 2005), over 300 adolescents aged 11–14 were asked to list their five favorite television programs. These programs were analyzed for the amount and type (direct or indirect) of aggression they contained. Peer-nominated indirect aggression was higher among adolescents who watched programs containing indirect aggression. In particular, indirectly aggressive girls viewed more indirect aggression on television than any other group. This study suffers from the common correlation-causation problem in media studies, but nevertheless this is a new concept and a new line of research worth following.

**THINKING CRITICALLY •••**

Even if violent television does not have clear effects on adolescents’ aggressive behavior, is it possible that it has other effects, such as on their moral development? What other effects should be considered, and how would you design a study to test your hypotheses?
A relatively new type of media that has become popular among adolescents is computer games. It used to be that you had to go to a video arcade to play video games, but now these games are played mostly at home on personal computers. This form of media use has quickly become popular among adolescents, especially boys (Olson et al., 2008). In a recent study of middle school students in the United States (Olson et al., 2007), 94% reported having played computer games during the preceding six months. Of those who played computer games, one third of boys and 11% of girls said they played nearly every day. A study in 10 European countries and Israel found that children ages 6 to 16 averaged more than a half hour per day playing computer games (Beentjes, Koolstra, Marseille, & van der Voort, 2001).

Some of these computer games are in the category of harmless entertainment. A substantial proportion of the games simply involve having a computerized character jump from one platform to the next; or sports simulations of baseball, tennis, soccer, or hockey; or fantasies in which the player can escape to other worlds and take on new identities (Klimmt, 2006). However, the majority of adolescents’ favorite computer games involve violence. A content analysis of nearly 400 of the most popular computer games found that 94% contained violence (Haninger & Thompson, 2004). Because violent games have proven to be so popular, manufacturers have steadily increased the levels of violence in computer games over the past decade (Sherry, 2006). Here are a few examples of violent games:

- **Night Trap.** Vampires attack attractive young women while the player tries to save them. If they are not defeated, the vampires end the game by drilling the young women through the neck with a power tool.
- **Doom.** Player has been assigned to a research station on Mars, which turns out to be populated by evil aliens. Player must use a variety of weapons to kill all the aliens and stop them from reaching the earth.
- **Postal.** Players try to slaughter an entire high school marching band using various weapons such as flame throwers.

This all sounds potentially unhealthy, on the face of it, and there have been some notorious cases of the games appearing to inspire violence. For example, one of the two boys who murdered 12 students and a teacher in the massacre at Columbine High School in 1999 named the gun he used in the murders “Arlene,” after a character in the gory Doom computer game. And in a video the boys made before the murders, the same boy said of the murders they would commit, “It's going to be like fucking Doom. Tick, tick, tick . . . Haaa! That fucking shotgun is straight out of Doom!” (Gibbs & Roche, 1999).

A number of studies have examined the relation between computer games and aggressiveness (Anderson et al., 2007; Brake, 2006; Funk et al., 1999, 2002, 2005). One early study found that aggressiveness and hostility were heightened after playing arcade video games (Mehrabian & Wixen, 1986). Another found that the content of computer video games was related to adolescents’ emotional responses, with levels of hostility and anxiety increasing in correlation with the level of violence in the computer game they were playing (Anderson & Ford, 1987). A more recent study of adolescents aged 11 to 15 found that a preference for violent computer games was related to anxiety and depression but unrelated to aggression (Funk et al., 2002). One study in which college undergraduates played computer games with varying levels of violence found that the students reported decreased feelings of aggressiveness after playing a moderately violent game, but...
increased feelings of aggressiveness after playing a highly violent game (Scott, 1995).

Some experimental studies seem to show that violent computer games actually cause aggressive behavior. In one study (Anderson & Dill, 2000), college students were assigned randomly to two groups. One group played a nonviolent computer game, while the other played a violent game, Wolfenstein 3D, in which the player chooses from an array of weapons to kill Nazi guards, with the ultimate goal of killing Adolf Hitler. Students were “tested” against each other on three different days, supposedly to see how well they played the game. On the third day, they were told to punish their opponent with an unpleasant blast of noise when the opponent lost. Students who played the violent game blasted their opponents for a longer time than students who played the nonviolent game.

The authors’ interpretation of the results was that violent computer games cause aggressive behavior. But do you see the problem in the research design? It does not take into account the uses and gratifications insight that people make choices about what media to use. It may sound good to assign students randomly into two different groups, playing either violent or nonviolent games, but in fact this means that you do not know which students would actually have chosen to play the violent games themselves. Although some of the students in the “violent game” condition behaved more aggressively than students who played the nonviolent game, without knowing their game-playing preferences we cannot say if the ones who behaved more aggressively are also the ones who would choose to play the more violent games. So, this design does not really prove causality after all. This is a very common research design problem, not just for computer games studies but for other media studies as well.

One recent study asked boys themselves about the effects of playing violent computer games (Olson et al., 2008). The interviews showed that the boys (ages 12–14) used computer games to experience fantasies of power and fame, and to explore what they perceived to be exciting new situations. The boys enjoyed the social aspect of computer games, in playing with friends and talking about the games with friends. The boys also said they used computer games to work through feelings of anger or stress, and that playing the games had a cathartic effect on these negative feelings. They did not believe that playing violent computer games affected them negatively.

It seems likely that with computer games, as with other violent media, there is a wide range of individual differences in responses, with young people who are already at risk for violent behavior—such as the Columbine murderers—being most likely to be affected by the games, as well as most likely to be attracted to them (Funk, 2003; Funk et al., 1999; Slater et al., 2003; Unsworth et al., 2007). With computer games as with television, effects may be less definite for violent behavior than for more common characteristics, such as empathy and attitudes toward violence (Anderson, 2004; Funk, 2005; Funk et al., 2005).

**Television and Movies and Sex**

Sex is second only to violence as a topic of public concern with respect to the possible effects of media on adolescents. A high proportion of prime-time television shows contain sexual themes. What sort of information about sexuality does television present to adolescents?

In one study, Cope-Farrar and Kunkel (2002) analyzed the top 15 shows watched by American adolescents. Eighty-two percent of the programs they analyzed contained sexual content (sexual talk or sexual behavior). Sexual behavior was more frequent than sexual talk and tended to take place between partners who were not married but had an established relationship. Usually, the sexual behavior was limited to kisses and hugs—intercourse was depicted or strongly implied in only 7% of the programs—and nudity was also infrequent. Discussions of sexual risks or responsibilities rarely took place. Another recent content analysis, a study of the 20 TV programs most popular among adolescents in the U.S., found similar results (Eyal et al., 2007).

What uses do adolescents make of the portrayals of sexuality on television? With sexuality as with aggressiveness, it is difficult to establish causality, but most scholars in this area agree that through TV programs adolescents learn cultural beliefs about how male and female roles differ in sexual interactions and what is considered physically attractive in males and females (Pardun, L’Engle, & Brown, 2005; Rivadeneyra, 2005). Television also informs adolescents about appropriate sexual scripts (Gagnon, 1973; Rivadeneyra, 2005; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999), that is, the expected patterns of sexual interactions based on cultural norms of what is acceptable and desirable. For adolescents, who are just beginning to date, this information may be eagerly received, especially if their culture provides little in the way of explicit instruction in male and female sexual roles.

Of course, the “information” adolescents receive about sexual scripts from TV may not be the kind most adults would consider desirable. Television shows portray strong gender stereotypes, with the message that “boys will be boys and girls better be prepared,” that is, that boys seek sex actively and aggressively and girls act as “sexual gatekeepers” who are supposed to attract boys’ sexual interest but also resist their
advances (Hust et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2007; Tolman et al., 2007). Often, the sexual scripts in TV shows portray a “sniggering attitude” (Smith, 1991) and a “recreational orientation” toward sex (Ward, 1995). However, this may be mainly because most of the TV shows popular among adolescents are situation comedies (Cope-Farrar & Kunkel, 2002), and they rely on standard comedic devices such as sexual innuendo, double entendre (that is, words or phrases that have two meanings), irony, and exaggeration. Most adolescents are cognitively capable of separating what is intended to be humorous from what is intended to be a true portrayal of sexuality (Ward, 1995; Ward, Gorvine, & Cytron, 2002). Nevertheless, watching TV depictions of sexual interactions may affect adolescents’ own sexual scripts (Tolman et al., 2007).

**THINKING CRITICALLY •••**

To what extent is the portrayal of sexuality in television shows watched by adolescents similar to and different from the way adolescents regard sexuality in real life?

Movies are another medium in which adolescents witness portrayals of sexual behavior. Like TV shows, movies provide adolescents with sexual scripts, but in a more explicit way than TV does (Freeman, 2006; Pardun, 2002; Steele, 2002). As one prominent researcher in this area has observed, “What television suggests, movies and videos do” (Greenberg, 1994, p. 180). Now that pornographic movies are easily accessible on the Internet, more adolescents may be exposed to them and have their sexuality shaped by them. One recent study of Dutch adolescents concluded that boys who watched sexually explicit on-line movies were more likely than other boys to view women as sex objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). There was no effect for exposure to pornographic magazines, only movies.

**Sex and Violence on Music Television**

Today’s adolescents have grown up with a new medium that combines television and music: music television, often referred to by the initials of the most popular music television network, MTV. MTV began in 1981 and was instantly popular among adolescents (Hansen, 2006). Although MTV began in the United States, by now MTV is broadcast to more than one billion people in 164 countries worldwide, making it a significant force toward globalization (Roberts, 2005). There are also many other music television stations around the world today. Studies indicate that most American adolescents watch music videos for about 15 to 30 minutes per day (Roberts et al., 2005).

What uses are made of music videos by adolescents? Music videos can be divided into two general categories (Strasburger, 1995): **performance videos**, which show an individual performer or a group singing a song in a concert setting or a studio, and **concept videos**, which enact a story to go along with the lyrics of the song. For the most part, performance videos simply convey the songs and have generated no more (or less) controversy than the songs themselves. Most research attention has been directed at the concept videos and the stories they depict. The targets of concern among critics are the same as for television more generally: violence and sex.

Only about 15% of music videos show violence (Smith & Boyson, 2002), and the violence tends to be relatively mild (e.g., pushing rather than stabbing or shooting). Sexual themes appear in more than three fourths of music videos (Arnett, 2002c; Sherman & Dominick, 1986), but for the most part the sexuality is implied rather than shown—that is, the videos are more likely to contain provocatively dressed women than actually to show people kissing, fondling, and so forth. Rap videos have been found to be especially high in sexual content, compared to other videos (Jones, 1997; Peterson et al., 2007). Content analyses indicate that the characters in music videos tend to be highly gender stereotyped, with the women passive and the men aggressive and dominant (Dunstan & Sigler, 1989; Spencer et al., 2007). Most research finds that adolescents are more stereotypes more attracted to music videos, or both? But the authors also included an experimental component to the study, dividing the sample in half and showing one half of the adolescents four gender-stereotyped music videos and the other half four non–gender-stereotyped music videos. Afterward, the adolescents who viewed the gender-stereotyped music videos were more likely than the other adolescents to endorse gender stereotypes, providing at least a slightly stronger case for causality.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that studies show considerable diversity in how adolescents interpret the content of concept videos (Hansen, 2006). This is consistent with the uses and gratifications theme we have emphasized in this chapter. Adolescents may watch the same music video, yet the messages they perceive in it and the uses they make of it may be quite variable.

**Controversial Music: Rap and Heavy Metal**

Television is not the only medium that has been criticized for promoting unhealthy and morally questionable tendencies in adolescents. Music has been criticized just as much, and the criticism goes back even further. Jazz was criticized in the 1920s for promoting promiscuity and alcohol use. Rock and...
In the spring of 1953, an 18-year-old delivery truck driver named Elvis Presley walked into a recording studio in Memphis, Tennessee, and paid $4 for the opportunity to record two songs as a birthday present for his mother. Three years later, Elvis Presley was 21 years old, a multimillionaire entertainer, and the most famous person on the planet.

How did this happen? Part of the explanation, of course, lies in Elvis’s extraordinary talents. He had a uniquely rich, expressive, and versatile singing voice, and he sang with an extraordinary sensual intensity. He had grown up in the South listening to rhythm-and-blues songs performed by Black musicians, and he incorporated the sensuality and power of their styles into his own. Many people recognized the Black influence in his singing, and Elvis himself acknowledged it.

Not only his singing but his performing was influenced by Black musicians he had seen, as he developed a performance style of bracing himself against the microphone stand and thrusting his pelvis back and forth in a distinctly sexual way (leading to the nickname “Elvis the Pelvis”), his legs pumping rhythmically, his body shaking all over. He made Black rock-and-roll music and styles popular to White audiences at a time in American history when racist beliefs about Black people possessing an uncontrolled sexuality would have made it difficult for a Black person to be accepted by the American majority culture singing in that style.

However, in addition to Elvis’s talents, four media forms interacted to fuel his fame: radio, newspapers, television, and movies. His career got its initial burst through radio, when a Memphis radio station played a recording of him singing “That’s All Right (Mama)” and within days thousands of adolescents were storming Memphis record stores seeking copies of the record (which had not actually been released yet). Soon, radio stations all over the South were playing “That’s All Right” and every other Elvis song as he recorded more of them.

Next, newspapers came into the mix. A Memphis newspaper printed a front-page story with the title “He’s Sex!” and it was reprinted in newspapers all over the South. This, along with increasing exposure on radio stations, gave Elvis a hot reputation as he and his band began to tour and perform in cities throughout the South. Everywhere he performed, newspapers covered his concerts, mostly with rave reviews, further enhancing his popularity.

But it was television that made Elvis a world-famous star. Following his first television appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show early in 1956, when he was still relatively unknown outside the South, CBS was flooded with phone calls and letters from aroused adolescent fans. He appeared several more times on television in 1956, each time to an enormous national audience.

As he became increasingly popular, his critics grew louder and more numerous, calling his performances “lewd” and “obscene.” Jackie Gleason, a popular TV performer of the day, sneered, “The kid has no right behaving like a sex maniac on a national show” (Lichter, 1978, p. 22). A newspaper critic was one of many to express concern about the potential effects on young people: “When Presley executes his bumps and grinds, it must be remembered by [CBS] that even the twelve-year-old’s curiosity may be overstimulated” (Lichter, 1978, p. 34). By the time Elvis appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show again in September 1956, CBS executives decided he would be shown only from the waist up, so as not to interfere with the 1950s and 1960s for promoting rebellion and sexual license (see the Historical Focus box). In recent decades, the criticism has focused on two particular genres of popular music: rap and heavy metal.

Rap

Rap music (also called hip-hop) began in the late 1970s as street music in urban New York City (Berry, 1995; Decker, 1994). It started out with disc jockeys “rapping” (speaking or shouting rhythmically) spontaneous lyrics to a background of a lively beat and perhaps a repeated line of music. Only gradually did it develop into “songs” that were recorded. It was not until the late 1980s that rap attained widespread popularity. MTV had no program devoted to rap until 1988, but when MTV added Yo! MTV Raps it quickly became one of the station’s most popular programs and helped to spread the influence of rap. By the 1990s, a wide range of rap groups were appearing on lists of the highest-selling albums. Rap is now by far the most popular music genre among American adolescents. Two thirds of 12- to 18-year-olds report listening to rap/hip-hop within the past 24 hours, a percentage over twice as high as any other genre (Roberts et al., 2005). Although rap is especially popular among Black and Latino adolescents, it is also the most popular music genre among Whites. Rap is highly popular not only in the United States but in Europe and many other places around the world (Motley & Henderson, 2008).

Not all rap is controversial. Queen Latifah and other female rap performers often stress themes of self-esteem and self-reliance for young Black women (Emerson, 2002). Other rap performers also enjoy a wide mainstream audience for their themes of love, romance, and celebration. The controversy over rap has focused on “gangsta rap” performers such as Jay-Z and 50 Cent. The criticism has concerned three themes (Berry, 1995; Ward, 2006a): sexual exploitation of women, violence, and racism.

Controversial rap has been criticized for presenting images of women as objects of contempt, deserving sexual exploitation and even sexual assault. Women in controversial rap songs are often referred to as “hos” (whores) and “bitches,” and sexuality is frequently portrayed as a man’s success-
ful assertion of power over a woman (Berry, 1995; Emerson, 2002; Stephens & Few, 2007; Ward, 2006a).

Violence is another common theme in the lyrics of controversial rap performers (Watkins, 2006). Their songs depict scenes such as drive-by shootings, gang violence, and violent confrontations with the police. The violence spouted by gangsta rap performers is not just a pose but is part of the world many of them live in. In the late 1990s rappers Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. were shot to death, and other gangsta rap performers have been arrested for offenses from illegal possession of firearms to sexual assault to attempted murder.

With regard to racism, critics of rap have denounced the views toward Whites and Asians that rap performers have expressed in both songs and interviews. Also, research has found that rap songs reinforce racial stereotypes in listeners because the songs frequently depict Black men as violent, misogynist, and sex-obsessed (Johnson, Trawalter, & Dovidio, 2000; Rudman & Lee, 2002; Ward, 2006b; Watkins, 2006). Rap has also been accused of promoting homophobia, for example, in some of the songs of Eminem, one of the most popular rap performers.

What effect—if any—does listening to rap lyrics with themes of sexism, violence, and racism have on the development of adolescents? Unfortunately, although many academics have speculated about the uses of rap by adolescents, thus far few studies have provided research evidence on the topic. Rap has been found to be most popular among adolescents who have high rates of risk behavior (Miranda & Claes, 2004; Rubin, West, & Mitchell, 2001; Wingood et al., 2003), but this finding shows only correlation, not causation. One study found that rap was the favorite type of music of juvenile offenders (Gardstrom, 1999). However, only 4% of them believed that music contributed to their deviant behavior, whereas 72% believed the lyrics of the songs reflected the grim conditions of their lives. Some research indicates an association between rap listening and negative stereotypes of women among adolescents, although here, too, it is difficult to identify causality with any precision (Squires et al., 2006; Stephens & Few, 2007).

Elvis was wildly popular among adolescents.

Although corporate businesspeople have tried hard ever since Elvis to control the highly lucrative business of popular music, the enthusiasms of adolescents have usually proven difficult to predict (Brake, 1985), and ultimately it is adolescents who drive the direction of popular music.
Two studies that asked adolescent rap fans about their views on the effects of rap in their lives found that many of them perceived positive, life-affirming messages in rap (Mahiri & Conner, 2003; Sullivan, 2003). However, these studies did not report whether adolescents found these messages in “gangsta rap” as well as in other types of rap.

From the uses and gratifications perspective, it may be expected that some adolescents—especially Black adolescents in urban America—use rap as an expression of their frustration and rage in the face of the difficult conditions in which they live. Other adolescents may use rap simply as entertainment, and some may find positive messages in types other than gangsta rap. Rap has even been used in therapy with adolescents (Giardillo, 2003) because its themes help them express feelings of loss, rejection, and abandonment.

Heavy Metal

“Sometimes I’m upset and I like to put on heavy metal. It kind of releases the aggression I feel. I can just drive along, put a tape in, and turn it up. It puts me in a better mood. It’s a way to release some of your pressures, instead of going out and starting a fight with somebody, or taking it out on your parents or your cat or something like that.”

—Ben, age 21 (in Arnett, 1996, p. 82)

The history of heavy metal goes back to the late 1960s and early 1970s and groups such as Led Zeppelin, Iron Maiden, and Black Sabbath. The peak of heavy metal’s popularity—and controversy—came during the 1980s, with performers such as Metallica, Ozzy Osbourne, Megadeth, Judas Priest, and Slayer selling millions of albums and performing in large arenas all over the world. Heavy metal’s popularity has waned since the 1990s, but the most popular “metal” groups still sell millions of albums and play to concert halls of fervently devoted fans. Hard rock/heavy metal is the third most popular music genre among adolescents, after rap/hip-hop and alternative rock (Roberts et al., 2005).

As with rap, not all heavy metal is controversial. Metal is quite diverse, from “lite metal” groups such as Kiss that sing mostly about partying and sex, to groups such as Metallica and Creed that address serious social issues such as war and environmental destruction, to groups such as Slayer and Cannibal Corpse whose themes are relentlessly violent. Controversy and criticism have focused not on the “lite metal” groups but on the other heavy metal groups, especially concerning issues of suicide and violence.

Is there any credible evidence that heavy metal promotes suicide or violence? It is true that violence is a common theme in heavy metal songs; in fact, it is the most common theme (Arnett, 1996). However, this alone is not evidence that heavy metal causes violent behavior in those who listen to it. What the listeners hear in it, how they use it, is the crucial question.

Some of my own early research concerned the heavy metal subculture, and the effect of the music is one of the topics I investigated in a study of over 100 heavy metal fans (Arnett, 1991, 1996, 2007c). I found that it is true that heavy metal fans (“metalheads” or “headbangers” as they call themselves) tend to have a dark view of the world. They are alienated from mainstream society; cynical about teachers, politicians, and religious leaders; and highly pessimistic about the future of the human race. They also tend to be more reckless than other adolescents, reporting higher rates of behavior such as high-speed driving, drug use, and vandalism (Selfout et al., 2008).

However, I do not believe that their alienation or their risk behavior can accurately be blamed on the music. I asked them if they listen to the music when they are in any particular mood, and if the music puts them in any particular mood. Consistently, they said they listen to the music especially when they are angry; this is not surprising, in view of the violent, angry quality of the music and lyrics. However, they also consistently reported that the music has the effect of calming them down. Heavy metal songs have a **cathartic effect** on their listeners.

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**cathartic effect** Effect sometimes attributed to media experiences, in which media experience has the effect of relieving unpleasant emotions.
In recent years, the most controversial form of advertising with respect to adolescents has been cigarette advertising. Advertising cigarettes on television or radio has been illegal in the United States since 1971, but since that time cigarette companies have simply poured more money into other forms of advertising and promotion, such as billboards, magazines, newspapers, movie product placements, and sponsorship of sporting events and concerts. In fact, cigarettes are the second most heavily promoted consumer product in the United States, with cigarette advertising and promotion totaling over six billion dollars per year (Cummings, 2002).

Critics of cigarette advertising claim that it is targeted especially toward adolescents (Biener & Siegel, 2000; Cummings, 2002; Ling & Glantz, 2002; Pollay, 1997, 2006). The tobacco companies claim that their advertising is intended only to persuade adult smokers to switch brands, but critics note that only a small percentage of adults switch brands in a given year, a percentage far too small to justify the tobacco companies’ massive advertising budgets. Where the real market lies is among adolescents. Ninety percent of smokers begin smoking by age 18 (Cummings, 2002), and brand loyalty is very strong once established, which makes adolescents a ripe target for cigarette companies seeking to expand their share of the market. Furthermore, because so few people begin smoking after age 18, critics argue that tobacco companies try to persuade adolescents to smoke so that they will become addicted to nicotine before they are mature enough to realize fully the potential risks of smoking (Arnett, 2000b; Romer & Jamieson, 2001; Slovic, 1998). Thus, according to the critics, cigarette companies present images of independence (the Marlboro Man), youthful fun and vigor (Newport, Kool), and “coolness” (Camel, Kool) in order to appeal to adolescents (Arnett, 2006d).

Several studies have established a relationship between cigarette advertising campaigns and adolescent smoking. Pollay et al. (1996) traced tobacco companies’ advertising expenditures in relation to rates of smoking among adolescents (aged 12 to 18) and adults over the period 1979 to 1993. They concluded that the effect of advertising on brand choice was three times as strong for adolescents as for adults.
The “Joe Camel” campaign provides an example of this effect. Between 1988, when the “Joe” character was introduced, and 1993, Camel’s market share among 12- to 17-year-olds rose from less than 1% to 13%, and the proportion of adolescents who smoke increased. Under criticism, RJR Nabisco canceled the Joe Camel ad campaign in 1998.

Pierce and his colleagues (1994) examined trends in smoking initiation from 1944 to 1988. They found that for girls aged 14 to 17, a sharp rise in smoking initiation coincided with the introduction of three brands targeted at females—Virginia Slims, Silva Thins, and Eve—between 1967 and 1973. No such increase occurred during this period for girls aged 18 to 20 or 10 to 13, or for males. The ad campaigns were evidently particularly effective among—and targeted to—adolescent girls in the age range when smoking initiation is most likely to take place, ages 14 to 17.

Also, in a study I published with a colleague (Arnett & Terhanian, 1998), adolescents were shown ads for five different brands of cigarettes (Camel, Marlboro, Lucky Strike, Benson & Hedges, and Kool) and asked various questions about their responses. The ads for Camel and Marlboro were the ads the adolescents had seen the most, the ads they liked the best, and the ads they were most likely to see as making smoking appealing (Figure 12.2). In a number of respects, smokers’ responses to the ads were more favorable than the responses of nonsmokers. For all brands, smokers were significantly more likely to indicate that they liked the ad. For the Camel and Marlboro ads (but not for the other brands), smokers were more likely than nonsmokers to indicate that the ad made smoking more appealing. A second study yielded similar results (Arnett, 2001b).

Marlboro and Camel are two of the brands most popular among adolescents. Marlboro is by far the most popular, smoked by about half of 12- to 17-year-old smokers, with Newport second (25%) and Camel third at about 13% (Pollay, 2006). These are also the three most heavily promoted brands, indicating the influence of advertising and promotion in adolescent smoking (Arnett, 2001b). The fact that the ads for the most popular brands are so attractive to adolescents, especially to adolescent smokers, suggests that cigarette advertising is one of the influences that lead them to smoke (Arnett & Terhanian, 1998).

Of course, findings of a relationship between the appeal of cigarette advertisements and rates of adolescent smoking or brand preferences do not prove that the cigarette companies intended to appeal to adolescents. However, in lawsuits against the tobacco companies, the companies have been forced to release literally tons of internal documents, many of which provide stark evidence that for decades these companies have discussed the psychological characteristics of adolescents and have been acutely aware of the importance of adolescents as the perpetually new market for cigarettes (Cummings, 2002; Ling & Glantz, 2002). The documents contain such statements as “Today’s teenager is tomorrow’s potential regular customer,” “The base of our business is the high school student,” and “Realistically, if our Company is to survive and prosper over the long term, we must get our share of the youth market” (Pollay, 1997). This evidence has strengthened the claim that tobacco companies have directly attempted to market their cigarettes to adolescents.

In recent years, as a consequence of lawsuits and government policies, tobacco advertising in industrialized countries has decreased dramatically and cigarette smoking among young people has also declined (Krueger et al., 2006). Anti–tobacco advertising has also proven to be effective in decreasing the likelihood that adolescents will begin smoking (Terry-McElrath, 2007). However, the tobacco companies are now targeting developing countries, where smoking is increasing as wealth increases (Ho et al., 2007).

**THINKING CRITICALLY •••**

Given the research showing that cigarette advertisements appeal strongly to adolescents and make smoking more appealing to them, do you believe there should be a total ban on cigarette advertising (except perhaps in adult-only magazines)? Or would you defend the tobacco companies’ right to advertise on the grounds of “freedom of speech”?

**New Media**

Most of the media we have discussed so far have been around for a long time in one form or another. Even television has been around for over half a century. However, new media forms have appeared in recent years. In fact, the newest media forms have become so important in the lives of today’s adolescents and emerging adults that Jane Brown, a prominent scholar in media research, calls them the “new media generation.”

They are the first cohort to have grown up learning their ABCs on a keyboard in front of a computer screen, playing games in virtual environments rather than their backyards or neighborhood streets, making friends with people they never and may never meet through internet chat rooms, and creating custom CDs for themselves and their friends. This new media environment is dramatically different from the one in which their parents grew up because it is more accessible, more interactive and more under their control than any other ever known before. (Brown, 2006, p. 279)
In this section, we will consider two of the new media that have become most important in the lives of young people: the Internet and mobile phones. The section on the Internet will include a subsection on two recently developed Internet formats: social-networking websites (such as Facebook and MySpace) and blogs.

The Internet

The Internet has burgeoned in popularity and pervasiveness in industrialized countries over the past decade. In one national American survey, over 90% of adolescents aged 11 to 18 said they have access to the Internet at school, and one third said they use it at school “almost every day” (Roberts et al., 2005). Nearly 90% said they have a computer at home, nearly 80% with an Internet connection, and nearly half used the computer at home “almost every day.” The average amount of time per day on the Internet for 14- to 18-year-olds is 50 minutes (Hellenga, 2002). Adolescents are more likely than older age groups to use the Internet (Anderson, 2002). Furthermore, as Figure 12.3 shows, it is the medium they prefer the most, even more than music or TV. Findings on adolescent Internet use in other industrialized countries are similar (Anderson, 2002).

Internet use is also high worldwide among emerging adults. In the World Internet Project, a survey of Internet use among persons ages 18 and over in 13 countries in Europe, Asia, and the Americas, Internet use was over 80% among 18-24-year-olds in all countries but one (World Internet Project, 2008). Furthermore, in all countries Internet use was higher among emerging adults than in any other age group.

Ten years ago there was a “digital divide” among different segments of the population in their Internet access and use, but that gap has rapidly diminished (Roberts et al., 2005). Ninety percent of adolescents from high-SES families have a computer at home, but so do over 80% of low-SES families, and nearly all of these computers have an Internet connection. Ninety percent of adolescents in White families have a computer at home, but so do 78% of Blacks and 80% of Latinos, again, with nearly all having an Internet connection. Girls were initially less likely than boys to use the Internet, but this gap has also closed in recent years (Hellenga, 2002; Reese & Noyes, 2007). With remarkable speed, computers and the Internet have become a standard part of the households of families in industrialized societies (Anderson, 2002).

Adolescents use the Internet for a variety of purposes. As you can see from Figure 12.4, the most common use is searching for information (often for school projects), but e-mail and chat rooms are also common uses. Adolescents are more likely than younger or older persons to use chat rooms. Nearly 40% of 11- to 20-year-olds say they access chat rooms daily or weekly (Hellenga, 2002). They especially favor chat rooms on “relationships and lifestyles,” followed by “entertainment” and “hobbies or groups” (Roberts & Foehr, 2004). However, a substantial amount of their “chatting” is done with their own friends in “Instant Messaging” (IM) formats that allow multiple friends to carry on a simultaneous Internet conversation. About one third of American adolescents use e-mail and IM on a daily basis (Roberts et al., 2005). Girls are more likely than boys to use the Internet for social purposes such as e-mail and visiting chat rooms, whereas boys are more likely to use it to play computer games and download music (Anderson, 2002; Hellenga, 2002), but the gender differences are not large (Roberts et al., 2005).

The Internet is perhaps the greatest invention in human history for providing access to information. With a few clicks, people are able to find a staggering array of information sources on virtually any topic. The Internet has tremendous potential to enhance education in childhood and adolescence, which is why schools have been so zealous about becoming connected to it.

As with other types of media, however, research on Internet use in adolescence has focused less on the positive uses than on the potential perils it holds (Livingstone, 2003; Tynes, 2007). Numerous dangers have been claimed to be associated with adolescents’ Internet use. The chat rooms that
adolescents enjoy so much may give them a free arena to practice their social skills (Hellenga, 2002), but chat rooms are also sometimes frequented by adult sexual predators. There have been horrifying cases of adolescent girls developing an on-line relationship with a man that ended in sexual exploitation, rape, and even murder. A study of “on-line victimization” (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000) among adolescents aged 10 to 17 who were regular Internet users reported the following findings:

- One in four adolescents had been subjected to unwanted sexual exposure on-line (defined as pictures of naked people or people having sex), usually through surfing the Web.
- One in five adolescents had received a sexual solicitation, defined as a request for sex or sexual information.
- 3% reported an “aggressive solicitation,” defined as a suggestion for sexual contact by mail, phone, or in person.

Of course, not all of adolescents’ cybersexual experiences are involuntary. As noted in Chapter 9, pornography is among the most commonly viewed content on the Internet, for adolescents, emerging adults, and other adults (Carroll et al., 2008).

Another concern related to adolescents and the Internet involves academic cheating. Although the Internet can be a great information resource for school projects, it also allows adolescents to find and purchase prewritten papers that they can use for school assignments (Anderson, 2002). This is a concern with respect to emerging adult college students as well.

For both adolescents and emerging adults, the concern has been raised that use of the Internet may promote social isolation (Nie & Erbring, 2000). However, research has shown that for most adolescents and emerging adults the Internet is more likely to relieve social isolation and promote social connections (Sundar, 2000). For example, one study that followed adolescents for 3 years after high school found that e-mail and Instant Messaging helped them maintain their high school friendships even after they had moved away in emerging adulthood (Theil, 2006). Of course, some people do become dependent on the Internet to an extent that reduces their direct social contacts (Griffiths, 2006), but for most adolescents and emerging adults the social effects of the Internet are positive.

Another positive use of the Internet is that it provides adolescents with an opportunity to practice social communication and engage in “identity play,” in which they actively choose how to represent themselves in terms of gender, personality, and conversational style (Theil, 2006). Adolescents who have particular interests or problems not shared by their peers may be able to find like-minded adolescents on-line. For example, the website <http://www.outproud.org> developed by the National Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Youth offers an archive of coming-out stories, publications on sexual orientation, and a “high school forum” chat room with various discussion topics. The Internet, like other media, holds both positive and negative potentials for adolescent development depending on what the content is and how it is used.

New Internet Forms

The Internet is highly flexible to different uses, and new uses are constantly being invented for it. Two of the most important innovations pertaining to adolescents and emerging adults in recent years are social-networking websites and blogs.

Social-Networking Websites The use of social-networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace has become increasingly popular among adolescents and emerging adults. Facebook and MySpace were originally developed by and for college students, and college students and other emerging adults are still the main users, but the sites have rapidly become widely used by adolescents and adults as well (Baker & Moore, 2008; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Users of social-networking websites construct a profile describing themselves, containing information about topics such as their family, their romantic partner, and their interests (Magnuson & Dundes, 2008). Most profiles also include a photo (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Many users have a “blog”

**social-networking websites** Internet websites such as Facebook and MySpace that allow users a forum for identity presentation and for making and maintaining social contacts.

**blog** A public Internet journal of a person’s thoughts, feelings, and activities.

**text messaging** Communication through cell phones that involves typing a message on the cell phone screen and sending it like an e-mail message.
linked to their profile (more on this below). Profiles are an arena for identity presentation (Mazur, 2009). Users can individualize the site’s template by changing the template’s layout, design, and colors, or by adding photos, poems, videos, and links to other websites. Page design, images, and links are expressions of self that enable users to communicate a style and personality (Stern, 2002; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008).

Having a profile also allows users to maintain and expand their social networks. Adolescents and emerging adults use the sites mainly to keep in touch with old friends and current friends and make new ones (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). This function is especially important in emerging adulthood because emerging adults frequently change educational settings, jobs, and residences (Arnett, 2004). Social-networking websites allow them to keep in contact with the friends they leave behind as they move through emerging adulthood and to make new friends in each new place.

**Blogs**

“Zack just came and delivered us pizza. He’s so cute.”
—16-year-old female blogger

“All of a sudden she crossed my mind today. Reminding me of all the good times we spent together. We didn’t have any problems, we didn’t have any crises. That explains why it hurt so bad when she stopped loving me.”
—19-year-old male blogger

“I really don’t like myself, but that is starting to change. I am learning that there are good things about me and that I am an ok person.”
—19-year-old female blogger

“My mom is drunk the day she said we could spend time together. I know it sounds childish but I really did want to spend time with her.”
—16-year-old female blogger

(All quotes are from Mazur, 2009)

As part of their social-networking profile, many adolescents keep a blog, which is a public Internet journal of a person’s thoughts, feelings, and activities (Mazur, 2009). National surveys in the United States have found that about one in four adolescents ages 12–17 (27%) have created their own blog, and half (49%) read others’ blogs (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2007; Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007). Adolescents are more likely than adults to create and read blogs (Lenhart & Madden, 2005).

The most common kind of blog content is simply daily activities—what I ate, read, watched, or bought today (Mazur, 2009). Interactions or conversations with friends or family members are frequently described. Discussion of past, present, and potential romantic relationships is another common topic. Research also indicates that blogs can be an arena for identity explorations, as adolescents and emerging adults reflect on their experiences and their feelings about themselves (Schmitt et al., 2008). In one study of adolescents’ and emerging adults’ blogs, over three fourths of blog content focused on the author (Mazur, 2009).

What makes blogs a fascinating and unique media form is that they are at once private and public, personal and social. Bloggers often record a highly personal account of their lives, as a person might in a journal only he or she would read, yet blogs are posted publicly so that anyone else can read them. Analyses of blog content report that many adolescent and emerging adult bloggers freely express their previously private ideas and concerns and discuss their sexual behavior, drug use, and other sensitive topics (Mazur, 2009). One study found that half of all teenage bloggers discussed sexual identity, love relationships, and real or desired boyfriends and girlfriends (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005).

Another way that blogs are both personal and social is that they often contain links to other blogs, and anyone reading a blog can post a comment on a blog entry. One analysis of randomly selected teenage blogs found that half offered links to other blogs and 67% contained a comment section (Huffaker, 2006). A national U.S. survey indicated that three of four on-line adolescent social network users have posted at least one comment to a friend’s blog (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). Because blogs are often interconnected, they may facilitate the fulfillment of adolescents’ and emerging adults’ needs for conversation, social bonding, and relationship building and maintenance, with both their close friends and a larger group of acquaintances they are unlikely ever to meet (Bortree, 2005; Lenhart & Madden, 2005).

**Mobile Phones and Text Messaging**

Like the Internet, the pervasiveness and popularity of mobile phones (also called cell phones) have skyrocketed in the past decade, and like the Internet, mobile phones are most popular of all among adolescents and emerging adults (Madell & Muncer, 2004). For example, mobile phones are used by 77% of 15- to 19-year-olds in Finland (Oksman & Rautainen, 2003) and by 80% of 13- to 20-year-olds in Norway (Ling, 2003). In the United States, rates are lower but rising; about half of late adolescents and emerging adults own a mobile phone (Roberts et al., 2005; Weiss, 2003). Young people use mobile phones not only for calling someone and talking the way other phones have long been used but also for text messaging, which involves typing a message on the mobile phone screen and sending it the way an e-mail message is sent. A study of Japanese adolescents found that they used their mobile phones much more often for text messaging than for talking (Kamibeppu & Hito-mi, 2005). More than half of those who owned a mobile phone sent at least 10 text messages a day to their friends.

Mobile phones, like e-mail and social-networking websites, allow adolescents and emerging adults to remain in contact with each other when they are apart, virtually all day long. The social worlds of young people are no longer neatly divided into time with family and time with friends or at school. Rather, the new media allow the world of friends to be a nearly constant presence in their lives. The limited evidence so far indicates that young people enjoy the way the
new media allow them to keep in touch with their friends. In one ESM study in Italy, adolescents reported that many of their happiest moments took place while communicating with friends on the Internet or using their mobile phones (Bassi & Antonella, 2004).

**Media and Globalization**

There are interesting similarities and differences in the media uses of adolescents across cultures. Some of the similarities reflect the globalization of adolescence. All over the world, on every continent, adolescents are increasingly familiar with the same television shows, the same movies, and the same musical recordings and performers (Taillon, 2004). (Magazines are the only exception; they still tend to be locally produced.) For example, in a study of adolescents in Botswana (southern Africa), two thirds reported watching American television programs on a weekly basis (Lloyd & Mendez, 2001). Adolescents and emerging adults with access to the Internet can use it to make contacts with young people in other parts of the world (although there is also a “digital divide” between countries, with adolescents in industrialized countries being much more likely than those in developing countries to have Internet access; Anderson, 2002).

Adolescents are not the only ones who enjoy Western—especially American—media. However, Western media tend to be especially appealing to adolescents for several reasons. First, in developing countries around the world, social and economic change has been extremely rapid in the past 50 years. Today’s adolescents in these countries often have parents and grandparents who grew up in a time when their country had less economic and technological contact with the West, so that these adults are more familiar with and more attached to their native traditions, such as their native musical forms and songs. In contrast, the adolescents have grown up with Western media, which compete for their attention even if they also learn the songs and arts of their own culture. Second, adolescents are more capable than younger children of exploring the environment outside of the family, so they are better able than younger children to obtain media products that their parents would not have provided for them. Third, adolescence is a time when young people are forming an identity, a sense of themselves and their place in the world. When social and economic change is rapid and they sense that the world of their future is going to be different from the world that has been familiar to their parents and grandparents, they look outside the family for information and instruction on the world they will inhabit and how they might find a place in it (Goode, 1999; Mead, 1970; see the Cultural Focus box for an example).

Several of the ethnographies from the Harvard Adolescence Project provide examples of the role of the media in promoting globalization in the lives of adolescents. Among the Moroccan adolescents studied by Davis and Davis (1989, 1995, 2007), this influence is especially notable with respect to gender roles. In the past, Moroccan culture, like many traditional cultures, had strictly defined gender roles. Marriages were arranged by parents and were made on the basis of practical family considerations rather than romantic love. Female

![Image](image.jpg)

Mobile phones have quickly become popular with adolescents worldwide. Here, an adolescent girl in China.

(but not male) virginity at marriage was considered essential, and adolescent girls were forbidden to spend time in the company of adolescent boys.

These gender differences and the narrower socialization for girls continue to be part of Moroccan culture today, particularly in rural areas, and they are reflected in different standards for adolescent boys and girls with respect to their access to media (Davis & Davis, 2007). Adolescent boys attend movies frequently (in Davis and Davis's [1995] data, 80% attended movies occasionally or more), whereas for adolescent girls attendance at movies—any movie—is considered shameful (only 20% had ever been to see a movie in a theater). Adolescent boys are also allowed freer access to cassette tapes and players, as well as to videocassettes. However, for both adolescent boys and adolescent girls, their exposure to television, music, and (for boys) movies is changing the way they think about gender relations and gender roles. The TV programs, songs, and movies they are exposed to are produced not only in Morocco and other Islamic countries but also include many from France (Morocco was once a French colony) and the United States.

From these various sources, Moroccan adolescents are seeing portrayals of gender roles quite different from what they see among their parents, grandparents, and other adults around them. In the media the adolescents use, romance and passion are central to male-female relationships. Love is the central basis for entering marriage, and the idea of accepting a marriage arranged by parents is either ignored or portrayed as something to be resisted. Young women are usually portrayed not in traditional roles but in professional occupations and as being in control of their lives and unashamed of their sexuality.

Young people are using all this new information to construct a conception of gender roles quite different from the traditional conceptions in their culture (Obermeyer, 2000).
CULTURAL FOCUS ● “Teenagers” in Kathmandu, Nepal

Few places in the world have been more remote and more isolated from the West historically than Nepal, which is located between southwest China and northeast India. Not only is Nepal thousands of miles from the nearest Western country, but until 1951 the government made a special effort to isolate its citizens, banning all communications (travel, trade, books, movies, etc.) between Nepal and “the outside.” Since then, Nepal, and especially its largest city, Kathmandu, has been undergoing a rapid transition into the world of global trade, Western tourism, and electronic mass media. Ethnographic research by the anthropologist Mark Liechty (1995) provides a vivid look at how adolescents and emerging adults in Kathmandu are responding to Western media, and at how media are a potent force toward globalization.

According to Liechty and his colleagues, a variety of imported media are highly popular with young people in Kathmandu. Movies and videos from both India and the United States find a broad audience of young people. American and Indian television shows are also popular, and televisions and VCRs are a standard feature of middle-class homes. There is an avid audience among the young for Western music, including rock, heavy metal, and rap. Sometimes young people combine local culture with imported Western styles; Liechty gives the example of a local rock band that had recorded an original Nepali-language album in the style of the Beatles. However, many urban young people reject older traditions such as Nepali folk songs.

A locally produced magazine called Teens embodies the appeal of Western media to young people in Kathmandu. In addition to features such as comic strips, Nepali folk tales, puzzles, and games, each issue contains pages of profiles devoted to Western pop music heroes, including biographical data and lyrics to popular songs. Each issue also includes a list of the top 10 English-language albums of the month and a list of recent English video releases. A substantial proportion of the magazine is devoted to fashion, much as in American teen magazines, and the fashions shown are Western.

Nepalese people use the terms teen and teenager in English, even when speaking Nepali, to refer to young people who are oriented toward Western tastes, especially Western media. Not all Nepalese young people are “teenagers,” even if they are in their teen years—the term is not an age category but a social category that refers to young people who are pursuing a Western identity and style based on what they have learned through media. To many young people in Kathmandu, being a “teenager” is something they covet and strive for. They associate it with leisure, affluence, and expanded opportunities. However, many adults use teenager with less favorable connotations to refer to young people who are disobedient, antisocial, and potentially violent. Their use of the term in this way reflects their view that Western media have had corrupting effects on many of their young people.

Even to “teenagers” themselves, the availability of Western media is a mixed blessing. They enjoy it, and it provides them with information about the wider world beyond the borders of Nepal. Many of them use media to help them make sense of their own lives, growing up as they are in a rapidly changing society, and as material for imagining a broad range of possible selves. However, Western media also tend to disconnect them from their own culture and from their cultural traditions, leaving many of them confused and alienated. The media ideals of Western life raise their expectations for their own lives to unattainable levels, and they eventually collide with the incompatibility between their expectations and their real lives. As 21-year-old Ramesh told Liechty:

You know, now I know sooooo much [from films, books, and magazines about the West]. Being a frog in a pond isn’t a bad life, but being a frog in an ocean is like hell. Look at this. Out here in Kathmandu there is nothing. We have nothing (p. 187).

Altogether it amounts to an influence toward globalization and toward the broad socialization of the West, as media are “used by adolescents in a period of rapid social change to reimagine many aspects of their lives, including a desire for more autonomy, for more variety in heterosexual interactions, and for more choice of a job and of a mate” (Davis & Davis, 1995, p. 578). Here we see an example of socialization from the media going “over the heads” of parents and other adult socializers, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

Another example of media and globalization comes from Richard Condon’s (1988, 1995) study of the Inuit (Eskimos) of the Canadian Arctic. Condon’s ethnography is of particular interest with respect to media because he first observed Inuit adolescents in 1978, just before television first became available (in 1980), and he subsequently returned there for further observations several times during the 1980s. Between his first visit and his subsequent visits he observed striking changes in adolescents’ behavior with respect to romantic relationships and competition in sports. Condon and many of the Inuit he interviewed attributed the changes to the introduction of television.

With respect to sports, before TV arrived Inuit adolescents rarely played sports, and when they did they were reluctant to appear that they were trying hard to win and establish superior skills over other players because of Inuit cultural traditions that discourage competition and encourage cooperation. All of this changed after the introduction of television. Baseball, football, and hockey games quickly became among the most popular TV programs, especially among adolescents, and participation in these sports (especially hockey) became a central part of the recreational activities of adolescent boys, with adolescent girls often coming to watch. Furthermore, adolescent boys became intensely competitive in the games they played,
no longer shy about trying hard to win and talking loudly about their superior talent when they did win—clearly emulating the players they watched on TV. It is rare to see such an unambiguous example of the effects of media on adolescents.

The other area in which the influence of television was observed by Condon was male-female relationships. Before the introduction of television, adolescents’ dating and sexual behavior was furtive and secretive. Couples rarely displayed affection for one another in public; in fact, couples rarely even acknowledged any special relationship when they were around others. Condon described one adolescent boy whom he had known closely for a year before the boy confided that he had a girlfriend he had been dating for the past 4 years—and even then, the boy refused to reveal her name!

However, all this changed after a couple of years of exposure to TV. Teenage couples were frequently seen together in public, holding hands or hugging. At community dances, young couples no longer ignored each other at opposite ends of the dance hall but sat together as couples and danced as couples. When Condon inquired about the reason for the change, many of the adolescents told him they thought it was due to the introduction of television. Happy Days, a program about American teens in the 1950s, was a particular favorite.

A recent study of adolescent girls in Fiji was also able to observe them before and after the introduction of television (Becker, 2004). The study found positive effects: the girls indicated their explicit imitation of the perceived positive attributes of television characters. However, there were also negative effects. Specifically, from observing the slim Western women on TV, girls became preoccupied with their weight and body shape, and there was a disturbing increase in purging behavior to control weight. The girls also began to perceive the slimmest among them as having the highest status.

Does all of this mean that, eventually, Western (especially American) media will obliterate all the other media of the world and establish a homogeneous global culture dominated by the United States? It is difficult to say. In some countries, locally produced media are having difficulty competing with the popularity of American media. However, what seems to be happening in most places, at least so far, is that local media are coexisting with American media. Young people watch American television shows, but they also view shows in their own language produced in their own country, and perhaps shows from other countries as well. They go to American movies, but they also attend movies that are locally produced. They listen to American and British music, but also to the music of their own culture and their own artistic traditions. As we discussed in Chapter 6, globalization appears to promote a bicultural identity, with one rooted in the local culture and one attached to the global culture (Arnett, 2002a), and this appears to be true for media use as in other areas.

In some places, new blends of music are resulting from increasing globalization. For example, in Britain, immigrant musicians from India have developed a musical style dubbed “Indipop,” a combination of traditional Indian musical forms and instruments with British and American popular music forms and technology. Whether creative and original new forms will continue to develop from globalization or whether globalization will lead to a relentless homogenization into one global media culture will be substantially determined by what appeals most to the adolescents and emerging adults of the world.

### SUMMING UP

In this chapter we have discussed a wide range of media and how they are used by young people. The main points we have covered are as follows:

- Media use is an important part of young people’s daily experience in industrialized countries and increasingly in traditional cultures as well.
- The uses and gratifications approach depicts young people as active media users rather than as the passive recipients of media stimulation. This approach recognizes that young people vary in the media choices they make and in their responses to the same media experience. The Media Practice Model applies this approach to adolescents. Uses of media among young people include entertainment, identity formation, high sensation, coping, and youth culture identification.
- Although hundreds of studies have been conducted on television and aggression, mostly on children, the evidence that television is a motivator of aggressive behavior in adolescents is mixed. Computer games have also been said to promote aggressive behavior, but this effect has not been persuasively demonstrated.
- The television shows most popular among adolescents contain a high proportion of sexual interactions. Generally, these interactions emphasize the importance of physical appearance in male-female relationships and display a “recreational” attitude toward sex.
- Criticisms of “gangsta” rap target themes of sexual exploitation of women, violence, and racism in rap songs. Little is known about the responses of adolescents who like rap music.
- Heavy metal music has been accused of promoting suicidal and violent tendencies. However, adolescent heavy metal fans generally report that the music has a cathartic effect on their anger.
• Studies find that cigarette advertisements for Marlboro, Camel, and Newport are highly attractive to adolescents, especially adolescent smokers, and that these brands are also the ones adolescents are most likely to smoke. Internal tobacco company documents provide evidence that tobacco companies have explicitly sought to appeal to adolescents.

• Internet use is becoming increasingly popular among adolescents. There are concerns that Internet use puts adolescents at risk for sexual exploitation and social isolation, but Internet use has positive functions as well, especially for providing access to educational information and for allowing adolescents to practice social skills. Two new Internet forms popular among adolescents and emerging adults are social-networking websites and blogs.

• Mobile phone use has spread quickly over the past decade, and now most adolescents in industrialized countries own one. Research indicates that mobile phones allow adolescents to keep in perpetual contact with their friends through phoning and (especially) texting.

• Media are a powerful force in the globalization of adolescence, but in most traditional cultures young people use local media as well as Western media.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of young people’s immersion in media today is that it marks such a dramatic change from the environment they experienced just a century ago. Six and a half hours a day is a lot of time to spend on anything, and it is remarkable that today’s young people in industrialized countries spend this much time with media. Young people in developing countries are headed in the same direction. In fact, current trends in these countries represent a research opportunity to study them before and after their immersion in a media environment. Effects—rather than correlations—of media use are much easier to discern under these circumstances.

Many people find adolescents’ uses of media alarming in both amount and content. Some of this concern is undoubtedly legitimate. It is important to keep a close eye on what is being produced in the media and how adolescents are using it because media producers usually are motivated more by profit than by a desire to promote the general good. At the same time, however, it is wise to be skeptical when claims of media effects are made without definite evidence. Young people use media in many different ways, and their media uses may have positive as well as negative implications for their development.

KEY TERMS

uses and gratifications approach 339  performance videos 349  blog 357
sensation seeking 341  concept videos 349  text messaging 357
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INTERNET RESOURCES

http://www.kff.org
Website for the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. The Kaiser Foundation does research and public policy advocacy on a range of topics, especially related to health issues, but it has also sponsored some of the most important research on adolescents and media. The 2005 Kaiser Foundation study Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8–18 Year-olds, examined media use among a nationally representative sample of more than 2,000 3rd through 12th graders who completed detailed questionnaires, including nearly 700 self-selected participants who also maintained 7-day media diaries. The report can be downloaded free from this site.

FOR FURTHER READING


For more review plus practice tests, videos, flashcards, and more, log on to MyDevelopmentLab.